

The Boston Red Sox Friday, October 18, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Sign stealing is a part of baseball — but some lines should never be crossed

Peter Abraham

Aaron Judge held onto his batting helmet when he got back to the dugout after hitting a two-run homer off Justin Verlander in Game 2 of the American League Championship Series and used it to shield his face from the television cameras when he spoke to a few teammates about the pitch he hit.

“Somebody is always watching,” Judge said. “You have to be careful.”

That is the uncomfortable undercurrent of the playoffs this season, that teams are either cheating with their surveillance of the opposition or bending the definition of what’s proper.

Even the most innocuous conversations on the field or in the dugout are done with gloves or hands over mouths. Players and coaches now assume that the other team has high-definition cameras trained on their every move.

Contrary to how it’s often portrayed, stealing signs is legal. For more than century, observant players or coaches have had the ability to watch the third base coach give signs and decipher them.

If there’s a pitchout and a runner is easily thrown out trying to steal, it’s usually because somebody stole the sign.

Going back to his playing days, Red Sox manager Alex Cora has been a sign-stealing savant.

Others can study a pitcher for an inning or two and figure out if he’s throwing a fastball or breaking ball based where his hands come set in his delivery or how he moves his hand within his glove. Even the smallest movement can be telling.

It’s also within the rules for a runner at second base to watch the catcher flash signs to the pitcher and then signal to the batter what’s coming.

What’s illegal is using a camera or some other electronic device during the game to aid in cracking the code.

“Sure, there are boundaries, yeah,” Yankees manager Aaron Boone said Thursday before New York’s 8-3 loss to Houston in Game 4 of the American League Championship Series. “There are boundaries. There are things you’re not allowed to do and things that are perfectly within the context of the game.”

The Astros were found to have a team employee spying on the Red Sox dugout with a cell phone camera from an adjacent space reserved for photographers during Game 1 of the ALCS last season.

The Sox had security remove the man. The Astros claimed they were monitoring the Red Sox to make sure they weren’t cheating, not trying to steal signs, and Major League Baseball went along with it.

MLB has tried to keep up with technology by putting clubhouse televisions on a longer delay and having a representative monitor the video replay system to make sure it’s used only to challenge calls and not steal signs.

But, still, there are suspicions. Counting the postseason, the Astros are 64-22 (.744) at home and 48-36 (.571) on the road this season.

That has raised questions about whether some kind of illegal system is in use at Minute Maid Park.

The Yankees heard a whistle coming from the Houston dugout during Game 1 and believed it was to signal hitters. But MLB quickly cleared the Astros of wrongdoing.

Houston manager A.J. Hinch passionately defended his team on Thursday.

“It made me laugh because it’s ridiculous,” he said. “Had I known that it would take something like that to set off the Yankees or any other team, we would have practiced it in spring training.”

Hinch acknowledged the Astros are looking for tells from opposing pitchers.

“If you don’t want us to know the pitch is coming, don’t do something that demonstrates what pitch you’re going to pitch or what you’re going to throw,” he said. “But they’re doing the same thing.”

Hinch went on to condemn anonymous sources accusing the Astros of cheating.

“I suggest they put their name by it if they’re so passionate about it to comment about my team or my players,” he said.

“There’s nothing going on other than the competition on the field. The fact that I had to field the question before a really, really cool game at Yankee Stadium is unfortunate.”

Justin Verlander, who is scheduled to start Game 4 on Friday for Houston, plans to use multiple signs to keep the Yankees from stealing them.

“It sucks for our players, because those guys are so talented. And I don’t think anything should take away from what they’re able to accomplish,” Verlander said.

“But I think we know what’s going on there. Look at what we’re getting accused of. But I understand where the paranoia comes from. We have it. I have it.”

Verlander, who made his major league debut in 2005, believes technology isn’t necessarily changing the game for the better.

“It used to be kind of a gamesmanship thing, runner gets on second base and if he’s able to decipher your signs the time he’s on second base, that’s OK, good for you,” he said.

“But if you’re pre-studying them or having some person study them before you even get out there and all of a sudden you take the field and the team already knows what you’re using, I think that’s a little bit different.”

