

# ***The Boston Red Sox***

## ***Thursday, October 24, 2019***

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

#### **It's not hard to find traces of home at this World Series**

Dan Shaughnessy

HOUSTON — The Houston Astros and Washington Nationals are engaged in the 115th World Series and a lot of folks in Boston have tuned out because the games are too late, the pace is too slow and . . . in case you hadn't noticed . . . the Red Sox are not here.

But the Sox are always here, don't you know? Everything in life traces back to New England and the Red Sox. So here's a clip-and-save, handy-dandy guide to how New England and the Red Sox are represented in a Astros-Nationals World Series:

- If the Nationals win the World Series it might help the Red Sox in their PR campaign if they have to trade Mookie Betts. Bryce Harper was The Franchise for Washington, but the Nats couldn't re-sign him and then went out and won the National League pennant anyway. A championship for the Nats makes it easier for the Sox to justify trading their best player. They can point to Washington and say, "Look what happened after the Nationals lost Harper." Meanwhile, if you are thinking about a logical place to trade Betts, consider the White Sox.
- The Red Sox have David Price in the middle of a seven-year contract that pays him \$31 million per season. Chris Sale next year starts a five-year, \$145 million deal that puts him on the threshold of Price. This series has Stephen Strasburg (seven years, \$175 million), Max Scherzer (seven years, \$210 million), Zack Greinke (six years, \$206.5 million), and Justin Verlander (two years, \$66 million). It also has Houston righty Gerrit Cole, who is a free agent and will be making more than any of them by the time spring training rolls around.
- I'm thinking Scott Boras may steer J.D. Martinez toward the Yankees.
- Veteran Josh Reddick is the Astros' everyday right fielder. He's had an 11-year career and has played in 58 postseason games. Reddick was drafted by the Theo Epstein Red Sox in 2006, along with another outfielder named Ryan Kalish. The two came up through the Sox system together and many Sox personnel, including Terry Francona, preferred Kalish. Plagued by injuries, Kalish played only 153 games over parts of four seasons before he hung 'em up in 2016. Reddick was traded to the A's in December 2011 and never looked back. He's on a long list of Red Sox folks who were fired, traded, released, retired or quit after the chicken-and-beer 2011 season. The list includes Epstein, Francona, Tim Wakefield, Jason Varitek, J.D. Drew, Jonathan Papelbon, Jed Lowrie, Marco Scutaro, Hideki Okajima, and Heidi Watney. Miss Heidi is at the World Series, working for MLB Network.
- Former Red Sox employee Ken Nigro, now retired in Florida, was first to invoke "the fallacy of the predestined hit." Nigro came up with the phrase during his lengthy career as a baseball writer for the Baltimore Sun. It's baseball's version of the Butterfly Effect: One cannot predict precisely what would happen if the prior event was somehow changed. A great example of this came in the eighth inning of Game 1 when George Springer failed to run hard out of the box on a long double to right. Springer thought he had hit a homer. He ended up on second instead of third with one out.. When Jose Altuve followed with a fly out to right, it was widely speculated that Springer would have scored on the fly ball if he'd been on third. No. Washington pitcher Daniel Hudson might have worked Altuve differently with a runner on third. Everything changes. This is the fallacy of the predestined hit. We saw it again in Game 2 when Michael Brantley singled to center after Altuve was caught stealing at third. Folks wrote that Brantley's hit would have scored Altuve from second. Don't fall for it.

