

## ***The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, October 16, 2019***

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

**Chris Sale injury: Boston Red Sox say ace is ‘doing very well’ but they have no update on his rehab process since season ended**

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox ace Chris Sale, who missed the final six and a half weeks of the 2019 season because of left elbow inflammation, continues to take a slow approach to his rehab.

MassLive.com on Tuesday emailed Eddie Romero, one of the Red Sox’s four interim GMs, to ask whether Sale had visited Dr. James Andrews for his follow-up appointment; and if so, if the ace had started throwing.

“We don’t have an update since the press conference (Sept. 30),” Romero replied. “Chris is doing very well in Ft Myers.”

The Red Sox held their 2019 season wrap-up press conference Sept. 30, exactly six weeks after Sale’s initial visit with Dr. Andrews. At that point, the Red Sox had not scheduled a follow-up appointment and Sale hadn’t begun throwing, but co-interim GM Brian O’Halloran said he expected the lefty to be healthy entering spring training 2020.

Sale initially visited Dr. Andrews and underwent a PRP injection Aug. 19. A press release from the Red Sox on that day said Dr. Andrews “recommended a period of shutdown from throwing” and Sale would “be re-evaluated in six weeks by Dr. Andrews.”

Today (Oct. 15) marks eight weeks and one day since Sale’s initial visit.

O’Halloran already acknowledged the Red Sox were taking Sale’s rehab slow.

“There was a range on when that (throwing) could begin and we’re taking that a little bit slower than we initially anticipated just to be certain,” O’Halloran said Sept. 30. “Once he was totally shut down, we took a close look at his schedule and our medical staff recommended that we take it slowly just to give him as much time as possible to heal before he started throwing. But that will happen sometime in the near future.”

Sale went 6-11 with a 4.40 ERA, 1.09 WHIP and 3.39 FIP in 25 starts (147 1/3 innings) in 2019.

Shoulder inflammation limited him to 158 innings in 2018, including 29 innings during the second half. But then-president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski signed him to a five-year, \$145-million extension during spring training 2019.

He never had posted over a 3.41 ERA in any season until this year. His seven-year streak of consecutive All-Star selections ended. His seven-year streak of finishing in the top six in the American League Cy Young voting also will come to an end.

**Red Sox-MLB free agency: If Martinez opts out and leaves, who might Boston sign to replace him?**

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox designated hitter J.D. Martinez can opt out of his contract’s remaining three years, \$62.5 million once the World Series ends. He’ll receive a \$2.5 million buyout if he opts out.

Super agent Scott Boras spoke with Forbes' Barry Bloom who reported, "Boras, for one, is confident he can generate more dollars for (Stephen) Strasburg and Martinez elsewhere."

"Great players are always coveted, and those are great players," Boras told Bloom. "It's really up to them how they view their situation and what they want to do."

Martinez has indicated Boras will make the opt-out clause decision for him.

"You know Scott Boras? Call him up," Martinez said in August.

Co-interim GM Eddie Romero recently said, "I think all options have to be put on the table. We want to see where J.D. is at. We'll sit down with him at some point and I'm sure we'll have discussions with him before then. But J.D. is an offensive force and incredible consistent and it rubs off on the other players on the team, what he can do. We would love to have J.D. back. Among the other things on the agenda, that's a big one also."

Martinez's opt-out decision will be the first major shoe to drop for the Red Sox this winter.

If Martinez opts out and signs elsewhere, who might the Red Sox sign to replace him?

First baseman Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce are headed to free agency (Pearce might retire). The Red Sox, therefore, could pursue a power-hitting first baseman, then also rotate him and others at DH.

The Red Sox have been interested in slugger Jose Abreu ever since the White Sox outbid Boston by approximately \$5 million in international free agency in October 2013. Since then, Boston has been linked to Abreu several times in trade rumors.

Abreu is a pending free agent who turns 33 in January. He slashed .284/.330/.503/.834 with 33 homers, 38 doubles, one triple and an AL-leading 123 RBIs in 159 games during 2019.

Blue Jays' Justin Smoak, who turns 33 on Dec. 5, also will be a free agent. Most of the switch-hitter's power production comes from the left side of the plate vs. righties. So he's potentially someone who could platoon at first base with right-handed hitters Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec and Sam Travis.

The Red Sox might be best served to sign or acquire a talented hitter who can play the outfield like J.D. Martinez.

