

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, September 7, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

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Julian McWilliams

Yankees catcher Gary Sanchez and designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion spent their off day in Boston visiting David Ortiz. Ortiz went to Instagram to post a picture of him and Encarnacion, and Sanchez posted a picture on his Instagram of him and Ortiz.

“He was the same David, his old self,” Encarnacion said. “It was good to see him.”

Boone knows Ortiz’s impact across the baseball landscape. Despite his being on the Yankees, when Sanchez was struggling last year, Ortiz reached out.

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Cora said he saw Ortiz recently, too.

“He’s watching every game, he’s paying attention. I’m glad the boys were able to go over there. There’s a lot of guys who have stopped by throughout,” Cora said. “A lot of energy, obviously lost some weight. He’s back to eating mangu and salami and all that good stuff. He’s good. He’s in a good place.”

Moments to savor for Red Sox have been precious and few

Tara Sullivan

The attempt at venom erupted in the ninth inning, a “Yankees suck” chant that might have fit the moment – the Red Sox were two outs away from an easy 6-1 win – but couldn’t pack a real punch given the 15½-game lead the Yankees still hold over the Red Sox.

Not to blame the fans for trying. The calendar tells us it’s September and history tells us this is a series of enmity, one that is supposed to get even meaner when the season is in its final throes. But the reality of where these teams are took the bite out of the series long ago.

No, this surely wasn’t what the schedule-makers had in mind when they penciled this one in, probably the easiest decision they made in putting the 2019 season together. Instead of a taut, tense series with the American League East crown in the balance, they got a home team desperate not just to beat the Yankees, but to beat anyone.

With 6½ games between the Sox and the nearest wild-card spot when play began, this is a team that can barely afford many more losses.

“I think wins in general, they’re very precious,” Xander Bogaerts said. “We have to win a lot more.”

So no manager eruptions, no inside pitches whizzing a bit too close to batters, no boomboxes in the hallways. Too bad for baseball, which is better when the full force of bitterness of this long-standing, traditionally intense rivalry is alive.

Such is what the struggling Red Sox have wrought. No buzz. No drama. And, let's be honest, no real surprise the Fenway Park stands were more than half empty at first pitch. Was anyone rushing into the city to see 31-year-old journeyman Jhoulys Chacin make his first Red Sox start?

Chacin did his part, two perfect innings starting a parade of seven Boston pitchers who combined to three-hit the Yankees. Chacin was the last-minute replacement for David Price, whose balky wrist scratched him from a scheduled turn in the rotation, just as Chris Sale's angry elbow has put him out of action, just as Nathan Eovaldi's similarly shaky elbow kept him idle for long stretches of the season, all of it adding up to another bullpen game Saturday.

Not quite the marquee matchups to go along with the likes of Sunday's Rick Porcello/Masahiro Tanaka clash, but it's all the Red Sox have right now. And with a glimmer of wild-card hope still flickering, they'll take it.

"It's definitely going to be difficult, we're not in the best of spots, but everyone in here is looking to fight and try to help this team find ways to win," said Mitch Moreland, whose three-run home run in the fourth gave the Sox all the cushion they would need (while also giving himself a nice 34th birthday present). "We're going to give it our best shot."

He was echoing manager Alex Cora's hopeful, if wishful, tune.

"I told the guys today, let's do what we have to do this weekend. We've got to win the series. And we know we have to keep winning series. But if we make it and we play that game, I don't think too many people will like to match up with us in a playoff series," Cora said before the game. "And that's the fact because we're that talented."

Before we end up in another Bronx rehash of the team meeting that never was, Cora clarified that he wasn't delivering any rah-rah, we-can-do-it pep talk when he referenced talking to his team, but rather chatting with different players as he made his way around the locker room.

"I know where we're at, I know the odds are against us, but whatever percent chances we have, we still have a chance to play them in October as of now," he told them. "So let's not get ahead of ourselves. We're still hungry. We know where we're at."

"For everything I heard around the league, and where we play, [Twins manager] Rocco Baldelli told me, 'See you in a month.' I don't think he's planning on going on vacation and see me. So I don't know. I know we haven't played well, but we're still talented. We're still good. And we still got two weeks. We can get on a run, although you guys don't believe me. But I feel that way."

Of course he does. And I don't doubt his sincerity. But I'm not convinced of his version of reality. The Red Sox never did deliver on their manager's offseason "wait till this year" promise, his notion that last year's World Series triumph was just the beginning of what this group of players could accomplish. No amount of wishful thinking across these last two weeks of the season can change that.

For every tease the Sox turned a corner, there was always another wall to crash into. The wreckage after that Yankee series was the low point, but even short bursts of success since then have proved fleeting.

"It sucks because we feel like we're right there, we're one swing away, one pitch away," Cora said. "That's the nature of our season. We still feel we're playing good baseball. Obviously they're a good team. The last time they were here we beat 'em three out of four. At that point, the talk was to put us away. Well that weekend they didn't. They did it two weeks after. Probably the talk this weekend is they can put us away for good in the playoff hunt. So we'll see where it goes."

The Sox have a long way to go to even sniff the playoffs. Not quite what we envisioned in a September series against the Yankees.

A desperate pitcher gave the desperate Red Sox a surprising lift

Peter Abraham

Jhoulys Chacin gave up four runs on six hits against the Cincinnati Reds on July 24. The Milwaukee Brewers placed him on the injured list the next day with what was said to be a strained right oblique.

It was really more of a fractured earned run average given what had been a series of poor starts. Chacin was released a month later, completing an unlikely journey from Opening Day starter to free agent.

His fastball command disappeared and Chacin was left relying his slider. The hitters knew it and the 31-year-old righthander was hit hard.

On Friday night, Chacin returned to the majors, a desperate pitcher starting for a Red Sox team desperate to stay in contention for a playoff spot.

In what has been a season of unexpected setbacks, the Sox got a surprising lift as Chacin pitched two perfect innings in a 6-1 victory against the Yankees.

“That felt good, man,” he said.

Baseball is endlessly unpredictable. Chacin had not faced hitters in 43 days before D.J. LeMahieu stepped to the plate in the first inning. He needed three pitches to produce a groundout to shortstop.

Chacin then struck put Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius, Gary Sanchez, and Edwin Encarnacion before Gleyber Torres grounded to third.

“I’ve been waiting for the opportunity to pitch. I was worried about throwing strikes and I’m happy with the result,” said Chacin, who threw 23 of his 35 pitches for strikes

Chacin threw first-pitch strikes to four of the six hitters and didn’t let a ball out of the infield with a mix of fastballs and sliders.

“He put us in a good spot and we moved forward,” Sox manager Alex Cora said.

At a time when many pitchers are using high fastballs and breaking balls in the dirt to combat hitters trying to get the ball in the air, Chacin worked side to side and expanded the corners of the strike zone.

“He’s done it before. He’s pitched in big games,” Cora said. “He’s an accomplished big leaguer and he set the tempo right away.”

The second inning was impressive. Chacin got ahead of Sanchez and came back to strike him out on a slider that finished down and away. He did the same with Encarnacion before winning a 10-pitch battle with Torres by getting a groundout.

“I was able to throw off the plate, to get swing and miss and weak contact,” Chacin said.

Cora was not tempted to have Chacin continue. Two innings was enough after six weeks off. Six other pitchers combined with Chacin to hold the Yankees to three hits with three walks and 13 strikeouts.

Three of those pitchers — Chacin, Ryan Weber, and Bobby Poyner — were September call-ups.

Chacin returned to his home in Arizona after the Brewers released him. He met the Sox in Anaheim last week and threw in the bullpen at Angel Stadium last Friday.

For a month's worth of the prorated minimum salary, the Sox gave him a chance. Chacin had other opportunities but was intrigued by the Sox.

"I felt it was the best opportunity here," he said. "They're World Series champions. It was a no-brainer to come here."

Chacin would help the Sox in other ways, too. He's been in the majors for 11 years and started 222 games, no small feat.

"There's a lot of respect for him already," said Eduardo Rodriguez, a fellow Venezuelan. "He's a good guy, too. The way he pitched, a lot of people were happy. We needed that."

The Sox will try to beat the Yankees with another bullpen game on Saturday. Travis Lakins will get the start, his first in the majors. He may be good for four or five outs.

The Sox are carrying 21 pitchers and they could use 18 or 19 of them before this series is over. Every inning is a grind for Cora and pitching coach Dana LeVangie. But all six pitching changes worked on Friday night.

"I've never seen that many pitchers in the bullpen before, not even in September," said Chacin, who joked that he's still learning everybody's name and what kind of handshake they like. "It's a cool experience for me."

Lakins will become the 14th starter the Sox have used this season, the most since 2006. If they can take three of four against the Yankees in this series, then next week becomes interesting.

"Probably the talk this weekend is they can put us away for good for the playoff hunt," Cora said. "We'll see where it goes."

Red Sox pitching puts it together, shuts down powerful Yankees

Julian McWilliams

The Red Sox had done it before, but never against the New York Yankees.

In the absence of David Price, Alex Cora made the decision to go with a bullpen day Friday evening. They had the arms to do it, said Cora in his pregame presser. The Sox sent out seven different pitchers from the bullpen, and beat the Yankees convincingly, 6-1, in the first game of a four-game set.

Boston (76-65) has largely been reduced to spoiler, its win reducing its wild-card deficit to 6½ games behind Oakland with 21 to play, pending the A's late-night result. Houston, meanwhile, pulled even with the Yankees (92-50) for the top record in the American League by beating Seattle.

The Red Sox started Jhoulys Chacin, Milwaukee's Opening Day starter, who hadn't pitched since July 24 and was released Aug. 26. He retired all six men he faced, getting a groundout on each side of strikeouts against Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius, Gary Sanchez, and Edwin Encarnacion.

"He's done it before," Cora said. "He's an accomplished big-leaguer. He set the tone right away."

The first hit of the game didn't come until two outs in the fourth, when Gregorius sliced a liner down the left field line for a double against Marcus Walden (9-2). But the Red Sox' bats woke up as well.

In the bottom half of that frame, Rafael Devers led with his 49th double to left-center off Yankees starter Domingo German (17-4). With two outs, Andrew Benintendi walked, and Brock Holt ripped a single past Torres, who could have made a play on it at second. That scored Devers and set the stage for Mitch Moreland, who ripped a three-run homer to put the Sox up, 4-0.

It was Moreland's first homer since Aug. 9 and 15th of the season. The Sox' eight players with 15-plus homers are most in the team's history.

"We felt like we needed to try to go up there and really lock it in against [German] and have good at-bats," Moreland said. "We were able to do it tonight."

Brett Gardner homered off Andrew Cashner in the fifth, shrinking the deficit to 4-1, yet Yankees manager Aaron Boone pulled German with one out in the fifth after he walked Mookie Betts, electing to go to reliever Nestor Cortes Jr. Cortes walked Devers, and Xander Bogaerts made him pay, just missing his 32nd homer of the season, settling for a 413-foot double scoring Betts and Devers. It was Bogaerts' 49th double of the year, tying him with Devers for the most in baseball.

The Yankees had a chance to score in the seventh when Gardner singled up the middle with Sanchez on second. Sanchez tested the arm of Jackie Bradley Jr. in center field, and Bradley Jr. gunned down the Yankees catcher to end the frame on a close play.

Darwinzon Hernandez took the eighth, induced a Luke Voit groundout, and sat Clint Frazier down on strikes. He did yield a two-out walk to DJ LeMahieu, but got Aaron Judge to line out to right.

Bobby Poyner, who had just four prior innings of work this year for the Sox and surrendered seven earned runs in them, sat the Yankees down in order in the ninth, striking out Encarnacion to end it.

The Sox had a plan going in, wanting to bridge the gap between Chacin and the back part of the bullpen, but to expect a three-hitter might have been considered a stretch. Yet the Sox had the Yankees off balance for the entire game, mainly keeping them out in front of pitches that they would pull hard, but foul, or choppers off the end of the bat.

Boone talked pregame about how difficult it can sometimes be as a hitter in a bullpen game. The Yankees fell victim to that belief Friday.

"I think that's the biggest thing, is trying to get guys to have a different look," Walden said, "so they have to have a different approaches. Obviously, we want to attack LeMahieu and Judge with sinkers, with me and [Ryan] Weber coming in for the fourth and the sixth inning. Knowing what some of our strengths are with some of our guys, and being able to exploit them and letting our strengths dictate what's going to happen in the game."

Bullpenning can be seen as gimmicky approach, even in a copycat league that's had more of it this year. Ultimately, depending on a plethora of arms over starters isn't something Cora necessarily thinks is going to be the future of the game. You need starters, but in times of crisis — like the one the Red Sox are facing — it's their only option. It worked Friday

The Sox hope that's the case on Saturday, too.

"It's an uncomfortable game for hitters," Cora said. "But like I said four days ago, I'm not going to apologize for having 21 pitchers [with expanded rosters]. We tried to maximize our matchups."

Crowded house in Red Sox bullpen to finish trying year

Julian McWilliams

The list of Red Sox relievers filled up the NESN telecast Wednesday against the Twins. There were 17 arms beyond the right field wall, crammed in the bullpen, and essentially serving as the last stop at saving what's been a lost season.

There's no room to sit out there. Some parts of the bullpen maybe should have a sign that reads, "Standing Room Only." The team drags some extra seats out there.

Just how many?

"Maybe six," Colten Brewer said recently.

Heath Hembree, who is on the injured list, doesn't even bother going out to the bullpen. Instead, he watches the games from the dugout.

Twenty-one of the Sox' 36 players are pitchers. If Hembree is activated, which there's a chance he could be before the season is up, the Sox would tie the record for the most pitchers on a roster.

"I got my seat," Hembree said. "I already told them I'm going to get my seat back. It's just crazy."

The Oakland A's reached 22 last year much like the Red Sox did. The team had a crew of starters they didn't trust, but found something in their bullpen arms and rode the September expanded roster all the way to a postseason berth. The Sox are hoping for the same fate — even if there's some comedy involved.

"There's a lot of bodies out there," closer Brandon Workman said.

Said Josh Smith: "You kind of have a small area. So, it's like, I don't want to cram in with everybody. So then I said on one chair, 'This one is too low. Let me try this other chair.'"

The Sox are trying everything. Entering Friday, they logged the most relief innings (36) in all of baseball since Aug. 30. Yes, even more than the Tampa Bay Rays (35), who rely heavily on the bullpening method.

It was effective Friday, when the Sox used seven pitchers in their 6-1 win against the Yankees. The Sox will test it again in Saturday's matchup.

"We have a few guys that can give us starts, too," manager Alex Cora said prior to Friday's series opener. "It's hard for this weekend. Also, matchup-wise. It's a tough team to match up with. I do believe that the best way to attack them is to be creative."

The Yankees have more experience with bullpening, something they have done since the beginning of the season.