- Pedro Martinez (MLB Network) and David Ortiz (Fox) are both here as television commentators. After watching 20-year-old Dominican slugger Juan Soto dominate Game 1, Pedro said the kid is the best young hitter he has seen, “better than Andruw Jones or a young Vlady [Vladimir Guerrero].”
- J.J. Watt, who is 0-7 lifetime against the Patriots, was part of the festivities at Minute Maid Park before Game 1.
- Springer went to UConn with Sox pitcher Matt Barnes.
- Mike Lowell is here with the MLB Network and said he is not a candidate for the Red Sox GM vacancy. The Red Sox 2007 World Series MVP also expressed surprise that the Red Sox fired assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett. “Looked like they hit pretty well to me,” said Lowell, a longtime friend of Barkett.
- Winning the first two games of the World Series on the road does not guarantee a championship. The 1986 Red Sox won the first two games against the Mets at Shea Stadium, came home, lost two of three and then . . . well, you know.
- One year ago Wednesday the Red Sox beat Clayton Kershaw and the Dodgers, 8-4, at Fenway in Game 1 of the World Series. Yaz threw out the first pitch. Fans chanted “Beat LA!”, Eduardo Nunez hit a three-run homer, and the game was played in a tidy 3:52. One year ago Thursday it was Price shutting down the Dodgers in a 4-2 win at the Fens. The Red Sox won the World Series in Los Angeles four days later.

They are still the “World Champion Boston Red Sox.”

For just a few more days.

### **Red Sox sign Taiwanese prospect Chih-Jung Liu**

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox on Wednesday signed 20-year-old righthander Chih-Jung Liu, an interesting prospect from Taiwan, for \$750,000.

Liu was a high school standout who elected to attend college and in the last six months has seen his fastball jump up to 98 miles per hour after he recovered from some injuries.

Liu was the Most Valuable Player of the recent Asian Championships, teaming with Red Sox infielder Tzu-Wei Lin as Taiwan won the gold medal, and is set to play for Taiwan in the upcoming Premier12 tournament, an Olympic qualifier.

In Taiwan, Liu told reporters that he spoke to Lin about his decision and was eager to join the Sox.

“Lin will look after me,” he said.

Liu, a switch-hitting shortstop with some power, was a two-way player in Taiwan but was signed as a pitcher by the Red Sox. He played on the same junior team as former Yankees pitcher Chien-Ming Wang and is now being coached by Wang with the Premier12 team.

Liu was overworked in high school and passed on a professional career to attend Culture University. Coaches there shut him down from pitching until earlier this year. When he returned to the mound, his velocity took a jump and major league scouts became interested.

**\* *MassLive.com***

## **Boston Red Sox sign Chih-Jung Liu, a prospect from Taiwan with upper-90s fastball; deal is pending physical**

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have signed Taiwan prospect Chih-Jung Liu, who has a high-90s fastball. The deal still is pending a physical.

Liu earned MVP of the 2019 Asian Baseball Championship. He struck out five in 2 ½ scoreless innings in the championship Sunday.

He has been a two-way star and switch-hitter in Taiwan. But the Red Sox view him as a pitcher. His fastball topped out at 98 mph at a tournament Sept. 24, according to CPBL Stats.

He'll play for the Taiwan national team alongside Boston Red Sox's Tzu-Wei Lin in next month's WBSC's Premier12 Tournament.

CPBL Stats reported, "Liu took almost two years off from pitching after high school due to injuries. During those times, he mainly played as a middle infielder and did not return to the mound again until 2019."

## **Boston Red Sox GM search providing more questions than answers with GM meetings approaching**

Chris Cotillo

A look back at what we've learned about the Red Sox' search for a new head of baseball operations in the last six weeks reveals speculation, some notable denials, more speculation and... dead silence from the organization. Since Dave Dombrowski was fired in mid-September, there have been no confirmed candidates or interviews, no surefire favorites or longshots and very little in the way of facts about the search process.

A day spent reaching out to dozens around the game revealed little about the process, with industry insiders ranging from general managers to agents all saying they knew very little about Boston's targets. Word from inside the organization was that there's still no rush to hire a new general manager or president of baseball operations and that things are running smoothly under the interim leadership of assistants Raquel Ferreira, Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero and Zack Scott.