Cardinals' Marcell Ozuna, Phillies' Corey Dickerson, Cubs' Nicholas Castellanos, Yankees' Brett Gardner, Rays' Avisail Garcia and Indians' Yasiel Puig are the top pending free agent outfielders.

Ozuna, who has enjoyed a strong postseason, turns 29 in November. He posted an .804 OPS, 29 homers, 23 doubles, one triple and 89 RBIs in 130 games this year. His best season came in 2017 for Miami (.924 OPS, 37 homers, 30 doubles, two triples, 124 RBIs, 159 games).

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.

He hasn't come near his 2017 production in any other year. But he's a talented right-handed hitter with 30-plus homer potential at Fenway Park.

Castellanos slashed an eye-popping .321/.356/.646/1.002 with 16 homers, 21 doubles and 36 RBIs in 51 games for the Cubs after a trade from the Tigers on July 31.

The right-handed hitter has a career .797 OPS but he's still young (turns 28 on March 4). Maybe his production with the Cubs isn't an outlier but a sign of what is to come in the coming years.

The Red Sox's goal, although not a mandate, is to stay under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold in 2020. Therefore, Abreu, Ozuna and Castellanos might be too expensive.

Dickerson's 2019 season ended prematurely because of a foot fracture. The 30-year-old left-handed hitter has a career .832 OPS. He posted a .304/.341/.565/.906 line in 78 games during 2019 for the Pirates and Phillies.

He belted 27 homers in 2017 and 24 home runs in 2016 for the Rays.

Garcia, a 28-year-old right-handed hitter, crushed 20 homers, 25 doubles and two triples with a .796 OPS in 125 games for Tampa Bay this year. His best season came with the White Sox in 2017 (.330/.380/.506/.885 line, 18 homers, 27 doubles, five triples and 80 RBIs, 136 games).

ESPN's Buster Olney reported the Twins plan to exercise Nelson Cruz's \$12 million team option.

Edwin Encarnacion's contract has a \$20 million team option. It's likely the Yankees will pick it up because his buyout (\$5 million) is expensive.

Kole Calhoun (33 homers, .792 OPS) has a \$14 million team option the Angels might not exercise. The 32-year-old left-handed hitter has a \$1 million buyout.

Nationals' Adam Eaton (15 homers, .792 OPS) turns 31 in December. He has a \$9.5 million team option and \$1.5 million buyout.

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

### **Four potentially undervalued pitchers Red Sox could target this offseason**

John Tomase

It's time for the Red Sox to start thinking like a small-market team, because burning money in the name of their rotation could have dire consequences that stretch well into the 2020s.

With Chris Sale, David Price, and Nathan Eovaldi set to earn \$80 million annually through 2022 despite being major injury risks, the Red Sox will need to bargain hunt to fill the rest of their rotation. So where might they turn?

The key will be finding undervalued assets. One way to identify them is to look for pitchers with the biggest disparity between their ERA and FIP.

The latter — fielding independent pitching — is an ERA-like number derived from the events a pitcher can directly control: walks, strikeouts, home runs, and hit by pitches, the idea being that everything else is in the hands of the defense. FIP has its flaws, because it operates on the assumption that a pitcher can't impact balls in play, which means hurlers aren't credited for the majority of their outs, but it can still be a useful tool.

A wide spread between a pitcher's ERA and FIP can suggest bad luck or bad defense that mask some underlying strengths. The Red Sox, interestingly enough, looked a lot better as a staff via FIP than ERA, led by Chris Sale (4.40 ERA vs. 3.39 FIP), David Price (4.28 vs. 3.62), and even Rick Porcello (5.52 vs. 4.76).

Their staff ERA of 4.70 surpassed their 4.28 FIP by the widest margin of any team in baseball. Defensive metrics are notoriously spotty, but Fangraphs ranked Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts dead last at his position in defensive runs saved, saying he cost the Red Sox 19 runs. Similarly, center fielder Jackie

Bradley Jr. (minus-2) and third baseman Rafael Devers (minus-13) were considered negatives, too. Bogaerts and Devers aren't going anywhere, but Bradley, a defending Gold Glover, is likely to be traded this winter. The Red Sox could also upgrade their defense at second base.

In any event, we're drifting a little far afield. The point is finding opposing pitchers who significantly underperformed their FIP, which could make them targets this winter. Here are four names to remember.

