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After the Red Sox traded him in 2011, Josh Reddick had ‘a better career than I could have imagined’

Peter Abraham

Josh Reddick will forever be grateful the Red Sox selected him in the 17th round of the 2006 draft and called him up to the majors three years later.

But he’s equally thankful they traded him after the 2011 season.

Reddick, now 32, never quite fit in with the Sox. Coaches at every level lectured him about working the count, swinging at strikes and being patient. But Reddick was the rebel who wanted to swing as hard as he could at anything close to the plate.

In that sense, he was ahead of time given how baseball has evolved into a glorified home run derby where exit velocity matters more than on-base percentage.

But back then, the Sox saw Reddick as expendable. He was swept up in what were a series of changes following the team’s September collapse in 2011.

New general manager Ben Cherington sent Reddick and two prospects to Oakland for standout closer Andrew Bailey and outfielder Ryan Sweeney.

For Reddick, it was a career-changing moment. He emerged as a reliable player for the Athletics and has since played for the Dodgers and Astros. His 11-year career has included seven appearances in the postseason and a World Series ring with Houston in 2017.

“That trade was absolutely the best thing that could have happened for me,” Reddick said before Game 2 of the American League Championship Series against the Yankees on Sunday night.

“The trade made complete sense at the time because they needed a closer. But I had no idea how much it would help me.”

Oakland GM Billy Beane recognized Reddick’s ability to hit for power against righthanders and play above-average defense in the spacious outfield at Oakland Coliseum.

Reddick hit 32 home runs and drove in 85 runs in 2012 and won a Gold Glove for a team that finished 92-70 and won its division.

“And I avoided that mess they had in Boston in ’12,” said Reddick, referencing the insurrection-filled season under manager Bobby Valentine. “It was perfect for me.”

The trade was a failure for the Red Sox. Bailey had a 4.91 earned run average in 49 games and was released after having shoulder surgery in 2013. Sweeney lasted one unproductive season and also was released.

Once Reddick got too expensive, the Athletics traded him to the Dodgers in 2016. Then the Astros signed him as a free agent.

Reddick has hit .263 with a .753 OPS, 140 home runs and 531 RBIs in his career. Through Saturday, he was 12th among active players with 51 postseason games.

“It’s a better career than I could have imagined,” Reddick said.

Outside of Reddick and Dodgers infielder Kris Negron, every player the Red Sox signed from their 2006 draft class is out of organized baseball.

“I feel like I made the best of my opportunities. But I don’t believe the ride is over yet,” said Reddick, who has a year left on the four-year, \$52 million contract he signed before the 2017 season.

“I have plenty left in the tank. I’d love to play this thing out until I’m 40 years old. That was always the goal.”

Reddick doesn’t lack for motivation to continue playing. He became a father for the first time on Oct. 2 when his wife, Jett, had twin boys.

Maverick Joshua and Ryder Blaze arrived two days before the start of the playoffs. They have watched their dad play, even if they won’t remember it.

After his wife told him to go play, Reddick started Game 1 of the Division Series and scored a run in a 6-2 victory against Tampa Bay.

“I’ve changed a little bit already being a father,” Reddick said. “It’s an awesome thing. I never thought I’d be responsible for two little humans.

“I won’t change as far as the baseball world, but when I go home it’s all about them.”

In a sport with so many assembly-line personalities, Reddick is an original. He has befriended Ric Flair — Woo! — and several other noted wrestlers; put “Mr. Irrelevant” on the back of his uniform for Players Weekend; and got married wearing custom-made Spider-Man sneakers and cufflinks.

The Reddicks also have five dogs along with their new sons.

“It’s a good life,” Reddick said. “It never mattered where I was picked. I knew deep down I was a good player and I wanted to show it to everybody.

“Wherever this takes me, I’ll play hard and try to win.”

The next Red Sox pitching coach will have a full plate of responsibilities

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox have gone five weeks without a general manager since firing Dave Dombrowski and that isn’t expected to change any time soon.

Eventually, we assume, somebody will be put in charge of baseball operations.

Besides, the Sox actually have a much more interesting hire to make.

They’re also looking for a pitching coach after reassigning Dana LeVangie to the pro scouting department. Who lands that position will reveal much about the direction the organization is heading.

Long gone are the days when the pitching coach was some old buddy of the manager.

Houston Astros righthander Justin Verlander, who has pitched in the majors since 2005, expects a lot more from a pitching coach than he once did.

“It’s changed a lot. I think you have to be willing to change with the times,” Verlander said Saturday before the Yankees beat the Astros, 7-0, in Game 1 of the American League Championship Series.

“You have to be willing to adapt. And you have to be able to embrace some analytics and the numbers. There’s so much data out there now, not just when it comes to scouting, but when it comes to pitching mechanics and tracking the body and how it’s moving and release points and all of this different stuff.

“You kind of have to be able to blend it all and, at the same time, remember the pitching side of it.”

Teams often struggle with defining the role and finding the right fit.

Only four pitching coaches in the American League have been in their current positions for more than three seasons.

The next pitching coach of the Red Sox will be the fourth in a span of six seasons. Major league coaching or pitching experience is not a prerequisite as they screen candidates, a process they are already deep into.

It’s possible the Sox will have a new pitching coach before they settle on a new GM so their pitchers can start getting acclimated.

There are a wide range of possibilities in what is an active search.

When the Twins hired Rocco Baldelli as manager last winter, their choice as pitching coach was Wes Johnson. All of his prior coaching experience was at the college and high school level and he had no professional playing experience.

The assistant pitching coach, Jeremy Hefner, had pitched in the majors but never coached before. He had been an advance scout with the Twins.

The Twins finished sixth in the American League with a 4.18 ERA — a 7.1 percent decrease from 2018 — and won 101 games.

The Astros have a traditional pitching coach in Brent Strom, who turns 71 on Monday.

He pitched parts of five seasons in the majors and worked his way up as a coach through the minors.

Bullpen coach Josh Miller, who is 40, joined the staff this season after being the organization’s pitching coordinator. He’s essentially the assistant pitching coach.

Houston also has baseball operations staffers in charge of major league advance information, major league video, pro scouting analysis, and research and development. All play some role in preparing pitchers for games.

“Supplying information comes from a lot of different ways, [from] our front office and our pitching department” Astros manager A.J. Hinch said.

“The application of the game-planning and how you go into a series knowing where you’re going to exploit hitters or where your best weapons are, there’s great knowledge that’s been deployed to these players more so than ever before.”

That’s what the Sox have to figure out, how to structure the job and the flow of information.

At a time when analytics often dictates game-planning, the pitching coach has to find a way to present the information in a way the pitcher can best use it.

The Sox never quite made that work this season. It was common to hear a starter say he junked the game plan after the first inning and fell back on something else.

“We’re not robots,” Verlander said.

“The best pitching coaches, I think, are able to take the new wave and combine it with the old. I think that’s the best recipe for success.”

That mix is forever changing. A day after the Red Sox season ended, they had staff members on the field at Fenway Park testing equipment that would provide biomechanical feedback on pitchers.

Players from a local college wore jerseys embedded with sensors while they pitched and the data came back instantaneously to the medical and sports science staff.

The Red Sox also have invested in portable high-speed cameras and other devices that measure the spin and movement of pitches.

Their next pitching coach doesn’t need to be an expert in all of these fields, but he does need to tie them all together in such a way that the pitcher benefits when he’s on the mound.

“Once you get out on the field we want our guys to compete,” Hinch said. “They’re not analysts out there on the mound. We’re not generating a lot of computer reports trying to overcomplicate the game. But we prepare them much better today.”

The language of baseball: Often crude, sometimes comical

Dan Shaughnessy

There was no profanity in the house when I grew up. Folks were pretty religious and swearing was prohibited. It was a sin to take the Lord’s name in vain. There was no “hell, yeah,” or “damn right.” Nobody would have ever said, “This sucks.” That would have gotten you a week in solitary.

An F-bomb was more powerful and unspeakable than the atomic bomb. Dropping an F-bomb would have been risking eternal damnation in you-know-where.

So it was quite an ear-opener when I started working in Major League Baseball clubhouses at the age of 21.

Earl Weaver? Billy Martin? Yikes. It was “bleep this” and “bleep that.” You bet your bleeping bleep it was. And if it offended you, that was too bleeping bad.

In this environment, you go numb fairly quickly. You stop hearing it. Maybe you even start doing it yourself. But you don’t ever do it in front of your parents or (later) in front of your own children. It’s like an embedded censor. You have your workspeak and you have your familyspeak.

All of this came to mind this past week when the St. Louis Cardinals clinched the NLDS over the Braves. The series was hotly contested and emotional. When the Cardinals won it, St. Louis manager Mike Shildt delivered a “Bull Durham”-esque postgame clubhouse speech, unaware that one of his players (rookie outfielder Randy Arozarena) would post it on his Instagram account.

“They [the Braves] started some [bleep],” yelled Shildt. “We finished the [bleep]. And that’s how we roll. No one [bleeps] with us. Ever. Now, I don’t give a [bleep] who we play. We’re going to [bleep] them up.”

OK, so it was not Winston Churchill exhorting, “We shall fight them on the beaches . . .” to the House of Commons in 1940.

No. This is baseball. There are no Robert's Rules of Order. No Parliamentary Procedure. You can take your decorum and stick it up your bleep.

Clearly, Shildt was bleeped by one of his players. It was a breach of the century-old clubhouse code. If a Patriot player pulled a stunt like this, he'd risk getting released by Bill Belichick.

In the old days, Weaver or Martin would have told the offended public that it was too bleeping bad if their choice of words offended anybody. In 2019, a chagrined Shildt was forced to grovel.