With the official beginning of the offseason at most a week away, the Sox have given very few indications of how they're approaching the search for their new front office leader. It now appears that search will go one of two ways: either the Sox announce a hiring out of the blue -- revealing a well-kept secret akin to the Celtics' hiring of Brad Stevens in 2013 -- or the team simply promotes from within, elevating someone like Romero or O'Halloran to the lead role or keeping the current collaborative structure led by Romero, O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira intact permanently.

At this point, the latter looks more likely. Reading the tea leaves and talking with people in the organization, it would no longer come as any sort of surprise if the Sox stayed within the family and entrusted their interim "Gang of Four" with permanent decision-making power.

Until an announcement is made, everyone is truly just guessing. But here's what we know, right now, about where things stand with the search.

1. Principal owner John Henry originally said the Red Sox preferred to hire an external candidate with GM experience -- but none of those types stand out

Henry's only public comments about the search came Sept. 27, when he said the Sox would prefer an external candidate with GM experience to replace Dombrowski.

“To put one of (internal candidates) in charge, that’s sort of a tough way to start your career as a general manager,” Henry said. “We are starting the search looking outward.”

Henry also cautioned that poaching a top executive from another organization would be extremely difficult given the rules in place to avoid such circumstances. He said it was more likely the Sox would bring aboard someone who was second-in-command elsewhere.

Those second-in-command choices have mostly dried up, from Chicago’s Jed Hoyer (appears content to stay put) to Arizona’s Amiel Sawdaye and Jared Porter (signed extensions) and Houston’s Brandon Taubman (Sox job is the least of his worries right now). At this point, there is no clear favorite who fits the profile of what Henry explicitly said it was looking for.

Some imperfect fits include Rays VP of baseball operations Chaim Bloom, Dodgers senior VP of baseball operations Josh Byrnes and Cubs senior VP of player personnel Jason McLeod. None of those three seem especially likely at present.

2. Boston’s attempts at some of the bigger fish have proved fruitless, so far

Henry’s fears that the Sox would not be able to poach a top dog from another organization have come true, potentially being aided by a perceived lack of instability throughout the industry about the position after the last two baseball operations heads (Dombrowski and Ben Cherington) were fired within two years of winning World Series titles.

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein is still under contract and denied any interest. Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen signed an extension and won’t be coming. Ditto Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey. And just last week, Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman said he expects an extension to be finalized soon, ruling out potentially the top candidate available.

Astros GM Jeff Luhnow might be of some interest once the World Series wraps up. But early indications are that he’s not interested in leaving Houston, and the recent controversy involving assistant GM Brandon Taubman may steer the Sox away from poaching anyone from the Astros.

3. The Red Sox have a massive amount of trust in the four people currently running baseball operations

The “Gang of Four” -- Ferreira, O’Halloran, Romero and Scott -- each have at least a decade of experience in Boston’s front office and have been entrusted with key decisions in a variety of roles before earning their interim promotions.

“We are very pleased with the work Eddie, Zack, Brian and Raquel have done,” said chairman Tom Werner last month. “They’re all been with us for a decade each. We have great confidence in them.”

A Sox source reaffirmed that trust earlier in the week, saying the organization is in a good spot with the current quartet. That trust could parlay itself into a permanent structure of shared responsibilities, or, at least, a delay in the search.

4. Recent movement in the front office and coaching staff would support the argument that the team will stay in-house

Speaking at the team’s year-end press conference Sept. 30, O’Halloran and Romero both promised the interim group would be aggressive while they were at the helm. They’ve delivered on that promise in all aspects of the organization.

First came a front office shuffle in the scouting department, with Mike Rikard being promoted to vice president of scouting and Paul Toboni earning the director of amateur scouting role. Next came major changes to the coaching staff, with pitching coach Dana LeVangie and assistant pitching coach Brian

Bannister reassigned and assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett fired. Last week, some roster tinkering was done as Steven Wright was released and three other players were sent off the 40-man roster.

The construction of the 2020 staff won't wait until a new baseball operations head comes in, either. Peter Fatse was hired as the new assistant hitting coach last week and interviews are underway for the pitching coach position.

