

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, September 28, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox still vexed about Rangers allowing foul pop to drop

Alex Speier

One day after the Rangers intentionally let a foul ball drop to facilitate the efforts of their starter, Mike Minor, to reach 200 strikeouts, the Red Sox remained vexed by their conduct. Indeed, that befuddlement appeared to grow with the claim by Rangers manager Chris Woodward that the Red Sox, in swinging at the first pitch of all three of their at-bats in the eighth inning, had stopped trying to win while trying to foil Minor's pursuit of a plateau.

The controversy was set in motion with one out in the ninth inning, when Red Sox infielder Chris Owings hit a foul popup between home and first on a 1-and-1 count. Rangers first baseman Ronald Guzman, at the urging of Minor, let the ball drop. On the next pitch, Minor struck out Owings on a called third strike.

"I'm not going to comment on it," said Owings. "There's really nothing to talk about. Give the guy respect. It's what he wanted, so . . . there's just not much to talk about."

The Rangers aren't the only team in late-season games trying to help their players reach milestones. The Red Sox allowed Eduardo Rodriguez to try to work through five innings despite an escalating pitch count on Tuesday to help him claim a victory and leave open the possibility of a 20-win season. Late in the season, teams might make in-game decisions — holding a runner at third base if a batter in the on-deck circle has 99 RBIs, allowing a pitcher to enter in the ninth inning of a blowout to hit "games finished" incentives — that are meant to facilitate individual goals.

That said, the Red Sox remained put off by the blatancy of the foul ball. One member of the Red Sox noted that the matter would have been a non-issue had Guzman merely pretended to lose the ball in the sun.

Though Woodward said after Thursday's game he expected he'd connect at some point with Red Sox manager Alex Cora to discuss the disagreement, as of Friday afternoon, that conversation hadn't occurred.

"He has my number," said Cora. "There's no messages."

Meanwhile, Cora said that the team wasn't aware that Minor was pursuing 200 strikeouts when it started attacking first pitches. Instead, it saw an opportunity to attack a pitcher whose pitch count had escalated.

"We hit two home runs in the seventh on first pitches," noted Cora, referring to long balls by Jackie Bradley Jr. and Owings, "so maybe it was our approach. We're not going to grind out at-bats with [Minor at] 117 pitches in the eighth inning. We're trying to get the pitch count up in the eighth? I don't know."

In Arlington, Texas, Minor faulted the Red Sox for complaining.

"You can look at it both ways, but I don't think they should be crying about it," he told reporters. "[The dropped foul ball] gave them another chance. I don't understand that."

Ultimately, Cora seemed ready to stop contemplating the matter.

"On to Baltimore," he chuckled.

Workman-like

Brandon Workman went into the final weekend of the season putting up numbers that require historic context. He had held hitters to the lowest average (.125), slugging percentage (.168), and OPS (.438) in the majors, with the slugging percentage ranking as the lowest permitted by any pitcher in any season in the last 50 years. Objectively, he's been one of the most dominant relievers in baseball this year. Does he care whether he's recognized accordingly?

"Honestly, by the casual fan, no," said Workman. "There are certain aspects where I'd like to be recognized, but to the casual fan, no. I really don't care. I've had highs and lows with fans through my career. I don't care anymore."

The trust of members of his organization matters more to the 31-year-old, as does his own sense of progress. In 2019, Workman has combined an improved understanding of how to use his curveball, fastball, and cutter with a full year of health and improved arm strength. His average four-seam fastball velocity of 92.9 m.p.h. this year was the highest of his career, up from 91.2 in 2018. Those ingredients allowed Workman to enter Friday with a career-high 72 appearances while sustaining his excellent performance throughout the year.

"There's a sense of pride," said Workman (9-1, 16 saves, 1.91 ERA). "I worked very hard this offseason to put myself in a position to take the ball whenever I needed to and be able to perform consistently, not have the ups and downs that come with a heavy workload."

Workman believes that the formula he's found this year – during the offseason, between outings, and on the mound – is one that can allow him continued success moving forward.

"I don't expect to be worse next year," said Workman. "I don't think I just got lucky this year – that it was a great year and it's going to be an outlier. I feel like everything I've done, I'm capable of repeating. And honestly, I feel like there are aspects of my game where I can improve on them next year."

Hernandez 'penned in for future

Darwinson Hernandez, who registered a 4.45 ERA with 16.9 strikeouts and 7.7 walks per nine innings while representing a potentially dominant late-innings force, will not pitch again over the final weekend of the season. While there had been some debate throughout the season about whether he might be more valuable as a starter or reliever moving forward, Cora said that the Sox view Hernandez strictly as a reliever heading into 2020.

"We're very proud of him, we're very happy with him, and going into the offseason, we see him as a reliever. He's a big part of what we're trying to accomplish next year," said Cora. "For a sprint, I do feel it's very good for us. Get three outs and move on."

Moving on

A number of injured players — starters Chris Sale and David Price as well as first baseman Steve Pearce — were in the clubhouse. Cora said Sale has shown progress and physical improvement in his rehab work in Fort Myers, Fla., but the pitcher had yet to resume throwing, and had yet to have a planned follow-up visit with Dr. James Andrews to determine the status of his left elbow injury, characterized by the team as inflammation. The manager suggested that he anticipates Sale and Price "should be OK" heading into spring training . . . The zip of rolls of packing tape provided a soundtrack in the Red Sox clubhouse as players readied to head home. Cora and members of the team's training staff and strength coaches spent several hours meeting with player to discuss offseason strength programs.

Nate Eovaldi is one problem regrouping Red Sox must solve

Peter Abraham

Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner met with reporters at 5 p.m. on Friday to discuss what had gone wrong this season and how they planned to fix it by hiring a new general manager.

Two hours later, Nate Eovaldi took the mound and demonstrated why his performance is one of the problems to be solved as the Sox regroup.

Eovaldi pitched poorly again as the Baltimore Orioles beat the Sox, 4-1, before a crowd of 35,533 at Fenway Park.

Eovaldi finished the season 2-1 with a 5.99 earned run average after agreeing to a four-year, \$68 million contract in December. He missed three months because of elbow surgery and biceps tendinitis.

“He was never able to find his rhythm throughout the season,” manager Alex Cora said.

Eovaldi allowed 14 home runs over 64 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings including a three-run shot to left field in the third inning on an 0-and-2 pitch by Renato Nunez on Friday.

Eovaldi knows what he needs to improve on.

“I felt like for the most part this whole season my cutter and splitter were real inconsistent,” he said. “I’ll be able to work to those and come into spring training next season healthy and strong.”

Nunez added an RBI double off Marcus Walden in the ninth inning.

Journeyman righthander Asher Wojciechowski allowed four hits over six innings and struck out six for the win.

Wojciechowski faced the Red Sox three times this season and allowed two earned runs over 18 innings. He had a 6.02 ERA in 14 other starts.

Wojciechowski and three relievers retired 12 Red Sox in order before Rafael Devers doubled leading off the ninth. He scored on a single by Xander Bogaerts, the 500th RBI of his career.

Bogaerts was then picked off.

Baltimore pitchers struck out 12 with one walk. Five Red Sox pitchers combine to walk nine.

The Red Sox (83-77) have lost seven of 10 and at 37-40 are assured of a losing record at Fenway Park this season. Jhoulys Chacin starts the penultimate game of the season on Saturday afternoon.

Next Red Sox general manager will be asked to win with less

Peter Abraham

Help wanted: Magician. Apply at Fenway Park.

The job responsibilities Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner outlined for their next general manager included slashing payroll by 15 percent to get under the luxury tax threshold, finding a way to keep Mookie Betts, rebuilding the farm system, and contending for a championship all the while.

Speaking to reporters crammed into a suite at Fenway Park late Friday afternoon, Henry and Werner said Dave Dombrowski didn’t share those same goals and that’s why he was fired Sept. 8.

During a session described as both informal and on the record, Henry and Werner indicated they plan to hire a GM from outside the organization instead of promoting one of the four assistants who have been running the team the last three weeks.

“This is a tough job. This is a challenging offseason,” Henry said. “To put [one of the assistants] in charge and responsible for that, that’s sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So we are starting the search looking outward.”

The new GM will have a full agenda. The owners said their goal was to cut the payroll approximately \$34 million before next season to get under the \$208 million threshold in 2020. That would reset the penalties the team accrued for being over the limit the last two seasons.

“We’ve known for some time now that we needed to reset as other clubs have done,” Henry said.

The Sox, Werner said, want to become more sustainable.

“One of the things that we’ve talked about, and I think is apparent, is that we need to have more depth in our minor league system and more people coming up through the system who can be everyday baseball players,” he said.

The owners also made it clear that the new GM will inherit Alex Cora as manager and much of the baseball operations staff. But they expect a lot of interest.

“I consider this position to be one of the most coveted in all sports,” Werner said.

That’s inarguable. The Sox are one of the cornerstone franchises in baseball and have vast resources.

But stability is an issue. The new GM will be the third person in that position in the last six seasons.

Henry said immediately after the World Series last season that he wanted to get Dombrowski signed to an extension. But on Friday he said the Sox knew they needed to make a switch in leadership shortly after the Series. That’s how quickly it changed.

“It was clear to me that we weren’t on the same page at that point,” he said.

Henry pushed back at the idea of the Sox acting rashly.

“We always opt when we can to have — whether it’s a general manager or manager — here as long as possible,” he said. “We don’t look to make changes willy-nilly.”

Much will be made about the Sox slashing payroll. But nine of the 10 playoff teams this season have payrolls below the tax threshold. Only the Yankees, at \$231 million, exceeded it.

The Athletics, Braves, Brewers, Cardinals, Twins, and Rays all succeeded with payrolls at or below \$130 million. If the Red Sox can’t figure out a way to win with \$208 million, shame on them.

Under Dombrowski, the Sox filled every hole in the most obvious, direct, and usually expensive way. They need to get back to the creativity Ben Cherington showed in building the 2013 team or the subtle moves Theo Epstein made during his tenure that so often paid off.

Financial might can win a championship, Dombrowski proved that. Financial might and more resourcefulness can win two in a row or three over five seasons.

The Red Sox will shed roughly \$63 million in payroll with the free agents coming off the books, a group that finally includes Pablo Sandoval.

But Chris Sale has a \$15 million raise coming his way and Xander Bogaerts an \$8 million hike thanks to their contract extensions. Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., and Andrew Benintendi also are in line for significant increases through arbitration.

Getting to \$208 million likely will require J.D. Martinez opting out of his contract or trading Betts.

As to who will want those challenges, look to the teams that succeeded with less this season.

Tampa Bay vice president of baseball operations Chaim Bloom has shown he can win on a tight budget. The same is true for Lynn native Derek Falvey, the chief baseball officer of the Twins, or his GM, Thad Levine.

Former Sox player Tim Lincecum, a vice president with the Yankees, would be a good choice. Or maybe, against long odds, Epstein can be lured back.

Advice to the new guy: Get a long-term deal. There's a lot to be done.

Sox owners finally field questions, but spare the clear answers

Dan Shaughnessy

You say Tomato . . . I say Bridge Year.

Almost three weeks after firing World Series winning GM Dave Dombrowski, Red Sox (and Globe) owner John Henry finally had a press conference at Fenway late Friday afternoon, before the start of the season-ending series against the moribund Baltimore Orioles.

I'd like to tell you that this session answered all of our questions about the firing of Dombro and the future of the team, but that would be an alternate reality. Accompanied by ubiquitous wingman Tom Werner and CEO Sam Kennedy, Henry (and Werner) responded to 26 minutes of inquiries, but it was a tad confusing and intentionally ambiguous. These guys rarely talk to us and, when they do, sometimes it feels like they are speaking a foreign language. It was an awkward, sometimes bizarre press conference.

We were told that there was considerable disagreement with Dombrowski regarding the depletion of the farm system and the direction of the team. We were told that the financial goal of the 2020 Red Sox is to shed payroll. Henry indicated the Sox would probably go outside the organization for their next GM. We were told that payroll alone does not guarantee success.

I asked if this meant the Red Sox are headed for the dreaded Bridge Year.

"You'd have to call Theo and ask him," Henry said with a chuckle.

"I'd say absolutely not," added Werner. "One of the things we observe is that there are teams that make the playoffs with half the payroll that the Red Sox have. Look at the success that Oakland has had this year. Milwaukee . . . We intend to be competitive every year, but the solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball."

The third-place, no-playoff Red Sox had the highest payroll in baseball this year — \$242 million. They are trying to get that down to about \$208 million. Thanks to Dombrowski, they are committed to three sore-armed pitchers — Chris Sale, David Price, Nathan Eovaldi — to the tune of \$80 million per year in each of the next three. Mookie Betts is going into his walk year looking for something in the \$350–\$400 million range. J.D. Martinez has an option to leave if the Sox don't extend him. Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland, and Brock Holt appear to be goners.

And Henry says, "This year we need to be under the CBT," referencing the competitive balance tax, which is \$208 million next season. "That's the goal."

Swell. But how will that allow the Sox to be competitive when they couldn't get it done in 2019 with the highest payroll in the game?

No one knows. But we do know that Dombrowski won't be making the decisions.

"He was the right choice at the right time. . . . But things have changed quite a bit and we made a decision that we were not going to continue in that direction," Henry said. "That afternoon [Sept. 8] was the first time I had seen Dave in quite a while. We had made the decision in the previous few days and did not want to wait.

"We can talk about what he did wrong, but I'd prefer to talk about what he did right. Right after the World Series, it became clear to me that we were not going to be on the same wavelength going forward. It was clear to me we weren't on the same page. He and I talked about it that night [in Los Angeles]. There was a difference in how we thought we should move forward."

"I think it's apparent that we need to have more depth in our minor league system, and more people coming up through the system that can be everyday baseball players," added Werner.

When asked why there was no press conference when Dombrowski was fired, Henry turned toward his VP of media relations Kevin Gregg and said, "Should I tell the truth?" Werner cackled.

In this awkward moment, CEO Kennedy stepped forward.

"I can handle this one. Right or wrong we felt we weren't going to answer questions about Dave's departure. It was going to be a situation where we'd be asked a lot of questions about blame and what he did wrong, and we felt very strongly as a group that the right thing was to thank him for his time and his service," Kennedy said. "That was the decision, and it's fair to disagree with it."

