

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, October 17, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Nationals took a chance at trade deadline, Red Sox did not

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox season ended on Sept. 29 when Mookie Betts kept on running and scored from first base on a single to right field in the bottom of the ninth inning against the inept Baltimore Orioles.

But for all practical purposes, the season ended late in the afternoon on July 31 when the Sox decided not to make any trades to improve their worn-down pitching staff before the deadline hit.

The Sox were 59-49 at the time, nine games out of first place but only 2½ games behind the Athletics in the American League wild-card race with 54 games to play.

Sox manager Alex Cora said in the days leading up to the deadline that he thought there would be additions. The players felt the same way.

But it didn't happen.

"The club here needs to play better on a consistent basis. That's the way I look at it," president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said at the time.

As a rallying cry, it wasn't exactly Winston Churchill. The Sox reacted by losing the game that night and the five games that followed. Dombrowski was fired in September and the Sox finished a pedestrian 84-78.

At the same time the Sox were essentially giving up on their season, the Washington Nationals acquired three relievers on July 31: lefthander Roenis Elias and righthander Hunter Strickland from Seattle and righthander Daniel Hudson from Toronto.

The Nationals were 57-50 a day before the deadline, 5½ games out of first place in the National League East but leading the wild-card race by half a game.

Nobody thought at the time that the Nationals had changed their team dramatically, if much at all.

Elias was a borderline major leaguer and Strickland had been injured all season. Hudson was pitching well for the Blue Jays, but they were his fourth team in four years.

The cost in terms of payroll and prospects wasn't significant. But the Nationals added three arms to a bullpen that needed help.

Elias quickly got injured and ended pitching in only four games for Washington. He didn't work out.

But Strickland, despite a few rocky outings, contributed to 15 victories. He was particularly good in August as the Nationals went 19-7 and took hold of a playoff spot.

Hudson was the real difference maker. He had a 1.44 earned run average in 24 games and picked up six saves. His presence allowed the Nationals to give overworked Sean Doolittle a 14-day stretch on the disabled list to heal up and prepare for the postseason.

Doolittle has had a 2.35 ERA since coming back, counting the playoffs.

With Hudson as the closer and Doolittle setting him up, the Nationals beat Milwaukee in the wild-card game, upset the Dodgers in the Division Series, and swept the Cardinals in the League Championship Series to reach the World Series for the first time.

Hudson has pitched 5⅓ scoreless innings in six postseason games and been a reliable closer. The scouts Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo sent out before the deadline got it right with him.

The Sox were considering Hudson at the time but didn't make a move. The Nationals got him for Kyle Johnson, a Single A righthander who was 9-9 with a 4.03 ERA.

As similar as their records were at the trade deadline, the Sox and Nationals were in different situations.

The Sox won the World Series in 2018 and the Nationals missed the playoffs. The Nationals also are owned by 94-year-old Ted Lerner, who cared much more about a World Series at this stage of his life than some prospect in the Carolina League.

Rizzo also knew that a rotation headed by Max Scherzer, Stephen Strasburg, and Patrick Corbin would be dangerous in the postseason.

Still, it was hard not to watch the Nationals celebrate on Tuesday night and not wonder if the Red Sox would have benefited from a more proactive approach at the deadline. They treated an opportunity with indifference.

David Price and Chris Sale ended up on the injured list, so maybe the Sox wouldn't have done much regardless.

But we'll never really know how it would have played out. The Sox wasted an offense that scored the fourth-most runs in the majors.

The Nationals had their flaws, too. But Rizzo found a way to improve his team just enough that it made a difference. Now they're in the World Series.

There's something to be said for taking a chance.

Red Sox can learn from their recent experience with GM-by-committee

Alex Speier

Mythology features the terrifying Hydra in different ways, but all point to the same conclusion: A multiheaded monster is typically bad news, something best slain. Yet for the second time this century, the Red Sox have entrusted the direction of their organization on an interim basis to just such a creature.

Since the (literally) unceremonial firing of Dave Dombrowski Sept. 8, four front office members have overseen the baseball operations department: assistant general managers Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott, and senior vice president Raquel Ferreira.