"You obviously evaluate the other team's lineup where you see guys slotting in from a matchup standpoint," Yanks manager Aaron Boone said. "I understand the challenges of it. Going up against it at least there's a little bit of comfort level in the fact that a lot have teams have done it, but it can be a challenge."

Even if it means surrendering a little legroom.

Yankees visit Ortiz

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Cora said he saw Ortiz recently, too.

“He’s watching every game, he’s paying attention. I’m glad the boys were able to go over there. There’s a lot of guys who have stopped by throughout,” Cora said. “A lot of energy, obviously lost some weight. He’s back to eating mangu and salami and all that good stuff.

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Loose threads

Hembree has been on the injured list since the beginning of August with right lateral elbow inflammation, but could return soon. Hembree received a PRP injection and he says the elbow feels improved after throwing for the past week. The team would want him to face hitters before returning. “He just made progress the last two weeks,” Cora said. He’s been gaining strength throughout the process, so it would be good for him to get on the mound” . . . David Price played catch on Friday. He was originally slated to start in Friday’s game . . . Steve Pearce still isn’t running after suffering a partially torn PCL. “He hasn’t been able to run,” Cora said. “I don’t want to say we’re going to shut him down, but obviously there are not too many games left. It would be hard to get him back.” When asked if it’s something that will require surgery, Cora said it will be something they discuss internally . . . The Lowell Spinners had their second walkoff win in as many days, 4-3, to eliminate the Batavia Muckdogs and advance to the New York-Penn League championship series, starting Sunday. Single A Salem, meanwhile, lost on a walkoff by the Wilmington Blue Rocks, who scored twice in the ninth for a 3-2 win. Salem still holds a 2-1 lead in the best-of-five Carolina League Northern Division Championship Series, which continues Saturday.

Improved pitching a developing story for Red Sox

Alex Speier

Before Thursday, few had heard of Yusniel Padron-Artiles. With one playoff relief outing for the Lowell Spinners, that changed.

Padron-Artiles entered the Spinners’ game in the top of the fourth inning as a piggyback starter behind highly touted Sox prospect Jay Groome. The righthander, a 22nd-round selection in 2018, delivered a historic performance, striking out 12 straight batters in an eventual 2-1 Lowell win – the most consecutive strikeouts in affiliated pro baseball, whether the major or minor leagues.

The performance from a previously unheralded pitcher came with liberal use of a pitch that Padron-Artiles did not have before this spring: A slider, a pitch he learned to mix with his fastball, changeup, and slow curve. The result was dominance in Lowell this year (7-1, 2.67 ERA, 11.8 strikeouts per nine innings), and a path forward in the organization with at least a chance of a big league future – a possibility that, if fulfilled, would represent a rousing success given where he was drafted.

He is a story of a healthy pitcher development culture, one that starts with the scouting of valuable traits (command, deception, competitiveness, makeup) to bring a player into an organization and then continues his improvement through player development recommendations. That pattern has been widespread in the Red Sox system this year.

At the big league level, and specifically the big league rotation — it has been a disastrous year for Red Sox pitching, one that has savaged their postseason outlook in 2019. But on the horizon, there is emerging promise.

The talent pool is growing. Righthander Tanner Houck (8-6, 4.01 ERA in Double A and Triple A) looks like he'll be ready to contribute out of either the rotation or bullpen (he finished the year as a reliever in Pawtucket, but will start in the Arizona Fall League) in 2020. Bryan Mata (20 years old) took a sizable step forward in High A and then Double A. He, too, may be a 2020 option in the big leagues.

In Lowell, the return of Groome (21) from Tommy John surgery and arrival of fourth-rounder Noah Song (22) — in combination with Mata — gave the Red Sox three pitchers with the ceilings of mid-rotation (or higher) starters. Righthander Thad Ward (22) built on a dominant first full pro season (8-5, 2.14 ERA, 11.2 strikeouts per nine innings in Single A and High A) with six innings of one-run ball in a playoff start for Salem on Thursday. Lefthander Chris Murphy (1.08 ERA in 33½ innings) was a revelation with a back-of-the-rotation ceiling after being taken in the sixth round.

"I think the Red Sox got a steal with that one," said Lowell pitching coach Nick Green.

Yet the promise for the Sox goes beyond the performances of individual pitchers. The improvements made by numerous pitchers in the system suggest that after years of struggling to transform prospects into successful big leaguers, the team may have rebuilt a functional pipeline that can flow relatively efficiently from the lowest levels to the big leagues.

"We've seen guys get better," said minor league pitching coordinator of performance Dave Bush. "In some cases, they're guys that we like more than the rest of baseball, guys we were pretty high on before this year that so far have proven that [team perspective] to be true. It's just part of the process of player development where we're always looking at certain skills guys have and looking to make them better. I think you've seen that on the field."

It hasn't just been seen in the minors. Darwinson Hernandez has gone from a scouting find for \$7,500 in Venezuela to a dominant late-innings reliever as a 22-year-old. Josh Taylor, acquired from the Diamondbacks for Deven Marrero last year, has likewise emerged as a standout bullpen performer after narrowing his pitch mix to a four-seam fastball and slider and sharpening those two weapons in his 16 months with the Red Sox.

Their success signals that the Red Sox — who saw highly regarded prospects Allen Webster, Henry Owens, Anthony Ranaudo, and Michael Bowden struggle to get over the proverbial hump — may be ready to do just that with greater consistency moving forward.

"If you're looking at, over the next 12 to 18 months, really having depth, and not just having depth getting to the mid-levels of the minor leagues but depth that can be able to help us next year when we need a starter, we do feel like we have some in-house options going into next year," said Red Sox assistant GM Eddie Romero.

"The players have put in the work and it's just starting to show. It's always good to have the Taylors and Hernandezes — homegrown guys — because they're the perfect examples of what you need to do, how you need to work, and what you need to work on to be successful at this level. Now, we need to produce some starting depth. We've gotten some bullpen arms, but now we have to produce some starting arms. Hopefully that next wave that is coming with Mata and Houck and those guys can be those starting prospects that we need."

For years, such an outlook has seemed like one of false hope. Yet surprisingly, in a year where the team's starting pitching has collapsed, the long-term view of its pitcher development appears more promising than it has in years, with members of the organization enjoying clear signs of improvement by several young pitchers — most of whom entered the organization with modest industry profiles — who are progressing in the system toward intriguing big league futures.

"For me, that's my high — seeing a kid that comes in and makes a name for himself. For me, that's player development," said Green. "You have talented guys where they get a lot of recognition, maybe they got a big signing bonus. But for a guy who isn't really heard of to turn himself into, 'Hey, we may have

something here,' that's the beauty of the job. I take a lot of pride in player development. When you see a guy like that, it makes you sleep well at night, knowing that a guy may turn himself into something special."

THREE UP

The Lowell Spinners, after losing the first game of their best-of-three series against the Batavia Muckdogs, claimed back-to-back walkoff wins to advance to the New York-Penn League finals, a series that will start on Sunday at LaLacheur Park. The Salem Red Sox lead their Carolina League semifinal series against the Wilmington Blue Rocks, 2-to-1.

Bryan Gonzalez (.251/.341/.435) and Albert Feliz (.250/.320/.428) both hit nine homers in their age-17 seasons in the Dominican Summer League. The nine homers are the most by any Red Sox players in the DSL since at least 2006 (the first year for which such archives are offered on Baseball-Reference.com).

Outfielder Tyler Esplin hit a pair of homers for High-A Salem in a 5-2 win in Game 2 of his team's Carolina League playoff series. The multi-homer game was the first of the 20-year-old's career. He was promoted to Salem with Casas on the final weekend of the regular season.

THREE DOWN

Righthander Denyi Reyes, who spent the entire season in Double-A Portland, was the only healthy player on the 40-man roster not to be called up in September. He went 8-12 with a 4.16 ERA in 26 starts for Portland. He did show improvement down the stretch after a tough start, forging a 3.64 ERA with a 5-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 59⅓ innings after the All-Star break after going 3-9 with a 4.50 ERA in the first half.

Cameron Cannon, the Red Sox top pick in the 2019 draft, went 0 for 13 with five strikeouts in the series against the Muckdogs. He's 0 for 30 in his last eight games dating to the regular season.

Much to the chagrin of the Salem teammates with whom he was extremely popular, second baseman/outfielder Jagger Rusconi was promoted to Double-A Portland on the final weekend of the regular season to open a roster spot for players promoted to Salem from Single-A Greenville. Shortstop Ryan Fitzgerald, in tribute to his former teammate, switched his walkup song to "Moves Like Jagger."

Red Sox minor league pitcher sets record by striking out 12 in a row

Alex Speier

When lefthander Jay Groome left the mound for the Lowell Spinners after three innings Thursday in his ongoing buildup following Tommy John surgery, it seemed the rest of the night on the mound might be anticlimactic. But righthander Yusniel Padron-Artiles overshadowed his more heralded teammate, who is the Red Sox' top pitching prospect.

Padron-Artiles, a 22nd-round draft pick in 2018 out of Miami Dade Community College, offered more than just relief. The righthander struck out 12 consecutive batters to start his outing, setting a record for major or minor league-affiliated baseball (the major league record is 10 straight by Tom Seaver in 1970).

The 21-year-old native of Cuba finished the night with 14 strikeouts over six shutout innings in which he allowed just one hit, an infield single, to help Lowell to a 2-1 walkoff win over Batavia in the New York/Penn League semifinals.

"Unbelievable," said Lowell pitching coach Nick Green. "It's something I will probably never see again in my career. It's just unheard of when you sit back and think about it.

“I tried to just let him do his thing, sit back, and watch. I gave just very minimal feedback in the dugout between innings, and towards the end I just asked him how he felt — did he feel like he could keep going? — and he said he wanted it.

“It’s pretty much like a guy having a no-hitter — not much to say, and just observe.”

Padron-Artiles was a “gut-feel” player identified by Red Sox area scout Willie Romay in 2018 based on his mound presence and feel for changing speeds and commanding a solid if unspectacular arsenal. His fastball has topped out around 94-95 m.p.h. but typically sits in the high 80s to low 90s. The Red Sox worked with him to find the right complementary mix in extended spring training this year.

“At the beginning of the year, he was pretty much a three-pitch pitcher,” said Green. “He just had the fastball, a slow breaking ball, and a changeup. The biggest thing with him was just trying to find something that could complement his slow breaking ball. The slow breaking ball was his go-to pitch, but the velo was kind of too slow. It was in the low 60s to 70s.

“We wanted to try to give him a slider that would be more of a put-away pitch, a little bit of a harder velo as a kill pitch, a pitch in a two-strike situation. It’s something he worked hard at in the throwing program, he developed a feel for it, and that’s helped him a lot to add that extra pitch to keep hitters honest.

“He can use the slow breaking ball early in the count and the slider with two strikes. He uses his fastball. He has superb command, the best fastball command on the team. He elevates, changes eye levels, does everything you want as a pitcher.”

That ability was on prominent display Thursday. Padron-Artiles located an 88-94 fastball to both corners and above the zone, while using a heavy diet of off-speed pitches for strikes. He elicited 12 swings and misses (five on fastballs, three on sliders, four on curveballs) while getting 10 swinging third strikes and four looking.

Padron-Artiles was 7-1 with a 2.67 ERA and 11.8 strikeouts against 2.0 walks per nine innings this year for Lowell. His lack of electrifying stuff limits the view of his ceiling.

But on Thursday, Padron-Artiles did something that had never been done before, all in the context of saving his team from elimination in the best-of-three playoff series.

“If a starter makes 30 appearances a year, you will have maybe less than seven or eight where everything is working, whether it’s the command, the action on his pitches, everything,” said Green. “Last night was one of those nights.

“He wasn’t predictable. He mixed his sequences. It was just fun to watch. He’s a true pro and now he’s made a name for himself.”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Jhoulys Chacin intriguing candidate for Red Sox 2020 rotation

Tom Keegan

The new kid in the class moving into town late in the school year can relate to how veteran right-hander Jhoulys Chacin must feel. So many new names and faces to memorize in such a small window of time.

Chacin has no complaints though, not even about the cramped conditions out in the Red Sox bullpen. A few days after Chacin signed a minor league contract with the Sox on Saturday, the bullpen swelled to 17 men, the pitching staff to 21.

“I’ve never seen that many pitchers in the bullpen, not even in September,” Chacin said. “It’s been a cool experience. I haven’t spent much time in the bullpen.”

He had grown into too accomplished a starting pitcher to be considered a reliever. After he went 13-10 with the Padres in 2017, Chacin signed a two-year, \$15-million contract with the Brewers. He rewarded the Brewers with a 15-8 season in 2018 and they rewarded him with an Opening Day start. Then he lost command of his 92 mph fastball, got knocked around, missed some time with a couple of injuries and ultimately was released by the Brewers, last pitching for them July 24.

He’s accustomed to meeting new teammates. The Red Sox are his seventh team. He impressed teammates with his debut Friday, pitching two perfect innings as the opener in a combined three-hitter shared by seven pitchers, sending the Red Sox on their way to a 6-1 victory in the opener of a four-game series with the Yankees at Fenway Park.

“It felt good, man,” Chacin said. “I’ve been waiting for the opportunity to pitch.”

He was perfect on the mound, imperfect in receiving congratulations. While extending his hand for a shake on his way down the dugout steps, Chacin wiped out.

“I was trying to get to the dugout, I was trying to shake the hand and stepping down and then I slipped,” he said. “Maybe it wasn’t the best first impression, but I was just happy we were able to get the win.”

Sometimes a fresh start can get a pitcher out of a rut. A discovery on video here, a suggested change there, and good early results can restore lost confidence.

Chacin struck out four consecutive batters, three with his best pitch, the slider, during his six-up-and-six-down start.

Is three weeks enough time to stretch his workload so that he could make a start?

“Maybe less,” Chacin said. “Today I threw 36 pitches. After you throw more than 40 pitches I think you can go 60, 70 pitches. I’m happy. I feel good and the ball was coming out well and I was throwing strikes.”

The Red Sox have a chance to learn what type of student Chacin is in terms of making changes suggested by pitching coach Dana LeVangie.

“We’ve been working on trying to improve my cutter to strengthen my arsenal, especially against lefties,” he said. “Moving a little bit on the rubber and some other stuff they’ve seen on my videos, especially this year because I haven’t been pitching good.”

Chacin, 31, said he had other opportunities but chose the Red Sox because he knew he could pitch right away for them out of the bullpen. He’s an intriguing case because of a recent two-year stretch (2017-18) in which he won 28 games coupled with a frightening outlook for a 2020 rotation packed with so many question marks after behind left-handers Eduardo Rofriguez and David Price: Will Chris Sale’s elbow recover? Can Nathan Eovaldi put together a healthy season and curtail his walks? Will impending free agent Rick Porcello be pitching elsewhere?

Chacin didn’t sign with the Red Sox merely for a paycheck. He plans to make this an audition. In his brief time on stage he gave himself a shot at an expanded role.

Chacin arrived with clear goals: “Pitch strong, try to show I still can pitch good and try to take advantage of the opportunity, however many innings it is.”

