

## ***The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, October 15, 2019***

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

**Drafted by the Yankees in 2008, Gerrit Cole has always wondered about the career path he didn't take**

Peter Abraham

The 2008 Yankees were a team in transition, Joe Girardi having replaced Joe Torre as manager and young players such as Robinson Cano and Joba Chamberlain becoming more prominent.

They got off to a slow start and finished third in the American League East, a disappointment considering what was an abundance of talent.

But June 7 was a day that lifted the spirits of the entire organization.

Gerrit Cole, a 17-year-old high school star from Southern California, fell to the Yankees in the amateur draft and they selected him with the 28th pick.

Cole had a 97-mile-per-hour fastball, a sharp slider, and a bit of arrogance the scouts all loved.

It was a nice story, too. The kid's father, Mark, grew up in Syracuse rooting for the Yankees before he moved to California and passed that affinity along to his son.

It didn't take long before Yankees beat writers — I was one of them at the time — discovered Cole attended one of the 2001 World Series games in Arizona to see his favorite team and was photographed waving a sign that read, "Yankees Fan Today, Tomorrow, Forever."

When Cole spoke to reporters on a conference call after the draft, it sounded like he was ready to sign.

"Hopefully it'll go quite smoothly," he said.

Scott Boras was Cole's agent — or "advisor" as the NCAA so ridiculously likes to label it — and had cut deals with the Yankees to sign first-round picks Andrew Brackman in 2007 and Ian Kennedy in 2006. Cole was next in line.

But it never happened. UCLA coach John Savage persuaded Cole to accept a scholarship from the Bruins. Every offer the Yankees made was turned aside, right up until the deadline.

The Cole family was well off financially and couldn't be swayed. The teams who had passed on Cole because they weren't sure he would sign were right. General manager Brian Cashman was angry at the time, but the Yankees regrouped by signing CC Sabathia and A.J. Burnett in the offseason and won the World Series a year later.

They have not returned to the Series since and now Cole stands in their way of going back. He faces the Yankees in Game 3 of the American League Championship Series on Tuesday afternoon.

Cole acknowledges he has considered the path not taken.

"I don't want to be dishonest and tell you that it didn't cross my mind," he said Monday. "Obviously I got drafted by them, so I thought about it then. And all the rumors going around, it's kind of hard to control what you hear. But, as of late, it's just been not a thought at all."

Cole played three seasons for UCLA and was the first overall pick of the 2011 draft by the Pirates. This time he signed and started 127 games for the Pirates — with mixed results — before being traded to the Astros in 2018.

Cole has become the ace the Yankees thought they had drafted. He was 20-5 with a 2.50 earned run average in the regular season before allowing one run over 15½ innings in two starts against the Tampa Bay Rays in the Division Series.

Counting the postseason, Cole is 18-0 with a 1.66 ERA in his last 24 games with the Astros winning all but two of those games. He has a 0.79 WHIP and 13.9 strikeouts per nine innings in those games. Opponents have hit .125.

Completely unfair, basically.

Yankees manager Aaron Boone looks at Cole and sees an uncommon ability to maintain high-end stuff into the seventh or eighth inning.

“He’s in a groove,” Boone said. “Just in complete control and command of pitches. I would say the biggest thing — and always the separator for guys, especially guys with elite stuff like he has — is command. And he’s commanding the ball as well as he ever has.”

Throw in late-afternoon shadows at Yankee Stadium and Cole will be tough to hit. He also hasn’t faced the Yankees since April 9 when he allowed three runs over seven innings.

“We expect to have success. We know it’s going to be tough,” Boone said.

It can be done. The Red Sox scored five runs off Cole in six innings at Fenway Park in Game 2 of the ALCS last season. Jackie Bradley Jr. had the big hit, a three-run double with two outs in the third inning that gave the Sox a 5-4 lead.

Cole attended seven games at Yankee Stadium as a fan, rooting for Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera. But he hasn’t pitched there since May 18, 2014, with the Pirates.

Postseason in the Bronx is quite another environment.

“I’ve heard my teammates’ recollection of the atmosphere here. So it just sounds like what a great stage and electric atmosphere and a great place to play some exciting baseball,” Cole said.

The Yankees tried to trade for Cole in 2018 before the Pirates took Houston’s offer. Cole will become a free agent for the first time once the World Series ends and the Yankees, who need rotation help, could be chasing him again.

