

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, October 10, 2019***

### **\* *The Boston Globe***

**Ex-Red Sox skipper John Farrell a candidate to become Angels manager, report says**

Christopher Price

John Farrell could be leaving his lobster boat behind and getting back into baseball.

The former Red Sox manager, who has spent time working at sea and as a scout for the Reds since he was fired by Boston, is one of multiple candidates in the mix to become the next manager of the Angels, according to multiple reports. The Los Angeles Times says Farrell, Buck Showalter, and Joe Maddon are all possibilities to replace Brad Ausmus.

Farrell, who pitched for the Angels from 1993 to 1994, was a pitching coach with the Red Sox from 2007 to 2010. After a two-year stint as skipper in Toronto, he returned to Boston as the manager, and led the Sox from 2011 through 2017, when he was fired after the Red Sox were eliminated from the AL Division Series.

He managed Boston to the 2013 World Series title, and has a career managerial record of 586-548.

### **\* *The Providence Journal***

**Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts (\$27.7 million) tops MLB in projected arbitration salary**

Bill Koch

The avenues toward the Red Sox being compliant with the Competitive Balance Tax in 2020 became a bit clearer on Wednesday.

MLB Trade Rumors released salary projections for Boston's 12 arbitration-eligible players, and several are in line for significant raises. Jackie Bradley Jr., Mookie Betts, Brandon Workman, Eduardo Rodriguez, Matt Barnes and Andrew Benintendi account for the majority of the \$70.1 million expected to be paid to the group.

Betts is expected to be the highest-paid arbitration-eligible player in baseball during this cycle. His \$27.7 million in expected salary represents a raise of \$7.7 million from 2019 and makes him one of just two arbitration-eligible players expected to top \$20 million. Houston outfielder George Springer is a distant second at a projected \$21.4 million.

Bradley is expected to jump from \$8.5 million in 2019 to \$11 million next season. He and Betts are both in their final arbitration years before reaching free agency prior to the 2021 season. Workman, Leon and Wright are also scheduled to hit the open market.

Rodriguez and Workman are likely to more than double their 2019 compensation thanks to career years. Rodriguez is expected to jump from \$4 million to \$9.5 million after winning 19 games and surpassing both 200 innings pitched and 200 strikeouts. Workman is expected to collect \$3.4 million after allowing just one home run and leading relievers in slugging percentage against for just \$1.15 million.

Chris Owings (\$3 million), Barnes (\$3 million), Heath Hembree (\$1.6 million), Benintendi (\$4.9 million), Marco Hernandez (\$700k) and Gorkys Hernandez (\$1 million) are also among Red Sox players who are

arbitration-eligible. It's Benintendi's first time through the process after taking home just \$717,500 in 2019. Barnes stands to nearly double his money after making \$1.6 million last season.

Boston already has \$133.87 million committed to players under contract in 2020 – David Price, J.D. Martinez, Nathan Eovaldi, Dustin Pedroia, Chris Sale, Xander Bogaerts and Christian Vazquez. The Red Sox are also able to return a host of pre-arbitration players like Rafael Devers, Darwinzon Hernandez, Josh Taylor, Michael Chavis and more. Boston will be pushing \$204 million in salary if it tenders contracts to all of its arbitration-eligible players, and that's before paying out any bonuses or striking deals with the likes of Devers and the rest.

Principal owner John Henry and club chairman Tom Werner have a stated goal of dipping below \$208 million in payroll for 2020, an achievement that would allow the Red Sox to reset their CBT penalties. The Red Sox could save nearly \$10 million by non-tendering Leon, Owings, Wright, Hembree and Gorkys Hernandez. Boston could shed more cash should Martinez opt out of the final three years of his contract, saving \$22 million annually through 2022.

The Red Sox could also opt to explore trades for Betts and Bradley as they enter what could be their final year with the club. Betts has rebuffed any extension offers from Boston to this point. His stated desire to hit the open market could also lessen any potential return the Red Sox could receive from clubs basically hoping to utilize Betts as an expensive one-year option.

## **\* *MassLive.com***

### **Boston Red Sox GM search could finally begin to heat up; here's why**

Chris Cotillo

More than a month after the Red Sox fired president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, their search for his replacement might finally begin to heat up in the coming days.

Though it's currently unclear whether or not the Sox have interviewed any external candidates or even asked any clubs permission to speak to their executive, the end of the Division Series likely signals an important milestone in the search. Many -- if not all -- of the speculative candidates linked to the opening work for teams currently in the postseason and likely won't get involved until their clubs are eliminated.

If the Red Sox are targeting who we think they're targeting, the first round results have gone well so far. The Dodgers' epic collapse in Game 5 against the Nationals puts much of their future in doubt, cracking the door slightly for president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman -- who isn't under contract for 2020 -- to potentially consider leaving the organization. The Twins' ouster likely means a resolution on chief baseball officer Derek Falvey, a Lynn native who is reportedly nearing an extension to stay in Minnesota that does not look in any way unrelated to Boston. And whoever loses Game 5 between the Rays and Astros soon might be getting a call from the Sox, who could target Tampa Bay's Chaim Bloom and Erik Neander or Houston's Jeff Luhnow and Brandon Taubman.

About all that's clear on the Sox' search is that they're aiming high, preferring to land an external candidate with experience running a baseball operations department. If the candidate was going to be someone from within, the hire would have most likely already have been made in concert with the recent significant changes made to the scouting department and coaching staff.

Principal owner John Henry tipped his hand a little bit late last month, telling reporters that the hire might be difficult because it's rare for top-ranking executives to leave their No. 1 positions with one team for No. 1 positions with another. Henry looks like he'll be exploring every poaching opportunity possible before turning to Plan B if he hits all dead ends.

Henry and the ownership group believe that every high-end option is worth exploring because these are the Red Sox we're talking about and no one -- absolutely no one -- could say no without at least thinking about taking what they describe as one of the best jobs in baseball. But Falvey's impending extension with Minnesota, Mike Hazen's well-timed deal with Arizona last month and Theo Epstein's lack of interest in returning all speak to a general uneasiness around the industry about the stability of the gig on Jersey Street.

So where do things stand now? As of last Monday, team president and CEO Sam Kennedy said the Sox had not begun the process of asking other clubs for permission to talk to any of their employees. Now, there are no such assurances, making it seem like progress has been made over the next 10 days and that a long list of names is finally being narrowed.

The Sox will certainly place a call to Friedman, and probably Luhnow if the Astros lose Thursday night. Once they're told no by every top guy, they'll move onto executives who are second-in-command in rival organizations like Taubman, the Cubs' Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod, Arizona's Jared Porter and Amiel Sawdaye and others -- a pool of candidates in which the eventual hire will most likely come from.

Either way, the search might finally be going somewhere.

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List of potential candidates a long one

Listed no particular order, here's a list of candidates who have been floated in reports since Dombrowski's firing Sept. 9. There are over 30:

Red Sox assistant GM Eddie Romero; Red Sox AGM Brian O'Halloran, Red Sox AGM Zack Scott, Red Sox senior vice president Raquel Ferreira; Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein (declined interest); Cubs GM Jed Hoyer; Cubs senior VP of player personnel Jason McLeod; Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman; Yankees VP Tim Lincecum; Rays GM Erik Neander; Rays VP of baseball operations Chaim Bloom; Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen (signed extension); Diamondbacks AGM Amiel Sawdaye; Diamondbacks AGM Jared Porter; Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey (nearing extension); Twins GM Thad Levine; Astros GM Jeff Luhnow; Astros AGM Brandon Taubman; Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti; Indians GM Mike Chernoff; Athletics president of baseball operations Billy Beane; Athletics GM David Forst; Orioles AGM Sig Mejdal; ex-Orioles/Red Sox GM Dan Duquette; Giants special advisor J.P. Ricciardi; Dodgers VP Josh Byrnes; Mets farm director Jared Banner; Mets assistant GM Allard Baird; Brewers GM David Stearns; Brewers AGM Matt Arnold; Royals AGM Scott Sharp; Blue Jays VP Ben Cherington (not interested); Astros manager A.J. Hinch

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10 observations from the last week in baseball:

1. The Red Sox still don't have any competition on the GM market. There are no other openings.
2. Don't the White Sox seem to fit Joe Maddon? If Rick Renteria gets Rick Renteria'd again...
3. Maddon seems likely to go to the Angels, though. Predictions: Maddon to Anaheim, Mike Matheny to Kansas City, Carlos Beltran to the Mets and a big-name veteran to San Diego.
4. John Farrell is getting some managerial looks, just like last year. His silence since leaving the Red Sox has been deafening.
5. Boston's decision to reassign Dana LeVangie was no surprise after how long they waited to do it. The more surprising moves were the reassignment of assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister and firing of assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett.