1. Joe Musgrove, RHP, Pirates

A first-round pick of the Blue Jays in 2011, Musgrove was traded to the Astros a year later before joining Pittsburgh as the centerpiece in the 2018 Gerrit Cole blockbuster. He made a career-high 31 starts this year, going 11-12 with a 4.44 ERA that masked a 3.82 FIP.

Those relatively middling numbers still established the 26-year-old as Pittsburgh's most effective starter, and he remains under team control through 2022.

With the Pirates in what feels like an eternal rebuild, it's hard to imagine they'd consider any player untouchable. Musgrove could make for an intriguing target.

2. Kevin Gausman, RHP, Reds

Gausman is a non-tender candidate, since he's set to make at least \$10 million in his final year of arbitration. Chosen fourth overall in the 2012 draft by the Orioles, Gausman was once considered a top-10 prospect.

He has yet to live up to that hype, but he's better than the numbers suggested last year between Atlanta, where he posted a 6.19 ERA (and 4.20 FIP) in 16 starts, and Cincinnati, where he found use as a reliever (4.03 ERA, 3.17 FIP). Gausman struck out a career-high 10 batters per nine innings and is still only 28, so perhaps a flyer is in order, particularly if other teams are viewing him as a reliever and the Red Sox give him an opportunity to start.

3. Spencer Turnbull, RHP, Tigers

How does the AL's loss leader sound? Pitching for a woeful team, Turnbull went just 3-17 with a 4.61 ERA in 30 starts. His 3.99 FIP suggests better stuff than results, however, and he doesn't become a free agent until 2025.

Turnbull throws 95-97 and is considered a piece of Detroit's future, but it never hurts to ask. The 27-year-old went winless in his final 18 starts and is a late bloomer who was still pitching in Double A at age 25.

4. Pablo Lopez, RHP, Marlins

The rookie went 5-8 with a 5.09 ERA in 21 starts, but his 4.28 FIP and low walk rates (2.2 per nine innings) suggest some promise. The 23-year-old hails from Venezuela and can't become a free agent until 2025. He features a low-90s fastball and changeup, and the Marlins like his competitiveness. Being the Marlins means they're in perpetual fire-sale mode, however, and Lopez is worth a look.

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

### **What realistic closer options will be available to the Red Sox in free agency?**

Jen McCaffrey

The Red Sox bullpen woes of this past season were largely a result of an underperforming rotation, but the club certainly could have benefitted from another reliable reliever, one with closing experience.

Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman did their best in new situations as the primary candidates for high-leverage spots. But for next season, adding an arm or two to the bullpen will be a priority.

Two top tier closers, the Dodgers' Kenley Jansen and the Yankees' Aroldis Chapman, can opt out of massive contracts this winter, but given the uncertain market for closers over the last few winters (hello, Craig Kimbrel) it's likely both will remain with their clubs and keep their guaranteed money. That's especially true for Jansen, whose mediocre season and postseason struggles have led to questions about whether he'll even be the Dodgers closer next year.

Meanwhile, given the Red Sox's desire to tighten their payroll, they aren't likely to be pursuing a closer with an \$18-20 million annual salary. They will more likely seek experienced relievers either via free agency or trade to supplement their existing group.

For now, let's take a look at some free agent relievers with closing experience who could provide a boost to Boston next season:

RHP Sergio Romo

- Stats: 3.43 ERA, 1.11 WHIP, 9.0 K/9, 2.5 BB/9, .221 BAA (batting average against), 20 saves

- Salary: \$2.5 million

Romo, who turns 37 in March, has at least 20 saves in four of his 12 seasons, and had 25 for Tampa in 2018. He spent the first half of 2019 as closer in Miami before being traded to Minnesota just before the deadline. For the Twins, Romo took on more of a setup role (mainly in the eighth inning) in front of closer Taylor Rogers. Romo's range of experience could be a boost for the Red Sox, and he has a reputation as a good clubhouse guy.

Romo is likely due for a salary increase, but it'd still be manageable for the Red Sox.

RHP Daniel Hudson

- Stats: 2.47 ERA, 1.14 WHIP, 8.8 K/9, 3.3 BB/9, .210 BAA, 8 saves

- Salary: \$1.5 million

Hudson, who turns 33 in March, is experiencing a career renaissance, and has been an important part of Washington's World Series run. Hudson began the season with the Blue Jays, posting a 3.00 ERA and 9.0 K/9 over 45 appearances in late-inning relief before being traded to the Nationals at the deadline. Washington transitioned him into the closer's role and he posted a 1.44 ERA, 0.88 WHIP, 8.3 K/9, 1.4 BB/9 and six saves in 24 appearances. Entering this season, Hudson had only nine saves over nine seasons. Now he's locked down that closer spot and, with 5.2 scoreless innings pitched in these playoffs, has delivered a very effective postseason. Sometimes postseason bullpen success doesn't translate to the regular season, but Hudson will likely garner significant interest.