"I apologize if my language offended anyone," said the manager. "I am flawed and have my moments. I grew up in a clubhouse. I try to represent this organization with class and dignity.

"I will not apologize for having passion about our team."

The key line there is "I grew up in a clubhouse."

It's baseball.

It's the way they talk.

Like Shildt, Indians manager Terry Francona grew up in a big league clubhouse. Francona's dad was a major leaguer for 15 seasons. Unfiltered Titospeak is very much like Shildt's postgame valedictory. Francona and I did a book together in 2013, and the manager's college coach refused to read it because it had more than 100 F-bombs.

I called Tito Friday to talk about clubhouse dialect.

"I don't even know where to begin," he said. "There are things you can say in the clubhouse that would get you arrested or at least fired from a job if you said them on the street. But in the clubhouse, nobody will even blink.

"As a manager, sometimes you're up there and you don't even know what you are saying. I'd go on a rant and after I'd ask Millsie [coach Brad Mills], 'What did I just say?'"

"It was shocking to me when I got to the minor leagues," said Dwight Evans, a 67-year-old veteran of 20 big league seasons. "You get acclimated to it a little bit. I always felt that some people use four-letter words to embellish things, and I never thought that needed to be done.

"I don't care if people swear. I don't really enjoy it, but it doesn't really faze me. If you're smart enough, I really don't think you need that."

Hall of Fame pitcher Jim Palmer worked under the combustible Weaver in Baltimore for the bulk of his career.

"It's just the way it was," said the three-time Cy Young Award winner. "My pitching coach was George Bamberger and [10-letter bleep] was a term of endearment. If he called you pal, that meant he was really mad at you.

"Everything else was just gutter language. [Cleveland manager] Birdie Tebbetts had one rule about it. You could swear, but you just couldn't say [a 12-letter bleep]. That was a \$100 word."

Like Evans, Palmer steered clear of the crude clubhouse dialect when he got back home. It made a better impression on his two daughters.

“One of my girls said bleep one time,” he said, “and I said, ‘I understand that you like the shock value in that, but we’re sending you to private school so you’ll actually have a vocabulary and you won’t have to speak like that.’”

“In baseball, there is no shock value to it because that’s the way they talk. It’s accepted.”

Bruce Hurst, a devout Mormon who pitched 15 years in the majors, remembered, “It was eye-opening. Words were used as parts of speech that I wasn’t taught at school. It was interesting for me to hear how certain words were used.

“The religious words were the ones that were most offensive to me, and I never got comfortable with it. Some of the other ones I found almost comical how they were used. The intensity of it could be remarkably funny. It wasn’t meant to be offensive.

“For some people, it was the best way to communicate their emotions and their feelings. In a funny way, you kind of learn to respect it.”

The late Ken Coleman, voice of the Red Sox and a perfect gentleman, called me in 1990 when he was hired to read the audio version of “The Curse of the Bambino.”

“Dan,” he started, gently. “I’ve got a little problem. I am going into the studio to read your book tomorrow, but I’ve been going over the text and noticed there are some ‘bleeps’ in here and I’m not sure how to handle that.”

“Just skip over them, Kenny,” I told him. “Pretend they are not there.”

It was a matter of public safety. Any Red Sox fan driving around listening to that book would have run off the road if they’d heard Ken Coleman dropping bleeps.

Now is not the time for Red Sox to trade Mookie Betts

Peter Abraham

You know, of course, that the Red Sox won the World Series in 2004, 2007, 2013, and 2018. The players on those teams and the big moments they manufactured will never be forgotten.

Ryan Dempster, one of the pitchers on the ’13 team, told me a few weeks ago that fans still stop him on the street when he’s in Boston just to shake his hand.

“People always want to talk about that season,” Dempster said. “It’s special for me to have won a championship in Boston.”

What those same people don’t remember and never will without looking it up is which team had the best farm system that season. Or which front office did the best job of managing the payroll in 2018 so it stayed under Major League Baseball’s luxury-tax threshold.

Winning the World Series is all that matters.

The Dodgers have won seven consecutive division championships and assembled a player development machine that churns out high-end talent. But they still haven’t won a championship since 1988.

The Yankees have done everything right under Brian Cashman, investing in analytics and building up their farm system. But they have one championship in the last 18 seasons.

For all the cognoscenti who laud the Athletics for their enlightened frugality, their last World Series was in 1990.

The poor Twins have managed to lose 16 postseason games in a row since 2004. But that's better than the Mariners, who were last in the postseason in 2001. Jamie Moyer, who won 20 games for that team, turns 57 next month.

The point is that championships are precious and the opportunity to win another one can't be treated casually.

So how in the world are the Red Sox even considering the idea of trading Mookie Betts?

Outside of Mike Trout, Betts has been the best all-around player in baseball the last five seasons.

In Red Sox history, only Ted Williams accomplished more statistically in his first six seasons in the majors than Betts.

This season will be the fifth in a row Betts receives MVP votes and should be his fourth consecutive with a Gold Glove. It's the foundation of a Hall of Fame career.

You don't trade players like that. You win again with players like that.

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

The Red Sox were fourth in the majors in runs this season. Even if J.D. Martinez opts out of his contract, they will still have a powerful offense with better production likely to come from first base and second base.

The Sox also had the makings of a solid bullpen by the end of the season with Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Darwinzon Hernandez, and Josh Taylor as the building blocks.

If the Sox are telling the truth and really do believe David Price and Chris Sale will be healthy next season, they have all the parts needed to win a third championship in the last eight seasons.

It's a group you keep together, not break up.

As colleague Alex Speier explained in a recent story, the Sox are unlikely to get equal value on the trade market in return for Betts. He's due to make \$27.7 million next season, and while half the teams in baseball would happily pay that, they're not going to empty their prospect pool knowing Betts will go into free agency after the season.

There's more value to keep Betts, take a run at another championship, and get an additional 11 or so months to convince him to stay.

Angels general manager Billy Eppler worked hard to build a relationship with Trout, going to him for advice on clubhouse and roster matters and even inviting him into the draft room in June.

"He had this investment in the organization," Eppler said.

That led to Trout agreeing to an extension in spring training. When the Sox name their new GM, that person's main job needs to be forming the same relationship with Betts. Make him an investor.

Betts has never once said or even indicated he doesn't like playing for the Sox. His standard response to questions about an extension is that he wants to get what he feels his value is and is willing to go to free agency to accomplish that goal.

In other words, Betts and his agents have a number. So find that number.

In the meantime, let him see what happens in free agency this offseason. Let him further consider that Bryce Harper and Manny Machado watched the playoffs from home and saw their managers get fired. Let him consider the downside of not being identified with one team.

If by July the Red Sox are out of contention and Betts has turned down the team's best offer, trade him. A team desperate to win will probably give up as much talent for Betts then as you could get before the season starts. Probably more.

Trading Betts now would not be giving away Babe Ruth to finance a Broadway musical. But it would send a message that the Sox care more about something other than winning.

There are certainly advantages to wrangling the payroll below the tax threshold and resetting the penalties. But now is not the time for that.

Now is the time to take another shot. Betts is a player who comes around a handful of times in the history of a franchise. Take advantage of that for as long as you can.

PAINFUL HISTORY

In LA, Dodgers facing questions

Dodgers rookie Gavin Lux was born in 1997, long after the Dodgers won their last World Series.

He was asked during the National League Division Series if he knew who Kirk Gibson was. The conversation went like this:

Lux: "Yeah, of course. Who did he hit it that home run off of? Tell me."

Reporter: "Dennis Eckersley."

Lux: "Yeah, mustache. Yeah."

It was a fun moment. Institutional knowledge aside, Lux was one of four rookies the Dodgers had on their playoff roster. First baseman/outfielder Matt Beaty, righthander Dustin May, and catcher Will Smith were the others.

There could have been a fifth had the Dodgers kept righthanded reliever Tony Gonsolin.

"We have a chance to move up together and it's kind of gone that way," Lux said. "I think that's pretty special."

The question now is whether manager Dave Roberts can deliver a championship with Lux and all the other talented players on that roster.

Roberts is 393-256 in four seasons with the Dodgers with two National League pennants. But the Game 5 meltdown against Washington in the Division Series will be hard to shake after the Dodgers won 106 games in the regular season.

Roberts had too much faith in Clayton Kershaw, especially given his issues in the postseason. But the real mistake was leaving Joe Kelly in for a second inning with the game tied.

Kelly had not pitched more than one inning since Aug. 24 and had considerably worse statistics all season when he got past 25 pitches.

Once Kelly sailed though the ninth inning in a 3-3 game, Roberts should have pulled him. Instead, Kelly loaded the bases in the 10th and allowed a grand slam by Howie Kendrick on his 23rd pitch.

By the time Kenley Jansen got in the game, it was too late.

“I liked Joe right there in that spot, I really did,” Roberts said. “After 10 pitches there was no stress. Ball was coming out well. So for him to go out there and take down that inning and to have Kenley take down the other part of the order, I felt really good about it.”

To what degree the bullpen strategy was dictated by the analytics staff isn't known. But the blame landed on Roberts.

Roberts has three seasons remaining on his contract and will return in 2020, the Los Angeles Times reported. But at this point, the regular season is almost meaningless for him. The Dodgers are 25-22 in the postseason the last four seasons and long overdue for a championship.

ETC.

Opportunity for Red Sox prospects

It was good news for the Red Sox that infielders C.J. Chatham and Bobby Dalbec were selected for the Premier 12 team along with righthanders Tanner Houck and Noah Song.