And enjoy meeting so many new people.

“I know a little bit about them now because we’re out in the bullpen talking all these days, trying to get to know each other. And maybe they know a little bit about me because I’ve been a little bit more around. I’m trying to get to know what they do with all the handshakes and all the nicknames. That’s a lot of what we talk about in the bullpen. I’m happy they’ve been pitching good.”

That they have. Starting with July 24, the day Chacin made his final appearance with the Brewers, the Red Sox bullpen has posted a 3.29 ERA. Seven pitchers combined on Friday’s three-hitter. None of them were on the Red Sox Opening Day roster.

Cora turns to the bullpen again in today’s 4 p.m. start to the second game of the series to cover the nine innings.

“It’s an uncomfortable game, it is for hitters when you see four different pitchers,” Cora said. “It’s not that the game is going to go this way but like I said four days ago, I’m not going to apologize for having 21 pitchers. The rules are the rules and we’ve got to go that way. It’s two spots that we don’t have (Sale and Price) and we’re going to maximize our matchups and try to win games.”

In the process, the Sox will try to learn as much about everyone in the crowded bullpen to see which pitchers stand the best chance of figuring in the plans for next year. Chacin’s worth a close look to see if he’s worthy of bringing to enter the derby for the 2020 fifth starter.

Jhoulys Chacin, Red Sox bullpen three-hit Yankees

Tom Keegan

For openers, Jhoulys Chacin was nothing less than perfect for the Red Sox in the Friday night opener of a four-game series vs. the Yankees at Fenway Park.

Making his Red Sox debut, Chacin faced the first six batters and retired them all, including four in a row, and his start was over in the first of back-to-back bullpen games for the Sox. Chacin was the first and best of seven pitchers who combined on a three-hitter to help the Red Sox defeat the AL East-leading Yankees, 6-1.

After opening the game by retiring D.J. LeMahieu on a grounder to short, Chacin struck out Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius, Gary Sanchez and Edwin Encarnacion in order and finished his short-but-sweet night by inducing a grounder to third from Gleyber Torres.

OK, so it wasn’t the equivalent of screwball specialist Carl Hubbell fanning Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, Al Simmons and Joe Cronin in order in the second All-Star Game at the Polo Grounds in 1934. It certainly doesn’t rank up there in Fenway moments with Pedro Martinez striking out Barry Larkin, Larry Walker, Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire in succession in the All-Star Game at Fenway Park 20 summers ago, the night Ted Williams threw out the first pitch and was showered with love from the best players on the planet.

Even so, Chacin likely will remember the night for quite some time, especially considering it came in a year that he otherwise would like to forget.

A 6-foot-3, 255-pound right-hander from Maracaibo, Venezuela., Chacin had big seasons for the Padres in 2017 (13-10, 3.89 ERA) and Brewers in 2018 (15-8, 3.50). He battled back troubles and a strained oblique this season and was so ineffective when healthy that the Brewers released their Opening Day starter Aug. 26 after he went 3-10 with a 5.79 ERA. He plummeted from a reliable starting pitcher to become a virtual batting practice-pitching Chacin. He signed with the Red Sox last Saturday.

Not a particularly hard thrower but armed with a wide-breaking slider, Chacin picked up three of his strikeouts with the slider, two on called third strikes.

He has pitched for seven different teams in the big leagues.

Cora could have sent Brian Johnson or Hector Velazquez to the mound, but decided to go the bullpen route, working the matchups, which is proof the manager means it when he says he thinks the Sox still have a shot at making the playoffs.

“I know where we’re at. I know the odds are against us, but whatever percent chances we have we still have a chance to play them in October, as of now,” Cora said before the game. “So let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We’re still hungry. We know where we’re at and for everything I heard around the league, and the way we were playing, (Twins manager) Rocco Baldelli told me, ‘I’ll see you in a month.’ I don’t think he’s planning on going on vacation to see me.”

Most of the rest of the world views three teams (Rays, A’s and Indians) as credible combatants for the two AL wild cards, but Cora clings to hope, although the series started with the Red Sox trailing all three.

“I know we haven’t played well, but we’re still talented,” he said. “We’re still good and we still have two weeks (to close the gap before playing a four-game series in Tampa). We can get on a run, although you guys don’t believe me, but I feel that way. I told the guys today, ‘Do what we have to do this weekend, you gotta win the series.’ And I know we have to keep winning series, but if we make it, and we play that game, I don’t think too many people would like to match up with us in a playoff series, and that’s a fact because we’re that talented.”

The standings don’t put the Red Sox with the elite AL teams, but again, Cora doesn’t view it that way.

“(The Yankees are) good. Houston is good. Minnesota is good. Cleveland is good. The A’s are good. We’re good too,” he said. “We haven’t been consistent, obviously. But as far as talent, we’re still one of the best teams in the big leagues. The thing is we haven’t proven it.”

No, they haven’t, but that doesn’t mean the manager is about to do his job by writing out the lineup card with one hand while waving a white towel with the other.

Making it a bullpen game worked for Cora, and Mitch Moreland (3 for 4) supplied all the offense the Red Sox needed with a three-run home run, his 15th in his 232nd at bat, in the Sox four-run fourth inning that turned Domingo German (17-4) into the losing pitcher. Charging center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. supplied the defensive highlight of the night, gunning down a run at the plate for the final out of the seventh.

After Chacin’s terrific two innings, Josh Taylor pitched the third, Marcus Walden the fourth, Andrew Cashner (allowed a Brett Gardner home run) the fifth, Ryan Weber the sixth and seventh, Darwinzon Hernandez the eighth and Bobby Poyner worked the ninth.

Manager Aaron Boone says hunger key to Yankees improvement

Tom Keegan

Friends from their days working together at ESPN, Red Sox manager Alex Cora and Yankees counterpart Aaron Boone gave different answers to the same question: Why are the Yankees better than last season?

Boone’s response captured the intangible driving his team, whereas Cora offered a tangible reason.

“I think they’re really hungry,” Boone said of his players after giving the question some thought. “And not to say we weren’t last year because I felt like it absolutely existed last year. But this is a group that a lot of these guys have tasted the postseason, have tasted success and failures in the postseason and I just feel like there has been a real good mindset as far as a singular goal.”

Slammed hard by injuries the first half of the season, the Yankees never leaned on that as an excuse. For one that, they didn't have any need for alibis because they kept winning big.

"No matter who we brought in the room, and obviously we brought a lot of different people up from the minor leagues and from outside the organization based on some of the injuries and adversity we faced," Boone said. "That mindset has not changed on a daily basis and I feel like they've done a really good job, no matter where we are in the season, no matter what level of grind it is in the season, that hunger has carried them well."

The source of that hunger was not available to the defending World Series champion Red Sox.

"I think a lot of the players feel like there's a lot of unfinished business," Boone said.

From a spring training that focused as much on recovering from a season that included an extra month as on preparing for the 2019 season, the Red Sox never were able to exhibit hunger.

Boone pointed to center fielder Brett Gardner, 36, who entered Friday's opener of a four-game series with 20 home runs, compared with 12 last season, as a player whose spirit is representative of this season's Yankees.

"I feel like he kind of embodies what I talked about with our team," Boone said. "There's this hunger and focus and he's just so mentally tough I just feel like he's going to do all he can especially while his body is still cooperating, which it still is. I feel like in some ways he's grown as a hitter. ... The experience he has gained over the years is paying off for him while his body can still cash the checks."

Cora said what he has noticed from the Yankees' improvement from a 100-win season is how they "put the ball in play. They put the ball in play. (Offseason acquisition D.J.) LeMahieu, I've been saying all along he changed the complexion of that lineup. Last year there were more strikeouts. Not this year. Man in scoring position, they're putting the ball in play. "

Most of the Red Sox problems have stemmed from the starting rotation and bullpen, but Cora pointed to what he thinks the Yankees do best as an area the Red Sox have done worse than a year ago.

"When you give your team a chance to win is when you put the ball in play, second and third, less than two outs, ground ball. ... If you look at us, we've been striking out a lot compared to last year. That's something that we haven't done a good job of this year," Cora said.

The Red Sox struck out 7.73 times a game last year and 8.38 this year. The Yankees struck out 8.77 times a game last season, 8.7 this season. Hunger tends to make improvement easier to attain.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 6, Yankees 1: Boston goes bullpening, Mitch Moreland goes deep in victory

Bill Koch

Tropicana Field is the more customary setting for the pitching performance authored by the Red Sox on Friday night.

The Rays have generally cornered the market on the opener and bullpening. They do so by choice, not necessity. With David Price (left wrist) scratched from his scheduled start and Chris Sale (left elbow) still ailing on the injured list, Boston was forced on an adventure to the dark side at Fenway Park.

The result was a surprising success. Jhoulys Chacin set the tone in his Red Sox debut with two scoreless frames and it was smooth sailing from there, as the Red Sox handcuffed the Yankees in a 6-1 victory.

Mitch Moreland celebrated his 34th birthday with a three-run homer, one swing that broke open what was a 1-0 game in the bottom of the fourth. Xander Bogaerts added a sizzling two-run double off the Green Monster in the fifth and seven Boston pitchers limited New York to just three hits.

Chacin and Ryan Weber each logged two innings while Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Andrew Cashner, Darwinzon Hernandez and Bobby Poyner each took care of one. Brett Gardner's solo homer to right in the top of the fifth against Cashner was all the Yankees had to show for their efforts at the plate.

Chacin impressed while making his first appearance since July 24 with the Brewers. He worked two perfect innings and didn't allow the ball out of the infield while striking out four. Chacin's lone bobble of the night was a minor slip down the dugout steps after receiving a congratulatory handshake from Alex Cora.

Taylor turned in a 1-2-3 top of the third and Walden escaped a jam in the fourth to keep it a 0-0 game. Didi Gregorius lined a double to left to break up a string of 11 straight men retired by Red Sox pitching and Gary Sanchez drew a walk. Walden struck out Edwin Encarnacion on three pitches, including the finishing fastball high and tight.

Boston snapped a scoreless tie with a four-run rally in the fourth, doing all of its scoring with two men out. Brock Holt's one-hop liner toward second forced a weak wave of the glove from Gleyber Torres on the backhand, an RBI single that made it 1-0. That set the stage for Moreland, who jumped on a hanging curveball to highlight what was a three-hit evening.

Bogaerts added to the lead after a pair of one-out walks in the fifth. Nestor Cores Jr. left a pitch out over the plate and Bogaerts scalded a liner to deep left-center, just missing a 32nd home run of the season. Bogaerts settled for his 49th double instead, and the Red Sox had a five-run cushion.

Domingo German controlled the Red Sox in each of his last two starts against them, recording a pair of victories while racking up 16 strikeouts in 12 1/3 innings. He managed just 13 outs on this occasion, requiring 92 pitches to work into the bottom of the fifth. It was just the fourth defeat of the season for German and only his second since June 7.

Playoff stakes missing from this Red Sox-Yankees series

Bill Koch

"I'll see you in a month."

That was the parting message from Twins manager Rocco Baldelli to Red Sox manager Alex Cora prior to Thursday's series finale at Fenway Park.

It was a touch of class from Baldelli, the former Bishop Hendricken star and Boston outfielder. His reference, of course, was to the American League playoffs in October. But if we're being honest, such a reunion has a slim chance of taking place.

The Red Sox entered their weekend series against the Yankees with just 22 games to play. Boston sat 6½ behind the Athletics for the second wild card spot, with the Rays and Indians also making strong bids. Cora was a picture of defiance during his pregame remarks on Friday, properly refusing to concede defeat while his club still clings to mathematical life.

"I don't think he's planning on going on vacation to see me," Cora said. "I don't know. I know we haven't played well, but we're still talented. We're still good. We still have two weeks. And we can get on a run – although you guys don't believe me. I feel that way."

“I told the guys today, ‘Let’s do what we have to do this weekend. We have to win the series.’ We know we have to keep winning series. If we make it and we play that game, I don’t think too many people would like to match up with us in a playoff series. And that’s a fact, because we’re that talented.”

The injury-ravaged Red Sox rotation includes just three pitchers at the moment. Rick Porcello starts on Sunday against New York and Eduardo Rodriguez takes the ball on Monday. Boston was forced to ride its bullpen through the first two games of the weekend.

The Red Sox lineup seems to have done its share. Mookie Betts and Rafael Devers are 1-2 in the A.L. in runs scored while Devers leads in RBI. Devers and Xander Bogaerts are 1-2 in extra-base hits while Betts checks in fourth.

“As far as talent, we’re still one of the best teams in the big leagues,” Cora said. “The thing is we haven’t proven it. That’s the difference.”

The Yankees carried a 9½-game lead over Tampa Bay in the A.L. East race into Friday and are all but assured of stopping Boston at three straight crowns. The Yankees could eliminate the Red Sox this weekend, and it would seem a rather appropriate turnaround from the 2018 season. Boston popped champagne on two occasions at Yankee Stadium – on Sept. 20 after clinching the division and again after winning Game 4 of the A.L. Division Series.

Crowded Red Sox bullpen ready for action against Yankees

Bill Koch

The competition for seats in the Red Sox bullpen is a serious one.

Veterans are granted their usual prime spots under the makeshift roof and next to a large heater. Those lacking such tenure have been pushed to the outside on folding chairs or left to lean along the outfield wall in right-center at Fenway Park.

These are the consequences of expanded September rosters and carrying 16 relievers. Boston could eventually require every one this weekend against the Yankees, declining to name a starting pitcher for Friday or Saturday to begin the four-game series. Jhoulys Chacin was scheduled to make his Red Sox debut as the opener on Friday.

“You try to maximize your strengths and go from there,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “The key here is try to get the first 15 outs the way we want to and see where the game is at from there.”

David Price (left wrist) was scratched from his scheduled Friday start after experiencing some tightness during his regular Wednesday bullpen session. Chris Sale (left elbow) is all but certain to remain on the injured list for the remainder of the season. Those two spots come up back-to-back in the Boston rotation, forcing the relief corps to be ready at a moment’s notice.

“We’re doing the best job we can do,” left-hander Josh Taylor said. “I think we’re up to the task with the bullpen days coming up. We’ve got a lot of arms down there and we’re ready to go.”

The mixing and matching done prior to the sixth inning likely won’t involve Taylor. He’s been a revelation in his first big league season, pitching to a 3.00 earned-run average through his first 43 appearances. Taylor has earned himself a role at the back end of the bullpen, joining fellow rookie Darwinzon Hernandez and veteran right-handers Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman.

“Our training staff, they do a good job keeping us ready to go,” Taylor said. “I feel good. I feel like I’m ready to go whenever that phone rings down in the bullpen.”

Taylor appeared in four straight games and seven of nine from Aug. 24 to Wednesday. The scheduled off days on the three-city road trip to face the Padres, Rockies and Angels gave him some much-needed rest. Otherwise, Taylor and the other high-leverage options have been ridden hard with the Red Sox trailing in the chase for an American League wild card berth.