6. Here are some candidates to take over for LeVangie on Alex Cora's staff.
7. Even if the Rays lose tonight, they've proven they are no fluke. What a tough division the A.L. East is.
8. Could anything possibly take the air out of a stadium faster than surrendering 10 runs in a winner-take-all playoff game? SunTrust Park is begging to know.
9. The early results are exactly why Cora thought the Sox had a chance if they just made the dance. Anything can happen in October.
10. Will take the Astros tonight and in the ALCS. Nationals now seem to have a team-of-destiny vibe, so look for a Houston-Washington World Series.

### **Red Sox 2020 salaries: Betts projected to earn \$27.7M, Rodriguez \$9.5M by MLB Trade Rumors**

Christopher Smith

MLBTradeRumors.com released its annual salary arbitration projections for each major league team.

It projects Mookie Betts to earn \$27.7 million in 2020, Jackie Bradley Jr. to receive \$11 million and Eduardo Rodriguez to receive \$9.5 million.

The website's projections usually are fairly accurate. But Betts' projection might be low. He has a chance to earn \$30 million or more.

If Rodriguez receives \$9.5 million, it would represent a \$5.2 million raise from 2019.

Andrew Benintendi is projected to receive 4.9 million in his first year of arbitration eligibility after earning \$717,500 in 2019.

MLBTradeRumors.com's salary arbitration projections: Jackie Bradley Jr., \$11 million; Sandy Leon, \$2.8 million; Chris Owings, \$3.0 million; Mookie Betts, \$27.7 million; Brandon Workman, \$3.4 million; Steven Wright, \$1.5 million; Eduardo Rodriguez, \$9.5 million; Matt Barnes, \$3.0 million; Heath Hembree, \$1.6 million; Andrew Benintendi, \$4.9 million; Marco Hernandez, \$700,000; Gorkys Hernandez, \$1.0 million.

The Red Sox are trying to cut payroll to get under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold. It seems likely the club will non-tender Owings.

## **\* *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

### **Xander Bogaerts delves into growing leadership role**

Chris Mason

Though it was a lost season in the standings, 2019 was an important year for Xander Bogaerts on the field and in the clubhouse.

The shortstop returned to the All-Star Game, and armed with a six-year deal that'll keep him in Boston through 2026, Bogaerts took on a more vocal role behind the scenes, too. He represented the best case scenario in giving a ballplayer an early extension.

So what'd Bogaerts learn about himself as a leader in a season that fell well short of expectations?

“Man, tough times are tough,” Bogaerts told the Eagle-Tribune. “There was always hope for us this year. We saw a light at the tunnel a lot of times and just came up short so many times. Guys, we could have divided, we could have gone separate ways, but the success we had in ‘18, I think this group was so special that it seems like nothing breaks us. It’s just that we couldn’t get the job done.

“But everybody stayed in tact. The coaching staff down to the players, it was unbelievable, man. It was rough, but at the same time we learned a lot.”

It’s always curious to see which players will speak to the media after losses. In 2019, it was Bogaerts more than anybody — even if his play often didn’t make it necessary.

And though Alex Cora repeatedly cited Bogaerts as a go-to guy for young players, especially Rafael Devers, the 27-year-old is still reluctant to call the Red Sox his team.

“I don’t know about that, man,” he said. “I don’t know about that. We’ll see what happens this offseason. There’s been a lot of talk that it’s different but we’ll see what happens, man. I don’t have any input on those (personnel) decisions.”

Ownership has made it clear they’re determined to get under the \$208 million luxury tax threshold in 2020, which means players like J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts may be finding new homes.

If that’s the case, Bogaerts will need to be even more vocal next season. He wants to lead like David Ross, a good-natured player that only got nasty when he needed to. As such, the shortstop is still focused on finding the positive.

“Hopefully they can stay,” Bogaerts said. “I don’t know who’s going to go, who’s going to stay, we don’t know. But we know that we had an amazing group of guys. An amazing bond. And those are memories that will last forever. Just like 2013, the year we won it, you won’t forget those good times.”

## **\* *RedSox.com***

### **An oral history of Pedro's '99 ALDS masterpiece**

Ian Browne

As the Red Sox and Indians braced for a winner-take-all Game 5 of the American League Division Series on Oct. 11, 1999, one question emerged loudly to the forefront: Would Pedro Martinez be able to pitch?

While on his way to the Hall of Fame, Martinez was otherworldly in '99, going 23-4 with 313 strikeouts and a 2.07 ERA while winning his second of three Cy Young Awards. For context, David Cone finished second in the AL that year with a 3.44 ERA, and the Majors-wide mark was 4.71, still the second highest of any season since 1901.

Pitching with an injured right shoulder against a Cleveland team that scored 1,009 runs during the regular season (still MLB’s most since '50) seemed like a daunting task, even for Martinez.

This set the stage for Martinez to produce perhaps the defining moment of his illustrious career, firing six no-hit innings in relief to carry his team to victory. Before Martinez set foot on the mound, a surreal slugfest took place in the first three innings. Twenty years later, here is a look back at a memorable night at Jacobs Field through the eyes of several of the key participants.

#### **THE LEAD-UP TO AN EPIC**

The Indians won the first two games of the ALDS in Cleveland, and when Martinez exited Game 1 after four innings with an injury to the back of his right shoulder, the Red Sox appeared to be finished. But Boston manager Jimmy Williams came up with a mantra beginning with Game 3 at Fenway Park, and his

players kept parroting it: "You better sweep us!" In other words, the Sox felt that if the Indians didn't finish it off when they could, they would be finished themselves.

The resilient Sox won Game 3, 9-3, even with Nomar Garciaparra out of the lineup with a right wrist injury. And on a football Sunday, they smashed the Indians by a football score of 23-7. Then, it was back to Cleveland for Monday night's Game 5, and Martinez would spend the day trying to get his prized right arm healthy enough so that he could pitch when his team needed him most.

Martinez, Red Sox ace from '98-'04: I thought I did something bad because I heard it. I wasn't just feeling it. I heard it. I heard the pull. Pop. I thought I did something really bad [in Game 1]. It was the back of my shoulder, the lat. I wasn't able to do a lot of work in between. Actually, the same day of Game 5, that was the first time I had touched a ball afterward.

Dan Duquette, Red Sox general manager, '94-'01: The night before the game, we got off the elevator at the hotel, and he asked me if I thought he should pitch in the game. I said, "Pedro, you'll have to be the best judge of that. You know yourself, and you know what you're capable of doing, and you know what you can and can't do. I know there's a lot of stress of being in the playoffs and you like to perform when the lights are the brightest, but you'll have to see how you feel. If you can pitch, pitch. We need you."

Martinez tried to warm up a couple of hours before the game, and it didn't go very well.

Martinez: When I went to warm up, it was cold and rainy. It was a nasty day. I couldn't get loose.

Indians outfielder Dave Roberts, who would become a postseason hero for the Red Sox five years later: I just think it was one of those things, we didn't expect him to pitch.

#### EARLY HOME RUN DERBY, STARRING JIM THOME

Indians manager Mike Hargrove made the curious decision to start his ace, Bartolo Colon, in Game 4 on three days' rest with his team up, 2-1, in the series. The strategy backfired, leaving Charles Nagy, who had a 4.95 ERA that season, to start Game 5 on three days' rest. Meanwhile, with Martinez unavailable for the start of the game, Bret Saberhagen -- who had shoulder issues of his own -- got the nod for Boston.