That team will represent the United States in the Olympic qualifying rounds. USA Baseball selected Joe Girardi (for now) to manage the team with a staff made up of former big league coaches.

It'll be good experience for Chatham, Dalbec, and Houck before they get to spring training.

Chatham, who has been a shortstop, will need to find another position with Xander Bogaerts in his way. That could be as a utility player.

Dalbec is a candidate to take over at first base and Houck could yet emerge as a rotation prospect after going to the bullpen in Triple A this past season.

It's also further evidence that the Sox could have something special in Song, a fourth-round pick out of the Naval Academy last June.

If the Navy allows Song to pursue his baseball career next season, he could move fast.

The internal data the Sox compiled on his seven outings for Lowell suggested the quality of his pitches was even better than they thought when he was drafted.

A few other observations on the Red Sox:

- As much as baseball gets romanticized, it's not a civic trust. The Red Sox are a business with a product and can charge what they want for that product.

But they made a mistake raising ticket prices by an average of 1.7 percent only 11 days after ownership announced its goal of cutting the payroll approximately 15 percent.

Most non-premium single-game tickets will go up by only a small amount. But that's not the point. It's tone deaf to raise prices after the team finished in third place then decided to slash payroll.

The Sox also sharply raised the prices on their cheapest tickets. General standing room is going up \$4.72 and pavilion level standing room got a \$4.62 hike.

The cheapest standing room seat at Fenway will be \$25.86.

Whatever additional revenue the Red Sox will generate from this price hike, it's offset by aggravating those people who support them the most.

- J.D. Martinez hit .293 with an .884 OPS, 21 home runs, and 64 RBIs in 485 plate appearances as the designated hitter this season. The other nine players the Red Sox used as DHs hit .172 with a .523 OPS, two home runs, and 13 RBIs in 207 plate appearances.

Whether it's Edwin Encarnacion or somebody else, the Sox will need to find a veteran hitter if Martinez leaves.

- The home clubhouse at Fenway Park will get a major renovation this winter. It will include new lockers and changing the layout of the space so the entrance to the field is more direct from the dugout and the showers are somewhere more private than behind a curtain.

The Sox also are trying to find space for a second batting cage.

There are no plans to move the manager's office back into the clubhouse, where it was for decades before this season. It remains quizzical that the Sox hired Alex Cora for his communication skills then moved his office farther away from the players.

- Blake Swihart decided to become a free agent after the Diamondbacks outrighted him to the minor leagues. Deven Marrero did the same with the Marlins. Swihart was a first-round pick of the Sox in 2011, and Marrero in '12. They have combined for minus-1.3 WAR in the majors.

- John Farrell emerged from his lobster boat and interviewed with the Angels for their managerial vacancy. That position seems almost sure to go to Joe Maddon, but Farrell has made it clear he wants back in the dugout after two years away.

The Phillies could be a better option. They were impressed with Farrell's interview in 2017 before selecting Gabe Kapler. Now that Kapler has been fired, Farrell could get another look.

If Farrell doesn't manage next season, he'd fit well as a pitching coach.

Extra bases

Aroldis Chapman pitched 4½ innings over five games in September, Yankees manager Aaron Boone smartly talking advantage of his team's big lead in the American League East. "Just a bit," Chapman said when asked if he were frustrated by the lack of action. "You want to get in games and have some action, but preparation was the same. You've got to pitch to stay sharp. But every day I went out, and I did my work." The rest could allow Boone to use Chapman for more than an inning in the American League Championship Series . . . Manager A.J. Hinch on what has made the Astros so special: "People like it here. The winning helps, but the culture really is about just bringing the best version of yourself here. We let guys be themselves. If you're quiet, be quiet. If you're loud, be loud. If you're in between, be in between. I don't think there's one cookie-cutter way to run a team. You have to adapt to the personalities on the team. I tell these guys from the very beginning, you can be yourself, but we're going to be very elite on the field. We're going to talk a lot about the baseball." . . . Cardinals ace Jack Flaherty allowed four runs over 13 innings in the Division Series and struck out 16 with two walks. "This kid's a legit No. 1 guy. It's almost like he gets stronger as he goes," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "He doesn't tire. He just keeps getting stronger. His delivery works, stuff's live." . . . Tampa Bay's Blake Snell on going down to the bullpen between starts in the postseason: "It was weird; it's just super boring. That's the truth. It's boring. There's not a lot to do. You just kind of look around. It's like you're in la-la land. It's not for me. I had some gum, some seeds. Normal snacks. I brought beef jerky. So it was an exciting time for me food-wise, but watching the game, a little boring." . . . Happy 69th birthday to Dick Pole, who pitched for the Red Sox from 1973-76. He was 14-14 with a 4.56 ERA for the Sox and appeared in Game 5 of the 1975 World Series at Riverfront Stadium. He started the eighth inning and walked Johnny Bench and Tony Perez on nine pitches. That was it for Pole. Diego Segui came in and allowed three fly outs. That was enough to get

Bench to third and then score him. The Mariners took Pole in the expansion draft before the 1977 season. Scott Cooper is 52. He was the only All-Star for the Red Sox in the dark days of 1993 and '94.

Why Andrew Friedman is the best fit for the Red Sox (if he wants it)

Alex Speier

More than a month removed from Dave Dombrowski's firing, why does the Red Sox' search for his replacement remain in a due diligence phase, without any known interviews having taken place? Could it be that the team is waiting to see whether the ideal candidate — one who will soon be a free agent, rather than requiring the permission of his team to interview — is interested in them?

Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman is nearing the end of the five-year contract he signed in October 2014 to relocate from Tampa Bay to Los Angeles. Though the Dodgers were bounced from the playoffs by the Nationals in a Game 5 NLDS stunner, the organization he's built remains a model for what other teams want.

And so, with the Red Sox looking for a new steward of their baseball operations department, it's hard not to see Friedman as the best candidate. His résumé is so compelling that it would almost qualify as negligence if the Red Sox didn't investigate any interest he might have in coming to Boston.

Red Sox principal owner John Henry made clear a desire for an experienced head of baseball operations, particularly given the challenges awaiting the Sox as they work to get below the luxury-tax threshold and to maintain competitiveness. Friedman's experience includes building the small-market Rays into a perennial contender, as well as scraping nearly \$100 million off the Dodgers' payroll (from a record \$291 million in 2015 to roughly \$195 million in 2018) while maintaining LA's stranglehold on the NL West.

Meanwhile, chairman Tom Werner noted that the Red Sox needed a renewed focus on development and depth. Friedman is considered extraordinary in both fields.

"Andrew and his front office, the guys he surrounds himself with, are very dedicated to development," Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers — an assistant hitting coach with the Dodgers in 2016-17 — noted this season. "They're not afraid to take a chance, they're not afraid to think outside of the box when it comes to developing a player."

Friedman got deep into the weeds inside the Dodgers and Rays organizations not just on the players in his system but also on the organization's development processes — including the increasing technologies that have become part of player development. The result of that perspective is a decision-maker who constantly sees possibility not just in the players in his own organization, but who constantly sees unrealized potential in players from other organizations — players with tremendous skills that have yet to be realized on the field.

Meanwhile, Friedman remains vigilant about players all over professional baseball. He's searching for players who are undervalued — perhaps someone in Double A or the lower minors who has very high exit velocities but posts high ground-ball rates that suppress his numbers. In Los Angeles, the Dodgers built a development infrastructure (coaching, philosophy, and technology) that allowed them to help several such players refine raw skill sets into eventual big league contribution.

"He's not afraid to venture out with any of the technology, thinking about how this would help a player, how this would help an organization," said Hyers. "He was always looking for that value that might be picked up in a trade, in a released player, see a skill set that they like, that fits a model, that fits maybe something they need, and see if they can develop that one skill set and break it free."

The interest in unlocking depth is underscored by the difference in the Red Sox and Dodgers in roster construction in recent years. According to the transaction tracker at MLBTradeRumors.com, the Red Sox have made 22 trades since Dombrowski's hire in August 2015, the vast majority to address specific,

immediate big league needs. In the same period, the Dodgers made 60 trades, many involving players in the minors.

“He was looking at any trade that could upgrade the team,” Hyers said of Friedman. “He wanted to build a great development system, plug in some players in that development system, and give them an opportunity to help the club.”

The Red Sox will need such an approach with their roster in the coming years to cover the holes in the upper levels of their farm system while ensuring that they maximize the talents now matriculating through their system. Friedman’s track record suggests he is an ideal person to do just that.

Of course, the fact that the Sox might view Friedman as an ideal fit doesn’t mean that he will see the Sox — or, for that matter, any organization outside of the Dodgers — as a desirable landing spot. Friedman has spent five years overseeing an organization with an elite big league roster (106 wins this year), an elite group of young talent (their farm system was ranked No. 5 by Baseball America in August, and the presence of star-caliber talent in Walker Buehler, Gavin Lux, and Will Smith who are not yet arbitration-eligible), financial flexibility, massive resources, and what many describe as a great front-office culture and working environment.

In other words, there’s a lot to suggest that Friedman will remain in Los Angeles. The Dodgers have made it clear they’d like for Friedman to remain. One industry estimate of the likelihood of his departure was roughly 10 percent; another was “nearly zero.”

Yet as the Red Sox contemplate their own candidate list, “nearly zero” is not the same as “absolute zero.” And the fact that Friedman could be on the open market — at a time when the Red Sox have noted the difficulty of getting permission to talk to general managers and presidents of baseball operations who are under contract elsewhere — represents the type of scenario to prolong a search and make for a very long due diligence period in which the effort to interview candidates isn’t rushed.