Rafael Devers named an AL finalist for 2019 Players Choice Awards

Julian McWilliams

It was a down year for the Red Sox but a breakout season for their third baseman, Rafael Devers.

On Thursday, the Major League Baseball Players Association announced Devers as an American League finalist for outstanding player in the 2019 Players Choice Awards. This is different than the Most Valuable Player Award, which will be announced Nov. 14.

Devers, 22, hit .311 with 32 homers and 115 RBIs, sporting a .916 OPS. He led the AL with 54 doubles. His 50-plus doubles made him the youngest Red Sox to accomplish the feat and his 32 homers were the most by a Red Sox third baseman.

Recipients of the AL and NL awards will receive \$20,000 grants from MLB to direct toward a charity of their choice.

The other two AL finalists are Astros third baseman Alex Bregman and Angels center fielder Mike Trout. The NL finalists are Cody Bellinger of the Dodgers, Anthony Rendon of the Nationals, and Christian Yelich of the Brewers.

The league will announce the winners next week.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers nominated for MLBPA award

Bill Koch

Postseason honors have started to trickle in for Rafael Devers.

The Red Sox third baseman has been named an American League finalist for Outstanding Player honors at the 2019 Players Choice Awards. Angels outfielder Mike Trout and Astros third baseman Alex Bregman were also selected as finalists in a mid-September vote by their peers in the Major League Baseball Players Association. The winners in both leagues will be announced later in November.

Devers emerged as a star in his second full season, leading the majors with 90 extra-base hits and 359 total bases. He also topped Boston in hits, doubles and batting average. Devers recorded just the 25th 30-homer/50-double season in big league history and the first by a left-handed hitter since former Red Sox slugger David Ortiz accomplished the feat in 2007.

In terms of his age, Devers cemented his place in both club and league record books. He's the only Boston player with more than 50 doubles in a season before turning 23 and one of just three players all-time with as many as 90 extra-base hits in a season. Devers was the first player since Miguel Cabrera in 2005 and one of just 10 all-time to post a season of at least a .300 average, 30 home runs, 100 RBI and 100 runs scored before turning 23.

According to FanGraphs, Trout and Bregman were the top two position players in baseball in terms of Wins Above Replacement. Trout smashed 45 home runs and posted a 1.083 OPS through 134 games. Bregman helped power Houston back to the playoffs by racking up a 1.015 OPS and walking a league-high 119 times against just 83 strikeouts.

Dodgers outfielder Cody Bellinger, Nationals third baseman Anthony Rendon and Brewers outfielder Christian Yelich were named as National League finalists. Rendon has been one of the catalysts behind Washington's run to the World Series. Yelich is the reigning National League Most Valuable Player as voted by the Baseball Writers Association of America.

J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts joined Yelich as overall MLBPA finalists in 2018, and Martinez took home the award thanks to a brilliant debut season in Boston. Betts went on to win Most Valuable Player honors as voted on by members of the BBWAA.

*** *MassLive.com***

Red Sox 40-man roster: Bazardo (2.21 ERA) likely to be added in November with Dalbec, others

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox likely will add right-handed prospect Eduard Bazarido to the 40-man roster next month after he dominated in the minor leagues during 2019.

The deadline to protect Rule 5 Draft eligible players is Nov. 20. The draft takes place in December at the Winter Meetings.

A team that drafts an unprotected player must give \$100,000 to the player's previous team. The player must stay on his new team's 25-man roster for the entire season (barring an IL stint) or be returned to his former club for \$50,000.

Bazarido, one of Boston's several Rule 5 eligible players, features a fastball that tops out in the mid-90s and a plus-curveball.

The Venezuela native, who turned 24 on Sept. 1, started the 2019 season at High-A Salem where he posted a 1.76 ERA, 0.93 WHIP and .191 batting average against in 17 relief outings (41 innings). He then recorded a 2.78 ERA, 1.24 WHIP and .225 batting average against in 21 games (32 ⅓ innings) for Double-A Portland.

He had a 2.21 ERA overall and averaged 10.8 strikeouts per nine innings in 73 ⅓ innings.

Dalbec, Chatham and Wilson

The Red Sox will protect power hitter Bobby Dalbec.

