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Sources: Red Sox, Dodgers have agreed to new deal involving Mookie Betts

Alex Speier

The Red Sox and Dodgers have reached agreement on a blockbuster — again.

According to multiple major league sources, the Red Sox and Dodgers have agreed to a deal that would send superstar Mookie Betts and pitcher David Price to Los Angeles. In exchange, the Red Sox would receive outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers along with shortstop prospect Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong. As part of the deal, the Red Sox will also send \$48 million to the Dodgers to help subsidize the remaining three years and \$96 million on Price's contract.

The only remaining step to the deal's completion is approval of the money transfer by Major League Baseball. The medical evaluations have been completed to the satisfaction of the teams, and the players have been notified of the deal by both teams.

The deal represents a solution to a stalemate that prevented the completion of a previous deal that had been agreed upon on Tuesday between the Red Sox, Dodgers, and Twins. In that initial deal, Betts and Price were to go to LA, Kenta Maeda was to head to Minnesota, and Verdugo and Twins prospect Brusdar Graterol were supposed to go to Boston.

But that deal stalled when the Red Sox, after the exchange of medical information, concluded that Graterol — a pitcher viewed by some as having mid-rotation upside or better, though with a good chance of ending up as a late-innings reliever — was more likely to have a bullpen future based on his medical file than they'd anticipated. While the Twins showed a willingness to alter the deal, they could not find common ground with the Sox on additional prospect compensation to complete the trade.

As a result, the sides decided to split the negotiations into separate two-way trades, breaking the impasse. The Dodgers negotiated directly with the Twins and reportedly landed Graterol (who'd been seen by their head physician, Dr. Neal ElAttrache, during the season), a minor league outfielder, and a draft pick from the Twins for Maeda, a prospect, and cash.

And the Sox received Verdugo — the originally agreed-upon anchor of the package in the original three-team deal who is viewed as a potential above-average everyday outfielder who had a strong rookie season in 2019 — as well as two additional prospects from the Dodgers.

Downs is a top-100 prospect, a 2017 first-rounder who reached Double A last year as a 20-year-old, hitting .276/.362/.526 with 24 homers. One National League scout raved that he saw Downs as one of the best hitters in the 2017 draft, someone who could represent an up-the-middle anchor (at second base — like other evaluators, he did not see Downs staying at shortstop long-term) with Xander Bogaerts for years.

"There is a calmness when he hits," texted that evaluator, who felt that Downs sees the ball well, is capable of using the whole field, displays impressive pull-side power, and has excellent makeup. "[I] see him being a top-of-the-order hitter in 2021 playing plus defense at [second base]."

Another evaluator was more reserved, suggesting that as a righthanded hitter who pulls the ball in the air, Downs could be a strong fit for Fenway, albeit with enough swing-and-miss that his offense will be driven primarily by his slugging ability rather than his on-base skills or ability to hit for average.

Wong, a 2017 third-rounder, hit .281/.336/.541 with 24 homers as a 23-year-old last year. Like Downs, he split the year between High A Rancho Cucamonga and Double A Tulsa. One evaluator described him as an athletic catcher who can also play third. Though his strikeout rate (30.8 percent last year) is high, the evaluator suggested that he has the skill set of a potential big league regular, while another felt that, like Downs, his ability to pull the ball in the air could play well at Fenway.

Wong and Downs collectively give the Red Sox a deeper pool of position players in the upper levels, providing the team with their best two up-the-middle prospects in the upper minors. (Evaluators were split over whether Downs would rank ahead of or behind first baseman Triston Casas as the top Red Sox prospect.) Verdugo, meanwhile, gives the team a big league-ready everyday outfielder who will remain under team control for five more years and won't be arbitration eligible until after 2021.

Of course, that deeper core of young position players comes at the cost of a player in Betts who ranks as one of the best talents in Red Sox franchise history and a pitcher in Price who, when healthy, represented a rotation anchor — as when he claimed the Game 5 victory to clinch Boston's 2018 World Series title in Los Angeles.

Assuming the deal is approved by MLB, the Red Sox now have a hole to fill in their rotation, an all-lefthanded outfield (Verdugo, Jackie Bradley Jr., and Andrew Benintendi) that may require a righthanded complement. Obviously, the Sox are a less complete team in 2020 as a result of the deal — though they still view themselves as contenders for the coming season, and better positioned to sustain such ambitions for the coming years thanks to the resetting of luxury tax penalties thanks to their payroll reduction below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold in the coming year and the infusion of controllable long-term talent.

Spring training will offer a welcome diversion after the Red Sox' offseason of discontent

Christopher L. Gasper

The offseason can't end fast enough for your Boston Red Sox. With baseball spring on the horizon in the form of spring training, the winter of the Sox' discontent has a definite ending in sight, and, mercifully so does the Mookie Betts trade in refashioned form. It's hard to recall an offseason that the Sox will be more eager to put in the rearview mirror when pitchers and catchers officially migrate to Fort Myers, Fla., on Tuesday.

The Sox have taken more dings and dents than the fabled Green Monster this offseason. They've lurched from one organizational/reputational crisis or self-inflicted wound to the next. They've looked indecisive, unaware, and shambolic. Who would have thought the offseason would be more disappointing and uninspiring than last season's 84-78 campaign?

Finally, there's some certainty and clarity for the Sox on the cusp of spring training via the news Sunday that the Betts deal is back on. A much-needed mulligan produced a better return from the Dodgers, closing the book on an ignominious offseason. The revamped deal sends Betts to LA for Alex Verdugo, the centerpiece of the original three-team swap with Minnesota that the Sox had put in cold storage since Tuesday, and Dodgers prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong. It still divests sourpuss pitcher David Price — the salary cement blocks the Sox strapped to Betts in trade talks — to Dodger Stadium and allows the Sox to dodge the luxury tax. Boston only has to pick up the tab on half of the remaining \$96 million on Price's albatross contract. Minnesota and the Dodgers worked out a separate deal involving the pitching prospect originally earmarked for Boston that the Sox suspiciously marked medically defective to reboot the deal, Brusdar Graterol.

The Sox will hold their first workout for pitchers and catchers Wednesday at Fenway South. They might not have officially named their manager by then, but at least the Sox won't be fielding RFPs (request for proposals) for Betts during PFPs (pitchers' fielding practices) at Camp Chaos. They've turned a distasteful salary dump into a decent deal. That's still not enough to redeem a dreadful offseason.

To recap Boston's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad offseason:

■ They started out searching for a successor to deposed president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, who spent the team into luxury tax oblivion. They aimed for established names like Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman, Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey, and Boston baseball alums Mike Hazen of the Arizona Diamondbacks and Cubs savior Theo Epstein. After striking out, they floated the idea of sticking with the Gang of Four of capable and loyal front office executives that had collectively run the Sox following Dombrowski's unceremonious departure — Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, Raquel Ferreira, and Zack Scott. When that trial balloon got popped, they tapped one of the game's brightest young executives from the rival Tampa Bay Rays, Chaim Bloom, in late October. But then they clumsily married Bloom to the existing Gang of Four, further muddling a complicated and opaque baseball decision-making structure.

■ With a goal — NOT A MANDATE — expressed by Sox principal owner John W. Henry (you know what else he owns) of avoiding paying the luxury tax for a third straight season, the Sox were largely frozen in carbonite Han Solo-style trying to figure out what to do. Owners of baseball's highest payroll in 2018, they nibbled around the edges of their roster with coupon-clipping signings like second baseman Jose Peraza (one year, \$3 million). Meanwhile, the rival New York Yankees, who finished 19 games ahead of the Sox, fortified their roster, adding ace Gerrit Cole via a \$324 million mega-deal. Swell.

■ In January, the Sox found themselves part of the fallout of the Houston Astros' illicit electronic sign-stealing scandal, first unearthed by The Athletic. Sox manager Alex Cora was singled out by MLB commissioner Rob Manfred as one of the key principals in the trash-can banging, sign-swiping scheme while serving as Houston's bench coach in 2017. With the Sox under MLB investigation for allegedly employing similar sign-stealing methods using their video replay room during the 2018 World Series-winning season, the Sox and Cora "mutually agreed to part ways" on Jan. 14. The loss of a popular and charismatic manager was a devastating blow. The next day, the club held a sophistry-filled press conference that didn't play well with fans or media, inviting ridicule.

■ Even when the Sox succeeded this offseason in achieving an objective, it devolved into an episode worthy of a laugh track. Last Tuesday, the Sox agreed in principle to a three-team deal to ship imminent Fenway flight risk Betts and his \$27 million salary, plus Price, to the Dodgers in exchange for Verdugo and Twins prospect Graterol. The Sox shed enough salary to limbo under the \$208 million luxury tax threshold. Making a difficult call on their best player should've stood as the crowning achievement of their offseason. Instead, it became an embarrassing fiasco, exposing sloppy disagreement and indecision.

Spooked by the medicals on Graterol and potentially the negative reaction from fans and media about dishing Betts in a manner that prioritized payroll-paring over player procurement, the Sox plunged the deal into a state of purgatory while they forced a more favorable return. In the end, they got the Mookie Mulligan they desired and a better deal, winning the staredown. Give them some credit for fixing a mistake. But the clumsy, botched nature in which it was executed reflected poorly on the organization and Bloom. It was indicative of their entire offseason.

Boston's cold feet made some in baseball hot under the collar, drawing the ire of the MLB Players Association; superagent Scott Boras, and Los Angeles Angels owner Arte Moreno, whose team has a deal with the Dodgers contingent upon the Betts trade.

Poor Graterol became a pawn in the Red Sox public relations game of Twister. The portly pitcher possesses some medical red flags. He missed the 2016 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery in 2015 and more than two months last year with a shoulder impingement. But the Sox — and the rest of baseball — knew this when they traded for him. Graterol isn't good enough for the Sox, but now the Dodgers are poised to take him to separately complete their portion of the deal with the Twins, which revolves around sending starter Kenta Maeda and \$10 million to Minnesota.

The Sox should have gotten more in the deal for Betts from the jump, especially considering they had all offseason to engineer it. The Sox even got the right moves wrong.

The only person that might come out of this deal with his reputation more unfairly maligned than Graterol is Bloom, thrust into a bubbling cauldron of crises and agendas in his first months on the job. How can other GMs and colleagues around baseball trust and respect his word if he can be so easily overruled by the internal workings and PR sensitivities of the Sox' organizational hierarchy? Bloom's credibility was collateral damage of Boston upgrading its take for Betts.

Bring on the baseball. We need to see players wielding bats and gloves in a sunny setting because we've seen enough of this offseason of gloom, doom, and Bloom.

It's a horror movie with the Sox haunting themselves.

Mookie Betts trade will likely involve two separate deals between Red Sox, Dodgers, Twins

Alex Speier

With the official opening of spring training nearing, the Red Sox, Dodgers, and Twins have broken a logjam in their negotiations and are making renewed progress towards a deal — or, quite possibly, towards two separate deals — that would send Mookie Betts and David Price to Los Angeles and bring young talent back to Boston.

According to multiple major league sources on Sunday morning, after days of stop-and-start conversations between the Sox and Twins, all three teams were again talking and making progress. In all likelihood, according to one source familiar with the talks, the likeliest path now appears to be two separate trades involving the three teams.

On Tuesday night, the three teams agreed in principle to a deal to send Betts and Price to the Dodgers, Kenta Maeda to the Twins, and outfielder Alex Verdugo and righthander Brusdar Graterol to the Twins. However, that agreement required the teams to review the medical files of the players involved to reach completion. The Sox became concerned, when reviewing Graterol's medical file, that there was more risk than anticipated that he wouldn't be able to start. (Agent Scott Boras, who represents Graterol, said that the Twins doctors and Dr. Neal ElAttrache both had seen Graterol in person and determined that despite his two months on the sidelines during the minor league season, there was no physical limitation that would prevent him from starting in the future.)

The Sox and Twins had worked for days to identify an alternate path to complete the deal, with Minnesota adding a prospect to Graterol. But the teams couldn't agree upon the additional prospect. On Saturday, major league sources said that the Sox and Twins considered it unlikely that they would be able to find common ground. Even so, multiple sources familiar with the deal characterized it as more likely than not that a Dodgers-Red Sox deal would happen — with or without the Twins.

The Dodgers and Twins can work directly on a deal involving Maeda to the Twins (presumably for prospects), while the Sox and Dodgers can work to round out a deal that would send Betts and Price to the Dodgers for (most likely) Verdugo and one or more additional players. In Sunday morning's conversations, the Sox appeared unlikely to end up with Graterol, the hardthrowing righthander. It's worth noting that the Dodgers have a deep inventory of pitching prospects, and earlier in the talks (before Tuesday's trade agreement), had expressed a willingness to discuss virtually anyone in their system aside from middle infielder Gavin Lux and righthander Dustin May.

Whether these advancing talks net a deal remains to be seen, but after days in which the probability of a finalized trade seemed to have receded to some degree, the needle is now moving in the other direction — with three days remaining before the first workout of the spring for Red Sox and Twins pitchers and catchers.

Source: Twins 'very likely' are backing out of Mookie Betts deal

Alex Speier

Four days after the Red Sox, Dodgers, and Twins agreed to a blockbuster trade, that deal may be taking a detour — though it remains to be seen whether that course change leads to a dead end.

A major league source confirmed that it is “very likely” that the Twins are backing out of the deal. The Star Tribune was first to report that Minnesota may be nearing an egress from negotiations. Jon Heyman of MLB Network reported that the Twins have set a Saturday deadline to resolve the impasse.

In the original agreement, Mookie Betts and David Price were to go to the Dodgers, Kenta Maeda to the Twins, and outfielder Alex Verdugo (from the Dodgers) and pitcher Brusdar Graterol (from the Twins) to the Red Sox. But that agreement first required review of each player’s medical files.

According to multiple major league sources, the Sox had some concerns related to the health of Graterol, with The Athletic reporting that the Sox concluded based on his medical file that his likelihood of emerging as a starter had diminished.

“It would not stun me,” one American League scout said on the Sox expressing pause surrounding Graterol’s health issues, “he’s had issues in the past.”

A National League executive said just as much, adding that Graterol possesses elite stuff on the mound, but can’t seem to stay healthy.

In June 2015, Graterol underwent Tommy John surgery. In May 2018 he dealt with back spasms, followed by shoulder impingement syndrome in 2019. Now, the Sox might have their own medical issues surrounding Graterol.

But, perhaps, that might not be the only thing that has held the Sox back from putting their final stamp on the Betts trade.

According to The Athletic’s Ken Rosenthal, the backlash from fans and media members surrounding the Verdugo-Graterol return has given Sox ownership pause.

Scott Boras, Graterol’s agent, suggested that concluding Graterol would be less likely to emerge as a starter based on a review of the medical file ran counter to the conclusion of both Twins doctors and Dr. Neal ElAttrache.

“No doctor has told me that there is anything about his future going forward other than that it is very bright and he has no limitations. That is the evidence of people who have examined him,” said Boras. “Now I have people who have only looked at medical records — and I know have not contacted these doctors — making bald allegations about this player. It’s supposition.”

Boras also hinted at the fact that something else could be holding up the trade.

“It gets out as to the reason why a trade has a hiccup,” said Boras. “There could be a variety of reasons [for a trade to break down]. All I’m saying to this is that the reason is not Brusdar’s health.”

As a result, the Red Sox and Twins spent recent days discussing the possibility of alternate compensation — with the Sox seeking a prospect from Minnesota (reported by the Star Tribune to be another of the team’s top 10 prospects) in addition to Graterol.

Those discussions have moved deliberately, and ultimately stalled — with the departure of the Twins component of the deal seeming the likely outcome as of Saturday afternoon.

Assuming that Minnesota is indeed out of a three-way trade, two major league sources expressed hope that a deal could still be worked out, either directly between the Red Sox and Dodgers or with the involvement of a different team. It’s even possible that the Dodgers could make separate trades with the Twins (Maeda

for one or more prospects) and Red Sox (Betts and Price, most likely for Verdugo and one or more additional prospects).

Two sources familiar with negotiations still believed it was more likely than not that a deal involving at least the Sox and Dodgers will still get done.

That said, while the absence of the Twins from a deal might not prove a deal-breaker, it lowers the probability of the deal between the Red Sox and Dodgers involving Betts, Price, and Verdugo by at least some degree.

If a deal between the Red Sox and Dodgers does collapse, other teams have reached out to Boston about the possibility of a deal. However, while the Padres — who talked extensively to the Sox about a Betts deal before the three-team agreement — represent an obvious alternative, San Diego made a separate deal Saturday that suggests that it doesn't expect renewed talks.

The Padres sent Manuel Margot and prospect Logan Driscoll to the Rays for reliever Emilio Pagan. Margot had been among the names discussed in prospective packages for deals involving Betts. According to a major league source, San Diego's inclusion of Margot in the Pagan deal occurred after the Padres concluded that the Red Sox were unlikely to re-engage them in trade talks.

Despite unusual offseason, Red Sox still have reason to be optimistic

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The season doesn't start for another 47 days and it already feels like the 2020 Red Sox have lost because of all that has happened since the calendar flipped over to a new year.

Manager Alex Cora, an almost seamless fit for the one of the toughest jobs in sports, stepped down by mutual agreement in January after Major League Baseball identified him as the organizer of a scheme to improperly steal signs while bench coach of the Houston Astros in 2017.

The Sox have yet to hire a new manager as they wait anxiously for baseball to conclude an investigation into allegations they broke rules by using live video to steal signs during the 2018 season.

Then ownership approved trading homegrown superstar Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers to fulfill its goal of dropping the payroll below the luxury-tax line. Lefthander David Price was added to the deal, saving even more money but depleting an already thin starting rotation.

Red Sox fans reacted with predictable anger as early-arriving players to spring training watched televisions in the clubhouse waiting to see what would happen next.

But righthanded reliever Matt Barnes offered a more measured and dispassionate look at the situation when asked his opinion.

"If you look around our clubhouse there's still an awful lot of talent," he said. "We can still achieve our goals."

The latest projections based on cumulative wins over replacement have the Red Sox finishing with the fourth- or fifth-best record in the American League, a position that would give them a berth into the postseason for the fourth time in five years.

Even without Betts, the Sox will have a lineup featuring All-Star shortstop Xander Bogaerts, who finished fifth in the American League Most Valuable Player voting last season. Betts was eighth.

Another All-Star, J.D. Martinez, declined his option to become a free agent and remained with the Sox. The designated hitter has hit 79 home runs and driven in 235 runs over the last two seasons.

Third baseman Rafael Devers, only 23, led the majors with 359 total bases last season. Christian Vazquez had a .798 OPS last season, sixth among major league catchers with at least 400 plate appearances.

The Sox expect better production from left fielder Andrew Benintendi, a standout in 2018 who was at best average last season. Center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. also has plenty of incentive to produce as he enters his free agent walk year.

Outfielder Alex Verdugo, who will join the Sox once the trade with the Dodgers is finalized, gives the team another capable hitter.

“This team will score a lot of runs,” Bradley said. “We’re all confident of that.”

The Red Sox failed to make the playoffs last year because Price, Nate Eovaldi, and Chris Sale missed large chunks of the season with injuries. Based on observations of their early work at spring training, Eovaldi and Sale are now healthy.

Lefthander Eduardo Rodriguez, 32-11 with a 3.81 earned run average over the last two seasons, is the key to holding the rotation together.

The bullpen proved better than expected last season, and the nine relievers with the most appearances all return. Brandon Workman, who had 16 saves in 2019, should again be the closer.

Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, hired in October to bring a consistent approach to roster building, has scavenged the waiver wire and free agent market for an assortment of undervalued pitchers.

If that strategy works as well for the Red Sox as it did for Tampa Bay when Bloom worked there, the pitching staff could be better than expected.

For now, as in over the next few days, the Red Sox very badly need to get clear of the investigation, finalize the trade, and name a manager. That would restore order to what has been at least unusual if not unprecedented upheaval.

The season starts March 26 in Toronto. One way or another, the issues that seem hopeless now will have been addressed by then.

“We just need to get back to playing baseball,” Barnes said. “That’s what we’re here to do. This is still a good team. We want to play and see what we can do.”

What baseball scouts think about new Red Sox outfielder Alex Verdugo

Peter Abraham

Replacing Mookie Betts in right field is an impossible task for the Red Sox. He’s a four-time All-Star, a four-time Gold Glove winner, and has posted an .898 OPS since 2015.

Outside of Mike Trout, there hasn’t been a more valuable player in baseball the last five seasons.

But with Betts still presumably headed to Hollywood, 23-year-old Alex Verdugo will get the chance to prove what he is worth once he arrives at Red Sox camp.

Beyond the millions of dollars lopped off the payroll, Verdugo was the primary asset the Sox picked up in the trade that sent Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Verdugo is a former second-round pick who has hit .282 with a .784 OPS in 158 games (over three seasons) for the Dodgers. He has started games in left, center, and right field, and was generally ranked among the top 35 prospects in the game before last season.

The first significant move by Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom generated headlines across baseball and anger among Sox fans because of their appreciation for Betts.

To get a better sense of what Verdugo will bring to the Red Sox on the field and how Bloom fared on the trade, I sought the opinion of three veteran scouts from teams not involved in the deal.

Scout 1: “Verdugo’s got a chance to be a consistently above-average player. He won’t hit for big power but he’s going to get on base. He’s going to be what he’s supposed to be.

“You could compare him to Jacoby Ellsbury when he was going well, but he won’t steal as many bases. He’ll get extra-base hits and score plenty of runs. He does a lot of things well.

“I thought Chaim did pretty well. They were up against Betts becoming a free agent after one more season. Most teams weren’t going to take on that kind of money, but the Dodgers could. He did the best job he could. Verdugo will be a good player for them. He’s a good athlete.”

Scout 2: “I saw him quite a bit last year. He’s got talent across the board — offensively, defensively, and running the bases. He’s a very talented kid who hasn’t fully tapped into that talent yet. He’s inexperienced.

“I didn’t always like his act, but all the Dodgers carry themselves that way. There’s a lot of antics. But Verdugo is a five-tool guy and you can’t deny the talent. He’s got bat speed, strength, and shows glimpses of plate discipline.

“Sometimes he’s right on the ball and taking his walks, and sometimes he’s flailing away. But that will get better as he gets more experience.

“He can play all three spots in the outfield. I saw him a lot in center and he’s got the arm to play right field. He has the range to play right field at Fenway Park. I’m not saying he can replace Mookie Betts in right field; nobody can do that. But he’s more than capable defensively. He’s an average to above-average right fielder.

Scout 3: “You’re never going to get anything close to the same value for Betts. But they did well to get Price off the books. He seems to get traded every few years. I’d have wanted a second player from the Dodgers, but Verdugo can help them this season, right from the top. He’s an everyday player who could work his way up the lineup.

“Verdugo plays with a lot of energy and he’s a good outfielder. I think his power will get there but he’s probably not going to hit a ton of home runs. But he doesn’t strike out a lot, either. There’s a lot to be said for putting the ball in play and he does that. Betts does that, too, obviously.

“I think he’s immature, kind of like [Clint] Frazier [of the Yankees]. He’s talented but he knows he’s talented and he’s got an edge.

“Red Sox fans will probably like him. They’ll be able to plug him into the lineup and give him a chance.”

ON THE TABLE?

Sox could become an issue in CBA

As Major League Baseball and the Players Association gear up to negotiate the collective bargaining agreement after the season, the union could point to the travails of the Red Sox as a prime reason to shift the financial structure of the sport.

Consider that a theoretically contending team with a vast revenue stream felt compelled to drop roughly \$51 million off its payroll in one offseason. That is something the players could raise as not being good for the sport overall.

The Red Sox were set up to challenge the Yankees if they improved their starting rotation. They instead traded David Price, let Rick Porcello walk away as a free agent, and signed underwhelming Martin Perez for \$6.5 million.

At the moment, there is no clear candidate to be the No. 5 starter.

That one of baseball's bedrock franchises went this route almost certainly will motivate the players to seek change in the parameters of the luxury tax.

Of course, the rebuttal is that the Red Sox should have better managed their spending and been more efficient at producing players from their farm system to avoid this problem.

A few other observations on the Red Sox as spring training gets going:

- Now that the payroll is projected for approximately \$192 million, they have room to improve their roster and not get close to the first luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million.

That's unlikely to include the return of Brock Holt. But the Sox could consider free agent starter Taijuan Walker, who is making a comeback after pitching only 14 innings the last two seasons following Tommy John surgery.

If Walker is willing to take a minor league contract, it's worth a shot considering he's only 27 and had a 3.49 ERA for Arizona in 2017.

- I've spoken to six Red Sox players since the trade was announced and one theme was common: They respect Mookie Betts for wanting to go to free agency.

"Back in the day, that was the thing to do," Jackie Bradley Jr. said. "It wasn't about, how can I sign something as fast as possible? It was, how can I get that time and get to free agency? [Betts] has every right to exercise his rights. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks.

"A lot of people ask, 'But what if it was you?' It doesn't matter. I'm not in his shoes. You've got to respect a player who believes in himself and is willing to bet on himself. I have nothing but the utmost respect for that."

Said Matt Barnes: "Mookie has been consistent with what he wanted to do, and I admire that. I loved playing with him, but we all know it's a business and he has the right to become a free agent if he thinks that's what best for him and his family."

- Infielder Tzu-Wei Lin, who is from Taiwan, connected in Hong Kong on his way to the United States this past week. The coronavirus outbreak made for a nervous trip.

"Everybody on the plane was wearing a [surgical] mask," Lin said. "I kept washing my hands. It's all everybody was talking about on the plane and in the airport."

Lin appeared in only 13 major league games last season because of injuries that included a concussion. The 25-year-old utility player is also out of minor league options.

"I have a lot to prove," Lin said. "This is a big year for me."

- Baseball America reports that the Sox are lined up to sign 16-year-old outfielder Miguel Bleis to a bonus of at least \$2 million in July. Bleis, who is from the Dominican Republic, is 6 feet 2 inches and very athletic. He has a pronounced leg kick in his swing, a bit like Manny Ramirez.

The Sox have parceled out their international bonuses in recent years, signing lower-grade prospects in bulk. But they feel strongly about Bleis.

- The Sox will reportedly be responsible for half of the remaining \$96 million on Price's contract. Dustin Pedroia has two years and \$25 million left on his deal. And Rusney Castillo's back-loaded contract is for \$13.5 million this season.

That's \$86.5 million in dead money the next three seasons, assuming Pedroia isn't able to play again.

- As of Friday, the Red Sox had 62 players on their spring training roster. Outfield prospect Jarren Duran was assigned No. 92. The Sox have not yet issued the No. 12 Holt wore.

- This news went largely unnoticed in Boston, but the Phillies named Red Sox assistant athletic trainer Paul Buchheit as their head athletic trainer.

Buchheit was with the Red Sox from 2004–19, starting as an intern and working his way up to the major league staff in 2016. The Sox have yet to announce a replacement.

- The concert lineup at Fenway Park this summer reads like a salute to the 1970s and '80s. You have Aerosmith, Billy Joel, Dead & Company, Guns N' Roses, Motley Crue, New Kids on the Block, and James Taylor.