"I've had a long relationship with Dave," added Henry, who worked with Dombrowski when Henry owned the Florida Marlins. "It was painful to make a change. For me personally, it was painful. But we felt it was the right thing to do. And if we were going to have a press conference, I would love to have talked about what he accomplished while he was here. You guys all would have asked what went wrong, which is your job to do. It wasn't as much a case of us hiding, as has been portrayed. We didn't see the utility of going through what the differences were."

So instead of outlining their philosophical differences with Dombrowski when he was fired, they did it Friday night. Good luck to the Next Man Up, who will be the Sox fourth GM since 2011.

Will the new person come from the in-house, Group Of Four currently running the team?

"It's possible," said Henry, "but this is a tough job and a tough offseason, too. This is a challenging offseason. To put one of the candidates you keep bringing up [Eddie Romero Jr., we presume] in charge, that's sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So we are starting the search looking outward."

Look westward, toward 42-year-old Dodgers GM Andrew Friedman. Never rule out Theo. And strap yourselves in for the bridge year to 2021 and beyond.

The idea of Red Sox trading Mookie Betts this winter is unacceptable

Chad Finn

The permanent record shows that Markus Lynn Betts — soon to be adored by the Fenway masses simply as Mookie — made his major league debut for the Boston Red Sox against the New York Yankees on June 29, 2014.

He started in right field, batted eighth (right behind all-time fan favorites A.J. Pierzynski and Stephen Drew), and picked up his first major league hit in the fourth inning, a single off Yankees starter Chase Whitley. He finished 1 for 3 with a run in an 8-5 Red Sox win.

In that lost season for the Red Sox — what is it with this franchise and its habit of following up duck boat parades with broken-down jalopies of seasons? — Betts was a bright light. Sure, there were a few hiccups along the way, including a return to Pawtucket that he actually welcomed, and a conversion from second base to right field.

But that went as smoothly as anyone dared imagine, as most things with Mookie would. The next Red Sox superstar was on the scene.

So much has happened in the 5½ seasons since, almost all of it good, much of it spectacular. Betts, who turns 27 Oct. 7, has made four straight All-Star appearances and won three Gold Gloves in right field, with a fourth probable this year. (I mean, did you see that throw?)

He finished second in the AL MVP race to Mike Trout in 2016, hitting .318 with 31 homers, 26 stolen bases and 214 hits, then won the award after the Red Sox' near-perfect 2018, putting up a 32 HR/30 SB season while leading the majors in batting (.346), slugging (.640), and runs (129).

This season has been a bummer, and sometimes it has felt like something of a letdown with Betts, too. But that's largely because the bar is set so high. Entering Friday, he had 29 homers and a .917 OPS, and his 134 runs are the most by a Red Sox player since Ted Williams scored 150 in 1949.

That's the company Betts keeps: Red Sox legends, icons for all-time.

His most statistically similar players on baseball-reference.com include Carl Yastrzemski, Jim Rice, and Manny Ramirez, and that's just offense. His skills are more varied than any Red Sox player I can think of.

While Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts have had spectacular seasons — man, the rest of the roster really failed this team, huh? — it is Betts, the brilliant defender and baserunner, who still leads the way in Wins Above Replacement (6.9) by a large margin.

I bring all of this up because, well, frankly, it seems like some of you really need the reminder right about now.

It's fun to appreciate Betts's greatness in real time, but there's a desperation to it too. That debut against the Yankees wasn't that long ago. And yet it seems the conclusion to his time with the Red Sox is arriving much too soon.

That's a shame. It doesn't have to be this way. And I'm increasingly annoyed with anyone who wants to be complicit in trading Betts this winter.

Yeah, we know the circumstances. He's a free agent after the 2020 season. He has made it clear that he likes playing in Boston. He's made it even clearer that he intends to maximize his value, which means getting to free agency.

Red Sox ownership (requisite acknowledgement that John Henry owns the Globe) has made it clear there will be a tighter budget, its prerogative given that the Sox had the highest payroll in baseball this year. Dave Dombrowski made the regrettable decisions to award Chris Sale and Nate Eovaldi a total of \$213 million in contract extensions between the end of last season and the start of this one, which is why Dave Dombrowski no longer has his job.

That opens the door to Betts being traded this offseason. Colleague Alex Speier offered a warning of the consequences of this lousy season and the desire to cut payroll a few weeks ago, writing:

“Dombrowski put the Sox in a position where — based on their payroll projections and a significant desire to get under the luxury tax threshold sometime in the next two years to reset the penalty structure — they’ll likely end up parting with J.D. Martinez, Mookie Betts, or possibly even both this winter.”

This, Red Sox fans, is unacceptable, and I can’t believe I’m hearing from so many who are rationalizing it. The Red Sox would be making a huge mistake in trading Betts. The notion that they have to is nonsense, and we shouldn’t fall for it.

You want prospects? First of all, why? This team has a fine core of young talent, which includes Betts, who is better than any prospect you’ll ever acquire will become. And he’s not going to bring a ton in return because he’s a free agent in a year. Put down your Baseball America handbook and appreciate the great player you already have.

I’m convinced the incredible success of Bill Belichick, in his emotionless approach to roster-building, has carried over to New England sports fans in the worst way. We’re always looking for a bargain, value, and too often taking management’s side when it comes to divvying up cash.

Football is different. You have 53 players, and many different ways to win. Superstars matter in baseball, especially well-rounded ones like Betts.

I understand that the Red Sox need clarity on his willingness to re-sign. I hope he gives them that, though I suspect he would stay if they — wait for it — make the best offer.

But this is not a player, in the heart of his prime, that you trade a year from free agency out of fear he will leave — or worse, because he damages your budget. This is a cornerstone player, one who does everything right, one who has been the best player in a given season in a league in which all-timer Mike Trout also plays.

Trading him wouldn’t be quite the same thing as trading Yaz after the ’67 season, or Rice after ’79. But it’s awfully close. I know this: The Red Sox will rue the day they let him go. This is Fred Lynn to the Angels, Luis Tiant to the Yankees, Carlton Fisk to the White Sox. We don’t know where the ghost will be located, but we know it will haunt.

Betts, who wisely turned down an eight-year, \$200 million offer after the ’17 season, says he is taking the emotion out of it now. That’s his prerogative. You, as a fan, don’t have to. And I’m telling you, once he’s elsewhere and the Red Sox have a few magic beans to plant in Pawtucket, you’re going to feel the emotion of it then.

This could be Mookie Betts’s last weekend playing for the Red Sox. It feels like we just said hello.

Owners aim to get Red Sox under luxury tax, and are looking outside for a baseball ops leader

Alex Speier

In their first public comments since firing Dave Dombrowski on Sept. 8, Red Sox principal owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner outlined the reasoning behind their decision to part with their former president of baseball operations while acknowledging their hope to get payroll under the \$208 million luxury tax threshold in 2020.

The comments were made during a 26-minute media session in a suite at Fenway Park. Among the topics addressed by Henry (who also owns the Globe) and Werner:

- Both owners said that Dombrowski had been “the right choice at the right time” when brought to the Sox as president of baseball operations in August 2015, and Henry — who’d also worked with Dombrowski with the Florida Marlins from 1998–2001 — described him as a “great general manager.” In fact, Henry

said that immediately after the 2018 World Series, he anticipated hammering out a long-term deal with Dombrowski.

However, as the Red Sox began their offseason planning last winter, Henry said it quickly became clear he and Dombrowski did not share the same long-term outlook. While Henry said that he hoped that view would alter and the two would come more into alignment over the season, that never happened. Thus came what Henry characterized as the “painful” decision to let Dombrowski go earlier this month.

“What changed quickly was right after the World Series, we had preliminary talks about our way forward and it was clear to me we weren’t on the same page at that point,” said Henry. “There was a difference, I think, in how we thought we should move forward.”

- While the owners did not directly outline that difference, they did offer clues in their view of the team’s future direction. Most notably, Henry said that in 2020, the Red Sox “need to be under the [luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million] and that was something we’ve known for more than a year now.” Werner later clarified that it was a strong preference rather than an absolute.

There are three luxury tax penalty tiers: An initial one that incurs one tax rate, a second one that results in even higher taxes for any overage, and a final tier that produces both a whopping tax rate as well as a draft-pick penalty. The tax rates go up when exceeding the luxury tax threshold in consecutive seasons. By going under the threshold, a team resets its penalty structure.

In 2018, when the threshold was \$197 million (with tax rates at the three thresholds of 20 percent, 32 percent, and 62.5 percent), the team spent past the third and highest threshold in a championship season. In 2019, which had a luxury tax threshold of \$206 million (with tax rates of 30 percent, 42 percent, and 75 percent), the team will spend over \$240 million, incurring roughly \$12 million in taxes, but staying below the highest tier of \$246 million.

In 2020, the team wants to get below the first luxury tax threshold of \$208 million (when the tax rates would be 50 percent, 62 percent, and 95 percent), a move that will require parting with players on the roster, and almost certainly guaranteeing that at least one of J.D. Martinez or Mookie Betts will not be back.

“We’ve known for some time now we needed to reset [the penalties by staying under the threshold], as other clubs have done,” said Henry.

- Even with a plan to lower payroll, the team still hopes it can find common ground on a long-term deal to keep Betts — a homegrown superstar — in Boston. Werner and team president/CEO Sam Kennedy recently talked with Betts’s agents, and Werner said the team has no reason to think that the 2018 A.L. MVP doesn’t want to remain in Boston.

“I think he loves the Boston Red Sox,” said Werner. “We’ve stated publicly that we would hope he would stay with us the rest of his career. We have made proposals to him in the past and he did want to test free agency, which is his right. And we’ll have some conversations with him going forward. But obviously, there’ll be a point where hopefully we can make a deal or we’ll decide at that point what is plan B or plan C [if he doesn’t sign], but we haven’t gotten to that point and we’re very open to continuing discussions with him.”

- Despite the strong desire to lower payroll, the Red Sox still expect to be contenders in 2020. “There are teams that make the postseason with half the payroll the Red Sox have,” said Werner. “Our real intention is to be competitive every year and we’ll do whatever we have to do to do that. The solution to that isn’t always having the highest payroll in baseball.”

- Werner noted that the team “[needs] to have more depth in our minor league system and more people coming up through the system that can be every day baseball players.”

While the Sox fielded a standout homegrown core under Dombrowski, the team dealt a number of well-regarded young players. Most notably Yoan Moncada, but also players who might have been positioned to contribute in 2020, such as pitchers Michael Kopech, Jalen Beeks, Logan Allen, and infielder Mauricio Dubon, who might have been positioned to sustain depth.

Meanwhile, the team under Dombrowski never contemplated the kinds of trades of veterans for prospects (or young big leaguers) that would backfill some of that lost depth. That will have to change moving forward for the Sox to achieve their goal of getting under the luxury tax threshold, at a time when their own homegrown core has become increasingly expensive.

- With enormous questions looming over the organization, Henry said the Red Sox will begin their search for a new head of baseball operations by looking for an experienced general manager, which means looking outside the organization rather than to internal candidates.

- That said, the search does not come with a timetable, given both the owners' comfort with the current Gang of Four — assistant GMs Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott, along with senior VP Raquel Ferreira — in charge of baseball operations, and the difficulty of getting permission to talk to someone who is already running another club.

- Asked why Dombrowski was fired mid-game on Sept. 8, the owners said that the former president of baseball operations had expressed a desire to know his contractual future, in Henry's words, "sooner rather than later." Henry said that evening's Yankees game marked the first time that he had encountered Dombrowski in some time, and the first opportunity to let him know face-to-face of the decision to fire him. "We had made the decision in the previous few days," said Henry. "Did not want to wait."

- Werner, in a subsequent round of on-camera interviews, characterized as "ridiculous" the suggestion that the job of heading Red Sox baseball operations might be unappealing in light of the firing of Dombrowski less than one year after he won the World Series, as well as the displacement of Ben Cherington less than two years after the 2013 championship. "I consider this position to be the most coveted, or one of the most coveted in all of sports," said Werner.

Henry also countered the notion that the position is unstable, noting that in 22 seasons as an owner, he's only had three heads of baseball operations: Dombrowski in Florida from 1998–2001; Theo Epstein — after one year from interim GM Mike Port in 2002 — from 2003–11; Cherington from 2011–15; and Dombrowski again from 2015–19.

"We don't look to make changes willy nilly," said Henry. "I think in this case, we were unanimous that we needed to make a change. But I don't feel like we're going through general managers."

Context: There are executives in Major League Baseball who were shocked by the decision to part with Dombrowski and who have suggested that, if approached to interview for the Red Sox job, they'd absolutely have misgivings about the stability of the position given Dombrowski and Cherington. That said, there are others who have said unequivocally that they'd want to explore the position if given the opportunity to do so.

- The owners confirmed that Alex Cora will remain as manager, regardless of who is brought in to work with him.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Nathan Eovaldi finishes his season healthy, Red Sox fall to Orioles

Steve Hewitt

Nathan Eovaldi probably isn't exactly where he wants to be as he closes the book on his 2019 season, but it's a lot better than where it could have been.

Most importantly, the Red Sox right-hander is healthy going into the offseason, which is more than the other two high-priced pitchers in the rotation can say.

It certainly was not the season Eovaldi envisioned when he signed a four-year, \$68 million contract last winter, but he'll take his health with him as a victory. In his last start of the season, the 29-year-old finished his turbulent year by going five innings and giving up three runs on a third-inning homer that was the difference in the Red Sox' 4-1 loss to the Orioles on Friday night at Fenway Park.

Eovaldi had something of a breakthrough in the Red Sox' win against the Rays last Sunday, pitching a quality start and finishing strong in that outing. But he wasn't as good Friday. He matched a season high with four walks and couldn't seem to find a groove.

Still, he came a long way considering his circumstances this season, which saw him miss three months because of loose bodies in his elbow. He came back in a bullpen role but never seemed comfortable there before returning to the rotation, where he made eight starts to end the season, posting a 6.25 ERA in 31 1/3 innings.

Those numbers aren't great, but a healthy Eovaldi will use it as a much-needed building block heading into 2020.

Eovaldi's third-inning mistake proved costly. Austin Hays doubled and Trey Mancini walked before they both advanced on a passed ball. Then, Eovaldi hung an 0-2 curveball to Renato Nunez, who smashed it off the light tower above the Green Monster to give the Orioles (53-107) a lead they didn't relinquish.

The Red Sox (83-77) couldn't pick up Eovaldi as they again couldn't solve Asher Wojciechowski, the journeyman right-hander who continued to be their nemesis.