Chacin made the last of his 19 starts for the Brewers this season on July 24, a 5-4 win over the Reds in which he lasted just three innings. The right-hander pitched to a 5.79 ERA before being released in late August, a stark contrast to the 3.50 ERA he posted in 35 starts with Milwaukee last season. Boston has depth options like Brian Johnson, Ryan Weber, Josh Smith, Mike Shawaryn and Hector Velazquez to cover multiple innings in case of an emergency.

“It just feels like where we’re at right now, it’s hard for this weekend,” Cora said. “Also, matchup-wise, it’s a tough team to match up with. I do believe the best way to attack them is just being creative.”

Red Sox manager Alex Cora, Edwin Encarnacion and Gary Sanchez among those who have visited David Ortiz

Bill Koch

David Ortiz has started accepting visitors at his area home.

The former Red Sox slugger continues to recover from a June shooting in his native Dominican Republic and subsequent surgeries. Boston manager Alex Cora and a pair of Yankees, Edwin Encarnacion and Gary Sanchez, are among those who have checked up on Ortiz in recent weeks.

Cora saw Ortiz before the three-city road trip to face the Padres, Rockies and Angels that wrapped up August. They were teammates while Cora was a utility infielder with the Red Sox from 2005-08 – Ortiz arrived in Boston as a free agent signing after being released by the Twins in December 2002.

“A lot of energy – obviously lost some weight,” Cora said. “He’s back to eating mangu (mashed plantains) and salami and all that cool stuff. He’s good. He’s in a good place.”

New York enjoyed a scheduled off day on Thursday and spent it in the city. Encarnacion and Sanchez – both fellow Dominicans – posted pictures with a smiling Ortiz on their respective Instagram accounts. The 6-foot-2, 230-pound Sanchez and Ortiz appeared to be about the same size in a side-by-side photo – Ortiz’s listed playing weight was also 230 pounds.

“Honored, Mr. Ortiz,” Sanchez wrote at his account, @elgarysanchez. “Wishing you a long life so you can continue to help and inspire future generations. #HeIsBigPapi”

Cora also saw Ortiz’s wife, Tiffany, at a Friday morning fundraiser held by the Red Sox wives. ‘From Fenway to the Runway’ is a fashion show benefiting the club’s education and recreation programs. Angelica Feliciano, Cora’s long-time girlfriend and the mother of their toddler twin sons, was among those who walked the stage at Hotel Commonwealth.

“He looks good,” Cora said. “He’s watching every game. He’s paying attention. I’m glad that the boys were able to go over there. There’s a lot of guys who have stopped by throughout.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Cameron Cannon, Red Sox 2019 top draft pick: ‘I’m taking this year as a lot of lessons learned’

Christopher Smith

Red Sox 2019 top draft pick Cameron Cannon struck out only 60 times in 147 games (644 plate appearances) for an outstanding 9.3% strikeout percentage in three years at the University of Arizona.

But he quickly learned professional baseball is a whole new ballgame.

"I struggled striking out a little bit more than I'd like to, or more than I'm used to," Cannon told MassLive.com recently.

He punched out five times in nine at-bats for the Gulf Coast League Red Sox after inking a \$1.3 million signing bonus with Boston. He then had a 31.5% strikeout percentage in his first 17 games (73 plate appearances, 23 strikeouts) for Short Season Lowell.

But he trimmed it to 13.1% for his final 25 regular season games (107 plate appearances, 14 strikeouts) at Lowell.

"I've made that adjustment where I've limited down my strikeouts now and just try to put the ball in play," he said.

It has been a somewhat challenging first two months of professional ball for Cannon who MLB Pipeline ranks the No. 14 prospect in the organization. But this experience should help him as he heads into the offseason, then his first full professional season in 2020.

The 21-year-old right-handed hitter finished the regular season with a .205/.289/.335/.624 line, three homers, 12 doubles and 21 RBIs in 42 games.

"I think I've learned a lot," Cannon said. "I'm taking this year as a lot of lessons learned."

He said he feels he put together quality at-bats as the season progressed and as his strikeout rate dropped.

"I'm excited for the offseason and next season because I kind of have an idea of what I'm getting into with professional baseball and pitching style and playing style, things like that," he said. "So I'm super excited to get to work in the offseason and come back stronger."

His batting average on balls in play (.248) was low, indicating he might have experienced some bad luck.

"Sometimes you're going to get unlucky and it's not going to find holes," Cannon said. "But I'm just doing the best I can to put together quality at-bats for the team."

Cannon made three errors in 19 games at second base and 10 errors in 20 games at shortstop. He projects longterm as a second baseman.

He wants to improve on "the littler things" defensively.

"Knowing the situations. Slowing the game down," he said. "Playing different situations in your head before it happens."

He plans to work out at the the University of Arizona this coming offseason.

"I'll live with a couple of former teammates and that way we'll be able to push each other and always have a guy to play catch with, hit with and work out," he said.

Cannon keeps in contact with fellow Arizona baseball alum Bobby Dalbec, the Red Sox's No. 2 prospect who bashed 27 homers this year between Double-A Portland Triple-A Pawtucket.

“The last time I talked to him was when he got promoted to Triple A,” Cannon said. “I shot him a text, congratulations and stuff like that. And he’s been killing it up there. So I’m excited for him. He’ll usually come back to Tucson about every offseason. So hopefully I’ll be able to see him there for a week or so.”

Cannon comes from a baseball family. His father played DII baseball. The Orioles drafted Cannon’s brother Tanner Murphy in the 22nd round in 2010.

“He ended up tearing his labrum so he’s kind of hung 'em up right now,” Cannon said.

But Murphy keeps a close eye on Cannon’s career.

“He’s very supportive and I’m lucky to have him. He’s like a role model to me, for sure,” Cannon said. “I was grateful to grow up with him and learn off his work ethic and knowledge of the game.”

Lakins to open Red Sox bullpen game vs. Yankees on Saturday; Happ will start for New York

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox used seven relievers Friday, beginning with newcomer Jhoulys Chacín who hurled two perfect innings.

Boston beat the Yankees, 6-1, here at Fenway Park.

Manager Alex Cora will try another bullpen game Saturday. Why not? Thanks to expanded September rosters, the Red Sox are carrying 21 pitchers, including 17 relievers.

Travis Lakins will open for Boston on Saturday. He has allowed eight earned runs in 15.1 innings (4.70 ERA) for Boston this year. He also posted a 4.60 ERA, 1.53 WHIP and .264 batting average against in 40 outings (45 innings) for Triple-A Pawtucket.

Lefty J.A. Happ (11-8, 5.34 ERA) is scheduled to pitch for the Yankees on Saturday.

Rick Porcello will start for Boston on Sunday. Eduardo Rodriguez will start Monday vs. New York.

Darwinzon Hernandez reminds Red Sox newcomer Jhoulys Chacin of Brewers closer Josh Hader

Christopher Smith

Red Sox 22-year-old Darwinzon Hernandez fired another scoreless inning vs. the Yankees on Friday. He lowered his ERA to 2.10 in 25 ²/₃ innings of relief.

The left-hander, who eventually could emerge as the Red Sox closer in the coming years, averaged 96.9 mph with his fastball and topped out at 98.2 mph, per Statcast.

“He reminds me of (Josh) Hader,” Red Sox newcomer Jhoulys Chacin said. “He throws that raised fastball that some guys just can’t catch up. I’ve talked to him a lot since I’ve been here. I want him to stay healthy and keep doing what he’s been doing.”

The Red Sox won 6-1 over the Yankees here at Fenway Park. Chacin hurled 2 scoreless innings to start the game.

Hernandez — whose fastball has averaged 95.4 mph this year — has held the opposition to a .202 batting average against and has averaged 16.9 strikeouts per nine innings. He also mixes in a slider.

Baseball America's Boston Red Sox 2022 projected lineup has Darwinzon Hernandez as the closer.

Chacin played on the same team with Hader — the dominant Brewers closer — the past year and a half.

“I played with Hader and to see his fastball just raise up,” Chacin said. “His (Hernandez’s) fastball does pretty much the same, too. Like I said, he just needs to stay healthy and take his approach every day to the field and I think he can be a pretty good pitcher.”

Hader has a 2.43 ERA and 0.85 WHIP in 140 career relief outings (192 ⅓ innings). He has averaged 15.3 strikeouts per nine innings in his career.

Boston Red Sox shut down Yankees using 7 pitchers who weren’t on Opening Day roster: ‘We’re just in a position now where we have to do this,’ Alex Cora says

Chris Cotillo

Two rookie lefties, a couple minor-league journeymen, a former 14th-rounder and two veteran starters trying to prove themselves before hitting free agency walk into a bullpen.

Sounds like there’s a punchline coming, right?

There’s not. Instead, that’s the group of Red Sox pitchers that held the hot-hitting Yankees to one run and three hits in a 6-1 win Friday night.

Seven pitchers-- Jhoulys Chacin, Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Andrew Cashner, Ryan Weber, Darwinson Hernandez and Bobby Poyner-- combined to produce one of the most complete games by the staff all season. None of the seven made Boston’s Opening Day roster and two-- Chacin and Cashner-- actually served as Opening Day starters for other teams (the Brewers and Orioles, respectively.)

Yet they all found themselves at Fenway Park on Friday night trying help a reeling Red Sox team stay afloat in the playoff race. After David Price was scratched from his start due to wrist tightness he experienced in a recent bullpen, it was time for manager Alex Cora to get to work and mold together a pitching lineup, piece-by-piece.

It started with Chacin-- picked up from the scrap heap last weekend after being released by the Brewers-- retiring all six batters he faced and striking out four in his first time facing live hitters since July 24.

“He did an outstanding job moving the ball around,” Cora said. “Fastball command was good, slider was good. It’s a different look. It’s not north-south, it’s east-west and expanding. He’s done it before. He has pitched in big games and he was an Opening Day starter. He’s an accomplished big-leaguer and he set the tempo right away.”

Chacin handed the baton to Taylor, who pitched a 1-2-3 third. Walden then worked around two baserunners to escape the fourth unscathed. Cashner, a converted starter, allowed a Brett Gardner homer for the staff’s only blip of the night. Weber allowed one baserunner in two innings, Hernandez threw a scoreless eighth and Poyner pitched a 1-2-3 ninth in his first big-league outing since June 11.

Needless to say, it wasn’t the group anyone would have expected the Red Sox to trot out for a mid-September game against their archrivals.

“Like I said in spring training, it takes more than the guys that you take on Opening Day to win a World Series,” Cora said. “We proved that last year. I think it was 27 (pitchers); we have 21 here. You look around the league and someone has to contribute. Honestly, they’ve done an outstanding job throughout the last month in a half.”

With Price and Chris Sale out, the Sox are down to three starters with 21 games to go. Tentatively, they’re scheduled to make up 40% of their remaining games with bullpen days in which there’s no set starting pitcher and a handful of pitchers will likely appear for varied amounts of innings.

That's why Cora has 21 pitchers (and 17 relievers) on his roster.

"I'm not going to apologize for having 21 pitchers here," Cora said. "The rules are the rules and we're going to do it that way. It's two spots that we have and we'd like to maximize our matchups and put the team in position to win games."

The homework is harder this time of year for Cora and his staff, who must work tirelessly to put the nearly two-dozen pitchers in the best possible situations to succeed. Poyner, for example, will pitch to hitters who struggle with fastballs up in the zone. Weber will provide length. A guy like Chacin will likely bounce back and forth between starting and relieving in the next month.

The Red Sox are all-in and are trying to get their relievers to think the same way.

"Whenever you pitch, it's not about setting up guys or trying to trick guys," Cora told the group. "It's just your strength against them. It's actually a sprint. Three or four guys and then we move forward. They were great."

Instead of relying on five horses in the starting rotation, the Sox are now working with a large group of pitchers who excel at certain things and could be something special as a unit. While most of the team's relievers haven't established themselves as forces in the majors, the team believes they have enough to work with in order to get outs.

"The stuff that we have is pretty good," Cora said. "They don't have the time. You start looking around the guys and it's one year of service, two years of service. We don't have a veteran out there. That's the difference."

Injuries and the standings have made these desperate times for the Red Sox. The requisite desperate measures have followed.

"We're just in a position right now where we have to do this," Cora said. "We know it's going to change next year. We were actually talking about that in the 8th inning. Right now, this is the way we have to go. We have guys who can get people out. We just have to make sure we find the right matchups for them to attack guys."

Jhoulys Chacin, Boston Red Sox shut down Yankees in 6-1 win Friday

Chris Cotillo

Thrust into a tough spot with David Price scratched from his start due to elbow tightness, the Red Sox embraced an all-hands-on-deck approach when it came to the pitching staff Friday night. The result? Seven pitchers who weren't on the Opening Day roster combining for one of Boston's most complete pitching performances of the year.

The Sox won, 6-1, holding the high-powered Yankees offense to three hits. Jhoulys Chacin, Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Andrew Cashner, Ryan Weber, Darwinzon Hernandez and Bobby Poyner dazzled New York, allowing just five baserunners in the victory.

Chacin, who was signed last weekend after being released by the Brewers, was dominant in two innings, striking out four. Taylor and Walden followed with scoreless innings, setting the Sox up for an offensive outburst against Yankees starter Domingo German in the fourth.

After Brock Holt plated the game's first run with an RBI single, Mitch Moreland gave Boston a 4-0 lead with a three-run home run to right field. Moreland's 15th homer of the season was his first since Aug. 9 and just his second since May 21.

Brett Gardner homered off Cashner in the fifth for New York's only run. Xander Bogaerts made it a 6-1 game with a two-run double in the bottom of the inning.

Weber allowed one baserunner in two innings, Hernandez threw a scoreless eighth and Bobby Poyner retired the side in the ninth.

Moreland had three of Boston's six hits. Rafael Devers doubled and scored.

The Sox improved to 4-1 against the Yankees at Fenway Park this season and 76-65 overall. They'll look to continue rolling in the second game of the series Saturday afternoon at 4:05 p.m.

Chacin impressive in Sox debut

Chacin, making his Red Sox debut, retired all six hitters he faced. He struck out Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius, Gary Sanchez and Edwin Encarnacion along the way. He threw 35 pitches in his first outing since July 24.

Saturday starter TBA

The Sox will have another bullpen game Saturday and are likely to start a pitcher who didn't throw Friday night. Mike Shawaryn, Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez will be available to give Boston some length.

Rick Porcello will pitch in primetime Sunday night and Eduardo Rodriguez will pitch the series finale Monday.

Boston Red Sox's Alex Cora was 'baffled' when Yankees manager Aaron Boone received criticism in 2018; 'Aaron has more wins in the big leagues than me'

Christopher Smith

Red Sox manager Alex Cora was surprised when Yankees manager Aaron Boone received criticism during 2018.

Cora and Boone became friends working together at ESPN. They both were hired before 2018. In his first season, Cora posted a 108-54 record, then won 11 of 14 postseason games to clinch the World Series title.