History is somewhat instructive. After the 2002 season, the Red Sox — who had spent the year with Mike Port as interim GM after the Henry/Werner ownership group fired Dan Duquette after assuming control of the team in March — conducted a series of interviews in October. But during that time, the team was waiting to see if the A’s would grant them permission to talk to Billy Beane.

That finally happened in mid-November, and the sides rapidly reached an agreement, before Beane changed his mind because of a desire to keep his family on the West Coast. Once he did so, the Red Sox reassessed their search and decided to promote assistant GM Theo Epstein.

Now, Friedman is held in the same industry-wide regard as was Beane after 2002 — only with the added intrigue that he is weeks away from free agency. In other words, there is a key piece of due diligence for the Red Sox to conduct that could frame their search for Dombrowski’s replacement.

Curt Schilling reportedly is interested in interviewing to be Red Sox pitching coach

Nicole Yang

Retired ace Curt Schilling is interested in interviewing for the Red Sox’ pitching coach job and/or the Phillies’ managerial opening, according to USA Today.

Schilling, who played for both teams, has no formal MLB coaching experience.

Boston is looking to replace pitching coach Dana LeVangie, who was reassigned to the pro scouting department this week, while Philadelphia fired skipper Gabe Kapler, another former Sox player, on Thursday.

After retiring in 2009, Schilling has drawn ire for his failed video game venture and his outspoken political views. ESPN named him an analyst for “Sunday Night Baseball” in 2014, but he was suspended in 2015 and fired in 2016 after controversial posts on social media.

Schilling has remained active on Twitter, often to vocalize his support for President Donald Trump. In August, Trump endorsed Schilling’s potential Congressional run in Arizona.

When the Red Sox honored a group of players from the 2004 World Series team in 2018, Schilling was not invited. A team executive said the decision was not done “out of spite.” Schilling was included in the group that visited Fenway Park in April for the 2018 World Series ring ceremony.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox-MLB free agency: starter market loaded & Boston needs 5th starter, but it has about \$83.1M owed to other 4 starters

Christopher Smith

The Boston Red Sox want their 2020 payroll to be under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold. But Boston heads into this offseason without a No. 5 starter and its other four starting pitchers counting for approximately \$83.1 million toward the Competitive Balance Tax threshold.

The club’s 2020 payroll already is at approximately \$218 million before any offseason additions.

The money tied up in Boston’s injury-prone starting rotation is the most challenging issue the new boss of baseball operations will face.

Rick Porcello, who fought through his worst major league season in 2019, is headed to free agency. Boston must find a replacement.

This offseason’s free agent class is loaded with talent, including 2019 AL Cy Young candidate Gerrit Cole and NL Cy Young candidate Hyun-Jin Ryu.

Jake Odorizzi, Madison Bumgarner, Zack Wheeler, Cole Hamels and Dallas Keuchel also are eligible for free agency. Stephen Strasburg can opt out of his remaining four years, \$100 million.

But the Red Sox are unlikely to pursue any of the market’s top starters unless they free up significant payroll like they did in August 2012, when they unloaded the contracts for Josh Beckett, Carl Crawford and Adrian Gonzalez in a mega-trade with the Dodgers.

That trade was a once-in-a-generation gift from Los Angeles. Don’t expect it to happen a second time.

David Price’s average annual value of \$31 million, Chris Sale’s \$25.60 million and Nathan Eovaldi’s \$17 million count toward the Red Sox’s 2020 Competitive Balance Tax threshold. Eduardo Rodriguez, meanwhile, is projected to earn \$9.5 million in salary arbitration, per MLBTradeRumors.com’s projections.

Sale’s five-year, \$145-million extension and Eovaldi’s four-year, \$68-million contract will put major restrictions on whoever ownership hires to lead the baseball operations department.

The Red Sox want to keep their payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Threshold in 2020 but it’s only a goal but not a mandate.

The Sox have five starting pitchers — Bryan Mata, Jay Groome, Thad Ward, Tanner Houck and Noah Song — in their top-10 organizational prospect rankings. But none are ready to win a spot in the 2020 Opening Day starting rotation.

Boston needs to pursue a durable fifth starter.

Porcello struggled at times during his five-year Red Sox career, but he made 33 starts three times and 32 starts once. He hurled 200 innings twice, including 223 innings during his 2016 AL Cy Young season.

Signing or acquiring a starter who can pitch 200 innings is incredibly important considering uncertainty surrounding Sale, Eovaldi and Price.

Sale's elbow injury limited him to 147 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings during 2019. Shoulder inflammation limited him to 158 innings in 2018, including just 29 innings during the second half.

Price, who will turn 35 during the 2020 season, tossed just 107 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings in 2019 because of left elbow tendinitis and a cyst on his wrist.

Eovaldi — who has a lengthy injury history, including two Tommy John procedures — hurled only 67 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings during 2019 because of an arthroscopic procedure to remove loose bodies in his elbow.

Boston might attempt to re-sign Porcello to a cheaper contract after not extending him a qualifying offer. This offseason's one-year qualifying offer will be set at 17.8 million, The Athletic's Jayson Stark reported.

Porcello almost certainly would accept the qualifying offer if Boston offered one. That makes it unlikely the Sox would take the chance in order to secure draft-pick compensation if he were to decline and sign elsewhere.

Wade Miley, who pitched for the Red Sox in 2015 (4.46 ERA, 32 starts), is an affordable option for Boston.

The durable lefty, who will turn 33 in November, posted a 3.98 ERA in 33 starts for the Astros during 2019 on a one-year, \$4.5-million contract.

Pending free agent Tanner Roark has made more than 30 starts each of his five seasons primarily used as a starting pitcher. He posted a 4.35 ERA in 31 starts for the Reds and Athletics during 2019.

The Red Sox should at least speak with free agent-to-be Rich Hill about his interest in returning.

The Milton, Mass., native turns 40 next March and he has durability issues. But he has remained a dominant starter when he is healthy. He recorded a 2.45 ERA in 13 starts for the Dodgers this year.

He has a 2.91 ERA in 87 outings (86 starts) since the final month of the 2015 regular season, which he spent with the Red Sox. Boston signed him out of the independent Atlantic League. He went 2-1 with a 1.55 ERA in four starts that September.

Hill has expressed a desire to re-sign with the Dodgers, Andy McCullough of The Athletic reported. But he has family ties to this area and a history with the Red Sox organization. He also appeared in 40 relief outings for Boston from 2010-12.

The non-tender deadline is Dec. 2. The free agent market will expand. More starting pitching candidates could emerge.

Boston obviously could explore the trade market as a way to dump salary and add a starter simultaneously.

The Red Sox using an opener every fifth day seems high unlikely considering the unknown health of Sale, Eovaldi and Price.

Boston Red Sox likely to cut payroll at non-tender deadline with \$70.1M projected for salary arbitration players

Christopher Smith

Twelve Red Sox players eligible for salary arbitration in 2020 are projected to receive a combined \$70.1 million, according to calculations by MLBTradeRumors.com.

Dec. 2 marks the deadline for teams to tender contracts to arbitration and pre-arbitration players. Players who are not tendered a contract immediately become free agents.

The Red Sox already have discussed non-tendering at least one player as a way to cut payroll.

The club's 2020 payroll already is at approximately \$218 million before any offseason additions. Principal owner John Henry and team president Sam Kennedy said keeping the Red Sox's 2020 payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold is a goal but not a mandate.

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 want to keep their payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Threshold in 2020 but it's only a goal but not a mandate.

Who on this list might the Red Sox non-tender?

Gorkys Hernandez and Chris Owings (projected \$4 million combined) might not even make the Dec. 2 non-tender deadline. They could be designated for assignment in early November when teams are required to add to the 40-man roster any Rule-5 eligible players who they want to protect.

Hernandez went 7-for-49 (.143) in 20 games for Boston during September. Owings went 7-for-45 (.156).

Sandy Leon (projected \$2.8 million) and Steven Wright (projected \$1.5 million) seem like the most obvious non-tender candidates.

Wright has appeared in just 31 games (nine starts) the past three years because of major knee surgery (same procedure Dustin Pedroia underwent) and an 80-game PED suspension in 2019. Wright also received a 15-game suspension for domestic violence in 2018.

Leon, meanwhile, has batted only .199 with a .259 on-base percentage, .312 slugging percentage and .571 OPS in 239 outings (780 plate appearances) the past three seasons.

Many reporters use catcher ERA — a vastly overrated statistic — to make their case for Leon's value to the pitching staff. But Leon's 2019 catcher ERA (4.88) was even slightly higher than Christian Vazquez's (4.86).

Jackie Bradley Jr. (projected \$11 million) might be another non-tender candidate. But he still has one year of team control remaining. The Red Sox instead likely will tender him a contract and look to trade him this offseason.

The Red Sox also might need to keep Bradley if they were to trade Mookie Betts.

Arbitration contracts aren't fully guaranteed until a player makes the Opening Day roster.

The Red Sox, therefore, could tender a contract to a player and still release him before Opening Day if they are unable to complete a trade.

Curt Schilling interested in Boston Red Sox pitching coach opening, Phillies managerial position

Christopher Smith

Curt Schilling, who helped the Boston Red Sox win their first World Series title in 86 years, has interest in returning to the organization as the pitching coach.

That doesn't mean the Red Sox have any interest in him.

USA Today's Bob Nightengale reported Schilling would like to interview for the open Phillies managerial position as well as the open Red Sox pitching coach job.

Schilling — who won World Series titles with Boston in 2004 and '07 — confirmed his interest on Twitter.