The Angels have been considered a logical choice for Cole, who is from Orange County and now lives a short distance away from Angel Stadium in Santa Ana. The Rangers are moving into a new park and have money to spend. It’s easy to match Cole with any team, he’s that good.

“That’s all for later,” said Cole, the Yankees fan who passed up the chance to play for the Yankees.

### **Andrew Friedman expects to finalize deal to stay with Dodgers**

Katie McNerney

Andrew Friedman said Monday that he is finalizing a contract to return to the Los Angeles Dodgers, taking a possible candidate off the board in the Red Sox’ search for a new leader of the baseball operations department.

Friedman was considered one of the most logical possibilities for the job, which has been vacant since Dave Dombrowski was fired in September as president of baseball operations. Friedman, 42, made a name for himself in Tampa Bay and has spent the past five years in Los Angeles, helping to lead the Dodgers to two straight World Series before getting bounced out of the playoffs by the Nationals early this year.

Despite the success, Friedman had not signed a contract extension and there was speculation he may become a free agent.

Friedman ended that speculation on Monday when he told the Los Angeles Times that his contract would be finalized “in the next couple of days,” ahead of its expiration at the end of October.

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

### **Red Sox GM search: Friedman not a candidate as he expects new Dodgers contract in coming days**

Christopher Smith

Andrew Friedman is not a candidate to lead the Boston Red Sox’s baseball operations department.

Friedman, Dodgers president of baseball operations, told reporters Monday he expects to finalize a new contract with Los Angeles in the next few days.

Friedman would have been a perfect fit for the Red Sox. He not only led the Dodgers to back-to-back World Series series appearances in 2017 and ’18, but he also has built an elite farm system.

Baseball America ranks Los Angeles’ farm system fifth out of 30 organizations.

Friedman also turned around the Rays organization. He helped Tampa Bay go from a perennial last-place team to 2008 AL champions.

The Red Sox fired Dave Dombrowski last month. Ownership prefers to replace him with an experienced external candidate.

## **\* *The Portland Press Herald***

### **Potential roster moves could help, hurt Red Sox**

Tom Caron, *The Portland Press Herald*

Some random baseball thoughts while waiting for the American League Championship Series to resume Tuesday. ...

The Astros-Yankees series is already shaping up to be a classic. After being pounded into submission by New York in Game 1, Houston countered with an epic 3-2 win in 11 innings Sunday night. “There was never going to be 0-2,” MVP candidate Alex Bregman said after the win.

It was after midnight in the East when Carlos Correa’s home run ended the game, making it exactly one year to the day since the Red Sox won Game 2 against the Astros to even the 2018 ALCS. Houston never won another game, losing all three at home. Now the Yankees are facing a similar situation. ...

Many fans want the Red Sox to trade Gold Glove center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., the MVP of the 2018 American League Championship Series, because of his inconsistent offense. AP Photo/Louis DeLuca

Jackie Bradley Jr. won the MVP of that ALCS in 2018. Now many fans want him traded away. Bradley has become one of the most polarizing players in town – some people love him, some can't stand the inconsistencies of his offense. Just keep this in mind – if the Sox wind up moving Mookie Betts this winter, they're probably going to need help defensively in the outfield next season. And there isn't a better defensive outfielder in the game.

A lot of people continue to wonder how the Red Sox even could consider trading Betts, one of the best players in the game. It has nothing to do with whether they want him here. Who wouldn't want him? It's a question of whether he's willing to sign a contract here. If not, the team owes it to itself to see what it can get for him.

Then it needs to weigh the value of that trade vs. the value of having one more year of Betts, knowing he may leave for nothing.

That value of one season of Betts might be worth more than a trade. Or it might not.

Keep an eye on the Braves when you're weighing that option. Atlanta might be willing to offer an enticing package after its stunning loss to the Cardinals in the NLDS. The Braves trailed 10-0 before batting in the decisive Game 5.

The Braves have the kind of major and minor league pitching depth that could make them a perfect trade partner with Boston. Losing Betts would hurt the offense, but the Red Sox had plenty of offense last year and won only 84 games. They need better pitching on the big league roster – and more depth in the upper levels of their farm system – to get the team back on track in 2020 and years to come. ...

J.D. Martinez has five days after the World Series to announce if he's opting out of his contract with Boston. His agent, Scott Boras, consistently has said he believes there are always contracts available for elite hitters like Martinez. It seems pretty clear he believes he could get more than the \$62.5 million due Martinez over the next three years.