Boone, meanwhile, went 100-62. His Yankees lost 3-1 in the best-of-five ALDS to the Red Sox.

"Aaron Boone did a good job last year. Aaron won 100 games," Cora said. "Aaron actually has more wins in the big leagues than me. He did an outstanding job last year. This guy, he knows the game. It baffled me last year when they were like all over him. I was like, 'Why?' It just happened that we won 108. But he did an outstanding job. In the playoffs, we did what we did. I mean, we were one foot away from losing Game 4 and see what happens in Game 5. So he's a good guy. He's a good manager"

Boone has a 192-111 regular-season record (.634 winning percentage). He has gone 194-114 (.630 winning percentage), including postseason.

Cora has a 183-119 regular-season record (.606 winning percentage). He has gone 194-122 (.614 winning percentage), including postseason.

"It just happened that we manage in two markets that every move is second-guessed," Cora added. "And we know it. We did it probably on TV (at ESPN). So I'm very proud of him. I'm very happy for him. Obviously not happy for us. You know what I mean? But on a personal level, he's been great."

Who is Jhoulys Chacin? New Boston Red Sox starter was Opening Day starter for Brewers, won 15 games last season

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox will have a new pitcher on the mound Thursday night against the Yankees when right-hander Jhoulys Chacin gets the start in the opener of a four-game series against the Yankees. Chacin, an 11-year major-league veteran, was signed Saturday and added to the big-league roster a day later.

Chacin, 31, was released by the Brewers on Aug. 26 after spending just over a month on the injured list with an oblique strain. Before that, he was a major disappointment in Milwaukee's rotation, going from the club's Opening Day starter to posting a 3-10 record and 5.79 ERA in 19 starts.

Chacin struggled with command (4 BB/9 innings) and homers (19) on his way to being cut by the Brewers. The righty features a four-pitch mix, throwing a four-seam fastball, slider, sinker and changeup.

"Talking to him and going over his season, I think fastball command was a big issue with him," manager Alex Cora said Friday. "A few pitches have the same action and the same results. Others, not as much. That was the whole thing. The margin for error is not that big obviously because his fastball is not 97-98 mph. But when he is able to spot his fastball, he can expand with his other pitches. Talking to him, it just didn't happen early in the season."

With Chris Sale and David Price dealing with injury, the Sox identified Chacin as a potential option once he was released. Scout Steve Peck reportedly saw him throw in Arizona and recommended he throw a bullpen in front of Sox officials-- including Cora and president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski-- last Friday in Anaheim.

The team came away impressed enough to offer a minor-league deal, which Chacin accepted. He was added to the major-league roster when rosters expanded to 40 players Sunday.

"Obviously, you can't tell much from a bullpen. Talking to (pitching coaches) Dana (LeVangie) and (Brian Bannister), and me sitting there, the action of the slider is still good. He feels he's healthy. Obviously he's fresh. The two-seamer was moving the right way. Maybe the cutter, which was the pitch he used before. He didn't go to it too often this year because he was always behind, especially against lefties. We'll see where it goes. He's in a good place."

Chacin isn't far off from being a successful big-league pitcher. After going 13-10 with a 3.89 ERA and 7.6 K/9 in 32 starts with the Padres in 2017, he was a highly coveted free agent and ended up signing a 2-year, \$15 million deal with the Brewers. In his first season in Milwaukee, he was 15-8 with a 3.50 ERA in 35 starts.

Chacin has previously pitched for the Rockies (2009-14), Diamondbacks (2015), Braves (2016), Angels (2016), Padres (2017) and Brewers (2018-19). He owns a career 77-85 record and 4.00 ERA in 249 appearances (221 starts).

Chacin hasn't pitched since July 24, when he lasted three innings in a start against the Reds. The expectation is that he'll just be able to give the Sox an inning or two against New York in place of Price, who was scratched with wrist tightness.

"I've got it mapped out. We'll see how it starts," Cora said. "You try to maximize your strengths and go from there. The key here is trying to get the first 15 outs the way we want to and see where the game is at. Then go from there."

Alex Cora on Red Sox/Yankees series: 'The talk this weekend is that they can put us away for good'

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox manager Alex Cora knows it's do-or-die time for a team fighting for any chance at making the playoffs.

The Red Sox, who enter Friday trailing the Athletics by 6 ½ games for the second American League wild-card spot, will take on the league-best Yankees for four games at Fenway Park. Their last two series have gone very differently from each other; the Sox took three of four from New York at Fenway in late July before being swept in the Bronx in early August.

"Last time they were here, we beat them three out of four. At that point, the talk was like, that's to put us away," Cora said. "That weekend they didn't. They did it two weeks after. Probably the talk this weekend is that they can put us away for good in the playoff hunt. We'll see where it goes."

The Sox trail three teams in the wild-card race: the Rays, Athletics and Indians. To get into the postseason, they'll have to leapfrog both the Indians and A's in the final 22 games of the season.

The Sox have played good baseball since breaking their eight-game losing streak with a win over the Royals on Aug. 6. They're 16-11 in their last 27, losing five one-run games and eight games by less than three runs in that span.

Boston is 12-6 in its last 18 games, losing only one of those six by more than three runs.

"It sucks because we feel like we're right there. We're one pitch away, one swing away," Cora said. "That's the nature of our season. We still feel we're playing good baseball."

The next task for the Sox is not an easy one, as the Yankees have been one of baseball's best teams since the beginning of the season. New York has taken a staggering 11 of the 15 games they've played against the Red Sox this year.

"There's a few things, also, they're doing that they're better at," Cora said. "Paying attention to detail, running the bases and all that. They've been outstanding since Day 1. They are where they are because they've played better baseball than us."

Alex Cora visited David Ortiz in August; Boston Red Sox manager says Big Papi is 'in a good place'

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox manager Alex Cora visited David Ortiz before the team's recent west-coast trip and said the recovering Sox legend is "in a good place" after being shot in the lower abdomen on June 9.

Cora said he stopped by Ortiz's home before the team departed for San Diego two weeks ago. He also saw Ortiz's wife, Tiffany, at the Red Sox Foundation's "From Fenway to the Runway" event at Fenway Park on Friday.

"He looks good," Cora said. "He's watching every game, he's paying attention."

Yankees sluggers Edwin Encarnacion and Gary Sanchez posted photos with Ortiz on Instagram Thursday after visiting the 43-year-old on their off day. Cora said a few members of the Red Sox have gone to see Ortiz as well.

"I'm glad the boys were able to go over there. There's a lot of guys who have stopped by throughout," Cora said. "A lot of energy, obviously lost some weight. He's back to eating mangu (mashed plantains) and salami and all that good stuff. He's good. He's in a good place."

Ortiz underwent three surgeries before being released from the hospital on July 26. He has been recovering at home and has yet to make his first public appearance since being shot at the Dial Bar and Lounge in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Five Takes: Jhoulys Chacin leads the way as Red Sox bullpen their way to a win

Chris Mason

A new age manager, Alex Cora relishes the opportunity presented by bullpen games.

So with David Price scratched (wrist), Cora opted to go the opener route, handing the ball to freshly-signed reliever Jhoulys Chacin.

It couldn't have gone any better. The Red Sox 'pen was dynamite, and they knocked the Yankees off in last night's series opener, 6-1.

Here are five takes from a mostly dry evening at Fenway Park:

1. Welcome, Jhoulys

Designated for assignment by the Brewers last month, Chacin hadn't pitched since July, but his first appearance in Boston was quite impressive. The veteran threw two perfect innings, striking out Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius, Gary Sanchez and Edwin Encarnacion.

Just as we all expected, right?

2. 'Pen follows suit

From there the next six relievers were just about lights out, too.

Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Ryan Weber, Darwinzon Hernandez and Bobby Poyner all threw scoreless innings. Andrew Cashner gave up the lone run, a solo homer in the fifth, but the Yankees couldn't get any traffic on the bases for most of the night. They finished with just three hits.

3. Celebrates in style

On his 34th birthday, Mitch Moreland curled a three-run shot around Pesky's Pole to open the scoring in the fourth. It was his first homer in almost a month, and just his second since returning from the injured list in July, but Moreland knew it was gone right off the bat.

4. Bogey-Devers double

Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers entered last night tied for the league lead with 48 doubles. They exited still tied, but one closer to 50, as they each hit a two-bagger off the Green Monster.

Bogaerts' was particularly lethal, as it drove in a pair of insurance runs.

5. Try again tomorrow?

Though it worked to perfection last night, it'll be interesting to see how the Red Sox relievers respond this afternoon. With no starter available, Cora is going with another bullpen game, and it'll be significantly tougher given the strain of back-to-back outings in less than 24 hours.

Hunger has fueled Yankees' rise to the top of AL East

Chris Mason

It was supposed to be a series with major AL East implications, but instead, this weekend at Fenway Park will be one last chance for New York to bury Boston's October ambitions.

The Red Sox opened the four-game set 16 1/2 games out in the division, and the Yanks held a seemingly insurmountable 9 1/2-game lead over the Rays, too. What should be a compelling threeteam race is an absolute laugher.

Friday afternoon, Aaron Boone's first questions were about a home run race between Gary Sanchez and Gleyber Torres, not anything to do with the Sox.

So how in the wide world of sports did we get here?

"They've been outstanding since day one," Alex Cora conceded. "They are where they are because they've played better baseball than us. It is what it is. They've been very consistent and we've been inconsistent." A year ago, the Sox made quick work of the Yankees in the ALDS, but Cora's club has regressed in a major way this season. That's no secret.

Whether it's been awful starting pitching, an overtaxed and undermanned bullpen, or a lack of timely hitting, we've examined their shortcomings at great length in this space.

So let's take a \$10-Fenway-Park-beer-half-full approach for a change.

On the flip side, New York must be doing something well, right? A 100-win team a year ago, they're on pace to blow past the century mark, and they've done it with a slew of injuries befitting the New York Giants.

So how have the Yankees gotten even better?

Boone paused for a second and mulled the question over before answering.

"I think they're really hungry," Boone said. "Not to say we weren't last year, because I felt like it absolutely existed last year, but this is a group that a lot of these guys have tasted the postseason and tasted success and failures in the postseason.

"I just feel like there's been a real good mindset as far as a singular goal. No matter who we've brought into the room, and obviously we're brought a lot of different people up from the minor leagues or from outside the organization based on some of the injuries and adversity we've faced, that mindset has not changed on a daily basis.

"I feel like they've done a really good job of no matter where we are in the season, no matter what level of grind it is in the season, that hunger has carried them well," Boone added. "They, I think in a lot of ways, feel like they have a lot of unfinished business."

It's an intriguing response for a couple of reasons.

First and foremost, Boone's repeated use of "they" to deflect his team's successes speaks to who he is as a leader, and that selflessness is contagious in the visitors' clubhouse. He deserves a tip of the cap.

Beyond that, Boone could have come up with any myriad of reasons his team has improved.

He could have credited a changed offensive approach, pitchers spinning the ball more, infielders shifting all over the place, or any other newfound point of emphasis that front offices are stressing in 2019.

Instead, Boone opted for the chip on his team's shoulder.

In an age of analytics, there's still something to be said for some good old-fashioned fire. Just look to the top of the AL East standings.

*** *RedSox.com***

7 Sox arms not on Opening Day roster foil Yanks

Ian Browne

As the opener and bullpen games became part of baseball lexicon over the past couple of seasons, the Red Sox had no problem letting those things pass them by, preferring to go with a sturdy rotation that helped them win the 2018 World Series.

However, the attrition of a challenging title defense has left Boston manager Alex Cora with no choice but to go, as he likes to say, "all in," on the concept during this rivalry weekend.

The plan worked masterfully for Cora and the Red Sox in Friday's 6-1 victory over the Yankees at Fenway Park.

It started with a brilliant opener outing from veteran righty Jhoulys Chacín, who made his debut for the Sox by throwing two perfect innings that included four strikeouts.

Chacin signed a Minor League deal with the Sox less than a week ago, and it was hard to know what to expect from a pitcher who went 3-10 with a 5.79 ERA for the Brewers this season and hadn't pitched since July 24.

In fact, until his first pitch of Friday's game, he hadn't even thrown a pitch with a batter standing in the box since that last start for Milwaukee.

"That's why I was worried about just throwing strikes," said Chacin. "It's not the same as throwing bullpens -- especially against the Yankees, they have a really good lineup. I was just trying to see the glove and hit the glove. After that, just forget about everything and try to have fun. Good experience for me to pitch in the Yankees-Boston rivalry."

From there, Cora went to a collection of more familiar faces in Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Andrew Cashner, Ryan Weber, Darwinzon Hernandez and Bobby Poyner to mostly dazzling results. The heavy-hitting Yankees mustered just three hits on the night.

"It's a little bit different, but it's September baseball unfortunately," said Yankees center fielder Brett Gardner. "We've got three more weeks of that. It's part of the game and it doesn't matter who we're facing or how many times we face them. Our job is to go out there and put good at-bats together and try to score runs and obviously do a little better job than we did tonight. So hopefully we saved some for tomorrow."

What did all seven pitchers who appeared for Boston in Friday's game have in common? None of them were on the Opening Day roster.

"Like I said in Spring Training, it takes more than the guys that you take on Opening Day to win a World Series," said Cora. "We proved it last year. I think it's, what, 27 [pitchers this season]? We've got 21 here [now]. That's the way it works. And, honestly, they've done an outstanding job throughout the last month and a half. We did it in Anaheim. They did it today. And we're planning on going tomorrow and doing the same thing."

Saturday's opener will be righty Travis Lakins. Cora will go back to the traditional route on Sunday and Monday with starters Rick Porcello and Eduardo Rodriguez, respectively.

It isn't as if Cora is doing the less conventional method by choice. Chris Sale is done for the season. David Price has pitched just once since Aug. 4, and there's no definitive word on when he will pitch again.

Meanwhile, the Red Sox are just trying to keep some hope alive in their uphill climb to secure a postseason berth.

"I mean, we're just in a position right now where we have to do this," said Cora.

Right now, Cora has strength in numbers, if nothing else, with 21 pitchers on his September roster. Starting next season, MLB will cap rosters at 28 players in September.

"We know it's going to change next year," said Cora. "We were actually talking about it in the eighth inning. But, right now, this is the way we have to go. We've got guys that can get people out. We just have to make sure we find the right matchup for them to go and attack guys."

Attack they did on Friday.

Thanks to the shutdown pitching, the offense had some time to get into a groove. And Mitch Moreland, celebrating his 34th birthday, punctuated a four-run fourth inning with a three-run homer to right against Yankees starter Domingo German. Xander Bogaerts tacked on two more with a double in the fifth.

"We're not in the best of spots, but everybody in here is continuing to fight and try to find ways to go out and produce and help the team win," said Moreland. "Obviously you can see all the extra lockers in here. I saw the picture on the website of the bullpen the other night. It's pretty impressive right now. All these guys are in here and doing everything they can to help the team win. We're going to give it our best shot."