5. The industry consensus is that no one -- from executives to agents -- has any idea where the Sox will go

A quick poll of about a dozen agents, executives and scouts this week revealed something rare in the ultra-gossipy baseball world: no one has any idea where the Red Sox are looking. Some of the responses:

Agent: "Haven't heard one guy."

AL general manager: "Nothing."

NL executive: "I haven't heard anything whatsoever. It's kind of weird."

Agent: "Total crickets."

NL scout: "Nothing yet, to be honest."

NL executive: "Everyone mentioned gets an extension!"

AL executive: "Haven't heard anything."

NL executive: "Heard they want an established GM with an analytical background. But as far as names, very quiet."

NL scout: "Nothing. But I'm sure it'll be a big name."

Names always leak out in searches like this one. So the fact no one knows anything either means the Sox are keeping things extremely close to the vest or that nothing has advanced too far yet.

6. The Sox clearly aren't in a rush to make a move

The annual GM meetings begin Nov. 10 in Scottsdale, Arizona, so it would make sense the Sox would have someone in place by then. Henry said in September that he didn't think that was a mandate, instead calling it a competitive advantage and a preference.

That Nov. 10 date is now just over two weeks away. It's hard to envision a hire is made before then.

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10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. Kudos to Sports Illustrated's Stephanie Apstein for bravely reporting the Brandon Taubman incident this week. And also great she has gotten so much support from other writers, whether they were in that clubhouse or not.

2. David Ross to the Cubs is the second obvious managerial hire in this cycle. Easy to have seen that one coming.

3. Ross is one of six ex-Red Sox to have won a ring in Boston that are current managers. The others are Alex Cora (Boston), Dave Roberts (Los Angeles), Kevin Cash (Tampa Bay), Terry Francona (Indians) and

Torey Lovullo (Diamondbacks). Gabe Kapler, who was just fired by the Phillies, will be the seventh if he gets an open job.

4. Bryan Price is an interesting fit for Sox pitching coach and appears to have a legitimate shot. He managed the Reds from 2014 to 2018
5. I wouldn't think Curt Schilling would be a candidate. Dave Bush, Mickey Callaway, Kevin Walker, Ricky Bones and others are among the possibilities.
6. This Nationals' run is one for the ages. Beating two all-time powerhouses in the Dodgers and Astros would be as impressive as anything we've seen in a while.
7. Starting pitching really does go a long way, huh? Six of the best starters in baseball are featured in this World Series.
8. The minor-league realignment story is a major one that is being overshadowed by the World Series right now. But it'll be a big deal in a couple weeks.
9. The J.D. Martinez countdown is on. If the Nationals sweep, Martinez's opt-out decision will be due on Halloween. Tick, tick, tick.
10. Congratulations to Chris Mason, MassLive's new Patriots beat writer. Mason has been covering the Sox for the Lawrence Eagle-Tribune.

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

### **Expect David Ross to soar in Chicago**

Chris Mason

As Xander Bogaerts lounged at his locker after the final game of Boston's season, a familiar name came up amid small talk: former Red Sox catcher David Ross.

"He's going to be a manager someday," Bogaerts told the Eagle-Tribune. "Just wait."

Bogaerts was spot on: That day is coming very, very soon.

According to multiple reports, Theo Epstein is expected to name Ross the next manager of the Chicago Cubs. The move likely won't be official until after the World Series, but it's coming.

And it's a wise hire.

Ross is everything a team should be looking for in a manager in 2019. He's sharp, knows what it takes to win, has a ton of baseball experience, and above all else, he can get through to people.

Nothing is more important for a modern day manager than the ability to communicate.

Whether fans like it or not — and many certainly don't — analytics are here to stay. The ability to understand the information, digest it, and regurgitate things to players is crucial.

But the communication goes well beyond that, too.

Look no further than the last two managers to win the World Series, Alex Cora and A.J. Hinch. Both have developed personal bonds with their players, something Ross never struggled to do as a glue guy in championship clubhouses.