That structure serves as something of an echo, a reminder of one of the more unsettled and confusing times for the franchise during its four-championship run. In 2005, when then-GM Theo Epstein walked away from the Red Sox in a gorilla costume on Halloween, the front office operated over the next six weeks under the interim leadership of another committee until the appointment of Jed Hoyer and Ben Cherington as co-GMs in mid-December, a prelude to Epstein's official return in January 2006.

There are lessons — both promising and cautionary — to take from that unsettled period that seem relevant to the current one.

“Any experience you go through professionally helps you in future experiences,” said O’Halloran, a baseball operations assistant in that interim period after Epstein’s departure. “Of course, the situations are very, very different, and my role this time is different than it was in 2005.

“But I guess what I came out of that with is, one, you can make good decisions and you can function well during a period of transition with a multiheaded monster at the top.”

That doesn’t mean doing so is easy, and certainly little was easy about the period that followed Epstein’s departure, one in which job responsibilities were particularly messy. When Epstein resigned — shortly after assistant GM Josh Byrnes had been hired as Diamondbacks GM — the Sox initially identified a group of four leaders to helm their baseball operations: Cherington, Hoyer, Craig Shipley, and Peter Woodfork.

But by mid-November, veteran executive Bill Lajoie, who had resigned with Epstein, was rehired to join the Gang of Four, which presumably became a Gang of Five . . . at least until Woodfork left later that month to become assistant GM of the Diamondbacks.

Yet even then, it might have been more like a Gang of Five or Six or Seven or Eight, as several Red Sox officials — including Lajoie, Hoyer, Cherington, Shipley, Larry Lucchino, senior adviser Jeremy Kapstein, and O’Halloran — served as spokesmen for the organization.

All the while, the Red Sox were conducting interviews to replace Epstein, with Lajoie (a former Tigers GM who repeatedly said that he did not want to be considered a candidate) and Kapstein (who started a campaign to serve as GM) introducing those candidates in media sessions.

“It was a strange time,” Cherington once recalled. “Obviously, there was a bit of a power vacuum, a leadership vacuum, some sort of vacuum.”

It was the sort of vacuum that created (to borrow a phrase from presidential elections past) a “giant sucking sound,” and is remembered as something of a circus among those who were there. The structure and responsibilities tended to be fluid. And the efforts to communicate proved incredibly challenging.

Without a single leader through whom all decisions and conversations flowed, the group had to make a point of communicating internally on a daily basis about everything that had gone on in their orbit. Those developments subsequently had to be communicated up the food chain to Lucchino and the team’s owners.

“With four, it became very convoluted and very inefficient,” said Hoyer, now the GM of the Cubs. “I think everyone was working to make the Red Sox better and had the best intentions, but it’s very difficult to make decisions trying to get consensus among four people — and frankly, it might have been more than four. It might have been more like eight.”

Yet time and the baseball calendar don’t stop in deference to job searches, so while the Sox were trying to identify Epstein’s replacement, they still had to go about building for the future. In fact, they made some important deals during that time.

Over Thanksgiving, they built upon conversations that Shipley started with the Marlins at the GM Meetings in November, consummating a trade that landed Josh Beckett and Mike Lowell while sending Hanley Ramirez and Anibal Sanchez to the Marlins. Then at the Winter Meetings in December, the Sox made another deal, sending Edgar Renteria to the Braves for prospect Andy Marte. (The team later flipped Marte to Cleveland for Coco Crisp.)

Those deals offered multiple important takeaways. First, by empowering the baseball operations department during a time of transition, the Red Sox made dramatic changes that played a crucial role in forging a championship in 2007.

“We did make some important decisions,” said O’Halloran. “There were pros and cons, but we ended up winning a championship a couple years later. I use it as a point to illustrate that big decisions can be made. You don’t have to be stagnant while you’re waiting for the final solution at the top of the department.”

At the same time, the process was enormously challenging, particularly when the group was spread out over Thanksgiving, when a seemingly endless number of phone calls sabotaged the holiday.

“I think when you look back on it, the Red Sox probably don’t win the ’07 World Series without Beckett and Lowell,” said Hoyer. “The organization was put in a better place, but that process was far from streamlined or smooth.”

The current four-person steering committee is mindful of the need for outstanding communication — a task made easier, perhaps, by the long working relationship among them, with all having been in the organization for at least 13 years. O’Halloran called trust and communication “a real strength for this group.”