The Phillies fired manager Gabe Kapler earlier this week. The Red Sox reassigned pitching coach Dana LeVangie to the professional scouting department.

It seems impossible an MLB team would hire Schilling because of his controversial social media posts.

ESPN fired Schilling as a baseball analyst in 2016, two days after he posted an anti-transgender meme on his Facebook page.

*** *ESPN.com***

Red Sox's Raquel Ferreira breaks through baseball's glass ceiling

John Florio and Ouisie Shapiro

We're at Fenway Park, sitting with Raquel Ferreira in the team's executive suite adjacent to the press box. The season just ended, so the stands are empty and the field, still emerald green, is empty except for the tarps covering the mound and the plate.

Just a month ago, the Boston Red Sox made history when they named Ferreira, a senior vice president, part of the team's interim leadership group, the "gang of four" that took the reins from exiting general manager Dave Dombrowski. (Ferreira's three cohorts are assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran and Zack Scott.) In her newly expanded role, Ferreira became, at least for now, the highest-ranking woman in baseball operations. The move not only is a capstone for 20 years of service to the team but, more importantly, put a woman in charge of a major league club's front office during the regular season.

According to the principal owner of the Red Sox, John Henry, putting Ferreira, 48, on the leadership team was a no-brainer. "I met with Raquel for a lengthy discussion of her career and experiences at the Red Sox," he told *The Undeclared* in an email. "The longer we spoke the more apparent it was to me that if changes were going to occur, she had earned a leadership role. She was already overseeing minor and major league operations logistically among other duties.

"So [it] was an easy decision," he wrote. "She is a star who represents everything our organization values."

Chicago Cubs general manager Theo Epstein held the general manager job in Boston from 2002 to 2011 and was Ferreira's boss during those years. He promoted her twice, having recognized her ability to bond with players.

“She’s the most empathetic person there,” he told *The Undefeated*. “She puts herself in the shoes of the players and understands what they must be feeling, where they came from, how foreign the organization must seem to them, what it’s like to be away from home for the first time. Not just players from the Dominican [Republic], but we draft 17- and 18-year-old high school kids [from the United States]. All of them have a significant adjustment period. Raquel does a great job of understanding that.”

Ben Cherington, the vice president of baseball operations for the Toronto Blue Jays, succeeded Epstein as general manager of the Red Sox from 2011 to 2015. “Players are human beings and they need to feel a sense of connection, and they need to feel valued,” he said. “Raquel played a huge role in humanizing what we were trying to do in helping them grow as baseball players and as people.”

It’s no coincidence that Ferreira interacts so well with young players and foreign-born players, easing their entry into the U.S. and, ultimately, the city of Boston. She herself is the child of immigrants. Her grandparents and her parents emigrated from the Cape Verde islands, a former Portuguese colony off the coast of West Africa. Their struggles, more than anything else, have shaped the way Ferreira sees the world.

She shares how her father, Gammy, and her mother, Lotty, arrived in the U.S. when they were still in their teens. They met in their adopted country and raised a family in Cumberland, Rhode Island. At one point, they were both working in factories — Gammy in a manufacturing plant, Lotty in a textile mill — taking opposite shifts so that one of them was always home with Raquel; her brother, David; and sisters, Eunice and Melinda. Her mother, a skilled dressmaker who eventually opened her own shop, installed herself between two English-speaking co-workers to learn the language.

“Oh, my God, I have all the respect in the world for my parents. My whole family was about sacrificing for their kids and their grandkids,” Ferreira says. “One summer, when I was 16 or 17, I worked at my dad’s plant. I would sit there and take these perfume caps off of this conveyor belt. They had gold rims, and you had to make sure the rims went all the way around. If there was a break in it, you threw it to the side. Then you put the caps in a box and waited for somebody to come and inspect them. I was like, ‘I am not doing this.’ But I told myself, I have to, my dad works here. So I went in there every day. I showed up early and wanted my boxes to be the best boxes that were packed because I had to represent my dad.”

It seems as if Ferreira’s work ethic has never waned. We mention that Epstein spoke about how she was the last to leave the office, that he would wrap up at 10 at night and she’d still be at her desk.

She shrugs it off, noting that she was no early bird. She’s also quick to praise her husband, Erik Stamps, with whom she is raising their 11-year-old daughter, Gabriella. Stamps, she says, doesn’t get enough credit for putting up with the extended hours she spends with her “other family.”

Epstein promoted her twice, first to director of minor league administration and then to director of minor league operations. She tells us about one of her first interactions with him after Henry purchased the team. The staff figured there would be changes, and many in the front office were on edge.

“He told me, ‘There’s going to be an org [organizational] chart floating around and you’re going to see your name on it,’ ” she tells us, her eyes wide. “In my head I’m thinking thank God, I still have a job. So he shows me the chart, and my title reads ‘Director, Minor League Administration.’ I looked at it and said, ‘Are you sure?’

“I thought people were going to be mad,” she says. “I thought they’d say, ‘Wait a minute, she went from administrative assistant to a director?’ I was more concerned about what others thought than what I was capable of doing.

“He said, ‘If anybody’s mad, you tell them to come talk to me.’

“I said, two or three times, ‘Are you sure? Are you sure?’

“And he said, ‘Absolutely.’ ”

Epstein shared a similar story, wrapping up his version with this observation: “As the years went on, she became the backbone of all of player development. And then, over time, she became part of the fabric of all of baseball operations. And so, her perspective, her knowledge and her wisdom were desired in every decision.”

Ferreira started with the Red Sox in 1999, seven years after graduating from the University of Rhode Island with a bachelor’s degree in communications. Since then, she has had more titles than she can remember: administrative assistant, director of minor league administration, director of minor league operations, senior director of minor league operations, vice president of baseball administration, vice president of major and minor league operations, senior vice president of major and minor league operations.

Kent Qualls, now with the Baltimore Orioles, joined the Red Sox in 1995, and four years later, as director of player development, he was the person responsible for bringing Ferreira to the team. Looking to replace a retiring staff member who’d booked travel, he whittled down a slew of applicants to a handful of interviews.

Ferreira had no previous baseball experience. But she was a fan of the sport, having grown up watching the Triple-A Pawtucket Red Sox, and her brother David in little league.

“It was a position where you had to interact with a lot of different people: players, coaches, families, front office,” Qualls said. “She immediately embraced it and picked up the job very quickly. It was obvious that she was going to do well in baseball.”

Still, he said, it would’ve been nearly impossible to predict her rise through the ranks. “I knew that, if she wanted to, she could stay and work in baseball for a long time and would have a bright future. But she’s taken it to another level, obviously. It’s just been remarkable.”

Still, no woman has ever been a general manager, and even the highest-ranking women in baseball still say they’re fighting to belong. According to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, in 2018, 29 of baseball’s 30 clubs had at least one woman serving in a vice president or senior vice president role. But aside from Ferreira, only Jean Afterman, assistant general manager of the New York Yankees, is in baseball operations.

Kim Ng, a senior vice president with Major League Baseball, came close to breaking the barrier. In 2005, Ng, then an assistant general manager for the Los Angeles Dodgers, stepped in as co-interim general manager during the winter meetings and interviewed for the permanent position. She has since met with several other teams, most recently the New York Mets, but has yet to win the job.

“Women in this industry, what few of us there are, really need to prove ourselves on a daily basis,” Ng said. “Every day you get tested — sometimes in very explicit ways, sometimes in more covert ways — whether it’s someone on the staff you’re familiar with or someone you don’t know very well. They automatically think you are on the administrative side, that you’re not a decision-maker, that you are, quote, support. Those are the things that face us on a daily basis.”

Ferreira’s career in the front office has brought her four World Series rings. But gender is still an issue, she acknowledges.

“It’s extremely frustrating because you’re always fighting stereotypes,” she says. “People use different words to describe you. If a man comes into a room and he’s excited about something, and really fighting for something, people will say, ‘Wow, he is so passionate about this topic.’ If I do the same, it’s, ‘Raquel, stop being so emotional.’

“You are constantly in a room with just men, and you are forever reminded of it. Even if you try and pretend to be one of the boys, or you think that you are, you will never be one of them. And it’s not bad, but you’re just not going to be and you shouldn’t try to be.

“A scout or somebody else will start talking, and they’ll curse, and they’ll say, ‘Sorry, Raquel.’ So I’ll say, ‘Don’t f—ing worry about it.’ Stop saying you’re sorry, because you saying you’re sorry just draws attention to the fact that I’m the only woman in the room, which is what I don’t want.”

Her gender never held her back, she says, but then she mentions how grateful she was when Epstein dropped the word “administrative” from her title. (The word reappeared on her business card when she became vice president of baseball administration but was dropped again when she advanced to vice president of major and minor league operations.)

“I just wanted to take on more responsibility instead of seeing ‘administrative’ next to my name,” she says. “Because with that comes a certain connotation, especially in baseball, which is hard to kick once you have it. Even after I was a director for five or six years, people would say, ‘Oh, Raquel’s the secretary of whatever.’ I’d be thinking, are you serious? You know what everybody else’s title is, but because I’m a woman, [you’ve forgotten mine].”

Ng believes the sport is ready for its first female general manager — and is rooting for Ferreira. “The criteria that [a general manager be a former player] no longer exists. The criteria that you were a scout or a coach no longer exists. All it’s going to require is an opportunity. That’s all it takes. ... Raquel wholeheartedly has my support.”

Epstein could also envision Ferreira as general manager. “It’s going to take someone with vision to make it happen. ... The job of GM these days is so big that you’re not doing it yourself. You’re managing people, building the right kind of system, developing consensus, seeing the big picture, making calm, rational decisions and moving forward together under a common vision. Raquel is outstanding at doing all those things.”