Red Sox fans seem to almost want Martinez gone next year, hoping that will increase the chances of signing Betts. Just remember: In the last two seasons, not a single major league hitter has driven in more runs than Martinez. That's a lot of production to lose. ...

It was no surprise the Red Sox announced changes in the coaching staff last week. Three coaches were taken off the staff, with two reassigned as scouts. It's never fair when underpaid, hard-working coaches become the fall guys for underperforming players. But here we are. The same coaches who helped this team win a franchise-record 108 games and a championship a year ago are now the reason the Sox missed the postseason.

The replacement for Dana LeVangie might want to rent when he chooses a place to live in Boston. He will be the team's eighth pitching coach in 11 years. The last pitching coach to last three full seasons in Boston was John Farrell. ...

Pitchers and catchers report in 120 days. Stay warm out there.

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

### **Building depth has Yankees worlds ahead of Red Sox**

Chris Mason

With James Paxton struggling to find his command in Game 2 of the ALCS, Aaron Boone strode to the mound and gave him an early third inning hook.

New York's biggest offseason addition had only allowed one run, but Boone had seen enough.

"Just felt like we were covered as far as today with getting some length and having guys rested," the Yankees manager said afterward. "Obviously going into an off day tomorrow we're just going to be aggressive. I thought as far as pitching-wise we did a good job of holding them down."

Could you imagine Alex Cora doing the same in 2019?

Of course not. A third inning hook for the Red Sox was the equivalent of a white flag. Cora would have needed to cross his fingers and white knuckle it, hoping his starter would figure it out.

That's not the case for New York. Brian Cashman has built a better roster.

After Paxton was pulled, seven Yankees pitchers allowed one run over the next eight innings, before J.A. Happ finally took the loss in the bottom of the 11th. Handing the ball to a nasty arm like Chad Green in the third inning isn't the same as giving it to Hector Velazquez.

Depth, depth, depth.

That's why the Yankees have soared past the Red Sox right now.

With a seemingly blank checkbook from John Henry, Dave Dombrowski brought a World Series to Boston, but in not cultivating depth, the Sox now are what they are: A third place team.

It's one thing to spend almost half a million dollars on David Price, Chris Sale, and Nathan Eovaldi. It's another to do it while grooming reinforcements, should they falter. And they did in 2019. All three big money starters wound up shelved for some period of time and the Sox torpedoed accordingly.

But it's baseball. Players get hurt. That didn't matter for the Yankees. Though their beleaguered lineup gets most of the injury attention, their arms weren't exactly healthy either.

Luis Severino missed almost the entire season, James Paxton and CC Sabathia both spent time on the injured list, and the Yankees still ran away with the AL East and won 103 games. They used Green as an opener 15 times and went 11-4; they're really, really deep.

That let-everybody-pitch strategy has worked so well the Yanks will probably turn to their bullpen on Wednesday in Game 4.

"I think one thing I've talked about a lot is we have a lot of confidence in our 12 and 13 pitchers," Boone said. "So it may look a little different than some other teams that are a little more traditional, although we can be traditional with obviously running out (Masahiro Tanaka), James (Paxton) and (Luis Severino).

"But there's a lot of ways to skin a cat, you know?" Boone continued. "And the bottom line is so far in the postseason through five games we've pitched really well, including (Game 2) where we lost. In the end you've got to get 27 outs. (In Game 2) we needed more than 27 outs, and we feel like we have a pitching staff capable of doing that at a high level. I think so far we've shown that and expect us to continue."

The Yankees do have a roster of quality arms, not just a few, and that's why they're hosting a game this afternoon in the Bronx while the Red Sox watch from home.

**\* *RedSox.com***

Could Red Sox land a big-name GM?

Ian Browne

Questions regarding general manager candidates, starting pitchers, Jackie Bradley Jr.'s future and more are answered in the latest Inbox.

Why is it taking so long to hear about any possible GM candidates, other than just speculation? And why are they making so many personnel changes before hiring a GM to assess the situation?

The operative phrase on Jersey Street these days is “due diligence.” This is too big a decision to rush into. There might have been extenuating circumstances due to the fact Andrew Friedman had an expiring contract with the Dodgers. However, that situation has been resolved, with Friedman announcing he will finalize a new contract with L.A. in the coming days. Now that Friedman is off the table, the Sox could get really bold and ask the Cubs for permission to speak to Theo Epstein or the Athletics for a chance to talk to Billy Beane. Or maybe they’d make a run at someone like Chaim Bloom, who has obviously done a great job with the Rays.