Cora: We're still hungry; we can get on a run

Ian Browne

Though the math didn't look pretty for the Red Sox as they got set to open a four-game series with the rival Yankees on Friday night at Fenway Park, manager Alex Cora made it clear that he's not ready to make a concession speech, or anything close to it.

Cora's genuine optimism and belief that his team is still capable of an epic late-season run is admirable, considering the team's baffling inconsistency all season long, not to mention the fact Chris Sale is out for the season and David Price has pitched two innings since Aug. 4.

"I know we haven't played well, but we're still talented. We're still good," said Cora. "We've still got two weeks. We can get on a run. Although you guys don't believe me, but I feel that way. I told the guys today, 'Let's do what we have to do this weekend. We've got to win the series. And we know we have to keep winning series, but if we make it and we play that game, I don't think too many people would like to match up with us in a playoff series.'

"And that's a fact, because we're that talented. [The Yankees] are good, Houston is good, Minnesota is good, Cleveland is good, the A's are good. We're good, too. We haven't been consistent, obviously. But as far as talent, we're still one of the best teams in the big leagues. The thing is, we haven't proved it. That's the difference."

Cora spread that message to his players that there is still time to prove it in an informal setting -- not a team meeting.

With 22 games left in the season, the Sox entered Friday's game trailing the Rays by seven games (six in the loss column) for the first American League Wild Card spot and the Athletics by 6 1/2 for the second spot. Not only that, but they also trailed the Indians by 5 1/2 games.

To play in the AL Wild Card Game on Oct. 2, the Sox would have to vault ahead of two of those three teams.

Even Cora would admit that winning the division is basically a fantasy at this point, given the 16 1/2-game deficit to the team they are hosting this weekend.

"Like I told the guys today, I know where we're at, I know the odds are against us, but whatever percent chances we have, we still have a chance to play them in October -- as of now," said Cora. "So let's not get ahead of ourselves. We're still hungry."

Cora continues to feel the respect that other teams have for the defending World Series champs.

"We know where we're at and for everything I heard around the league and whoever we play, [Twins manager] Rocco Baldelli told me, 'I'll see you in a month.' I don't think he's planning on going on vacation to see me," said Cora.

But if Cora wants to avoid starting his vacation at the beginning of October, his team will need an historic finish.

Health updates

Price would have started Friday night's game if not for the recurring discomfort he felt in his left wrist in a bullpen session on Wednesday. But the lefty was able to play catch prior to the game.

Cora had an encouraging update on reliever Heath Hembree. The righty, who has been out since Aug. 2, was at last able to throw a side session, meaning there's still a chance he can pitch again this season.

"We'll see how he reacts the next few days. At least that's a positive," said Cora.

What about first baseman Steve Pearce, who last played for the Red Sox on May 31?

"Not much. He hasn't been able to run, so I don't want to say we're going to shut it down, but obviously as you guys know, there's no games down there [in the Minors]," Cora said. "It's going to be hard to get him back."

Cora visited with Papi

With Instagram photos surfacing on Thursday of Yankees players Edwin Encarnacion and Gary Sanchez visiting Red Sox legend David Ortiz, Cora was asked if he's had a chance to see his former teammate, who suffered a gunshot wound in the Dominican Republic on June 9.

"I visited David before the road trip," Cora said. "He's in a good place. He looks good. He's watching every game. He's paying attention. I'm glad the boys were able to go over there. A lot of the guys have stopped by throughout. A lot of energy. Obviously he lost some weight. He's back to eating mangu and salami and all of that good stuff. He's in a good place."

*** *WEEI.com***

Darwinzon Hernandez gets sizable compliment from newest teammate

Rob Bradford

Jhoulys Chacin has only known Darwinzon Hernandez for a few days. But as soon as he saw the rookie lefty pitch, an image came to mind.

Josh Hader.

"He's good, man," said Chacin, the former Brewer who turned in two perfect innings Friday night against the Brewers. "He reminds me of Hader. He throws that raised fastball that some guys just can't catch up to. I've talked to him a lot since I've been here. I want him to stay healthy and keep doing what he's doing."

Chacin sat back and watched Hernandez do his thing in a one-inning stint against New York, throwing a total of 15 pitches, all but one being fastballs. It was that heater -- which topped out at 98.2 mph this time around -- that has led this year's Opening Day starter for Milwaukee to offer up the Hader comparison.

It's not a leap of faith to match up the pair. Both are lefties who lean heavily on high-90's fastballs. Hader throws his 81.9 percent of the time, while the Sox hurler offers his four-seamer at a 72.5 percent clip.

"I played with Hader and Hader's fastball just rises," Chacin noted. "To see (Hernandez), his fastball does pretty much the same. Just stay healthy and take his approach every day to the field and he can be a really good pitcher."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Turns out Red Sox didn't need Edwin Diaz after all, because bullpen suddenly boasts legit weapons

John Tomase

Barely a month ago, we were supposed to seriously entertain the question of whether the Red Sox should trade Andrew Benintendi to the Mets for closer Edwin Diaz.

Those of us with some common sense noted that potential All-Star outfielders, even ones in the middle of relatively down seasons such as Benintendi, should never, under any circumstances, be traded for a reliever. After failing to acquire a single bullpen arm at the trade deadline, Red Sox boss Dave Dombrowski insisted that the relief corps was better than we thought.

Six weeks later, with Diaz blowing saves left and right -- his latest a tying two-run homer to Philly's J.T. Realmuto on Friday in a game the Mets won anyway -- it's worth noting that the Red Sox bullpen has actually turned out to be pretty good, with a number of young arms emerging as viable options for Alex Cora's 2020 pen.

(Before we go any further, this does **not** change the fact that shoddy relief put the Red Sox in an early hole from which they never really extricated themselves. The time to address their relief shortcomings was June; had the relievers pitched like this all season, we wouldn't be looking at a missed playoff berth.)

Those arms were on display on Friday, when manager Alex Cora rode seven pitchers who weren't even on the Opening Day roster to a 6-1 victory over the Yankees. It just further cemented the team's commitment to bullpening to the finish line, and it turns out there may be a silver lining to rostering 21 arms, because the Red Sox have unearthed some potential contributors.

First and foremost, there's left-hander Darwinzon Hernandez. A starter throughout the minors, the 22-year-old shifted to the bullpen this summer and has made a legitimate impact.

A National League scout who has evaluated him at three different levels this season was concise in his assessment.

"Wow," he said. "Wow. His stuff really plays in the bullpen. He doesn't have to worry about setting guys up for the second or third time through the order. He's just attacking."

While command can be an issue -- and certainly was as a starter in the minors -- Hernandez's stuff is absurd. He tossed a scoreless inning on Friday night Yankees and entered the day with 62 swings and misses within the strike zone, which suggests dominance.

He pairs a 97-99 mph fastball with a sharp slider and has struck out 55 in only 29.2 innings, or nearly 17 per nine. He has mostly shelved the curveball and changeup he needed as a starter, living primarily on his dominating fastball, which has overwhelmed left-handed hitters, in particular.

"I like this guy," Cora said recently. "I like what he's doing right now. Obviously we'll talk about it in the offseason but right now, he's one of the high-leverage relievers on our team. He's a guy who can get lefties and righties out. He has a good mix and he's actually enjoying it. He likes it. He's up to the challenge. He's durable too. Obviously, you have to be careful because there's more than this year. This guys is a big part of what we're trying to do as an organization and be consistent every year and compete for a World Series and he's part of that."

He's not alone. Left-hander Josh Taylor, acquired from the Diamondbacks as a player to be named later last season for light-hitting shortstop Deven Marrero, has taken his opportunity and run with it. He doesn't throw quite as hard as Hernandez, but he's consistently 94-96 mph and with a scoreless inning on Friday, he dropped his ERA below 3.00 to 2.93.

Not bad for an undrafted free agent already in his third organization at age 26.

Add Marcus Walden, another success story despite being a 30-year-old rookie who kicked around the minors for 12 years, and the bullpen looks like it has some workable pieces for 2020. The aforementioned trio has earned Cora's trust alongside veterans Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman, which means a case can be made that the Red Sox really only need to add one high-leverage pitcher this winter, be it a closer or setup man.

Edwin Diaz? Who needs him. Since his name entered trade rumors in late July, the former Mariners All-Star has posted an ERA slightly over 9.00 and blown three saves, including New York's most crushing loss of the year when he served up the walk-off, three-run homer to Washington this week.

It doesn't take Andrew Benintendi to patch a bullpen, just some patience.

Alex Cora remains convinced no one wants to face Red Sox in playoffs

John Tomase

Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Twins counterpart Rocco Baldelli had a message for him as their three-game series concluded on Thursday: See you in a month.

It may sound like wishful thinking, but Cora made it clear before the series opener against the Yankees on Friday night that he's not giving up on the season, even if the math makes a return to the playoffs highly improbable.

He told his team as much in a series of individual conversations on Friday afternoon.

"Well, like I told the guys today, I know where we at, I know the odds are against us but whatever percent chances we have, we still have a chance to play [the Yankees] in October -- as of now," Cora said. "So let's not get ahead of ourselves. We're still hungry. We know where we're at and for everything I heard around the league and whoever we play, Rocco Baldelli told me, I'll see you in a month. I don't think he's planning on going on vacation to see me."

The Red Sox opened Friday trailing the A's by 6.5 games for the second wild-card spot with only 22 games remaining. They must also leapfrog the Indians, who stood a game out of the playoffs before Friday's games.

So what gives Cora confidence that his team can suddenly turn it on when that has yet to happen all season?

"I know we haven't played well, but we're still talented," he said. "We're still good. We've still got two weeks. We can get on a run, although you guys don't believe me, but I feel that way. I told the guys today, let's do what we have to do this weekend. We've got to win the series. And we know we have to keep winning series, but if we make it and we play that [wild-card] game, I don't think too many people would like to match up with us in a playoff series. And that's a fact.

Because we're that talented. They're good, Houston is good, Minnesota is good, Cleveland is good, the A's are good. We're good, too. We haven't been consistent, obviously. But as far as talent, we're still one of the best teams in the big leagues. The thing is, we haven't proved it, that's the difference."

Needless to say, they're running out of time to make that point in any meaningful way.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Down a couple of starting pitchers, Red Sox try a novel approach

Sean McAdam

This wasn't how they drew it up at the start of the season. No, not even in their wildest dreams did the Red Sox imagine this would be how it all played out in September.

They had invested almost \$90 million in their starting rotation. They had re-signed Nathan Eovaldi and they had extended Chris Sale.

While seemingly every other team was focusing on their bullpen, the Red Sox were going decidedly old school, putting their money on the starters.

And to make sure that those starters would be in peak form for the stretch run, they mapped out a spring training plan to bring them along slowly, saving pitches and arms in the process.

Or so they thought.

Never in a million years did the Sox envision that for the start of a four-game series with the Yankees, they would have to go with a bullpen game. Never did they think that they would use seven different pitchers — not a single one of them, incidentally, part of the team's Opening Day roster — to beat the Yankees, 6-1.

But they did.

The rotation around which they constructed their roster is in shambles, like an abandoned car broken down on the side of the road. Sale is done for the season with an ailing elbow. David Price may well have thrown his last pitch, too, sidelined for the second time with a wrist injury. Eovaldi, having missed half the season earlier, is just now getting to the point where he can give the Sox five innings. And Rick Porcello sports a bloated 5.63 ERA.

So the Sox made do. They first handed the ball to Jhoulys Chacin, making his Red Sox debut, for the first two innings. After that, there was a procession of relievers summoned nearly every inning thereafter. Groundskeeper Dave Mellor could be excused for worrying about the steady stream of pitchers wearing out a path between the bullpen in right field and the pitcher's mound.

This wasn't so much a baseball game as it was a relay race, with one pitcher after another handing off the baton.

Somehow, it worked, too. That's the part that no one saw coming. And not one of them was part of the 25-man roster when the Red Sox began the year in Seattle.

"Like I said in spring training," said Alex Cora, "it takes more than the guys that you take for Opening Day to win a World Series. We proved that last year with, what, 27 pitchers? That's how it works. You look around the league and somebody has to contribute. Honestly, they've done an outstanding job."

Trailing three teams for the two wild-card spots, the Sox are giving off a whiff of desperation. They've got 21 pitchers on their active roster, and are squeezing as many as 17 of them out in the bullpen.

On Friday night, one by one, they were given work release. Following Chacin was Josh Taylor, who begat Marcus Walden, who begat Andrew Cashner who begat Ryan Weber. Darwinzon Hernandez and Bobby Poyner finished things out.

The only run came in the fifth when Cashner yielded a solo homer by Brett Gardner.

Other than that, the strategy worked. The assembly line approach managed to limit a fearsome New York lineup to a mere three hits.

Turns out, that's part of the charm of this nothing-left-to-lose strategy.

"It's an uncomfortable game for hitters," Cora noted. "You see four different pitchers. It's not that the game is always gonna go this way. But like I said four days ago, I'm not going to apologize for having 21 pitchers here. The rules are the rules and we're going go that way. There are two spots (in the rotation) that we don't have and we're going to try to maximize our matchups and put the team in position to win games."

Gone is any semblance of a game plan. Pitchers aren't saving themselves for the third time through the order or trying to set-up hitters. This is blunt force pitching — give it everything you have because you're not going to be out there long.

"It's actually a sprint against them," said Cora. "Three or four guys and we move forward."

Cora isn't claiming that he's begun a trend or stumbled upon a new way to win. This is born of necessity.

"We're just in a position where we have to do this," he said flatly.

It worked for one night. Saturday afternoon, they'll cross their fingers and try it again.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 6, Yankees 1 – Led by newcomer, seven Sox pitchers shut down Yanks

Sean McAdam

Chacin makes his mark: Jhoulys Chacin was out of work, having been released by the Milwaukee Brewers. He then threw a bullpen in front of Dave Dombrowski and Alex Cora at Angel Stadium and got himself signed to a minor league deal. From there, he was added to the major league roster, and Friday night, he found himself starting for the Red Sox in the first game of a four-game series against the Yankees. Since he hadn't pitched in the big leagues since late July, Chacin wasn't sufficiently built up enough to go very deep. But he did provide two perfect innings with four strikeouts to send the Sox in the right direction. "I was more worried about throwing strikes," he said, "so I tried to take my time, see the glove and hit the glove. I knew it was going to be short, but I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity."

Moreland beats the shift: Few players have been as affected by shifting than Mitch Moreland, who tends to pull the ball a lot on the ground and lose a lot of potential hits in the process. But Friday night, Moreland drove one pitch through the shift on the ground, another over it on a line drive to right and a third to where

no one could get it — into the right-field box seats for a three-run homer. “It’s tough when they usually get caught,” said Moreland. “The ones in the four-hole (on the right side of the infield) aren’t as tough as the ones up the middle. But it’s part of the game now — as soon as you hit them, you kind of know most of the time. You’ve just got to continue to go up there and try to have good at-bats and get a good pitch That’s kind of the way I approach it.”