C.J. Chatham and Marcus Wilson are strong candidate along with Bazarido to be added to the 40-man roster next month.

The 6-foot-4, 234-pound Dalbec batted .239 with a .356 on-base percentage, .460 slugging percentage, .816 OPS, 27 homers, 19 doubles, two triples and 73 RBIs in 105 games for Portland and 30 games for Triple-A Pawtucket combined.

The slugger, who turned 24 on June 29, belted seven homers in 123 plate appearances for Pawtucket.

Chatham, a 2016 second-round pick, posted a .298/.333/.408/.741 line with five homers, 31 doubles, one triple and 46 RBIs in 90 games for Portland and 20 games for Pawtucket combined.

Chatham, who turns 25 on Dec. 22, began playing some second base late in the 2019 season after primarily playing shortstop during his professional career. He has continued to play both shortstop and second in the Arizona Fall League.

Wilson — who the Red Sox acquired from the Diamondbacks for Blake Swihart in April — has impressed in the Arizona Fall League. He's 10-for-30 (.333) with a .412 on-base percentage, .467 slugging percentage, .878 OPS, one homer, one double and eight RBIs in eight games for Peoria.

Josh Ockimey, Rule 5 eligible for the second time

The Red Sox left 2014 fifth-round draft pick Josh Ockimey unprotected in the 2018 Rule 5 Draft. He remained in the Red Sox system after no club drafted him at the 2018 Winter Meetings.

Ockimey who turns 25 today (Friday), spent the entire 2019 season playing for Pawtucket. He batted just .204 but he posted a much more impressive .353 on-base percentage.

The 6-foot-1 left-handed hitting first baseman belted 25 homers, 17 doubles, two triples and drove in 57 runs in 122 games.

Other candidates: De La Guerra, Hart, Castellano

Chad De La Guerra, Kyle Hart and Pedro Castellanos also are candidates to be protected Nov. 20.

De La Guerra missed some time during 2019 because of a right wrist sprain and right knee sprain. He finished with a .288 batting average, .361 on-base percentage, .540 slugging percentage, .901 OPS, 13 homers, 16 doubles, one triple and 37 RBIs in 61 games for Pawtucket.

He'll turn 27 on Nov. 24. The Red Sox drafted him out of Grand Canyon University in the 17th round in 2015.

Kyle Hart, who turns 27 on Nov. 23, began 2019 at Portland where he delivered a 2.91 ERA, 1.01 WHIP and .199 batting average against in nine starts. He then posted a 3.57 ERA, 1.30 WHIP and .253 batting average against in 15 starts for Pawtucket.

He's a finesse lefty who Boston drafted out of Indiana in the 19th round in 2016.

Castellanos, who will turn 22 on Dec. 11, slashed .276/.321/.397/.718 with nine homers, 23 doubles, two triples and 71 RBIs in 117 games for Salem this year.

MLB free agency: Boston Red Sox to pursue reliever; will Brandon Workman remain closer in 2020 or should Boston add one?

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox plan to add at least one reliever this offseason whether through free agency or the trade market.

"We're going to hopefully supplement our relief pitching," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said at Fenway Park on Sept. 27.

The Red Sox's goal, although not a mandate, is for their 2020 payroll to be under \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold. The 2020 payroll already is approaching \$218 million. Boston must subtract from the current roster to upgrade in other areas, such as the bullpen.

Brandon Workman dominated all season. Rookies Josh Taylor and Darwinzon Hernandez also pitched well. Those three provide stability heading into 2020.

Workman took over as closer midseason. He led all major league relievers (minimum 40 innings) with a .123 batting average against. He allowed just eight extra-base hits. His 1.88 ERA ranked sixth. He allowed the fewest hits (29).

Workman has posted a 2.59 ERA in his past three seasons (149 outings, 152 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings).

The Red Sox should feel fairly confident with Workman as the closer heading into 2020. But Boston also might want to add another reliever who brings at least some closing experience in case Workman falters.

Pending free agent Daniel Hudson (2.47 ERA, eight saves, 73 innings for Blue Jays and Nationals in 2019) fits that description.

Sean Doolittle also would fit the description if the Nationals buy out his contract. He has a \$6.5 million mutual option and \$500,000 buyout for 2020.