As for making personnel changes without a GM, the organization can’t just stand still while it waits for a new leader. There is a lot of planning that takes place for the upcoming season, and you might as well take action. The Red Sox trust the four decision makers who are running the front office in the interim.

With the injury histories of Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi, not to mention Rick Porcello's pending free agency, why did manager Alex Cora already make it clear Darwinson Hernandez will be a bullpen arm in 2020 season? I understand he was lights out in that role but Red Sox need starting rotation help.

At this point, the Red Sox feel Hernandez, 22, can be an elite, high-impact reliever. They don’t feel he’s ready to be a difference-maker in the starting rotation. It’s really that simple.

Thoughts on adding pitching help? If J.D. Martinez opts out, can they add some help to the rotation?

Either way, the Sox need to beef up the rotation. You have the likelihood of Porcello departing via free agency, so that is one spot you need to fill. Also, it was proved last year that the club didn’t have enough depth in the rotation in the event of injuries. I’d look for them to make every effort to address that.

Does JBJ have any trade value or does a non-tender make more sense?

A trade always makes more sense than a non-tender because you can actually get something for him that way. This is hardly the first time Bradley, 29, has been on the market. The Red Sox will see if there’s an offer that makes sense, otherwise you could see him back in center field in 2020. The only way I see him getting non-tendered is if they can’t find a trade partner, and they are still hovering above the \$208-million mark that they need to get below on team payroll.

What’s the most salary/years you’d offer Mookie Betts to sign an extension this offseason? If Mookie refuses, where do you trade him and for who?

I’d go 10 years at \$300 million with the hope you can back-load the contract so it doesn’t have too much of an impact on payroll the next couple of seasons. If he turns down the offer, I keep him with the Red Sox and try to win with him in 2020. If it becomes clear by July that the team isn’t a true World Series contender, I’d offer him up in a trade at that point.

What is the probability of Curt Schilling actually becoming the pitching coach?

I’d say it’s unlikely for a couple of reasons. The first is that Schilling and Red Sox owner John Henry do not have a good relationship. The second is that I believe the Sox are really looking for an analytics guru to lead the pitching department.

Schilling knows the mindset of being a great pitcher, and he knows mechanics as well or better than anyone. But a lot of analytics have come into the game since Schilling left 12 years ago, and I think the Red Sox will look for a candidate who is well-versed on the recent explosion of science in baseball.

## **\* *WEET.com***

### **Andrew Friedman takes name out of Red Sox mix**

Rob Bradford

It was an interesting idea. It's also not going to happen.

Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman became another well-established name that won't be in the mix for the Red Sox general manager/president of baseball operations job, telling the Los Angeles media that he is close to re-signing with the Dodgers. Friedman just completed the final year of a five-year deal.

A major league source suggested the idea of Friedman's candidacy had diminished for the Red Sox well before Monday's announcement.

The 42-year-old represented a high-end option to replace Dave Dombrowski, having built the Dodgers into one of the game's model franchises since taking over in 2014. The creativity Friedman exhibited while running the Rays -- starting as a 28-year-old general manager in 2015 -- to managing the big-market Dodgers painted the kind of picture the Red Sox would seem to be craving.

Principal owner John Henry did say on the final weekend of the regular season the organization would be looking for a candidate with previous experience as a general manager, citing the numerous challenges in forming the Red Sox' future.

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein also eliminated his name from consideration, while Massachusetts native Mike Hazen (Diamondbacks) recently agreed to a contract extension, with the Twins' Derek Falvey -- also a local product -- reportedly on the verge of extending his tenure in Minnesota.

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

### **Andrew Friedman announces he's staying with Dodgers, taking biggest name off board for Red Sox**

John Tomase

The Red Sox can cross the biggest name off their GM search before he was ever even an option.

Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman announced on Monday that he will finalize a deal to stay in L.A. "in the next couple of days." Friedman had technically become a free agent after the Dodgers' season ending in shocking fashion against the Nationals last week.

His five-year, \$35 million contract expired, but the Dodgers moved quickly to lock up the 43-year-old, who has built consistent winners in both Tampa and Los Angeles and was considered the most intriguing candidate for the job of running the Red Sox, which opened up when the team parted ways with Dave Dombrowski in September.