Wojciechowski, who had a no-hitter going into the seventh inning against the Red Sox back in July in Baltimore, allowed just four hits and held the Sox scoreless again through six innings Friday. The Sox' best threat came in the fourth, when Sam Travis was hit by a pitch before Jackie Bradley Jr. doubled to right. But Travis was sent home and was thrown out at the plate.

In three starts against the Red Sox this season, Wojciechowski posted a 1.05 ERA across 17 2/3 innings.

The loss dropped the Red Sox to a 37-40 record at Fenway this season, assuring them of a sub-.500 record at their home ballpark.

Next Red Sox GM faces wicked juggling act

Tom Keegan

Theo Epstein didn't break baseball's two longest curses by making bad decisions, so don't look for him to succeed Dave Dombrowski as baseball boss of the Red Sox.

But don't be surprised to see Epstein return home to succeed Dombrowski's successor, if things don't work out well for the next Red Sox general manager.

So before that happens, the Sox need a "bridge" GM between Dombrowski and Epstein, although that's not how they view it and certainly not how they'll sell the job.

It's not going to be easy to find an established GM to take on the daunting challenge of meeting all the Red Sox' competing, borderline conflicting goals, but that's what ownership is seeking and will find.

The bridge GM will clean up the financial mess, and if doing so results in the Red Sox missing the postseason too many times, the table will be set for the next GM to cash in.

Might the replacement come from inside the organization?

“It’s possible, but this is a tough job,” owner John Henry said. “This is a tough offseason, too. We talk about the challenges of (competitive balance tax), but there are, I think you would all agree, this is a challenging offseason, so to put one of the candidates you keep bringing up in charge and responsible for that is sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So we are starting our search at looking outward.”

For an experienced GM?

“Yes,” Henry said. “Which I explained earlier is challenging.”

Credit Henry for being honest about just what a complex juggling act the next GM faces: Keep the payroll under the CBT threshold of \$208 million, restock a barren farm system, and in one offseason, greatly improve a pitching staff that ranks 19th in the majors with a 4.68 ERA.

And by the way, if you can’t sign popular and productive 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts, you might have to trade him even though the public won’t understand the reason you don’t get value for him is because he only has one year remaining on his contract and wants to experience free agency. And if you don’t trade him, rebuilding the farm system will take even longer.

Good luck.

The starting rotation, the No. 1 source of a crash from the 119-win season that ended with the fourth World Series title of the century, is the top cause for concern heading into 2020, aside from new ace Eduardo Rodriguez, who will try to join the ranks of 20-game winners in Sunday’s season finale.

The Red Sox have three starting pitchers in Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi who will make a combined \$80 million in each of the next three seasons. They combined this season to go 15-16 with a 4.68 ERA and made just 58 starts because of injuries. In 2018, Price and Sale alone combined for 57 starts and were 28-11 with a 2.89 ERA.

Co-owner Tom Werner said he was looking at statistics Friday and shared what he gleaned.

“Maybe this is obvious, but the most important thing is health, good health,” he said. “When you look at the number of innings that we got out of Eovaldi this year or Chris Sale or David Price, if we could be as healthy this year as last year, we might not be having sort of conversations in the same tenor.”

Correct. And if Eovaldi, Price and Sale can have healthy 2020 seasons, book the Sox for the playoffs. But if you’re a general manager with a good situation where you are, would you want to bank on that happening?

The job certainly has its advantages. If there is a better office in the world than Fenway Park, I’ve never visited it. Plus, the history of the Red Sox makes it a prestigious job in an appealing city. The owners have demonstrated a willingness to spend liberally, so liberally that they must put the brakes on this offseason, which makes that a double-edged sword, at least for the first year on the job. But it beats working for cheapskates.

Epstein? He is to baseball executives what Phil Jackson used to be to NBA coaches. Jackson chose a team with Shaq and Kobe. He never would have signed on for one centered by Greg Oden.

Red Sox stay optimistic about signing Mookie Betts

Steve Hewitt

While Mookie Betts' desire to stay with the Red Sox long-term remains uncertain, the team's ownership is steadfast in keeping its star right-fielder in Boston for years to come.

And the Sox are confident that Betts wants to stay here, too.

They are entering a critical offseason with Betts, who seems likely to test free agency when his contract expires after the 2020 season. The reigning American League MVP has declined several offers from the Red Sox on a long-term extension in past years.

What to do regarding Betts' future will be at the top of the checklist for whoever the Sox decide to hire as their next president of baseball operations. But speaking to reporters for the first time since they fired Dave Dombrowski earlier this month, Sox chairman Tom Werner was optimistic about getting something done to lock up their star.

“(Red Sox president) Sam (Kennedy) and I actually had a nice conversation with Mookie's agents on a couple of different topics a couple of weeks ago,” Werner said. “We think he is one of the great players in baseball. Hopefully there is a meeting of the minds going forward.”

Werner said he hasn't heard anything from Betts or his representation that would indicate he's not interested in staying with the Red Sox.

“I think he loves the Boston Red Sox,” Werner said.

Werner said Friday it's “apparent” the Red Sox need to replenish their farm system. Trading Betts in order to do that might be a possibility, but their priority is to keep him around.

“We've stated publicly that we would hope he would stay with us the rest of his career,” Werner said. “We have made proposals to him in the past, and he did want to test free agency, which is his right. And we'll have some conversations with him going forward. But obviously there'll be a point where hopefully we can make a deal or we'll decide at that point what is plan B or plan C, but we haven't gotten to that point, and we're very open to continuing discussions with him.

“We want Mookie to finish his career with the Red Sox. We completely respect his desire to test free agency, but we think he wants to be with the Red Sox.”

Epstein reunion unlikely

Don't expect Theo Epstein to be the Red Sox' next president of baseball operations.

Two days after Epstein, who serves in that role with the Cubs, publicly said there was nothing to the story regarding him leaving Chicago to come back to Boston, Werner indicated there wasn't much interest for a reunion on the Sox' end, either.

Werner said the Red Sox have not spoken to Epstein — who was the GM here from 2002-11 and helped deliver two World Series titles — nor have they considered it.

“There's nothing to that story,” Epstein said Wednesday. “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.”

Werner also noted that there are clear tampering rules that prevent him from discussing Epstein in detail.

No love lost in Texas

Alex Cora hadn't heard from Rangers manager Chris Woodward the day after the Red Sox' 7-5 loss on Wednesday in Texas, in which drama unfolded in the ninth inning, when Rangers infielder Ronald Guzman purposely didn't catch a pop-up to allow Mike Minor to record his 200th strikeout of the season.

"He has my number," Cora said. "There's no messages."

Cora clearly was agitated by the Rangers' tactics to get Minor his milestone, but Woodward shifted blame on the Red Sox, saying they were intentionally swinging at first pitches in the eighth inning to prevent Minor from recording strikeouts. Two of those first-pitch swings, though, resulted in homers by Jackie Bradley Jr. and Chris Owings that tied the game.

"We were doing damage on the first pitch," Cora said. "I don't know. You guys watched the game. ... We're not going to grind out at-bats with 117 pitches in the eighth inning. We're trying to get the pitch count up in the eighth? I don't know."

Woodward went as far as to say the Red Sox weren't trying to win the game, but Cora clearly wanted to move on from the topic.

"I don't know," he said.

John Henry smart to cut Red Sox payroll, but is it too late?

Jason Mastrodonato

John Henry wants to cut the Red Sox payroll ahead of 2020.

And that's exactly what he should be doing.

The Sox have been out-spending the field for two years. Everybody knows that's not a sustainable strategy for long-term success, especially with the new penalties, financial and otherwise, that limit MLB's biggest spenders.

After his comments Friday that he wants the Sox to be under the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold in 2020 (their payroll is around \$238 million in 2019), Henry will take plenty of criticism over the next several months for what's about to happen with the Red Sox.

Some key players won't be here next year. That's just simple math. They have around \$50 million coming off the books but will see almost exactly as much money being added in raises through salary arbitration and contract extensions that kick in for the first time.

J.D. Martinez would be a gambler to opt out, so he likely will return while making \$24 million. The only way the Sox can get back to under \$208 million is by trading at least one of their three players who will be making at least \$30 million next year: David Price, Chris Sale or Mookie Betts.

Otherwise they'd have to get really creative, maybe non-tender Jackie Bradley Jr. and trade Martinez. But it just doesn't seem like there's any way they can enter 2020 without breaking up one of their two power combinations of Price/Sale or Betts/Martinez.

Again, that's perfectly fine. The Sox have known for a long time this was coming. Their window has been closing, with Sale's pending free agency after 2019 and Betts' after 2020 the two circled dates on their calendar.

They made the decision to erase one of those dates by extending Sale before the 2019 season. And as we look at what Henry wants to accomplish going forward, and what he had to say Friday, letting Dave Dombrowski spend freely on Sale and Nathan Eovaldi might be the owner's only mistake.

It was the night the Sox' won the World Series that Henry knew Dombrowski, an all-in type of executive who wants to spend a lot to win a lot without any regard for the farm system, was not the right man for the job any longer.

"Right after the World Series, I think it became clear to me that perhaps we weren't going to be on the same wavelength going forward," Henry said. "But I was hopeful throughout the year that maybe that perception would change. It didn't."

It's hard to get mad at an owner who saved Fenway Park, broke the curse, won four World Series in 14 seasons and continuously spends more than most other teams in baseball. But if you want to get mad at Henry for something, this is it.

"What changed quickly was right after the World Series, we had preliminary talks about our way forward and it was clear to me we weren't on the same page at that point," Henry said. "In fact, he and I talked about it that night, that Sunday evening. I think he disagreed with me about that, that we disagreed. We were even disagreeing, you might say, that we disagreed. There was a difference, I think, in how we thought we should move forward."

Firing Dombrowski after winning a World Series would have looked insane. And if it didn't work, folks around New England would have had real beef with the owner for a long time.

The problem, it seems, is Henry let Dombrowski keep spending his money in a way that furthered the Red Sox from Henry's vision of starting to rebuild the farm system. Spending big on Sale might have been a huge mistake. Spending big on Eovaldi, too.

Henry wouldn't say if he had a problem with either decision, but made it clear he didn't agree with what Dombrowski was doing overall.

So the ownership group sat down this summer and, according to Henry, "we were unanimous among us" that Dombrowski should not return.

Dombrowski told Henry he wanted to know his fate before the season ended. The next time Henry saw him, he fired him.

Now the Red Sox are in a pickle.

"This year we need to be under the CBT and that was something we've known for more than a year now," Henry said.

The need to fall back under the CBT will reset their tax structure. Having gone over in consecutive years in 2018 and 2019, the Sox have seen their tax on overages increase from 20 percent to 30 percent. The tax would grow to 50 percent if they were over a third straight year.

Additionally, there's another 12 percent added on top of payroll that goes more than \$20 million over the CBT, which the Sox will have to pay this season. Going more than \$40 million over, which the Sox likely avoided, would present a tax as high as 90 percent.

Going more than \$40 million over also costs a team 10 spots on their first-round draft pick, a penalty the Sox suffered this year.

It's the smart move to cut back. It's the smart move to start exploring trades of veteran players with big-money contracts in an attempt to rebuild the farm system.

Chairman Tom Werner said the team plans to be competitive in 2020, despite the desire to make cuts.

They certainly could be. Thanks to the breakouts of Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers, the Red Sox have enough talent to get rid of one or two star players, rebuild with younger ones, make shrewd moves in the offseason and come back strong in 2020.

The only question now is whether or not they should have started this process one year earlier.

Tom Werner: Red Sox have not spoken to Theo Epstein or considered reunion

Steve Hewitt

Don't expect Theo Epstein to be the Red Sox' next president of baseball operations.

Two days after Epstein, who serves in that role with the Cubs, publicly said there was "nothing to say that story" regarding him leaving Chicago to come back to Boston, Red Sox chairman Tom Werner told reporters Friday that there wasn't any interest for a reunion on their end, too.

Werner said the Red Sox have not spoken to Epstein — who was the Sox' GM from 2002 to 2011 and helped deliver them two World Series titles — nor have they considered it, and also said he didn't think Epstein would be interested, citing his comments from Wednesday.

"There's nothing to that story," Epstein said Wednesday. "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."

Werner also noted that there are clear tampering rules that prevent him from discussing Epstein in detail.

The Red Sox are in an ongoing search to replace Dave Dombrowski, who they fired earlier this month. There's no timetable on when the new hire will come, but they did indicate they're looking for an experienced GM.

"This is a tough job, this is a tough offseason, too," said John Henry. "We talked about the challenge of CBT, but I think you would all agree this is a challenging offseason. To put one of the candidates you keep bringing up in charge and responsible for that, that's sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So we are starting the search looking outward."

Owner John Henry says Red Sox want a smaller payroll

Jason Mastrodonato

Speaking publicly for the first time since the Red Sox fired former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, John Henry told a small group of reporters on Friday that the team plans to have a smaller payroll in 2020.

Henry said the club has always intended to have a payroll that stays under the competitive balance threshold, which kicks in at \$208 million in 2020.

"This year we need to be under the CBT and that was something we've known for more than a year now," Henry said. "If you don't reset there are penalties so we've known for some time now we needed to reset as other clubs have done."

The Sox currently have a payroll around \$238 million for luxury tax purposes.

They have roughly \$50 million coming off the books this off-season, but will see almost exactly as much money being added in raises through salary arbitration and contract extensions that kick in for the first time.

Unless J.D. Martinez opts out of his contract, which seems unlikely, the Sox will have a steep challenge ahead if they intend to fall back under \$208 million.

The need to fall back under the CBT will reset their tax structure. Having gone over in consecutive years in 2018 and 2019, the Sox have seen their tax on overages increase from 20 percent to 30 percent. The tax would grow to 50 percent if they were over a third straight year.

Additionally, there's another 12 percent tax added on top of payroll that goes more than \$20 million over the CBT, which the Sox will have to pay this season. Going more than \$40 million over, which the Sox likely avoided, would present a tax as high as 90 percent.

Going more than \$40 million over also costs a team 10 spots on their first-round draft pick, a penalty the Sox suffered in their 2019 draft.

Despite trying to cut payroll, chairman Tom Werner said the team plans to be competitive in 2020.

"Our real intention is to be competitive every year and we'll do whatever we have to do that," Werner said. "The solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball."

Does that mean 2020 will be a "bridge year?"

"You'd have to call Theo (Epstein) on that one," Werner said. "I'd say absolutely not. One of the things we observe, and I think we all observe, is first of all, there are teams that make the postseason with half the payroll the Red Sox have. Look at success Oakland has had this year and the Milwaukee Brewers. And we have resources.