Devers and Bogaerts continue doubles race: Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts came into Friday tied for the major league in doubles with 48 each. Devers then surged ahead when he hit his 49th to lead off the fourth, but his lead didn’t last long. The next inning, Bogaerts answered with a double of his own, tying him with Devers again. The two are now a double away from becoming the first American League teammates in 23 years to have 50 or more doubles in a season, and the first two Red Sox teammates to ever do so. Asked if he and Devers had made a friendly side bet on who gets there first or who finishes with the most doubles, Bogaerts responded: “No but it seems weird that every time he hits one, I hit one right after — or the other way around,” he said chuckling. “We don’t have any side bets, but maybe we should make one.”

TURNING POINT

The double by Bogarts in the fifth inning did more than tie them on the doubles leaderboard. It also scored two baserunners — Mookie Betts and Devers — and took what had been a 4-1 Red Sox lead and stretch it to 6-1.

ONE UP

Ryan Weber: Other than “starter” Chacin, Weber was the only other Red Sox pitcher to provide multiple innings. He pitched the sixth and seventh and allowed just one hit and one walk.

ONE DOWN:

Christian Vazquez: The Red Sox catcher may be tiring from the workload, as he went 0-for-4 and has seen his batting average drop from .302 as the second half began to his current .271.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

“I think it was huge. He came out and really set the tone for us, putting up a couple of zeros.” Mitch Moreland on starter Jhoulys Chacin.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Sox now have a franchise-record eight players with 15 or more homers.

Jackie Bradley Jr. posted his 10th outfield assist of the season when he threw out Gary Sanchez at the plate in the seventh.

Brock Holt is batting .322 with runners in scoring position.

Xander Bogaerts established a career-high with 105 RBI.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Yankees meet again at 4:05 p.m, with RHP Travis Lakins (0-1, 4.70) vs. LHP J.A. Happ (11-8, 5.34).

*** *The Athletic***

The Red Sox bullpen multiple-choice exam: Play along with Alex Cora

Chad Jennings

Aside from a preferred closer and high-leverage reliever, the Red Sox bullpen is a mix-and-match collection of 17 largely anonymous, often interchangeable arms who don't have to fill one set role. There are multiple lefties, several former starters, a handful of guys who throw hard and breaking ball specialists of every kind. Alex Cora has tried to mix and match all season, and it's worked better than it seems it should. The Red Sox bullpen numbers are hardly the worst in the game. In fact, they're better than most.

Friday night was a showcase for the unheralded and understated. Without an available starting pitcher, Cora used seven different relievers — none of whom was on the Opening Day roster — to hold the second-highest-scoring offense in baseball to one run, beating the Yankees 6-1. It was unusual, but effective, and Cora's going to try to do the same thing on Saturday with yet another bullpen game.

Every inning was like a multiple-choice exam, but without an obvious correct answer.

Which one-time ace was supposed to start Friday's game?

A: Chris Sale

B: David Price

C: Rick Porcello

D: Eduardo Rodriguez

Either A or B would be an acceptable answer. Price was lined up to make the start before feeling renewed soreness in his wrist. But Sale, too, could have been lined up had he not landed on the injured list with season-ending elbow inflammation in mid-August. Injuries to Price and Sale means the next true Red Sox starter will be Porcello, whose next turn is Sunday. The Red Sox went into the series opener knowing they'd have back-to-back bullpen games, using a bunch of arms Friday and a bunch more on Saturday.

Without a true starter available, which of the Red Sox' 21 active pitchers was chosen to start on Friday?

A: Nestor Cortes

B: Kyle Kendrick

C: Jhoulys Chacin

D: Trevor Gordon

The answer is C, the veteran right-hander released by the Brewers last month, who wound up pitching two hitless innings in his Red Sox debut. He struck out four. The other possibilities listed here are intentionally absurd. Cortes is a Yankees pitcher, Kendrick hasn't pitched in the big leagues in two years, and we made up Gordon, but those options seem fitting given the Red Sox constant search for arms. Chacin was their 13th starting pitcher of the year.

After Chacin got through two innings, and knowing a Yankees lefty was due up, which left-handed reliever did Cora turn to next?

A: Brian Johnson

B: Darwinzon Hernandez

C: Bobby Poyner

D: Josh Taylor

The answer is D, but it's kind of remarkable there were four left-handed options to begin with. Cora was willing to go without a lefty reliever for much of last season, and he tends to avoid one-batter lefty specialists. Taylor, though, has emerged from relative obscurity to become a key piece of the bullpen. He struck out Brett Gardner, struck out Luke Voit, then got a groundball to keep the perfect game intact. His season ERA is down to 2.93. Even before rosters expanded, the Red Sox were carrying three bullpen lefties much of this season.

With the top of the Yankees order up next, which surprisingly effective middle reliever did Cora trust to keep a scoreless game scoreless?

A: Marcus Walden

B: Trevor Kelley

C: Ryan Weber

D: Brandon Workman

All four have been better-than-expected in their own ways, but Cora's solution in the fourth inning was Walden, who retired DJ LeMahieu and Aaron Judge in order, then put two runners on base before striking out Edwin Encarnación on three pitches.

Walden was a 29-year-old minor league journeyman before getting into eight games with the Red Sox last season. This season, though, he's pitched to the second-lowest WHIP in the Red Sox staff, becoming a vital and versatile weapon. Kelley, a 36th-round draft pick, had a terrific Triple-A season and made his big-league debut earlier this year. Weber has been effective as an up-and-down long man. Workman has pitched his way into the Red Sox closer role. But when Cora needed key outs on Friday, Walden was his man.

After a four-run bottom of the fourth put the Red Sox in the lead, which former starting pitcher wound up giving up the only Yankees run of the night?

A: Josh Smith

B: Hector Velazquez

C: Brian Johnson

D: Andrew Cashner

All four started at least two games for the Red Sox this season, and all four have wound up in the bullpen. Most notable among the starters-turned-relievers is Cashner, who was called on for the fifth inning and promptly allowed a solo home run to Brett Gardner. It pushed his Red Sox ERA to 6.27 through 15 games — hardly what the Red Sox had in mind when they traded for Cashner in mid-July, back when he had a 3.83 ERA for the Orioles — but Cashner's actually pitched much better since moving into the bullpen on August 12. He's pitched in relief nine times, six of them without allowing a run.

With the bullpen revolving door spinning at a rate of one inning per pitcher, which minor league call-up slowed things down by handling two innings without allowing a run?

A: Mike Shawaryn

B: Ryan Weber

C: Travis Lakins

D: Colten Brewer

The correct answer is B, and that wasn't unusual. Weber is a 29-year-old former 22nd-round pick who's pitched for four different organizations and gotten to the big leagues with each one, though never with much staying power. With the Red Sox he's made three mostly forgettable spot starts, but as a reliever he's pitched to a 1.90 ERA through 10 appearances, seven of them lasting at least two innings. With Velazquez struggling most of the year, Johnson spending much of it on the disabled list, and Walden moved into shorter stints, Weber has been arguably the Red Sox' most effective long reliever. The other names listed here have more prospect stock and have been occasionally called on for multiple innings, but it's Weber who's really thrived in the role.

Given a roster that's seen four different players with the last name Hernandez this season, which did Cora use to face Yankee power hitters in the eighth?

A: Gorkys Hernandez

B: Marco Hernandez

C: Oscar Hernandez

D: Darwinzon Hernandez

An easy one because Darwinzon is the only pitcher of the Hernandez bunch. Gorkys is a fourth outfielder, Marco is a back-from-injury utility man, and Oscar is a spare catcher who never got into a game. But Darwinzon has been one of the most significant discoveries of the season. He was a well-regarded prospect as a minor league starter, but he's dazzled since moving into the big league bullpen. When he struck out pinch-hitter Clint Frazier, it was Darwinzon's 47th strikeout in 24 2/3 innings as a major league reliever.

With a 6-1 lead and the game in hand, which of the final wave of September call-ups got the nod to close out the ninth inning?

A: Colten Brewer

B: Mike Shawaryn

C: Bobby Poyner

D: Trevor Kelley

It probably wouldn't have mattered which one Cora chose, but he went with Option C, the lefty who likes to work up in the zone with his fastball and finished the game with back-to-back strikeouts of right-handed sluggers Gary Sanchez and Encarnación. Final statistics for the seven Red Sox pitchers: 9 innings, 3 hits, 1 earned run, 3 walks, 13 strikeouts. Walden got his ninth win.

"You see the numbers," Cora said. "Early in the season (the relievers were good), and then between Boston, London and somewhere else (mid-season), they struggled. But they've been really good throughout the last, what, two months? And we expect them to go out there and perform. You saw it today. It was a different look."

With little to lose, Red Sox throw it all out there — and for the moment, it's working

Jen McCaffrey

Jhoulys Chacin wasn't supposed to pitch more than one inning Friday night. But after a dominant 13-pitch introduction, Red Sox pitching coach Dana LeVangie and manager Alex Cora realized what's often said about best-laid plans often going awry.

In the end, the Red Sox notched one of their best pitching performances of the season against the Yankees, with a menagerie of seven relievers holding New York to one run on three hits and three walks in a 6-1 victory. None of the seven pitchers had been on the Red Sox Opening Day roster.

The wins and losses hardly mean anything at this point. But this was a moral victory. Something finally worked for this Boston team.

Chacin, who hadn't pitched since July 24 and was released by Milwaukee on Aug. 26, signed with the Red Sox on a minor-league deal and unexpectedly dominated New York for two innings.

"It's been so long since he faced hitters, he threw the ball so well," LeVangie said after the game. "We knew he was a dominant strike-thrower, but you never know when a guy hasn't faced a hitter for that long, so it was pretty special."

After Chacin's first inning, the Red Sox decided to give him one more, and the 31-year-old got three more quick outs. Rather than push their luck, LeVangie and Cora turned to Josh Taylor for the third inning, a bit of next-man-up teamwork to get through the night. Taylor got a groundout and two strikeouts. Next. On came Marcus Walden, who gave up the first Yankees hit in the fourth but worked around it. Next. He turned the ball over to Andrew Cashner. Cashner was tagged for the only run of the night, a Brett Gardner solo homer to right. Next. Ryan Weber took over for two innings and kept the Yankees off the board, largely thanks to Jackie Bradley Jr. throwing a runner out at home. Next. Darwinzon Hernandez had the eighth and, finally, Bobby Poyner the ninth. Piece of cake, just like they drew it up. Sort of.

"It's tough," LeVangie said. "I think Alex and I both had conversations prior to the game and we were leaning to go one certain way, but the first inning went so well, let's go for another one. It went well, and we kind of changed our plan a little bit and worked on the fly a little bit, but we tried to match up each guy effectively to the hitter coming up, so I guess having all those guys out there gives you that chance, so it was a big-time benefit to us tonight."

When the Red Sox added four more relievers to the roster Wednesday, it pushed the number of pitchers on staff to an eye-popping 21. Seventeen relievers attempted to cram into a crowded bullpen in right-center. The jokes surfaced immediately when Cora announced Thursday that David Price would miss his scheduled Friday start with a wrist injury and that a bullpen day was the only option. That Chacin was starting against a powerful Yankees lineup seemed a recipe for disaster, but the Red Sox had the last laugh Friday. Their motley crew of bullpen arms beat New York once and will be put to the task again Saturday.

"It's an uncomfortable game. It is, for hitters," Cora said. "You see four different pitchers. It's not that the game is going to go this way, but like I said four days ago, I'm not going to apologize for having 21 pitchers here. The rules are the rules, and we handled it that way. It's two (rotation) spots that we don't have, we tried to maximize our matchups and put the team in a position to win games."

The one- and two-inning stints meant no Yankees batter saw the same pitcher more than once. They weren't able to get comfortable against any one pitcher, many of whom spent the majority of the year in the minors.

"I would like to think it's a challenge because teams do so well preparing for starters," LeVangie said. "What they do so well and what they don't."

On Saturday, Travis Lakins takes the mound for the first inning, maybe more. The Red Sox are likely to follow the same formula as they did Friday because why not: There's not much to lose at this point.

“I don’t think you could ever say it’s a perfect-case scenario,” LeVangie said.

*** *The New York Times***

After Tyler Skaggs’ Death, M.L.B. Turns a Cautious Eye to Its Drug Policy

Tyler Kepner

M.L.B. and the players’ association plan to re-evaluate their drug policy in the wake of the autopsy report last week on Tyler Skaggs, the Los Angeles Angels pitcher who had fentanyl, oxycodone and alcohol in his system when he was found dead in a Texas hotel room on July 1.

“There are a lot of factors that come into play in terms of preventing a tragedy from happening, but one tragedy is one too many,” said Dan Halem, M.L.B.’s deputy commissioner. “So we’re going to continue to speak to the union to think of everything possible to try to be in a place where we have no tragedies.”

While M.L.B. does test for opioids — which are classified as drugs of abuse, rather than performance enhancers — in its minor league program, it does not test major leaguers unless it has “reasonable cause.” Tony Clark, the executive director of the players’ association, said that Skaggs’ death had sharpened the union’s focus on the issue, but he stopped short of specifically calling for a change in testing procedures.

“For several reasons, including the tragic loss of a member of our fraternity and other developments happening in the country as a whole, it is appropriate and important to re-examine all of our drug protocols relating to education, treatment and prevention,” Clark said through a spokesman.

Drug overdoses killed more than 70,000 Americans in 2017, a record, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nearly 48,000 of those deaths involved opioids. Drug overdoses have caused more deaths than H.I.V., car crashes or gun violence at their peaks, and the data show that the increase in deaths corresponds strongly with the use of fentanyl, synthetic opioids that are 30 to 50 times stronger than heroin and can be fatal in low doses.

Skaggs was found to have fentanyl and oxycodone — a prescription painkiller — in his system, and a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.122 when he died. But beyond the report from the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s office, much remains unknown about the circumstances of Skaggs’ death at age 27, including how often he had used the substances and where he acquired them. His family issued a statement pledging to learn how Skaggs came to possess the drugs and added, “We were shocked to learn that it may involve an employee of the Los Angeles Angels.”

The Angels have pledged “full support” to the Southlake Police Department in Texas, which is investigating the death; M.L.B. is doing its own probe. But Halem said the league had no reason to suspect a widespread problem with opioids among players. In the last five years, he said, the league had conducted 78,000 drug tests on minor league players, which yielded about 10 or 12 positives for opioids.

“We honestly don’t get a lot of reports from clubs’ medical staffs that they believe opioids are as significant an issue among our population as it is in some other populations in the United States,” Halem said. “But that doesn’t mean we’re naïve to think that the opioid crisis will have no impact on our player population.”

Jake Odorizzi, a pitcher for the Minnesota Twins, said teams closely regulate pain medication they give to players.