They’ve also proven mindful of the impact that can be made by pushing ahead rather than standing still. So far, the Red Sox have made changes to their coaching staff while committing to altering their pitching infrastructure. They’ve also made changes to their pro and amateur scouting departments.

As strange as it may seem that such decisions are occurring before the appointment of a new leader, the experience in 2005 suggests that an organization need not wait for a replacement to try to grow stronger. Needs don’t disappear simply because of the absence of a leader; nor do opportunities. The actions that occur during a transitional period do not come easily, yet they could nonetheless have a profound impact on the future of the Red Sox.

A bad year for the Red Sox isn’t getting any better in October

Dan Shaughnessy

We interrupt your regularly scheduled programming of Patriots, Bruins, Celtics, and well-deserved LeBron bashing to remind you that the stove glows dimly on Jersey Street.

As the baseball playoffs keep reminding us, the Red Sox — despite having the top payroll in baseball — are not part of October ball for the first time since 2015.

In the absence of postseason games, bad news seems to visit Fenway Park regularly. Ticket prices are up. NESN ratings are way down. And nobody seems to want the once-coveted job of Red Sox general manager.

Hotshot Dodgers GM Andrew Friedman is not interested in the Sox position and just re-upped with Los Angeles. Friedman joins Theo Epstein, Jed Hoyer, Mike Hazen, and Chris Antonetti in the swelling group of guys who have either used the Sox as leverage to make more money or decided they would rather not get into contract discussions with an organization that abruptly broomed championship-winning GMs Ben Cherington and Dave Dombrowski.

Red Sox CEO Sam Kennedy insists that the Sox have yet to formally reach out to any candidate, but I am of the opinion that several veteran baseball men have been approached through back channels. And no one has bitten.

Try to imagine a conversation in Cleveland when Tribe GM Antonetti stopped by Tito Francona’s office and asked, “Hey, got a minute? Do you think it’s a good idea for me to talk to the Red Sox about their GM job?”

A classified ad for the current Red Sox opening would look something like this: Wanted: Established evaluator of baseball talent willing to work for iconic major league franchise with deep pockets. Need to

slash payroll by \$35 million, replenish depleted farm system, and still compete with the New York Yankees, who finished 19 games ahead of our team in 2019. May need to trade our best player. Must be willing to take blame for anything that goes wrong.

As if this isn't a large enough bowl of bad, we also are being told that ownership would like to be more involved in baseball ops, and that the analytics department will be calling all the shots. From this point forward, the Sox' strategy will be all about precise spin rates, swing paths, and velocities supplied by Statcast. Game-planning will be directed by the analytics department (pardon me while my skull explodes).

I am told that Dan Duquette might still be available.

The longer this goes, the more I am convinced that the Sox are going to go with some combination of the Gang of Four (Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Raquel Ferreira, Zack Scott) that currently runs the team. I'm making O'Halloran and Romero co-favorites.

"We're in the early stages and continuing to do a lot of due diligence and our own homework," said Kennedy. "But in the meantime, the existing group is doing an outstanding job leading the department forward. We are pleased with everything they are doing."

Why not just stay in-house at this point? The clock is ticking as we lurch toward the time J.D. Martinez is allowed to opt out of his contract five days after the World Series. There is no GM in place and yet the Sox have decided to retain Tony La Russa as an adviser, name a new amateur scouting director, and dump assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett. They are also looking for a new pitching coach to replace the deposed Dana LeVangie.

Does all this activity mean there is less chance of going outside for the GM job?

"I wouldn't speculate one way or the other," said Kennedy. "We are doing our homework on external candidates. John [Henry] and Tom [Werner] made that clear. We haven't ruled anything out."

Any urgency?

"No."

Looking back, it's impossible to overstate just how bad the Sox were in 2019. They went 26-43 against teams with winning records, which projects to a 162-game record of 61-101. In their own division, they went 12-26 against the Yankees and Rays.

Making matters worse, their average game time was 3:25, a full nine minutes longer than any other big league team. That means that if you are a devout watcher, you wasted 24 more hours of your life than any other fans in baseball in 2019. Any surprise that ratings were down by a whopping 23 percent?