"And I would just like to say that while we would like to get under the competitive balance tax threshold, we have had years we've been above it, we've had years where we were below it. There may be certain circumstances that we exceed it. Obviously there are penalties to exceeding it but it's not that we go into a room and say, 'it has to be a certain dollar number.'"

*** *The Providence Journal***

Turns out the Red Sox might be just getting started in 2019

Bill Koch

The cramped home clubhouse at Fenway Park had some fresh clutter as of Friday afternoon.

Moving boxes were spread in the thin aisle that separates the two main walls of lockers. Rolls of packing tape sat on a pair of coffee tables, with their familiar crackling and ripping sounds storing away some precious items for the offseason.

The players parking lot was nearly empty. The bulk of the luxury SUVs and monster trucks favored by members of the Red Sox have been shipped home to states like Florida and California, Texas and South Carolina. There will be no October drives to the ballpark this season for the first time since 2015.

These were sobering reminders ahead of a meaningless series with the Orioles. There was little energy among the 34,533 fans on hand or the team they came to support, as Boston suffered a 4-1 defeat against Baltimore.

"The whole season I've been thinking about it," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "To sum it up, very consistent at being inconsistent."

Being marooned on the West Coast and starting 3-8 didn't help matters. Losing eight straight games around the July 31 trade deadline was ultimately the knockout blow. The Red Sox were stuck running uphill behind the Yankees and Rays in the American League East from what felt like the start of the race.

"When you come here the expectations are just like last year," Cora said. "You win the World Series – if not, it's not good enough. This year we weren't good enough."

This perfect fall evening confirmed it. And it went well beyond the fact that 30-year-old rookie Asher Wojciechowski shoved on Boston for the second time in three starts this season. This was the type of occasion the last three years where the Red Sox were still playing for something, still attempting to remain sharp heading into their most important games of the season.

"Everybody's going to have that extra month this year unfortunately," Matt Barnes said. "We'll look at that as giving everybody an extra month to work out and get the bodies right to come back into spring training."

Just how many Boston players will return? There is no current president of baseball operations or general manager – whatever title you'd like to bestow, the Red Sox don't have one. And the depth of the decisions to be made in the coming weeks was laid bare by principal owner John Henry and club chairman Tom Werner prior to Friday's first pitch.

"Our real intention is to be competitive every year, and we'll do whatever we have to do to do that," Werner said. "But it doesn't mean – the solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball."

That blank check Dave Dombrowski seemed to have in his pocket when he signed Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce to a combined \$220 million in contracts? Gone. That leverage Dombrowski used after building arguably the best baseball team in Boston's history? Squandered in less than 11 months. It has been a stunning fall from grace for both Dombrowski and the organization as a whole.

The next executive making the critical decisions for the Red Sox finds Mookie Betts a year from free agency and noncommittal on pledging his future to the club. Bobby Dalbec, C.J. Chatham, Jarren Duran and Tanner Houck could be on the verge of graduating from the farm system, but they're unlikely to play leading roles on a postseason contender as soon as next season. Ruthlessness will be required while parting company with some players at the bottom of the roster in the name of freeing up necessary Competitive Balance Tax space.

Monday will be the final morning of player meetings and media interviews in the Boston clubhouse. This meandering, mediocre campaign on the field will all be over soon. The real Red Sox business seems to be just getting started.

Red Sox owner John Henry: 'It's our goal to be under' Competitive Balance Tax in 2020

Bill Koch

The next Red Sox general manager will be asked to mind his or her pennies.

Boston's stated goal for 2020, per principal owner John Henry and club chairman Tom Werner, is to come in under the first threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax.

The Red Sox are targeting \$208 million as their financial ceiling, and staying below that figure will allow the franchise to press the reset button on the financial penalties it's currently paying Major League Baseball. Henry and Werner addressed the media prior to Friday night's first pitch against the Orioles at Fenway Park.

"There may be circumstances that we exceed it," Werner said. "Obviously there are penalties to exceeding it. But it's not that we go into a room and say, 'It has to be a certain dollar number.'"

“That’s a good clarification, because you’re right,” Henry said in response to Werner. “We may not be under. It’s our goal to be under.”

Boston smashed through the third threshold of the CBT in 2018, spending more than the allowable \$237 million on its way to a fourth World Series championship this century. The Red Sox paid \$11.95 million in penalties and saw their first pick dropped 10 spots in the 2019 draft. Boston followed by bloating its payroll further and missing the playoffs in 2019, twin transgressions that ultimately cost president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski his job.

“When we looked at doing a new long-term deal, we were unanimous among us that we’re not in the same situation that we were in four years ago,” Henry said, referencing Dombrowski’s August 2015 hiring. “Things have changed quite a bit with the makeup of the team and where we were headed and the direction we were headed.”

Dombrowski was fired with one year remaining on his contract, and he had approached Red Sox management about working on an extension. Henry said his personal hopes regarding moving forward with Dombrowski began to waver “right after the World Series.” Boston’s franchise-record 108 victories and five-game triumph over the Dodgers were followed by more than \$74 million in contracts dished out to Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce, the two trade deadline acquisitions who combined to appear in just 52 games this season.

“We don’t feel we were in dire straits,” Werner said. “We just felt that we needed a different approach going forward.”

Eovaldi is one of just seven Red Sox players under contract next season, and Boston also counts 14 others who are eligible for arbitration. Long-term deals include an average annual sum of \$73.6 million for Eovaldi, Chris Sale and David Price – all three pitchers have spent significant time on the injured list this season. Sale begins a five-year extension in 2020 while Eovaldi made just 12 starts in the first year of his own four-year deal.

“Our real intention is to be competitive every year, and we’ll do whatever we have to do to do that,” Werner said. “But it doesn’t mean – the solution to that isn’t always having the highest payroll in baseball.”

The Red Sox paid more than \$178.6 million to those 21 players this season, and that doesn’t include the likes of Rafael Devers, Michael Chavis, Darwinzon Hernandez and Marcus Walden. None of those four players are eligible for arbitration and will be paid on the league minimum scale. Six pending free agents also took home nearly \$48 million in 2019, including \$20.625 million for Rick Porcello.

“In the end, we take responsibility for the overall direction of the club,” Werner said. “One of the things we’ve talked about that I think is apparent is we need to have more depth in our minor league system and more people coming up through the system that can be everyday baseball players.”

Boston started the season ranked dead last among farm systems per Baseball America. The Red Sox have improved to No. 22 despite graduating Chavis and Hernandez to the big leagues and place a significant amount of stock in prospects like Triston Casas, Bobby Dalbec, Jarren Duran and Tanner Houck. Dalbec and Houck should both get a long look for a place on the 25-man roster next spring.

“It was painful to make a change,” Henry said. “For me personally, it was painful. But we felt it was the right thing to do.”

Henry said Alex Cora will return as the club’s manager in 2020, but he made no such guarantees regarding right fielder Mookie Betts. The 2018 American League Most Valuable Player will be a free agent following the 2020 season and has stated on multiple occasions his intention to test the open market. Boston could explore trading Betts during the offseason in an attempt to recoup some of his considerable value.

“Obviously there will be a point where hopefully we can make a deal, or we’ll decide at that point what is Plan B or Plan C,” Werner said. “We haven’t gotten to that point. We’re very open to continuing the discussions with him.”

Henry offered no timeline for making a hire, saying the Red Sox will likely open their search outside the organization. Assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O’Halloran and Zack Scott and senior vice president Raquel Ferreira having overseen the club’s daily operations since Dombrowski was dismissed on Sept. 8. Romero had been frequently mentioned as the most likely among that group to be promoted.

“We all know Boston is an incredibly great sports town,” Werner said. “It’s also very demanding. We want to be excellent year-in and year-out. I consider this position to be the most coveted – one of the most coveted – in all of sports.”

“It’s sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager,” Henry said. “We are starting the search looking outwardly.”

Orioles 4, Red Sox 1: Asher Wojciechowski dominates listless Boston again

Bill Koch

Asher Wojciechowski has now enjoyed his two best career starts against the Red Sox.

The journeyman right-hander silenced Boston’s bats in July at Camden Yards and again Friday night at Fenway Park. The dreadful Orioles and the Red Sox were on somewhat equal footing this time around – both will be watching the playoffs next week from the comfort of their respective couches. Boston still had realistic October aspirations the first time it faced the 30-year-old rookie.

Wojciechowski shut out the Red Sox over six innings and Baltimore made Nathan Eovaldi pay dearly for the lone mistake of his outing. Renato Nunez took care of the offense with a three-run homer as the Orioles silenced Boston, 4-1, on a perfect fall evening.

Sam Travis was one of two Red Sox runners to touch third base, and he did so on his way to being thrown out at the plate in the bottom of the fourth inning. That was the sole early threat Boston mustered against Wojciechowski and three relievers, coming three outs from suffering a seventh shutout defeat in 2019. Baltimore pitching set down 12 straight Red Sox hitters into the ninth until Rafael Devers doubled and Xander Bogaerts sent an RBI single up the middle.

The announced crowd of 34,533 fans had little to cheer until Travis was hit by a pitch with two outs and Jackie Bradley Jr. launched a drive to deep right. The ball hit the top of the low wall fronting the visiting bullpen and Travis attempted to score all the way from first. The Orioles executed a perfect relay and Travis was out by a considerable margin at the plate, taking any realistic Boston hopes of a comeback with him into the dugout.

Wojciechowski set down the final six men he faced and allowed just four hits in all. He walked one and struck out six, bringing his total to 16 punchouts in his two victories over the Red Sox this season. He carried a 5.31 earned-run average into this start and shaved it to 4.92.

Eovaldi finished his first full season in Boston on the opposite note. His ERA stands at 5.99 after just 23 appearances and a lengthy stint on the injured list. Nunez crushed an 0-and-2 curveball off the light tower in deep left, breaking up a scoreless tie in the top of the third.

“It was just the walks that got me,” said Eovaldi, who issued four bases on balls. “Then I was ahead of Nunez right there, left it down the middle and he was able to hit it out. That was the difference, really.”

The Red Sox will finish just 27-32 this season in games started by Eovaldi, Chris Sale and David Price. Their collective failure atop the rotation went a long way toward putting Boston in this position – playing

meaningless games on the final weekend with Dave Dombrowski fired. Nunez touched Marcus Walden for an RBI single in the ninth, tacking on more insurance that wasn't required.

"It's going to be an interesting offseason for (Eovaldi)," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "Obviously he's healthy – you saw it today. That's good. Just clean a few things up.

"This is a guy that we trust. We made a big commitment to him. We saw what he did last year when he came here and then towards the end of the season. We believe that he can be a force in the rotation."

This defeat also clinches the first losing record for the Red Sox in the Back Bay since 2014. The last Boston team defending a World Series crown finished just 34-47 at this ballpark, a rudderless roster darkened by malcontents like A.J. Pierzynski and John Lackey. The Red Sox slipped to 37-40 here with just two games left this weekend.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox ownership considers open GM position 'one of the most coveted in all of sports'

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox open GM position might not be appealing to everyone on ownership's list of candidates.

After all, ownership dismissed Ben Cherington and Dave Dombrowski after both built World Series championship teams.

Cherington and Dombrowski combined for more championships (2) in the past seven years than Yankees GM Brian Cashman (1) has in the past 18 years — and yet both are gone.

ESPN's Buster Olney wrote, "Why nobody might want to be Boston's GM."

But Red Sox ownership feels it is an attractive position.

"I consider this position to be one of the most coveted in all of sports," chairman Tom Werner said at Fenway Park on Friday.

Werner and principal owner John Henry are pursuing a candidate with previous experience.

"I look at it as we've had three general managers since 2003, right?" Werner said. "So I look at it like we've had three general managers in 17 years."

Mike Port served as interim GM in 2002, the first year Henry owned the Red Sox. Theo Epstein served as GM from 2003-11.

"We've been successful bringing in a general manager from the outside. And we've been successful by bringing in somebody internally," Werner said.

Dates revealed for Boston Red Sox Winter Weekend at MGM Springfield

Chris Cotillo

Springfield's first turn at hosting one of the biggest baseball-related events of the winter will take place from Jan. 17 to 19, 2020.

The fifth annual "Red Sox Winter Weekend" event, which was held at Foxwoods for the first four years before the team reached a multi-year partnership with MGM in February, will be held at MGM Springfield

on the third weekend of January. The fan festival will take place less than a month before the team reports to spring training in Fort Myers, Florida.

The Winter Weekend event is the club's premier offseason event and includes meet-and-greets with coaches and players, baseball clinics and a Red Sox Town Hall event. Reigning A.L. MVP Mookie Betts headlined a group of 20 players at this year's event in January along with Chris Sale, Rick Porcello, Andrew Benintendi and Xander Bogaerts.

The Red Sox introduced Winter Weekend in 2015 in an effort to drum up interest ahead of the team's departure for spring training. Historically, it has started with a Town Hall event Friday night and autograph sessions, clinics and panel discussions highlighting the Saturday festivities. The weekend wraps up with a mascot breakfast Sunday morning.

MGM became the "official and exclusive resort casino" of the Red Sox earlier this year in a partnership that guaranteed signage throughout Fenway Park, including in the middle of the iconic Green Monster in left field. That deal replaced a five-year contract with Foxwoods.

John Henry explains why Boston Red Sox didn't publicly address Dave Dombrowski's firing

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox principal owner John Henry addressed the media Friday for the first time since firing president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski on Sept. 9. More than a month later, Henry explained why the ownership group didn't hold a press conference in the days after Dombrowski's dismissal.

"I've had a long relationship with Dave. It was painful to make a change for me personally," Henry said. "It was painful. But we felt it was the right thing to do. And from my own standpoint, if we were going to have a press conference, I would love to have talked about the things he brought, what he accomplished for us. You guys all would've asked what went wrong, which is your job to do. I understand that."

Henry, chairman Tom Werner and president/CEO Sam Kennedy met with reporters in a private briefing at Fenway Park before Friday's game. Henry addressed the idea that the ownership group had hid from the public after the move was made to fire Dombrowski earlier in the month.

"It wasn't so much a case of us, I think, as it was portrayed... that we were hiding from you," he said. "It's just that I didn't see, we didn't see a utility of going through what the differences were. It was more of a personal thing."

Dombrowski's firing was announced by a team spokesman after midnight Sept. 9 and confirmed in a press release later that morning. Before Friday, the only public comments from Henry and Werner on the topic came via prepared statements in the team press release.