Green Day and Maroon 5 are what pass for new music. In all, there are 11 dates scheduled so far.

ETC.

Pulling doubleduty in question

With spring training upon us, some off-the-field updates:

- The issue of whether broadcasters should also work as team executives is fully in the spotlight with Jessica Mendoza's resignation from the Mets.

Mets general manager Brodie Van Wagenen, who hired Mendoza as an adviser last season, cast her departure as a function of time management.

But the conflict of interest was hard to ignore, especially after Mendoza criticized Mike Fiers for blowing the whistle on the Astros and their sign-stealing operation.

Commissioner Rob Manfred acknowledged the awkwardness of split loyalties.

"No, I'm not all that comfortable with it. I'm really not. But it's a topic that remains under discussion internally," he said. "As you know, it causes a lot of complications, not just on this particular incident or comments, but in general."

Pedro Martinez (Red Sox), Al Leiter (Mets), and David Ortiz (Red Sox) are among the team employees who also have roles in the media. New Cubs manager David Ross was a special assistant to Theo Epstein last season and worked for ESPN at the same time.

Mendoza will work weekday games for ESPN after four-plus years on "Sunday Night Baseball." She also will appear more frequently on other shows.

■ With 79-year-old Joe Torre stepping back into more of an advisory role, three former players will take on significant responsibilities regarding how the game is played.

Chris Young, who pitched 13 seasons in the majors, was named vice president for on-field operations. Two recently retired players, Gregor Blanco and Nick Hundley, were named senior directors of baseball operations under Young.

Their department oversees the umpires, rules, on-field standards, discipline, and pace of game.

The 40-year-old Young, who played at Princeton, has moved quickly through MLB's hierarchy to become an influential voice in Manfred's cabinet.

■ In an interview with MLB Network, former Houston manager A.J. Hinch did not deny Astros players used buzzers under their jerseys to get signaled what pitches were coming.

When asked a straightforward question by Tom Verducci, Hinch's indirect answer cited MLB's findings that no buzzers were used.

Jose Altuve demonstrably warning teammates not to tear his jersey off following a walkoff home run to win the 2017 American League Championship Series remains suspicious.

Meanwhile, thousands of Dodgers fans have purchased tickets for Houston's four-game series against the Angels in Anaheim to boo the Astros. A fan group organized the effort.

Extra bases

Longtime scout Phil Rizzo, the father of Nationals GM Mike Rizzo, died Feb. 1 at the age of 90. A former minor league player who went on to work in baseball for 38 years, Phil Rizzo was too ill to attend the World Series. But he watched his son's team on television, and they spoke shortly after the Nationals won . . . Yankees manager Aaron Boone took to Twitter 30 minutes before the Super Bowl kicked off and correctly predicted the winner and score. "FWIW, I'm goin' w the Chiefs. 31-20," he wrote . . . Major League Baseball is set to host UConn, Cal Poly, Michigan, and Vanderbilt for a four-team MLB4 round-robin tournament next weekend at Salt River Fields in Arizona. Vanderbilt, the defending national champion, features 6-4, 255-pound sophomore righthander Kumar Rocker. Its roster also includes sophomore utility player Dominic Keegan of Methuen, who played at Central Catholic . . . Matt Kemp has made approximately \$171 million in his career, so there's only so much sympathy one can have for him. But according to the Los Angeles Times, the 35-year-old outfielder recently sold his home in the Los Angeles area for \$4.3 million, far less than the \$9 million he paid in 2013. Kemp also sank \$3 million in renovations into the 15,884-square-foot mansion. No, Mookie Betts did not buy it. Kemp is going to spring training on a minor league deal with the Marlins . . . Here's to Roger Kahn, who died Thursday at the age of 92. He was the author of "The Boys of Summer," a baseball book that wasn't always about baseball. Kahn's personal narrative and ability to weave in the social issues of the time changed how baseball was written about . . . Agent B.B. Abbott, whose clients include Chris Sale, Corey Kluber, Mike Minor, and Charlie Morton, is going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro this coming week to raise money for childhood cancer research. He has so far raised \$125,000 . . . Happy 86th birthday to Ted Wills, who pitched for the Red Sox from 1959–62. Wills won the first big-league game he started, throwing a complete game at Fenway Park against the Orioles on May 30, 1959. Ted Williams helped the rookie out with a two-run homer in the seventh inning of an 8-3 victory. Willis was traded to the Reds in 1962. He retired from baseball in 1965 and went on to a career in the insurance business. He lives in California.

Benintendi, Red Sox agree on two-year \$10m deal

Alex Speier

The Red Sox and outfielder Andrew Benintendi reached a two-year, \$10 million deal, thus avoiding salary arbitration.

The sides were scheduled for a hearing in Arizona after the team submitted a recommendation of a \$3.4 million salary for 2020 and the outfielder countered at \$4.15 million.

Benintendi, 25, hit .266/.343/.431 with 13 homers and 10 steals in 2019 — a step back from his .290/.366/.465 line in the 2018 championship run. Since his call-up in August 2016, he owns a .277/.354/.442 line.

With just more than three years of big league service time, he was eligible for salary arbitration this year for the first time in his career.

The two-year deal will cover his first two seasons of arbitration eligibility. He'll be eligible one additional time (for the 2022 campaign) before he is eligible for the open market.

Scott Boras, MLB Players Association blast delays in Mookie Betts megadeal

Alex Speier

With the three-way trade between the Red Sox, Dodgers, and Twins stalled over concerns about righthander Brusdar Graterol — the prospect who would head from Minnesota to Boston — agent Scott Boras blasted suggestions that his client is unhealthy or in any way limited.

“To suggest that this player is not healthy going forward, or has any form of substantive medical defect that would in any way damage his career, all of that is false. This is a scant supposition created by medical review, by someone who has never seen him physically,” Boras said by phone. “I don't know Boston's position on this. I know that people are suggesting that Graterol has some malady about him medically, which is inaccurate. That supposition is false.

“He is in spring training. He's ready to throw without limitations going forward through the season. And there's no suggestion that there's anything at issue with this player in the current or immediate aspects of his career.”

According to major league sources, some Red Sox evaluators viewed Graterol as having a chance to emerge as a mid-rotation starter or better, albeit with a strong chance that he can be a valuable late-inning reliever if he doesn't stick in the rotation. The last three days, evaluators from four different teams have offered similar views: Graterol's premium, triple-digit fastball, slider, and changeup give him the pitch mix of a potential starter, even though his high-effort delivery and lack of a clear third pitch suggest a greater likelihood he ends up in a bullpen.

However, as first reported by The Athletic, the Red Sox became concerned by Graterol's medical file that he had less of a chance than they'd anticipated to remain a starter. Since then, the Red Sox, Dodgers, and Twins have spent days trying to figure out if — based on that view — the Red Sox could receive additional compensation in the deal.

But Boras suggested any concerns about Graterol's health or ability to start were unfounded based on examinations by the Twins medical staff and Dr. Neal ElAttrache.

“No doctor has told me that there is anything about his future going forward other than that it is very bright and he has no limitations. That is the evidence of people who have examined him,” said Boras. “Now I have people who have only looked at medical records — and I know have not contacted these doctors — making bald allegations about this player. It's supposition.”

Might his health history, which includes Tommy John surgery in 2015 as well as a diagnosis last year by the Twins of right shoulder impingement — which Boras referred to as inflammation, often an associated symptom of an impingement — that sidelined him for two months, limit Graterol's ability to start moving forward?

“Absolutely not,” said Boras, noting that the Twins moved him to the bullpen in order to fast-track him to the big leagues, where he could fill a need. “I had this conversation with the Minnesota staff. There’s a very clear probability that this player will return to be a starting pitcher.”

Boras said that evidence of Graterol’s return to health came in the form of his 100-plus m.p.h. velocity upon his return. He also suggested that minor league pitchers often miss time and are rested conservatively in response to any signs of shoulder inflammation, but that such a course does not offer evidence of long-term risk.

Ultimately, Boras said, if the three-team deal that would send Mookie Betts and David Price to Los Angeles breaks down, he doesn’t believe it will be over concerns about Graterol’s health.

“It gets out as to the reason why a trade has a hiccup,” said Boras. “There could be a variety of reasons [for a trade to break down]. All I’m saying to this is that the reason is not Brusdar’s health.”

As of Friday, the Red Sox, Twins, and Dodgers continued their conversations in an effort to bring their deal to resolution. Boras isn’t the only one concerned.

With the fate of at least 10 players spread across four teams still up in the air on Friday, nearly 72 hours after the Sox, Dodgers, and Twins agreed in principle, and the Dodgers and Angels agreed to a related second deal, the MLB Players Association delivered a rare comment on a transaction: Enough.

“The proposed trades between the Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins, and Angels need to be resolved without further delay,” MLBPA executive director Tony Clark said in a statement. “The events of this last week have unfairly put several Players’ lives in a state of limbo.”

As of late Friday afternoon, the three-team blockbuster to send Betts and Price to L.A., pitcher Kenta Maeda to Minnesota, and outfielder Alex Verdugo (from the Dodgers) and Graterol (from the Twins to Boston); and the Dodgers’ deal to send outfielder Joc Pederson and starter Ross Stripling along with a prospect to the Angels for infielder Luis Rengifo and a prospect, had not been finalized. The teams involved had agreed in principle to the two deals on Tuesday night.

Clark took particular issue with the loss of Graterol’s medical privacy, and that Pederson was left to argue in an arbitration hearing against a team that has already agreed to send him elsewhere.

“The unethical leaking of medical information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often Players are treated as commodities by those running the game,” Clark said.

After MLB concludes investigation into sign-stealing, Red Sox plan to name Ron Roenicke manager

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The Red Sox said on Friday they have not completed their search for a new manager, even as a major league executive said the team is planning to choose bench coach Ron Roenicke to replace Alex Cora.

The Sox are waiting for Major League Baseball to finish its investigation into the team before making any announcement, said the executive, who requested anonymity because of the sensitive timing of the issue.

Roenicke, 63, was the team’s bench coach for two seasons under Cora. In January, he said he did not have any involvement or knowledge of the Sox allegedly using video to steal signs in 2018.

Commissioner Rob Manfred said he hopes to issue the report before the start of spring training on Wednesday. At that point, the Sox would be comfortable in announcing their decision.

“Our managerial search is not yet completed. We will comment at the completion of the search,” a team spokesman said.

Third base coach Carlos Febles was considered for the job. The Sox also are known to have interviewed former Toronto Blue Jays manager John Gibbons, Oakland Athletics coach Mark Kotsay, and Arizona Diamondbacks coach Luis Urueta.

Roenicke would be a sensible choice because of his knowledge of the team and prior experience as a manager. That would help make for a smooth transition after what has been a chaotic period for the organization.

The Sox have been seeking a manager since Jan. 14 when they mutually parted ways with Cora because of his prominent role in the sign-stealing scandal that led to Houston Astros manager A.J. Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow being suspended for a year, then fired.

MLB has withheld what is expected to be a significant punishment of Cora until it finishes the investigation into the Red Sox.

Roenicke was adamant that he would not be implicated.

“It would be concerning if something happened — that I knew I wasn’t part of — that I was brought into as part of that,” Roenicke said last month. “I know what I do. I always try to do things the right way.”

The Sox are likely to make a short-term commitment to Roenicke, which would leave chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom the option of finding a more permanent replacement for Cora.

Roenicke was 342-331 managing the Milwaukee Brewers from 2011–15. He led the Brewers to 96 victories and the NLCS in 2011, and had two other winning seasons before being fired 25 games into the 2015 season.

Roenicke was on the Los Angeles Angels coaching staff under Mike Scioscia from 2000–10 before being hired by Milwaukee.

The former outfielder played in the majors from 1981–88, then became a minor league coach in 1991.

Roger Clemens was ‘paranoid’ about sign stealing when he played

Michael Silverman

Before speaking at the Hot Stove Cool Music panel discussion on pitching Friday, Roger Clemens gave a clinic on sign-stealing, the pending Mookie Betts trade, and his Hall of Fame chances.

“I had two [Red Sox] teammates, Marty Barrett and Dwight Evans, you’re talking about two guys who would study the opposing pitcher. If he came set by his nose with a fastball and he covered his logo on his cap on a breaking ball, those guys had him, so, it pretty much made me paranoid,” said Clemens at the Seaport Hotel.

Clemens spoke as the sign-stealing controversy still swirls around two of Clemens’ former teams, the Astros and the Red Sox. Clemens, a Houston advisor, made it clear that he did not approve of their approach — “obviously, you can’t have a live feed and banging on a trash can and all that stuff” — but was perfectly fine with accepting eyes-only live feeds as part of the “big cat and mouse game” all have always participated in.

“If you pay attention to detail, you know pretty quick what’s going on,” said Clemens. “We had other ways to find out, where I would call my catcher out and call two consecutive pitches, and then he knew what the pitches were and sit behind home plate and basically wave his fingers to ‘c’mon’ and no sign. When I’d

come set, the guy on second obviously didn't get my sign, the hitter called timeout — so we knew something was going on then.”

He channeled his paranoia into chin music.

“In the old days, in the first part of my career back then, we policed that pretty well, as you guys know,” he said. “It got ugly at times, but that’s professional baseball and how we make our living.”

This winter, Clemens picked up on signals that something was wrong when the Astros’ front office “kind of went radio silent, so I figured something was going to happen.” That something was the punishment that cost GM Jeff Luhnow and manager A.J. Hinch their jobs.

On Betts, Clemens sounded sympathetic to the outfielder’s well-known desire to become a free agent and discover his worth on the marketplace.

“I guess if you’re a Red Sox fan, you hope that next year maybe he’ll come back this way,” said Clemens. “He’s a tremendous player. He’s really bet on himself to do well. You can see the business part of the game, sure. You wish him all the health and that he has another great year for those guys.”

Clemens, the greatest Red Sox home-grown pitcher of the modern era, was allowed to walk in his free-agent year.

“I wanted to play here. I wanted a four-year deal. I thought I was going to finish [here] and I guess, unfortunately and fortunately for me, it worked out,” said Clemens, who ended playing 11 more seasons, retiring at age 45 in 2007.

The seven-time Cy Young Award winner, whose slam-dunk Hall of Fame induction was derailed by accusations of PED use, garnered his highest percentage of the writers’ vote yet last month, 61 percent, in his eighth of 10 years of eligibility. Players need 75 percent for enshrinement.

“That’s great. I appreciate people looking at the facts and my situation,” said Clemens. “They can try to group me in, whatever they want. You hear asinine comments from guys on the shows and stuff like that who have no clue, and never took time to read or see anything that we went through, but we did it the right way.”

Other highlights from the Business of Baseball Luncheon’s “Developing Pitching in an Offensive Era,” moderated by former and current Boston Globe baseball scribes Peter Gammons and Alex Speier:

- Everyone conceded there’s a risk of information overload and overkill for young and old pitchers in the era of spin-rates and Edgertronic cameras.

“Over-reliance of data and analytics can become a crutch. Pitchers will over-assess,” said ex-Red Sox reliever Craig Breslow, Cubs director of pitching.

Clemens said he got by with spin rate and his stuff in the early part of his career, but for the greater part, it was “my heart, mind, and I willed myself through games.”

- Robert Lewis Jr., head of The BASE, which focuses on baseball and education for Boston youth, said “human spirit, resiliency, and love of the game” are essential to success in baseball.

This is the 20th anniversary of Hot Stove Cool Music, founded by Gammons and former Boston Herald baseball writer Jeff Horigan. Proceeds from Friday’s event and Saturday’s concert at Paradise Rock Club benefit The Foundation To Be Named Later, founded by brothers Paul and Theo Epstein, and its Peter Gammons college scholarship fund.

Players’ Association calls for Red Sox trade to be done ‘without further delay’

Katie McInerney

MLB Players' Association executive director Tony Clark issued a statement Friday calling for the four teams involved in unfinished trades — including the Red Sox — to resolve the matter “without further delay.”

Clark said that the lack of resolution in the deal has “unfairly put several Players' lives in a state of limbo.”

He also criticized “the unethical leaking of medical information” and what he called “the perversion of the salary arbitration process,” calling them reminders “that too often Players are treated as commodities by those running the game.”

The deal that would send Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts to the Dodgers, along with pitcher David Price, has been tied up since it came together Tuesday evening. The Red Sox were due to get Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins pitcher Brusdar Graterol in return. But after Red Sox team doctors looked at Graterol's medical records, they concluded that his projection was not that of a starter, as they expected, but more as a reliever.

The discrepancy led the Red Sox to seek additional compensation of the deal, in a matter that remained between Boston and Minnesota, but that has yet to be resolved.

As a result, the other players involved — the Dodgers are sending Kenta Maeda to the Twins and trading Joc Pederson to the Angels in exchange for Luis Renfigo — are also waiting for the deal to be completed.

Pitchers and catchers are expected to report for spring training early next week. The rest of the players report the week after.

The best individual seasons in Red Sox history, and where Mookie Betts fits

Chad Finn

While we all sit here waiting in baseball purgatory for the Red Sox to waste this golden opportunity to nix the Mookie Betts trade, I hear from the occasional fan who claims Betts is not that good in the first place.

I cannot understand why anyone who actually has watched Betts attentively during his 5½-year career would have even a fleeting thought that he might be overrated. I know he doesn't have the postseason heroics of David Ortiz or the '60s/'70s-child admiration of Carl Yastrzemski. And Ted Williams stands alone.

But Betts is already a generational superstar, entering his age-27 season. The only players to accumulate more Wins Above Replacement through their first six seasons were Williams, Mike Trout, Albert Pujols, Jackie Robinson, Wade Boggs, and Joe DiMaggio. From what I understand, all of them are or were quite good at baseball.

I know WAR is an unappealing statistic for many, but it does allow for greats to be compared across eras, usually confirms what aesthetics and our memories tell us, and sometimes helps you understand why a player had more or less value than you thought.

My friend Bob Ryan is going to yell at me for leaning on WAR, and I know it's not the be-all-end-all, but it is a valuable tool. I like it in moderation.

And it can be fun, believe it or not, such as when we do something like this: Using it to identify the best single seasons by a position player in Red Sox history — and confirm, one more time, why the Red Sox are making such a grievous mistake by trading Betts.

There have been 26 seasons in Red Sox history in which a position player has delivered 8.0 WAR. Here are the top 12.

1. Carl Yastrzemski, 1967

WAR: 12.5

Age: 27

Key stats: .326/.418/.622, 44 HRs, 121 RBIs, 189 hits, 112 runs

This is one of those special situations in which analytics and nostalgia meet up in perfect agreement. Yaz's iconic Triple Crown season, during which he led the Red Sox to an improbable pennant, inspired a generation of fans, hit .560 with 13 RBIs over the final seven games of the regular season, and more than occasionally made a tremendous catch in left field is remembered with the warmest of sentiments from anyone lucky to live through it.

The memories are so sweet that you almost don't want to let them get tangled up with cold, hard data, but the data only reassure his season deserves to be remembered with reverence.

That 12.5 WAR is the third-best season by a position player in baseball history, behind two Babe Ruth seasons, 1923 (14.1) and 1921 (12.9).

"Carl Yastrzemski, Carl Yastrzemski, Carl Yastrzemski, the man we call Yaz . . ."

2. (tie) Mookie Betts, 2018

WAR: 10.9

Age: 25

Key stats: .346/.438/.640, 32 HRs, 80 RBIs, 180 hits, 129 runs, 30 SBs

So we've established and agree that Yaz had the best season in Red Sox history, yes? Good. Now let's make a Yaz Bread sandwich and remind ourselves why Betts ties Teddy Ballgame for second: Because he did everything extremely well, and some things even better than '67 Yaz.

Betts stole 30 bases while getting caught just six times. He played equally brilliant defense, but at a far tougher position at Fenway, right field. He led the league in batting and slugging, and finished second to Mike Trout (.460) in on-base percentage.

He was the best player on the winningest team in Red Sox history, a 119-victory World Series champion.

2. (tie) Ted Williams, 1946

WAR: 10.9

Age: 27

Key stats: .342/.497/.667, 38 HRs, 123 RBIs, 176 hits, 142 runs, 156 walks

To be honest, I figured his .406 season in 1941 would rank as his best, for the very simple reason that he hit .406! But this one might be even more impressive for this heroic reason: He served his country as a Marine Corps pilot in World War II from 1943–45 and missed three full seasons. Imagine the numbers he would have put up. And think how unfathomable it is that ballplayers would be drafted into the military today.

4. (tie) Ted Williams, 1941

WAR: 10.6

Age: 22

Key stats: .406/.553/.735, 37 HRs, 120 RBIs, 185 hits, 135 runs, 147 walks

Well, here it is, the last .400 season in the MLB annals, one of the most storied seasons in baseball lore. But did you know that Williams actually had a higher batting average in another season? It's true: In 1953, he hit .407 — but in just 37 games and 110 plate appearances. He returned that August from another wartime stint, this time as a fighter pilot in Korea. Williams hit 13 homers in those 37 games, with a 1.410 OPS. Mercy.

4. (tie) Ted Williams, 1942

WAR: 10.6

Age: 23

Key stats: .356/.499/.648, 36 HRs, 137 RBIs, 186 hits, 141 runs, 145 walks

In claiming the Triple Crown, Williams led the majors in batting, homers, RBIs, runs, walks, on-base percentage, slugging percentage, OPS, and total bases. Also: He finished second in the MVP balloting for the second straight year. And you like to give sportswriters grief nowadays because one of us left Derek Jeter off a Hall of Fame ballot.

6. Carl Yastrzemski, 1968

WAR: 10.5

Age: 28

Key stats: .301/.426/.495, 23 HRs, 74 RBIs, 162 hits, 90 runs

The Year of the Pitcher, man. Those numbers aren't out of line with what we generally expect from Andrew Benintendi, which is why it's so important to be able to adjust for the circumstances of the era. Yaz led the league in batting (the American League average was .230) and on-base percentage, and finished fourth in slugging.

7. Tris Speaker, 1912

WAR: 10.1

Age: 24

Key stats: .383/.464/.567, 10 HRs, 90 RBIs, 222 hits, 136 runs, 52 steals, 53 doubles

Ten homers would seem modest nowadays. In 1912, it led the American League. In a span of four years, the Red Sox traded Speaker to the Indians (in 1916) and sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees. That kind of inept team-building makes Haywood Sullivan "forgetting" to mail Carlton Fisk his contract in the winter of 1980 look quaint.

8. (tie) Rico Petrocelli, 1969

WAR: 10.0

Age: 26

Key stats: .297/.403/.589, 40 HRs, 97 RBIs, 159 hits, 92 runs, 98 walks

Bet you weren't expecting to see the popular Petrocelli on this list, but this was a truly extraordinary season, enhanced by the fact that he made just 14 errors in 749 chances at shortstop. He led the AL in WAR (Oakland's Reggie Jackson was second, with 9.2), but finished seventh in the MVP balloting. Twins slugger Harmon Killebrew collected the hardware.

This season reminds me a lot of John Valentin's awesome 1995, which also was better than we remember. Look it up.

8. (tie) Tris Speaker, 1914

WAR: 10.0

Age: 26

Key stats: .338/.423/.503, 4 HRs, 90 RBIs, 193 hits, 101 runs, 46 doubles

Another brilliant season in a brilliant career, though I must admit, I do dock a few points from players who put up all of their numbers before baseball integrated in 1947. The modern players who show up on Speaker's most similar players list on Baseball Reference include Paul Molitor, George Brett, and Tony Gwynn.

10. Ted Williams, 1947

WAR: 9.9

Age: 28

Key stats: .343/.499/.634, 32 HRs, 114 RBIs, 181 hits, 125 runs, 162 walks

Williams led the American League in batting average, on-base percentage, and slugging in the same season five different times (1941, '42, '47, '48 and '57). Yet he didn't win the AL MVP award in any of those seasons. This oversight was particularly egregious. The Triple Crown winner finished second this time to Joe DiMaggio, who hit .315 with 20 homers and 97 RBIs and contributed not even half as many WAR (4.9).

11. (tie) Mookie Betts, 2016

WAR: 9.7

Age: 23

Key stats: .318/.363/.534, 31 HRs, 113 RBIs, 214 hits, 122 runs, 26 steals

Consider this a were-you-even-paying-attention? rebuke for those who like to suggest Betts — the runner-up to Mike Trout for AL MVP — had only one great season. I'll grant you this: Not all of Betts's first five full seasons have been extraordinary. Some were merely outstanding. His worst season was his first full one in 2015, when he provided 5.9 WAR. Lou Brock, a first-ballot Hall of Famer, never had a season of more than 5.8 WAR in his 19-year career.

11. (tie) Ted Williams, 1957

WAR: 9.7

Age: 38

Key stats: .388/.526/.731, 38 HRs, 87 RBIs, 163 hits, 96 runs, 119 walks

What's a greater accomplishment: Hitting .406 at age 22, or .388 at 38? I'm going to take the diplomatic (or wimpy, if you prefer) way out, call it a tie, and admire both seasons.

Williams didn't make a particularly suspenseful run at .400. His .388 average after the Sept. 29 finale was his highest since he was at .390 on Aug. 20, and the last time he was at or above .400 was when he checked in at .401 on June 5. But he did pull his batting average up from "just" .343 on July 7 by hitting .451 his final 61 games. Don't know about you, but I'm glad the Red Sox never traded him to the Dodgers.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Willingness to trade Mookie Betts raises serious questions about Red Sox (cult)ure

Tom Keegan

As news broke Tuesday night that the Red Sox had agreed to a Mookie Betts trade, all but the blind sheep in Red Sox Nation felt a collective punch to the gut. Then the trade was put on hold for nearly five days. Then Red Sox Nation had the wind knocked out of itself again.

ESPN's Jeff Passan first reported Sunday night that after the Twins backed out of the three-way deal, the Dodgers sent outfielder Alex Verdugo and Jeter Downs, 21, a shortstop with pop, and another player to the Red Sox for Mookie Betts, David Price and \$48 million (to pay half of what Price has coming to him).

Baseball America ranked Downs as the sixth-best prospect in the Dodgers' "loaded" farm system. He's a good piece to add to the Sox barren farm system, but not at the expense of letting go of a driven superstar who plays in a way that energizes teammates and spectators alike.

It's truly remarkable that the Sox agreed to trade Betts a year before he becomes eligible for free agency. Talk about surrendering without a fight. It's obviously a sign of the lack of confidence they have that they can sign the 2018 American League MVP to a long-term contract, but how can you reach that conclusion without giving him an offer in line with his market value?

How can you not just keep him another year, pay the luxury tax, in the neighborhood of \$17 million had Betts and Price remained in Red Sox uniforms, and buy yourself more time?

The fact that the Red Sox not once, but twice, pulled the trigger on making a trade that intentionally makes them a lot worse in 2020, raises the question of what the (cult)ure is now at Fenway Park. They throw the word "family" around an awful lot. When that word is used in a context that doesn't involve blood relatives, it sometimes can serve as a euphemism for "cult."

If nobody felt confident enough to slam his or her fist on the table to urge everyone to take a deep breath and realize the foolishness of trading Mookie, that does not portend well for the state of the Red Sox.