RHP Hector Rondon

- Stats: 3.71 ERA, 1.25 WHIP, 7.1 K/9, 3.0 BB/9, .242 BAA, 0 saves

- Salary: \$4.5 million

Rondon, who turns 32 in February, is coming off a two-year, \$8.5 million deal with the Astros. Rondon had 15 saves for Houston in 2018, but the closing duties went to Roberto Osuna this season. Rondon spent the first five years of his career with the Chicago Cubs where he tallied 29, 30 and 18 saves in three consecutive seasons, including one as the Cubs' primary closer in 2016 when they won the World Series. As the Red Sox aim to revamp their pitching approach this winter to keep up with the advances made by the Astros and Dodgers, Rondon's past two seasons in Houston can't hurt.

LHP Will Smith

- Stats: 2.76 ERA, 1.03 WHIP, 13.2 K/9, 2.9 BB/9, .196 BAA, 34 saves

- Salary: \$4.225 million

Smith, 30, had a breakout year in his first full season as a closer for the Giants after taking over the role midway through 2018, when he finished with 14 saves. Smith missed 2017 with a torn UCL, but came back a different pitcher. Though he doesn't have a lengthy track record of closing success, he had a dominant season and will likely garner a lot of interest this winter.

RHP Greg Holland

• Stats: 4.54 ERA, 1.37 WHIP, 10.3 K/9, 6.1 BB/9, .198 BAA, 17 saves

• Salary: \$3.25 million

Holland, who turns 34 in November, has tallied 40 or more saves three times, most recently in 2017 with the Rockies. After a rough start in 2018 when the Cardinals cut him, Holland signed with the Nationals and posted an 0.84 ERA over 24 appearances. This year, he started with the Diamondbacks and was released in August, and his high walk rate was an issue. He joined the Nationals on a minor league deal but never got a call-up despite posting a 1.00 ERA over eight appearances in Double-A. Holland has experience and the potential seems to still be there. It could be a low-risk, high-reward type of signing.

RHP Fernando Rodney

• Stats: 5.66 ERA, 1.62 WHIP, 9.3 K/9, 5.3 BB/9, .269 BAA, 2 saves

• Salary: \$5.25 million

Rodney, who turns 43 in March, always feels like a wild card as a closer with stretches of success matched by periods of disappointment. Nevertheless, he's second only to Kimbrel among active relievers with 327 career saves over 17 seasons. Rodney began the season in Oakland, but was released after posting a 9.42 ERA in 17 games. Washington signed him shortly thereafter and in 38 games for the Nationals, he's posted a 4.05 ERA and 9.5 K/9, mainly serving as their set-up man in the eighth inning. Last season he tallied 25 saves for the Twins before a trade to Oakland.

### **Bill Lee at 72: Still zany (and still pitching) after all these years**

John Lott

Bill Lee and I have made a deal. He will give me an interview. I will give him a lift.

A few minutes later, I'm driving my compact car south on Highway 400 while Lee holds my tape recorder in the passenger seat. At 6-foot-3 and 215 pounds, he barely fits. As oncoming headlights reflect off his glasses, he spins yarns about pitching for the Expos and Red Sox, quotes assorted philosophers, extols the benefits of marijuana and laments the divide between the rich and poor.

The white light of an Eaton's sign appears as we pass a shopping mall, launching Lee into a rhapsodic homage to Roch Carrier's classic story, "The Hockey Sweater," about a boy in Quebec who orders a Canadiens jersey from the Eaton's mail-order catalogue and gets a Maple Leafs sweater by mistake. Lee loves that story.

It is a warm summer night in 1995. Lee, 47, is still in full uniform. He has just pitched against a team of 21-year-olds in Barrie, a whistle-stop on a tour across southern Ontario for a barnstorming band of former big-leaguers called the Legends of Baseball. As Ernie Whitt, Vida Blue, George Foster and the other Legends board a bus bound for their hotel, I approach Lee for an interview.

Could we meet at your hotel?