Kennedy appeared on WEEI the day after Dombrowski was fired and told the hosts of "Ordway, Merloni and Fauria" that the ownership group believed holding a formal press conference was a futile exercise. He expanded on that point Friday.

"Right or wrong, we weren't going to answer questions about the departure other than to thank him for a job well done," Kennedy said Friday. "You're obviously in a situation where you're going to be asked a lot of questions about blame and what you did wrong. We just felt very strongly as a group that what we would do is thank him for his time and his service here."

Boston Red Sox rumors: Tom Werner says team will 'hopefully supplement' their relief pitching

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox want to add to their bullpen this offseason.

Boston entered Friday ranked 17th in the majors in reliever ERA (4.40). The bullpen especially struggled in June (4.92 ERA) and July (5.19 ERA).

"It's not a secret we're going to upgrade our pitching," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said at Fenway Park on Friday.

Werner said he sees the starting rotation receiving an upgrade simply by Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi returning healthy.

"And we're going to hopefully supplement our relief pitching," Werner said.

This should be an interesting offseason with the Red Sox adding and subtracting players from the roster. Principal owner John Henry said Friday his goal is for the 2020 payroll to be under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Threshold.

But the 2020 Red Sox payroll — before any offseason transactions — already is approaching \$218 million. Boston's 2019 payroll reached approximately \$240 million.

Boston, therefore, will need to cut significant payroll to add players via trades or free agent signings.

One potential subtraction is Mookie Betts who is eligible for free agency after 2020. The Red Sox still hope to sign him to a contract extension. But they will turn to a "Plan B or Plan C" if they are unable to reach a deal with him by a certain point, Werner said.

"I was just looking at some statistics today. Maybe this is obvious but the most important thing is health. Good health," Werner said as he looked ahead to 2020. "When you look at the number of innings we got out of (Nathan) Eovaldi this year or Chris Sale or David Price."

Sale pitched 147 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings, Price pitched 107 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings and Eovaldi pitched 62 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

Boston Red Sox will undergo big changes this winter as result of cost-cutting mission

Chris Cotillo

If you attend any of the Red Sox' final games of the season this weekend, make sure you realize you're probably witnessing the end of an era in Red Sox baseball.

Soak it in, tip your cap... and come to terms with how some of the key players who led the Sox to three consecutive A.L. East titles and a World Series championship in the last few years are likely taking the field in a Sox uniform for the final time.

If there was one major takeaway from ownership's private meeting with the media before Friday's game, it's that wholesale changes are coming to the team's roster this winter. It turns out the surprising dismissal of Dave Dombrowski earlier this month might just be the tip of the iceberg.

As the roster currently stands, 19 of the 25 players who made up the World Series roster last October are still with the organization. Save for Craig Kimbrel, Joe Kelly and Eduardo Nunez, almost every key member of that championship team is still with the club nearly a year later.

That is about to change, potentially in a pretty drastic way. The desire of owners John Henry and Tom Werner to get under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold is real and will likely require some significant roster gymnastics far more creative than Dombrowski's decision to bring back almost the entire championship roster a year ago.

Henry seems to have some big changes in mind already.

“There are certain things that we can do that would create a problem,” he said. “But there don’t seem to be any of those on the horizon at this point. We’ve known about this for some time so we were able to plan ahead.”

Counting against the luxury tax, the Red Sox have about \$150 million in contracts guaranteed for next season and will need about \$60-65 million more for raises for key players like Chris Sale, Xander Bogaerts, Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. A trimming down is inevitable.

The Sox won’t retain all their key free agents, meaning Rick Porcello, Brock Holt and Mitch Moreland could all be gone. J.D. Martinez must decide whether he’s going to opt out or stay put. The discussion about Betts’ future will dominate the winter as the Sox decide whether to cash in their best trade chip or hope for a change of heart about signing an extension.

The back end of the roster will undergo an overhaul as well. Steven Wright and Sandy Leon appear likely to be non-tendered. A reliever or two -- finally -- will be brought in from the outside. And Bradley Jr.’s days appear numbered, whether as a trade candidate or, in a more drastic possibility, a non-tender.

Manager Alex Cora will be back, as will his two young infield stars Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers. The financial commitments to Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi likely lock in their roster spots, and Eduardo Rodriguez is probably untouchable after the year he has had.

Beyond that? Everything’s fair game. Andrew Benintendi might not return. Ditto Christian Vazquez, whose value is at an all-time high.

Yet the Red Sox, ever allergic to the terms “rebuild” and “bridge year,” promise they’re going to find a way to contend. A team that is already behind both the Rays and Yankees and will likely be less talented in 2020 is somehow expected to contend in an improving A.L. East.

“Our real intention is to be competitive every year,” Werner said. “We’ll do whatever we have to do to do that. The solution to that isn’t always having the highest payroll in baseball.”

Boston’s desire to get below the \$208 million threshold makes all the sense in the world. The Sox have blown past the threshold in each of the last two years and would face steep penalties for doing so again for the third year in a row.

But to do that, the roster will likely look significantly different come spring training. The contention window for these Red Sox might have just closed much earlier than anyone would have expected.

Boston Red Sox owner John Henry says relationship with Dave Dombrowski began deteriorating in October: ‘It became clear to me we weren’t on the same wavelength going forward’

Chris Cutillo

It turns out that the seeds of Dave Dombrowski’s firing were planted at Fenway Park long before the final decision was made earlier this month.

Red Sox principal owner John Henry-- who expressed his desire for Dombrowski to sign an extension shortly after last year’s World Series victory and later doubled down during spring training -- said Friday that he began to see his relationship with Dombrowski deteriorating shortly after the World Series.

“Right after the World Series, I think it became clear to me that perhaps we weren’t going to be on the same wavelength going forward,” Henry said. “But I was hopeful, throughout the year, that maybe that perception would change. It didn’t.”

Henry refused to discuss the specific differences he had with Dombrowski, only saying that the pair disagreed on the vision for the future of the organization. That schism, along with the Sox' underperformance this season, led to Dombrowski's dismissal Sept. 9.

"When we looked at doing a new long-term deal, we were unanimous among us that we were not in the same situation we were in four years ago," Henry said. "Things have changed quite a bit. The makeup of the team, where we were headed and the direction we were headed. We made a decision we were not going to continue in that direction."

Dombrowski's firing came at an odd time, being announced by a team spokesman shortly after a loss to the Yankees finished up around midnight on a Monday morning. Henry had officially informed Dombrowski of the decision earlier that evening, honoring the executive's wishes that he be informed of any decision as quickly as possible.

"Once we made a decision, we just did not want to wait," Henry said. "It was in Dave's interest and our interest not to wait. As soon as we made a decision, to be forthright. That afternoon was the first time I had seen Dave in quite a while. We had made the decision in the previous few days."

Henry said the dismissal of Dombrowski, who he had previously worked with in Miami, hit him hard personally.

"Just because we see things differently doesn't mean he's not a great general manager," Henry said. "I have tremendous respect for him. I was very hopeful at the end of the World Series that we would end up working together for the long term. It didn't turn out that way."

Boston Red Sox hopeful Mookie Betts will sign extension, but will decide on a 'plan B or plan C' by certain point

Christopher Smith

Mookie Betts has strongly indicated he won't sign a contract extension. He has expressed his desire to become a free agent after the 2020 season.

The Red Sox still remain hopeful the two sides can strike a deal. But it sounds as though the organization will move in a different direction by a certain point if they are unsuccessful in completing an extension.

"We have made proposals to him in the past and he did want to test free agency, which is his right," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said. "And we'll have some conversations with him going forward. But obviously there will be a point where hopefully we can make a deal. Or we'll decide at that point what is Plan B or Plan C? But we haven't gotten to that point. And we're very open to continuing the discussions with him."

Betts' reluctance to sign an extension could lead the Red Sox to trade him this coming offseason. Boston's 2020 payroll already is at approximately \$218 million. Principal owner John Henry said Friday he wants to stay under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Threshold in 2020.

Betts likely will receive more than \$30 million in arbitration.

"(Red Sox president) Sam (Kennedy) and I actually had a nice conversation with Mookie's agents on a couple of different topics a couple of weeks ago," Werner said. "We think he's one of the great players in baseball. Hopefully there's a meeting of the minds going forward."

Betts and Betts' agent never have told the Red Sox he does not want to remain in Boston beyond 2020, Werner said.

"I think he loves the Boston Red Sox," Werner said.

Red Sox GM search: Henry says team would prefer external replacement; no timetable set for hire

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox are primarily looking at external candidates with experience running a baseball operations department as they begin their search to replace Dave Dombrowski, team principal owner John Henry said Friday.

Henry downplayed the notion that Dombrowski's replacement could come from inside the organization. Internal candidates like assistant GMs Eddie Romero and Brian O'Halloran had been linked to the opening.

"It's possible, but this is a tough job," Henry said. "This is a tough offseason, too. We talked about the challenges of the CBT, but this is a challenging offseason. To put one of (internal candidates) in charge, that's sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. We are starting the search looking outward."

Henry and chairman Tom Werner both said the Sox have not established a timetable for the hire. At this point, the team has not begun the process of asking permission to speak to executives with other organizations.

Henry said trying to hire a top executive from outside the organization is a challenging process, noting that just two sitting department heads -- Chicago's Theo Epstein and Los Angeles' Andrew Friedman -- left top jobs for other organizations.

"It's very difficult the way things are set up in baseball," Henry said.

There is no mandate to have a replacement in place by the general managers' meetings, which begin Nov. 11 in Scottsdale, Arizona.

"In an ideal world, absolutely. I don't think we absolutely need to," Henry said. "I think it would be an advantage to. We have tremendous belief in this group that's leading baseball operations right now. They're very strong."

Since Dombrowski was fired Sept. 9, the baseball operations department has been run by a group consisting of assistant GMs O'Halloran, Romero, and Zack Scott and senior VP Raquel Ferreira. All four of those executives have been with the Sox for more than a decade, leading ownership to believe they are capable of running things before a full-time replacement is brought in.

"We are very pleased with the work Eddie, Zack, Brian and Raquel have done," Werner said. "They're all been with us for a decade each. We have great confidence in them."

The next head of baseball operations -- whether deemed the team's president of baseball operations or GM -- will be tasked with building up depth in the minor-league system and developing homegrown talent. Another focus will be on trimming payroll, as ownership's goal is to get under \$208 million and reset their status in the competitive balance threshold system.

The next baseball operations head will be Boston's fourth since 2011. Both Henry and Werner denied that prospective candidates would be scared off by the amount of turnover in recent years.

"We all know Boston is an incredible great sports town. It's also very demanding," Werner said. "We want to be excellent year in and year out. I consider this position to be the most coveted, or one of the most coveted, in all of sports."

"We always opt when we can to have, whether it's a general manager or manager, have them be here as long as possible," Henry added. "We don't look too make changes willy-nilly."

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

5 non-CBT takeaways from John Henry's press conference

Chris Mason

John Henry made waves with his desire to slash salary, but there was more news in ownership's Friday afternoon press conference than that alone.

Here are the five biggest non-luxury-tax takeaways:

1. Strange not to hold earlier presser

Dave Dombrowski was fired 10 months after delivering a World Series, but ownership didn't feel the need to hold a press conference explaining the move. Henry's reasoning yesterday further muddied that.

"It was painful to make a change for me personally, it was painful," Henry said. "But we felt it was the right thing to do. And from my own standpoint, if we were going to have a press conference, I would love to have talked to about the things he brought, what he accomplished for us. You guys all would've asked what went wrong, which is your job to do, I understand that.

"It wasn't so much a case of us, I think, as it was portrayed that we were hiding from you. It's just that I didn't see, we didn't see a utility of going through what the differences were. It was more of a personal thing."

Sure, it's nice in theory, but Henry faced the same questions yesterday. And most still went unanswered.

2. Breakup months in the making?

Though Henry stated a desire to extend Dombrowski following the 2018 World Series, that urge was short-lived.

"Right after the World Series we had preliminary talks about our way forward, and it was clear to me we weren't on the same page at that point," Henry said. "In fact, he and I talked about it that night, that Sunday evening, I think he disagreed with me about that, that we disagreed. I think, in how we thought we should move forward."

3. GM search is national

Eddie Romero, Raquel Ferreira, Zack Scott, and Brian O'Halloran are acting general managers, but ownership is prioritizing an external hire.

Chairman Tom Werner believes Red Sox GM is still one of sports' most coveted positions, and Henry pointed to the road ahead.

"This is a challenging offseason," Henry said. "So, to put one of the candidates you keep bringing up in charge and responsible for that, that's sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So, we are starting the search looking outward."

4. Minors matter

Rebuilding the minor league system will be a focal point for whoever the new general manager is, as the Sox prospects are consistently ranked in the bottom third of baseball.

"We need to have more depth in our minor league system," Werner said. "More people coming up through the system that can be every day baseball players."

5. AC is safe

Henry's briefest answer came when asked if Alex Cora will continue to manage the team, no matter the new general manager.

"Yes," the owner replied.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox owners address Dombrowski, future

Ian Browne

Almost immediately after last October's World Series triumph over the Dodgers, Red Sox owner John Henry had a feeling that president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski had a different vision of the organization going forward than ownership did.

In part of a 24-minute session with the media on Friday that also included chairman Tom Werner, Henry said that he had hoped Dombrowski would change his view of the way the organization should look over the next five years or so.

As the weeks and months went by, it became obvious to Henry that Dombrowski's vision wasn't going to mesh with ownership's.

And with a disappointing 2019 season nearing its final weeks, and Dombrowski's contract up after '20, ownership decided on Sept. 8 to part ways with the executive who led the Sox to three consecutive division titles, including last year's World Series championship season. Henry, Werner and team president/CEO Sam Kennedy made the decision unanimously.

"We can talk about what he did wrong, but I prefer to talk about what he did right," said Henry in his first public comments since the front office shakeup. "He was, as I said earlier, I think the right person at the right time. Right after the World Series, I think it became clear to me that perhaps we weren't going to be on the same wavelength going forward. But I was hopeful throughout the year that maybe that perception would change. It didn't."

It was a difficult move for Henry to make, given his long-standing relationship with Dombrowski that dates back to when they worked together with the Marlins from 1998-2001 and then reunited in '15 in Boston.

The direction the Red Sox want to go in the early part of their next five-year window includes deepening the farm system and trimming payroll to get below the first luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million.

"If you don't reset [the competitive balance tax], there are penalties," Henry said. "So, we've known for some time now we needed to reset as other clubs have done."