"You're never pleased when ratings are down, but we did have a disappointing season, so it was not unexpected," says Kennedy.

What about moving forward with (gulp) more ownership involvement with baseball ops?

"There's a misconception going back a decade and a half that ownership was not involved in baseball operations," said Kennedy. "I've been here since 2002 and John Henry and Tom Werner have been heavily involved with baseball operations since the day we arrived in 2002. That will continue as we go forward."

And yet we only seem to find the owners when the trophies are being handed out. Which reminds me of President John F. Kennedy's remark after the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961 when the president said, "Victory has a hundred fathers, and defeat is an orphan."

Orphans once named Dombrowski, Cherington, Tito, and Grady.

And now an orphan-to-be-named-later.

*** *MassLive.com***

How the new Boston Red Sox GM must attack a critical offseason

Chris Cotillo

If the Red Sox ever do hire a new head of their baseball operations department, he or she will be tasked with wading through one of the biggest offseasons for the organization in quite some time. Boston's future -- in both the short-term and long-term -- will largely be shaped by what happens between now and Opening Day.

Though the capable quartet of interim leaders Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira is being active while the search for a full-time leader is ongoing, the new leader (whether from inside the organization or outside) will be fully handed the reigns once the hire is made. At that point, the work will begin... and be just about nonstop all winter.

The to-do list for the incoming general manager or president of baseball operations is a long one. Here are 10 key items that need to be addressed:

1. Get an answer from J.D. Martinez

Martinez's opt-out decision is a huge one for the Sox this winter, and the jury still appears to be out on exactly what the slugger would do. If he returns for \$23.75 million, the chances of Mookie Betts being on the roster next season decrease dramatically. If he does leave, Betts likely stays but there's a giant hole in the middle of the lineup. Martinez's decision is due five days after the World Series but the incoming baseball operations head would benefit from getting a feel for his decision much earlier.

2. Assess the health of starters Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi

The Sox' heavy investment in starting pitching means the team's chances will live and die with the health of the top three pitchers. Sale (shut down in August with elbow inflammation), Price (dealt with wrist cyst in second half) and Eovaldi (never found his groove after April elbow surgery) are key pieces who need to be healthy for Boston to be successful. Assessing where each pitcher stands and beginning to consider alternatives will be one of the first tasks at hand.

3. Begin deciding Mookie Betts' future -- whether in Boston or elsewhere

Once Martinez decides, all eyes shift to Betts, who will be a free agent after the season. Maybe a new person running baseball operations will be able to get through to Betts and get him to sign an extension, but probably not. The parties will get a sense of what the other is feeling, likely leading to serious trade talks involving the reigning A.L. MVP. If an offer is good enough, trade Betts. If not, keep the window open for a deal.

4. Build a creative plan for get under the \$208 competitive balance tax threshold

Perhaps the most important part of the offseason is the most complicated, as the front office will have to trim payroll significantly to get under the \$208 luxury tax threshold and avoid harsh penalties. How exactly the Sox will do this is unclear, though everything -- from trades, non-tenders and restructurings -- should be on the table.

5. Cut the fat off the roster and assess areas of need

There are about 15 players on Boston's 40-man roster who are either free agents or candidates to be cut. Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland, Brock Holt, Steve Pearce, Andrew Cashner and Jhoulys Chacin are on expiring contracts. Guys like Ryan Weber, Josh Smith, Gorkys Hernandez, Juan Centeno, Chris Owings and others can be designated for assignment.

6. See where Boston's free agents stand and assess the free-agent market as a whole

Porcello and Holt look like candidates to return, and maybe even Moreland, too. If a team-friendly deal can be made, it likely will be, considering what those guys have meant to the organization in the last few years. A year after signing zero new free agents, the Sox won't be sitting on the sidelines this time around. The rotation, bullpen and infield can all be upgraded via free agency.

7. Explore creative trade scenarios and non-tender possibilities

Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. are clear trade candidates and a potential deal to move Price's contract will likely be explored. The Sox could also look to get a team to buy into Andrew Benintendi's raw talent or sell high on Christian Vazquez or Brandon Workman. Beyond Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers, no one is untouchable.