Garciaparra, who was on a Hall of Fame path at that point of his career, set the tone for a wild start to the game when he jumped on the first pitch he saw from Nagy for a two-run homer to center in the top of the first. But the Indians stormed back against Saberhagen for three in their half of the first, highlighted by a mammoth two-run shot to right-center by Hall of Famer Thome that traveled a projected 477 feet.

Jason Varitek, Red Sox catcher, '97-'11: You make mistakes to a guy like Thome, they go a long way.

Thome, Indians infielder/DH, '91-'02: I'll be honest, I felt really good that whole series. And that game, particularly, it was just one of those days where you go to the ballpark and the game is slowing down.

After the Red Sox didn't score in the top of the second, the Indians came back for two more when Travis Fryman knocked Saberhagen out of the game with a two-run homer. The World Series MVP for the Royals in '85, Saberhagen would make just four more appearances in his career.

Duquette: Saberhagen's shoulder was trash at that stage. He was taking the ball because he was a competitor, he was a warrior. He gave us what he could give us.

Martinez: Saberhagen is one of my favorites of all time. After knowing him, and knowing the kind of pain he went through to try to pick me up, there's no way I was going to go down without a fight.

Undeterred by an early 5-2 deficit, the Sox roared back in the top of the third. With runners at second and third and one out, Hargrove made a logical enough decision -- ordering an intentional walk to Garciaparra, who, ailing wrist and all, hit .417 in that series with two homers and a 1.646 OPS in 16 plate appearances.

Sandy Alomar Jr., Indians catcher, '90-'00: We were trying to walk Garciparra [earlier in the series], and he was swinging at everything and hitting it out of the ballpark. I don't even know how the heck he was doing it. It seemed like he was hitting balls over his head. He was just exceptional.

Troy O'Leary, who had 28 homers and 103 RBIs that season, made Hargrove pay with a first-pitch grand slam to right-center against Nagy that put Boston back in the lead, 7-5. It was the first grand slam in the postseason history of the Red Sox.

O'Leary, Red Sox outfielder, '95-'01: I was the first one to do that, and then Johnny Damon [in Game 7 of the '04 ALCS at Yankee Stadium] was the second. People don't mention my name. They always mention Johnny Damon.

Thome: To be honest, I can remember O'Leary getting really big hits, even in the years before that. He was always a guy you could never let your guard down against.

O'Leary: I don't usually get too emotional when I do something, but I just gave it a little fist pump. The thing about it was, we're playing Cleveland, and in that ballpark, they could score some runs at any time. I didn't want to celebrate too hard because the fat lady wasn't singing. Or the skinny lady. Skinny lady, fat lady, nobody was singing.

O'Leary's mindset was dead-on. The first three innings were outrageous. Back came Thome with another two-run shot to highlight a three-run third for the Indians against Derek Lowe, who had come on for Saberhagen. It was now 8-7, Indians. It was Thome's 16th career homer in the postseason, allowing him to surpass Babe Ruth. He would hit one more in his career. The press box announced Thome's second homer at 431 feet, giving him a combined 908 feet of homers on two swings.

Thome: That one was more to center field. That was one of those special days where you don't know for sure you're going to do anything special, but I just felt great, and that's how it played itself out.

Alomar: We were feeling pretty good, but we were not completely comfortable because we knew they had a great offense also, and we knew there was a possibility Pedro was going to come in.

Thome: It was like, "OK, let's get as many runs as we can as fast as we can," because we knew there was a chance Pedro could come into the game at some point.

#### PEDRO'S WARMUP ACT AND GRAND ENTRANCE

The slugfest was too much for Martinez to watch anymore sitting down. He got up from his seat in the dugout and told Williams that he was ready to warm up.

Martinez: When I started seeing the game going in such a wild way, I just said, "I need to do something, and I need to do it now." I guess, between adrenaline, the little medications I took and the situation, it just made me forget.

O'Leary: When Pedro got up to start warming up, you could see their faces start to change.

Martinez: The atmosphere there was electric. They were really out to beat us. And when I saw that, I went to Jimmy and I said, "I want to try now. I want to see if I can throw a little bit more." Because when I tried the first time, it was really cold and rainy. The day had kind of calmed down to a point where the weather was more comfortable than it was earlier. I said, "Maybe the medicine kicked in a little bit. Let me try it."

Williams went on to win the AL Manager of the Year Award in '99, and he clearly had the respect of his players. But Martinez wouldn't take no for an answer.

Martinez: Jimmy said, "No. The orders I have is that if you can pitch, you're going to pitch toward the end of the game, if we need you to close the game." I said, "You know what, the way this game is going, Jimmy, I'm sorry, you're going to have to let me go try it out there." He goes, "Nope, you don't have my approval."

Martinez decided the situation was too big to wait for an approval, so he went for it.

Martinez: I said, "No, I'm going to try it now. If I can pitch, you're either going to have two pitchers on the mound or you're going to call me in." That's when I took off for the bullpen. I have all the respect in the world for Jimmy, but I needed to do it there, at that point. It wasn't that Jimmy sent me down. Nobody sent me down. I did it on my own.

Duquette: Pedro was clearly in charge because it was his career and only he knew how he was feeling, but he stepped up. When he went out to warm up in the bullpen, that was like a scene out of "Rocky."

Martinez: I just went out there and I told Rod Beck, who was warming up at that moment, I said, "Shooter, if I'm OK, would you please allow me to go out there? I know you're a veteran. You're supposed to go in. Would you allow me to go out there?" He goes, "You know what, you carried this team the entire season, if that's what you want to do, you're the ace of this staff, you go on and do it."

When Martinez trotted out from the bullpen for the bottom of the fourth, the score was tied, 8-8. Martinez's fastball had generally been in the upper 90s that season. His first pitch of the night was 91 mph to Alomar. FOX analyst Tim McCarver immediately noted that his arm slot was lower than normal.

Martinez: When I went to the bullpen, I realized that I didn't have the pop on the fastball. I couldn't do it. I was feeling the back of the shoulder. But I did throw a couple of changeups and I snapped a breaking ball, and it didn't bother me as much because I didn't have to force it so much.

Varitek: He was going to pitch backwards. Threw a lot of breaking balls, a lot of changeups and used his cutter predominantly and kind of hid his fastball a little bit. To be able to morph yourself on the fly like that, and against historically one of the best lineups out there, is pretty amazing.

After Martinez induced a groundout from Alomar for the first of the 18 outs he would record, there was an unfortunate injury delay. Kenny Lofton, Cleveland's speedy leadoff man and spark plug, hit a grounder to the right side that first baseman Mike Stanley made a diving stop on. Stanley fed to Martinez, who beat Lofton to the bag.

As Lofton dived to try to beat the throw, he rolled over his left shoulder, dislocating it, and had to leave the game. Lofton was a .345 career hitter against Martinez, so this was a damaging blow.

Thome: We're all family. We're all brothers. When someone gets taken off the field and you know they're hurting, it does, it bothers you as a teammate. It was hard to see that happen because Kenny was our catalyst. He could do so many things for our club.

With the Lofton delay over, Martinez went back to his business of carving up the mighty Cleveland lineup. In the fifth, after walking Manny Ramirez, Martinez encountered Thome, who seemed to be the Indians' only hope of lifting them to victory. After falling behind 3-0 to the dangerous slugger, Martinez came back to punch him out.

Martinez: That was the one guy, I didn't want to let him beat me. What I did was play around the edges, see if the umpire would kind of bear with me, and I got away with some great pitches. [Thome] was aggressive. He knew he was hot. He wanted to swing. I never left the ball anywhere where he could kind of feel comfortable. Never threw him anything that was the same speed or the same location at any point, and he fell for it.

Varitek: With Jim, particularly, Pedro's ability to cut the ball up and in on him and be able to change the plane with his breaking ball to open up his changeup was huge.