"Our real intention is to be competitive every year, and we'll do whatever we have to do to do that," Werner said. "But the solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball."

Whether it was with the 1997 Marlins, his perennial contenders in Detroit or his teams in Boston, Dombrowski's best teams had higher-tier payrolls.

“Moving forward, we just thought that in order to be successful the next five years, we needed to improve in a number of different areas,” Werner said. “He was, as I said, the right man for the time, and moving forward, we’re going in a different direction.”

Since Dombrowski’s departure, assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O’Halloran and Zack Scott have been running baseball operations along with senior vice president Raquel Ferreira, who has taken on an expanded role during the transition.

While Henry and Werner both praised the current quartet, Henry said that the search for the next leader of baseball operations will start outside the organization for someone with previous experience running a front office.

“This is a tough job. This is a tough offseason, too. We talked about the challenges for the CBT, but I think we would all agree, this is a challenging offseason,” Henry said. “So, to put one of the [internal] candidates in charge and responsible for that, that’s sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So, we are starting the search looking outward.”

And it figures to be somebody who has experience building a farm system and building a championship-caliber team with a more efficient payroll than Boston’s recent teams have had.

“One of the things we observe, and I think we all observe, is first of all, there are teams that make the postseason with half the payroll the Red Sox have,” said Werner. “Look at the success Oakland has had this year and the Milwaukee Brewers. And we have resources. And I would just like to say that while we would like to get under the competitive balance tax threshold, we have had years we’ve been above it, we’ve had years where we were below it. There may be certain circumstances that we exceed it.”

The new general manager will have some big decisions to make going forward. One of the biggest will be to gain as much clarity as possible going forward on the contract situation of star right fielder Mookie Betts, who is eligible for free agency at the end of 2020.

The Red Sox had extension talks with Betts multiple times in recent years, but it has never led to a long-term deal. Betts has said repeatedly since Spring Training that he plans on going to free agency before signing his next contract.

“We think he is one of the great players in baseball. Hopefully there is a meeting of the minds going forward,” said Werner. “We’ve stated publicly that we would hope he would stay with us the rest of his career. We have made proposals to him in the past, and he did want to test free agency, which is his right.”

It’s at least possible the Red Sox will explore trading Betts this winter if they don’t think a long-term deal is feasible.

“And we’ll have some conversations with him going forward,” Werner said. “But obviously there’ll be a point where hopefully we can make a deal [with Betts], or we’ll decide at that point what is Plan B or Plan C. But we haven’t gotten to that point, and we’re very open to continuing discussions with him.”

In the ownership led by Henry and Werner, the Red Sox have won four World Series championships after not winning any for 86 years.

Theo Epstein was the architect of the first two, guiding the front office from 2003-11. He left because he wanted a new challenge with the Cubs. Ben Cherington took over in ‘12, won a World Series in ‘13 and left after opting not to take a demotion when Dombrowski was hired in August of ‘15.

And now the team is looking to replace Dombrowski, just one year after he built a World Series champion.

Both owners scoffed at the notion that recent turnover in the front office makes Boston a less-desirable place to run a front office.

“We all know Boston is an incredibly great sports town,” Werner said. “It’s also very demanding. We want to be excellent year in and year out. But I consider this position to be the most coveted, or one of the most coveted, in all of sports.”

“I think we take our responsibility very seriously, and we always opt when we can to have, whether it’s a general manager or a manager, [stability] as long as possible,” said Henry. “We don’t look to make changes willy-nilly. I think in this case, we were unanimous that we needed to make a change. But I don’t feel like we’re going through general managers.”

Henry and Werner said there is no timetable to name Dombrowski’s replacement.

Eovaldi: 'Next year I'll come in ready to start'

Ian Browne

Nathan Eovaldi was one misfire away from closing 2019 with a scoreless outing.

But as has been the case for Eovaldi for most of this season, something went amiss in a 4-1 loss to the Orioles on Friday night at Fenway Park.

This time, it was a curveball in the dead-center of the plate that Renato Núñez mauled for a three-run homer in the top of the third.

“It was definitely frustrating,” Eovaldi said of his season. “I felt like I couldn’t get consecutive good starts. Felt like there was always a little bit of something going on. Felt like I threw the ball well tonight, it was just the walks that got me. I also had Núñez right there, left it down the middle and he was able to hit it out.”

In a five-inning performance, Eovaldi also had some control issues, walking four. He gave up three hits and struck out three.

“I think obviously strike one is very important. We know the stuff is there,” said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. “I really liked the one [at] Tampa Bay after the first inning. I think his rhythm was great. He did an outstanding job keeping them off-balanced. Tonight, he walked four and there was a lot of traffic out there. And that 0-2 pitch to Núñez, he stays on it. It’s kind of like, [he needs to be] more consistent.”

A significant injury which required right elbow surgery and a fluctuation of roles made this a difficult season for Eovaldi, coming off his brilliant October of last year. In 23 appearances -- 12 of them starts -- Eovaldi went 2-1 with a 5.99 ERA.

“He was never able to find his rhythm throughout the season,” said Cora.

The flame-throwing righty will now turn his attention to the offseason and putting together the type of 2020 season the Sox envisioned when he was signed to a four-year, \$68 million contract back in December.

“I felt like for the most part this whole season, my cutter and splitter were real inconsistent. So [I would like] to be able to work on those and go into Spring Training next year healthy and strong and ready to go,” said Eovaldi. “And I feel like I can have a little more rhythm to my windup and my mechanics, so that will be what I’m really trying to work on this offseason and, like I said, be ready for next year, ready to go.”

Without question, Eovaldi is one of the key players the Red Sox need to see some improvement from in 2020.

"This is a guy that we trust," Cora said. "We made a big commitment to him. We saw what he did last year when he came here and then towards the end of the season. So we believe that he can be a force in the rotation."

Eovaldi is of the firm belief that sticking with one role next season will benefit him.

"I was trying to do different roles and help the team out, but next year I'll come in ready to start," Eovaldi said.

*** *WEEI.com***

Welcome to the new reality facing these Red Sox

Rob Bradford

So, the owners spoke. Their message? Dig in.

"This is a tough offseason, too," said Red Sox principal owner John Henry. "We talked about the challenge of CBT, but I think you would all agree this is a challenging offseason. To put one of the candidates you keep bringing up in charge and responsible for that, that's sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager."

Wow.

It was just one of the nuggets offered by Henry over the course of a 25-minute get-together with the media in the owners' box at Fenway Park. That answer was in response to who the Red Sox might be looking at to replace Dave Dombrowski as the chief decision-maker on the baseball operations side of things. But earlier in the session were items of significance, such as that aforementioned "challenge of CBT (Competitive Balance Threshold)."

"This year we need to be under the CBT and that was something we've known for more than a year now," said Henry, citing the quest to get the payroll under \$208 million.

There was also the update regarding the Red Sox' attempt to keep Mookie Betts around beyond 2020.

"We've stated publicly that we would hope he would stay with us the rest of his career," added chairman Tom Werner. "We have made proposals to him in the past and he did want to test free agency which is his right. And we'll have some conversations with him going forward. But obviously there'll be a point where hopefully we can make a deal or we'll decide at that point what is plan B or plan C but we haven't gotten to that point and we're very open to continuing discussions with him."

There were plenty of other items. The dissatisfaction with the farm system and current options to supplement the big league roster with. How there were immediate disagreements after the World Series win regarding how the team should be built between Dombrowski and ownership. And of course what they are prioritizing when looking for Dombrowski's successor.

But through it all two words jumped out: "Challenging offseason." This wasn't a secret, but the bucket of cold water thrown on everyone by Henry and Werner crystalized the organization's reality.

The world knows this isn't the quick-fix Red Sox Dombrowski took over.

For example, we texted a baseball executive who would check off all the boxes in regards to what Red Sox' ownership was looking for in the next head of baseball operations. He has had previous experience as a general manager, has been immersed in baseball's new way of thinking and has continued to contribute to

the success of a well-respected organization. (No, it wasn't Theo Epstein.) The question was simple: Would you be interested in the Red Sox job?

"I don't think so."

The exec certainly doesn't speak for everyone but it is eye-opening to imagine viewing this organization with this payroll and this kind of talent in such a light. In the baseball world, it's still a good job, just not as appealing as some (such as the owners) might want us to believe.

The first challenge starts with figuring out how to manage what was supposed to be Dombrowski's foundation, the starting rotation. No matter what the medical reports heading into spring training, uncertainty will immediately hover over the three pitchers -- Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi -- who make up nearly \$80 million of next season's payroll. For the next GM, this is perhaps the biggest stumbling block considering there is really no avenue to break free of this commitment (which runs for another three years).

So with the core locked in, finding avenues to wiggle the payroll down toward that \$208 million becomes increasingly challenging.

The mandate would put a damper on any reunion with the likes of players such as Brock Holt, Mitch Moreland or Rick Porcello unless their free-agent market plummets to the lowest of low levels.

Trading Betts? That isn't a turn-key proposition either. The value of executing such a move wouldn't seem to be residing any time before next season's trade deadline, with the offseason return being minimized by the fact that any team getting Mookie would be committing to paying him around \$30 million for what might be just one season.

There is Jackie Bradley Jr.'s contract, as well. Heading into the final year of arbitration-eligibility he will be slated to make upwards of \$10 million. But if the Red Sox are going to entertain moving on from Betts than there can't be complete stripping of the starting outfield, with the only real internal addition from the minors residing in the form of a player -- Jarren Duran -- who hasn't played above Double-A.

Simply put, ownership wants to change direction with a locked steering wheel.

"Our real intention is to be competitive every year and we'll do whatever we have to do that," Werner said. "The solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball."

Welcome to the new world of the Red Sox.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

John Henry and Tom Werner make it official - Red Sox want to start cutting payroll

John Tomase

Let the bloodletting begin.

It's hard to form any other takeaway after listening to Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner proclaim their desire to drop below the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold for 2020.

Speaking to reporters for the first time since firing president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski in early September, Henry made it clear that the team's bloated payroll must be trimmed.

"This year we need to be under the CBT [competitive balance tax] and that was something we've known for more than a year now," he said. "If you don't reset, there are penalties, so we've known for some time now we needed to reset as other clubs have done."

With the correlation between spending and winning no longer as one-to-one as it was 15 years ago, the Red Sox see an opportunity to get leaner. As it stands now, their hands are largely tied by the \$80 million annually they've committed to unreliable starters Chris Sale, David Price, and Nathan Eovaldi. Meanwhile, the A's and Rays are headed to the postseason despite two of the bottom-six payrolls in baseball.

Though Henry and Werner left open the possibility of spending beyond the tax, their intentions sounded pretty clear.

"One of the things we observe and I think we all observe is, first of all, there are teams that make the postseason with half the payroll the Red Sox have," Werner said. "Look at the success Oakland has had this year and the Milwaukee Brewers. And we have resources. And I would just like to say that while we would like to get under the competitive balance tax threshold, we have had years we've been above it, we've had years where we were below it. There may be certain circumstances that we exceed it. Obviously, there are penalties to exceeding it, but it's not that we go into a room and say it has to be a certain dollar number."

Added Henry: "I want to answer by saying our real intention is to be competitive every year and we'll do whatever we have to do to do that. The solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball."

The task of dropping below \$208 million is a daunting one. The Red Sox have about \$220 million committed to 16 players, assuming they keep each of their arbitration-eligible players except catcher Sandy Leon and Steven Wright, extend or go to arbitration with Betts, and retain DH J.D. Martinez.

That includes second baseman Dustin Pedroia (\$13.75 million), whose career is almost certainly over, and center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., who is due more than \$10 million in arbitration and could be jettisoned.

The Red Sox won't keep all 16 of those players, though. Betts could be traded, though Werner said the two sides have spoken and that the team is still holding out hope he can be extended. Martinez could also opt out of his deal and walk away for virtually nothing.

Even without their roughly \$50 million on the books, the Red Sox would still have a hard time staying under \$208 million. Their offseason wish list could include a starter to replace Rick Porcello, depth to support the top three starters in case of injury, a first baseman, a second baseman, multiple relievers, and maybe an outfielder if Betts is dealt.

As we wrote a couple of weeks ago, the Red Sox spent more than \$240 million last year and will be in that range again this year. If they spend beyond the tax threshold again in 2020, they'll trigger the most onerous penalties, with a tax of 50 percent on every dollar spent over \$208 million, 95 percent on every dollar over \$248 million, and a sliding scale in between. They could end up making a tax payment of more than \$20 million.

They want to reset all of those penalties, and there's only one way to do it -- start hacking off some limbs.

Red Sox want to keep Mookie Betts, but preparing 'Plan B or Plan C' if he decides to test free agency

John Tomase

Trading Mookie Betts is not a foregone conclusion, not for Tom Werner anyway.

The Red Sox team chairman said on Friday that the team has had talks with Betts' agents within the past two weeks and remains hopeful that the reigning American League MVP can be signed to a contract extension.

"We've stated publicly that we would hope he would stay with us the rest of his career," Werner said. "We have made proposals to him in the past and he did want to test free agency, which is his right. And we'll have some conversations with him going forward. But obviously there'll be a point where hopefully we can make a deal or we'll decide at that point what is plan B or plan C, but we haven't gotten to that point and we're very open to continuing discussions with him."

Betts has one year of arbitration eligibility remaining after signing a one-year, \$20 million contract to avoid arbitration this season. He's due \$28 million-\$30 million this winter, but if the red Sox decide he's not interested in staying long term, they'll have to explore moving him.

Werner disputed the notion that Betts wants out.

"No, I think he loves the Boston Red Sox," he said.

Betts, who turns 27 Oct. 7, began the day hitting .294 with 29 homers, 79 RBI, and a 6.9 WAR that ranks sixth in the American League.

"We think he is one of the great players in baseball," Werner said. "Hopefully, there is a meeting of the minds going forward."

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Red Sox owners paint a portrait of change

Sean McAdam

Making their first comments since the firing of Dave Dombrowski earlier this month, Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner met with reporters Friday and sketched out their reasons for making a change at the top, along with their thoughts on a number of other issues facing the franchise in the near future.

Here's a list of what was said ... and what it might mean in practical terms:

1. On firing Dombrowski

NEWS: While continuing to be somewhat vague about the reason behind the dismissal and being careful not to bad-mouth Dombrowski, Henry and Werner suggested that the move didn't reflect any dissatisfaction with the job Dombrowski did, but rather, concern that he wasn't the right fit for what lies ahead for the Sox.