8. Build a bullpen structure with internal and external options

A year after throwing a bunch of relievers at the wall in hopes some would stick in unclear roles, the Sox have a decent core (Workman, Matt Barnes, Darwinson Hernandez, Josh Taylor and Marcus Walden) and will likely add from the outside. Naming a closer early and building around him would be an effective strategy.

9. Explore extensions for players like Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez

Devers and Rodriguez had breakout 2019 seasons that will likely lead to extension talks. How that works considering the \$208 million threshold remains to be seen.

10. Build the back end of the roster with savvy depth additions

The Sox had way too many 4-A players on their roster in 2019. Adding veteran players on minor-league deals will add depth and allow back-end guys to play less prominent roles. With so many vets going unsigned into spring training, there could be some bargains here.

10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. Weren't the Nationals the NL version of the Red Sox all summer? Maybe Alex Cora was onto something when he said all he wanted was a chance to dance in October.

2. Still would take the AL winner over Washington, either way. Too much talent on that side of the bracket.

3. Joe Maddon to the Angels is done, finally. Brad Ausmus is officially the new Rick Renteria.

4. Sure looks like Joe Girardi is going to get a managing job this time around.

5. Would think it's more of an uphill climb for John Farrell, though. Hasn't had a real shot since being fired.

6. The OTL story about Tyler Skaggs was devastating and heartbreaking, much like the entire situation has been.

7. Curt Schilling wants to be a pitching coach or manager. I want to be 6-foot-6.
8. The takes about Daniel Hudson were extremely tired. Highly recommend this, from ESPN's Jeff Passan.
9. How many times are we going to see that clip of Bryce Harper's slip-up about bringing a championship back to DC in the next week?
10. Still way too quiet on the Red Sox GM search front. They're either waiting until the postseason is over or striking out completely.

*** *WEEI.com***

Idea of Red Sox going with internal candidates may be gaining steam

Rob Bradford

This is the John Henry quote from just a few days before the end of the regular season that so many keep pivoting to:

"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."

And so they did look outward. The view, however, may have been a bit foggier than anticipated. No Theo Epstein. No Mike Hazen. No Andrew Friedman.

Now Red Sox ownership may be realizing its ultimate solution to finding Dave Dombrowski's replacement was already inside the building.

While team officials remain mum on the interviewing/hiring process, the rumblings throughout the baseball world have more to do with how no names from outside the organization are being tied to the job. There is a growing belief that the foundation of the Red Sox' baseball decision-making process will land back where it started, with some sort of chain of command that involves current executives Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira.

Perhaps Red Sox ownership is doing a next-level job of keeping whispers out of the very gossipy landscape of Major League Baseball. But what is becoming evident are the abilities shown -- both before and after Dombrowski's dismissal -- by the four people in charge.

Considering their organizational experience (having seen the good and bad from the Epstein, Ben Cherington and Dombrowski regimes), along with the solid distribution of skill-sets, such an idea may make more sense than trying to catch up to speed in what figures to be a rapid turnaround to the aforementioned challenging offseason. It is a path that is hardly far-fetched.

The lingering question would be how final decisions would be made and which one of the four might be tasked that responsibility. One of the positives from carving out Dombrowski's position was that everyone understood who was responsible for on-field decisions where before there were questions as to if Henry, Cherington or Larry Lucchino were driving the bus with certain moves.

Maybe a veteran voice is brought in to be part of the mix, perhaps even overseeing the dynamic. Perhaps there is a mystery candidate out there who we will discover in the coming weeks. But it is becoming clear that Romero, O'Halloran, Scott and Ferreira have at least earned the right to be part of what Sox ownership feels will be a solution to a very complex problem.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Red Sox can look in one of these two directions to find their next GM

John Tomase

The Red Sox fired Dave Dombrowski more than a month ago, and we still can't name a single candidate to replace him.

The mere existence of the opening has contributed to a run on contract extensions in front offices across baseball, however. The latest domino to fall was Dodgers boss Andrew Friedman, who announced on Monday that he's staying in Hollywood. He joins Arizona GM Mike Hazen and Minnesota VP Derek Falvey — two Massachusetts natives — on the list of those either extended or nearing an extension.

Any one of them could've been a compelling candidate in Boston, particularly Friedman, given his track record building winners in both large and small markets. And that's before we even consider hometown hero Theo Epstein, who recently restated his commitment to the Cubs, albeit without receiving a contractual sweetener like any of the above.