Our hotel's in Aurora, he says.

I live in Aurora, I say.

He grins. Let's ride, he says.

Over the next 70 kilometres, I ask questions and he tells tales, some of them quite tall.

Twenty-four years later in another Ontario town, I hear a few of those stories again, almost verbatim. The pitcher known as Spaceman is still doing standup while sitting down. He praises pot, condemns "cybermetrics" and rides a stream of consciousness that can flow from Buckminster Fuller to Jiminy Cricket in a matter of seconds.

He has just come from a ball game in New York state and is on his way to another in Arizona. At age 72, Bill Lee is still barnstorming, and still pitching.

To baseball fans of a certain age, the name Bill "Spaceman" Lee evokes instant recognition, especially if those fans are from Montreal or Boston. Mention the madcap left-hander and they'll smile, or roll their eyes, or both, because wild stories about him abound.

But they'll also tell you that Lee was a good pitcher for a long time, as Baseball Reference confirms: 14 seasons, 3.62 ERA, 119-90 record, nearly 2,000 innings pitched, an all-star selection, two starts in the 1975 World Series.

He would not fit today's pitching prototype because his strikeouts were few and far between. To wit: In 1979, his first year in Montreal, he pitched 222 innings but struck out only 59. His ERA that year: 3.04.

Back then, his fastball averaged 88. At age 65, when his heater hovered around 75, he became the oldest pitcher to beat a pro team with a complete game. (They sent his indy-ball uniform to the Hall of Fame.)

Now, he says, the fastball is down to 70. He gets by on guile and command. And changing speeds.

Slow and slower.

"I can add and subtract," he says. "I'm Pythagoras."

He is standing in the lobby of the Registry Theatre in Kitchener, Ont., waiting to go on stage for an event to benefit the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. This time, our interview is more conventional, although fans occasionally interrupt the Spaceman for a handshake or a selfie.

I ask about the origin of his nickname. The details come rapid-fire. Early in his career, after a splendid outing for the Red Sox in Baltimore, reporters mobbed Lee's locker, blocking third baseman John Kennedy's access to his own. Impatient to clear out, Kennedy heard someone mention astronauts on the moon. He nodded toward Lee and said, "We have our own spaceman over there."

Kennedy was in a hurry, Lee tells me, because he had a date with a divorcée he met in the stands down the third-base line.

"So it was all because of a horny third baseman," he says. "That's how I got my nickname."

Standing with us is Richard Griffin, the Blue Jays' director of baseball media. Before that, he was the Toronto Star's longtime baseball columnist, and before that the media-relations mogul for the Expos, in which capacity he did his best to pick up the pieces after Bill Lee, a generally hapless task. In that light, Griffin is the ideal referee for this event at the Registry. Both he and Lee know where the bodies are buried.

I ask Griffin whether he plans to ask Lee about the nickname when they go on stage. I also ask whether he expects to get the same answer.

"No," he replies, "it would be the same answer but ..."

Lee interrupts and takes over.

“But it would be even more embellished, which is hard to do, because I tell you, I got two hits in that ballgame,” he says. “I won the ballgame. We won 7-4. I went 2-for-2, I had a fake bunt and hit a ball by Brooks Robinson down the left-field line for a double. I had two great at-bats and won the ballgame.”

Fact-checking Bill Lee stories can be a tortuous task, in part because of, you know, embellishments. But on these details his recollection was remarkably accurate.

On Aug. 2, 1971 two U.S. astronauts drove their off-road vehicle on the moon. That night in Baltimore, Luis Tiant gave up four runs in the first inning and Lee was summoned from the Boston bullpen. He pitched 8 1/3 scoreless innings. He also collected three hits (not two), including a bunt single. (This was two years before the DH came along.)

The Red Sox won 7-4, just as Lee said.

I ask him how he stays in shape to keep pitching.

“By pitching,” he says. “I played all summer. Had a terrible year. Had a terrible team behind me. Burlington (Vermont) Cardinals, 35-and-older senior league. But I played for a junior team, an elite team, in Thetford Mines in front of 5,000 fans on Canada Day. I won that game.”

Lee lives on a rural hillside in Craftsbury, Vermont. Thetford Mines lies three hours' north across the Quebec border. And Lee loves Quebec. Montreal is his kind of town. Like Lee, Montrealers know how to have a good time, he says.