When things become too insular in an organization and everyone forms a circle, tells each other how great they are, and adds that everyone outside the circle has no credibility, it's a prescription for long-term decay. They drink in unison from the cup of their shared enlightenment. By the time they realize the Kool-Aid is spiked, it's too late.

Can you imagine the Yankees dealing Aaron Judge without putting up a fight? Not a chance, and Betts is a far more complete baseball player and greater asset to an organization than the talented, personable Judge.

The Angels locked up Mike Trout because to do otherwise would be to expose an emotional disconnect to their fan base.

The Nationals lost Bryce Harper to the Phillies via free agency, but not until they took advantage of the final year of his services. Losing him without getting anything in return but a draft choice didn't prevent them from winning the World Series without him.

The fickleness of Red Sox ownership blows the mind. After the 2018 World Championship, the Red Sox went about their business as if the luxury tax was not something that would alter their spending habits. That was understandable, given the bottomless revenue sources the Sox so skillfully have nurtured. They rewarded Nathan Eovaldi's loyalty for putting his health at risk with his unorthodox postseason pitching schedule by giving him a contract that guaranteed him four years at \$17 million per. It came off as a classy move, one that seemed to send a message that they weren't going to let the so-called "competitive-balance tax" dictate the way they ran their business.

Then, instead of waiting to see if Chris Sale could remain healthy for the 2019 season, they guaranteed him five seasons with an average annual value of \$29 million. Limited to 25 starts by arm troubles, Sale went 6-11 with a 4.40 ERA. Strange, impulsive move.

They guaranteed \$46 million a year to Sale and Eovaldi, who as pitchers obviously present greater health risks than an outfielder, and a year later they send Betts to the Dodgers? General manager Dave Dombrowski paid with his job for the bad signings, and now the owners are turning around and punishing themselves by letting Betts go either a year or as many as 13 years too soon all because they approved Dombrowski's bad pitching decisions.

It makes no sense. And one or many voices with the Red Sox know it makes no sense, but apparently nobody had the courage to speak up. To do so would be to identify oneself as an outsider. To do so would be to run the risk of being kicked out of the "family." No job. No means of feeding the real family. Safer to shut up and drink the Kool-Aid.

Red Sox spring training 2020: 10 storylines to watch as camp opens

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — A manager search that is apparently still ongoing. An investigation by Major League Baseball into cheating allegations against their 2018 World Series title team that also isn't done. And a trade involving their MVP right-fielder that took nearly a week to complete.

Is that all? Talk about an awkward start to spring training.

One of the most tumultuous offseasons in team history will conclude when Red Sox pitchers and catchers report to Fort Myers on Wednesday, but there are still far more questions than answers hovering over the team as camp officially opens. Resolutions, eventually and preferably soon, will be found. But coming off a disastrous 83-win season in 2019, expectations excitement and optimism are at an all-time low for the Red Sox.

Here are 10 storylines to monitor as 2020 spring training gets going this week.

1. Who's the manager?

The Red Sox still don't officially have a replacement for Alex Cora, who was dismissed on Jan. 14, but reports late last week indicated bench coach Ron Roenicke is in line to take the job. The Red Sox, though, responded by saying the search is ongoing, leaving some doubt.

If Roenicke is the guy, he's charged with the unenviable task of leading who remains with the team into the season after a drama-filled offseason. But the 63-year-old skipper represents continuity and he's well-

respected in the clubhouse, something that should benefit the Sox with so much uncertainty circling around them.

2. How do they fill Mookie Betts' shoes?

The departure of Mookie Betts leaves a gaping hole in right field and the batting order for the Red Sox. Simply put, there's no replacing Betts. Alex Verdugo, the 23-year-old outfielder traded from the Dodgers, will likely take his spot in right, but Betts' ability and production is far too much to replicate.

Betts, the 2018 American League MVP, was the face of the franchise. Without him, Xander Bogaerts likely takes that mantle, and the likes of veterans Chris Sale and J.D. Martinez will continue to be leaders and respected voices in the clubhouse. But as the emoji Martinez tweeted last Tuesday after news of the trade broke indicated, they will miss Betts badly, and it will take more than one guy to make up for his departure.

3. How does Chris Sale look?

As his five-year, \$145 million contract kicks in, Sale's status is critical, especially with the rest of the rotation in some limbo after the loss of Price. Most importantly, how is his health? The ace missed the final month and a half of last season with an injured elbow, but reports throughout the offseason from upper management indicated he was progressing as planned and would be ready to go for spring training.

Sale, who turns 31 in late March, has not pitched a full season in his last two, breaking down physically at the end of both. After a self-admitted disastrous 2019 season in which he had a career-worst 4.40 ERA, the Red Sox need a bounce-back season from Sale if they have hopes of being competitive.

4. Who emerges as the fifth starter?

With Price gone, the Red Sox have a glaring need for a No. 5 starter behind Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez, Nathan Eovaldi and new signing Martin Perez.

They have plenty of different paths they can take. Some in-house candidates include Tanner Houck, Hector Velazquez and even Darwinzon Hernandez. The Sox view Hernandez as a reliever, where he blossomed last season, but he has the ability to start, even if he's still a little raw.

Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom could navigate the free-agent market, too, even if it's slim pickings, with Marco Estrada, Aaron Sanchez and even Clay Buchholz still available. Bloom, who was with the Rays when they introduced the opener, could go that route every fifth day as well.

5. Who's on first? And second?

The biggest positional competition at spring training this year will come on the right side of the infield, with question marks at first and second base. Mitch Moreland recently signed a one-year deal to stay in Boston, so it's likely he'll see a chunk of the playing time there. Michael Chavis showed flashes at the plate last year and provides versatility for the Sox at first and second. And then there's power-hitting prospect Bobby Dalbec, who is transitioning to first and says he's comfortable playing there. He could make a case.

The Red Sox signed Jose Peraza in the offseason, and he's the favorite to play second. They also like Jonathan Arauz, who was selected in the Rule 5 draft, and the 21-year-old could also get a look at second.

6. What's up with Dustin Pedroia?

Dustin Pedroia is not a candidate to play second base right now; that much is clear. The 36-year-old, who has played a total of nine games over the last two seasons with lingering knee problems, suffered a significant setback while rehabbing last month and his future is completely unclear.

It would not be a surprise if Pedroia, who is under contract with the Red Sox through 2021, tries to make yet another comeback after his refusal to give up over the last few years. If he ultimately decides to retire, it's possible he can latch on to a role within the organization. Whatever the case, we should get some more clarity about his future during spring training.

7. Are there any prospects who can make an impact?

There's already a bunch of youth on the roster, and there could be more. As mentioned, the 24-year-old Dalbec will certainly get a long look to compete for a spot on the Opening Day roster, something he said a few weeks ago he feels like he's ready for. Top prospect Triston Casas will also get a chance to show what he's capable of this spring. The 19-year-old first baseman with a power bat is likely at least a year away from making his big-league debut.

Beyond Dalbec, it's unlikely there's another prospect who will progress enough to be major-league ready this season. Right-hander Tanner Houck, who will likely open the season in Triple-A, may have the best chance to break in. It's an important spring for many others, including Bryan Mata, the Red Sox' top pitching prospect, who will look to build off a strong 2019 season.

8. What's next for Rafael Devers?

One MVP may be gone, but a potential future MVP may be just getting started. Rafael Devers, who finished 12th in AL MVP voting last season, broke out in 2019, putting together one of the best seasons for a 22-year-old in league history, hitting .311 with 32 homers, 54 doubles and 115 RBI. He also drastically improved defensively at third base, where he struggled as a rookie.

It's scary to think about the possibilities for Devers in 2020. If he can even exceed what he did in 2019, the Red Sox have a bona fide superstar in the making.

9. How will the bullpen look?

The Red Sox bullpen eventually figured it out last season after roles were clearly defined. Brandon Workman had a breakout season after locking down his role as the closer, Marcus Walden was solid all year and newcomers Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor came on and made an immediate impact. The Sox bring back the same group to spring training this year. It remains to be seen if the roles will change at all, but if the bullpen can build off its strong end to 2019, it could be the team's best strength.

10. Can Benintendi bounce back?

With Betts no longer in the fold, the Red Sox are going to need someone to step up, and they need Andrew Benintendi to show what he's truly capable of. One of the purest hitters on the team, Benintendi had a frustrating 2019 in which he posted career lows in average (.266), on-base percentage (.343) and home runs (13). Reports all offseason have indicated that the left fielder is in good shape physically and hitting coach Tim Hyers recently raved about his attitude and what he's doing to right the ship in 2020. One way or another, how Benintendi performs this season will significantly impact the Red Sox' outlook.

Red Sox, Dodgers finally complete Mookie Betts trade, per reports

Steve Hewitt

Let's try this again.

A trade sending Mookie Betts and David Price from the Red Sox to the Los Angeles Dodgers has been agreed upon for a second time, and this time around, it appears to be the real thing. Five days after a three-team blockbuster between the Sox, Dodgers and Twins was agreed to before it fell apart, the Sox and Dodgers finally worked out a deal, according to multiple reports on Sunday night.

Betts and Price, along with cash to help pay off the rest of Price's contract, are still going to the Dodgers, and coming back to Boston are three prospects from the Dodgers: right fielder Alex Verdugo, who was part of the first trade, shortstop Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong. The players have reportedly been notified of the deal by their clubs.

The thought of Betts and Price, without a deal in place, awkwardly returning to Red Sox camp this week as players report can likely be squashed now. Of course, the new trade still needs to be finalized, with medical reviews forthcoming, something that didn't come to fruition last week.

The three-way trade agreed to last Tuesday hit a hiccup, of course, after the Red Sox weren't satisfied with the medical report on Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol, who the Sox reportedly viewed more as a reliever than a starter after viewing his medicals. That began a mess in which the entire trade was held up, the delay causing anger on multiple sides as the Sox sought additional compensation.

The Twins ultimately backed out of the deal Saturday, leaving the Red Sox and Dodgers left for themselves to make something work. They ultimately did.

Though they received more prospects in this deal, the Red Sox didn't get any pitching back — at least temporarily continuing a void in their rotation. Ironically, the Dodgers reportedly ended up with the flame-throwing Graterol as they sent starter Kenta Maeda to the Twins, which was another part of the original trade. It just took two separate deals and some more prospects to all get it done.

In Downs, the Red Sox are receiving a 2017 first-round pick who was traded from the Reds to the Dodgers after the 2018 season. Drafted as a shortstop, Downs, who was the Dodgers' No. 6 ranked prospect according to Baseball America, has played a significant amount of his pro career thus far at second base, where he likely would project to play in Boston, with Xander Bogaerts at shortstop for the foreseeable future.

The 21-year-old Downs, a bat-first player according to Baseball America, was projected to start this season in Double-A, so he still needs time to develop.

Do the Red Sox know what they're doing?

Jason Mastrodonato

What are the Red Sox doing?

It's the million-dollar question not just in New England, but in every baseball city around the country as we're now left to wonder if the Sox themselves have any conviction in their decisions.

The Mookie Betts saga began on Tuesday, when it was first reported that the Sox had agreed to a deal that would send him to the Dodgers with David Price for young outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol.

By Saturday, Betts and Price were still on the Red Sox roster, wondering where they're supposed to report when camp opens this week: Phoenix or Fort Myers?

The news was mixed as to what exactly was going on, with the Minnesota Star Tribune first reporting that the Twins pulled out of the deal because the Sox are asking for another prospect with Graterol, whose medicals they reportedly didn't feel comfortable with. Reports from various media outlets confirmed the Twins' decision. Then other reports contradicted it.

This mess is becoming more confusing by the hour.

Here's the most striking part of the whole ordeal: the Red Sox don't know what they want.

There's growing speculation around the industry that they aren't backing out of the deal because they suddenly feel different about Graterol's medical information, but for other reasons.

Some think it's because the Red Sox didn't like the public reaction when the deal was first announced on Tuesday.

What on earth did they think was going to happen when they traded the franchise's first MVP since Dustin Pedroia?

Of course that's not an easy pill for fans to swallow. Even if it was the right move — Betts won't be worth the contract he'll sign next winter and the Sox aren't good enough to contend in 2020 — it takes people time to sit with the difficult reality of watching their favorite player slip off his Sox uniform and start wearing Dodger blue.

But it wasn't just the fans who seemed undeniably and rightfully upset. Many of the industry reactions on Wednesday were negative, with a general sense the Sox didn't get a great return.

Baseball's premier reporter, The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal, said Saturday the Sox were feeling pressure from ownership who aren't happy with the public reaction to the Betts trade. Now it might fall apart.

This is the kind of public relations circus that has followed this team for the better part of a decade.

Graterol's agent, Scott Boras, hinted at it when he told the Globe, "it gets out as to the reason why a trade has a hiccup. There could be a variety of reasons. All I'm saying to this is that the reason is not Brusdar's health."

At the Herald, we were told by a high-ranking National League executive that the Sox did "pretty well," but were understandably given lesser prospect talent due to the excessive salaries the Sox were shedding.

Yes, it was a salary dump. It was also a smart baseball move.

Verdugo and Graterol, while coming with their own risks and baggage, have All-Star potential. They're under team control for five and six years, respectively. The Sox could reset their luxury tax and go all-in next offseason to put together the next championship team for 2021 and beyond.

We've made those points over and over.

But many understandably disagreed.

And now it appears the Red Sox are so flabbergasted by the disagreement that they're trying to back out of a deal they felt good about just five days earlier.

Imagine for a moment that Betts and Price, supposedly on the move, return to camp on Wednesday and start preparing to play for a team that tried to trade for them.

Then the Sox go over the luxury tax threshold again and face 2021 without financial flexibility, without resetting the tax system and with big penalties in store if they choose to shell out any large contracts and try to win in 2021.

All while the farm system remains quite barren.

It doesn't sound like a winning recipe.

If the Sox end up with a better prospect than Graterol from the Dodgers, good for them. But it remains silly to think they suddenly realized Graterol doesn't look like a starter and now want more in return.

It's hard to blame the Twins for backing out. The Dodgers still want to get this done.

Of course they do. They're dealing with a Red Sox team that has no direction.

Red Sox, Andrew Benintendi agree to two-year contract

Jason Mastrodonato

It's not the news many were expecting on Saturday evening, but the Red Sox did accomplish something.

The Sox agreed to a two-year contract with outfielder Andrew Benintendi, buying out his first and second years of salary arbitration at a fair price for an impact player who has yet to reach his ceiling.

According to an industry source, the Sox will pay Benintendi \$3.4 million in 2020 and \$6.6 million in 2021. He was expected to make \$3.8 million in 2020 according to MLB Trade Rumors arbitration projection model, which has proven quite accurate.

Benintendi, 25, hit 40 doubles and 13 homers with a .266 average and .774 OPS in 2019. It was a decent year by most standards but a drop from his 41 doubles, 16 homers, .290 average and .830 OPS in 2018.

The seventh overall pick in the 2015 draft, Benintendi arrived in the big leagues as an elite prospect expected to make at least a handful of All-Star appearances as the Sox left fielder, though he's yet to play up to that level.

In January, hitting coach Tim Hyers said he's visited with the youngster this offseason and expects a much better year ahead.

Benintendi is arbitration eligible in 2020, 2021 and 2022 before he can test free agency ahead of the 2023 season.

Given the two-year length of Saturday's agreement, Benintendi's salary will count as \$5 million each year for luxury tax purposes, effectively giving the Sox a reduced payroll figure in 2021 while committing a bit more to their payroll figure in 2020. The additional flexibility could let them spend a bit more freely next winter.

One could surmise that the agreement to such a deal would indicate the Sox have confidence they'll be able to get under the luxury tax threshold in 2020. They most certainly will if they complete their trade to send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, though the trade was still on hold as of Saturday night due to medical concerns.

Eduardo Rodriguez is the only remaining arbitration-eligible player on the Red Sox who has yet to agree on a salary for the 2020 season.

Twins likely backing out of Red Sox trade involving Mookie Betts, per reports

Jason Mastrodonato

The Minnesota Twins are likely backing out of the Mookie Betts deal, according to multiple reports.

The Minnesota Star Tribune first reported on Saturday that the Twins aren't interested in adding another prospect to the deal after the Red Sox questioned the medical review of 21-year-old right-hander Brusdar Graterol, a flame-thrower whose shoulder issues may have been worse than the Sox originally expected.

Graterol will no longer be included in the trade, according to the Tribune and confirmed by multiple reputable media outlets, though the Red Sox have not commented.

While it's likely the Twins have pulled out completely, indications are there's still a chance they remain involved.

Graterol had already undergone Tommy John surgery and missed two months with shoulder issues in 2019, but returned to form with the Twins as a reliever late in the year. He throws a triple-digit sinker that looks like an elite pitch and a slider that doesn't move a lot, but is effective when working together with the sinker. A two-pitch pitcher primarily, he projects as more of a reliever than a starter, though the Red Sox apparently changed their mind on that.

Graterol's agent, Scott Boras, rushed to the defense of Graterol's health on Friday, telling MLB Network's Jon Heyman that he threw without limitation to end the 2019 season and the Sox are "relying on a cursory medical record review, yet noted orthopedic doctors who saw him say there's no issue going forward."

Whether or not concern of Graterol's health was warranted, the Red Sox had other reasons to wiggle their way out of the trade after facing loads of public backlash when news of the trade leaked out early in the week.

The Dodgers were supposed to receive Betts and David Price in exchange for former top prospect Alex Verdugo, a left-handed hitting outfielder who projects as a .300 hitter at Fenway Park. They were also sending right-hander Kenta Maeda to the Twins for Graterol, who was then supposed to go to the Red Sox as part of a three-team deal.

A high-ranking executive in the National League told the Herald the Red Sox did "pretty well" in the deal, but obviously lost prospect value because of the the large salaries of Betts (\$27 million over one year) and Price (\$96 million over three years, though the Sox are reportedly paying half that).

Now it seems the Sox will have to work something else out with the Dodgers if they're going to complete the trade, with the Twins no longer interested in being a part of it.

The Dodgers should be plenty motivated to find a way to work it out, especially after the praise they received both locally and nationally for acquiring Betts and Price in their attempt to win their first World Series since 1988. They otherwise whiffed this offseason on acquiring superstar talent, reportedly coming close on Gerrit Cole before he signed with the Yankees.

With the San Diego Padres also having been in the heat of negotiations with the Red Sox for Betts, the Dodgers could face competition if they don't find a way to make the deal work quickly.

L.A. is loaded with prospects in the farm system, with six players ranked in the top-100 released by Baseball Prospectus in January: SS/2B Gavin Lux (No. 4), RHP Dustin May (No. 8), RHP Josiah Gray (No. 61), 3B Miguel Vargas (No. 65), C Keibert Ruiz (No. 79) and RHP Tony Gonsolin (No. 81).

Ron Roenicke will be Red Sox' new manager, per reports

Steve Hewitt

The Red Sox appear to have finally locked in on their new manager.

Ron Roenicke, who has served as the Red Sox' bench coach since 2018, is expected to be promoted as manager, according to reports from USA Today and the Globe on Friday morning. The Globe reported that the Red Sox are waiting for Major League Baseball's investigation into the 2018 team's sign-stealing allegations to be complete before making an announcement.

The Red Sox, though, issued the following statement in light of the report: "Our managerial search is not yet completed. We will comment at the completion of the search."

The news comes five days before pitchers and catchers report to Fort Myers for spring training, and ends a search that lasted more than three weeks since the Red Sox mutually parted ways with former manager Alex Cora, who was dismissed for his involvement in the Astros' sign-stealing operation.

The 63-year-old Roenicke is one of five known candidates the Red Sox had been considering as Cora's replacement. Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta was expected to interview for the position, and Red Sox third-base coach Carlos Febles and Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay each reportedly interviewed.

The Athletic reported Friday that former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons also interviewed for the job this week.

Roenicke managed the Brewers from 2011 to 2015, amassing a record of 342-331. In his first season, he led them to a franchise-record 96 victories and a National League Central division championship, the team's first division title in 29 years. They went on to advance to the NLCS before falling to the Cardinals.

Roenicke was ultimately fired in May 2015 after the Brewers had a rough start to the season. After serving as a third-base coach for the Dodgers and Angels, he was named Cora's bench coach, which he served for two seasons. Days after Cora's dismissal in January, he contemplated the possibility that he might be his replacement.

"I'm always content," Roenicke said at the team's Winter Weekend event on Jan. 18. "Coaching is fun. It's a fun job. Managing is challenging. I enjoy it. I love the challenge of it. I wasn't really thinking about it too much, but my phone was lit up every day from my friends or whoever, saying this was a possibility."

With less than a week before camp opens in Fort Myers, promoting an internal candidate was the logical conclusion. That seemed to be the favorable route among Red Sox players, who prefer continuity and communication, both of which fit Roenicke's profile, a player-first manager.

"Ron is a great candidate," J.D. Martinez said at Winter Weekend. "He knows our team. I wouldn't be surprised if it's Ron or something. ..."

"I think for me, it's that open book," Martinez added when asked what he wants in his next manager. "Being able to say, 'Hey J.D., you're going to be off next Tuesday.' Or, 'Hey, I need you today, how you feeling?' Because at the end of the day we're all men. Being open and straight-up is the most valuable asset a manager can have."

There was a thought that the Red Sox may wait until after MLB's investigation is complete before making a decision, given Roenicke or Feibles may be implicated. But picking Roenicke suggests they're not worried he'll be disciplined. USA Today reported Friday that two high-ranking officials involved in the investigation said that the Red Sox "will receive no more than a light punishment, with little evidence of cheating."

"It would be concerning if something happened that I knew I was a part of, that I was brought into as part of that," Roenicke said at Winter Weekend of the 2018 allegations. "I know what I do. I always try to do things the right way."

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday at the league's owners meetings that he hopes to complete the investigation before spring training begins and that no Red Sox players will be disciplined.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Report: Red Sox, Dodgers finalize trade sending Mookie Betts, David Price to Los Angeles

Bill Koch

Five days after it was agreed to in principle, the Red Sox appear to have finalized a trade that will send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

Outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong are reportedly on their way to Boston. Los Angeles will make a separate deal with the Twins to send right-hander Kenta Maeda and cash to Minnesota for right-hander Brusdar Graterol and a 2020 draft pick.

ESPN and The Athletic reported the details Sunday night, appearing to put an end to an ugly impasse that lingered through the end of the week. The Red Sox balked upon receiving Graterol's medical information and demanded additional prospect capital from Minnesota to complete the transaction. The Twins were prepared to walk away from discussions late Saturday night before striking an independent trade with the Dodgers.

Boston is parting with one of the premier players in baseball. Per FanGraphs, only Angels outfielder Mike Trout has posted more wins above replacement than Betts since 2016. The 27-year-old was the American League Most Valuable Player in 2018, a four-time Gold Glove winner and three-time Silver Slugger.

Price has started just 63 games over the past three seasons, but his playoff performance during a run to the 2018 World Series title went a long way toward exorcising his October demons. The 34-year-old left-hander won the clinching games in the A.L. Championship Series against the Astros and the Fall Classic against Los Angeles.

Betts has repeatedly said he will test the free agent market prior to the 2021 season, and the Red Sox were simply unwilling to take a chance on him walking away without receiving some sort of value in return. Boston is also shedding about half the dollar amount remaining on Price's contract, which runs through the 2022 season. Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom has achieved the goal set by principal owner John Henry of slipping under the first threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax.

The Red Sox remove roughly \$40 million in payroll for the upcoming season – \$27 million in the one-year deal Betts signed to avoid arbitration and about half of the \$31 million average annual value commanded by Price. Los Angeles will pick up the remaining half of Price's salary as it attempts to capture a first championship since 1988. Verdugo took home just \$560,000 in 2019 and is likely the only player sent by the Dodgers who will break spring training on Boston's roster.

Price's departure and Rick Porcello's one-year deal with the Mets leaves the Red Sox with a thin starting rotation. Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi both missed extended time due to injury in 2019 and only Eduardo Rodriguez enjoyed what could be qualified as a strong year – Boston finished 24-8 in games started by the left-hander. Bloom now has roughly \$20 million to work with below the CBT should he seek to make a late free agent addition or subsequent trade that would take on salary.

Verdugo was a consensus top-40 prospect in baseball and made his debut with the Dodgers in 2017. The 23-year-old slashed .282/.335/.449 through parts of his first three years and 158 games. He won't be eligible for free agency until after the 2024 season.

Downs is a top-50 prospect in baseball per MLB.com and immediately moves toward the head of the Red Sox minor league ranks in that regard. The 21-year-old infielder reached Double-A last season and slashed .276/.362/.526 with 24 home runs, 35 doubles and 24 stolen bases across two levels. Downs is the younger brother of Jerry Downs, a Boston prospect who appeared at Class A Salem and Double-A Portland in 2019.

The 23-year-old Wong immediately becomes the top catcher in the Red Sox minor league system. A third-round pick out of Houston in the 2017 draft, Wong slashed .281/.336/.541 at Class A and Double-A last season. Wong totaled 24 home runs and 24 doubles in 111 games.

Boston was initially set to receive the 21-year-old Graterol in a three-team trade, but concerns about his health and whether or not he profiled as a starter or reliever gave the Red Sox cold feet. Graterol underwent Tommy John surgery in 2015 and was shut down for two months last season due to a right shoulder impingement. Minnesota sent him to Los Angeles instead, bringing back Maeda and some \$10 million in cash.

The lengthy delay in formally announcing the deal drew the ire of MLB Players Association executive director Tony Clark and Angels owner Arte Moreno. Clark released a statement on Friday imploring the three teams to reach a final agreement and Moreno voiced his objection in light of another transaction

involving his club that was put on hold. Clark said the impasse “unfairly put several players’ lives in a state of limbo.”

With Betts in the fold, the Dodgers were thought to be prepared to complete a five-player trade with the Angels involving another outfielder. Joc Pederson and right-hander Ross Stripling were reportedly set to be moved for infielder Luis Rengifo and a pair of Angels prospects. The Athletic reported late Sunday night the two Los Angeles clubs had called off the proposed deal.

Reports: Twins pull out of three-team trade involving Red Sox, Mookie Betts and David Price

Bill Koch

The proposed three-team blockbuster between the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins appears to be in some jeopardy.

According to a Saturday afternoon report from the Star Tribune, Minnesota is prepared to withdraw from the trade after clashing with Boston over possible additional compensation. The Twins and Red Sox are locked in a dispute regarding the medical records belonging to right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol.

Minnesota and Graterol’s agent, Scott Boras, insist the 21-year-old has been fully cleared and would be capable of working as a starting pitcher as soon as the 2020 season. Boston’s eyebrows were raised by a further look at Graterol’s history, which includes Tommy John surgery in 2015 and a two-month shutdown in 2019 due to a right shoulder impingement. Profiling Graterol as a reliever would decrease his value, and the Red Sox were said to be seeking at least one more prospect from the Twins.

Hanging in the balance, of course, is the immediate future of two prominent Boston players. Mookie Betts and David Price were ticketed for Los Angeles in the deal, with the Red Sox trading away a cornerstone piece and a serviceable left-handed starter. Betts figures to break the bank on the free agent market in 2021 while the 34-year-old Price could use the warmer weather, pitcher-friendly Dodger Stadium and thinner National League lineups to author a personal renaissance.