With Friedman off the board and the Twins reportedly nearing a deal to extend Lynn native Derek Falvey as their chief baseball officer, the Red Sox have seen the candidate pool for their opening diminish before their search even starts. Before the season ended, the Diamondbacks took another name out of play by extending GM Mike Hazen, a Massachusetts native and former Red Sox executive. Cubs president of

baseball operations Theo Epstein also declared his commitment to Chicago, though his contractual status hasn't changed.

One name that hasn't been taken off the board is Chaim Bloom, Tampa's VP of baseball operations. The 36-year-old Yale graduate oversees Tampa's baseball operations alongside Erik Neander, and the two guided the Rays to a wild card before taking the Astros to Game 5 of the ALDS.

Widely considered one of the most innovative franchises in the game, the Rays have reached 90 wins in two straight seasons despite fielding one of the lowest payrolls in baseball.

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

### **Red Sox' search for new top baseball executive continues to hit roadblocks**

Sean McAdam

The pattern has been established: as soon as one door opens to a potential solution to the Red Sox' president of baseball operations vacancy, it soon closes.

The collapse of the Chicago Cubs in the final weeks of the season led to rampant speculation that perhaps Theo Epstein would return to Boston, eight years after he left, to restore the franchise to glory. That lasted only a day or so before Epstein publicly announced that he had work still to do in Chicago and would not be going anywhere.

Then, the sudden and shocking elimination of the Los Angeles Dodgers from the playoffs created a groundswell for Dodgers executive Andrew Friedman as the perfect hire for the Red Sox. Friedman had won with a small budget in Tampa Bay, with a big budget in Los Angeles, and more to the point, had overseen a Dodgers organization that has enjoyed sustained success at the major league level (five straight division titles under Friedman) and a Top Five minor league system.

The fact that Friedman was also nearing the end of his contract and untethered to the Dodgers past this month served to only heighten the interest. Here was a proven executive, seemingly with all the necessary skills, soon to be a free agent.

It made perfect sense.

Until Monday, when it didn't.

Friedman told reporters in Los Angeles that a contract extension with the Dodgers would be finalized in a matter of days, effectively taking him off the market and closing one more door for the Red Sox.

“At this point,” said one baseball source, “it wouldn't surprise me if they went ‘status quo’.”

By that, the source meant that the Sox could continue to be run indefinitely by the Gang of Four — Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira — that has been put in charge by ownership in the immediate September firing of Dave Dombrowski.

One of the benefits of moving on from Dombrowski when they did was to signal to the rest of the industry that the Sox would have an opening. Doing so with three weeks remaining in the season would presumably give time to interested executives working elsewhere to arrange for permission to speak to the Red Sox about their opening.

Instead, the response throughout the industry has been decidedly underwhelming.



No one has been interviewed for the position and obtaining permission from other organizations to interview executives currently under contract has proven to be a daunting task. It's believed that, through back channels, the Sox have sought to sound out prospective candidates.

"I think," said the source, "(the Red Sox) are finding that maybe this (job) doesn't have the allure they thought it did."

A number of factors are likely contributing to that perception.

The last two top baseball executives — former GM Ben Cherington and Dombrowski — were each effectively pushed out of their roles less than two years after winning a title. Cherington, who won a World Series in October 2013, was nudged aside by the hiring of Dombrowski in August of 2015, some 22 months later.

And Dombrowski's reign as president of baseball operations lasted all of 11 months after the Red Sox won 108 regular season games and captured the World Series last October.

That sense of instability could scare off some otherwise interested candidates, who might reasonably ask of themselves: "Why I try to get out my job as a No. 1 here and go somewhere where I might only last a few seasons?"

Also, any new executive jumping to the Red Sox would be joining the organization at a time when there's the expectation that payroll will be cut by more than \$30 million for 2020.

Within weeks of accepting the job, the new executive might be tasked with trading off the popular Mookie Betts, a year away from free agency, while seeking a replacement for J.D. Martinez, who has the option of opting out of his contract early next month.

In the meantime, a new executive would be inheriting a team saddled with long-term contractual obligations to an aging starting rotation.

Chris Sale has not yet begun the five-year, \$145-million extension he agreed to last March and Nathan Eovaldi, who missed half of last season with injuries and was mostly ineffective the rest of the year, still has three years and \$57 million remaining. David Price, who had a 7.88 ERA in the second half and underwent a surgical procedure on his left wrist in the final week of the regular season, still has three years and \$96 million remaining.