Thome: He went to pitching. He pitched. He hit his spots. He pitched to the corners. When you can do that and you have the history that Pedro had, it's one of those things where when you can lock in to areas on the plate, you're going to get those calls. He's just got great stuff.

Martinez: When you're in that situation, do or die, whatever resources you have, you have to use. And that's how I felt. I felt like I needed to use every resource I had.

#### UNSUNG HERO O'LEARY STRIKES AGAIN

Even with his soft-serve approach and a compromised right shoulder, Martinez had established his dominance in innings four through six. All he needed was a lead. In the top of the seventh, O'Leary gave him one, again attacking the first pitch he saw and taking reliever Paul Shuey out of the yard for a three-run homer. Hargrove had again set up O'Leary by walking Garciparra intentionally, this time after the shortstop had gotten ahead 2-0 in the count. O'Leary would finish the game with seven RBIs, tied for the most ever in a postseason game. It has been replicated only once since then, by Enrique Hernandez of the Dodgers in Game 5 of the '17 NLCS against the Cubs.

Varitek: We had finally stopped the bleeding, and then you get a big hit to propel you forward. It had to be completely demoralizing on their end because they weren't able to get anything going offensively once Pedro entered the game.

Duquette: How would you like to have that night? A grand slam and a three-run jack in a clinching playoff game.

O'Leary: Paul Shuey, his ball is really heavy and it moves a lot. Just like against Nagy, I was going to take three healthy swings, and once again I caught it on the first pitch, and it actually barely got over because I thought it was going to go off the fence.

Duquette: Troy O'Leary's performance was a personal favorite of mine because I saw him play in high school when I was the scouting director for the Brewers. He was a wide receiver and had a scholarship to Oregon State, but we took him in the 13th round and signed him. That was in 1987. Eight years later, we picked him up in a waiver claim for the Red Sox.

Varitek: Amazing teammate. Great player. Great guy to play with. There's not many better teammates and class guys to play with than Troy O'Leary.

O'Leary: I watch videos of it and see people in the stands, and their faces are just of disgust. People were crying, too. I felt kind of bad for them. They hated me in Cleveland for that.

Thome: You can feel the silence in the stadium.

Martinez: That's when I said, "You know what? I need to take over now and probably just set the tone for whoever is coming in. Now I need to get it closer to where Shooter or someone would come in."

#### SOUNDS OF SILENCE: PEDRO FINISHES THE JOB

With Martinez now in possession of the lead and the Indians showing no signs of resistance, rowdy Jacobs Field went stone-cold silent for the rest of the game.

Martinez: What was amazing was that the Cleveland Indians never realized that I was hurt. They thought I was going to be the 98[-mph] guy that they were used to seeing, and I never changed my approach, and neither did they. It was changeups, breaking balls, little cutters, changeups, and my velocity was never there.

Alomar: By far, he was the best pitcher I ever saw. I faced many other guys, but Pedro had so many pitches and so much spin rate on the ball. I would have loved to see what Trackman would have had on him. The guy had any pitch in the world, and he could throw it at any count.

As Martinez got closer to the finish line, the only question was if his right shoulder would allow him to keep going.

Martinez: By the third inning that I pitched, it was getting tighter and tighter, but the adrenaline kept going up and we started scoring runs, and I thought I'd put us as close as I can for a win. And then Ramon [Martinez, Pedro's brother] started warming up. I thought I was going to break down at one point because of how bad I pulled the muscle, but the adrenaline and the anxiety of seeing that now we have the lead, the opportunity to win really takes over.

Varitek: He was a little guy that could fight like a lion. His team relied on him to be where we are and he's not at 100 percent, and he finds a way to get out there, and he dominates on top of it. When he sniffs blood, he goes.

Where Martinez once thought he might give way to big brother Ramon or Beck to finish the game, he emerged for the ninth and had the fairly undaunting trio of pinch-hitter Enrique Wilson, Roberts (who was in for Lofton) and Omar Vizquel to get by to win the series.

Roberts: Once he came in, the whole tone changed. We were just blown away.

Martinez: Once I got through the eighth inning and everybody is quiet, I said, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it." I'm just going to go out there, see if I can get one out and if I fade, they're going to come in and help me. Thank God, first out, boom. Then second out and I'm really close. And here he is, Omar Vizquel.

Martinez struck out Vizquel on four pitches, completing an amazing six innings of no-hit ball. He jumped into Varitek's arms as the Red Sox celebrated their advancement to the AL Championship Series and their first playoff series win since the '86 ALCS. The only sound that could be heard was that of Red Sox players shrieking with joy in the victory pile.

Martinez: I went after Vizquel. All I wanted was strike one and get the ball back right away. Strike two and get the ball right away. The last pitch was a cutter, coming down and in, and he swung right through it.

Duquette: What was really exciting was the silence in the Cleveland ballpark. Cleveland knocked us out in '95 and '98 [in the ALDS]. We squeaked by them this time on the basis of the performance by the future Hall of Famer.

Indians hitting coach Charlie Manuel: He sucked all the wind out of the place. He shut it down. I think everybody realized he did. That was remarkable. That was a first-class lineup he shut down.

Thome: Very tough. You never want to be at your home ballpark and hear silence. That's one thing in October you don't want to hear.

#### THE AFTERMATH

Playoff elimination is always gut-wrenching, but this one was tougher than most for the Indians, who had lost the '95 World Series to the Braves and also in '97 to the Marlins. They'd make another playoff appearance in '01, losing again in the ALDS. In hindsight, that loss to the Red Sox was the beginning of the end for Cleveland's strong run from the mid to late '90s. Hargrove was dismissed as manager shortly after Game 5.

Thome: I'll be honest, that made the loss tougher. We had some great runs, and we always believed we were a World Series team. I felt like we put ourselves in position every year to be in those moments. Unfortunately, we didn't accomplish what our ultimate goal in the '90s was, which was to win a World Series.

Alomar: That was the last time Hargrove managed a game in Cleveland. He got let go, it wasn't even his fault. In 2001, they came back and won the division, but I wasn't here. In 2000, we were sitting here in this

locker room waiting to see if Texas would beat Oakland so we could go in as the Wild Card. We end up being eliminated with our luggage being ready to go. It was an outstanding run we had.

After a quick celebration, in which players repeatedly chanted, "You better sweep us!", the Red Sox had a late-night flight to catch to New York for ALCS Media Day the next day. Thousands of feet above land, Martinez received a painful reminder of what he had just pitched through.

Martinez: I've never been in more pain once the plane took off. That's when I knew I was really, really bad. I thought someone was stabbing me in the back. I got really scared, it was like having a knife going slowly through my back. I started screaming. The entire plane got quiet. The medical staff had to jump on me. At that time, the medicine, probably the two Aleves, went away.

In the ALCS, Boston went down in five games to the eventual World Series champion Yankees, who were in the middle of a three-peat. However, Martinez pitched gallantly in the only win of the series for the Red Sox, outpitching Roger Clemens by a large margin in a 13-1 romp in Game 3. As the sun splashed down on Fenway, fans roared for Pedro, having no idea how much his performance that day (seven shutout innings, two hits, 12 strikeouts) masked his condition.

Varitek: So much of that goes to his competitiveness. He's dealing with an injury, and he finds a way to still be elite. Elite, when you're probably at 60 percent, 50 percent.

Martinez: I remember I had to face Roger Clemens at Fenway with the worst pain I've ever pitched in during a game. And we beat them really bad. It was unfortunate we weren't able to do it in consecutive games or more than once in that series.

Game 5 of the '99 ALDS was the start of a trend of thrilling postseason comebacks by the Red Sox. In the '03 ALDS against Oakland, the Sox again roared back to win in five games after falling behind 0-2. In the '04 ALCS, they took it to another level, becoming the first -- and still only -- team ever to overcome an 0-3 deficit in a postseason series, and doing it against the Yankees no less. And en route to the second of four championships they'd win in a 15-year-window, the '07 Sox roared back from 1-3 deficit against those Indians again to win the ALCS.