This was set to be the first major transaction for Boston chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, as his acquisition of Graterol and outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers also included squeezing Boston under the Competitive Balance Tax. The Red Sox were set to shed upwards of \$45 million on the remaining three years of Price’s deal and all of the \$27 million due to Betts for his final arbitration campaign in 2020. Boston’s total payroll for the upcoming season would drop near \$190 million, comfortably below the first CBT threshold of \$208 million.

The Boston Globe said the Red Sox and Los Angeles could continue to work towards a two-team resolution, but that figures to require significant reworking in terms of prospects returning to Boston and cash pledged by the Dodgers to pay Price. Los Angeles was already retaining almost all of its deep prospect base including infielder Gavin Lux, right-hander Dustin May, catcher Keibert Ruiz and infielder Jeter Downs. MLB.com said Minnesota was most likely to withdraw from any further talks but had yet to formally do so.

News of the deal leaked Tuesday night, and Boston’s medical concerns regarding Graterol began to surface as the week continued. Tony Clark, the executive director of the MLB Players Association, issued a statement Friday urging all three teams to find an immediate resolution.

“The events of this last week have unfairly put several players’ lives in a state of limbo,” Clark said. “The unethical leaking of medical information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often players are treated as commodities by those running the game.”

The delayed completion of the trade has affected other pending transactions involving the Dodgers, Twins and Angels. Los Angeles was set to send right-hander Kenta Maeda to Minnesota and had also struck a four-player deal with its Southern California neighbor. Outfielder Joc Pederson, right-hander Ross Stripling

and outfield prospect Andy Pages were headed for the Angels while infielder Luis Rengifo was returning to the Dodgers.

Pederson, Stripling, Pages and Rengifo all remain with their respective teams. Los Angeles will not part with Pederson until it has Betts safely in the fold. The Dodgers would become betting co-favorites with the Yankees to win the World Series, something the franchise hasn't accomplished since 1988.

Red Sox, Andrew Benintendi avoid arbitration with two-year deal

Bill Koch

The Red Sox have avoided salary arbitration with Andrew Benintendi for each of the next two seasons.

Boston and the left fielder agreed to a two-year deal on Saturday, one formally announced by the club in an evening email. Benintendi and Eduardo Rodriguez were the only two Red Sox players set to enter the process, and now Benintendi will have one final year of eligibility in 2022.

The Boston Globe reported Benintendi will receive \$10 million over the life of the deal. MLB.com reported Benintendi will take home \$3.4 million in 2020 and \$6.6 million in 2021.

The 25-year-old Benintendi suffered drops across his slash line in 2019, finishing at .266/.343/.431. His move to the leadoff spot ahead of Mookie Betts was a failed experiment, and Benintendi eventually settled into his familiar No. 2 hole in the lineup. He reached 40 doubles for the second straight season but slipped to just 13 homers and 10 stolen bases.

The contract represents something of a compromise between Benintendi and Boston. The Red Sox proposed a \$3.4 million salary for Benintendi in arbitration for 2020, and he countered with \$4.15 million. Benintendi will play for Boston's figure next season and nearly double his money in 2021 regardless of performance.

Benintendi is the lone member of the Red Sox starting outfield under contract beyond this season. Mookie Betts remains in limbo regarding the proposed three-team trade between Boston, the Twins and the Dodgers that would send him to Los Angeles. Jackie Bradley Jr. is playing out his final arbitration season for \$11 million.

Benintendi is a member of what shapes up to be a significant free agent class for the Red Sox in 2023. David Price, Nathan Eovaldi and J.D. Martinez – barring a previous option voiding his contract – are scheduled to hit the market. Price, of course, is embroiled in the same trade uncertainty as Betts after apparently being headed to the Dodgers.

Benintendi is part of the homegrown core that helped the Red Sox capture a World Series title in 2018. His diving catch at Minute Maid Park ended Game 4 of the American League Championship Series against the Astros, giving Boston a stranglehold. Benintendi was the seventh overall pick out of Arkansas in the 2015 draft.

Eduardo Rodriguez is now the last man standing for the Red Sox in terms of arbitration. The left-hander submitted a proposed \$8.975 million figure for 2020 while Boston countered with \$8.3 million. Boston went 24-8 in games started by Rodriguez in 2019 and just 58-70 behind the rest of its staff.

Report: Red Sox to name Ron Roenicke next manager

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- The Red Sox will promote from within when they eventually name the franchise's next manager.

Per a Friday morning report from the Boston Globe, bench coach Ron Roenicke will be elevated to replace Alex Cora as soon as next week. The 63-year-old has previous experience with the Brewers, guiding the club to the National League Championship Series during his four-plus seasons with Milwaukee from 2011-15.

Roenicke was one of at least five candidates reportedly interviewed for the position, joining third base coach Carlos Febles, Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay, Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta and former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons. The Red Sox declined to confirm whether or not they will formally hire Roenicke, saying their search is “not yet completed.”

Boston’s reluctance makes sense in light of the ongoing Major League Baseball investigation into the club’s alleged 2018 sign stealing. The Red Sox stand accused of illegally using their video room just off the home dugout at Fenway Park to gain an advantage against opposing clubs. Cora and Boston parted ways by mutual consent after he was implicated both in Boston’s alleged scheme and in the confirmed 2017 sign stealing caper perpetrated by the Astros, where he previously served as bench coach.

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday the investigation into the Red Sox is expected to be completed next week. It would be unnecessarily risky for Boston to formally name Roenicke its next manager prior to learning MLB’s findings. Cora is expected to be sanctioned covering his time with Houston and the Red Sox, and it’s unknown if any other members of the Boston staff will be subject to disciplinary action.

Roenicke has spent the last two seasons with the Red Sox and represented an experienced hand alongside Cora, who had no previous managerial experience in the major leagues when he was hired in October 2017. They shared player development roots with the Dodgers, as Roenicke was a first-round pick by Los Angeles in 1977. Roenicke, a California native, also carries previous coaching experience with the Dodgers and Angels.

The timing of Cora’s departure in January could hardly have been worse for Boston. The Red Sox were left with barely a month prior to spring training to find their next manager – pitchers and catchers formally report to Fort Myers on Feb. 12, and the first full squad workout is scheduled for Feb. 17. This is also the first time chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom will be tasked with making such a hire, which adds another layer of difficulty for the franchise.

Cora’s close relationships with Boston players always promised to make him hard to replace. Those connections – along with superb talent on the field – were credited with helping the Red Sox steamroll to a club record 108 victories and a World Series title in 2018. Several Boston players took to social media to publicly lament Cora’s departure when it was announced.

Roenicke posted a 342-331 record with the Brewers and enjoyed his greatest success in his 2011 debut season. Milwaukee went 96-66, capturing a N.L. Central championship and eventually bowing to the Cardinals in six games. The Brewers missed the playoffs in each of the next three seasons and Roenicke was fired after a 7-18 start in 2015.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox’s 40-man roster includes Alex Verdugo (from Mookie Betts trade), starter Martin Perez and eight other new players from different organizations (meet them all)

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — David Price and Mookie Betts won’t be here at the JetBlue Park complex when Boston Red Sox catchers and pitchers officially report to spring training Tuesday. Alex Verdugo will be around here with the next eight days.

The Red Sox and Dodgers reportedly have reached an agreement after reworking their trade. Betts and Price are headed out west. Verdugo, a right fielder who had a strong rookie season in 2019 for LA, as well as prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong are headed east.

Verdugo is one of 10 players on the 40-man roster who the Red Sox acquired from another organization or signed in free agency this offseason.

Let's meet all 10:

Alex Verdugo, RF: The Red Sox acquired the 23-year-old with prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong for Mookie Betts and David Price. The left-handed hitter batted .294 with a .342 on-base percentage, .475 slugging percentage, .817 OPS, 12 homers, 22 doubles, two triples and 44 RBIs in 106 games for the Dodgers during 2019. He's a solid defender, too. He had 13 Defensive Runs Saved last year, per Fangraphs.com.

Kevin Plawecki, C: The 28-year-old catcher spent 2019 with the Indians. He's expected to fill Sandy Leon's old role as backup to Christian Vazquez. The Red Sox traded Leon to Cleveland. The 6-foot-2 right-handed hitter batted only .222 with a .287 on-base percentage, .342 slugging percentage, .629 OPS, 10 doubles, three homers and 17 RBIs in 59 games (174 plate appearances) last year. He spent from 2015-18 with the Mets. He has only a 23% caught stealing percentage for his career. A Mets' 2012 first-round pick, Baseball America ranked him No. 63 on its top 100 list entering 2015.

Martin Perez, SP: The Red Sox and Perez agreed to a one-year, \$6-million contract this offseason. The deal includes a \$6.25 million option for 2021. He added a cutter last season in his first and only year with the Twins. It ended up becoming his best pitch. He held the opposition to a .214 batting average and .343 slugging percentage when he threw it, per Statcast. But his fastball continued to get hit hard despite good velocity in 2019, leading to a 5.12 ERA in 32 outings (29 starts).

Chris Mazza, RP: Boston claimed the righty off waivers from the Mets on Dec. 20. The reliever mostly throws a sinker, cutter and slider. He also sometimes mixes in a changeup and four-seamer. Joe, Dom and Vince DiMaggio are his third cousins, according to MetroSportsReport. Dom DiMaggio played all 11 of his major league seasons for the Red Sox, posting a .298 batting average, .383 on-base percentage, .419 slugging percentage and .802 OPS.

Josh Osich, RP: The Red Sox claimed Osich off waivers Oct. 31. He had a strong final two months of 2019 for the White Sox (2.96 ERA in 23 outings, 27 1/3 innings) as he regained the feel of his changeup vs. righties and began throwing a curveball. He grew up a big Pedro Martinez fan in Idaho. His wife Jessica introduced him to all Boston sports when she and her family moved to Boise from Andover, Mass. Josh and Jessica now live in Maine and he enjoys attending Celtics and Bruins games as well as watching the Patriots. Osich's father-in-law sold soda and popcorn at Fenway Park and the Boston Garden in the 1960s.

Jose Peraza, IF: The Venezuela native likely will compete with Michael Chavis for the starting second base job. He received a one-year contract but the Red Sox have control of him through 2022. The right-handed hitter, who turns 26 in April, slashed just .239/.285/.346/.631 during a disappointing 2019 season for the Reds. But he made adjustments to his swing this offseason and hopes to return to his 2018 form when he posted a .742 OPS, stroked 49 extra-base hits (31 doubles, four triples, 14 homers) and drove in 58 runs in 157 games.

Jonathan Arauz, 2B/SS: The Rule 5 Draft pick will try to earn a spot on the Opening Day. The 21-year-old Panama native batted only .249 with a .319 on-base percentage, .388 slugging percentage, .707 OPS, 11 homers, 22 doubles, two triples and 55 RBIs in 115 games at High A and Double A in the Astros' system last year. A Rule 5 Draft selection must stick on the 25-man roster for the entire season (barring an injury) or be offered back to his previous club.

Austin Brice, RP: Boston acquired the right-handed reliever — who was born in Hong Kong — from the Marlins for minor league shortstop Angeudis Santos on Jan. 10. He posted a 3.43 ERA, .214 batting

average against, 1.23 WHIP, 46 strikeouts and 18 walks in 44 $\frac{2}{3}$ relief innings during 2019. His 4.87 FIP wasn't as impressive.

Matt Hall, RP: Boston acquired the left-handed reliever for minor league catcher Jhon Nunez on Jan. 17. Hall averaged 10.4 strikeouts per nine innings (27 strikeouts, in 23 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings) last year. But he also averaged 5.8 walks and recorded a 7.71 ERA. He has a 9.48 ERA in 21 outings (31 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings) during his major league career. He doesn't throw his four-seam fastball hard. It averaged 90.5 mph in 2019, per Statcast. His four-seamer and curveball are his main two pitches.

Jeffrey Springs, RP: The Red Sox acquired him from the Rangers for Sam Travis on Jan. 15. The left-handed reliever posted a 3.38 ERA in 32 innings his rookie year in 2018, but his ERA jumped to 6.40 in 32 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings last year.

Mookie Betts trade: Chaim Bloom set table for Boston Red Sox to spend in 2020-21 MLB free agency, might have found Dustin Pedroia's longterm replacement at second

Christopher Smith

Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom remained patient and took his time the past two days after MLBPA executive director Tony Clark and agent Scott Boras pressured him Friday to complete the three-team blockbuster trade that initially was agreed upon Tuesday.

Bloom wasn't satisfied after a review of Brusdar Graterol's medical records showed the 21-year-old righty's longterm outlook more as a reliever than starter. He held his ground and ended up with a better return.

Los Angeles and Boston finalized the trade Sunday evening. In addition acquiring major league right fielder Alex Verdugo, the Red Sox received prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong (not Graterol). Mookie Betts, David Price and half of Price's remaining \$96 million are headed to the Dodgers.

Price will count for \$16 million — instead of \$31 million — toward the Red Sox's Competitive Balance Tax in 2020, '21 and '22. The salary relief certainly sets the table for the Red Sox to spend money in free agency next offseason.

Boston's 2020 payroll dropped approximately \$18 million below the \$208 Competitive Balance Tax. MassLive.com has estimated the payroll at \$189.6375 million.

Trading one of baseball's best players is hardly a conventional move for a big market club. But Red Sox ownership made it clear they hired Bloom to rebuild the farm system, which should make winning more sustainable longterm.

Boston has even more money coming off the books next offseason. Jackie Bradley Jr., who will earn \$11 million in 2020, is free agent eligible. The Red Sox also don't need to pick up Martin Perez's \$6.25 million option for 2021.

Bloom not only has plenty of cash to spend on next winter's free agent class, but he also has flexibility to negotiate longterm extensions with Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez, who is free agent eligible after 2021.

Connecticut native/UConn grad George Springer and Marcell Ozuna are two free agent outfield options the Red Sox might target next offseason. Boston also likely will try to sign or trade for a starter. Robbie Ray, Marcus Stroman, Trevor Bauer and James Paxton are among the starting pitchers eligible for free agency after 2020.

By staying under the \$208 million base threshold in 2020, the Red Sox will forfeit just one draft pick (instead of two picks) if they sign a qualified free agent like Springer or Ozuna next offseason. They also will lose \$500,000 less in international signing money.

Don't rule out the Red Sox pursuing Betts next offseason in free agency, although it seems unlikely because the two sides didn't come close in extension talks. Betts presumably will sign with whichever club offers him the most money. Maybe the Red Sox and Betts will come closer in negotiations once the star's free agent market value becomes clear.

The Sox would have received only a 2021 compensation draft pick after the fourth round for Betts if they kept him this season, the 2020 payroll stayed above \$208 million and Betts then signed with another club in free agency.

Look at it this way: Bloom traded one guaranteed year of Betts for five controllable seasons of Verdugo. He also acquired two prospects.

Let's not forget, Verdugo is a good player. Baseball America and MLB Pipeline both ranked him No. 35 on their top 100 lists entering 2019. Baseball Prospectus ranked him 19th. The 23-year-old left-handed hitter then recorded a .817 OPS with 12 homers, 22 doubles, two triples and 44 RBIs in 106 games for the Dodgers as a rookie.

Meanwhile, the Red Sox's farm system is better today than it was yesterday. Downs has the potential to be Dustin Pedroia's longterm replacement at second base. He posted a .526 slugging percentage, .888 OPS, 24 homers, 35 doubles, four triples, 86 RBIs and 24 steals in 119 games (535 plate appearances) at High A and Double A combined during 2019.

Catcher is the weakest position in the Red Sox minor league system. Acquiring Wong helps bolster the position. The 23-year-old, who was a 2017 third round pick, has potential both offensively and defensively, but he needs to cut down on his strikeouts (143 in 111 games last year). He posted a .541 slugging percentage, .878 OPS, 24 homers, 24 doubles, seven triples and 82 RBIs in 465 plate appearances at High A and Double A combined during 2019. He threw out 52% (16-of-31) of base stealers at Double A.

Mookie Betts trade: Who are Jeter Downs, Connor Wong? Boston Red Sox newest prospects both bashed 24 homers in 2019

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have acquired a shortstop named Jeter.

After a lengthy delay because of concerns over medical records, the Dodgers and Red Sox reportedly have finalized a blockbuster trade that will send Mookie Betts and David Price to Los Angeles.

Alex Verdugo, who was part of the initial deal, remains part of this trade. He's headed to Boston along with shortstop/second baseman Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong.

Yes, Jeter Downs is named after Yankees legend and Hall of Famer Derek Jeter.

The 21-year-old Downs was born Colombia and graduated from Monsignor Edward Pace High in Miami Gardens, Fla. The Reds selected him in the first round (32nd overall) in 2017. Baseball America ranks him No. 86 on its 2020 preseason top 100. It ranked him the No. 6 prospect in the Dodgers system.

Baseball America wrote, "Acquired from the Reds in the trade that sent Yasiel Puig to Cincinnati, scouts aren't all that sure of where Downs will end up defensively in the majors. But the man can hit. Whether he plays second or this (third) base eventually, he has the chance to hit for average and power."

The 5-foot-11, 180-pounder has an above average arm and good hands, but “his range is suboptimal for an everyday shortstop,” per his Baseball America scouting report. BA also described him as an intelligent base runner and added “evaluators see Downs as a multi-positional, everyday infielder in the mold of Josh Harrison.”

MLB Pipeline’s Top 100 has Downs at No. 44. It set his MLB ETA for 2021.

The Red Sox need a longterm second baseman with Dustin Pedroia’s career potentially finished. Downs could be the answer.

He batted .276 with a .362 on-base percentage, .526 slugging percentage, .888 OPS, 24 homers, 35 doubles, four triples, 86 RBIs and 24 steals in 119 games (535 plate appearances) at High A and Double A combined during 2019.

Wong — a 23-year-old who the Dodgers selected in the third round in 2017 — started games at second and third base in addition to catcher last year. He batted .281 with a .336 on-base percentage, .541 slugging percentage, .878 OPS, 24 homers, 24 doubles, seven triples, 82 RBIs and 11 steals in 111 games (465 plate appearances) at High A and Double A combined during 2019. Swing-and-miss is an issue right now. He struck out 143 times and drew 32 walks in his 111 games.

He threw out 37% of base stealers overall, including 52% (16-of-31) at Double A.

Verdugo, a 23-year-old left-handed hitter, batted .294 with a .342 on-base percentage, .475 slugging percentage, .817 OPS, 12 homers, 22 doubles, two triples and 44 RBIs in 106 games for the Dodgers during 2019.

Both Baseball America and MLB Pipeline ranked him No. 35 on their top 100 lists entering 2019. Baseball Prospectus ranked him 19th.

Verdugo might not be ready for Opening Day because of an injury to his back, oblique and core. MLB.com provided an injury update Jan. 3:

“The outfielder said his ‘goal’ is to be ready for Opening Day, certainly leaving open the possibility that he won’t. He suffered a back/oblique/core injury that cost him the final two months of the regular season and the Dodgers’ National League Division Series loss to the Nationals.

“Verdugo went on to say that as he continues to rehab, he has not resumed any baseball activities. Maybe that’s why the Dodgers haven’t dealt Verdugo or Joc Pederson from a position where the Dodgers have a surplus. Club officials say there is no concern with the 23-year-old’s health long term, but initially nobody thought his injury was this serious.”

Mookie Betts trade: Jeter Downs, new Red Sox SS prospect, named after Yankees’ legend Derek Jeter

Matt Vautour

The bizarre path of the Red Sox’s Mookie Betts trade was completed with Boston ending up with a shortstop named Jeter.

Jeter Downs, the top 100 prospect from the Dodgers, who replaced Brusdar Graterol to complete the deal that sent Betts and David Price to Los Angeles, is in fact named after Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter, who’ll enter the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown this summer. The Red Sox also received Alex Verdugo and Connor Wong in the deal.

Downs, a Floridian, explained how he came by the moniker to MLB.com in 2017 after he was a first-round pick of the Cincinnati Reds.

“When he came into the Major Leagues, he was the name. He was the thing. He was shining,” Downs said in the MLB.com article. “It was ‘Jeter this, Jeter that.’ It was actually my Mom’s idea. My brother got Jerry from my Dad. It was my Mom’s turn to pick a name since I was a second child. She just fell in love with Jeter and the way he played, his humbleness, how he carried himself on and off the field. That’s how I pride myself. I try to do the right thing on and off the field, whether it’s baseball-related or out with friends or helping somebody out on the street. It’s kind of ironic that I have the name because that’s exactly the person I model myself after.”

Despite misconceptions to the contrary, Betts, whose given name is Markus, was not nicknamed after Mookie Wilson, who was part of the Mets’ comeback vs. the Red Sox in 1986, but partially after former NBA guard Mookie Blaylock.

Mookie Betts, David Price traded: Boston Red Sox, Los Angeles Dodgers reach agreement after reworking deal (report)

Chris Cotillo

After an extended time in limbo, Mookie Betts and David Price are headed to the Los Angeles Dodgers after all, according to ESPN’s Jeff Passan.

According to the report, the Red Sox and Dodgers have finalized the trade sending Betts, Price and cash to Los Angeles in exchange for outfielder Alex Verdugo, shortstop Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong. The blockbuster, which was originally slated to be a three-team deal with the Twins, was agreed upon Tuesday night but was put on hold when the Sox found issues with the medicals of Twins righty Brusdar Graterol, who was originally coming to Boston.

The agreement puts the bow on a hectic week for the Red Sox, who faced significant backlash for trading Betts (their best player) and Price (who had received the largest contract in franchise history four years ago) in order to cut significant payroll a week before spring training. Betts, who is a free agent after the season, rebuffed multiple extension offers from the Red Sox and appears intent on hitting the open market. Price, who turns 35 in August, is due to earn \$96 million over the next three years, with Boston paying half (\$48 million).

Verdugo, a 23-year-old former second-round pick, will likely take over for Betts in right field in an outfield that will also employ Andrew Benintendi and Jackie Bradley Jr. Downs -- the No. 44 prospect in all of baseball, per MLB.com -- and Wong were both ranked among Los Angeles’ top 30 prospects in MLB.com’s most recent ranking and will help restock a Boston farm system that showed signs of improvement in 2019.

Verdugo was ranked as one of Baseball America’s top 100 prospects for each of the last four seasons, entering the 2019 campaign as the No. 35 prospect in the league. He appeared in 106 games for the Dodgers, hitting .294/.342/.475 with 12 homers and 44 RBIs before being sidelined for the season with a back injury in early August.

The 6-foot, 282-lb. lefty was a second-round pick in the 2014 draft, jumping directly from Sahuaro High School in Tucson to the pros. He’s a contact hitter who has a strong arm and can play all three outfield positions, though the Sox will likely keep him in right field as Betts’ direct replacement.

Downs, 21, played 119 games last season between High A and Double-A, hitting .276/.362/.526 in 535 plate appearances. Originally a first-round pick (32nd overall) by the Reds in 2017, he was sent to the Dodgers in a deal involving Yasiel Puig and Matt Kemp last December. Downs, who was named after Hall of Famer Derek Jeter, was recently ranked by Baseball America as the 6th-best player in the Dodgers’ system.

With Xander Bogaerts entrenched at shortstop, Downs looks like a potential long-term solution at second base for the Sox. Downs is unlikely to factor into the big league picture in 2019, leaving Jose Peraza and Michael Chavis as Boston's top two options at second in the meantime.

Wong, 23, played in 111 games combined at High A and Double-A in 2019, hitting .281/.336/.510 with 24 homers and 82 RBIs. A third-round pick out of the University of Houston in 2017, Wong appeared at three positions in 2019, logging 14 games at second base and 12 at third base in addition to 83 behind the plate.

The Dodgers also completed a trade with the Twins on Sunday, sending starter Kenta Maeda, outfield prospect Luke Raley and cash to Minnesota in exchange for Graterol and the No. 67 overall pick in next year's draft. The original iteration of the trade had Betts and Price going to Los Angeles, Verdugo and Graterol going to Boston and Maeda going to the Twins before Boston found issues with Graterol's medicals.

Mookie Betts trade: Boston Red Sox 'making progress' on revised deal with Dodgers; pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol unlikely to come to Boston (reports)

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox have made progress in their efforts to finalize the blockbuster trade that would send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, according to MLB Network's Jon Heyman. LaVelle Neal of the Minnesota Star-Tribune hears similarly, reporting that things have evolved enough for an announcement to possibly be made Sunday.

The three teams are likely to complete two separate deals, according to Alex Speier of the Boston Globe, with the Red Sox sending Betts, Price and cash to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo and additional prospects and the Dodgers trading right-hander Kenta Maeda (and potentially another player) to the Twins for a package including righty Brusdar Graterol.

Graterol, who was originally slated to go to the Sox in a three-team deal before Boston found some problems with his medicals, is unlikely to go to the Red Sox in the trade, per Speier. The Red Sox, instead, will likely make a standalone trade with the Dodgers, sending Betts and Price west and getting Verdugo and others.

The Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins previously agreed to a three-team deal sending Betts, Price and cash to Los Angeles, Verdugo and Graterol to Boston and Maeda to Minnesota, but that possibility fell through once the Sox took issue with Graterol's medical records. The major change in the revised version of the trades, will likely have Graterol going to the Dodgers and Los Angeles giving the Sox additional compensation for the Betts/Price package.

Three separate trades involving four teams -- the Red Sox, Dodgers, Twins and Angels -- are dependent on the sides resolving the differences. The Dodgers are reportedly set to send outfielder Joc Pederson and righty Ross Stripling to the Angels for a package that includes infielder Luis Rengifo, contingent on the Betts trade becoming official.

Red Sox pitchers and catchers are due to report to Fort Myers for spring training Tuesday, so a resolution should come sooner rather than later.

Andrew Benintendi, Boston Red Sox agree to two-year contract, avoid arbitration hearing

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox and Andrew Benintendi have agreed to a two-year contract, avoiding a salary arbitration hearing.

Benintendi was expected to go to a hearing after he filed for \$4.15 million and the Red Sox filed at \$3.4 million Jan. 10, the deadline for teams and players to exchange salary figures. Instead, Benintendi will receive \$10 million total over the next two seasons, Boston Globe's Alex Speier reported.

Benintendi is eligible for free agency after the 2022 season.

The 25-year-old left fielder slimmed down this offseason as he tries to bounce back from a disappointing 2019 campaign. His OPS dropped 56 points (.830 to .774) from 2018 to '19.

"I thought he was in really good shape," Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers said in January. "And he (had) tons of energy. He's really looking forward to this year. And he had a good perspective on what he needed to work on."

Benintendi added additional weight for 2019 to try to stay more durable but his offensive statistics dropped. He batted .266 with a .343 on-base percentage, .431 slugging percentage, .774 OPS, 13 homers, five triples, 40 doubles, 72 runs and 68 RBIs in 138 games.

He had slashed .290/.366/.465/.830 with 16 homers, 41 doubles, six triples, 87 RBIs and 103 runs in 148 games during 2019.