At his introductory press conference, Cora famously said there's no such thing as getting too close to players, and Hinch is so revered by his guys that George Springer called him after Game 1 of the World Series to apologize for not hustling enough when he could have legged a double into a triple.

Those connections matter. Clubhouses are now made up of mostly millennials, and like it or not, the old-school, hardball attitude isn't resonating like it once did. There's a reason fewer and fewer of those managers are in the game.

Bogaerts' breakup day comment was a callback to a conversation we'd had earlier in the season.

With a growing voice in the clubhouse, the shortstop was asked who he wanted to lead like. The guess here was David Ortiz — because obviously — but Bogaerts went a different route.

"I always liked David Ross," he said in July. "He has that type of (managerial) attitude. Sometimes he can be a little emotional, show a lot of emotion, but I guess that's what happens whenever you play baseball. You've gotta have a little fire in you. He does it the right way."

When Bogaerts debuted as a 20-year-old, Ross was a long-in-the-tooth catcher in his mid 30s. He was able to connect with the not-old-enough-to-buy-a-beer Aruban, but there were times Ross gave Bogaerts tough love.

"I won't say anything (specific), but, yeah, there were some times," Bogaerts chuckled. "As I said, all meaning in a good way and looking out for you as a young kid. He had a little point to it, but he does it the right way."

Ross' leadership resonated with Bogaerts, and there are a bunch more young Cubs who are about to experience that connection, too.

## **\* *RedSox.com***

### **Red Sox, prospect Liu agree to deal (source)**

David Adler

The Red Sox have agreed to a deal with Taiwanese prospect Chih-Jung Liu, a source told MLB.com's Mark Feinsand on Wednesday. The deal with the 20-year-old right-hander will be for \$750,000.

The club hasn't confirmed the agreement. The Boston Globe's Pete Abraham was the first to report the deal.

Liu was a two-way player in Taiwan. On the mound -- the Red Sox are signing him as a pitcher -- his fastball has reportedly reached up to 98 mph.

He was recently named Most Valuable Player of this year's Asian Baseball Championship. Taiwan won the championship to earn a spot in the qualifying tournament for the 2020 Olympics that will be held next March in Taipei City.

Liu was teammates on the Taiwanese national team with Red Sox infielder Tzu-Wei Lin, who signed with the Red Sox as an amateur free agent in 2012.

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

### **Needs improvement: What each player on the Red Sox roster can do better in 2020**

Jen McCaffrey

Aside from a few standout performances, almost every player on the Red Sox roster can find an area for significant improvement heading into 2020.

The offense produced wild blowout wins followed by unexplainable shutouts against pitchers they should have dominated. The bullpen had far too many blown saves. The rotation didn't pitch deep enough into games and overall was too inconsistent.

What specifically does each of these players need to do better to return the Red Sox to the playoffs? For those players likely to have 2020 roster spots (barring any trades), we looked at one area each could improve.

Starting pitchers  
RHP Nathan Eovaldi

Throwing more fastballs up in the zone.

Eovaldi missed much of the first half recovering from surgery to remove loose bodies in his elbow. Upon his return, he posted a 5.99 ERA over 23 games, including 12 starts. According to Baseball Savant, Eovaldi threw 14 percent of his pitches up in the zone last year compared to 17 percent in 2018. Manager Alex Cora regularly pointed to hitters not being able to catch up with Eovaldi's fastball velocity high in the zone in 2018, but when it came right down the middle, like it did much of this past year, Eovaldi became a relatively pedestrian pitcher.

LHP David Price

Pitch better with runners in scoring position.

Last year, batters hit .316 with an .877 OPS with runners in scoring position against Price. Over his 10-year career, Price has held batters to a .250 average and .710 OPS with runners in scoring position.

LHP Chris Sale

Pitch deeper into games.