"We're enormously grateful for everything that Dave did to bring us the three division championships and the World Series," said Werner. "He was the right leader for Baseball Operations then, but moving forward, we just thought that in order for us to be successful in the next five years, we needed to improve in a number of different areas. As I said, he was the right man for the time, but moving forward, we're going in a different direction."

Said Henry: "We were unanimous that we're not in the same situation we were four years ago. Things have changed quite a bit with the team and the direction where we're headed. We just made a decision that we weren't going to continue with that direction."

Werner noted that the Sox aim to be "competitive in all facets" with "some of the other teams around the league."

ANALYSIS: This is far from surprising. It is indeed difficult to criticize what Dombrowski accomplished. And as Henry and Werner noted, even the disappointment of 2019 wasn't a big factor. But it's clear that the Sox aren't interested in spending at the very top of the payroll scale year after year and want more out of

their minor league system. Dombrowski's MO, meanwhile, was to sacrifice prospects for established stars, a strategy that can only work for so long.

Werner was clearly referencing a more fertile farm system, the likes of which the league's two best teams — the Yankees and Astros — have done while also continuing to field championship-caliber teams at the big league level.

2. Timetable for a new hire.

NEWS: For now, the team is being run by a quartet of people from Baseball Operations — Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira — while the search for a new GM gets underway.

“We really don't have a timetable,” said Werner. “We're very comfortable with the progress that we've made and we're very comfortable with the leadership qualities of each of those four people.”

ANALYSIS: The owners were asked if they intended to have someone on the job in time for the GM Meetings in mid-November and responded that while that would be a preference, it's hardly a hard-and-fast deadline.

3. Ownership dismissed the notion that the organization is unstable.

NEWS: “I look at it as we've had three general managers since 2003,” said Werner. “So I don't look it like that. We all know that Boston is an incredibly great sports town. It's also very demanding and we want to be excellent year in and year out. But I consider this to be one of the most coveted in all of sports.”

“We don't look to make changes willy-nilly,” added Henry.

ANALYSIS: The Red Sox can spin this any way they wish, but the fact that they've either pushed aside or fired recent executives less than two years after winning titles has not gone unnoticed within the industry. It could deter some executives from showing interest in the opening and the Sox will have to convince interested applicants that the job will have some security.

4. The payroll is about to be cut.

NEWS: Last year, the Red Sox exceeded the third and final threshold of the competitive balance tax (CBT), with a payroll of more than \$245 million. This season, the Sox went over the second threshold at about \$240 million.

(In 2020), we need to be under the CBT,” said Henry, meaning below \$208 million. “This is something we've known for more than a year.”

Later, both Henry and Werner amended that to say that was merely a “goal,” and that sometimes, events intercede.

Still, it's evident the Sox don't wish to continue to pay the taxes on the overages or suffer the drop-back of draft pick spots that comes as another penalty.

ANALYSIS: This means the Sox are either going to have to unload either some veteran players or opt not to spend much money this winter.

The Red Sox will lose some free agents like Mitch Moreland and Rick Porcello and will likely non-tender the likes of Steven Wright and Sandy Leon.

But they're already committed to more than \$150 million in existing contracts — and that doesn't count big arbitration raises for the likes of Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr. and some relievers.

As such, the Sox may have to explore the possibility of dealing someone like David Price or Nathan Eovaldi — while agreeing to take back a sizeable chunk of the remaining obligations in place.

5. The Red Sox are still interested in resigning Mookie Betts

NEWS: “We’ve stated publicly that we hope he will stay with us for the rest of his career,” said Werner. “We’ve made proposals to him in the past and he did want to test free agency, which is his right and we’ll have conversations with him going forward. Hopefully, there will be a point where we can make a deal or we’ll decide at that point what is Plan B or Plan C. We haven’t gotten to that point and we’re very open to continuing the discussions with him.”

ANALYSIS: It’s difficult to square the Red Sox’ intentions to reduce payroll and also retain Betts on a deal that, by definition, will pay him in excess of \$30 million annually. But as the owners noted, getting under the CBT is a “goal” and not a mandate, an event as big as keeping one of the game’s best players might qualify as a move that would be worth making an exception for.

6. The next GM will likely come from outside the organization.

NEWS: Henry was most direct on this matter, pointing out that this offseason will present a number of challenges.

“This is a tough job and this is a tough offseason too,” said Henry. “This is a challenging offseason. To put (the in-house candidates) in charge is sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So we are starting the search looking outwardly (at experienced general managers).”

ANALYSIS: As we’ve been reporting for weeks, the Red Sox intend to reach out to some of the more successful and experienced executives in the game, a group that includes Houston’s Jeff Luhnow, LA’s Andrew Friedman and the Cubs’ Theo Epstein. If they strike out there, they have a list of others with somewhat smaller profiles. In that sense, nothing’s changed, though Henry did say the club has yet to ask permission to speak to any outside candidates.

BSJ Game Report: Orioles 4, Red Sox 1 – Three things we learned

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox returned home and lost to Baltimore, 4-1. Here are three things we learned:

1. Eovaldi’s season was a disappointment from start to finish.

When the Red Sox signed Nathan Eovaldi to a four-year, \$68-million contract last December, they thought he was poised to have a breakout season. Instead, he missed half the year with an elbow injury that was complicated by a biceps setback and he never got untracked. He didn’t pitch well in April, went on the IL, returned in July to help out in the bullpen, then was transferred back to the rotation in August but never seemed to get untracked. In that regard, Friday, his final outing of the year, was perfectly emblematic of his season: Five innings, three runs allowed and four walks. The three runs came on a three-run homer, his 16th allowed in just 67.2 innings. “It was definitely frustrating,” said Eovaldi of his season. “I couldn’t run off consecutive good starts. I felt like there was always something going on.” There’s no doubting the quality of his stuff, but too often, there were issues with his cutter and splitter — arguably his two best pitches. “I’ll be able to work on those and come into spring training healthy and strong.”

2. Right to end, Bogaerts and Devers grouped with some greats.

The left side of the infield has been one of the few bright spots for the team and as the final series of the season got underway, that was still true. Rafael Devers had a double, No. 53. He now needs one more to join Alex Rodriguez as the only other player to hit 54 doubles in a season before turning 23. He also has 197 hits and needs just three more for, something no one has done at this age in the American League since

... Alex Rodriguez in 1996. Meanwhile, Xander Bogaerts singled home Devers in the ninth to produce the only Boston run and that RBI was his 500th of his career. He's just the fourth player in team history to reach that level before turning 27. The others? Bobby Doerr (621), Jim Rice (583) and Ted Williams (514) — Hall of Famers all. Bogaerts needs one more extra-base hit in the final two games to tie Nomar Garciaparra (85) for most in a season by a Red Sox shortstop. Bogaerts set career highs in RBI, homers, doubles and extra-base hits last season...and has topped each category again this year.

3. Home woes continue

The Red Sox won 3 of their last five on the road to finish with an impressive 46-35 mark away from this season. But returning to Fenway, it was the same old story with another defeat, their 42nd this year. The Sox averaged nine runs in the recent road series in Texas, then came home and were shutout for eight innings by the second-worst team in the American League before breaking through in the ninth. This year will mark the first time since 1980 with the team posting an overall winning record for the season, but end up with a losing record at home. It's also only the second time in team history that happened. With virtually the same personnel as a year ago, the Sox saw their home record dip from 57 home wins in 2018 to just 37 this season, with only two games remaining. It's a mystery why the Sox have underperformed so much at Fenway. Statistically, there hasn't been a wide variance in their pitching or hitting splits between home and road. But it sure hasn't translated to wins, and it's an issue that needs to be addressed if the Sox are to bounce back at all in 2020.

*** *The Athletic***

You thought Red Sox' future was murky before? After ownership address, nothing is certain now

Chad Jennings

If you thought the Red Sox' path forward was uncertain on the day Dave Dombrowski lost his job, you should see it now that ownership has explained its decision and clarified its intentions.

What lies ahead, it turns out, is a vast, thorny wilderness. The next person in charge is going to have to hack his way through knotted payroll, clear the debris of existing contracts, plant the seeds of rapid player development, heal the wounds of a hobbled rotation and still somehow find his way to the bright sunshine of perennial contention.

"This is a tough job," principal owner John Henry conceded on Friday. "I think we would all agree, this is a challenging offseason."

In a 25-minute session with assembled beat writers, Henry and chairman Tom Werner laid out just how challenging it will be. They discussed their Sept. 8 decision to fire Dombrowski — the veteran president of baseball operations who won a World Series less than a year ago — and they laid out an intentionally vague vision for what comes next, making clear only that it will be very, very different. They'd like to significantly lower payroll, get more production from the farm system, sign Mookie Betts to an elusive extension and remain in the hunt without an awkward, bottom-of-the-division transition period.

All they need is someone who knows how to do it.

"I consider this position to be the most coveted, or one of the most coveted, in all of sports," Werner said.

Since Henry and his partners purchased the Red Sox in December 2001, they have been always bold in their objectives. They initially acknowledged an "obligation" to win a World Series, and three years later broke the 86-year curse that had come to define the organization. They have since replaced managers and general managers, often after winning seasons, and have always found further success right around the corner. They have pushed the Red Sox payroll to the highest in the game and have extensive commitments

still on the books. They have seen iconic players come and go, some of them hired as mercenaries and others drafted and developed.

Red Sox ownership was bold again on Monday. Henry and Werner intend to find a new way to keep on winning, but even as they offered answers, they left more questions in their wake. The path forward seems more tangled and less definitive than expected.

How was payroll allowed to get so high if massive cuts were always in the cards?

Henry declined to give specifics, but he said his misgivings with Dombrowski began almost immediately after last year's World Series.

"We had preliminary talks about our way forward," Henry said. "And it was clear to me we weren't on the same page at that point."

Given Henry said the Red Sox long planned to get below the Competitive Balance Tax threshold for 2020, it seems reasonable to assume he envisioned a proactive strategy to shift gears, save money and begin building from within. Dombrowski instead re-signed Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce, then signed Xander Bogaerts and Chris Sale to long-term extensions. Only the Bogaerts extension looks like a particularly good decision.

Why was Dombrowski allowed to spend when Henry wanted to save from the very beginning? Granted, it now makes sense Dombrowski did nothing to significantly deplete the farm system in his final 12 months — he made only minor trades that cost off-the-radar prospects and added minor-league depth — but the Eovaldi, Sale and Bogaerts signings added \$61 million to the books for next year, when the luxury tax threshold Henry wants to get under is \$208 million. The Red Sox payroll was just over \$240 million this year, according to The Associated Press.

Expiring contracts with Pearce, Rick Porcello, Brock Holt, Mitch Moreland, Eduardo Nunez, Tyler Thornburg and Pablo Sandoval — who was still being paid \$18 million by the Red Sox this season — will help trim payroll, but significant arbitration raises for Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Eduardo Rodriguez and Andrew Benintendi will not.

Henry clarified getting below \$208 million is only a "goal" and not a commandment, but if that was the goal all along, and so was signing Betts for the long haul, how did they sign off on payroll reaching that point in the first place?

Given such a mandate, what is the candidate pool, and is it truly one of the most coveted jobs in the game?

Henry and Werner bristled at the idea running the Red Sox baseball operations is an unstable gig. Sure, they've moved on from three World Series winners, but they've been patient in other regards, and past GMs and team presidents each left with at least one World Series ring.

But, as Henry acknowledged, that particular task will be particularly challenging, and he left no doubt he plans to pursue some of the most established candidates in the business. He all but dismissed the idea of promoting someone from within. This offseason would be awfully difficult for a first-timer, he said.

Still, the Red Sox have yet to seek permission to interview candidates from other organizations, former Red Sox boss Theo Epstein has stated a desire to stay with the Cubs, and Henry acknowledged it's difficult to get established general managers to change jobs.

Henry and Werner said there's no timetable for hiring a new general manager — or whatever the job title might be — and it's not even necessary to have someone in place by November's GM meetings.

Certainly, there is considerable allure to the job, but the path ahead is tricky and figuring out who exactly meets ownership's criteria — and who is looking for such a new challenge — is equally difficult.

Is this the end of Betts? Or Bradley? Or Holt?

Actually, we should start with this question: Is J.D. Martinez going to opt out this winter? If he does, it would clear nearly \$25 million, freeing some space to make an aggressive offer to Betts but also creating a massive hole in the middle of the lineup. It's a double-edged sword. It's also out of the Red Sox' hands.

To some extent, so is the fate of Betts. The Red Sox have made overtures, but to no avail. Betts seems determined to hit the open market. It's entirely possible the next person running the team will have to trade him at some point — either this winter or at the next trade deadline — to reap one last bit of value before he becomes a free agent.

More pressing is the decision to trade a guy like Bradley, who surely will earn more than \$10 million in his final year of arbitration. There is also the case of Holt, a wildly popular role player coming off a career year. He might not break the bank, but he won't come free either, and his role could be filled internally.

Where else could the Red Sox trim the payroll fat? The Eovaldi, Sale and David Price contracts seem difficult to trade — Werner said the Red Sox basically are counting on better health from those three — while Dustin Pedroia's injury makes him a sunk cost, and the Red Sox don't have the pitching depth to turn away from inevitable arbitration raises for Rodriguez, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes.

The door does seem open for rookies Michael Chavis, Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor to return to prominent roles next season while making basically the league minimum. It could also open opportunities for upper-level prospects Bobby Dalbec, C.J. Chatham and Tanner Houck to get looks at first base, the middle infield and the back of the rotation early next season.

“I think is apparent is that we need to have more depth in our minor-league system and more people coming up through the system that can be everyday baseball players,” Werner said.

Dombrowski's final act was to keep the Red Sox championship roster largely intact. His replacement's job will be dismantling some of that roster without taking the entire organization down with it.

Red Sox ownership indicates new, more frugal path ahead for team

Jen McCaffrey

In a far-ranging 25-minute session with the media at Fenway Park on Friday, Red Sox principal owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner attempted to address some of their decisions surrounding the departure of Dave Dombrowski and the future of the club. It was the first time the owners have spoken publicly since firing Dombrowski, and could signal an entirely new direction for the club — one that might see them shed payroll and look outside for new leadership, all while trying to lock up Mookie Betts long term.

Here were some of the main takeaways:

The Red Sox have a “goal” of staying under the luxury tax threshold

With a league-high payroll of more than \$240 million this season, the Red Sox are expected to be taxed an extra \$13 million, according to the Associated Press, based on the competitive balance tax rules. Unlike last year, however, they remained under the threshold that would force them to see their first pick in next year's draft moved back 10 spots.