Mookie Betts, David Price trade off? Red Sox, Twins, Dodgers still discussing possibility of 3-team trade but optimism waning (sources)

Chris Cotillo

There's still a chance the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins will complete the three-team deal slated to send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, but optimism is waning.

Despite reports that they had pulled out of discussions earlier Saturday, the Twins remain in active talks and have not declared their end of the deal dead, two sources with direct knowledge of the conversations said Saturday. Discussions are currently going slow and any path forward for the potential trade will likely not involve Minnesota.

The three teams agreed to a blockbuster, five-player trade Tuesday night, with Betts, Price and cash going to the Dodgers, Graterol and outfielder Alex Verdugo going to the Red Sox and right-hander Kenta Maeda going to the Twins, pending medical review. As the Red Sox reviewed Graterol's medicals, they had some concerns and began to project the right-hander as more of a reliever than a starter, causing progress to stall.

Graterol's medicals caused Boston to ask for more compensation on their end of the trade, and there seems to be a significant gulf between what the Red Sox are asking for and what the Twins are willing to give up. Minnesota is unlikely to want to give up much more than Graterol (a top prospect) for Maeda (a mid-rotation starter).

If the Twins pull out, the Red Sox and Dodgers could theoretically work out a new deal in which Betts and Price go to Los Angeles and Verdugo goes to Boston, along with other pieces. The Dodgers also have a pending deal with the Angels (in which outfielder Joc Pederson and righty Ross Stripling would go to the Angels for infielder Luis Rengifo) in limbo as they wait for the Betts/Price deal to be finalized.

It's clear the involved parties want a resolution as soon as possible, preferably before pitchers and catchers are due to report to spring training early next week. As things currently stand, there appears to be only a remote chance a three-team trade is worked out and significant uncertainty about whether or not a deal will be consummated at all.

Ron Roenicke: Who's Boston Red Sox's potential new manager? Former Brewers manager would become sixth Boston skipper in 10 years

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox likely will hire an internal candidate as their next manager. Ron Roenicke, who served as Alex Cora's bench coach the past two years, reportedly is the top choice. A Red Sox spokesman, however, said the manager search is not yet completed.

The 63-year-old would become the sixth Boston manager in the past 10 years. The group of six managers includes Diamondbacks' Torey Lovullo who managed for the final 49 games of the 2015 season (28-21 record) when John Farrell took a leave of absence to undergo cancer treatments.

The 2018 Red Sox are being investigated for allegedly using their video replay room to decode signs. But Roenicke denied any involvement. He has said he's prided himself on doing things the right way during his career.

"I always felt like, yes, there were lots of things we could do on the field," Roenicke said. "When I was a third base coach, I could have given the pitches to the hitters. That's legal to do in the third base box, but I didn't think it was right so I didn't do it."

Roenicke managed the Brewers from 2011 until being fired May 3, 2015. He went 342-331 (.508 winning percentage). He led Milwaukee to a 96-win regular season and an appearance in the NLCS in 2011. He finished second for NL Manager of the Year that season.

The Brewers never finished above third place during his final four years there.

He played in 527 major league games as an outfielder for the Dodgers, Mariners, Padres, Giants, Phillies and Reds from 1981-88. He batted .238 with a .353 on-base percentage, .338 slugging percentage, .691 OPS and 256 hits (including 51 doubles, three triples, 17 homers).

Roenicke — who managed Cora in the minors — served as third base coach for the 2002 World Series champion Los Angeles Angels. He worked two stints for the Angels. He first served as their third base coach from 2000-05 and bench coach from 2006-10. He also returned for the 2016-17 seasons to serve as third base coach.

His brother Gary Roenicke played 12 seasons in the majors for the Expos, Orioles, Yankees and Braves. Gary Roenicke spent eight seasons with the Orioles and was inducted into the organization's Hall of Fame. He put together a solid career overall, hitting double-digit homers six times, including 25 homers in 1979 and 21 blasts in 1982.

Boston Red Sox manager search 'not yet completed;' Ron Roenicke reported to be top choice

Chris Cutillo

The Red Sox have not yet completed their managerial search, a team spokesman said Friday.

"Our managerial search is not yet completed," the spokesman said. "We will comment at the completion of the search."

The Boston Globe reported earlier Friday that the Red Sox plan to promote bench coach Ron Roenicke to manager but are waiting to make a formal announcement until after Major League Baseball reveals the results of its investigation into the team's alleged sign-stealing practices in 2018. It's unclear if the team's statement denies that Roenicke is the choice or if it simply means official word will come after the league makes its ruling.

Roenicke, 63, interviewed for the opening, as MassLive reported earlier in the week. The veteran coach is one of five known interviewees, along with Sox third base coach Carlos Febles, Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta, Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay and former Blue Jays manager John

Gibbons (as Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic reported Friday). It's believed the Sox would prefer an internal choice to ensure continuity after the surprising ouster of Alex Cora, who was let go last month after being implicated in the league's investigation into alleged sign-stealing by the Astros in 2017.

The results of the league's investigation are expected to be released before pitchers and catchers report to spring training early next week, meaning official word of the managerial hire is likely to come shortly thereafter. Roenicke appears to be one of the top choices -- if not the only one -- to succeed Cora.

Boston's decision-makers are likely waiting to make sure Roenicke or any other top candidates are not implicated in any wrongdoing committed by the Red Sox, who are alleged to have improperly used a video replay room to steal opponents' signs in 2018.

Roenicke previously denied any involvement in the alleged scheme, claiming he even refused to legally steal signs while serving as a third base coach for the Angels before joining the Red Sox.

"It would be concerning if something happened -- that I knew I wasn't part of -- that I was brought into as part of that," Roenicke said. "I know what I do. I always try to do things the right way."

Mookie Betts, David Price trade: MLBPA asks Boston Red Sox, other clubs for immediate resolution on deals

Chris Cotillo

MLBPA executive director Tony Clark called for an immediate resolution on the blockbuster trade that would send Red Sox stars Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers on Friday.

"The proposed trades between the Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins, and Angels need to be resolved without further delay," Clark said. "The events of this last week have unfairly put several Players' lives in a state of limbo. The unethical leaking of medical information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often Players are treated as commodities by those running the game."

According to multiple reports Tuesday night, Boston agreed to a three-team deal that would send Betts, Price and cash to the Dodgers, outfielder Alex Verdugo and right-hander Brusdar Graterol to Boston and starter Kenta Maeda to the Twins, pending the review of the players' medicals. The Dodgers also agreed to a separate deal with the Angels that was slated to send outfielder Joc Pederson, right-hander Ross Stripling and outfielder Andy Pages to Anaheim for infielder Luis Rengifo and other pieces.

Those deals have been on hold for nearly 72 hours after Boston's review of Graterol's medicals reportedly caused the Sox to project him "more as a reliever than a starter." The Red Sox are believed to be asking for additional compensation in the trade, either in the form of an additional player or cash.

Negotiations between the clubs about a revised deal were "going slowly" as of Thursday night, according to The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal, though USA Today's Bob Nightengale reported that an official announcement was expected Friday. The involved teams have not commented on the trade.

Clark's statement comes in the middle of a tense time between Major League Baseball and the Players' Association, with the current collective bargaining agreement due to expire after the 2021 season. Players are due to report to spring training in Florida and Arizona next week, furthering the importance of a swift resolution.

Boston Red Sox manager search: John Gibbons, ex-Blue Jays manager, interviewed for job (report)

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox interviewed former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons for their managerial vacancy earlier this week, according to a report from Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic.

Gibbons, 57, managed Toronto for 11 seasons over two stints, first from 2004 to 2008 then again from 2013 to 2018. He ended his second tenure with a 793–789 record, having led the Jays to the ALCS in back-to-back years in 2015 and 2016.

Gibbons was out of baseball last year after being fired by the Blue Jays but interviewed for the Astros' managerial vacancy last month before Houston hired Dusty Baker. He's the fifth candidate known to have interviewed with the Red Sox to replace Alex Cora, joining two Sox coaches (bench coach Ron Roenicke and third base coach Carlos Febles), Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay and Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta.

The Boston Globe reported Friday that the Sox had decided on Roenicke and would announce the hire after Major League Baseball's investigation into alleged sign-stealing practices in 2018 was complete. The team refuted that report, with a spokesman telling MassLive that the team's managerial search was "not yet completed."

In any case, the Sox are considering a wide variety of potential candidates to replace Cora. Gibbons is the first known external candidate with big league managerial experience.

*** *RedSox.com***

Sox agree to reworked Betts-Price deal (source)

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Five days after the Red Sox thought they had a trade that would send star right fielder Mookie Betts and veteran lefty starter David Price to the Dodgers, it appears it is finally going to happen -- albeit in a different form and one that could well be a better return for Boston.

Just as in the original reported exchange, the Sox will get Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo. But instead of getting hard-throwing righty Brusdar Graterol from the Twins, the Red Sox will instead receive a top prospect in middle infielder Jeter Downs (ranked No. 44 by MLB Pipeline) as well as a Minor League catcher with power and versatility in Connor Wong. Both of those players will come to Boston from Los Angeles.

Neither team has announced the trade, but MLB.com has been told by multiple sources that the agreement is in place and will be finalized once the review of medical information is complete.

The three-way deal that the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins agreed upon earlier in the week couldn't be completed due to concerns Boston had after reviewing Graterol's medical file. At that point, according to MLB Network insider Ken Rosenthal, the Red Sox weren't confident in Graterol's ability to be a starting pitcher over the long haul.

For the rest of the week, the three clubs tried to broker a resolution, which finally occurred early Sunday evening with two separate transactions: One between the Red Sox and Dodgers and another between L.A. and Minnesota.

TRADES BREAKDOWN

RED SOX-DODGERS TRADE

Red Sox get: OF Alex Verdugo, SS Jeter Downs, C Connor Wong

Dodgers get: OF Mookie Betts, LHP David Price, cash

DODGERS-TWINS TRADE

Dodgers get: RHP Brusdar Graterol, OF Luke Raley, 67th pick in 2020 Draft
Twins get: RHP Kenta Maeda, Minor Leaguer, cash

The Sox, according to sources, will send roughly half of the \$96 million Price is owed over the next three seasons to Los Angeles as part of the transaction.

Downs could become a key part of the future for the Red Sox, especially at second base, a position where there has been a lack of stability since Dustin Pedroia badly injured his left knee early in the 2017 season.

Named after Derek Jeter -- one of Boston's all-time rivals -- Downs could one day become a fan favorite at Fenway. The No. 32 overall pick in the 2017 MLB Draft out of Monsignor Edward Pace High School in Miami Gardens, Fla., Downs was dealt from the Reds to the Dodgers on Dec. 21, 2018, as part of the deal that sent Yasiel Puig to Cincinnati.

The 21-year-old Downs hits for average and power. He split last season between Class A Advanced Rancho Cucamonga and Double-A Tulsa, slashing .276/.362/.526 with 24 homers and 86 RBIs.

Though Downs can play shortstop, scouts project his best position at second base.

Wong, 23, was a third-round pick of the Dodgers in 2017. Though his main position is catcher, he can also play second and third. In 241 Minor League games, he has a line of .275/.342/.510 with 48 homers and 160 RBIs.

While the Red Sox hope Downs and Wong will help them at some point in the coming years, Verdugo, a 23-year-old left-handed hitter with upside, figures to be a vital part of the '20 squad.

He will likely take the spot vacated by Betts in right field and is the type of hitter who can hit anywhere in the order.

Verdugo slashed .294/.342/.475 with 22 doubles, 12 homers and 44 RBIs in 106 games in 2019. His season ended in early August with a back injury. Verdugo can play all three outfield positions and the Red Sox are excited about his projectability. Verdugo will come to the Red Sox with five years of club control. He was picked by the Dodgers in the second round of the 2014 MLB Draft.

Verdugo, who also throws left, made a needed impact over the first half for the Dodgers when A.J. Pollock was injured. He took over in center, showed more power than he had in the Minor Leagues, brought energy to the lineup and was clutch.

But Verdugo injured his back playing on the artificial turf in St. Petersburg in May, tried to play through it as his production dipped and didn't play a game after Aug. 4.

Verdugo's cannon arm will come in handy in Boston. Fenway's right field is one of the most challenging in the game. A strong arm is considered a requirement to playing the position at a high level there.

As a hitter, the Red Sox are excited about Verdugo's projectability. They are optimistic that his gap-to-gap swing will play well in Fenway Park, which is known for being a great venue to hit doubles.

The dilemma of whether to trade Betts, a five-tool stud who was drafted and developed by the Sox and emerged into an MVP, hovered over chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and his front office for the entire offseason.

Just days before the start of Spring Training, and in his first major move since being hired by the Red Sox in October, Bloom opted to pull the trigger. In doing so, Bloom executed a blockbuster with the man he worked under for many years in Tampa Bay in Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman.

In a vacuum, the Red Sox never would have chosen to move Betts, who is one of the finest all-around players in the game -- not to mention the franchise's 119-year history. But there were other variables. Betts is entering his walk year, meaning he can become a free agent at the end of the upcoming season.

The Red Sox discussed long-term contract extensions with Betts in past years, but the two sides could never find common ground.

Dating back to Spring Training in 2019, Betts repeatedly stated that he planned on measuring his value in free agency rather than signing an extension with the club that drafted him in 2011.

Another big factor is that Betts will earn \$27 million in 2020 -- a record for an arbitration-eligible player -- and carrying that salary would have made it tough for Boston ownership to reach the stated goal of getting the team's payroll below the Competitive Balance Tax threshold of \$208 million.

The Red Sox have now reached that goal, taking roughly \$43 million off the payroll between Betts and Price. Boston now has a payroll close to \$190 million, which could give Bloom flexibility to fill more holes before Opening Day or perhaps leading up to the July 31 Trade Deadline.

By resetting the luxury tax, the Red Sox should have the financial flexibility to make significant additions to the roster in 2021 and beyond.

Though they face the enormous challenge of moving on without Betts, the Red Sox still plan on being a contender in 2020.

On offense, they have a strong nucleus that includes J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers and Andrew Benintendi.

While Verdugo can replace Betts in the lineup, it will be interesting to see how Boston fills the void left by Price in the rotation.

The rotation currently consists of Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez, Nathan Eovaldi and Martín Pérez.

Given Bloom's history with the Rays, it would not be surprising to see the Sox deploy an opener.

As for Betts, he, quite simply, was a force for the Red Sox in every way. In 2018, he won the American League MVP Award for a team that won the World Series, slashing .346/.438/.640 with 32 homers, 80 RBIs and 30 stolen bases.

While he wasn't as consistent last year, Betts was still an All-Star, putting up a solid line of .295/.391/.524 with 135 runs, 40 doubles, five triples, 29 homers, 80 RBIs and 16 stolen bases. He also won his fourth consecutive Gold Glove Award for his excellence in right field.

In his career with Boston, Betts played 794 games, hitting .301 with 613 runs, 229 doubles, 26 triples, 139 homers, 470 RBIs and an OPS of .893.

Though it seems highly unlikely, there's always a chance the Sox could reacquire Betts once he reaches free agency in November.

In four seasons with the Red Sox, Price was 46-24 with a 3.84 ERA. Price will best be remembered in Boston for his postseason heroics in 2018, when he pitched the Red Sox to clinching wins in Game 5 of the AL Championship Series against the Astros and Game 5 of the World Series at Dodger Stadium.

While Boston will have plenty of time to see what they have in their three newcomers, it will take Red Sox Nation some time to process the loss of Betts, a dynamic all-around player who gave the Fenway faithful their share of thrills.

Benintendi signs 2-year deal, avoids arbitration

Manny Randhawa

The Red Sox have agreed to a two-year contract with left fielder Andrew Benintendi, thus avoiding arbitration. A source told MLB.com's Mark Feinsand that the deal is for \$10 million -- \$3.4 million for the 2020 season and \$6.6 million for '21.

Benintendi, 25, has put up solid numbers for Boston since making his Major League debut in 2016, slashing .277/.354/.442 with 51 home runs and 52 steals over 471 games in his career. His best campaign came in '18, when he posted an .830 OPS with 16 homers and 21 steals to help the Red Sox win a World Series championship. During that postseason, he led all players with 15 runs scored.

Benintendi was selected seventh overall by Boston in the 2015 MLB Draft, and he has been the club's starting left fielder each of the past three seasons. His defense has been excellent -- he leads all outfielders with 32 assists over that span. His most memorable defensive play was a spectacular catch to end Game 4 of the 2018 American League Championship Series against the Astros, diving to catch a sinking liner off the bat of Alex Bregman with the bases loaded.

Left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez is the only remaining Red Sox player eligible for salary arbitration.

Sox nearing end of managerial search (report)

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- With five days until the Red Sox hold their first official workout of Spring Training, the team is moving toward the finish line in naming a new manager.

The Boston Globe's Peter Abraham reported Friday that the Sox have decided to promote Ron Roenicke to the post vacated by Alex Cora, but are waiting until Major League Baseball's investigation of sign-stealing allegations against the club in 2018 is complete.

A source told MLB.com's Mark Feinsand that the Red Sox have yet to offer the job to anybody.

"Our managerial search is not yet completed. We will comment at the completion of the search," said Red Sox vice president of media relations Kevin Gregg.

Amid an offseason that has had a lot of upheaval for the Red Sox, the choice of Roenicke -- the team's bench coach under Cora the last two seasons -- would certainly be a comforting one.

Also, the 63-year-old Roenicke has previous managerial experience with the Brewers, going 342-331 from 2011-15.

The Red Sox also interviewed at least one other internal candidate in third-base coach Carlos Febles, who managed 904 games in Boston's farm system.

The club, according to sources, spoke with two external candidates: D-backs bench coach Luis Urueta and former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons.

The Red Sox and Cora mutually decided to part ways on Jan. 14 due to MLB's findings that he played a central role in the Astros' sign-stealing investigation.

As for the investigation into the 2018 Red Sox, Commissioner Rob Manfred told reporters on Thursday at the Owners Meetings in Orlando, Fla., that he planned on releasing his report before the start of Spring Training.

The leadup to Spring Training has been a whirlwind for the Red Sox, who are still trying to complete the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers as part of a three-team exchange that also involves the Twins.

The sides agreed to the components of the deal on Tuesday, but the trade hasn't been finalized yet due to concerns the Red Sox had after viewing the medicals of Twins prospect Brusdar Graterol, who, along with Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo, is supposed to be coming to Boston as part of the blockbuster.

The Red Sox and Twins are trying to bridge the gap with Boston reportedly seeking additional compensation.

How will Boston find time for all 3 first basemen?

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- When it comes to position battles to follow at the Red Sox's Spring Training camp, the most compelling one figures to be at first base, where a gritty veteran will be challenged by two young power bats.

The gritty veteran, of course, is Mitch Moreland, the power hitter and slick fielder who didn't appear to be in Boston's plans for 2020 -- until he was.

Moreland was a free agent after last season, and there were little to no rumblings that he would be back. But on Jan. 28, the Sox signed him to a one-year, \$2.5 million deal that includes a club option in 2021.

That instantly raised the following question: How does Moreland's return impact the amount of playing time Michael Chavis and Bobby Dalbec will try to earn at first base?

Under typical circumstances, the manager would be asked that question. But with less than a week before camp opens, the Red Sox don't have one, as they continue to search for Alex Cora's successor.

So let's attempt to envision how the issue might play out.

While Moreland has been the primary starter at first for the last three seasons, he is now being paid at a rate where it wouldn't be uncomfortable for the Sox to use him as a backup. In fact, the 34-year-old could be a very useful mentor for Chavis and Dalbec, who are both 24.

And the fact that Moreland hits from the left side while Chavis and Dalbec are both right-handed hitters means they can complement each other as a unit and create some nice interchangeability.

Though Moreland has been a key presence the entire time he's been with the Red Sox, his body has broken down on him at times during each of the last three seasons. So moving to a reserve role could be best for his health as well.

If that's the case, who becomes the starter?

It would seem that Chavis has the inside track. He played in 95 games last season, slashing .254/.322/.444 with 18 homers and 58 RBIs. While those numbers don't jump out, it's important to remember how Chavis started. In his first 106 at-bats, he belted 10 homers along with a line of .283/.382/.585.

That player is still in there. The problem is that once the scouting report got out on Chavis, he had a hard time adapting to high fastballs. And once he started to make that adjustment, injuries forced his season to end in early August.

Healthy again and armed with experience, Chavis will now have a chance to show he's ready to be a consistent run producer. He also has the ability to play second base, though Jose Peraza is projected to be the starter at that spot.

Dalbec, the club's No. 2 prospect, is the No. 7-rated prospect at third base per MLB Pipeline, though that won't be his position in Boston. The Red Sox are set at the hot corner for many years with Rafael Devers. But Dalbec, a solid defender, has shown the ability to make the plays at first.

Dalbec hasn't spent any time in the Majors yet, so it might be asking a lot for him to make the Opening Day roster. But the opportunity will be there for him.

At the end of last season, Dalbec spent a week at Fenway Park working with the team's coaching staff and was said to be a quick study.

"He's a really good player, and we expect him to be a big part of our future," said general manager Brian O'Halloran, "so we look forward to him being with us again in big league camp and [we'll] go from there."

Dalbec also impressed evaluators in the Premier 12 Tournament in November.

"It was awesome," Dalbec said. "Especially playing in high-pressure situations, which is likely to happen up here. It was good. It was fun and a good way to develop some more."

After smashing 32 homers in the Minors in 2018, Dalbec came back with 27 more big flies last season, starting at Double-A Portland (359 at-bats) and finishing at Triple-A Pawtucket (113 at-bats).

There's a chance the Red Sox will opt to give Dalbec more seasoning at Triple-A when the season starts. But he will also have a chance to prove that won't be necessary.

It's too early to know how it will all play out, but it will certainly be a story to watch throughout Spring Training.

*** *ESPN.com***

Mookie Betts to the Dodgers is done: Here's what you need to know

David Schoenfield

It looks like Mookie Betts will -- finally -- be flying west for spring training. The three-way trade that was to send Betts and David Price from the Boston Red Sox to the Los Angeles Dodgers is now a two-team swap between Boston and Los Angeles, according to ESPN's Jeff Passan.

The new trade removes the Twins and pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the equation because of Boston's concerns about Graterol's medical reports. The Red Sox will instead send Betts, Price and cash to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo, shortstop prospect Jeter Downs and catcher/infield prospect Connor Wong. The Dodgers and Twins completed a separate deal that sends Kenta Maeda to Minnesota for Graterol, a lower-level prospect and the 67th pick in this year's MLB draft.

Let's look at the new ramifications of one of the biggest offseason blockbuster trades in history.

What changed since Tuesday's version of the deal?

Simply, the Red Sox wanted out on Graterol after reviewing his medical reports. The hard-throwing right-hander missed the 2016 season after Tommy John surgery and missed time in the minors in 2019 because of shoulder problems, but his electrifying fastball got him to the big leagues in September. His fastball averaged 99 mph in 10 relief appearances, and he earned a spot on Minnesota's playoff roster. With the

Twins unable to replace Graterol in the deal, the original part of the trade that sent Maeda to Minnesota was removed, and the Dodgers sent Downs and Wong to Boston in place of Graterol.

The Dodgers' decade?

L.A. needed a spark to close the book on a string of postseason disappointment. By acquiring Mookie Betts, they have gotten exactly that. Alden Gonzalez

How did the Dodgers and Twins rework their part of the trade?

Maeda will still go from the Dodgers to the Twins, in exchange for Graterol, outfield prospect Luke Raley and the 67th pick in the 2020 draft. The Dodgers will also send cash to the Twins. Maeda makes \$3.125 million in 2020 and is signed through 2023, with performance bonuses that could push his annual salary past \$10 million if he pitches as much as he did in 2010 (26 games started, 153 innings).

Who is Jeter Downs?

Yes, he was named after Derek Jeter, and he's the better prospect of the two players the Red Sox acquired. The Reds drafted Downs 32nd overall in the 2017 draft out of a Miami high school, and the Dodgers nabbed him (and pitching prospect Josiah Gray) in the Yasiel Puig trade last offseason. Downs had a breakout season in the minors in 2019, hitting .276/.362/.526 in 107 games at Class A and 12 at Double-A, showing a well-rounded offensive game with 63 extra-base hits, 24 steals and 60 walks while keeping his strikeouts in check, with 107.

Here's a report on Downs from ESPN prospect expert Kiley McDaniel:

"Downs showed flashes of everything early in his career, but his in-game power took a step forward in 2019, when he hit 24 homers across high-A and Double-A. He's a fringy runner and defender at shortstop who probably fits best long-term at second base or third base, but he now projects to have above-average hit and power tools, so his bat will profile anywhere on an everyday basis. He could be ready for the big leagues as early as the second half of 2020."

The Red Sox also picked up Wong, a third-round pick in 2017 out of the University of Houston, who started 80 games at catcher between Class A and Double-A while starting 21 games between second base and third base. He hit .281/.336/.541, including .349 in 40 games at Double-A Tulsa, with 24 home runs, albeit with a poor 143-32 strikeout-walk ratio.

Kiley on Wong: "This versatility was something the Dodgers have sought as a way to stretch roster spots with Austin Barnes, Will Smith and Kyle Farmer. Wong doesn't have big raw power but has learned to lift the ball well enough to do damage, with below-average contact skills and mostly average tools across the board. He profiles as a utility-type role player who could be ready as early as 2021."

Is Downs an equal prospect to Graterol?

This seems like a fair-value replacement, and depending on how you value talent, Downs might be the guy to prefer. In a general sense, Graterol is a riskier prospect because of concerns about his health and the possibility that he ends up in the bullpen, but he has the ceiling of a No. 2 starter. Downs probably has the higher floor, though his value is diminished a bit if he doesn't have the ability to stick at shortstop.

Again, from Kiley:

"Executives I polled just after the deal broke agreed that Downs is marginally more valuable than Graterol, without considering the confidential aspect of Graterol's medicals. My top-100 prospects list for ESPN is still in progress, but right now, Downs would be in the middle third of the top 100 and atop the Red Sox's prospect list. Graterol would be in the back third, along with first baseman Triston Casas, the top Red Sox prospect before this trade. Wong is a nice utility piece who somewhat uniquely plays multiple infield

positions and catcher and could contribute relatively soon, but his value is dwarfed by Graterol and Downs. The Red Sox, according to most I've spoken with in the industry, upgraded their return in the reworked deal."

For what it's worth, MLB.com rated Downs No. 44 and Graterol No. 83 on its top-100 prospects list. Baseball America rated Graterol No. 60 and Downs No. 86 on its list. It seems the Red Sox did pretty well here, other than having to sub in a position player for a pitcher. Downs has to pass the Double-A test, and Rancho Cucamonga, where he played the bulk of last season, is a good hitting environment, but Downs' across-the-board results in his age-20 season were impressive.

What does this mean for the Joc Pederson trade to the Angels?

That deal apparently was a casualty of all the maneuvering, though details as to why aren't clear. The Dodgers still might want to move Pederson, who will make \$7.75 million in his final year before free agency and is a bit of a spare part now. But he hit 36 home runs in 2019.

Does this change your opinion of the deal?