The 2019 season was undoubtedly the worst of Sale's career with a 4.40 ERA over 25 starts. His career ERA rose from 2.89 to 3.03. In those 25 starts, Sale reached the seventh inning just five times while averaging about 5 2/3 innings per start.

LHP Eduardo Rodriguez

Pitch better in the first inning.

There's no question that Rodriguez was the best starter the Red Sox had in 2019, finishing with a 3.81 ERA and a career-high 213 strikeouts over 34 starts in 203 1/3 innings pitched. One area Rodriguez could refine: his first inning performances. Rodriguez posted a 5.03 ERA in the first inning, the worst of any inning except the seventh (in which he pitched 15 times). He allowed 19 earned runs in the first inning and batters hit .300 against him in that frame.

LHP Brian Johnson

Command.

Johnson has never been a power pitcher and relies on command with his low 90s fastball. Last season, he struggled mightily with a 6.02 ERA over 21 games, including seven starts. He issued 23 walks over 40 1/3 innings. He is versatile and his ability to start or relieve has value, but opponents hit .315 off Johnson, so in



order to guarantee himself a roster spot next spring, he'll need to showcase better depth and deceptiveness with his arsenal.

#### Relievers

Darwinzon Hernandez has great stuff, but control remains an issue. (Adam Glanzman/Getty Images)  
LHP Darwinzon Hernandez

#### Control.

Hernandez blossomed in the Red Sox bullpen this past season as he transitioned from starter to reliever, with his stuff playing far better in shorter outings. Hernandez will remain a reliever entering next year and could be a big piece in the Red Sox bullpen, but needs to work on the overall control of his pitches. He issued 26 walks in 30 1/3 innings.

RHP Brandon Workman

#### Fewer walks.

Workman flourished in his role handling high-leverage matchups the season. He posted career bests with a 1.88 ERA, 1.03 WHIP, 13.1 K/9 and 16 saves, but he also had a career-worst 5.7 walks per nine innings, which hurt him in some key situations.

RHP Matt Barnes

#### Better pitch mix.

Barnes had a 1.99 ERA holding batters to a .160 average through his first 23 appearances from March 29 to June 1. But June was rough for the right-hander and he never again quite harnessed the same dominance. Part of Barnes' downturn came as a result of routine usage facing the heart of the lineup in high leverage spots in the eighth and ninth innings. In 47 appearances after June 1, Barnes posted a 4.75 ERA, despite opponents hitting only .235. In that stretch he allowed almost half as many walks (30) as he had strikeouts (69). Barnes' stuff became a little too predictable in the middle of the season. In July, he started varying the location of his fastball and using different pitch sequences with his curveball, regaining some of the form he'd had earlier in the year.

LHP Josh Taylor

#### Pitching with runners in scoring position.

Like Hernandez, Taylor had a surprisingly successful rookie campaign with a 3.04 ERA, 1.18 WHIP and 11.8 K/9 over 52 appearances. One area of improvement should be limiting damage with men on third. In 11 games in which Taylor was pitching with a man on third and two outs, he allowed six runs with the batters hitting .308 in that situation. It's a small sample size, but stranding runners on third is obviously important for his role.

RHP Marcus Walden

#### Working on the four-seamer.

Along with Hernandez and Taylor, Walden's success was a boon for the bullpen. The 31-year-old late bloomer had pitched for the Red Sox briefly in 2018, but took a big step forward with a 3.81 ERA and 8.8 K/9 over 70 appearances, tied for the second-highest total on the team with Barnes. Walden primarily used a sinker, slider and cutter combination to finally reach the majors after a decade in the minors, but has started to reincorporate a four-seam fastball to complement his primary pitches. Refining the use of the four-seamer in specific sequences is something he'll likely be working on in spring training.

RHP Ryan Brasier

Better command and location.

After a breakout 2018 where he posted a 1.60 ERA, Brasier struggled mightily. He posted a 4.85 ERA and allowed nine homers in 55 2/3 innings, spending a portion of the season in Triple-A Pawtucket. His slider was inconsistent and he wasn't able to locate his fastball effectively.