Cherington agrees with Epstein. “The big part of the job is building the team around you, complementing yourself with the strength and skills that you don’t have.”

Ferreira is generally credited with Xander Bogaerts signing a six-year, \$120 million extension with the team and is now one of the main players in the team’s efforts to retain 2018 American League MVP Mookie Betts.

“I first met Raquel in Fort Myers at the old complex of ours,” Bogaerts said. “I had to go and get meal money from her on every Friday. Also, she was the person I would go by to get all of my reimbursements from travel, visa, etc. She was really helpful in helping me get familiar with everyone in the organization and teaching me how to do stuff the right way with the organization. ... She was like my mom away from home. She’s a very straightforward person, very honest. She cares for us to do stuff the right way and make it to the majors. ... And she builds a trustworthy relationship from when we’re young boys until we become grown men. She is one of a kind.”

In September, Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy told The Boston Globe, “I’ll tell you flat-out: [The Xander Bogaerts] deal would not have gotten done without Raquel, her leadership, her relationship with Xander, the trust and candor that they had with each other.”

A team source said the Red Sox aren’t planning to name a new general manager soon, in part because they may consider people who are still involved in the postseason.

Could it be Ferreira? She says she’d be open to the position but “wouldn’t embrace it.” She believes there are still aspects of the job she needs to master.

Of course, she had similar trepidation when Epstein took out that organizational chart nearly 20 years ago.

* **WEEI.com**

The Sunday Baseball Column: The Gleyber Torres lesson

Rob Bradford

The year was 2013 and the Red Sox had a decision to make.

They knew a good chunk of the \$2.9 million they had to spend in the international free-agent market was going to go to one player. The top of Boston's list had two names: Rafael Devers and Gleyber Torres.

"We really liked Gleyber," remembered Red Sox assistant general manager Eddie Romero.

But the Sox liked Devers just a little bit better.

The Red Sox prioritized their current third baseman, giving the then-16-year-old a \$1.5 million signing bonus. The commitment to Devers, couple with the aggressiveness of the Cubs toward Torres, took the Sox out of the mix for reeling in both of the star teenagers with Chicago swooping in with a \$1.7 million deal for the current Yankee second baseman.

"We wanted to go after one big fish that year and we sided with Devers. But on our collective pref list that year Torres was right behind him if not one later. That was a really good year overall but of the guys we were still seeing, Gleyber was the one we were the most aggressive with," Romero said. "We just wanted to sign one and pick a couple of other guys and spread it out a little bit."

After a season of excellence from Devers along with Torres' latest breakout performance Saturday night (HR, 3 hits, 5 RBI) it's easy to resurface an important reminder when trying to figure out how the Red Sox might discover sustained excellence. Dominating the international free agent market has never been more important.

It would be easy to start with remembering the two best players on the 2019 Red Sox, Devers and Xander Bogaerts, were both signed as international free agents. Or that \$7,500 of the money the Red Sox spread out in that 2013 signing period after Devers' commitment was used to reel in a young pitcher from Venezuela named Darwinzon Hernandez. But the real reminder comes with simply taking a glance at the best teams in baseball.

Juan Soto. Victor Robles. Gary Sanchez. Luis Severino. Torres. Jose Altuve. Yordan Alvarez. Marcell Ozuna.

Finding these sort of young superstars have become the lifeblood of more and more successful big league clubs, a reality the Red Sox know all too well. And that's why the way teams are going about approaching this market is evolving at a rapid pace. It's a reality an organization like the Sox — one which is dying for high-end, controllable young talent — are embracing like never before.

"Teams have become more and more aggressive in scouting and allocating resources in terms of technology but also personnel. That has become obviously apparent," Romero noted. "You go to a showcase now whether it's in Columbia or the Dominican and you see larger presences of scouts from every team. All teams are involved. All teams are recognizing the value in the international market. And it's been interesting to see how technology has been utilized also. That's one of the other changes. There has been a lot more attention than ever before.

"Teams are sending four or five scouts including U.S.-based personnel. A lot of teams have done video for a while now but now they're setting up the same camera and Trackman units and cameras that are being

used in Stateside showcases and workouts. Those are all becoming prevalent in the international circuit as well.”

The Red Sox now have two people — Todd Claus and Rolando Pino — running their international scouting department, with Chris Becerra serving as a special assistant to the department. The organization has beefed up their number of crosscheckers while adding scouts in the Dominican Republic and Bahamas. The Sox’ Dominican facility has also seen significant renovations.

Then there are the analytics.

Along with the heavy dose of in-person scouting, teams are viewing these 16-year-olds from more angles than ever. Red Sox pitching Brayan Bello is a great case-study for how this whole thing is working.

“He was a guy who using basic Trackman stuff kind of popped out for us,” said Romero of the 20-year-old Bello, who excelled in the second half of his season with Single-A Greenville in 2019 despite being one of the South Atlantic League’s youngest players. “He had really good numbers on his breaking ball, not only in spin, but the shape of it. Really good extension numbers. Not being the biggest guy physically probably wouldn’t have been somebody who stood out immediately to us. But he was somebody who had a projectable frame and a fastball that could tick up a couple of notches. We were immediately like, ‘Let’s get a couple of looks at this guy.’ And after that, we ended up signing him. ... Five years ago it may have been where this guy wasn’t touching low 90’s yet. He’s not 6-foot-2. Maybe we just see this guy again instead of being really aggressive and having him stay at our Academy.”

There is another reason for the added attention: Patience for the payoff is no longer a prerequisite.

“More than anything is how the importance of knowing how young these guys can make an impact. It was always like, ‘Oh, it takes time. They have to get used to the culture.’ These guys now are so much more aware of what they need to do to get to the big leagues,” Romero pointed out. “I mean Juan Soto does interviews fully in English. To see a young kid in the International market to go about his business the way he does, and to show the emotion he does, and then to do postgame interviews in English, he’s a tremendous role model for all young guys who are coming up. I know (former Red Sox Latin America crosschecker) Johnny DiPuglia signed him and he’s like, ‘Eddie, this guy is special.’ Then you see guys like Gleyber Torres on the biggest stage performing so young. There are these guys out there who don’t need the traditional cycle to develop. These guys are coming along much more quickly than they were 10 years ago.

“That’s why your infrastructure has to be so strong. I’m sure the infrastructure when a Jose Altuve came up was different. That’s why we have to adjust to keep up with them and give them everything they need and no what they can handle. That’s just as important. Rafael Devers and Bogaerts, both of those guys, they were able to handle a lot early on and that’s something that has helped them adjust to the big league level quickly in terms of knowing how to approach and establishing routines. Those things are key. I don’t know for sure about Juan Soto, but I’m sure he came up the same way as well.

“Once they start talking to their individual coaches about process and routine and not just results, that’s when you start getting the feeling that, you know what, these guys are really maturing from the work standpoint. That’s when you can start being a little more aggressive. They start understanding how they’re being attacked. What they need to do on a daily basis to prepare themselves for that day’s game. It’s crazy. You see it. It’s like when you have a child and he’s growing up in high school and all of a sudden he’s taking care of his business. You see the way they grow. The special ones like these guys they just do it earlier than most.”

Torres gave the Astros a taste of that Saturday night.

DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH HELP FROM JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA

One international market that sometimes can offer a team like the Red Sox (who might be looking for rotation help) immediate help doesn't figure to be a factor this time around.

As we previously pointed out in this space, there is a desire for players playing in countries like Japan and South Korea to prioritize participating for their respective countries in the upcoming 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. There have also been some contract situations that limit the likelihood of playing in the majors with star Japanese pitchers Takahiro Norimoto and Kodai Senga seemingly locked into staying with their teams.

South Korean lefty Kim Kwang-Hyun is a possibility to finally find his way to the United States, having failed to reach an agreement with the Padres in 2014 after San Diego paid \$2 million for his posting rights. But the 30-year-old Kim doesn't figure to be anything more than a pretty solid middle reliever at this point.

The most intriguing Pacific Rim options are actually the imports from the United States. Former Dodger Zach Neal had a standout first half with Seibu, while former Cubs first-rounder Pierce Johnson dominated out of the bullpen for Hanshin. A former Oriole farmhand Joely Rodriguez also left an impression with his relief work for Chunichi. And in terms of starting options, Josh Lindblom, a 32-year-old former second-rounder, went 20-3 with a 2.50 ERA in 30 starts in South Korea.

RED SOX PROSPECTS OPENING EYES FOR PEORIA

Corey Wimberly has more experience than most with the minor-leaguers from the Red Sox organization who currently find themselves in the Arizona Fall League. But what the manager of the Single-A Salem Red Sox has witnessed over the last month while coaching for the Peoria Javelinas has left quite an impression. Here are Wimberly's observations regarding five AFL participants with ties to the Sox:

Tanner Houck: "He's really come out here and taken a step forward. He's been a guy who is really working on developing his offspeed more and I think he has made huge strides. ... They've polished up some of his off-speed pitches and he's been outstanding. He's made huge strides. I'm proud of him. ... He's throwing his changeup and his slider more. Most of it was learning how to use it and not giving up on it. Being able to adjust pitch to pitch. He's understanding each pitch serves a purpose even if it's not a strike, what it does to a hitter and how it makes him vulnerable. He's learned that and picked it up well."