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

### **Our survey shines a light on where Red Sox GM job is viewed in baseball landscape**

Chad Jennings

The best jobs are the biggest jobs.

Granted, this is all perception, but perception matters for jobs like these. Some are primed for success, some are doomed to failure, some are years-long headaches, and some are too unstable to trust. Is ownership predictable? Is payroll high enough to win? Is it sustainable? Is there talent in place, or in the pipeline, or the cupboard empty?

In an effort to determine just how appealing the Red Sox general manager's job actually is, we turned to The Athletic's baseball writers across the country, asking them to list the best and worst GM jobs in baseball. According to that group, these are the top five head of baseball operations jobs in the game today.

Dodgers

Yankees  
Astros  
Cardinals  
Braves/Red Sox (tie)

It's worth noting that some National League writers seemed to rank the Cubs higher, while some west coast writers seemed to more fully appreciate the San Diego Padres. The San Francisco Giants, too, got a few top-five mentions, while one writer kept Milwaukee out of his top five, but noted that the Brewers deserve honorable mention for a situation that offers a lack of pressure but with an owner who still wants to win.

Overwhelmingly, though, the high-spending Los Angeles Dodgers and New York Yankees ranked at the top of our writers' lists. Those teams have money to spend, good young talent in place, and recent signs of stability within their front offices. Of course, there's also little sign that those jobs are up for grabs.

Houston also has a committed owner, a good roster and legitimate talent waiting in the wings. The Cardinals offer patience (and existing talent), while the Braves have elite young players and a prestigious foundation.

The vacant Red Sox job didn't land in every writer's top five – and it made one writer's bottom five – but it's still seen as enviable enough to make our overall top-five list. There's good talent in place with a large payroll, but also an ownership group looking to cut spending and a penchant for making changes.

Most of the worst should come as no surprise.

Again, this is all perception — not so long ago, Houston would have appeared to be one of the worst general manager situations in baseball, now it's almost universally seen as one of the best. So, if asked our advice, which GM jobs would The Athletic writers least recommend? Starting from the bottom of the list:

30. Marlins  
29. Tigers  
26. Orioles/Mets/Pirates (tie)  
24. White Sox/Rockies (tie)  
22. Royals/Athletics (tie)

There was less separation when our writers were asked about the worst situations. The Miami Marlins and Detroit Tigers, though, got more universal bottom-of-the-barrel support than any others. Not much separated those two, but there was a significant gap beyond them. The Marlins landing at the very bottom was predictable based on the uncertain direction of ownership, the limited payroll in place, and the lack of existing talent. The Tigers, in recent years, haven't been much better.

Beyond, that, though, there's some eye-of-the-beholder happening.

The Baltimore Orioles seem to be starting from scratch, the New York Mets have a disjointed ownership situation, and the Pittsburgh Pirates are perhaps a little of both. There's surely more hope for the immediate future of the Chicago White Sox and Colorado Rockies, but not enough to make a potential general manager feel comfortable.

The most interesting inclusion is wild-card Oakland, a team that's somehow sustained success despite perennially low payroll and an albatross of a stadium situation. For similar reasons, the still-alive Tampa Bay Rays also got one last-place vote.

**Where does the Red Sox GM search stand now that Andrew Friedman's off the market?**

Chad Jennings

It's been five weeks since the Red Sox fired president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, and their ongoing search for a replacement has happened almost entirely in silence, with little public disclosure about which way they're leaning or whether they're close to making a hire.

Even while in limbo, though, the team continues to make key staffing decisions, and those currently in power are charting a very clear direction for the franchise. There's very little hard data about where things stand, but here are a few thoughts and observations.

The most obvious target is off the board

Typing Andrew Friedman's name into Google at roughly 2 p.m. on Monday yielded several suggestions to complete the search. The top three were:

- Andrew Friedman press conference
- Andrew Friedman actor
- Andrew Friedman red sox

Friedman is the Dodgers' president of baseball operations, and he'd just finished his end-of-season press conference a few hours earlier, so the top suggestion made obvious sense. And the Internet Movie Database is helpful in discovering a guy with the same name plays a recurring character on "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia."

But "Andrew Friedman Red Sox" seems purely the result of rampant speculation and analysis that he'd be the perfect candidate to replace Dombrowski. If only he wanted the job, which, it seems, he doesn't. At his Monday press conference, Friedman announced he expects to sign a new Dodgers contract in the coming days.