I actually like it a little more for the Red Sox, as I view Downs as a valuable asset. Even if he ends up at second base, it looks like he's going to hit, and the Sox don't have a long-term plan at second. Plus, I'm always wary of pitchers with Tommy John history and shoulder problems at age 21. Graterol threw 102 innings in 2018 and 71 in 2019, so we have no idea whether he can hold up with a starter's workload. Still, he has dominant closer potential, and given the Dodgers' need for relief help, it will be interesting to see whether they simply decide to stick him in the bullpen for 2020.

As much fun as it is to acquire Betts, it's worth noting that the Dodgers lost some of their depth from 2019. Gone from the rotation via free agency or trade are Hyun-Jin Ryu, Maeda and Rich Hill. That's 68 starts to replace, coming from a group that will include Price, Julio Urias, Tony Gonsolin, Dustin May and perhaps Graterol.

Still, much like the original three-way trade, this seems like a win-win-win: Everybody still got what they wanted. The Twins can now line up a top-four rotation of Jose Berrios, Jake Odorizzi, Maeda and Homer Bailey, with Michael Pineda returning from suspension in May. The Red Sox get under the luxury tax while adding a solid outfielder in Verdugo and long-term depth with Downs and Wong.

And the Dodgers? Well, they get Mookie Mania coming to Hollywood.

*** *WEEI.com***

A scout's take on what Red Sox are getting in Mookie Betts trade

Rob Bradford

While we wait for this trade to be finalized, let's take a look at what the Red Sox will likely be getting back in exchange for Mookie Betts and David Price.

The following is the take of one scout who has been assigned to the Dodgers' minor-league system for the past few years and has extensive knowledge of the three players headed to Boston.

JETER DOWNS, INFIELDER

(The 21-year-old former first-round pick briefly reached Double-A in 2019, playing most of the season in Single-A)

"I really can't tell you where he's going to end up playing. He's playing shortstop OK right now, but he's a really thick body. His body is starting to look a little more like (Jean) Segura. He's thick in the legs. He's getting stronger but he's getting thicker and I think he might slow down and that might send him to either second or third. But I would play him at shortstop and see if he can play there because the bat is going to play. This guy is a big-leaguer. Not a high-ceiling guy, but the bat is going to play.

"He's kind of a Charlie Hayes-type guy. Not body-wise, but the way he hits, gap-to-gap. And he has pull-power. He does have power. If he pulls the ball he will hit it out of the ballpark. I would say 15-20 home runs, .260, somewhere like that."

ALEX VERDUGO, OUTFIELDER

(The 23-year-old played 109 games for the Dodgers in 2019)

"My take on him is the kid is very talented. He can hit. The guy can hit. He is just a little bit immature. The Dodgers clubhouse was good for him because they treated him like the little kid brother in the clubhouse. But he is immature and it is going to come out at times. But he can hit. It's more of a line-drive swing right now. He will hit for average but I think as he matures as a hitter he will hit more home runs. This guy can hit, but the makeup issues are just immaturity and how he fits on a club because some guys get turned off by those guys. He played harder than he had in the past, but at times he has had trouble running out ground balls and things like that. They have been on him. He will do it for a while but then they have to get on him again. But the ability is there.

"Defensively he's good. Corner outfielder. He can play center field but it's not elite center. He's got a plus-arm. He's fine."

CONNOR WONG, CATCHER

(The 23-year-old split 2019 between Single-A and Double-A)

"He's an average catch and throw guy. His arm ranges from fringy to average. He is a contact hitter. He's a backup catcher in the big leagues for me. He's a smaller guy. (Note: "Smaller" referenced weight more than height. Per Baseball-Reference he stands at 6-foot-1). Durability will be a problem. But he makes contact and he is a pretty athletic kid. He's just small. I think he will be a decent backup catcher."

Red Sox, Andrew Benintendi agree to 2-year deal

Rob Bradford

It's not exactly the news most Red Sox followers were on pins and needles for, but it's something.

The Red Sox announced they have agreed to terms with Andrew Benintendi on a two-year contract. The deal is worth \$10 million and allows the outfielder to avoid going to an arbitration case this month while also buying out his second year of arbitration next offseason. He will be paid \$3.3 million in 2020 and \$6.6 million in 2021, per MLB.com.

The 25-year-old had somewhat of a down season in 2019, hitting .266 with a .774 OPS and 13 homers. During the Red Sox' championship season in 2018 Benintendi managed his best campaign, hitting .290 with an .830 OPS and 16 homers in 148 games.

Benintendi noted at the end of last season that his plan was to come into camp in 2020 lighter and more athletic after prioritizing power heading into 2019.

Twins reportedly may be backing out of Mookie Betts trade

Rob Bradford

Just when you thought the Red Sox' offseason couldn't get any more complicated, along comes the latest news.

According to the Star-Tribune, the Twins are backing out of their portion of the three-team deal that would have sent top pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol to the Red Sox with Kenta Maeda going from the Dodgers to Minnesota. This, of course, throws an enormous monkey wrench into the primary portion of the transaction, which was sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

The Red Sox had been asking for another prospect along with Graterol after they raised concerns over the 21-year-old's medical status. The hard-throwing hurler has already undergone Tommy John surgery while experiencing shoulder issues last season.

Update: Multiple outlets are now reporting the three-team deal might not be dead, after all.

MLBPA wants Mookie Betts deal resolved 'without further delay'

Nick Friar

With the three-team trade between the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins running into complications, Mookie Betts, David Price and other players involved in the process — including those in the deal between the Dodgers and Angels — are left in an unorthodox situation.

Listen to your team news NOW.

And the Major League Baseball Players Association isn't pleased with what's going on.

Tony Clark, the executive director of the MLBPA, released the following statement on the matter:

“The proposed trades between the Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins, and Angels need to be resolved without further delay. The events of this week have unfairly put several players' lives in a state of limbo. The unethical leaking of medical information, as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process, serve as continued reminders that too often players are treated as commodities by those running the game.”

Source: John Gibbons interviewed for Red Sox manager job this week

Rob Bradford

Add another name to the list of people the Red Sox are considering for their next manager.

According to a source, former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons interviewed for the job earlier in the week. Gibbons interviewed over multiple days and has ties to the area as his mother is from Gloucester, Massachusetts.

The Athletic was first to report the news.

While the Boston Globe reported earlier on Friday that Ron Roenicke would be the Red Sox' choice to replace Alex Cora after a ruling comes down from Major League Baseball regarding its investigation of allegations the Sox cheated in 2018, the team has not informed any of the candidates of a decision.

“Our managerial search is not yet completed. We will comment at the completion of the search,” a team spokesman said.

Gibbons, 57, last managed in 2018 with Toronto.

Ron Roenicke reportedly in line to become Red Sox manager

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox may soon have their next manager and it appears his name will likely be Ron Roenicke.

The Boston Globe is reporting that Roenicke would indeed be the Red Sox choice to replace Alex Cora after a ruling comes down from Major League Baseball regarding its investigation of allegations the Sox cheated in 2018. Commissioner Rob Manfred reiterated Thursday what Red Sox players had been told, which is that MLB's plan was to have the process completed before the start of spring training (Wednesday).

The 63-year-old has been a bench coach with the Sox the last two seasons, having served as the Brewers manager from 2011-15. Just prior to joining Boston Roenicke was the third base coach for the Dodgers and then the Angels.

As manager of Milwaukee he went a combined 342-331 in the regular season. Roenicke finished second in the National League Manager of the Year voting in 2011, finishing first in the National League Central Division with 96 wins. During that postseason run the Brewers made it to the NL Championship Series where they lost in six games to St. Louis.

Before getting his shot to manager in Milwaukee Roenicke was on Mike Scioscia's staff from 2000-2010 with the Angels. He also has experience managing in the minor leagues in both the Dodgers and Giants systems.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Breaking down Mookie Betts trade as Red Sox begin life without former MVP

John Tomase

And 133 days later, the Boston Red Sox officially put us out of our misery.

The lost 2019 season ended on Sept. 29 with one idea abundantly clear: the Red Sox intended to trade former American League MVP Mookie Betts. We didn't know where or when, but the outcome felt inevitable.

Inevitability does not equal urgency, however, and man, did the Red Sox try our patience on that front. For months we heard nothing, at least until last week's frenzy yielded a three-team blockbuster with a surprisingly small return, at least from a talent standpoint.

Then Brusdar Graterol's medicals interceded, the deal nearly imploded, and we finally arrived on Sunday night at another inevitable outcome: an imperfect conclusion. A true evaluation of winners and losers may take five years, but for now the best we can say is that the Red Sox saved some money, but definitely not some face.

As first major moves go, this one leaves a mark on Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom. The Red Sox waited all winter to trade Betts and half the Brinks truck idling in David Price's driveway, and what they got for their efforts was \$75 million in savings, young outfielder Alex Verdugo, and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

That's a light haul for a player of Betts' caliber, but this was never really about talent. It was about clearing the books, and if Betts needed to serve as a means to that end to rid the Red Sox of half of the remaining \$96 million owed Price, then so be it.

Problems arose when the Red Sox decided that Graterol's shoulder did not look like it should be attached to a big league starter. So they demanded more from the Twins, who politely told them to take a hike, leading Minnesota to send the boxy flamethrower directly to L.A. for veteran starter Kenta Maeda.

Tomase: Why didn't the Red Sox know Graterol was damaged goods?

This now gives the Red Sox another avenue to lose the trade, because if Graterol turns into Kenley Jansen's successor -- and with a 101 mph fastball, the stuff is there to close -- then the Red Sox will end up looking doubly stupid for refusing Graterol after acquiring him.

In the short term, there's no way around how much this one hurts.

Betts is a former MVP in his prime (27), who will almost certainly make the trade a KO for the Dodgers in 2020 by himself. Making matters worse is the possibility that Price is healthy, in which case the Red Sox will be paying one of the game's richest franchises to receive ace-like production from a former malcontent. Price would doubtlessly love to remind every critic in Boston what the Red Sox are missing.

Personally, I'd put him in the same 100-inning club as Red Sox holdovers Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi: hurlers who can't really be counted on to deliver 33 starts and 200 innings. But if there's one guy who can turn this trade into an overwhelming loss, it's Price.

So what did the Red Sox receive in return? The fact that they come out of this without a single starting pitcher -- Downs is a shortstop and Wong a catcher -- is pretty shocking, especially given the depth of pitching in the L.A. system. Not only could they have used Graterol in the bullpen, it's worth asking if they should've made a play for Maeda, since he's a league-average starter -- or slightly better -- who's only due a little over \$12 million total through 2023.

In any event, Verdugo projects as a similar hitter to Andrew Benintendi, with a comparable line drive stroke, but better strike zone discipline. The 23-year-old has a great arm in right field, but has also battled immaturity, which the Red Sox will need to watch closely. The pressure on him as Betts' replacement in right field, and maybe even atop the order, will be immense.

Downs, 21, is a former first round pick who is indeed named after the Yankees Hall of Famer. His 19 homers ranked seventh in the California League, and also made him the youngest player in the top 10. He added five more homers in Double-A to give him 24 for the season. It's unclear if he has the range to stay at short, but he could fill Boston's long-term hole at second base.

That leaves Wong, a 6-foot-1, 181-pounder who also smacked 24 home runs last year, including nine at Double-A Tulsa, where he hit an impressive .349. He owns a lifetime OPS of .852 in the minors since being selected in the third round of the 2017 draft, though there are questions about his size and whether he'll hold up at catcher, which remains a relatively new position.

With Betts and Price gone and three prospects in hand, the Red Sox can begin life after Mookie. We may one day look back at the deal as a necessary recalibration, but don't be surprised if it feels like a giant loss in 2020.

Get to know Red Sox prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, acquired in Mookie Betts trade

Justin Leger

OK, let's try this again.

Last week, we introduced you to pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol after it was reported the Boston Red Sox acquired him from the Minnesota Twins in a deal that sent superstar outfielder Mookie Betts and left-hander David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Well, Betts and Price are still headed to L.A., but Graterol will no longer be coming to Boston. In fact, he'll be joining Betts and Price out west.

So who are the Red Sox getting in this revised deal? They'll still receive 23-year-old outfielder Alex Verdugo, but instead of Graterol, they'll reportedly acquire Dodgers prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

Here's what to know about the two youngsters.

JETER DOWNS

Downs is ranked No. 44 in MLB's top 100 prospect list and immediately will become the best talent in Boston's farm system, right along with Triston Casas.

The 21-year-old middle infielder was selected in the first round of the 2017 MLB Draft by the Cincinnati Reds. In December 2018, he was traded to L.A. in the deal that sent Yasiel Puig, Alex Wood, Matt Kemp and Kyle Farmer to Cincinnati.

Downs spent 107 games in 2019 with the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes of the Class A-Advanced California League. There, he hit .269/.354/.507 with 19 home runs and 75 RBI. He also spent 12 games with Double-A Tulsa, hitting five homers and driving in 11 runs.

CONNOR WONG

Wong was a 2017 third-round selection by the Dodgers. The 23-year-old's primary position is catcher, but he has also contributed at second and third base over the last couple of years.

In his 71 games at High-A, Wong slashed .245/.306/.507 with 15 homers and 51 RBI. He also spent 40 games at Double-A Tulsa, where he hit .349/.393/.604 with nine homers and drove in 31 runs.

Wong needs to cut down on the strikeouts (143 in 111 games last year) but his bat and versatility in the field has him projected as a future big-leaguer.

Andrew Benintendi, Red Sox avoid arbitration with two-year deal

Justin Leger

The future at right field for the Boston Red Sox remains up in the air, but left field is a different story.

On Saturday, the Red Sox and Andrew Benintendi avoided arbitration by agreeing to a two-year, \$10 million contract.

With the blockbuster Mookie Betts trade still pending, this isn't necessarily the news Red Sox fans were impatiently waiting for. Still, it's some good news as Boston has at least secured one of its prized outfielders.

Benintendi will be eligible for arbitration again following the 2021 campaign.

MLB Rumors: Red Sox to hire Ron Roenicke as manager after investigation ends

Justin Leger

The Boston Red Sox' manager search reportedly is over.

The Red Sox plan to name bench coach Ron Roenicke their next manager following Alex Cora's departure, The Boston Globe's Pete Abraham reported Friday.

The team will announce Roenicke's hire after Major League Baseball concludes its investigation into Boston's 2018 club for its alleged sign-stealing operation, per Abraham.

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday he hopes that investigation will be done before spring training, which begins next Tuesday when Red Sox pitchers and catchers report to Fort Myers.

Roenicke was Boston's most polished internal candidate, with 673 games of big-league manager experience with the Milwaukee Brewers from 2011 to 2015. He guided Milwaukee to a .508 winning percentage in that span and finished second in National League Manager of the Year voting in 2011.

The 63-year-old former MLB outfielder joined Alex Cora's staff as the Red Sox' bench coach in 2018, winning a World Series title in his first year with the team.

He'll now become Boston's 48th manager after the Sox parted ways with Cora in mid-January due to his involvement in the 2017 Houston Astros' cheating scandal.

UPDATE (11:40 a.m. ET): The Red Sox declined to acknowledge Roenicke as their next manager in a statement Friday.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Red Sox, Dodgers salvage mega-deal — with some adjustments

Sean McAdam

Five days after it appeared a deal between the Red Sox and Dodgers was first in place, it became finalized late Sunday afternoon, according to several reports.

The Red Sox will send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers — as initially planned — but now, in addition to outfielder Alex Verdugo, the Red Sox will receive shortstop Jeter Downs.

In the initial swap, the Sox were going to receive Verdugo and Minnesota Twins pitcher Brusdar Graterol. But the Sox balked after viewing Graterol's medicals, wary that the 21-year-old pitcher may not profile as durable enough to become a starting pitcher, as they had envisioned.

After days of back-and-forth negotiations between the Sox and Twins failed to result in a satisfying resolution for both teams, the Twins focused on making the same deal they had originally — getting veteran starting pitcher Kenta Maeda from the Dodgers. This time, however, Graterol will stay with the Dodgers, instead of being flipped to the Red Sox.

In place of Graterol, the Sox landed Downs, a highly-regarded athletic middle infielder who was initially selected by the Reds, but dealt to the Dodgers in December of 2018 as part of a huge multi-player deal. He's the younger brother of Red Sox minor league first baseman Jerry Downs, and yes, he's named after you-know-who.

While Red Sox fans are likely to be unhappy about losing Betts, this iteration of the deal represents a better return for the Sox.

MLBPipeline rates Downs as the 44th prospect in all of baseball and the eighth-best shortstop. A former supplemental pick by the Cincinnati Reds in 2017, Downs has displayed the potential to be a five-tool player.

He's a 21 and last year, between Single-A and Double-A, he slashed .276/.362/.526 with 24 homers and 24 stolen bases. He could profile either as a shortstop or second baseman in the big leagues and may not need much more than a half-season or so to demonstrate he's ready for the big leagues.

Downs is, obviously, blocked at short by Xander Bogaerts, whom the Red Sox extended last year and control through at least 2025, with an option for 2026. Downs could be the Red Sox' second baseman of the future, or the Sox could deal him for young starting pitching — an area they've been unable to develop on their own for the past 15 years.

Perhaps Graterol could have helped in that regard, but lingering questions about his durability and ability to pitch 175 or so innings per season would have hung over the Red Sox.

In Downs, the Sox get a better prospect and while, for the time, he represents some redundancy at the shortstop position, he could easily move over to the other side of the second base bag and handle the position for a long time.

The Sox were properly criticized for being indecisive and perhaps reacting too quickly to the negative reaction the initial trade produced. It's likely, too, that the organization's reputation could take a hit for holding up the original deal for medical reasons. (It's noteworthy that the Dodgers didn't have any issues with Graterol, though to be fair, they see him a reliever for their own needs).

But by waiting another five days, the Sox obtained two promising, athletic players who the team can control for a combined 11 seasons.

However messily that was achieved, it's better than where they were only a few days ago.

Twins pull out of multi-team deal; Sox-Dodgers still trying to work things out

Sean McAdam

What a mess.

Four days after the Red Sox had reason to believe that they had pulled off a complicated, three-team, five-player deal with the Los Angeles Dodgers and Minnesota Twins, that deal was hanging in the balance Saturday night with the news that the Twins had pulled out of their portion of the blockbuster.

Originally, the Red Sox had agreed to send Mookie Betts, David Price and more than \$40 million to the Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitcher Brusdar Graterol. Graterol came to the Sox via L.A. after the Dodgers obtained him from Minnesota for veteran starting pitcher Kenta Maeda.

But the Sox grew alarmed at the medicals on Graterol, putting the deal on hold as they further reviewed things. Boston was concerned that, following a right shoulder impingement last spring — to say nothing of Tommy John surgery in 2016 — Graterol profiled more as a reliever rather than filling a starting role as they envisioned.

Talks between the Sox and Twins failed to yield anything, and late Saturday afternoon, the Minneapolis Star-Tribune reported that the Twins pulled out of their end of the deal, canceling the trade with the Dodgers involving Graterol and Maeda.

That left the Sox, for the time being at least, with only Verdugo to show for Betts, Price and tens of million dollars — obviously an insufficient return.

Where that leaves the rest of the trade is uncertain. As of Saturday night, the Sox and Dodgers were still negotiating, hoping to salvage the rest of the deal while working toward a way to deliver a top prospect to the Sox to make the deal more equitable.

Under such a scenario, the Dodgers could do either supply the Sox with one of their own prospects, or as they had tried with the Twins, make a deal with a third team to obtain a prospect to the Sox' liking.

Obviously, there's a lot at stake for both teams here, who have plenty invested in making sure the deal goes through.

The Red Sox don't want to have Betts and Price report to camp next week with full knowledge that the Sox had tried to deal them. And from the Dodgers' standpoint, their fan base had had its appetite whetted by the prospect of getting Betts, if only — for now — for a year. Betts is eligible for free agency after 2020, though the Dodgers certainly have the wherewithal to pay him a huge contract extension.

Further complicating matters is the fact that the Dodgers have another entirely separate deal with the Los Angeles Angels that is contingent on them obtaining both Betts and Price. The Dodgers plan to deal outfielder Joc Pederson — made expendable by the acquisition of Betts — and starter Ross Stripling in exchange for a couple of prospects from the Angels.

That trade is driven by salary reduction, since the Dodgers wish to rid themselves of Pederson and Stripling as a means of staying under the competitive balance tax (CBT). They would be taking on approximately \$43 million in 2020 should they land Betts and Price.

Should the deal fall apart entirely — not out of the question, given the volatility of the swap — the Red Sox could once again engage the San Diego Padres on a deal involving Betts. But that could require the Red Sox to take back some of the remaining \$61 million due outfielder Wil Myers as a condition of the deal — something Bloom was not in favor of only a week ago.

It would also force them to find another taker for Price, which won't be easy — given his age, injury history and \$96 million remaining on his deal.

And yet, on the eve of spring training, that's where the Red Sox stand.

MLB Notebook: In Dodgers, Chaim Bloom sees what he wants the Red Sox to become

Sean McAdam

There's more than a little irony in the fact that the Red Sox will (eventually) trade Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

And no, it has very little to do with the fact that those two players helped the Red Sox cap their magical 2018 season by beating the Dodgers in the World Series, with Price earning the victory in the decisive Game 5 in the ballpark he will soon call home.

No, it's much more than that.

Although the two franchises exist on opposite coasts, separated by 3,000 miles, they share a common heritage. Both franchises were, for the longest time, unable to defeat the New York Yankees. Both endured decades-long championship droughts — the Sox for 86 years, while the Dodgers were without a title for more than the first half of the 20th century before finally breaking through against their rivals in 1955.

But this isn't about the past; it's about the present.

When Chaim Bloom, the new Red Sox chief baseball officer, looks at the Dodgers, he sees a model for what he wants the Sox to become.

That's not an accident, of course. The Dodgers are capably run by president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman, who was Bloom's boss in Tampa Bay for Bloom's first decade with the franchise. Friedman proved himself a master of doing more with less while with the Rays, building a pennant-winner in 2008 and regularly constructing rosters which punched above their slight financial weight.

Since taking over the Dodgers after the 2014 season, Friedman has overseen a team that has won five straight N.L. West titles, reached the World Series twice and the NLCS another time.

Even more remarkably, Friedman has done so by actually cutting payroll. After inheriting a team with a bloated budget and beset by long-term commitments, he's succeeded in overhauling the organization's minor league system to the point where the Dodgers have hit the Daily Double of 21st-century baseball: good enough to regularly compete for a championship while boasting of a bountiful player development system, ready to supply young (and inexpensive) players to the major league roster on an annual basis.

Moreover, Friedman has done so without saddling his team with long-term obligations. On the current Dodgers roster, no player has a salary commitment past 2022. The biggest, longest salary commitment on the books for Clayton Kershaw who has two years and \$62 million coming to him.

In fact, in another bit of irony, the Dodgers' longest and biggest financial commitment on the books is to Friedman himself, who recently signed a long-term extension and remains the game's highest-paid executive.

(Contrast that to the Red Sox, who will have five players in 2021 drawing eight-figure salaries: Chris Sale, J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts, Nathan Eovaldi and Dustin Pedroia. Together, those five are due \$99.5 million; the Dodgers entire 2021 payroll commitment currently stands at \$89.4 million).

It's this business model that Bloom seeks to replicate: sustainable, affordable and with minimal long-term risks, all the while with the capability of reaching the postseason on a yearly basis. And while it's true that the Dodgers have ultimately come up short when it comes to championships, surely reaching (at least) the NLCS three times in the span of five years is a run most teams would gladly sign up for.

Any suggestion that Bloom is in Boston to turn the Red Sox into the Rays North is without merit. Ever-conscious of fan reaction, this current ownership understands that such measures would result in a full-scale revolt by the fan base and would never be tolerated.

Instead, the Red Sox hired Bloom to do what his mentor has accomplished in L.A. To wit: building a consistent winner, once regularly augmented by cheap homegrown talent, all the while eschewing burdensome contracts which stifle roster flexibility.

Friedman has managed a delicate juggling act by maintaining a winning team on the field and overseeing a fertile minor league system, the latter of which is the envy of most franchises. Across the game, there was universal acclaim that Friedman was able to obtain a player the caliber of Betts without sacrificing a single player off his team's Top 10 prospect list.

Meanwhile, it's likely that Tristan Casas would be the only Red Sox prospect who could crack the Dodgers' Top 10 list, and even then, only toward the bottom of the list.

At the major league level, the Dodgers are clear and prohibitive favorites to win the National League pennant and finally capture a title for the first time since 1988. The Red Sox, as currently constituted, are projected as only the third-best team in their own division.

Friedman has achieved all of this in a relatively short period of time. The Red Sox hope that Bloom is able to match his mentor.

Perhaps then, the Red Sox will be in the position the Dodgers are this week: adding to an already strong roster a franchise player who had become too expensive a proposition for his former team, and doing so without jeopardizing its own bright future.

David Price came to Boston because of the money. He's now leaving for the same reason.

In the press conference that served as his introduction to Boston, Price revealed that he went to bed believing he was going to sign with the St. Louis Cardinals. But when he woke up the next morning, his agent Bo McKinnis informed him that he was instead taking a 11th-hour offer by the Red Sox.

Desperate for a front-line starter after completely bungling the Jon Lester negotiations two years earlier, the Sox blew the Cardinals — and every other team — out of the water with a seven-year, \$217-million offer, the most ever given to a free-agent pitcher. (That distinction stood until the Yankees topped it recently for Gerrit Cole).

It was too much money — the deal reportedly topped the Cards' offer by more than \$20 million — and Price determined that he couldn't pass it up. Can't blame him there. For everyone who asks, "How much money do you need?" I'd counter with: "Would you leave an extra \$20 million on the table?"

In the end, Price didn't pitch up to his contract. His performance in Boston (46-24, 3.84 in 103 games) was, by and large, rather pedestrian given his salary. There were periods of brilliance (2018 postseason; a 7-1, 2.71 between mid-April and mid-July last year), but too often the spotlight was fixed on Price off the field.

He was strangely obsessed with Dennis Eckersley's NESN commentary and when Price launched an orchestrated verbal ambush of the Hall of Famer on a flight to Toronto in 2017, it sealed his fate with much of the fan base. He was also — and this is putting it mildly — prickly toward the media, especially in press conferences.

That was both odd and unfortunate, since, in one-on-one interactions, Price could be insightful, funny and sometimes downright charming.

That sort of split personality — hostile and defensive in group settings; helpful and perceptive in smaller ones — made it tough for fans to accept that Price was also highly popular with teammates and very much a leader of the pitching staff.

Some players are simply not good matches for certain markets. Adrian Gonzalez and Carl Crawford were two other obvious (and expensive) examples of that in Boston. I thought the fact that Price had experienced the baseball world in Detroit and Toronto after Tampa Bay would make it easier for him to adjust to the demands of Boston, but that proved not to be the case.

In the end, Price proved to be an obvious choice for the Red Sox to slash payroll, even if they had to subsidize about half of his remaining salary obligation to accomplish it. Due \$96 million, he was an easy target for a team looking to scale back spending, re-set its tax rate and go about the practice of preparing for a more sustainable roster and budget.