Varitek: It started that night in Cleveland, and it was led from our manager on down. Our message had always been from him, "Don't let us win one." He always instilled that belief. I'm a firm believer that that ability to come back that night is why this organization has had so much success since. It builds over time. And now you have the history and the confidence that you have done it before. ... Without that group that did that in '99, and that leadership from Pedro to take that ball, who knows what happens. Those are steppingstones to us winning in '04, to us winning in '07, and '13 and beyond.

Williams would manage the Red Sox for two more years, but he was let go late in the 2001 season as the team slumped. After 1999, Martinez had more brilliance in him, winning his third and final Cy Young Award the next season and finishing second to Barry Zito in a controversial vote in '02. But Martinez doesn't flinch when asked if Game 5 in Cleveland had an impact on the rest of his career.

Martinez: It did. That was the game that actually developed the rest of the shoulder problems for me. That's what got the 98 mph lowered to 90-whatever, whatever I was. That injury actually took a big chunk of my career. I did more damage to my shoulder because of that. I don't regret it at all. I had a beautiful career and I was able to come back. I don't regret it one bit. I'm extremely proud to have done it. I'd never suggest it to anybody with a bright future, but I'm so proud to have done it.

**\* *WEEL.com***

**Time is right for Red Sox to make run at Andrew Friedman**

Rob Bradford

Maybe the Dodgers and Andrew Friedman already have a handshake agreement. Perhaps this abrupt ending to the Dodgers' season will only motivate the President of Baseball Operations for last year's National League champs even more. There is also the possibility that the idea of leaving a good thing in Los Angeles to the uncertain existence of the Red Sox is simply a non-starter.

Fine.

But if the Red Sox don't make a Billy Beane-like push toward reeling in Friedman then they aren't going about this the right way.

We're not talking about asking or inquiring. We're talking about a full-court, let's make-a-movie-about-it courtship.

For whatever reason Friedman hasn't signed a new deal with the Dodgers, with 2019 serving as the final year of a five-year contract. All parties in Los Angeles have said the predictable things when asked.

"I love him, I think he's done a great job, expect him to be here for a long time," Dodgers president Stan Kasten told the Los Angeles Times at the end of the regular season. "That's all I really can say about it."

"Everything I hear is [a new contract] is imminent, that it will get done," Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts added just prior to the postseason. "And, for me, that is very exciting and that would be my expectation as well. For me, there's no better executive in the game."

Roberts is right. There probably is no better executive in the game. So that's why if you're the Red Sox you're pushing your chips to the middle of the table.

Friedman built his reputation in the American League East, taking over the role of general manager of the Rays in 2005 before building a team that went toe-to-toe with the division's big boys with a fraction of the budget. He went to the Dodgers in 2014, inheriting a roster full of dead weight. It wasn't long before LA was going on its run of postseason appearances thanks to the marriage of money, prospects and the ability to stay ahead of the analytical curve.

Friedman's front office is full of familiar names to Red Sox followers, with former Sox execs Josh Byrnes (Vice-President of Baseball Operations), Galen Carr (Director of Player Personnel) and Dave Finley (Director of Amateur/International Scouting). Despite Wednesday's night meltdown, this is a group that has a good thing going. There is a farm system that is rated No. 3 overall by MLB.com and a roster that while sitting with the seventh-highest payroll isn't weighed down with untenable contracts.

It is Friedman, however, who has earned the right to be separated from the pack.

It's one thing to do it in Tampa with a small-market team with the hope that the same philosophies will carry over to a big-market club. But to be able to use the resources a team like the Dodgers have maintained, while successfully building enough of an infrastructure that allows for on-the-fly rebuilds, that's a rare commodity. It's exactly the kind of skill-set the Red Sox are starving for.

The knock on the Dodgers during Friedman's regime is that maybe they overthink things. Their analytics department has had far and away more personnel than any team in baseball for some years now. It is a method that has led to more regular-season wins than any team in baseball not named the Astros over the past four seasons but also resulted in some odd postseason maneuvering.

Still, it's better to overthink than not think enough.

For an example of how Friedman approaches things one should go back to his courtship of Joe Kelly last offseason: Friedman personally hosted the relief pitcher for three hours, going into great detail how and why the Dodgers might view what Kelly had to offer in a different way than the player had ever heard.

Biomechanical analysis. Approach with the catchers. How the Dodgers' view differed from all the other teams calling Kelly.

Now, maybe this was an example of the Dodgers thinking they were smarter than everyone else, leading to a contract offer that was one year more than any team offered. But the point is that Friedman was in the weeds with this stuff. He had a grasp on more than just scouting reports and positional needs. And more times than not that approach has led to important pieces of the Dodgers' foundation.

Beane was 40 years old when John Henry tried to pry him away from the A's. Friedman is 42. The energy, intelligence and foresight seem the same. But it's fair to say that the Dodgers' chief decision-maker is more of a sure thing than Beane represented back in 2002.

You never know unless you ask. They did it before with Mr. Moneyball and now it's time to do it again with Mr. Friedman.

### **Cross Nelson Cruz off list of potential J.D. Martinez replacements**

Rob Bradford

If you're trying to envision a Red Sox lineup without J.D. Martinez Wednesday afternoon's report from Jon Heyman should be of some note.

Cruz's potential availability would have been of little consequence to the Red Sox if Martinez doesn't choose to opt-out of a contract that is scheduled to pay the designated hitter/outfielder \$23.75 million in 2020 with the opportunity to opt-out again next offseason. But if Martinez does elect to explore the open market it will leave the Sox looking for a designated hitter, which is where conversations involving players like Cruz come in.

The 40-year-old Cruz represents one of the rare players who might be able to match Martinez's offensive production, coming off a 2019 season that saw him finish with a .311 batting average, 1.031 OPS and 41 home runs. The righty hitter's impressive production during his 43 games at Fenway Park (.343 batting average, 1.035 OPS) would have only made the idea of a commitment by the Red Sox even more interesting.

The next-best potential free-agent candidate to replace Martinez if he leaves could be Edwin Encarnacion, who has a \$20 million club option for 2020 the Yankees may not want to pick up.

Decisions for options and opt-outs have to be made within five days after the completion of the World Series.

## **\* *NBC Sports Boston***

### **One team has all the pieces to sign J.D. Martinez in free agency — the White Sox**

John Tomase

If J.D. Martinez opts out of his Red Sox contract, as many of us expect, the natural question is where he'll land.

When I wrote about this six weeks ago, before we knew that ownership wanted to drop below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold, I assumed the answer would be Boston. Four years, \$100 million, lock down your All-Star DH and middle-of-the-order weapon for the long haul.

Now that we understand John Henry's motivations to cut costs, though, a Martinez opt-out must be viewed as a farewell, and the Red Sox are probably rooting for it at this point, just to simplify their offseason math.

If that's the case, a closer look at Martinez's potential landing spots yields a clear logical favorite — the White Sox.

Keep in mind, this is a purely academic exercise. We don't know if the White Sox are prioritizing offense this winter, given the woeful state of their entire pitching staff beyond All-Star right-hander Lucas Giolito.

But if there's a team that checks the most boxes, it's Chicago. The White Sox are blessed with one of baseball's best farm systems, which means they'll be able to offset the cost of a big-ticket free agent with cheap young talent. They have a glaring need for a veteran slugger and leader to augment their impressive young core of batting champ Tim Anderson, former Red Sox farmhand Yoan Moncada, and slugging left fielder Eloy Jimenez. And as their failed 2018 pursuits of Bryce Harper and Manny Machado suggest, they're willing to drop big money on a free agent.

Add it all together, and a strong case can be made that Martinez will be calling the south side of Chicago home come April.

First, it's instructive to play the process-of-elimination game. The 32-year-old Martinez overcame back issues this season to hit .304 with 36 homers and 105 RBIs. Though technically able to play outfield (he made 38 appearances in 2019), it's hard to imagine a team signing him long-term to play him there full-time. Anything's possible, but let's cross the entire National League off his list.