Catchers

C Christian Vazquez

Defense.

Vazquez had a breakout year at the plate with career highs in almost every offensive category. He finished the season with a .276 average, .798 OPS, 26 doubles and 23 homers. Anything close to that in 2020 (maybe fewer strikeouts), would be a positive, but he's already shown great improvement in all those areas. Vazquez's defense, however, is always an area that could use a little work. He allowed nine passed balls (on the high end among catchers with as many innings as him, but not outrageous), but the 55 wild pitches with him behind the plate is an alarmingly high number. It indicates mix-ups and miscommunication with the pitcher, something that needs fixing as he continues to guide the Red Sox staff.

Infield

SS Xander Bogaerts

Defense.

Bogaerts had a terrific year at the plate, buoying the Red Sox offense as he finished with a .309 average and .939 OPS along with 52 doubles and 33 homers. Though he improved defensively, it remains an area where he can get better.

3B Rafael Devers

Defense.

Sensing a theme here? Like Bogaerts, Devers' offense carried the Red Sox for a good portion of the season. The 23-year-old hit .311 with a .916 OPS and led the American League with 54 doubles while hitting 32 homers. There's not much more he can improve on offensively, but as with Bogaerts and Vazquez, defense remains his biggest area to improve. Devers continues to work hard on his defending and took a dramatic step in the right direction, but still suffered from some careless throws and poor decisions in the field.

INF Michael Chavis

Fewer strikeouts.

When Chavis earned a callup in late April after Dustin Pedroia went back on the injured list, it wasn't clear if the rookie would be around long term. But he made his mark right away and boosted a struggling Red Sox offense. Chavis played solid defense at several positions, mainly at first (48 games) and second base (42 games), but ended the year on the injury list. Nevertheless, he's likely to be a key piece of the roster next season and reducing his strikeout rate will be important, as he struck out in nearly one-third of his plate appearances.

INF Marco Hernandez

Fewer strikeouts.

We haven't seen a full season from Hernandez yet, so it's hard to say where he needs to improve, other than striking out less. Hernandez played in 61 games last season hitting .250 with a .617 OPS. He could make the roster as the utility man filling the role left by Brock Holt's potential departure, and if that's the case, he'll need to have a better approach at the plate.

DH  
JD Martinez

More of the same.

Martinez posted strong numbers once again with a .304 average, .939 OPS and 36 homers over 146 games. It marked the fourth straight year he'd finished with an average above .300 and OPS about .900. While Martinez's defense could always use improvement, he's a hitter first and foremost and maintaining that consistency and discipline he's shown at the plate is the biggest key for him.

Outfield  
RF Mookie Betts

Being more aggressive early in the count.

Betts finished the year with solid numbers including a .291 average, .915 OPS, 40 doubles and 29 homers. But it wasn't until the second half of the season that he heated up, thanks in part to a more aggressive approach at the plate. Early in the season, Betts had reduced his aggressiveness early in the count, leading to a more patient approach that put him in tough hitter's counts. He slowly returned to his aggressive approach in the second half and it led to him hitting .325 with a .992 OPS over the final two-and-a-half months.

CF Jackie Bradley Jr.

Consistency.

Bradley has been plagued by offensive inconsistency throughout his career. Though he finished the year hitting .225 with a .738 OPS, 28 doubles and 21 homers, the ups and downs were once again tough to endure. Bradley's defense is never in question and has been enough to keep him in the lineup despite his low points, but consistency at the plate and locking in his swing will always be an area of improvement for him.

LF Andrew Benintendi

Hit for more power.

Benintendi saw a dip in production with fewer hits, stolen bases homers, doubles and walks when compared to his first two full seasons. He finished with a .266 average and .774 OPS, but the numbers were lagging as he moved from batting leadoff to second to fifth. He put himself in tough counts and didn't capitalize on pitches he could hit. Driving the ball the way he did in 2017 and 2018 will be key entering next season.