As the Kitchener event unfolded, Griffin nimbly steered the proceedings, feeding Lee a quote here and a name there and letting him roll, never certain where it would lead because Lee's mind and mouth run a perpetual nip-and-tuck race.

At one point, as he was comparing the three strongest Expos' teams, Lee suddenly stopped and said: “I made mistakes. I fell out of a second-storey building.”

A pause. And then: “Never date a girl from Toronto.”

In the audience, everyone was thinking: This is gonna be good.

Montreal was the scene of this near-tragic yarn. The woman on the second floor was apparently from Toronto. As Lee tells the story, he was out running in the rain at 6 a.m. and decided to climb up the side of the building to “say goodbye to this girl, being an honourable guy.”

As he grabbed a ledge, some rotten wood gave way and he fell. “I landed on a wrought-iron fence on my left hip. My head and my knee knocked each other out.”

He managed to get himself to the hospital. Griffin handled the cover story. The papers said Lee, startled by a cat, had slipped on the wet pavement and was clipped by a passing cab.

In Kitchener 40 years later, Griffin described the pitcher's huge hip bruise – a massive swath of blue and yellow and purple – and said the imprint looked a lot like a wrought-iron fence.

Lee missed only two starts. “It was just a fuckin' flesh wound,” he said.

Shortly after Lee joined the Expos in 1979, the Boston media descended on spring training to interview the Spaceman. They asked him about rumours about a drug problem in the Red Sox clubhouse. Straight-faced, Lee said it was a disgrace, the way that the players had been abusing coffee, nicotine and alcohol.



No, the writers said, we meant marijuana.

Oh yeah, I've been using pot for years, Lee replied.

Amid the furor that followed, commissioner Bowie Kuhn called Lee to a meeting and confronted him. No, Lee said, I never said I smoked pot. I said I used it. I sprinkle it on my buckwheat pancakes every morning. It makes me impervious to the bus fumes when I run six miles to the ballpark.

OK, Kuhn said, before fining Lee \$250, to go to charity. The pitcher paid it in pennies and sent a cheque to an orphanage in Alaska.

He had smoked pot, of course. Lots of it. In Boston, he hung out with a group of teammates known as the Buffalo Heads – Lee, Ferguson Jenkins, Rick Wise, Bernie Carbo and Jim Willoughby, a.k.a. Willow. All were children of the Sixties, partial to rock music, booze and drugs.

“We would get into the room, we would open the drawer, we would throw Gideon’s Bible on the bed, and we would shuffle through an ounce of pot and we’d get the seeds out of it,” Lee said. “And then we would twist up about five or six joints, and we would roll a towel and put it under the door, and we would start smokin’ and tellin’ stories, and Willow would throw his knife into the wall. He was a Potawatomi Indian from Oklahoma.”

Fact-check: Willoughby had three-eighths Potawatomi blood. He was from California. His mother was from Oklahoma. I could find no record of his knife-throwing exploits.

Sometimes, you're just stuck with Lee's version.

Such as his assertion that he could have saved the Expos from their day of infamy in the autumn of 1981.

Thirty-eight years ago this week, Rick Monday of the Dodgers hit the infamous home run that ended the Expos' playoff run. It came off Steve Rogers in the top of the ninth inning of Game 5 of National League Championship Series in Montreal. Ever since, Expos fans have called that day Blue Monday.

It didn't have to turn out that way, Lee says. Manager Jim Fanning should've listened to him. But the strait-laced skipper and the free-spirited lefty were not fans of each other.

Rogers, the Expos' ace, had an ERA of 0.98 in the playoffs. But in relief that day, he “had nothing,” Lee said.

“I went down and warmed up on my own, went out and tapped my hat when Fanning went out to talk to him when they announced Rick Monday as the pinch-hitter,” he said, anger seeping into his voice all these years later. “And he left (Rogers) in there.”

In his career, Monday was 1-for-7 with four strikeouts against Lee.

“I guarantee it: I'd bury a sinker in on his hands and he hits a foul ball off his own foot,” he said. “I'd throw another one and he hits a foul ball off the other foot. And then I drop down and I throw him a sidearm slider away and he swings and misses and we go to the frickin' World Series.”

Then there's the Graig Nettles story. During a brawl between the Yankees and Red Sox in 1976, Nettles slammed Lee to the ground, separating his shoulder. Moments later, with his numb left arm dangling and the melee still rolling, Lee started yelling at Nettles, who responded with a punch to the face.

It was two years before Lee regained the strength in his shoulder.