Doolittle's stats dipped in 2019. His 4.05 ERA and six blown saves in 63 appearances (60 innings) came nowhere near his dominant 2018 season when he recorded a 1.60 ERA and converting 25-of-26 saves.

But Doolittle pitched well in September and he has carried it into the postseason. His strong late run might motivate the Nationals to exercise his option.

Brad Brach, a free agent this offseason, has closer experience in the AL East with the Orioles. He has been inconsistent the past two years but finished strong for the Mets this year.

Will Smith (2.76 ERA, 34 saves in 2019) is eligible for free agency. The Giants could extend him a qualifying offer. If so, he might accept it considering Craig Kimbrel's slow market last offseason. Kimbrel was attached to a qualifying offer, which requires any other team that signs a player to give up draft pick compensation (if signed before the draft).

Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman likely will opt out of his contract's remaining two years, \$30 million. Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen almost certainly will opt in to the remaining two years, \$38 million left on his contract after a disappointing 2019 season (3.71 ERA, eight blown saves).

Sergio Romo, the longtime San Francisco Giant, is a free agent after recording a 3.43 ERA and 20 saves in 60 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings for the Marlins and Twins in '19. He closed for the Rays in 2018.

The Athletics likely will pick up Yusmeiro Petit's \$5.5 million team option. He has a \$1 million buyout. But the A's are losing all their revenue sharing money this offseason. They'll probably need to cut payroll.

Petit would become one of the top relievers on the market if the A's part ways with him.

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.

Astros' Will Harris is a pending free agent. He dominated in 2019 with a 1.50 ERA in 60 innings.

Three other Astros relievers — Collin McHugh, Hector Rondon and Joe Smith — also are eligible for free agency.

McHugh's 4.70 ERA for 2019 comes nowhere close to his dominant 2018 (1.99 ERA in 72 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings).

But McHugh posted a 2.67 ERA in 27 relief outings this year compared to a 6.37 ERA in eight starts. The starts inflated his ERA.

He'd be a nice fit in Boston. He is a multi-inning, high-leverage reliever. The Red Sox could use a reliever who eats innings because of the question marks surrounding the health of Red Sox starters Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and David Price.

But McHugh shut down for the season in September because of some pain when throwing, per Chandler Rome of The Houston Chronicle.

Steve Cishek, a Falmouth, Mass. native, has a 2.52 ERA in 243 innings of relief the past four seasons. He'll be a free agent.

Craig Stammen, Dellin Betances, Brandon Kintzler, Josh Tomlin, Tommy Milone, Tyler Clippard, Pedro Strop and Chris Martin also are options.

Martin, who posted a 3.40 ERA in 55 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings between the Rangers and Braves in 2019, is a former Red Sox prospect who Boston traded to Colorado in December 2013.

Stammen's 3.06 ERA in 241 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings for the Padres the past three seasons is impressive.

Betances, the longtime Yankee, is an interesting option. He suffered a partial tear of his right Achilles on Sept. 15, after a long road back from a shoulder injury. It's unclear when he would be able to pitch in 2020 because of the Achilles injury.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

No surprise Red Sox ratings saw sharp decline in 2019

Chris Mason

Nobody in baseball played longer games than the Red Sox in 2019.

Fans could have watched "Titanic" in its entirety, taken five minutes to ponder whether Jack and Rose could have actually both fit on that door floating in the frigid Atlantic, and still had time for a bathroom break before the average Sox game would have ended.

At three hours and 25 minutes, you couldn't blame TV viewers for tuning out — and plenty of them did. According to Sports Business Journal, NESN's Red Sox ratings dropped 23%, the fourth steepest decline of anybody in baseball this season.

Of course, the team's regression on the field had plenty to do with that, too.

Alex Cora's Red Sox went from 108-win World Series darlings to an 84-78 team that almost universally underachieved. By season's end the stakes weren't compelling, there's no denying nor downplaying that.

But Sox fans have shown a great loyalty over the years — the NESN ratings were still fifth highest among MLB teams — so don't discount the slow pace's role in fans turning off their TVs and opting for more sleep.

"I don't know if you guys have noticed, but I think we're the only team that visitors come here and they use multiple signs with nobody on," Cora pointed out in September. "We slow it down, but the opposition slows it down more than we do. Maybe that's the reason our games are longer."