It's likely that Price will be a good middle-of-the-rotation option for the Dodgers. L.A. has enough starting pitching depth so that his workload can be carefully managed, guarding against age (he'll be 35 in August) and his injury history. Surely, the bigger ballparks (starting with his own) and the absence of the DH will benefit him.

But his stay with the Sox will forever be a case of unmet expectations and diminishing returns for the money involved.

It was inevitable that Pete Rose would take advantage of the cheating scandal involving the Astros and Red Sox to seek reinstatement by the game which permanently banished him some three decades ago.

That, plus the recent partnerships between Major League Baseball and numerous gambling companies (MGM, DraftKings) has created an opening for Rose's latest bid for reinstatement. Rose is asking: if MLB is doing business with a giant casino and a daily fantasy site, how can Rose's betting hold up as a reason to keep him on the game's banned list.

The answers, of course, are multifold.

Just because baseball has joined other professional sports leagues by teaming with the gaming industry does not mean that it's acceptable for players and/or managers to bet on games. It's still completely forbidden for people in the game to bet on the outcome of their games, or even games in which they're not involved.

That's precisely what Rose did as manager of the Cincinnati Reds in the 1980s. And while there's no evidence that Rose ever bet against his own team, he, in effect, did precisely that when he didn't bet on them. When Rose placed illegal bets on, say, two or three games in a row, then declined to bet on the Reds in the next game, he was placing more emphasis on winning some games more than others.

Indeed, by betting the first two games of a given series but not the third, Rose was signaling that he had extra incentive to win the games on which he had bet. So maybe he exhausted his bullpen in the first two games, knowing that he wouldn't have some of his best relievers available to him in the third, when he had no financial interest.

It's been argued by his supporters that Rose's misdeeds were no more destructive than the use of PEDs, or the intricate and illegal sign-stealing carried out by the Astros, and to a lesser extent, the Red Sox. If Jeff Luhnow, A.J. Hinch could be suspended for a year, why was Rose given a lifetime ban?

The answer, of course, lies with the game's history and the need to assure its fans that the outcome of games is not compromised.

Those who took steroids or stole signs were at least doing so in an effort to gain a competitive advantage, however illicit. By contrast, it could be said of Rose that there were times when he wasn't as interested in some games as he was in others — a dangerous precedent indeed.

Rose has appealed for a review of his lifetime ban. He's entitled to that much.

But commissioner Rob Manfred would do well to reject his appeal. Since his retirement, Rose consistently lied about his misdeeds, acknowledging them only when he was paid handsomely to do so by a book publisher. He's reveled in his rogue status, proudly and defiantly cashing in on his infamy by setting up autograph signings down the street from the Hall of Fame.

In short, Rose has tried to have it both ways. Either he shows genuine contrition or he doesn't. A defense of: "But other guys got away with stuff..." hardly has the ring of remorse.

Red Sox managerial picture still unclear

Sean McAdam

Like most everything else associated with the Red Sox this offseason, there's little clarity for them when it comes to their managerial vacancy.

Pete Abraham of the Boston Globe reported this morning that the Sox will announce Ron Roenicke as their manager once MLB is through with its investigation into the sign-stealing mess from 2018.

But no one else has confirmed that story and through a team spokesman, the Red Sox put out the following statement: "Our managerial search is not yet completed. We will comment at the completion of the search."

It's quite possible — maybe even likely — that the Sox have indeed settled on Roenicke as their choice to replace the departed Alex Cora, but want to hold off until the investigation into their 2018 season is finished. It would be a worst-case scenario to hire Roenicke, only to have him implicated in any way with the sign-stealing.

(Roenicke took steps to distance himself from the sign-stealing at the team's Winter Weekend festival several weeks ago in spring training, saying that he's always prided himself with treating the game with respect).

Roenicke would give the Red Sox some familiarity and comfort during a tough time for the franchise. He's been their bench coach for the past two seasons, is known and respected by nearly everyone on the current roster and has extensive managerial experience, both at the minor league level and four seasons with the Milwaukee Brewers.

My hunch all along — buffeted by a number of industry sources — has been that new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom would take advantage of an unexpected opportunity to hire someone younger (Roenicke is 63) with whom he could collaborate and envision as his manager for the next five or more seasons.

But perhaps the ensuing holdup to the team's blockbuster deal with the Dodgers and Twins — still unresolved — coupled with the uncertain timetable of the MLB investigation made it impossible for Bloom to cast a wider net for outside candidates.

And maybe the longer the process took — Cora was let go more than three weeks ago — the more it dawned on Bloom that it would be asking too much to install a manager from outside the organization just days before the official start of spring training. Roenicke, after all, won't have to learn names or introduce himself to many people should he be the choice.

Then again, as recently as earlier this week, the team interviewed former Toronto Blue Jays manager John Gibbons for the position according to The Athletic, so who knows?

Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta, Oakland A's coach Mark Kotsay and Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles were also interviewed.

Hot Stove Lunch: Red Sox to learn their fate soon

Sean McAdam

At the close of the owners' meetings in Orlando on Thursday, commissioner Rob Manfred indicated that Major League Baseball was getting closer to wrapping up its investigation of the Red Sox' 2018 sign-stealing scandal.

"I'm hopeful I can get (the) Boston (investigation) done before the camps open," Manfred told reporters. "I'd like to have this over. Investigations are funny. You think you know what the timeline is, but that's a day-to-day prediction."

It stands to reason that everyone involved — MLB, the Red Sox themselves — would like things done ASAP. Until findings and discipline are announced, they'll continue to hang over the sport, and in particular, the Red Sox themselves.

The longer this stretches on, the more uncertainty and the more questions Red Sox players will have to answer next week when pitchers and catchers report to Fort Myers.

Manfred confirmed that the players who were interviewed were granted immunity in exchange for information. The same process was used with the Houston Astros, who were caught stealing signs in 2017. That investigation, of course, cost Jeff Luhnow, A.J. Hinch and Alex Cora their jobs while costing the Astros \$5 million and four future draft picks.

Manfred also said that baseball will have new guidelines in place to limit access to video rooms. It's alleged that the Sox used a video replay room near their dugout to determine opponents' signs and sequences, then relayed that information from the dugout to runners on base.

* *The Athletic*

Budget-cutting Red Sox need to make this right, and reducing ticket prices is the place to start

Steve Buckley

It was the first day of October, some 48 hours after the 2019 season had been completed, and the Astros, Yankees, Dodgers, etc., were heading to the playoffs.

The Red Sox, alas, were headed back to the drawing board.

As a set-up to all that, the Sox were holding their traditional clearing-up-loose-ends press conference, during which CEO Sam Kennedy was asked whether the team planned to raise ticket prices for 2020.

“We’ve taken a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last four or five years, (including) low, single-digits or cost-of-living inflationary increases,” he said. “We haven’t made a decision this year for 2020. But I would anticipate another modest increase.”

In view of how this offseason has played out — Major League Baseball looking into whether the Red Sox cheated their way to a championship in 2018, the exodus of manager Alex Cora after his name was attached to the Houston Astros’ 2017 sign-stealing caper and, now, the finally completed trade that has sent Mookie Betts to the Dodgers — it might be a good idea for the team to announce a decrease in ticket prices for 2020.

Even if it’s just a per-game gesture — pick a day, charge 50 cents for bleacher seats and throw in a free hot dog — the Red Sox need to extend an olive branch to a very concerned and irritable fan base, and they need to do it now. This is not a drill. The Red Sox have some work to do.

To use Kennedy’s own words, the Red Sox have “taken a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last four or five years,” all this happening while the team was taking a pretty consistent approach to competing for a World Series championship. And the approach was pretty simple: Assemble the best team possible.

Are we in agreement that’s not the approach the Red Sox are taking with 2020?

Mookie Betts is on his way to the Dodgers. Lefty David Price is on his way to the Dodgers. Right-hander Rick Porcello was gone before any of this happened, choosing free agency and then choosing the Mets.

When you take a consistent approach to winning, then maybe you’ve earned the right to take a consistent approach to ticket pricing. But when you remove the former (that consistent approach to winning), then you need to remove the latter (the consistent approach to ticket pricing).

We have no way of knowing whether the Red Sox were already aware they were about to be embroiled in a cheating scandal when Kennedy commented on the modest increase. In the interest of fairness, let’s proceed along the lines that, no, they did not know. And that they did not know they’d soon be holding a press conference so Kennedy and owners John Henry and Tom Werner could take turns saying nice things about Cora, who had just been relieved of his job as manager.

But the Betts deal? Given Henry’s late-season, loose-lipped observation about getting the player payroll under the luxury-tax threshold, it’s reasonable to assume the Red Sox were contemplating a 2020 roster that did not include their marquee attraction, perennial MVP candidate of a right fielder. Put it all together — out goes Porcello, out goes Cora, out goes Betts, out goes Price — and you have a team that’s not likely to be a World Series contender this year.

You know it. Surely they know it. And while Price wasn't exactly a fan favorite — no need to get into all that again — Betts was the perfect ambassador in the team's (and baseball's) ceaseless quest to sell the game to younger fans. He was — he is — one of the best all-around players the Red Sox have ever produced. He has already won the Most Valuable Player Award, and he has received MVP votes in four other seasons. He has won four Gold Gloves. While keeping in mind the sad list of former players who looked like Hall of Famers after they'd been in the big leagues for five years (Fred Lynn, Nomar Garciaparra, Don Mattingly and so on), Mookie's trajectory points to Cooperstown. He's that good.

He's so good, in fact, that whether he agrees on a contract extension with the Dodgers (not likely) or chooses to hit free agency after this season (likely), he's going to wind up making more money than he ever thought possible when the Red Sox selected him in the fifth round of the 2011 June amateur draft.

It's bad enough the Red Sox traded Betts, but the way it played out was such a mess. After it was made known that the Sox had concerns about hard-throwing Twins pitcher Brusdar Graterol, this after looking under the hood for a medical review, the knee-jerk reaction was to view it as an 11th-hour opportunity to keep Betts for at least this season. No way was that going to happen.

And there was this beauty: The Sox were said to be horrified by the negative reaction to the trade and were using the reports about Graterol to get out of the deal. Sorry, conspiracy buffs, I'm not buying that one. The Red Sox knew exactly how fans were going to react to their decision to trade Betts.

Yep. They knew. They had to know. Which is why they never should have talked about a "modest" increase in ticket prices. I gave them a pass on that in October. I was wrong. And I was even wronger once it was made known that (A) representatives from MLB's Department of Investigations were showing up at Fenway Park and (B) the popular Cora would not be managing the team in 2020.

The Red Sox need to do some fence-mending with their fans, and they need to do it now. A good start would be finding ways to make it cheap and easy to watch a big-league ballgame this summer.

The Mookie Betts trade, Part 2: Electric Boogaloo

Keith Law

Sequels rarely live up to the quality of their originals, but in this case, I think Red Sox fans should be happier with the second Mookie Betts trade than they were with the first, which ends up costing the Dodgers a good bit more than they originally paid and leaves the Twins right about where they were when it all started.

The revised deal is way better for the Red Sox, even if Brusdar Graterol had passed whatever review that caused Boston to balk at the initial trade. Jeter Downs is a top-100 prospect whom the Dodgers acquired last winter in the trade that sent Yasiel Puig and Alex Wood to the Reds. He's primarily played shortstop but projects as at least an above-average defender at second or third, although he's probably just an emergency shortstop in the majors. His bat is extremely promising for a middle infielder: He led the Cal League in doubles and homers this year as a 20-year-old who was young for High A, even though he was promoted to Double A with two weeks to go in the season and even though he struggled badly to start the year. He had very good feel to hit even out of high school, but the Dodgers helped him make adjustments to the angle of his swing so he could drive certain pitches and unlock more power. If the return were just him for a year of Betts, I'd still say it was a good deal for Boston, as it seems very, very likely that Downs is at least a big-league regular at a skill position for many years, with a decent chance he's more.

Connor Wong is an unusual kind of utility player because he can catch well enough to do it on more than an emergency basis, but he can move to other positions, including second or third base, both of which he's played a little bit so far in the minors. He's power over hit right now, with swing-and-miss a real problem for him going back to his time at the University of Houston, but as the 26th man on a major-league roster, he could be quite valuable for his ability to back up at least three positions — and there's no reason he couldn't play the corner outfield spots — or even to serve as a regular catcher on a bad team.

So now Boston ends up with its new No. 1 prospect in Downs, a useful utility prospect in Wong and a solid everyday right fielder in Alex Verdugo. Verdugo, as I wrote the other day, is probably an average regular in right field now, with his ability to hit for average, plus defense in left (and the arm for right) and eventually enough power for 60-plus extra-base hits, although I think he's more of a doubles power guy than a home-run power guy even at his peak. That might get him to about 4 WAR, which isn't Mookie territory, but Boston has him for five more years plus the other two players. Given my skepticism about Graterol's ability to start, given his delivery and time missed with a shoulder issue in 2019, this feels like a much better outcome for the Sox, even if losing Mookie Betts was enough to ruin their summah. And they still shed salary, which was always the goal of this process, although as I said last time, it only matters if they put that money back into the major-league roster, preferably into starting pitching, which remains the organization's big weakness with Chris Sale's elbow and general durability now a question and most of its pitching prospects either far-away or back-of-the-rotation types.

The Dodgers, meanwhile, had to part with more than they originally wanted to get the deal done, and while acquiring Betts is always a good outcome, this one might sting a little. Downs was not their top prospect or their No. 2, but he would have been in the top two for a lot of teams, as not everyone has a Gavin Lux or a Dustin May just floating around. Losing him isn't just about losing his services in the long run — it's possible, even likely, that the Dodgers never would have needed Downs — but losing the ability to trade him for someone else in July or next winter, perhaps filling a critical need midseason if, say, they're short a starting pitcher. They do pick up Graterol, at least, and he could be a valuable reliever for them right now, maybe even handling closing duties at some point if Kenley Jansen doesn't show any improvement over 2019. If I'm trying to justify the deal more for the Dodgers, I'd argue they added a superstar in right field plus immediate impact for a bullpen that has generally been a weak link over the past few years plus a wild-card candidate for the rotation. And it is worth trading one of your best prospects for that plus a good, young corner outfielder.

The Twins had to pay a little bit more to get Kenta Maeda, sending Graterol to the Dodgers rather than the Red Sox, but now adding outfielder Luke Raley to the trade and possibly getting a low-level minor leaguer (which, really, could mean anything from a real prospect to an org guy) back. Raley was originally with the Dodgers and came to the Twins in the Brian Dozier trade; he missed most of 2019 after surgery to repair a torn ankle tendon but, once healthy, might be a useful backup corner outfielder/first baseman and left-handed bat off the bench for someone.

And then there's poor Joc Pederson, who was briefly an Angel before he was cast down into the fires of ... wait, not that kind of Angel. The trade between the team that actually plays in Los Angeles and the one that pretends it does has fallen apart, apparently, which is a shame for everyone involved, most of all Pederson, who endured a week of rumors, during which he also lost an arbitration hearing and now needs to wait for another trade to know he'll have a regular job this year. Pederson can be the strong half of an outfield platoon; he doesn't hit lefties at all and never has, but he can crush righties with on-base skills and power, and he plays above-average defense in either corner. The Angels would have been better off with him on their roster, and he would have regained the playing time he probably just lost. If the Dodgers don't trade him, he's hoping A.J. Pollock can't come back or the Dodgers choose to keep Chris Taylor moving around the diamond, which is a bit of a lousy position for the player and means the Dodgers have value they could convert into a player they need more. This is just a hope that there's a better resolution for Pederson before Opening Day.

One final thought: I wonder if the complexity of this deal chills the market further for the other superstars approaching free agency in the next year or two and whose teams have explored trading them, such as Francisco Lindor, Nolan Arenado and Kris Bryant. Getting this done required adding a third team, which sounds clever but just as likely makes it more difficult to pull off because now you have to get three GMs to agree and then get three owners to agree, and the only time you can get three MLB owners to agree on anything is if you tell them you found a way to pay players less. It's not as if other teams will stop trying to trade for Lindor et al, but we might be even less likely to see such a deal, now or next winter, than we were before this whole imbroglio happened.

Analyzing the prospects joining the Red Sox in the Mookie Betts deal

Jen McCaffrey

If baseball had its own version of the Oscars, the Red Sox and Dodgers would win best (or maybe worst) drama.

After days of speculation about whether Mookie Betts and David Price would end up in Los Angeles, the Red Sox and Dodgers have reached a resolution, albeit one that essentially bypasses the Twins. The original version of the Betts-Price trade, which included the Red Sox acquiring outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol from the Twins, has now been reconstructed. The Dodgers and Twins are now working on a separate deal for Graterol after the Red Sox found information on Graterol's shoulder that caused them to reconsider the deal.

Under the revised deal, sources told The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal that the Red Sox would send Betts, Price and half of Price's salary (which amounts to \$16 million per season for luxury tax purposes) to the Dodgers in exchange for Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong.

So who are these guys, and how much will they help the Red Sox? And is this a better deal than before?

The holdover, Verdugo, will replace Betts in right field and in the Red Sox lineup. The 23-year-old left-hander batted .294 with an .817 OPS, 22 doubles and 12 homers in 106 games in 2019, his first full season in the majors.

New to the deal are Downs and Wong. Downs (who is indeed named after Yankees' soon-to-be Hall of Famer Derek Jeter) is MLB.com's No. 44 overall prospect and spent most of this year at shortstop. The 21-year-old was drafted in the first round by the Cincinnati Reds in 2017 but traded to the Dodgers in December 2018 as part of a massive deal in which the Reds sent Homer Bailey, Downs and pitching prospect Josiah Gray to L.A. in exchange for Yasiel Puig, Kyle Farmer, Alex Wood and cash.

The Athletic's Keith Law, who believes the revised trade is a much better deal for Boston, said that Downs projects as an above-average defender at second base, with a promising bat for a middle infielder.

"If the return were just him for a year of Mookie Betts, I'd still say it was a good deal for Boston, as it seems very, very likely that Downs is at least a big-league regular at a skill position for many years, with a decent chance he's more," Law said.

A right-handed hitter, Downs hit .276 with an .888 OPS, 35 doubles, four triples and 24 homers in 119 games last season. He also went 24-for-32 on the basepaths. Red Sox officials said they believe Downs has enough bat to be an everyday player, though it might be at second base, which is where the Reds believed he fit best prior to his trade from Cincinnati. Last season, between High A and Double A, Downs played 102 of 113 games at shortstop with the other 11 games at second base. Over the course of 289 career games, Downs has played 195 games at short and 84 games at second. With incumbent shortstop Xander Bogaerts having signed a six-year, \$120 million extension with Boston last spring, second base is likely Downs' path to the majors, anyway. (Bogaerts' deal does include an opt out after the 2022 season, which leaves the door open for a potential fit at shortstop should he depart.)

Given that Downs ended his season with 12 games in Double A for the Dodgers, it's likely he'd open the season in Double-A Portland for the Red Sox.

As for Wong, his inclusion in the deal offers a significant upgrade at the catching position for a Red Sox farm system very thin on catching depth.

Wong, who turns 24 in May, was drafted by the Dodgers in the third round of the 2017 draft and currently ranks as the organization's No. 28 prospect, according to MLB.com. As with Downs, he split time between

High A and Double A in the Dodgers system last year, hitting .281 with a .878 OPS, 24 doubles and 24 homers in 111 games.

Wong caught 83 games between the two teams but did see time at second (14 games) and third base (12 games).

He too could start the year in Double-A Portland having been promoted to Double A after the All-Star break last season. It speaks to the lack of options in the Boston system that Wong immediately becomes the organization's best catching prospect.

Two likely regulars, plus a catcher with the tools to help at the major-league level someday? It's not Mookie Betts, but the Red Sox appear to have gotten, at least, more than they might have otherwise.

The Mookie Betts deal is finally done, and the Red Sox must now adapt to the new normal

Chad Jennings

After weeks of negotiations, and several days of starts and stops, the Red Sox have finally — or, once again — traded Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

The new deal was being finalized Sunday night, and it's similar enough to the original that fell apart earlier in the week. The Red Sox gain significant salary relief, plus a prospect package headlined by 23-year-old Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo. Instead of a third team being involved, the Dodgers will round out the return with 21-year-old shortstop Jeter Downs and 23-year-old catcher Connor Wong.

The Red Sox will pay half of the \$96 million remaining on the last three years of Price's contract. Their payroll for this season will drop by more than \$40 million, putting them well below the luxury tax threshold.

That sort of financial relief comes at a substantial cost.

The Red Sox still believe they have a team capable of making the playoffs, but they are significantly weaker without one of the game's perennial MVP candidates in right field. They've also lost a provocative but crucial piece of their rotation, which now lacks a clear fifth starter and stands out as a point of even more uncertainty than before.

And all of this comes two days before pitchers and catchers report to spring training.

The past four weeks have been tumultuous. The Red Sox lost their manager amid scandal, aborted an initial trade of the franchise's best player because of medical concerns and remain under league investigation for potentially illegally stealing signs in 2018. They still don't know the results of that investigation, nor do they have a manager.

But it was the attempt to trade Betts that became a debacle this past week.

On Tuesday, the Red Sox had an agreement to send Betts and Price to the Dodgers for Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol, a pitcher in the Twins system. The Twins had entered as a third piece of the deal, acquiring Dodgers pitcher Kenta Maeda. During the medical review, however, the Red Sox grew concerned by Graterol's health status and began working on an alternative. The drama played out so publicly that Players Association president Tony Clark condemned the negotiations for putting "lives in a state of limbo." Were they ever.

The entire baseball world watched as the Red Sox and Dodgers worked to find a new solution to a trade that had rocked each fan base in very different ways. The Dodgers got the high-profile superstar they had previously missed out on this winter, a wildly popular move in Los Angeles. The Red Sox, meanwhile,

executed a stunning salary dump involving arguably their most popular player. Even though the possibility of trading Betts before free agency had been discussed for months, it was still met with scorn.

In the end, the Dodgers and Red Sox went back to one-on-one trade talks. Verdugo and Downs had been discussed in negotiations more than a week ago, and they wound up being the biggest names in the deal. The Dodgers and Twins worked out a separate deal to send Maeda to Minnesota for Graterol and a low-level minor leaguer.

Verdugo, presumably, will replace Betts in right field. He had a 3.1 WAR in 343 major-league at-bats last season, and he ranked as a Baseball America top-40 prospect the two years before that. He's not a prototypical outfield slugger, but he gets on base often, strikes out rarely and did hit 12 home runs last season. One evaluator said he's "very similar" to Red Sox outfielder Andrew Benintendi.

Downs currently ranks 86th on Baseball America's top 100 list — Graterol was ranked 60th — and he's coming off an .862-OPS season in Single A, finishing with a short but strong stint in Double A, where he hit five home runs in 12 games. He should instantly rank as the top up-the-middle prospect in the Red Sox system. Even if he ends up at second base, the Red Sox believe his bat makes him an above-average major-league player.

Wong is the least touted of the three players coming to Boston, but he fills a massive void in the Red Sox system. He is a former infielder who's moved to catcher in pro ball (though he's continued to play some second and third base). The former third-round draft pick had an .878 OPS across Single A and Double A last season and should instantly become the organization's top catching prospect.

All told, the trade gives a strong boost to the Red Sox farm system, adds a young everyday player to the big-league roster and saves a massive amount of payroll to reset the luxury tax penalties.

All at the cost of one of the most talented players the organization has ever seen.

From a disappointment to an embarrassment: The Mookie Betts trade situation just keeps getting worse

Jen McCaffrey

What an absolute mess.

Four days ago, the Red Sox had an agreement to ship Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol, pending the exchange of medical information. The Twins were to receive Kenta Maeda from the Dodgers, and the Angels had a deal in place with the Dodgers revolving around Joc Pederson, contingent upon the Betts-Price trade.

But the wobbling of one domino in a 10-player, four-team trade is all that's needed before the whole thing collapses. That domino has been teetering back and forth for a few days now.

The Red Sox, unhappy with medical reports on Graterol that revealed his shoulder might be more suited for a role as a reliever rather than a starter, reportedly asked the Twins for another top-10 prospect. (For instance, the Twins' next best pitching prospect, right-hander Jordan Balazovic, would not be someone the Twins make available, according to The Athletic Twins reporter Dan Hayes.) So far, the Twins have refused, leaving the whole deal in jeopardy.

On Saturday afternoon, the Minnesota Star Tribune reported the Twins were "very pessimistic" about their end of the deal, suggesting Minnesota might withdraw from the trade altogether.

But The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal reported that's not the case, despite the teams still being at an "impasse." For the Dodgers, losing out on acquiring Betts in a winter when they finished second on top free agents Gerrit Cole and Anthony Rendon would be catastrophic. That might mean they're willing to bend over

backward to get this deal done. Rosenthal suggested the Twins could send Graterol and a lesser prospect to the Dodgers, with L.A. then flipping Graterol and a better prospect to Boston.

For those hoping the deal falls apart for the sake of Betts returning to Boston, that doesn't seem likely at this point. Sources told The Athletic "there's a good chance" Betts and Price end up traded one way or another. The same source indicated it doesn't necessarily have to be to the Dodgers.

MLB.com's Mark Feinsand added to the layers of this evolving deal by noting the "the Red Sox are focused on getting a deal done with the Dodgers above all else," but if the Dodgers fall out, the Red Sox could return to talks with the Padres or other teams.

The deal has been such a public mess for baseball that MLB Players Association executive director Tony Clark issued a statement late Friday addressing the debacle: "The proposed trades between the Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins and Angels need to be resolved without further delay. The events of this last week have unfairly put several players' lives in a state of limbo. The unethical leaking of medical information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often players are treated as commodities by those running the game."

While the hitch in all of this has been reported as Graterol's medicals, there may be an additional underlying reason. Trading Betts was never going to be a popular decision, but Rosenthal suggested that the negative media and fan reaction to a return of Verdugo and Graterol for Betts and Price may have given Red Sox ownership pause on the deal.

As the trade talks surrounding Betts picked up this winter, the idea of a Betts trade for a handful of top prospects emerged as one resolution to Betts potentially not wanting to sign an extension with the Red Sox, and many accepted that fate as inevitable. But when the Betts-Price deal that came to light earlier this week included just two young major leaguers, both with injury histories, the deal struck many as nothing more than a salary dump with a return somewhere between underwhelming and poor.

Red Sox ownership had to have known the scrutiny this deal would attract with whatever players came in return. And if they didn't, well, that's just another mistake made in the midst of a chaotic six weeks in Boston.

Delayed trade and awkward arbitration hearing prompt more friction between players and the league

Ken Rosenthal

In the 45-year history of salary arbitration in baseball, no one on the players' side could remember taking the action they did Thursday, shortly before the start of Joc Pederson's hearing.

With an agreement reportedly in place for Pederson to be traded from the Dodgers to the Angels, the players' union and the outfielder's agents at Excel Sports Management filed a motion for the hearing to be delayed, contending that Pederson effectively was in limbo, a man without a team.

Major League Baseball already had rejected the union's request. The three-person arbitration panel did the same. And thus began another odd chapter in an extraordinary week that started with two connected, captivating trade agreements and ended with the union again expressing public frustration over the way MLB treats its players.