Jarren Duran: "He's going to compete no matter what. He's going to find a way. For me, it was just getting comfortable in Portland where guys probably have better command. We worked on some slight mechanical changes in his swing but nothing drastic. It has seemed to pay off. I'm excited for him. He's in a good spot right now ... Ever since I've seen this kid step on a professional field, because I've had him the last two years, he takes every at-bat personal. It's a battle between him and the pitcher. It's serious every time he gets in the box. I don't think him being overconfident or under-confident had anything to do with his struggles. I think he went through a little phase. This was his first full season so he played a lot of baseball this year. I'm excited for where he's at. It seems he hasn't missed a beat."

Bryan Mata: "Mata is opening up some eyes. We've seen a tick up in his velocity. He's been up to 99 (mph) with an electric arm over and over. From my first year of coaching, I've seen him go from 88-91 and now to see him at 99 ... Just sitting sinker at 99 is unbelievable. He's opened some eyes out here for sure. ... I think just being in the bullpen, coming in throwing one inning at a time he has really let it go and hasn't had to pace himself. It's fun to watch him come out of the pen right now."

Yoan Aybar: "He's a lefty who is throwing upper-90's. He's been 95 to 99, showing some electric stuff. He's making great strides. His slider is electric as well. And this is his first full season pitching, as well. He's made some huge strides." (Aybar made the switch from position player to pitcher in 2018.)

Marcus Wilson: "He's just been on a tear ever since the second half of the season in Salem. He's opened up some eyes. He's been a guy if you just take off that first half of the season he's a guy who for sure has big-league ability. It's exciting to watch guys like him be successful." (Wilson was acquired from the Diamondbacks in exchange for Blake Swihart.)

C.J. Chatham: "C.J. has been working on a position change, working at second base quite a bit just trying to get him more versatility. Obviously second base in the big leagues for us, we don't know how Pedey is going to be next year.... He's done well at the position. It's just getting used to all the different turns, especially out of shifts and stuff like that which are coming into play. So we've been working with footwork around the bases a lot. He will be able to transfer into that position pretty easy. I just feel like if you're a shortstop at this level you can kind of play everywhere. It's just about getting comfortable."

BRIAN BANNISTER'S NEW EXISTENCE

While most of the focus on the Red Sox' coaching changes last week centered on the reassigning of pitching coach Dana LeVangie, it was also interesting to note Bannister's new role. The former assistant pitching coach will no longer be around the big-league club, instead focusing on the Red Sox minor leaguers. This is a change that 38-year-old is welcoming with open arms.

Bannister spent 210 days in a hotel between February and September while splitting time between the major league team and the minor-league development side. He requested the return to the role he participated in from 2015-16 in large part because of family considerations. This way he will spend 20 days on the road but then 10 days a month with his wife and two children on the West Coast.

"With my kids getting older (7 and 11 years old) I was looking for a way to continue to have an impact on the Red Sox arms coming up while still being able to be part of my kids' lives back in California," Bannister said.

THE PATERNITY PROBLEM

Daniel Hudson missing Game 1 of the National League Championship Series to be there for the birth of his son opened up some familiar conversation.

Or, as fellow Nationals reliever Sean Doolittle summed up the situation, "I think if your reaction to someone having a baby is anything other than, 'Congratulations, I hope everybody's healthy,' you're an (expletive)."

Point taken.

When it comes to these sort of things two Red Sox-related instances jump out. The first came in 2007 when Eric Hinske's wife was giving birth. Because Major League Baseball had no allowance to fill a roster spot for those leaving for such family reasons the Sox leaned on bereavement for the reason of Hinske's absence. It was true that the infielder had a death in the family, although that had come a month earlier with the passing of his grandmother. With MLB not quite yet up to speed on the importance of parenting, this was about finding a way to be there for the birth of his child.

And in 2011 Josh Beckett found himself in a similar situation as Hudson. The pitcher was slated to serve as the Red Sox starter if his team had to play a play-in game against Tampa Bay with the Sox having few options in what would be Game 163. But Beckett made it clear to all involved the team shouldn't count on him for such an outing with his wife slated to give birth to the couple's first child the day after the regular season.

This is what he told WEEI.com the following spring training regarding the decision:

"I got torn apart," Beckett said. "Everybody just destroyed me because I cared more about what was going on with my wife than I did that game. I almost think people want me to think the other way around, and I think that's absolutely absurd. To ask a man to care more about a major league baseball game -- and I know it's a major league baseball game -- than he does about what's going on with his wife, who's due any minute. And I never want her to be an excuse. Yeah, I was distracted, but that's not her problem. That's on me. I would never trade that."

He added, "If somebody reads this or somebody thinks I'm wrong, they can go [expletive] themselves. That's the truth. That's what's important to me. I'm not saying baseball is not important. I could differentiate on the day I was pitching. I went out there and I was still as competitive. I'm not saying my mind was only focused on just this pitch because I did have other things on my mind. Whether you want to understand that or not, I don't care because I know who I am and what I'm trying to do."

SOME OTHER THOUGHTS ...

- When it comes to the postseason let's be clear: Starting pitching is driving the bus. Through 46 playoff games so far this season the starting pitchers' ERA is down more than a run from 2018 (3.90-2.89) having thrown an average of eight more pitches per game. Hitters are managing just a .208 batting average against compared to the .220 clip a year ago. There have been 11 games where starters have gone at least seven innings, coming away with wins in seven of them. Last year that number finished at nine starts, six of which resulted in wins for the starter.)Conversely, OPS-against for relievers in the postseason has taken a significant jump, going from .661 to .771.)

- It's not the postseason without Justin Verlander commenting on the baseball. This is what he said Saturday night: I haven't personally noticed it. I haven't really talked to guys about it, especially because when all those reports came back, it was right before Game 5, and I didn't want the hitters to be talking about that; they had other things on their mind. ... I think MLB just came out with a report they haven't changed, right? I guess we've got to believe that, right? I don't know. Who knows? ... Like I said, I said this before, I mean, I think that the players should be involved if the ball is going to change. Who knows if they are or are not. But at the end of the day we are all using the same baseball when we step on the field. As long as it's an even playing field at this point in the game, that's all we can ask for."

What people might forget is that Verlander wasn't the only pitcher who went on-the-record during previous postseasons regarding the possibility that Major League Baseball had altered the equipment. Heath Hembree caught the attention of MLB officials last postseason with these comments to WEEI.com: "As soon as the regular season ended and they gave us the postseason balls, and we had regular season balls and postseason balls mixed in, they were completely different. ... We play 162 games, spring training, so we're dealing with these balls every day so we know them really well," Hembree said. "As soon as they try and switch something up you're able to tell. They feel smaller in the hand and they are definitely harder. It just feels tighter. It doesn't mess up your pitching, just don't let them barrel it."

- Verlander also offered this gem when talking about the state of baseball: "You look at the course of an inning, we're almost like playing an ADD version of baseball right now, where it's these huge elation moments, Home run, home run, yeah, yeah. And then you're just kind of sitting there waiting for the next moment with a bunch of strikeouts in between. If you're not a fan of strikeouts, then what are you watching? .. You think of getting a guy on first base, the next guy hitting ball to right field, that guy going from first to third, that's a great moment to cheer. The next guy hitting a sac fly, that's another good moment to cheer. ... There's so many different ways to love this baseball game that I think have kind of fallen by the wayside a little bit, and rightfully so."

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

MLB Notebook: Possible Mookie Betts destinations; experienced managers suddenly back in vogue again

Sean McAdam

There are another few weeks still before the offseason is upon us in earnest, and with it, the trade chatter that fills the Hot Stove League.

But you can be reasonably certain that somewhere in the Fenway Park offices, there is someone tasked with coming up with a list of teams who might be a logical trading partner with the Sox for Mookie Betts — should it get to that point.

Publicly at least, the Red Sox continue to say that their first priority remains getting a contract extension done with Betts, making clear that they see him as a franchise-type player whom they wish to finish his career in a Sox uniform. And undoubtedly, there will be continued dialogue with Betts and his representatives. (Chairman Tom Werner revealed last month that he and Sam Kennedy had talked extensively with the group in the final month of the season).

But that doesn't change the fact that Betts has indicated, while he doesn't preclude remaining in Boston, that he intends to go to free agency and see what the market has to offer.

That represents a big risk for the Red Sox, who could lose Betts to another team with a draft pick as their only consolation.

And should the Sox listen on Betts, it's likely the offers they get in return will be far less than what some fans are expecting. Under no circumstances will the Sox get the kind of franchise-altering return for Betts.

As talented as he is — and there can be no debate that he qualifies as one of the handful of best overall players in the game — his trade value is greatly limited by the fact that he has but one year of control left. Moreover, that one year is likely to cost a team, at minimum \$27 million.

Those two factors alone thin out the pool of potential landing spots for Betts. Any interested team must be good enough to believe that a player the caliber of Betts could be the difference-maker, and be willing to pay him the \$27 million. (Based on last year's salaries, a \$27.7 million salary — the exact amount estimated by MLBTradeRumors.com's reliable arbitration-predictor — Betts would be about the 11th highest-paid player in the game at that amount).

Of course, we're eliminating some teams from this exercise. For instance, the Red Sox aren't about to trade Betts to the Yankees, even if it's only for a season.

1. Atlanta Braves: This is logical enough, but perhaps not for the reasons you might think. A number of people believe that Atlanta is Betts's first choice in free agency, mostly due to the fact that it's the MLB team closest to his Tennessee home. But Braves' ownership hasn't shown the willingness to hand out the sort of deal that Betts will surely command, preferring to instead focus on developing its own core of players while augmenting them with shorter-term free agent and more affordable complementary players. But tellingly, the Braves were willing to splurge on a one-year deal for Josh Donaldson last year (\$23 million); the gambit paid off as Donaldson led the team in home runs and helped lead them to a division title. Another factor: the Braves certainly fit as the proverbial "one-player-away" model, having won the NL East in each of the last two seasons before losing the NLDS. And finally, the Braves have a surplus of pitching prospects, the kind which might entice the Sox.