OK, sure. But why are opponents using multiple signs? That might still fall on the Sox, right?

Home attendance was technically up, but that's a bit deceptive because it included the London series, which saw over 59,000 attendees for both games. Fenway Park only holds 37,731, so the extra British spectators cooked the books a bit there.

Boston fans are among the most loyal in baseball, but the Red Sox didn't make it easy on them in 2019, and they've got the ratings to prove it.

*** *RedSox.com***

Benintendi looks to learn from tough '19 season

Ian Browne

The breakout season that Andrew Benintendi expected for himself in 2019 instead became a battle for survival.

The Red Sox left fielder spent much of the season trying to keep his head above water, and he at least did that, slashing .266/.343/.431 with 13 homers, 40 doubles and 68 RBIs.

But after the glory of 2018, when Benintendi was a consistent force on offense and defense while helping lead Boston to a World Series championship, this was a step back that leaves him driven to rebound going forward.

A grind?

“A big one,” Benintendi said. “I feel like there was always something. I’d figure one thing out, and then there would be another [issue]. Not as consistent as I’d like it to be. Pretty much there was one good stretch, a two-week stretch. Other than that, it was trying to basically just grind and get the job done. Hopefully I can learn from it.”

What went right?

The fact that Benintendi could belt 40 doubles in an off-year proves how well his stroke is suited for doubles-happy Fenway Park. He also made a strong improvement against lefties, notching a .796 OPS compared to .694 in '18.

“I hit lefties better than righties, which is somewhat out of the norm for me,” Benintendi said. “I know I can hit lefties. I think if I hit righties the way I usually do, it’s a completely different year. I still feel like I hit a lot of doubles. There’s a lot that didn’t go the way I wanted it to, but there’s definitely some positives.”

What went wrong?

Benintendi struck out way too often -- 140 times to be exact.

“He has a few ideas about what he’s going to work on during the offseason and where we’re going to take him. This guy is going to bounce back,” manager Alex Cora said. “Look at his numbers, look at the doubles. Well, that’s a bad season. There’s just a few things he didn’t do this year that I think he’s going to get better at.”

Benintendi’s 13 homers were also a career-low in his three full seasons. However, the Red Sox aren’t worried about the power. In fact, that might be what got him into trouble. Benintendi worried too much about bulking up last offseason and it cost him some of his athleticism.

What is concerning is that Benintendi’s average went from .290 to .266 and his OBP went from .366 to .343.

Best moment?

When the Red Sox were fighting for playoff positioning from late July to mid-August, Benintendi picked a good time to have his best stretch of the season. From July 24 to Aug. 16, he looked like his 2018 self, putting together a line of .374/.418/.659 with four homers and 18 RBIs. He made a couple of adjustments to his swing, some of which were suggested by the man who has coached him his whole life -- his father Chris. But the momentum didn’t last. From Aug. 17 on, Benintendi hit .151 with just one homer in 93 at-bats.

2020 outlook

If J.D. Martinez, as many people expect, opts out of his contract and becomes a free agent, the Red Sox are likely going to want Benintendi in the No. 2 or 3 spot in the batting order. Benintendi mainly hit fifth or sixth over the final four months of the season. Benintendi will be perfectly-suited to get back to the player who can score 100 runs and hit close to .300 if he gets back to a more athletic state of mind. If the Red Sox have a resurgence in 2020, Benintendi is likely to be a key reason why.

“When you guys ask me Feb. 15 who will be the bounce-back player [in 2020], Andrew will be the guy,” Cora said. “I do think he’s a 20-homer guy, 45-doubles, a complete player. A lot of people love the home

runs, I love the complete player. He can be a .400-OBP guy with 20 bags, 20 homers, 45 doubles and play good defense. We'll take that player."

* ***The Athletic***

The starters: How will the Red Sox fill the hole in their rotation?

Jen McCaffrey

This year's Red Sox team missed the postseason for a number of reasons, but none was more damaging than the rotation's failure to perform consistently and pitch deep into games.

As the club turns toward next season, hope abounds that the incumbent trio of Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi will rebound, but they'll also have to fill one vacancy with Rick Porcello hitting free agency.