When accounting for cost, contention window, and positional need, most of the American League disappears, too (as we laid out in August). We're basically left with the White Sox, Blue Jays, and Mariners.

Toronto expects to have \$50 million to spend this winter, but president Mark Shapiro acknowledged the team's one glaring need in the Toronto Star.

"I think on a global level, it's moving from competing to winning," he told the paper. "Certainly, when you look at where the needs are on our team, it doesn't take a whole lot of in-depth analysis that starting pitching is probably our greatest opportunity to make those leaps."

Devoting half of their offseason budget to DH doesn't make a ton of sense, although a case can be made for Martinez mentoring a lineup that includes exciting youngsters Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette, and Cavan Biggio. I guess we shouldn't discount the Jays entirely, but directing their resources towards starting pitching, especially without former ace Marcus Stroman, seems their most likely course of action.

With the Mariners, who knows? They could use upgrades all over the roster after winning just 68 games, and they've shocked us before, landing All-Stars Adrian Beltre and Robinson Cano on long-term deals. But it's hard to find a motivation for them to add Martinez at this point in their rebuilding arc.

The White Sox, though, make sense. They could use a veteran to guide the aforementioned trio, and there's no debating Martinez's clubhouse impact on young stars Mookie Betts and Xander Bogaerts in Boston. An intense student of hitting, Martinez encouraged Betts to attack early in the count during an MVP 2018 (although he fell back into some bad habits this season) and helped convert Bogaerts to the cult of launch angle, resulting in an underrated 2018 and a breakout 2019.

If White Sox GM Rick Hahn is looking for someone who can show his youngsters the way, he won't find a better option than the bilingual Martinez, and that's before we even consider his biggest impact, which would be in the middle of Chicago's lineup.

During a lost 2017 without David Ortiz to anchor the order, virtually every young Red Sox hitter regressed. Once Martinez arrived in 2018, though, Betts, Bogaerts, and Andrew Benintendi felt free to do their thing without the pressure of carrying the offense. They considered themselves table-setters in service of

Martinez, and even if it wasn't reflected in their respective WARs, to a man they labeled Martinez the most important bat in their lineup.

He could fill all those roles in Chicago, and at a fraction of the \$250 million the White Sox reportedly offered Machado last winter. Martinez merely needs to beat three years and the roughly \$62 million remaining on his deal to justify opting out, and Chicago could beat that total with any number of three- or four-year offers.

After seven straight losing seasons, Chicago believes it's a year or two away from contention. Baseball America rates the farm system as No. 3 in the game, Anderson and Moncada are budding superstars, and Giolito is a legit Cy Young contender, alongside hard-throwing right-handers Michael Kopech, who's due back from Tommy John, and Dylan Cease.

What the White Sox need are veterans to help them make the leap. That's exactly what Martinez did in Boston, and he could easily duplicate the feat in Chicago.

Perhaps his decision will be as easy changing socks.

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Salary arbitration estimates illustrate the tight squeeze Red Sox will face**

Sean McAdam

As we now know, the Red Sox are going to try — “a goal, not a mandate” — to keep their 2020 payroll under the first competitive balance tax threshold of \$208 million.

But Wednesday brought further proof of just how difficult that task is going to be.

MLBTradeRumors.com, which annually predicts salary arbitration figures for those eligible and has done so with remarkable accuracy over the years, published its numbers for the Red Sox.

Their findings:

Mookie Betts \$27.7 million  
Jackie Bradley Jr. \$11 million  
Eduardo Rodriguez \$9.5 million  
Andrew Benintendi \$4.5 million  
Brandon Workman \$3.4 million  
Matt Barnes \$3 million  
Chris Owings \$3 million  
Sandy Leon \$2.8 million  
Steven Wright \$1.5 million  
Heath Hembree \$1.6 million  
Gorkys Hernandez \$1 million  
Marco Hernandez \$700,000

Those 12 players — among the most number of arbitration-eligible players for any team; only two teams (Philadelphia and Milwaukee) have more — will total an estimated \$69.7 million.

Now, a number of players on that list are likely to be non-tendered, with the Red Sox relinquishing their rights to the players in question.

There's no way, for example, that the Sox are going to pay \$3 million to utility infielder Chris Owings. They're also likely to non-tender Sandy Leon and Steven Wright. The Sox could always then attempt to

retain someone like Leon at far less. If he signs elsewhere, they can find another backup receiver with catch-and-throw skills.

So those three represent a savings of \$7.3 million, bringing the total down to \$62.4 million.

But if you add those raises for arbitration-eligible players to the approximately \$151 million already on the books for the Sox in guaranteed deals, you're at \$213.4 million even before you add in several million more for players with 0-3 years of big-league experience. Granted, those players will all likely be well under \$1 million each, but that could easily add another \$5 million or so, taking them up over \$218 million — or \$10 million over the initial CBT threshold.

And, of course, that doesn't allow for any meaningful additions through free agency, or create room to take on a veteran salary in a trade.

All of which is another reminder of how likely it is that the Sox will have to move some established players in deals — while likely taking back some portion of their remaining salaries — in order to reach their goal of re-setting their luxury tax rate.

## **\* *The Athletic***

### **Arbitration projections highlight just how tight Red Sox budget might be next season**

Jen McCaffrey

If the Red Sox are truly looking to trim their payroll heading into 2020, as ownership stated at the end of the season, it's going to be a tall task.

On Wednesday, MLB Trade Rumors offered salary arbitration projections for all 30 teams, including the 12 arbitration-eligible players on the Red Sox.

Though the arbitration process doesn't begin until January, those are a good starting point for estimating what portion of the payroll that group will likely consume. The calculations processed by MLB Trade Rumors have proven extremely accurate over the past several years.

Their projections:

Mookie Betts – \$27.7 million  
Jackie Bradley Jr. – \$11 million  
Eduardo Rodriguez – \$9.5 million  
Andrew Benintendi – \$4.9 million  
Brandon Workman – \$3.4 million  
Matt Barnes – \$3 million  
Marco Hernandez – \$700,000  
Sandy Leon – \$2.8 million  
Chris Owings – \$3 million  
Gorkys Hernandez – \$1 million  
Heath Hembree – \$1.6 million  
Steven Wright – \$1.5 million  
Total: \$70.1 million

There's a decent chance, however, that the Red Sox will non-tender, or not offer contracts to, five of those players. Doing so would allow Leon, Owings, Gorkys Hernandez, Hembree and Wright to hit free agency, which would save the Sox roughly \$10 million.



If that's the case, the \$60.1 million owed to Betts, Bradley, Rodriguez, Benintendi, Workman, Barnes, and Marco Hernandez represents \$23.2 million more than what they earned in 2019. (Betts' salary bump from \$20 million and Rodriguez's bump from \$4.3 million would account for a good portion of that.)

Meanwhile, Boston already has \$133.42 million committed to seven players. However, \$22 million of that belongs to J.D. Martinez, who might opt out of his deal by early November.

Average annual guaranteed salaries for 2020 (via Cots Contracts):

David Price – \$31 million  
Chris Sale – \$25.6 million  
J.D. Martinez – \*\$22 million (pending player option decision in early November)  
Xander Bogaerts – \$20 million  
Nathan Eovaldi – \$17 million  
Dustin Pedroia – \$13.3 million  
Christian Vazquez – \$4.52 million  
Total: \$133.42 million

Contract extensions signed by Sale and Bogaerts earlier this year kick in in 2020, meaning they, too, will see significant raises this season. Sale's average annual salary rises from \$15 million to \$25.6 million in 2020, while Bogaerts' increases from \$12 million to \$20 million.

The team also controls eight pre-arbitration eligible players in Rafael Devers, Brian Johnson, Ryan Brasier, Marcus Walden, Colten Brewer, Josh Taylor, Michael Chavis and Darwinzon Hernandez. A majority of those will make the major-league minimum of roughly \$565,000 next season, totaling about \$5 million.

An additional estimated \$15 million for player benefits also counts toward the payroll for luxury tax purposes, bringing Boston's projected payroll for 2020 close to \$220 million.