Nevertheless, for ownership, it's an unsustainable approach.

“This year we need to be under the CBT and that was something we've known for more than a year now,” Henry said. “If you don't reset there are penalties, so we've known for some time now we needed to reset as other clubs have done.”

With that in mind, it sounds like the Red Sox are hoping to chop a significant portion of their payroll in the coming months. Entering the 2020 season, competitive balance taxing begins for payrolls exceeding \$208 million. Henry said they would aim to reset under that number. But despite the Red Sox shedding some free-agent salaries in Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce, cutting \$32 million while still adding the necessary pieces this winter to the rotation and bullpen seems nearly impossible without contract restructuring or trades.

Werner rejected the notion that they would be gutting the team and vowed the club is not headed for a “bridge” year to reset their financial structure. He also wanted to clarify that while it’s their goal to get under the \$208 million payroll, they might end up surpassing it anyway.

“One of the things we observe and I think we all observe is, first of all, there are teams that make the postseason with half the payroll the Red Sox have,” Werner said. “Look at the success Oakland has had this year and the Milwaukee Brewers. And we have resources. And I would just like to say that while we would like to get under the competitive balance tax threshold, we have had years we’ve been above it, we’ve had years where we were below it. There may be certain circumstances that we exceed it. Obviously there are penalties to exceeding it, but it’s not that we go into a room and say it has to be a certain dollar number.”

Added Henry: “That’s a good clarification because you are right. We may not be under. It’s our goal to be under.”

Operating within the constraints they’ve set, it seems more of their on-the-cusp minor-league talent could be major-league options heading into 2020. That could come in the form of Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec, Marco Hernandez and Tzu Wei Lin all playing significant roles. It could also mean the club is anticipating a trade of Mookie Betts or an opt-out by J.D. Martinez, which would offer more financial flexibility — at the cost of elite production, of course.

“Our real intention is to be competitive every year, and we’ll do whatever we have to do to do that,” Werner said. “But the solution to that isn’t always having the highest payroll in baseball.”

Contract talks continue with Mookie Betts and his agent

While speculation has run rampant on Betts’ future in Boston, especially given his recent comments to WEEI.com about removing emotion from business dealings, it’s still too early to tell what the future holds for Betts and the team.

In fact, Werner made clear that they are still working with Betts’ agent.

“(Team president Sam Kennedy) and I actually had a nice conversation with Mookie’s agent on a couple of different topics a couple of weeks ago,” Werner said. “We think he’s one of the great players in baseball. Hopefully, there’s a meeting of the minds going forward.”

With Betts heading into free agency following the 2020 season and likely seeking a Mike Trout-esque deal in the \$350-400 million range, the numbers don’t seem to align with ownership’s decree it’d like to hack payroll. Unless there’s a plan to free up a significant portion of the payroll, by say, trading David Price and his \$31 million average annual salary, there doesn’t seem to be room for another monstrous long-term contract.

“We’ve stated publicly that we would hope (Betts) would stay with us the rest of his career,” Werner said. “We have made proposals to him in the past, and he did want to test free agency, which is his right. And we’ll have some conversations with him going forward. But obviously there’ll be a point where hopefully we can make a deal or we’ll decide at that point what is Plan B or Plan C, but we haven’t gotten to that point and we’re very open to continuing discussions with him.”

The next person to lead the Red Sox will almost certainly be an external candidate

When asked about the internal quartet of Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira currently overseeing the team's front office dealings, Henry was dismissive of the idea that one of them was ready to take over the job full time.

"It's possible, but this is a tough job, this is a tough offseason too," Henry said. "We talked about the challenge of CBT, but there are, you would all agree, this is a challenging offseason. So to put one of the candidates you keep bringing up in charge, and responsible for that, that's sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager. So we are starting the search looking outward."

Despite clearly wanting a more seasoned executive to take the reins, however, it seems for the moment they are comfortable proceeding with those four in charge.

"We really don't have a timetable," Werner said. "We're very comfortable with the progress that we've made. We don't think that our situation — we don't feel like we were in dire straits. We just felt like we needed a different approach going forward, but we are very comfortable with the leadership qualities of each of those four people."

Henry had concerns about Dave Dombrowski's future leadership dating back to last year

It might have seemed that Dombrowski's departure came in haphazard fashion, but the seeds of discontent had apparently been sown since the previous offseason.

Just prior to the World Series parade in November, Henry told the media he'd like to settle a Dombrowski contract extension that winter.

"What changed quickly was right after the World Series, we had preliminary talks about our way forward, and it was clear to me we weren't on the same page at that point," Henry said. "In fact, he and I talked about it that night, that Sunday evening, I think he disagreed with me about that — that we disagreed. We were even disagreeing, you might say, that we disagreed. There was a difference, I think, in how we thought we should move forward."

Henry wouldn't get into specifics, but the contracts for Nathan Eovaldi, Pearce and Chris Sale might have been factors. A scenario in which Henry did not want to make the offers, but Dombrowski insisted and Henry relented, seems plausible. Adding more long-term financial commitments when ownership is hoping to trim payroll is cause for a divide, even if Henry ultimately signed off on the deals.

"He was, as I said earlier, I think the right person at the right time," Henry said. "We made a determination that going forward, right after the World Series, I think it became clear to me that perhaps we weren't going to be on the same wavelength going forward, but I was hopeful throughout the year that maybe that perception would change. It didn't."

Another cause for divide could be the future of the farm system.

"When we looked at doing a new long-term deal, we were unanimous among us that we're not in the same situation we were four years ago," Henry said of hiring Dombrowski in 2015. "Things have changed quite a bit, the makeup of the team, the direction we were headed. We just made a decision where we were not going to continue in that direction."

Though much of their current lineup consists of homegrown talent in Andrew Benintendi, Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, Jackie Bradley Jr., Christian Vazquez and Betts, all were drafted or signed before Dombrowski arrived. The next wave of minor-league talent is still on the horizon in Bryan Mata, Triston Casas and Dalbec, but it's clear ownership felt Dombrowski depleted the prospect pool without adding much depth.

“I don’t want anything to be perceived as a criticism of Dave,” Werner said. “In the end, we take responsibility for the overall direction of the club. One of the things that we talked about that I think is apparent is that we need to have more depth in our minor-league system and more people coming up through the system that can be everyday baseball players.”

Setting priorities for the next leader of the Red Sox

Aside from building and fostering growth within the farm system, the next leader of the Red Sox has quite a job laid out in front of them.

“It’s no secret that we’re going to hopefully upgrade our pitching,” Werner said.

Assuming Sale, Price, Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez begin the 2020 season healthy, the Red Sox will have at least one rotation spot to fill, with starting depth a necessary addition as well. Will the Red Sox sign or trade for a closer and perhaps another arm or two?

The future of Betts and Martinez are significant questions as well. If Martinez opts out, how will the Red Sox replace his bat? And if payroll restructuring is something ownership wants, does that mean a trade of Jackie Bradley Jr. or maybe even Price?

At this point, anything’s possible.

*** *The Baltimore Sun***

Núñez’s 30th home run, Wojciechowski’s strong start help Orioles secure 4-1 win over Red Sox

Jon Meoli

Impossible as it would be to execute, no one would begrudge them if the Orioles simply asked for their season to end on this note, a near-perfect 4-1 win over the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park on Friday night.

There are still two games left, the threat level of which might be low considering the hosts looked as if they were playing in flip-flops with the offseason so close.

But with so much that deservedly will be forgotten as this team tries to get back to respectability, a night where it all went according to plan and all the positives of the season were on display is worth remembering.

“We’ve been kind of waiting for these type of games,” manager Brandon Hyde said. “We don’t have them very often where it’s smooth.”

Asher Wojciechowski, the pick of the heap when it comes to the Orioles’ midseason pitching acquisitions, finished strong with six innings of four-hit, scoreless ball.

Austin Hays singled twice off flamethrower Nathan Eovaldi and added a walk and a stolen base in the win. Renato Núñez hit his 30th home run of the season after sitting on 29 for nearly three weeks. Trey Mancini and DJ Stewart each walked a career-high three times.

Throw in scoreless innings for Tanner Scott (two strikeouts) and Mychal Givens (three strikeouts), plus a one-run ninth from Richard Bleier, and the Orioles improved to 53-107, with Friday’s outcome seldom in doubt.

“It was a great win all-around,” Núñez said. “Wojo threw an amazing game today. Everybody did his work. It was great.”

Worth the wait

Hays doubled and Mancini walked to get the Orioles in business in the third inning, and Núñez was down 0-2 when Eovaldi hung a curveball and Núñez drilled it off the light tower atop the Green Monster in left field for No. 30.

Núñez's home runs have typically come in bunches, so when he ended up at 25 on July 26, it felt fair to assume that 30 would only be a brief stop en route to many more this season. But his pace slowed, and Núñez hit No. 29 on Sept. 8 — making for a tense few weeks before he could finally hit the milestone.

“What can I say?” Núñez said. “It was always in the back of my mind. Like I always say, I’m just trying to help my win. I did that today, and that’s all I want. ... I got my 30. I’m really happy.”

Said Hyde: “I think Nunez’s really been pressing trying to get that 30. I just told him, he’s going to sleep a lot better tonight now that he’s got 30 homers. It’s a great accomplishment in really your first full year in the big leagues.”

He was also responsible for the Orioles’ tack-on run when Hays scored on a ninth-inning single by Núñez.

Watch that Woj

Wojciechowski brought his ERA down to 4.92 with six shutout innings, ending his season on a high note after both he and manager Brandon Hyde acknowledged fatigue earlier this month.

“I felt like that was just guts out there, the last two or three innings,” Hyde said. “Great way to end the year for him. He’s thrown more innings than he’s thrown in years. Just really showed his competitiveness tonight, going six scoreless.”

Friday was his fifth quality start of the season, and his six strikeouts were his most since July 26.

“It was definitely a goal I had all week, of just going out there and performing and competing and trying to get us a good chance to win,” Wojciechowski said. “Definitely something I thought about all week, and I really just wanted to end on a good note. Played some good defense. Had a couple line-outs. The ball kind of fell my way today.”

Relay drill

Wojciechowski’s shutout was preserved in the fourth inning when, with Sam Travis on first after a two-out hit-by-pitch, Jackie Bradley Jr. hit a deep line drive off the top of the short wall in right field that only narrowly missed landing in the Orioles’ bullpen.

So, Travis got on his horse, but Stewart’s relay throw to Mancini was on-target, as was Mancini’s throw home to Chance Sisco, whose tag was in time for the final out of the inning.

Boston didn’t have another base runner until the ninth inning, when Rafael Devers doubled to lead off against Bleier. Devers scored on a single by Xander Bogaerts, but Bleier picked him off first base to stomp out that threat.

*** *Associated Press***

Núñez hits 30th homer, Orioles beat Red Sox 4-1

Renato Nunez was starting to wonder if his breakout season would include 30 home runs.

Baltimore's promising young slugger spent nearly three weeks at 29 homers before belting No. 30 on Friday night, a three-run shot that helped lead the Orioles to a 4-1 win over the Boston Red Sox.

"I think Noonie's really been pressing trying to get that 30th and I told him he's going to sleep a lot better tonight," manager Brandon Hyde said. "It's a great accomplishment in his first really full year in the majors. Twenty-five years old and hitting 30 is impressive and he hit a big one for us tonight."

Nunez, homerless since Sept. 8, gave the Orioles a 3-0 lead with a line-drive out to left in the third.

"What can I say? It was always in the back of my mind," Nunez said. "I helped my team win. That's what I want."

Nunez added an RBI single in the ninth, driving in all of Baltimore's runs as the Orioles took the opener of the season-ending three-game series for both clubs.

Asher Wojciechowski (4-8) struck out six over six shutout innings for the Orioles, who won for just the 53rd time this season.

"We've been kind of waiting for this type of game. They don't happen very often, where it's smooth," Hyde said.

Baltimore also guaranteed that the Red Sox will finish with a losing record at Fenway Park, adding to the sting of missing the playoffs one year after winning the World Series. The Red Sox fell to 37-40 at Fenway, where they last finished with a losing record in 2014 -- when they were also coming off a World Series championship.

Boston will finish with a winning record overall but losing record at home for just the second time in franchise history.

Nunez's three-run shot to left in the third off of Nathan Eovaldi (2-1) was just about all the scoring the Orioles needed.

Eovaldi allowed only three hits, but walked four and the Red Sox never recovered after falling behind on the homer by Nunez on an 0-2 pitch.

"I feel like I threw the ball well tonight," Eovaldi said. "It was just the walks that got me. And also having Nunez right there, 0-2, and then I left it down the middle and he was able to hit it out. That was the difference really."

Xander Bogaerts broke up the shutout with a single up the middle, scoring Rafael Devers, who led off the ninth with a double off Richard Bleier. Although Bleier couldn't preserve the shutout, he picked off Bogaerts for the first out and Boston didn't get another runner on base.

The Red Sox were just 1 for 13 with runners in scoring position.

Wojciechowski allowed four hits and walked one. He pitched out of a jam in the third after Mookie Betts led off with a single. The Orioles saved a run with another strong defensive play in the fourth.

Jackie Bradley Jr. hit a drive that bounced off the top of the short wall in right after Sam Travis was hit by a pitch. The ball bounced back into play and DJ Stewart got it to first baseman Trey Mancini on one hop, then Mancini fired it home to catcher Chance Sisco in plenty of time to get Travis, who attempted to make it all the way around from first.

"We played some great defense," Wojciechowski said. "I had a couple lineouts and some balls kind of fell my way today, but I was happy with the way I competed."

Eovaldi allowed three runs on three hits and four walks over five innings. He struck out three.

LOOKING AHEAD

Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner addressed the club's future in a pregame news conference, pledging to slash payroll and get under the luxury tax next season.

Henry said the club fired Dave Dombrowski, president of baseball operations, on Sept. 8 because of differing opinions on how to build for the future. Regardless of who is hired to replace Dombrowski, Henry and Werner said Alex Cora will return for a third season as manager.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LF Andrew Benintendi was out of the lineup after leaving Thursday's game at Texas in the fourth inning when he fouled a pitch off his right calf. . RF Mookie Betts returned as Boston's designated hitter after missing two games with a jammed toe. Gorkys Hernandez started in right field for Betts.

UP NEXT

Orioles LHP John Means (11-11, 3.54 ERA) faces Red Sox RHP Jhoulys Chacin (3-11, 5.81) on Saturday afternoon in the next-to-last game of the season for both clubs.