Both the three-team blockbuster that would send star outfielder Mookie Betts to the Dodgers and a separate deal that would send Pederson to the Angels remained on hold Friday night. The trades are still alive, but likely will not be completed in their original, reported form due to concerns the Red Sox raised after viewing the medical records of Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol, one of the two players they would receive for Betts and left-hander David Price.

The fallout from the impasse prompted union head Tony Clark to issue a scathing statement shortly after 5 p.m. ET on Friday. The statement included a reference to Pederson's hearing, calling it a "perversion of the salary arbitration process." Pederson, 27, lost his case, and his salary in 2020 will be the Dodgers' proposed \$7.75 million rather than his requested \$9.5 million.

"The proposed trades between the Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins and Angels need to be resolved without further delay," Clark said. "The events of this last week have unfairly put several players' lives in a state of limbo. The unethical leaking of medical information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often players are treated as commodities by those running the game."

The collective-bargaining agreement says a hearing "may be postponed by the arbitration panel upon the application of either the Player or Club based upon a showing of substantial cause." The uncertainty surrounding Pederson satisfied that requirement in the view of the union and his agents.

Instead, the Dodgers went to a hearing for the first time since winning a case against reliever Joe Beimel in 2007 and paying him \$912,500. The team avoided arbitration by awarding multiyear extensions to two other current players, signing infielder Max Muncy for three years, \$26 million on Thursday and utility man Chris Taylor for two years, \$13.4 million on Friday.

MLB's position on Pederson, backed by the arbitration panel, was that the hearing could proceed because the player had not yet been traded officially, and might never be. The league also was confident that the Dodgers would win their case against Pederson and perhaps feared establishing a precedent for delays would embolden other players to seek ways out of hearings in the future.

MLB and the union negotiate the arbitration schedule, with the hearings taking place between Feb. 1-20. The union offered multiple dates to reschedule Pederson's case, but hearings generally are postponed only when a player and team are in agreement on a multi-year contract, pending a physical, sources said. An exception occurred in 2001, when Mariano Rivera's agency fired his primary representative. Rivera, under new representation, then avoided arbitration by signing a four-year, \$39.99 million deal.

A delay of four or five days would have been fairer to Pederson, his representatives contended, allowing time for the trade negotiations to resolve. If the deal had been completed during that time, the Angels might have reached a settlement with Pederson rather than make a case against a player they had just acquired. If the trade had fallen through, Pederson would simply have gone to a hearing with the Dodgers.

Instead, Pederson's side ending up in the awkward position of trying to prove his value for a team that was in the process of trading him. The Dodgers used outside counsel to argue its case, a common practice among clubs. The absence of top Dodgers officials from the hearing in Phoenix was more unusual.

Which, to those on the players' side, was the point.

The salary-arbitration process is designed for players and their employers to resolve their differences either through settlement or an arbitration panel's decision. Pederson, though, was not clear on which team employed him, sources say. He already had received text messages from members of Dodgers management wishing him well with the Angels.

Then there was the actual case, in which the Dodgers, according to sources, argued that Pederson was a platoon player, and not worthy of his requested salary. Pederson, a left-handed hitter, has only 375 plate appearances against left-handers in his career, compared to 2,004 against righties. The Dodgers, after asking him and other members of their club to sacrifice playing time for the benefit of the team, effectively held it against him.

Another problem for Pederson's representatives was that they could not make a case for how he might help the Angels going forward – a component that arbitrators take into account. Pederson likely would play a greater role for the Angels than he did with the Dodgers, replacing Kole Calhoun as the team's primary

right fielder, at least until the promotion of top prospect Jo Adell, and even filling in at first base. He also would bring winning pedigree as a past contributor to two World Series teams and five straight division champions. The Angels have not won a postseason game since 2009.

The process, those on the players' side say, was prejudiced against Pederson, preventing him from effectively arguing his case. In their view, the postponement of the hearing was only sensible. MLB and the arbitration panel disagreed. And an unusual situation that might have resolved amicably only sparked another dispute between the two sides.

It's chaos! For Red Sox, virtually everything is still in limbo as spring training arrives

Chad Jennings

The Red Sox are ready to name a new manager, except they're not. They've traded their best player, except they haven't. They've been under league investigation for a month, and they still don't know what MLB has found.

Spring training starts in four days, and the most recent post on J.D. Martinez's Twitter feed is an emoji described as: A pensive, remorseful face. Saddened by life.

Season tickets on sale now!

Back in September, when Red Sox ownership acknowledged a challenging offseason, the executives could not have expected this. When Chaim Bloom was hired as chief baseball officer job a month later, he had no idea what he was getting into. Even the team's celebratory Winter Weekend wound up overshadowed by manager Alex Cora "parting ways" three days earlier. It's been various levels of chaos right up to late Friday morning when the Boston Globe reported Ron Roenicke would be hired as Cora's replacement, only to have the Red Sox issue a rare public statement denying that they've made a decision. Separately, a team source told The Athletic that the team has made no managerial offer, and that the team can't possibly know its options until the league's investigation is complete.

And all of this was happening as the team tried to find a resolution to its blockbuster Mookie Betts and David Price trade, which hit a snag when medical reports on pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol uncovered some red flags, prompting the Red Sox to seek additional compensation.

Oh, and there are additional reports that the league might soon announce the findings of its investigation into whether the Red Sox illegally stole signs during the 2018 championship season.

So, you know, business as usual.

None of this is simple, and all of it comes with the unfortunate timing of pitchers and catchers reporting to Red Sox camp on Tuesday.

The team doesn't necessarily have to name a manager before spring training begins. As bench coach, Roenicke handled most of the day-to-day spring scheduling anyway, and the rest of the coaching staff is already in place, with most of them familiar to the players. They know what to do. The desire to have a manager in place, though, is fairly obvious.

While Roenicke stands out as an obvious internal candidate – he was Cora's bench coach the past two years, spent four years as Brewers manager, and he's popular with the Red Sox players – it seems impossible for the Red Sox to decide on an internal candidate without knowing the result of the league's investigation. With anything short of total exoneration, the viability of an in-house candidate surely comes down to the finer details. And the Red Sox don't want to get this wrong.

Same thing with the Betts trade. One source said the Red Sox typically "go the extra mile" when it comes to medical reviews, and that would be especially true with a trade like this. Trading Betts is fraught enough

as it is. Imagine the blowback if one of the two players coming back wound up with a significant injury soon after.

That said, both the Red Sox and Dodgers have considerable incentive to finish the deal. Two of the highest-profile Red Sox players already know the team tried to trade them. After that, does anyone – including Price himself – really want Price to be among those stepping into the clubhouse next week? Imagine the awkwardness of Betts arriving with Jackie Bradley Jr. and the other regulars five days later.

But incentive might be even higher for the Dodgers, whose fan base watched major free agents sign elsewhere, only to be rewarded with an 11th-hour trade for one of the best players in the game. There's no putting that lightning of excitement back in the bottle. And the Dodgers know the Red Sox have a potential trade partner in the Padres, who were also heavily involved in negotiating for Betts.

One way or another, the trade still seems likely to happen, but for now, it's in limbo. Just like the Red Sox managerial search. Which is still awaiting results of the league's investigation. It's all so many clouds of uncertainty, when the sunshine of spring training is supposed to be right on the horizon.

*** *The New York Times***

In Trade for Betts, Another of Astros' Vanquished Opponents Bulks Up

Tyler Kepner

The results of each postseason series are engraved on the inside of the Houston Astros' 2017 championship rings. Most champions design it that way, but the teams Houston thwarted in 2017 were, perhaps, the most regal of all baseball brands: the Boston Red Sox, the Yankees and the Los Angeles Dodgers. The familiar logos of the vanquished seemed to burnish the Astros' achievement.

Now a sign-stealing scandal has turned the Astros into a laughingstock, their rings all but meaningless to the rest of the sport. The Red Sox — who got revenge in 2018 by bouncing the Astros on the way to a World Series title — have helped the Dodgers' cause in exacting their own revenge by reworking their trade to send Mookie Betts and David Price to Los Angeles. And the Yankees will welcome a former Astros ace, Gerrit Cole, to spring training in Tampa, Fla., this week.

When the Astros gather in West Palm Beach, they will do it in a complex they share with the Washington Nationals, the very team that beat them in the last World Series. The Nationals won four road games to do it, a first in major league history.

The Yankees or the Dodgers will be strong favorites to claim the crown this time. Not only do the Yankees have Cole — perhaps the American League's best pitcher — but they will no longer face Betts, who had been the A.L. East's best player. To replace Betts, the Red Sox got right fielder Alex Verdugo, who is 23 and missed the final two months of last season with a back injury. They also got two prospects from the Dodgers: a catcher named Connor Wong and a shortstop and second baseman named Jeter Downs.

Downs was actually born on Alex Rodriguez's birthday, in Colombia in 1998, but his parents named him for a different young shortstop of that era. Their older son was named Jerry Jr., after his father, and they wanted another J name.

“Back then I had started watching the Yankees and I admired Derek Jeter, the young boy,” Downs's mother, Lucila, told *The Dayton Daily News* in 2018, when Downs was a Cincinnati Reds prospect. “I liked how he played baseball with that love and how he pushed himself. I loved the name ... and those pretty eyes.”

In time, Boston fans may learn to cheer for a guy named Jeter, just as they did for a guy named Mookie. (A different Mookie, last name Wilson, once took a memorable at-bat in New York against the Red Sox.) For

now, though, those fans can only fume about losing Betts, 27, who might be the best all-around player in the majors besides Mike Trout. In Price, they also lose a pitcher who should have been the most valuable player of the 2018 World Series, when he beat the Dodgers twice, including in the Game 5 clincher on short rest.

The Red Sox will not get Brusdar Graterol, the hard-throwing reliever who was originally headed to Boston by way of the Minnesota Twins, who had agreed to send him to the Dodgers for starter Kenta Maeda. The Red Sox reportedly had concerns with Graterol's durability after examining his medical records, so the Dodgers eventually agreed to send Downs and Wong instead, pending medical review. The Dodgers will keep Graterol for themselves now, with Maeda bolstering the Twins' rotation, once that deal becomes official.

The Red Sox were afraid of losing Betts in free agency next winter, at a time when they are trying to cut payroll to reset their luxury tax rate. Their owner, John Henry, acknowledged this goal at the end of the season, then emailed The Boston Globe's Dan Shaughnessy last month insisting that the focus on the tax "resides with the media far more than it does within the Sox."

As it turned out, the Red Sox were indeed determined to slash payroll. They blew past the luxury-tax threshold to win the 2018 title, the fourth under Henry's ownership. His new chief baseball officer, Chaim Bloom, will try to build another champion without Betts, but with — the Red Sox hope — the small-market ingenuity he used with Tampa Bay.

Bloom's old boss with the Rays, Andrew Friedman, now runs the Dodgers' baseball operations. Friedman has helped the Dodgers sustain a streak of National League West titles that should stretch to eight this year. The franchise has not won a World Series since 1988, but it does not want a flag for the near miss against Houston in 2017.

"We don't want a fake banner hanging in our stadium," Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner said at the team's Fanfest last month. "We didn't earn it."

The Astros believe they did, at least when they included the slogan "Earned History" — which now reads like a punchline — on that tarnished World Series ring. They retain a strong roster under their new manager, Dusty Baker, and new general manager, James Click, and their players will be highly motivated.

But so will the Yankees and the Dodgers. The Astros' victims are coming for payback, and they're bringing new superstars with them.

*** *The New York Daily News***

Red Sox find a new way to complete their most shameful deal in a century

Bradford William Davis

The Red Sox finally made the trade of the century, and Jeter made it possible.

After a number of significant roadblocks since an initial three-way deal involving the Twins was reported last Tuesday, Boston traded Mookie Betts to the Dodgers, directly, for outfielder Alex Verdugo and two prospects, including catcher Connor Wang and a shortstop named Jeter ... Downs.

(Yeah, he was named after the retired Yankees pending Hall of Famer.)

David Price is also going to Los Angeles in the mega-deal, which was confirmed by The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal and ESPN's Jeff Passan.

Boston is including some cash, effectively paying for the privilege of a cleaner balance sheet and a significantly worse team.

By Wins Above Replacement (WAR), Betts is the second-best player in baseball behind Mike Trout, trailing only the three-time AL MVP per Fangraphs' formula since 2015. But you don't need WAR, just eyes. He's the best defensive right fielder in the game and an elite hitter that has grown into 30 home run power the last few seasons. Betts, the 2018 AL MVP runs the bases on a high level, covers the plate well, and has scored at least 100 runs the last few years. Also, he's only 27.

There's no baseball reason to trade Mookie Betts. The Sox struggled down the stretch, sure, but they're a year removed from winning the World Series. Also, it bears repeating: he's Mookie Betts!

There's barely a financial reason to trade him — a Forbes report estimated the Red Sox franchise was valued at \$3.2 billion in 2019. But, Betts reportedly wanted to reach free agency rather than sign a contract extension significantly below his value, so the Sox decided to move on with a much worse team. Boston also attached Price, who's owed \$96 million, to sweeten the deal (for team owner John Henry).

Price, 34, remains an effective pitcher in his own right. Last year, the former Cy Young winner posted an ERA 11% better than the league according to Fangraphs. In 2018, he won Game 5 of the World Series against the Dodgers.

The Dodgers won 106 games in 2019 but suffered a disappointing first-round exit against the eventual champion Nationals. With Betts and '19 NL MVP Cody Bellinger, LA has two of the best five players in the sport batting in the same lineup.

Verdugo is only 23 and had a solid season at the plate and in the outfield last year, but he hasn't yet shown any he's a perennial MVP candidate in waiting. Downs is a top-100 prospect across baseball, though he was blocked by Corey Seager and Gavin Lux in LA.

If Downs, who last played in AA, becomes a good big leaguer and Verdugo remains one, Boston's new players might be able to equal or slightly surpass what Betts does every year.

Originally, the Red Sox were supposed to receive pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol from the Twins, while the Twins would get veteran starter Kenta Maeda from L.A., but the Sox got spooked by Graterol's medical record — the 21-year-old had elbow surgery back in 2016. The Dodgers and Twins completed the exchange separately, and Minnesota will receive cash along with Maeda in their new deal.

The Sox' shameful fire sale echoes the team's 1919 sale of Babe Ruth to the Yankees for \$125,000 in cash and \$300,000 in loans. Team owner Harry Frazee used the cash influx to invest in separate business interests.

Just like the Betts trade, both sides got exactly what they wanted.

*** *The New York Post***

MLBPA irate over delays holding up Mookie Betts blockbuster trade

Zach Braziller

While the players wait in the four-team blockbuster trades that sent Mookie Betts to the Dodgers, the players union is calling out MLB, demanding a resolution with spring training almost ready to begin.

“The proposed trades between the Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins and Angels need to be resolved without further delay,” Tony Clark, the Players Association director, said in a statement. “The events of this last week have unfairly put several players' lives in a state of limbo. The unethical leaking of medical

information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often players are treated as commodities by those running the game.”

On Tuesday, the Dodgers, Red Sox and Twins agreed on a three-way deal that sent Boston star Betts and pitcher David Price to the Dodgers, Los Angeles starter Kenta Maeda to the Twins, and outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol to the Red Sox. The Dodgers then would ship outfielder Joc Pederson and pitcher Ross Stripling to the Angels in exchange for infielder Luis Rengifo.

But before the deals were made official, The Red Sox grew concerned about Graterol’s medicals. They in turn wanted more in return from the Twins, who haven’t obliged. In the meantime, Pederson had his arbitration hearing with the Dodgers, the team that had decided to move him to get under the luxury tax threshold. He lost the hearing and will make \$7.75 million this year instead of the \$9.5 million he asked for.

Meanwhile, as of Friday evening, nothing has been decided. The players were still in limbo. Clark, however, is pushing for a resolution.

Red Sox planning to make Ron Roenicke next manager

Mollie Walker

Red Sox bench coach Ron Roenicke is expected to be named Boston’s next manager once Major League Baseball concludes its investigation into the organization’s involvement in the sign-stealing scandal, according to the Boston Globe.

Roenicke would succeed Boston’s 2018 World Series-winning manager Alex Cora, who was fired last month because of his role in the Astros’ systemic use of cameras to steal signs while he was Houston’s bench coach in 2017. Roenicke has been with the Red Sox the past two years, including the 2018 season for which they are being scrutinized, but has said he has no involvement in the sign-stealing scandal.

According to The Athletic, the Red Sox also interviewed former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons this week. Gibbons was also up for the Astros job, which went to Dusty Baker, after the team fired A.J. Hinch.

After playing in the outfield from 1981 to 1988 for six different MLB teams, Roenicke got back into baseball in 2011 as manager of the Brewers. He accumulated a 342-331 record in five seasons as manager, going 5-6 in the postseason. In his first season in Milwaukee, Roenicke led the team to a 96-66 record, the most wins in franchise history.

The California native served as third-base coach for the Dodgers and Angels between his time with the Brewers and Red Sox.

Boston was the last team without a manager despite pitchers and catchers reporting in less than a week. The organization is still awaiting its punishment from MLB for sign-stealing tactics. Commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday that MLB’s report on the Red Sox would be out soon.

*** *The USA Today***

Let's try this again: Mookie Betts blockbuster nears completion as Dodgers, Red Sox, Twins work out new deal(s)

Bob Nightengale

It was a trade that began with talks in November, picked up life in January, was agreed upon in principal last week, hit a speed bump days later, but was finally agreed upon Sunday, much to the relief of Major League Baseball.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins have worked out a new version of the blockbuster deal, according to an official with knowledge of the negotiations.

The person spoke to USA TODAY Sports on condition of anonymity because the deal had not yet been announced.

Mookie Betts and David Price are going from the Red Sox to the Dodgers, along with \$48 million to cover half of what Price is owed over the next three seasons

The Red Sox are receiving outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong from the Dodgers.

The Twins are getting pitcher Kenta Maeda, prospect Luke Raley and \$10 million from the Dodgers.

Twins reliever Brusdar Graterol, whose medical reports prompted this entire hold-up as the Red Sox voiced concerns, is now going to the Dodgers, along with the 67th overall pick in the 2020 draft.

The delay caused anger between the clubs, particularly towards the Red Sox, with agent Scott Boras insisting his client was healthy. Graterol underwent Tommy John surgery in 2016 and missed two months with shoulder issues in 2019, but was throwing 100 mph by the end of the season.

The Red Sox, instead, believed there were legitimate concerns with his physical and wanted the Twins to include another prospect. The Twins refused, requiring the Dodgers to get involved and work out separate deals.

It just took a whole lot longer than anyone could possibly have imagined.

“The events of this last week have unfairly put several players’ lives in a state of limbo,” union chief Tony Clark said on Friday. “The unethical leaking of medical information as well as the perversion of the salary arbitration process serve as continued reminders that too often players are treated as commodities by those running the game.”

Red Sox expected to promote Ron Roenicke to be next manager, replacing Alex Cora

Bob Nightengale

The Boston Red Sox, in one of the most tumultuous offseasons in franchise history, are expected to promote Ron Roenicke to be their manager for the upcoming 2020 season, according to a high-ranking baseball official with direct knowledge of the deal.

The official spoke to USA TODAY Sports on the condition of anonymity because it has not been finalized.

The Red Sox report for their first spring-training workout on Wednesday in Fort Myers, Florida.

The only hold-up to making the hiring official is awaiting the results of Major League Baseball’s investigation on whether the Red Sox were illegally stealing signs during the 2018 season, in which Roenicke was the bench coach for manager Alex Cora.

Yet two high-ranking officials involved in the investigation told USA TODAY Sports they believe that the Red Sox will receive no more than a light punishment, with little evidence of cheating. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because the punishment has yet to be announced.

Simply, there is no whistle-blower in this case like the Houston Astros' situation with former pitcher Mike Fiers, telling The Athletic and later MLB investigators of the Astros’ elaborate scheme using live computer feeds. There are no known Red Sox players or former players who acknowledged that the Red Sox did anything illegal.

Commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday at the owners' meetings in Orlando, Florida, that their findings are expected to be released before the start of spring training.

Ron Roenicke managed the Brewers for five year and has 21 years of major-league coaching experience. The Red Sox also interviewed Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta and Oakland Athletics control coach Mark Kotsay, but they are now out of the running. The only other known managerial candidate was Red Sox third-base coach Carlos Febles, who has been in the organization for 13 years, but has only been a major-league coach for one season.

Roenicke, 63, managed the Milwaukee Brewers for five years and has 21 years of major-league coaching experience. He also has coordinated the Red Sox's spring-training camp the last two years.

Roenicke takes over a team undergoing tremendous upheaval with the firing of GM David Dombrowski in September and Cora in January, and the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers, which is expected to soon be finalized.

*** *Associated Press***

AP Source: Red Sox will send Betts, Price to Dodgers

BOSTON (AP) — Two days before the start of spring training, the Boston Red Sox have again agreed to send 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts and pitcher David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a reworked deal, a person with knowledge of the negotiations told The Associated Press on Sunday.

The Red Sox will receive Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, the person told the AP on the condition of anonymity because the deal still needed the approval of Major League Baseball. Boston was to send cash to the Dodgers to offset Price's salary, reportedly half of the \$96 million still owed to the 2012 AL Cy Young Award winner.

A three-team deal that would have sent Dodgers pitcher Kenta Maeda to the Twins for pitcher Brusdar Graterol and then flipped Graterol to the Red Sox fell apart last week when Boston balked at Graterol's medical records. Los Angeles and Minnesota completed a separate deal on Sunday night, a person familiar with that deal told the AP.

But the Red Sox and Dodgers spent the weekend finding another way to complete the deal that put Betts in Dodgers blue while allowing Boston to get under the collective bargaining tax threshold in 2020. The 2018 World Series champions will save tens of millions of dollars this season in salary and penalties, but at the expense of one of the best players in baseball.

Los Angeles has won seven straight NL West titles, averaging more than 100 wins over the past three seasons, but has only a pair of NL pennants to show for it, twice losing in the World Series to teams that were later accused of cheating. With Betts and Price, the Dodgers have what they hope will be the final pieces they need to win their first Series since 1988.

Betts will earn \$27 million this year; he is eligible to become a free agent after the season and has turned down a nine-figure contract extension. To get him for one year, the Dodgers agreed to part with Downs, a middle infielder who batted .276 with 24 homers and 86 RBIs at Single- and Double-A last year, and Wong, a catcher who batted .281 with 24 homers and 82 RBIs in Single- and Double-A.

Price is due \$96 million over the final three years of a \$217 million, seven-year deal he signed before the 2016 season. After helping Boston win a franchise-record 108 games and the World Series in 2018, he missed time last year with a wrist injury and went 7-5 with a 4.28 ERA in 22 starts.

The Red Sox remain without a manager three weeks after firing Alex Cora for his role in the Houston Astros' 2017 sign-stealing scandal; Major League Baseball has not announced the results of its investigation into whether Cora implemented a similar scheme when he took over in Boston in '18. Pitchers and catchers are due to report to spring training on Tuesday.

AP source: Dodgers, Twins, Sox divvy Betts deal into 2 swaps

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Moving Mookie Betts out of Boston proved to be quite the task for the cost-cutting Red Sox.

The trade wound up taking all week — and being divvied into two different deals.

The Minnesota Twins agreed Sunday to send bullpen prospect Brusdar Graterol to the Los Angeles Dodgers for starting pitcher Kenta Maeda, according to a person with direct knowledge of the deal, five days after the initial Betts-headlined trade with the Red Sox was held up.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the deals had not yet been announced. The Twins also agreed to send one of their draft picks in the competitive balance round this summer — 67th overall — and a minor leaguer to the Dodgers for \$10 million and a minor leaguer to settle their portion of the trade.

Graterol was first headed for the Red Sox as part of a three-team swap agreed to Tuesday that moved Betts, a four-time All-Star, and starting pitcher David Price to the Dodgers. But the Red Sox, as first reported by The Athletic, raised questions about the health of the hard-throwing Graterol's arm.

The resulting renegotiation was resolved with the Red Sox and Dodgers conducting their own trade involving Betts and Price. The Twins and Dodgers technically now have a separate deal, the person said. The trades, of course, are subject to medical reviews before finalization.

The 21-year-old Graterol, who can touch triple digits on the radar gun with his fastball, missed time last season for Double-A Pensacola with a shoulder injury. The right-hander recovered in time to make his major league debut with the Twins and pitch in the postseason. The Twins confirmed last month their intent to focus on developing him as a reliever, rather than a starter.

Maeda, who spent his first four major league seasons with the Dodgers after coming over from Japan, likely will slide into the middle of Minnesota's rotation. The right-hander has a 3.87 ERA with 641 strikeouts in 589 career innings, including some late-season and postseason stints in relief.

Maeda made 103 starts over the last four seasons for the Dodgers, but their deep rotation allowed them to put him in the bullpen occasionally, too, and his desire has been to be a full-time starter. The 31-year-old didn't make his major league debut until age 27 when he came over from the Hiroshima Carp. His \$25 million, eight-year contract was written heavily with incentives that could make it worth as much as \$106.2 million. That's because the Dodgers discovered in his physical at the time "irregularities" in his elbow.

Maeda's deal entitles him to \$6.5 million annually based on starts: \$1 million each for 15 and 20, and \$1.5 million apiece for 25, 30 and 32 starts. He can earn \$3.5 million annually based on innings pitched: \$250,000 for 90 and each additional 10 through 190, and \$750,000 for 200. The deal includes a \$1 million assignment bonus each time he is traded.

To build their rotation behind ace José Berríos, the Twins re-signed Jake Odorizzi and Michael Pineda earlier this winter and signed free agents Homer Bailey and Rich Hill. Pineda can't pitch until mid-May because of a remaining suspension for a banned diuretic, and Hill won't be ready until mid-summer after elbow surgery. Maeda's arrival, then, will significantly reduce the number of starts the Twins will have to give to more inexperienced candidates. Randy Dobnak, Devin Smeltzer and Lewis Thorpe, who all debuted as rookies last year, will be given the longest looks in spring training.

Benintendi, Red Sox agree to \$10 million, two-year deal

BOSTON (AP) — Outfielder Andrew Benintendi and the Boston Red Sox avoided arbitration by agreeing to a \$10 million, two-year contract on Saturday.

He will earn \$3.4 million this year and \$6.6 million in 2021.

The 25-year-old hit .277 with 51 homers and 259 RBIs in his first three-plus seasons in the major leagues. In 2018, he led all players with 15 runs in the postseason while helping the Red Sox win the World Series. His game-ending catch in Game 4 of the ALCS was The Associated Press “Play of the Year.”

He hit .266 with 13 homers, 68 RBIs and 10 stolen bases last year, when he made \$717,500. Eligible for arbitration for the first time, Benintendi had asked for \$4.15 million and had been offered \$3.4 million when proposed salaries were exchanged last month.

Twelve players remain scheduled for arbitration hearings, which run through Feb. 21, including Red Sox left-hander Eduardo Rodríguez.

Teams have won all three hearings this year, involving Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Joc Pederson, Atlanta reliever Shane Greene and Minnesota pitcher José Berríos.