So, we can arrive at a rough estimate of the working budget the Red Sox are facing for next season:

Arbitration-eligible players: \$60.1 million  
Existing contracts: \$133.42 million  
Pre-arbitration: \$5 million  
Benefits, etc.: \$15 million  
Total: \$213.52 million

There are other costs, such as minor leaguers on the 40-man roster, that will probably push the total payroll higher. But even without getting to that exact calculation, we know the Red Sox are already in trouble if their goal is to be under the payroll tax level.

The lowest tier at which teams start getting taxed next season is \$208 million. Martinez's player option decision will play a key role in determining the offseason payroll flexibility, but even if he opts out, finding a replacement bat for him won't be cheap. The Red Sox also need to add at least one starter plus depth for the rotation, in addition to at least one bullpen arm.

All this is to say, the Red Sox don't have payroll flexibility as the current roster stands, which could mean they're either not planning to get under the \$208 million threshold or they're planning on finding players to trade to free up more salary space.

Red Sox assistant general manager Brian O'Halloran handles a majority of the financial structuring and contracts for the team and noted that challenge last week.

"There are always challenges with building a championship team, which we aspire to do every year, and doing that efficiently," he said. "We'll be as creative as we possibly can in finding ways to do that, as John (Henry) and Tom (Werner) and Sam (Kennedy) have noted, it's a goal, not a mandate."

## **‘How interested are you right now?’ Attendance, changing fandom and the health of Major League Baseball**

Evan Drellich

In the middle of an interview about the health of his sport, Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred held up his cell phone for emphasis.

“Look, this is a challenge,” Manfred said, putting his phone back down. “It’s a challenge across sports.”

The question was about Gen Z. Back in 1994, a few years before that generation’s arrival, a social psychologist named Rich Luker began to track sports fandom in the U.S. through a poll. It was called, aptly, the Sports Poll.

Luker saw a seismic change in 2010, when the spread of the smartphone took the internet off of the desk. For years, leisure activities had been dominated by two things: television and sports. All of a sudden, cat videos were accessible anywhere.

“Our emphasis for the first 25 years of the Sports Poll was to document the growth and proliferation of sports activity, because it was constantly growing,” Luker said. “Since 2010 our focus has changed to how time online is forever changing free time in America.

“In all things, from cat videos, weather, news, impeachment potential, whatever it is,” Luker continued, “any way you want it, you can get access to it. It completely changes the experience of what it means to be engaged in anything.”

MLB is among the many leagues that subscribe to Luker’s poll, now called the SSRS/Luker on Trends Sports Poll. Market research like Luker’s can help to answer those ever-nagging existential questions that go beyond \$10 billion in revenue: Is the sport healthy?

“There’s 110 million people seeing baseball live,” said Manfred, including fans who attended minor league games. “That’s a healthy, vibrant, entertainment product.”

MLB attendance reached an all-time high in 2007, at more than 79 million attendees. (“Attendance” is a misnomer, by the way, since the figures represent tickets sold, not the actual number of fans at games.) In 2019, the attendance was 68,494,752 — a drop of 1.7 percent from the 2018 season, based on average attendance per game. Based on total attendance, the decline was 1.6 percent.

“The biggest challenge,” Luker said, “is we think, in general, people are asking the wrong questions. Or making assumptions about things, where there’s really solid data that shows what’s going on.”

Luker’s poll collects more than 20,000 interviews per year, and he does not agree with the commissioner on every point.

For simplicity’s sake, you can drop the discussions into two buckets. The first are matters rooted in baseball: tanking, pace of play, anything else in-game, ticket prices.

“At the highest level, OK, we have to make sure that the product we’re putting on the field is as compelling as possible,” Manfred said. “So what does that mean? It means meaningful match-ups. It means action in the game. All of those things, those do affect peoples’ entertainment decisions.”

And then come the really complex issues: consumer habits, in sports and otherwise.

“This is a very key point: This is not a baseball problem,” Luker said. “It’s not. It’s a Blockbuster problem, it is a Tower Records problem, it’s a Borders bookstore problem. On and on and on. There are so many ways that the internet has changed the way we spend our free time, it affects all of sports.”

#### Collecting interest

Every box score includes attendance, which has long been the default starting point to discuss the health of the sport. But, in Luker’s words, attendance “is not the necessary requirement to be a fan.”

For example: A huge number of baseball fans live somewhere where they cannot reasonably drive to a major league stadium.

Per Chad Menefee, senior partner at Luker on Trends, 47 percent of Americans live outside an MLB media market. And 60 percent of MLB fans who have a favorite team are “displaced,” meaning they live outside of the home market of their favorite team.

This year, 29 percent of MLB fans said they attended at least one MLB game in the past year.

“Baseball does much better than any other sport, but we’re still only talking about 30 percent or less of all fans who are actively going to at least one game a year,” Menefee said.

Yet, the other 70 percent are still following the sport, and doing so in ways MLB has already monetized.

“We try to think about engagement with the game,” Manfred said. “We sell different things. We sell a live product. It’s really important to us. We need to focus on it. We sell a broadcast product. Our broadcast numbers were really strong this year. ... We try to look broader than just attendance. It’s everything we’re selling out there.”

MLB’s At Bat app saw year-over-year growth (18 percent), as did its subscribers to MLB.tv (15 percent). But to Luker, the most critical piece of information is in the bigger picture, in something that theoretically would drive app growth. A broad, simple question for the public: How interested are you right now?

“This is what scientifically predicts the most behavior,” Luker said. “Because if a person is not interested in something, they’re not going to do anything. But if they’re interested, then their behaviors are definitely predictable. And if they say they’re very interested, they’re statistically more engaged in their behaviors than anybody else.”

“And then we ask: ‘Are you more or less interested?’ And of course, there’s a certain bunch who are more, and a certain bunch who are less.”

In September, 362 MLB fans ages 18 and up were asked how their interest today compared to the last few years.

These were the results: 52 percent of fans said they had the same level of interest, 25 percent less and 22 percent more. (More on the 25 percent’s reasons later.)

So there is not a mass exodus from baseball, at least per that study. But Luker laments that leagues and teams don’t spend more time creating “tattoo value,” the devotion and connections that make people go out and get tattoos of, say, a giant Cardinal. Or just a Giant.

“I am very troubled with how often now, after 30 years, I hear people in sports talk about it as a business: The product. This and that,” Luker said. “It’s sports. It’s something we love. But at the same time, it is massive, big business. More so than it was 30 years ago. And it’s a media business, so they do have to deliver audiences.”

The challenge, then, is the business model. Luker believes the sports industry transitioned into a media industry during the last two to three years.

“Better than 50 percent of the dollars now come from media application,” he said.

Manfred, however, did not make quite the same leap.

“I think of it as a multi-product business,” Manfred said. “It is a media business in the sense (there are) all these other products that we’re selling. The fact of the matter is we still have a live product that generates a very, very significant portion of our revenue. And it makes our media product more compelling.

“You hear people say it all the time, ‘It looked empty behind home plate.’ You never want that look, right? It’s not a purely media business. We still have that live component that really matters to us.”

What about the kids?

Not everyone who walks through a turnstile is made equal. Who, exactly, is entering a ballpark matters too, not just the raw entry numbers.

“The two things that matter most in terms of developing fans is youth participation — that’s why we have spent so much time and money on the Play Ball initiative, because that’s No. 1,” Manfred said. “No. 2 is the age at which you go to the ballpark the first time. The younger you go the first time, the more likely you are to be a bigger fan.

“We do have very good data on how many people are coming in at that age. And it’s one of the reasons that we work so hard to maintain a fan-friendly product.”

Someone who attends their first baseball game, major league or minor league, before the age of five will attend 58 percent more games in their life compared to someone whose first game waits until age 14, Luker and co. found.

“I can’t overemphasize how important minor league baseball is to the whole of the (history) of baseball and the future,” Luker said. “That is what makes it approachable, and allows people to have access in ways that are affordable, and then, in fact, makes it aspirational to attend games later on in life.”