It's possible the team brings back Porcello on a team-friendly deal or even trades for a starter, but don't expect help from the minor leagues. None of the club's top starting pitching prospects is major-league ready yet.

It's hard to know exactly how much the Red Sox might be willing to spend on a starter without knowing whether J.D. Martinez will opt out of his contract or whether the club will pursue trading Mookie Betts or Jackie Bradley Jr. But if they intend to stick with their announced austerity plan, then once arbitration raises are factored in and they spend to improve the bullpen, there might not be a lot of room for a big-ticket starter signing. That would mean the Red Sox aren't likely to pursue top-tier starters like Gerrit Cole, Cole Hamels or even Hyun-Jin Ryu. Stephen Strasburg can opt out of the remainder of his deal this offseason, but even if he does, he'd likely be seeking upward of a \$20 million average annual salary, the kind of outlay the Red Sox are now trying to avoid.

With all that in mind, here are several free-agent starters who might offer the combination of affordability and experience the Red Sox are seeking.

RHP Jake Odorizzi

Stats: 3.51 ERA, 1.21 WHIP, 10.1 K/9, 3.0 BB/9, 30 starts

Salary: \$9.5 million

Odorizzi turns 30 in March and is entering his first year of free agency. The Red Sox are quite familiar with the righty from his days starting for Tampa. This past year was one of Odorizzi's most successful, with the second-lowest ERA of his career and a career-best mark in K/9. He only threw 159 innings over 30 starts and has never pitched more than 187 2/3 innings, but he's also never made fewer than 28 starts since his first full year in 2014. Even with a modest salary bump, a two-year, \$25 million- or three-year, \$36 million-type deal could be within Boston's price range, though Odorizzi might be looking for a longer-term contract.

RHP Michael Pineda

Stats: 4.01 ERA, 1.16 WHIP, 8.6 K/9, 1.7 BB/9, 26 starts

Salary: \$8 million

Pineda turns 31 in January and is coming off a two-year, \$10 million deal. The former Yankees starter missed all of 2018 after Tommy John surgery and then subsequently suffered a meniscus tear. Pineda returned as one of the Twins' best starters, helping the club to its first division title since 2010. But he was suspended in September for 60 games after testing positive for a banned diuretic he said he was taking to manage his weight. Pineda missed the postseason and will have to serve the remainder of the suspension at

the start of the 2020 season. That might mean, however, that he comes at a discount if teams are willing to take the risk.

LHP Dallas Keuchel

Stats: 3.75 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, 7.3 K/9, 3.1 BB/9, 19 starts

Salary: \$13 million

Keuchel, who turns 32 in January, seemed like a surefire candidate to nail down a lucrative, long-term deal last winter, but it didn't materialize. Like Craig Kimbrel, Keuchel remained on the free-agent market until June when teams could sign him without losing a draft pick. Keuchel is now back on the market after a solid season with the Braves. He has a career 3.67 ERA over eight seasons, including three years with 200 or more innings. He would be a big upgrade for the Red Sox rotation but might come at too high a price.

LHP Madison Bumgarner

Stats: 3.90 ERA, 1.13 WHIP, 8.8 K/9, 1.9 WHIP, 34 starts

Salary: \$12 million

Bumgarner, 30, put in a strong, healthy season after two years shortened by injury (only 21 starts in 2018 after a fractured finger and 17 starts in 2017 after a dirt bike accident). Bumgarner would surely be a solid, veteran addition to the staff and seemingly still has a lot left in the tank, but like Keuchel might come at too high a cost for Boston. He's pitched his entire 11-year career in San Francisco, posting a 3.13 ERA, and is 206 strikeouts shy of 2,000 for his career. Prior to his injuries in 2017 and 2018, he'd delivered six consecutive 200-inning seasons and rebounded with 207 innings this past year. Bumgarner had previously listed Boston on his no-trade list, but it remains to be seen what that means in free agency. He's coming off of an eight-year, \$58.06 million deal signed in 2012.