Lee displayed his long-term revenge to his audience in Kitchener. As he has done time and again, he reached into his hip pocket, pulled out his wallet and extracted a tattered Graig Nettles baseball card.

“The smell and the view do not improve for him,” Lee said. “I’ve been sitting on his face for ...”

The audience erupted, drowning out the rest of his sentence.

He has probably used that line a thousand times. It always gets a big laugh.

Lee loves this. In front of a crowd, his energy is extraordinary. These sessions have long since become performance art, and no matter how often he tells the same stories, he always sounds like he’s telling them for the first time. He is a trouper in the true theatrical sense, touring an old show that always feels new, throwing slow fastballs on old, rutted mounds and telling tall tales with evangelical fervour.

It is not all fun and games. Immodest and outspoken, this is a left-hander who has always espoused southpaw political views. He also walked away from both the Red Sox and Expos in protest after they released friends he thought deserved to stay.

“When people do things wrong, you have to put their feet to the fire,” he says.

His scattershot mind keeps audiences riveted as they wait to see where the next tangent goes. In one breath he’s playing basketball with Cheech Marin (remember “Up in Smoke”?) in Malibu and in the next he’s recommending that everyone read “The Denial of Death” by Earnest K. Becker.

In our rolling interview 24 years ago, he ranted about the DH and quoted author and philosopher Carlos Castenada. In Kitchener, he excoriated Bill James for ruining baseball with analytics and quoted Buckminster Fuller, who clearly has made a lasting impression, since Lee also kept mentioning him as he held my tape recorder in 1995.

In Kitchener, a Fuller citation took Lee on a whirlwind trip from philosophy to Disney movie inside of 10 seconds.

“Bucky Fuller wrote ‘Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth’ in ’69, and I signed in ’68 but I came to the big leagues in ’69,” he said. “And Bucky Fuller, his first chapter is Comprehensive Propensities. I had to read it three times. It means rely on yourself, or as Jiminy Cricket said, to thine own self be true.”

Actually, Shakespeare said that. Jiminy Cricket said let your conscience be your guide.

But enough fact-checking. It’s the sentiment that counts. And if you’ve read as much as Lee has, it’s easy to mix up the great thinkers.

“I’ve read everything out there,” he said. “I know Nietzsche personally.”

On his loosely guided tour of the Bill Lee canon in Kitchener, Rich Griffin’s last stop was the Spaceman’s impact on Canadian baseball, and so it shall be with this opus.

Lee’s four Expos years produced a 3.57 ERA in 95 games as a starter and reliever. But he has played many more games in Canada since then, starting with four seasons (1984-1987) as a pitcher-first baseman for the senior amateur Moncton (N.B.) Mets.

Then came his barnstorming days, which took him to countless Canadian cities, as well as many more around the world. (“I hit six home runs in one game in Kelowna,” he says. Drove in 22 runs that day. He tells that story everywhere he goes in Canada. We’ll take his word for it.)

Meanwhile, working through a Nova Scotia foundation, he helped collect millions of dollars' worth of baseball equipment for kids in the small towns of Cuba. For 18 years, he delivered the goods while helping to shepherd Canadian Little League teams on trips to play games in Cuba.

All of which left Griffin to wonder why the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame has so far spurned the Spaceman.

Lee replied: "There's an old saying: The outfit that really doesn't want you, why would you want to belong?"

He told me he'll never leave that old house on the hill in Vermont. But from there he can almost see Quebec. Clearly, a piece of his heart rests in Canada.

Lee once played a charity game with Montreal Canadiens all around: Frank Mahovlich at first, Yvan Cournoyer at second, Henri Richard at short, Steve Shutt at third, Jean-Guy Talbot catching, Maurice Richard on the mound. The entire roster, he says, boasted 48 Stanley Cup rings.

"People say, what's the greatest team you ever had on the field? It was that team."

About the charity

Lee's event in Kitchener benefited the anti-human trafficking division of the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. The centre itself is 30 years old, but the anti-human trafficking program has operated only since January 2018. In that time, staff have taken more than 260 calls and served more than 100 victims. Nearly all of them are Canadian citizens or permanent residents, said co-ordinator Nicky Carswell. "It's not like the movie 'Taken', with Liam Neeson," Carswell said. There's a severe housing shortage in the region for those trying to escape the trafficking trap, she said.

For more information or to donate, contact the centre here or call 519-741-8633.