Now, for as strong as Manfred may find today’s data, the league’s trend-mapping is limited to roughly the last decade. MLB has a data warehouse called “Wheelhouse,” but the league is only scratching the surface of the information it can compile as digital ticketing expands.

There is a sense at the league that baseball fandom is sometimes broken into two acts: childhood, and then some point later in life when you return to the game. Once fans hit adulthood, other pursuits can take over: a career, a family. A 162-game season of three-hour games can be particularly hard for someone to follow, until they regain some time and money.

Unsurprisingly, Menefee said that baseball has the best generational value of any of the major sports. As part of that, baseball fans are more likely to be fans of a team, he said, drawing a comparison to NBA fans, who are more likely to follow a specific player.

“When that player retires, they may fade away,” Menefee said. “It’s much easier for somebody to be reactivated as a baseball fan because of that connection to a team, which usually lasts over an entire lifetime.”

What is surprising, given general reputations: millennials are taking kids to games at an even younger age than they themselves were taken to games, Luker has found. That fits with the suggestion that fandom can return.

But the fear comes in with Gen Z, those born right around 2000.

Luker on Sports asked teens if the time they spend online adds or detracts from the time they spend on sports. The answers: 36 percent of 12- to 17 year-olds said time online adds to the time they spend on sports, while 51 percent said it takes away.

“We’ve seen declines with teens over most of the past 15 years,” Menefee said. “This is true across all of sports. With each passing year, teens are coming in less interested than the previous cohort. Smartphones changed everything. They made it easier to access Netflix and other streaming services, music services, social media, video games, communicate with friends, and more.”

Manfred said MLB’s Gen Z numbers are good, pointing to information cited in Sports Business Journal. He also cited the annual Topline Participation Report, produced by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association.

“I talked about youth participation, right?” Manfred said. “Our participation numbers in the last five years were up 21 percent. The next closest sport is basketball at 4 percent. Everybody else is down. Why are they down? They’re down because of (smartphones). They present a unique challenge. I think that there are aspects to our game that actually give us an advantage with that generation. You can be on your phone and not miss anything that’s going on in our game. Our game is the ideal second-screen experience. There are things that I think explain why those Gen Z numbers are good.”

Easier to stay home?

When radio and television were introduced, some in the sport feared broadcasts would discourage in-person attendance. Those fears were never realized.

Might we be hitting a point today where for a variety of reasons, it is easier to just stay home?

Menefee said there’s been “a complete reversal” in peoples’ preferences to attend in person or watch games on TV. In 1998, 56 percent of sports fans generally preferred to go in person. In 2018, that percentage was 32 percent.

“That’s true across sports,” Menefee said. “Baseball fans are the most likely to say they prefer attending, and that was true 20 years ago, still true today. But that’s also declined.”

MLB argues the value proposition of a baseball game is still centered on connecting with people. If you head to the old ballyard, you’re probably going in part for the company you would have at the game.

Cell phones indeed make it easier to get tickets last-minute today through the secondary market. But it is also easier in today’s world to avoid making firm plans. Advance planning typically carries some form of commitment; if you bought tickets a month out, you were probably going to follow through, particularly before it became easy to resell seats on your phone.

Per numbers provided by SeatGeek.com in July, day-of buying for MLB tickets through its service basically doubled in the last five years, up to 19 percent this year from 10 percent in 2014.

SeatGeek also showed that the average number of tickets purchased per order was dropping, to 2.74 from 3.00 in 2015. Seventy percent of purchases were made from a mobile device, compared to 50 percent in 2014.

“When you have 2,430 (games) that you’re going to sell, we can’t be a one-ticket-at-a-time business,” Manfred said. “We need family groups of four, five people, buying tickets on a regular basis coming to the ballpark.”

The season-ticket model is changing. (And, for what it’s worth, Manfred said teams are conscious of the importance of getting people into stadiums, not only maximizing revenue.)

“Our clubs, like most businesses, have two goals in mind,” Manfred said. “They want to optimize their revenue, and that’s a mix of elasticity and price, and how many people get in the ballpark. I think unlike

other businesses, our clubs are tempered by the understanding that you need to maintain that fan base, even if it involves taking a lower price on the ticket. That people getting away from the game is always a bad thing for us.”

Among the major U.S. sports, MLB has the lowest average cost for a ticket to a single game (\$32.99) and the lowest average for an outing for a family of four (\$234.38), per a calculation from Team Marketing Report called Fan Cost Index.

Another set of SeatGeek’s numbers, tallied through the most recently completed regular season in each sport, show an MLB ticket bought on its platform this year averaged \$57. Next lowest was the NHL at \$86, followed by the NBA at \$95 and NFL at \$172.

So it’s all the strikeouts?

Remember the survey that showed 25 percent of fans said their interest in the game had waned compared to recent years? Perhaps surprisingly, most were not pointing to something the sport had or had not done at all. It was their own lives that had changed.

“The biggest problem with this is the assertion that something’s wrong with sports,” Luker said. “There’s nothing wrong with sports.”

Here, Manfred and Luker seem to diverge.

“I think they impact attendance,” Manfred said of in-game issues. “Every issue we talk about with respect to the play of the game, we’re talking about it because of fan research suggesting that it’s an issue for our fans.”

Time of game has long been a go-to media discussion. There’s no question that if baseball could be the exact same game at its core, and be played in closer to two hours than three, the sport would be better off. The league realizes that, but probably would never say as much publicly.

Such a change is not realistic. So other changes, such as increasing the frequency of action and balls in play, are the focus.

“Can I tell you that Rob Manfred went to two fewer games last year because he didn’t like the pace of play?” Manfred said. “No, I can’t tell you that. But we do have research where our fans, segmented — avid, casual — tell us what makes the game more appealing, what makes it less appealing. In today’s entertainment market, which is so competitive, you have to be responsive.”

There’s a strange conflict inside the game.

What is best for front offices can, and indeed does, run counter to what would be best for both the development of players’ brands and the fan enjoyment of the sport. Think of the anonymity created by players being shuttled between the majors and minors, the seemingly endless parade of relievers, the replacement-level churn.

Manfred sees that dynamic generally.

“I do. I do. I think that people talk about changing the game or not changing the game, like those are two separate choices,” Manfred said. “What really is happening: We’ve allowed the game to change, based on decisions made by field managers and general managers with one goal in mind: Can I win one more game?”

“We have to be more proactive about managing the change that those very competitive people are — they’re doing the right thing, I’m not being critical at all. But it’s incumbent upon those of us at a different level of the game to manage that change in a way that you make sure the entertainment value of the product is maintained.”

This acknowledgment does not include tanking, which is a central labor topic in baseball, and was tied to attendance matters in a Baseball Prospectus analysis.

“The fact that we have markets that go up and down, that’s baseball,” Manfred said. “I mean, it’s always been baseball. We can’t have 30 teams that win every single year.”

The Major League Baseball Players Association has been outspoken about tanking, which it sees as a core competitive issue hurting the product (and ultimately player pay).

About three years ago, Luker on Sports started turning its attention in this direction, toward some player-specific topics.

“The media assumption is: in order for there to be compelling television, there’s got to be a star on the team,” Luker said. “That in order for you to follow a team, you have to have a favorite player. And that’s kind of important. But the fact of the matter is, the more players you know, the more engaged you are with the team. And in fact, most fans say they need to know many or most of the players in order to feel the greatest sense of belonging or connection with the team.

“We see very clear progression over the course of the season, where knowledge of the number of players and the depth of knowledge grows. And we believe that’s a key factor in the future: feeding this ability to increase the knowledge of the players so there’s a greater sense of relationship.

“That’s where the internet really comes into play, because there you’re able to isolate on players and say, ‘Tell me more about this player.’”

Good thing, then, that everyone’s got the internet in their pocket these days. Right?

“The challenge for the industry is not to become more like technology,” Luker said, “It’s more to understand how people enjoy sports, and to do everything they can to integrate the experience.”

At the park, and elsewhere.