When Red Sox owner John Henry noted the difficulty of poaching opposing executives, he wasn't kidding. The team's last two GMs were either hired from within (Ben Cherington) or plucked off the street (Dombrowski).

What should be one of the most coveted jobs in the game is instead serving as little more than leverage for some big names to stay put. So where do the Red Sox go from here?

Their pool may have narrowed, but their general options remain the same: familiarity or change.

The former is represented by the Epstein school of executives with Red Sox ties, as we discussed after Dombrowski's ouster. This starts with Epstein himself, and even if his commitment to Chicago sounds definitive, he can't be entirely discounted until the Red Sox hire someone else. The same goes for Cubs GM Jed Hoyer, who was linked to the job in one report, but hasn't been since.

With Henry claiming he wants to hire an experienced candidate, especially given the challenges facing whoever takes the job, that would seemingly eliminate Arizona assistants Amiel Sawdaye and Jared Porter, as well as Mets exec Jared Banner, who all spent time here.

What that leaves is Option B — an executive without Boston ties who has demonstrated success elsewhere and can give the Red Sox operation a fresh perspective.

One such man is Tampa's Chaim Bloom, a Yale grad like Epstein who has helped oversee Tampa's resurgence despite one of baseball's smallest payrolls. He's the team's VP of baseball operations alongside GM Erik Neander. The Rays followed up a 90-win 2018 with 96 wins and a wild card berth. They then rode one of baseball's most unconventional pitching staffs to Game 5 of the ALDS against the Astros.

With defending Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell limited to barely 100 innings by injuries and breakout candidate Tyler Glasnow making only 12 starts for the same reason, the Rays still found a way. Of their 14 pitchers who made starts, 11 also pitched in relief. Former Red Sox farmhand Jalen Beeks, acquired in the Nathan Eovaldi trade, threw over 100 innings despite making only three starts.

The Rays found a creative way to build their staff with castoffs and prospects and one targeted free agent strike in All-Star right-hander Charlie Morton, and the result was the best ERA in the American League. The Red Sox, meanwhile, devoted megabucks to Chris Sale, David Price, and Eovaldi, and then watched all three break down en route to a staff ERA of 4.70 — more than a run higher than Tampa's 3.65.

Tampa's ability to find and develop cheap pitching stands in direct contrast to Boston's struggles in that regard dating back to Epstein. The Red Sox have drafted and developed just two starters of note since 2000

— Jon Lester and Clay Buchholz — and had they a deeper well of talent in the minors, they wouldn't have needed to devote more than \$400 million to the Big Three.

The Astros, Rays, Dodgers, and Yankees have surpassed the Red Sox from a player development standpoint, which isn't just limited to the minor leagues. Improving the performance of big leaguers matters, too, whether it's New York turning castoffs like Luke Voit and Mike Tauchman into useful sluggers, the Rays finding diamonds under virtually every rock, or the Dodgers hitting on All-Stars Max Muncy and Justin Turner for nothing.

The question will be if the Red Sox can peel anyone away from the aforementioned organizations, especially since Boston's top job hasn't exactly exuded stability recently. And that's before we even consider the challenges awaiting the next GM as they relate to payroll and the future of Mookie Betts.

The Red Sox insist they will cast a wide net, and eventually they'll find their man. But for now it's a tad disconcerting that the best candidates aren't even interested in hearing what Boston has to say.

*** *The Athletic***

The setup men: Who will be available when the Red Sox go bullpen shopping this winter?

Jen McCaffrey

The Red Sox have already made clear that adding to their bullpen will be a priority this winter; what shape that takes is unknown so far.

We've already looked at free-agent relievers with closing experience who could take over that role for the Red Sox should the team opt to move in a more traditional direction for the end of games.

But it's also possible the team wants to keep Brandon Workman in the ninth inning role he handled much of last season while adding a reliever or two to help in high-leverage situations around him.