2. Texas Rangers: The Rangers are moving across the street to a new ballpark in 2020 and teams often like to make a big splash when doing so. What better opportunity to demonstrate ownership's willingness to spend than to obtain one of the game's best players? It can be argued that the Rangers need starting pitching far more than another bat, but given the paucity of free-agent options (after Gerrit Cole, there's a sizeable drop-off) the Rangers could take another approach in their efforts to improve.

3. New York Mets: GM Brodie Van Wagenen has already demonstrated a penchant for bold moves (typified by last winter's blockbuster that landed the Mets Robinson Cano and Edwin Diaz) and isn't afraid to defy convention (while reportedly looking to move starting pitching, he acquired Marcus Stroman). It didn't concern Van Wagenen that Stroman can be a free agent after 2020, and it won't bother him that Betts can be, too. And in the New York market, where stars matter and stealing some thunder from the Yankees is always welcome, Betts would generate interest and sell tickets.

4. Milwaukee Brewers: The Brewers have had a good run in recent years, but like most small-market teams, their window to compete is a relatively short one and with Christian Yelich free after 2022 and Lorenzo Cain aging, the time is now. Owner Mark Attanasio has never been afraid to make a big move, especially one that doesn't include long-term commitments. Obtaining Betts would require shifting Ryan Braun to first and perhaps moving on from Mike Moustakas, but getting a player the caliber of Betts would be worth any roster shuffle.

5. Los Angeles Dodgers. The Dodgers don't lack for talent, especially in the outfield, with Cody Bellinger, Joc Pederson, Enrique Hernandez, Chris Taylor and A.J. Pollock. But Betts is better than all of them except Bellinger and perhaps a player of his stature is what the Dodgers need to get over the hump, and surely, they could turn around and move one of their displaced outfielders to address other needs. Andrew Friedman doesn't like handcuffing himself with long-term deals, but this isn't one of those and surely the Dodgers can afford the one-year commitment. Finally, Los Angeles has a ton of young players who would interest the Sox and whose loss wouldn't cripple the talented Dodgers.

Perhaps it's merely cyclical, or a matter of timing, but with eight managerial openings, experienced and more traditional managers are suddenly back in vogue.

Buck Showalter, Joe Girardi, Dusty Baker and John Farrell have either been interviewed for some of the open positions or are rumored to be getting interviews.

That's something of a surprise, since the trend in the game has been to hire younger, more analytically driven managers, often without any managerial experience whatsoever.

In some cases, those hiring practices have worked out just fine: Alex Cora's Red Sox won 108 games and a World Series in his first season; Aaron Boone has won 100 or more games in his first two seasons in the Yankee dugout and qualified for the postseason both times; Rocco Baldelli won 101 games and the AL Central title with the Twins in his inaugural season.

The thinking was that younger managers would be better able to relate to players and, presumably, more versed in — or, at the very least, more accepting of — analytics and input from the front office regarding lineup construction, pitching decisions, etc. Not incidentally, hiring younger managerial candidates without much on their resumes meant they could be paid a fraction of the salaries typically commanded by bigger "name" candidates.

While Showalter, Farrell and Girardi all earned upwards of \$3 million in their previous jobs, newcomers to the dugout are often paid less than \$1 million annually.

But while there are success stories, others haven't fared as well. Gabe Kapler seemed overmatched in two seasons with the Phillies; Brad Ausmus lasted only one season in Anaheim; and the Padres fell apart in the second half under Andy Green.

In a number of these cases, the owners stepped in and did the firing. Phillies managing partner John Middleton fired Kapler over the objections of team president of baseball operations Andy MacPhail and GM Matt Klentak. San Diego owner Ron Fowler did the same with Green and mercurial Angels owner Arte Moreno wasn't on the same page with his GM Billy Eppler, who hired Ausmus.

Most of these owners are tired of losing. The Padres haven't been to the postseason since 2006 while the Angels have been there just once since 2009. And some believe the quickest path back to October would be entrusting their teams to a more experienced hand.

If money has been the major sticking point in the decision to pass by more experienced managers, then shame on the owners. The same owners who think nothing of paying role players or middle relievers \$3-4

million per year are somehow reluctant to spend the same for the decision-makers in charge of their rosters, and ultimately, their team's fate?

Some random thoughts as the postseason continues:

The sight of the Nationals and the Cardinals squaring off in the National League Championship Series — having both pulled off comebacks and upsets in their respective Division Series — is a reminder that their paths to October mirrored what the Red Sox thought would happen to their season. Like the Sox, both the Nationals and Cardinals began poorly and couldn't get out their own way for a while. The Nats were 19-31 through their first 50 games (for comparison's sake, the Sox were 27-23) while the Cards were 44-45 after their first game following the All-Star break. The Sox, too, though they were going to survive a slugging first few months and eventually have a hot streak that would vault them back into contention. As late as the end of August, "We know what we're capable of" continued to be the unofficial mantra of the 2019 Sox. But the good run that served as a course correction for the Nationals and Cardinals — both now a few wins away from a trip to the World Series — never materialized for the Sox.

Is it really 2019? Sometimes, it's hard to tell. Former Marlins president David Samson, notorious for his insensitive comments and whose chief accomplishment in life is being the son-in-law of former Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria, questioned Daniel Hudson's commitment to the Nationals. Hudson had the temerity to miss Game 1 of the NLCS to be with his wife, who was enduring a difficult pregnancy and gave birth on the day of the game. Is this something still worthy of debate?

The ninth and 10th inning of Game 5 of the NLDS at Dodger Stadium was pretty much The Full Joe Kelly Experience, was it not? A one-two-three ninth, followed in short order by a 10th inning in which Kelly walked the leadoff man, then yielded a double and following an intentional walk, a back-breaking, game-winning, season-ending grand slam from Howie Kendrick. That's the forever enigmatic Kelly in a nutshell: unhittable one inning, and totally unreliable the next.

Is it possible that, some 15 years ago, the Baseball Gods whispered to Dave Roberts: "OK, you can have this stolen base. But in return, you will never again enjoy that type of good fortune in October. Deal?" Because sometimes, it sure looks like it. Even if, as some have suggested, Roberts is following orders from the front office and doesn't have complete autonomy on in-game strategy, he sure has lost some tough ones in the postseason.

*** *The Athletic***

After the best season of his career, Brandon Workman's value is climbing

Chad Jennings

He finished the year tied for the sixth-best WAR (2.1) among all relievers in baseball, a tick above Aroldis Chapman (2.0) and Ken Giles (1.8). He posted a 10-1 record, the second-highest win total for a reliever. His 1.88 ERA ranked sixth among relievers with at least 50 innings pitched and his .123 opponents' batting average was the lowest in baseball.

He also led the Red Sox with 16 saves.

It might seem strange that the Red Sox bullpen boasted one of the best relievers in baseball this past year, but Brandon Workman's numbers bear that out.

Workman posted career bests in every major statistical category with his 1.88 ERA, 1.03 WHIP, 104 strikeouts and 73 relief appearances. The only season in which he threw more innings than the 71 1/3 he posted this year came in 2014, when he made 15 starts before he'd transitioned to a full-time reliever.

Despite registering six of Boston's 31 blown saves (Matt Barnes led the team with eight), Workman was Boston's most reliable reliever. For that, he's likely to see a decent raise this winter in arbitration.

Like Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts, the 31-year-old Workman will enter his final season before free agency, though he insists he's not focused much on the future.

"That's too far down the road to even think about," he said. "(I'm) just trying to stay the course and do things consistently and not overthink anything that's going on."

Salary arbitration can be a complicated process, but MLB Trade Rumors projects Workman will make \$3.4 million in 2020, nearly three times his \$1.15 million 2019 salary. Even at that relatively modest salary, Workman would be the highest-paid reliever in the Red Sox bullpen as it's currently constituted. (Barnes, who's only in his second year of arbitration eligibility, is projected to make \$3 million, up from \$1.6 million.)

Boston went into this past season relying on Barnes and Workman to handle the high-leverage spots at the back end of games. Barnes did his part for a while in the first half but soon became less effective after routinely facing 3-4-5 hitters in the lineup. Workman was more consistently successful, but it became clear the bullpen as a whole could have benefitted from a more veteran reliever with closing experience.

Red Sox ownership has declared its goal of reducing the team's payroll for 2020, so it's unlikely the team will be shelling out \$10 million to \$15 million per year on a multi-year deal for a reliever. But unlike last offseason, there does seem to be an understanding the bullpen could benefit from outside help.

"It's no secret that we're going to hopefully upgrade our pitching — both by hopefully having pitchers who are healthy," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said last month, "and we're going to hopefully supplement our relief pitching."

Many of the same faces are likely to return to Boston's bullpen, including Darwinzon Hernandez, who manager Alex Cora said will take on full-time reliever duties rather than return to a starting role. Josh Taylor, Ryan Brasier, Heath Hembree and Marcus Walden are all likely to be in the mix as well.

Workman plans to use the same offseason program he worked with last winter, one that set him up for the most successful season of his career. But there's no telling if he can replicate his career-best numbers. And even if he does, the Red Sox have already realized that he and Barnes can't do it alone, and adding another quality reliever (or two) to the bullpen could make him (and everyone else) even better.

If he delivers one more great year, the soon-to-be free agent could find himself an attractive commodity on the open market. And if the Red Sox stick to their mandate to reduce payroll, he could be seeking those big free-agent dollars somewhere other than in Boston.