Why so much attention on Friedman if he's ultimately staying on the West Coast? For starters, Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner have gone after the biggest front office fish in the past, starting way back in 2002 when they tried to coax Billy Beane away from Oakland. In some ways, it continued with their addition of Dombrowski four years ago.

With Dombrowski fired, Henry and Werner have expressed the desire for a proven executive who can continue the franchise's modernization, establish an improved prospect pipeline, trim payroll and keep winning. It's a massive task, one for which very few candidates have a track record. Those who do are likely under contract and perhaps unwilling or unable to accept a Red Sox offer. But for a fleeting moment, Friedman was a free agent. He built the Rays basically from scratch, then made the Dodgers a perennial powerhouse (albeit without a title). He was a perfect fit, but he's not the answer.

The Red Sox are making themselves more attractive

In explaining his desire for an outside hire, Henry said this late last month:

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

Why, then, are the Red Sox letting those second-choice internal options make massive decisions like promoting a new vice president of scouting, keeping Tony La Russa in an advisory role, firing an assistant hitting coach, reassigning a popular pitching coach and declaring the manager safe no matter what?

For one thing, these moves seem to signal the not-up-for-debate direction in which the Red Sox are heading. More analytical. Building from within. Tapping into all available information and resources. They clearly appreciate, for example, the way former pitching coach Dana LeVangie sees the game and the work he puts in, but they want those talents directed toward pro scouting as a piece of the puzzle, not overseeing

daily game planning. Whoever's in charge of baseball operations next year, the Red Sox are committed to evolving.

But here's a thought: Perhaps these updates also make the team more attractive to a prospective general manager or president of baseball ops. The Red Sox will want someone forward-thinking, and these changes show that the Red Sox are already moving in that direction. That could be a selling point to the right candidate.

Don't rule out the internal candidates

Go back to that Henry quote from a few weeks ago. The last line seems instructive:

“So, we are starting the searching looking outward.”

Starting the search.

Again, there aren't many front office executives who fit the preferred profile of the Red Sox. One was Friedman. Another was, arguably, Diamondbacks general manager Mike Hazen, who cut his teeth in the Red Sox organization and still has friends in the front office. But he signed an extension not long after Dombrowski was fired. Henry also noted last month that the Red Sox recognize it's rare for a sitting general manager to change jobs. It just doesn't happen very often. Contracts and various rules get in the way. So, even as the Red Sox said they were “starting” their search by looking at outside options, they seemed to be acknowledging that their top choices might not be realistically available.

In the meantime, they're letting the collection of Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira do what they feel they need to.

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

It's one thing to say that. Putting those words into action is something else, and the Red Sox have done that with their decisions since Dombrowski's firing. As Henry and Werner continue to put their faith in the Big Four — clearly, we need a better name for them — it's worth wondering if ownership might grow more and more confident in their decision-making. If those top targets remain unavailable, it seems entirely possible the initial outward search could shift toward an internal conclusion. Don't rule out the in-house candidates just yet.

An assumption that might be wrong

If the Red Sox do choose someone internally, one name seems almost always mentioned as the front-runner: Romero. He fits the mold of a next-in-line general manager. He's been a massively important international scout — Rafael Devers, for example — and as an assistant general manager the past four years, he's been an out-front voice for the organization. He's familiar and heavily involved in decision-making, and he seems like a natural successor.

But maybe he shouldn't be the presumptive favorite.

Especially as the Red Sox transition toward a more analytical model, Scott and O'Halloran could be equally viable — and in some ways more attractive — choices for the job. (Ferreira seems mostly uninterested in the head decision-making responsibility.)

Scott has been with the Red Sox for 16 years, and with Alex Cora as manager, Scott's voice and influence seem to have grown stronger. He's been assistant general manager only one year, but he spent two more years as a vice president and five years with the title of Major League operations director. He is the face of the Red Sox analytics department, and that seems especially meaningful going forward.

O'Halloran, meanwhile, has had an assistant general manager title since 2012, and he joined the Red Sox in 2002, so he was part of that initial front office assembled by Henry and Werner. He's more behind the

scenes than Romero, who's been more visible during batting practice and things like that, but O'Halloran has been vital to the team's contract negotiations, which is another crucial bit of their decision-making going forward.

If the Red Sox do go internal, don't necessarily rule out those two as options for the big chair.