Last season, Matt Barnes held that role for a while before burning out. Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden and Darwinson Hernandez performed well, but adding experienced arms can only help. If that's the route the Red Sox take this winter, there are plenty of those types of pitchers on the market. Let's examine some options for the Sox:

RHP Brandon Kintzler

Stats: 2.68 ERA, 1.04 WHIP, 2.1 BB/9 7.6 K/9, .220 BAA, 1 save

Salary: \$5 million

Kintzler, 35, had a rough 2018 but rebounded with a strong season this year for the Cubs. While he's mainly been a setup man the past two seasons, Kintzler posted 17 saves for the Twins in 2016 and 28 for the Twins the following year before a midseason trade to the Nationals. He's in the final year of a two-year, \$10 million deal and could be an interesting option for the Red Sox.

RHP Pedro Strop

Stats: 4.97 ERA, 1.27 WHIP, 10.6 K/9, 4.3 BB/9, .217 BAA, 10 saves

Salary: \$6.25 million

Strop, 34, has spent the last six seasons with the Cubs and though he's never had a full season as a closer, he tallied 13 saves in 2018 and 10 this past season before Craig Kimbrel arrived to take over the closer's role. Strop mainly handled the eighth inning and non-save situations in the ninth after Kimbrel joined the

Cubs. Prior to this year, Strop had posted five straight seasons with a sub 3.00 ERA and a WHIP under 1.18. He's coming off a three-year, \$17.6 million deal.

RHP Steve Cishek

Stats: 2.95 ERA, 1.20 WHIP, 8.0 K/9, 4.1 BB/9, .210 BAA, 7 saves

Salary: \$6.5 million

Cishek, 33, had a solid season for — you guessed it — the Cubs as a middle innings reliever. His closing days are probably behind him, but he did save 25 games as recently as 2016. Cishek has dealt with hip injuries, which is a red flag, but he could be an interesting option. Over his 10-year career, he's posted a 2.69 ERA and 9.5 K/9. The Massachusetts native has been tied to the Red Sox in trade rumors throughout his career, but now that he's on the free-agent market there might be more of a chance for him to land in Boston. He's coming off a two-year, \$13 million deal.

RHP Will Harris

Stats: 1.50 ERA, 0.93 WHIP, 9.3 K/9, 2.1 BB/9, .196 BAA, 4 saves

Salary: \$4.23 million

Harris, 35, is coming off one of the best seasons of his career. He tallied 12 saves in 2016 for the Astros, but is mainly a setup man and could be a solid addition to Boston's bullpen. In eight seasons, Harris has averaged a 2.84 ERA, a 2.3 BB/9 and a 9.6 K/9.

RHP Tyler Clippard

Stats: 2.90 ERA, 0.85 WHIP, 9.3 K/9, 2.2 BB/9, .176 BAA, 0 saves

Salary: minor league deal

Clippard, 34, had a strong season for the Indians, rebounding after a couple of rough years. In 2017, Clippard had bounced around among the Yankees, White Sox and Astros, posting a 4.77 ERA over 67 games. He followed that up with a mediocre 2018 season for the Blue Jays where he posted a 3.67 ERA. As a result Clippard remained on the market most of the last offseason, finally signing a minor-league deal with the Indians in late February. He was added to the Indians' major league roster in late April and was effective in middle-to-late inning relief.

RHP Joe Smith

Stats: 1.80 ERA, 0.96 WHIP, 7.9 K/9, 1.8 BB/9, .209 BAA, 0 saves

Salary: \$8 million

Smith, who turns 36 in March, is yet another Houston reliever on the market coming off a strong season. He missed the first half after rupturing his Achilles in an offseason workout. He returned after the All-Star break and pitched well over the final two and a half months, mainly in the sixth, seventh and eighth innings. Smith has a career 2.98 ERA, 1.17 WHIP and 8.0 K/9 over 13 seasons. He's coming off a two-year, \$15 million deal.

RHP Craig Stammen

Stats: 3.29 ERA, 1.16 WHIP, 8.0 K/9, 1.6 BB/9, .251 BAA, 4 saves

Salary: \$2.25 million

Stammen, who turns 36 in March, made the most appearances of his 10-year career this season for the Padres and posted solid numbers in front of closer Kirby Yates. Stammen had flexor tendon surgery that cost him the 2016 season, but he's been durable the last few seasons for San Diego averaging 70 appearances and a 3.06 ERA. He's coming off a two-year, \$6.75 million deal.