“If you want an anti-inflammatory that’s stronger than ibuprofen, you ask the trainer and the trainer takes it out of a locked box, at least here,” Odorizzi said before a game in Boston this week. “In Minnesota, there’s a locked cabinet, and they write it down in a book and keep track of who goes with what. It’s not like a free-for-all.”

Even so, Odorizzi said he welcomed deeper examination of the policies around such drugs.

“I think that’s probably good to have an audit of a procedure of that type of thing, because it’s a real-life problem,” he said. “Painkillers are addicting.”

Players for years have had access to a network of addiction therapists in every city — hired by the league and the union — who can meet with them at any time for treatment. League and union officials also emphasized that players are educated on the dangers of opioids during spring training meetings and rookie development programs.

As for regular testing, though, the union has long taken the stance that testing for drugs of abuse would cross a threshold into players’ private lives. The union took the same stance against testing for performance-enhancing drugs until 2003, but since then has continually strengthened that program and penalty structure, including the addition of blood testing for human growth hormone in 2013.

But the Skaggs revelation has at least provoked discussions, and players understand that if the national problem worsens — and if there are more high-profile cases within their ranks — they could face pressure to act.

“This could be like the steroid era where Congress came in and said: ‘Look, this is not good. This is going on in your game and this is illegal by our laws,’” Texas Rangers pitcher Shawn Kelley said. “Because it is already an issue in the country. If, in our sport, it seems like people think this is not one isolated incident and there could be more of that going on, I feel like they’re just going to make legislation and just spoon-feed us.”

*** *The New York Post***

Domingo German unravels as Yankees get ripped by Red Sox

Dan Martin

Not every rough outing by a starting pitcher is cause for concern, especially when that pitcher has been as steady as Domingo German.

But it’s also true the right-hander is in uncharted waters.

German entered Friday having already thrown a career-high 132 ¹/₃ innings and a potential limit has been discussed since almost the beginning of the season.

That talk could continue after a 6-1 loss to the Red Sox at Fenway Park to start a season-long 10-game road trip.

German, coming off two good starts in which he had given up just three runs over 11 innings, didn’t allow a hit through the first three innings on Friday.

But he was done in by a four-run fourth.

Aaron Boone, nevertheless, is confident the bad night was just that — and not a result of German’s workload over the season. The manager said there are no current plans to skip a start or otherwise cut back his innings.

“I still feel like he’s physically sound,” Boone said. “If and when we get more guys in mix that might happen. I’m not in a rush right now to give him a break. I think he’s thriving in his routine. We’ll continue to watch him closely. We may alter some things, but not right now.”

The Yankees could get Luis Severino or CC Sabathia back before the end of the month, which could give Boone more options, but German agreed with his manager and said he was fine.

“I feel strong,” German said through an interpreter. “Every inning I go out there, I feel like I’m getting stronger and my body is getting used to it. There’s no need for me to skip a start or get extra rest.”

A lack of command on his curveball was German’s undoing, and he was hurt by it in the fourth.

Rafael Devers delivered Boston’s first hit of the game, a double off the Green Monster to lead off the inning.

German struck out Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez grounded to second, moving Devers to third. Following an Andrew Benintendi walk, Brock Holt drilled a hard grounder that got by Gleyber Torres at second for an RBI single to give Boston a 1-0 lead.

Mitch Moreland then sent a three-run shot into the seats in right to make it 4-0.

German left after allowing five runs, all earned, in just 4 ¹/₃ innings. He also walked four.

Meanwhile, a trio of Boston pitchers retired the first 11 Yankees batters of the night until Didi Gregorius laced a double down the left-field line off Marcus Walden with two outs in the fourth. Gary Sanchez followed with a walk, but Edwin Encarnacion whiffed to end the inning.

Brett Gardner got the Yankees on the board with a homer off Andrew Cashner in the fifth, but that was it. The seven Red Sox pitchers shut down the Yankees, taking advantage of the expanded rosters.

“They did a good job of getting ahead,” Gardner said. “We couldn’t get anything going.”

Gardner knows the Yankees will see more teams use plenty of pitchers against them the rest of the regular season.

“That’s September baseball, unfortunately,” he said. “We’ve got three more weeks of that. Our job is to go out there and score runs, regardless of who we’re facing.”

Nestor Cortes Jr. came in and gave up a two-run double to Bogaerts after German left a runner on in the fifth. That bloated German’s road ERA to 5.73, compared to 2.35 at Yankee Stadium.

Both Boone and German dismissed any possible importance to the split, but it’s something to watch.

No starter has been more consistent for the Yankees than German, but he still has more to prove.

*** *The Bergen Record***

Yankees' Domingo German feels he's gaining strength into September

Pete Caldera

Domingo German doesn’t feel he’s in need of a short break, and right now the Yankees aren’t inclined to give him one.

He’s now pitched more innings than in any previous professional season, but “like I said before, I feel strong,” German said through an interpreter after taking the loss on Friday night.

Over the first three innings at Fenway Park, the right-hander raced through the Red Sox’ lineup without the benefit of his curveball on Friday night.

But the absence of that pitch cost him during a four-run fourth inning, as Boston went on to a 6-1 victory.

Mitch Moreland drilled a hanging breaking pitch for a three-run homer, following a two-out RBI single by Brock Holt – a smash that top-spinned past the backhand attempt of second baseman Gleyber Torres.

The velocity and life on German's fastball was there. "He just didn't have a real good feel for the curveball," said manager Aaron Boone, adding that German was "still probably a pitch away from getting way unscathed."

Boone backed up German, saying that the organization is "not in a race to give him a break," and that he's "physically sound and in a good place."

There might come a time when German (17-4) is skipped in September, or granted extra rest, or perhaps tried out of the bullpen as a run through for a possible October scenario.

But right now, at 136.2 innings and counting, German is more concerned about sharpening up his arsenal.

"Every inning that I go out there and that I log...I feel like my body is getting used to it," German said of feeling strong into September.

"There's no doubt in my mind that there's no need for me to miss a start or get extra rest or anything."

On the way

Meanwhile, some reinforcements to the rotation could be on the way shortly.

CC Sabathia (right knee inflammation) remains on the injured list, though he was encouraged by a bullpen session on Friday.

And Luis Severino could finally be headed back to the Yankees following his Friday night minor league rehab stint.

"Another positive step," Boone said of Severino working into the fourth inning and throwing 50 pitches for Class AA Trenton. "It's something now that we'll talk about with whether we think he needs one more (rehab appearance), if that would be beneficial, or if it's better now to just join the Yanks."

"Those will be conversations now that we'll have over the next 24-48 hours."

German used 92 pitches on Friday in his 4.1 innings, charged with five runs on three hits and four walks, with five strikeouts – three coming in a 1-2-3 first inning against Mookie Betts, Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts.

Devers' 49th double of the year opened the fourth inning and a two-out walk to Andrew Benintendi proved costly.

The curveball has become a signature German pitch and "it was a battle with that pitch" on Friday night. "I couldn't get good consistency. Just not my night tonight."

The crushing blow by Moreland came on "a backdoor curveball that stayed up," German said. "At this level, they're good hitters. They recognize those pitches and they don't miss them."

He's the one

With the Red Sox (76-65) still trailing the first-place Yankees (92-50) by 15.5 games in the AL East, Friday's game had an odd feel to it – despite the fall chill.

Starting with opener Jhoulys Chacin, the Red Sox used seven pitchers to stitch together a three-hit victory, keeping the defending world champions in shouting distance of an AL wild card.

But in the midst of a terrific season, Brett Gardner found success – matching his previous career high (2017) with his 21st homer of the year, off Andrew Cashner.

Gardner now has 25 extra-base hits in his last 41 games, including nine home runs.

“Yeah, it’s a little different but it’s September baseball unfortunately,” Gardner said, referencing the slew of recent callups. “We’ve got three more weeks of that. It’s part of the game.”

*** *The Newark Star Ledger***

Domingo German, Yankees bats duds in convincing loss to Red Sox

Randy Miller

Yankees right-hander Domingo German was dealing again in the early innings of his start Friday night against the Boston Red Sox. The Dominican righty struck out the side in a 1-2-3 first and allowed just two baserunners through three, both on walks.

His night at Fenway Park then unraveled in a hurry.

Usually a strike thrower, German struggled with his control big time. A mistake pitch that ended up in the Fenway Park seats, a three-run blast by Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland that capped a four-run fourth, was the crushing blow.

Couple all that struggling with the Yankees bats having a down night, and the end result was a 6-1 loss in the opener of a three-city, 10-game roadtrip.

German (17-4) allowed five runs over 4 1/3 innings and walked four, his highest total since his first start of the season.

Meantime, the Yanks were held on one run on three hits and struck out 13 times in a game Boston used righty Jhoulys Chacin as its opener and then six relievers. Edwin Encarnacion was 0-for-4 with three strikeouts, while Aaron Judge, Gary Sanchez and Gleyber Torres each had hitless nights with two whiffs.

Brett Gardner accounted for the Yanks’ only run with a fifth-inning homer off Andrew Cashner that cut into a 4-0 Boston lead.

With Boston up five runs in the seventh, Sanchez was thrown out at the plate by Red Sox center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., trying to score on a hit by Gardner.

The Yanks did nothing against Chacin, who struck out four retiring six in a row.

With the game still scoreless, the Yanks picked up their first hit in the fourth on a two-out double by Didi Gregorius off Marcus Walden. Sanchez then walked to put two on with two down, but Walden struck out Encarnacion to end the inning.

NOTABLE

-- Luis Severino allowed one run over three-plus innings starting a rehab game for Double-A Trenton, which hosted Reading in an Eastern League playoff game. This was Severino’s rehab outing - he started a Triple-A game last season - and it may be his last before he’s activated from the injury list.

-- Four-time All-Star reliever Dellin Betances began a rehab assignment by working a scoreless inning of relief for Trenton. He's expected to work another two outings before coming off the IL if Trenton and/or Scranton/Wilkes-Barre stay alive in their playoff series.

-- Gardner matched a career-high with his 21st homer. He also had 21 in 2017.

-- The Red Sox used an opener because left-hander David Price was scratched due to a sore wrist.

-- The Yankees can eliminate Boston from AL East title contention by winning the final three games of the series. Boston won the division the last three seasons.

-- Boston is 4-1 against the Yankees at Fenway this season. They've outscored the Yanks 44-14 in the four wins.

Plan your Yankees road trip: Travel services at TripAdvisor, Cheapflights.com, Uber, Priceline, Expedia, Orbitz

LOOKING AHEAD

Saturday: Yankees at Red Sox, 4:05 p.m., YES & FS1. LHP J.A. Happ (11-8, 5.34) vs. TBA.

Sunday: Yankees at Red Sox, 8:05 p.m., ESPN. RHP Masahiro Tanaka (10-8, 4.42) vs. RHP Rick Porcello (12-11, 5.63).

Monday: Yankees at Red Sox, 7:10 p.m., YES & MLB Network. LHP James Paxton (12-6, 4.16) vs. LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (17-5, 3.81).

*** *Associated Press***

Moreland's 3-run HR, 7 pitchers carry Red Sox past Yanks 6-1

The Boston Red Sox pieced together a victory by going to the bullpen six times.

The problem is they'll need to pile up wins and very likely need some help to make the postseason.

Mitch Moreland hit a three-run homer and seven pitchers combined on a three-hitter to lead the Red Sox to a 6-1 victory over the New York Yankees on Friday night.

"It's definitely going to be difficult," Moreland said. "We're not in the best of spots, but everybody in here is continuing to fight and try to help the team win."

Xander Bogaerts added a two-run double and Moreland two singles for the Red Sox, who won for the 13th time in 19 games but the defending World Series champions remained 6 1/2 games out of the AL's second wild-card spot with 21 games to play.

"It's an uncomfortable game for hitters. You see four different pitchers," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We're just in a position right now that we know that we have to do this."

Brett Gardner homered for AL East-leading New York, which lost for just the third time in 11 games. The Yankees lead atop the East dropped to 8 1/2 games over Tampa Bay, a 5-0 winner at home against Toronto.

"We just didn't mount a whole lot offensively tonight," New York manager Aaron Boone said. "Certainly, part of that is them being able to match up, but part of it we just had a down night."

New York starter Domingo German (17-4) gave up five runs in 4 1/3 innings, allowing three hits with four walks and five strikeouts in his bid to become the majors' first 18-game winner. He had given up two or fewer runs in three of his last four starts.

Marcus Walden (9-2), Boston's third pitcher, threw a scoreless inning for the victory.

New York's hitters looked baffled in a handful of at-bats, facing different types of pitchers.

"It's a little different but it's September baseball, unfortunately. We've got three more weeks of that," Gardner said. "It's part of the game. It doesn't matter who we're facing or how many times we see them, our job is go out there and put good at-bats together and try and score runs."

With the Yankees entering Fenway Park with a 16 1/2-game advantage in the standings over the third-place Red Sox, the matchup hardly held the billing usually provided the rivalry.

Boston moved ahead 4-0, scoring all the runs with two outs in the fourth. Brock Holt had an RBI single on a grounder that took a bad hop past second baseman Gleyber Torres before Moreland hooked his homer around the Pesky Pole.

Gardner hit his to right off Andrew Cashner in the fifth, but Bogaerts' two-run double off the Green Monster came in the bottom half off reliever Nestor Cortes Jr.

SPECIAL TRIP

Yankees C Gary Sanchez and DH Edwin Encarnacion both visited former Red Sox slugger David Ortiz Friday at his residence. Ortiz is in the area recovering from a gunshot wound suffered in the Dominican Republic in June.

Sanchez talked before the game about how Ortiz texted him and helped when the catcher was struggling last season.

"I know it's someone that obviously Gary looks up to a lot, and obviously David carries a lot of respect not only here but across the sport. He's a giant in our sport," Boone said. "If Big Papi's helped him out a little bit, I'm grateful for that."

GREAT ENTRY, GRAND EXIT

Boston starter Jhoulys Chacin, signed by the Red Sox on Aug. 31 after he was released by Milwaukee, pitched two hitless innings, striking out four in his debut with the club. When he walked off and shook Cora's hand, he slipped down the stairs. He was OK and laughing.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Yankees: LHP CC Sabathia (right knee inflammation) threw a bullpen session that Boone called "a positive step." ... Boone also said LHP Jordan Montgomery (recovering from left elbow surgery in March) has "put himself in the mix" for October based on his recent work. He could make another rehab start Monday. ... RHP Luis Severino (rotator cuff inflammation) pitched three innings for Double-A Trenton, giving up one run on five hits, striking out five without any walks. RHP Dellin Betances also pitched a hitless inning at Trenton, striking out one and walking one.

Red Sox: Cora said that LHP David Price (cyst left wrist) played catch. Heath Hembree (right elbow inflammation) threw a 20-pitch bullpen.

UP NEXT

LHP J.A. Happ (11-8, 5.34 ERA) is slated to go for the Yankees on Saturday. Cora said after the game that RHP Travis Lakins (0-1, 4.70) would start.