LHP Gio Gonzalez

Stats: 3.50 ERA, 1.29 WHIP, 8.0 K/9, 3.8 BB/9, 17 starts

Salary: \$2 million

Gonzalez, who just turned 34, also fell victim to last winter's slow free-agent market. He originally signed a minor-league deal with the Yankees but was released in late April, and subsequently signed a \$2 million deal with the Brewers. After not having much of a spring training, Gonzalez missed some time with a dead arm and shoulder tightness last season. He also only averaged five innings per start. Nevertheless, he put up decent numbers in helping the Brewers to the postseason and could be a cheaper option for the fifth starter spot.

RHP Tanner Roark

Stats: 4.35 ERA, 1.40 WHIP, 8.6 K/9, 2.8 BB/9, 31 starts

Salary: \$10 million

Roark, who just turned 33, is entering free agency for the first time. The right-hander was traded from Cincinnati to Oakland at the deadline this year after spending the first six seasons of his career in Washington. Over the last three years, Roark has averaged a 4.46 ERA and 8 K/9. He's made at least 30 starts in four consecutive seasons and could be a more affordable option for the Red Sox.

RHP Adam Wainwright

Stats: 4.19 ERA, 1.43 WHIP, 8.0 K/9, 3.4 BB/9, 31 starts

Salary: \$2 million, plus incentives

Wainwright, 38, had his best year since 2014. The right-hander signed a one-year incentive-laden deal with the Cardinals last offseason after a lackluster 2018. Wainwright had just come off a five-year, \$97.5 million deal in which he made \$19.5 million average annually. The veteran starter pitched well enough this season to hit all the incentives and take home an additional \$8 million. He still might be out of Boston's price range, but will surely get attention if he doesn't re-sign with St. Louis.

RHP Zack Wheeler

Stats: 3.96 ERA, 1.26 WHIP, 9.0 K/9, 2.3 BB/9, 31 starts

Salary: \$5.98 million

Wheeler, who doesn't turn 30 until in May, was a prime trade candidate this summer until the Mets opted not to part with him. Entering free agency for the first time, Wheeler will obviously get a big salary bump, but it still could be within Boston's price range. Even if Wheeler gets three years, \$45 million or four years, \$64 million, it could be worth it for the Red Sox to invest. Over the last two seasons in which he's made 29 and 31 starts, respectively, Wheeler's posted a 3.65 ERA with an 8.9 K/9 and 2.5 BB/9.

LHP Rich Hill

Stats: 2.45 ERA, 1.13 WHIP, 11 K/9, 2.8 BB/9, 13 starts

Salary: \$18.66 million

Hill, who turns 40 in March, missed two months with a knee injury before returning to the mound in September for a handful of starts. He also made a postseason start in the NLDS against the Nationals. Despite entering free agency, Hill said he hopes to re-sign with the Dodgers. But if that doesn't materialize, returning to Boston, where he resurrected his career in 2015, could be an option for the Milton, Mass., native. Over the last four seasons, Hill has posted a 3.00 ERA and 10.6 K/9. He's coming off a three-year, \$48 million deal, but given his age and recent knee injury, one- or two-year deals seem more likely.

RHP Kyle Gibson

Stats: 4.84 ERA, 1.44 WHIP, 9.0 K/9, 3.2 BB/9, 29 starts

Salary: \$8.13 million

Gibson, who just turned 32, is entering free agency for the first time. The right-hander posted a career-best 9.0 K/9 but struggled a bit toward the end of the season after being diagnosed with ulcerative colitis following an illness last winter. He posted a 4.03 ERA in 19 games, 18 starts in the first half and could be a cheaper option for the Red Sox rotation.

RHP Rick Porcello

Stats: 5.52 ERA, 1.39 WHIP, 7.4 K/9, 2.3 BB/9, 32 starts

Salary: \$21.125 million

Re-signing Porcello, who turns 31 in December, might seem like the last thing the Red Sox would want, given that 2019 was the roughest year of his career. But the idea gained some traction toward the end of the regular season. He'd have to take a significant pay cut, but he stated in spring training he was willing to take a hometown discount to remain in Boston. Porcello's leadership went a long way in the Red Sox clubhouse, but obviously results on the field matter most. If the Red Sox think they can get him back on track and sign him for cheap, perhaps with a Wainwright-style incentive-laden deal with a low base salary, it might be an intriguing option.