

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, February 11, 2020

*** *The Boston Globe***

Chaim Bloom has a plan, and his conviction deserves a chance

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — A phalanx of seven television cameras lined up along the sidewalk adjacent to the back entrance of JetBlue Park at 11:30 a.m. on Monday, waiting for Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom to arrive. A dozen print reporters were present as well.

You can be quite sure that never happened in the 15 years Bloom worked for the Tampa Bay Rays.

Bloom paused briefly and said he might have something to tell reporters later. He then joined his staff in the second-floor offices that overlook the practice fields.

Nearly eight hours later, Bloom emerged to announce the details of a trade that will define his tenure with the Red Sox.

Simply put: This had better work.

To hear Bloom tell the tale, trading Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo and two prospects was something he would have considered even if the Red Sox were only slightly over baseball's \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold.

"Everything is part of the calculus. But I don't know that it would have changed the calculus all that significantly given the big picture of our position, given the need to have a strong farm system to sustain competitiveness," Bloom said. "You need a sustainable roster to compete year after year after year in this division."

Sustainability is the watchword of the Bloom administration, the notion to always be looking ahead and building a wide talent base instead of putting everything into one season.

If the Sox turn their newfound financial flexibility into a team that wins multiple championships over two or three years, he'll be proven right. That's why, as much as you may hate Betts going to the Dodgers and making them a good bet to win the World Series, you can't judge this trade today.

"Knowing how great a player Mookie is, how important he's been to us, it had to be high bar for us to consider moving him," Bloom said. "This return met that bar."

Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran took questions about the trade alone in a small room. Principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, and team president Sam Kennedy were not present, a product of the timing.

"We believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox," Henry said in a statement.

Henry, presumably, will further explain why he allowed Bloom to take a course of action that brings with it considerable risk.

Betts is a given, one of the best players in the game at the peak of his considerable talents. In return, the Red Sox received a chance to build a championship team in a different way.

It could work. Bloom played a major role in how Tampa Bay has tormented the Red Sox and Yankees in recent years by being better at player development and roster management. The Rays are bloodless, trading players at the peak of their value to get younger, less expensive, and often better players in return.

Take that formula and mix it with a much larger payroll and Bloom could turn the Sox into a sustainable — there's that word again — powerhouse.

If it doesn't work, if the young players he brings in don't develop, Bloom will be the poor fool who traded Mookie Betts.

"You can't be afraid to do something that you think is right in the big picture," Bloom said.

And this can't be a five-year plan. The Sox may have given up on this season, but they have to get back in the box for 2021 and beyond.

Bloom said he fully expects the Sox to compete this season. But trading Betts and Price a few days before the start of spring training sent a clear message that ownership is more focused on the future.

"It's reasonable to expect we're going to be worse without [Betts and Price]," Bloom said.

If the Sox fall out of contention in July, it would only make sense for Bloom to make more even trades to improve the farm system. If this is the plan, double down on it.

The Sox very badly need actual pitching prospects, not the future relievers they have. The one downside of the return for Betts and Price is that it didn't include a young pitcher.

"At the end of the day, we chose to prioritize talent," Bloom said. "If you can maximize the talent on your team, it gives you more options, more flexibility to be able to fill holes and pursue whatever you don't have."

If you hate this trade, have at it. I'm with you. I'd rather watch Betts play at Fenway Park for another six months.

Just don't judge it yet. Bloom has a plan and this was the first step. He believes in what he's doing, and that conviction deserves a chance.

Chaim Bloom: Red Sox likely worse without Mookie Betts, David Price, but excited by return

Julian McWilliams

A team rarely gets equal value in return when it trades talents like Mookie Betts and David Price. The club tries to get the most it can, then has no choice but to move on.

In the case of the Red Sox, this is a truth they had to come to accept.

The Sox made the deal official, sending Betts and Price to the Dodgers in exchange for Alex Verdugo, and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

"What Mookie and David are capable on the field is a lot," Bloom said after the announcement of the trade that took almost a week. "I certainly think it's reasonable to expect that we're going to be worse without them, but we have real good talent coming back."

Verdugo can't fill Betts's shoes in right field, and it would be unreasonable to think otherwise. One American League executive who saw him play in Double A compared him to Nick Markakis.

“Gifted, talented, with a plus offensive approach,” the executive said back then. “Beautiful swing, down the road thump. Plays the game, not afraid, and natural swagger permeates. He successfully played center field through Double A. Cadillac approach and demeanor will be read and dissected in multiple ways.”

In 377 plate appearances with the Dodgers last season, Verdugo hit .294 with 12 homers and an .817 OPS.

“Alex Verdugo is a really talented baseball player on both sides of the ball,” Bloom said. “He could really hit. He has power, but not just power. He’s a really good hitter. Defensively, he can play all three positions.”

However, Verdugo was pegged a “polarizing figure” by the executive. Bloom said the team did their due diligence when looking into Verdugo’s makeup.

“We know those questions are out there,” Bloom said. “With him, and just as we would with any player, there’s a really extensive vetting process. I think every player in different ways needs the support of the organization to thrive and do his best. We try to provide that support to all of our players.”

As for Downs, he made strides last season, hitting .276 with 24 homers between High A and Double A.

“Jeter Downs has raked from Day 1,” the same AL exec said. “Good athlete, power, and speed profile. Sound defender with tenacious drive and a high motor.”

As for Wong, he was a shortstop in college who converted to a catcher, so the athleticism is there. He’s extremely versatile and, while he still has some way to go, he could be a potential backup option for the Sox moving forward.

“These are two guys who we were really excited to acquire,” Bloom said. “Both of them, we think, have the potential to help us at the big-league level. Obviously, there’s still some development ahead for both of them. Everything that we’ve heard, the background on the human being, is outstanding on both of them.”

Verdugo, Wong, and Downs are set to be a part of the club’s big league camp.

Betts and Price, meanwhile, are headed to Hollywood, while darker days might await in Boston.

Here’s what John Henry had to say about the Mookie Betts trade

Christopher Price

Although no representatives of Red Sox ownership were present for Monday’s press conference in Fort Myers, Fla., to announce the deal that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to Los Angeles, the team issued a statement.

“In trading a great player, a beloved player, we recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is,” principal owner John Henry said in the statement. “While the organization in its entirety very much wanted to see Mookie in a Red Sox uniform for the length of his career, we believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox. We thank Mookie for his incredible contributions, both on and off the field.”

“David’s arrival in Boston paved the way for a historic chapter for the Red Sox,” Henry continued. “His presence at the top of our rotation was critical to winning three consecutive division championships, and his 2018 Postseason performance put both his talent and tenacity on full display. We appreciate what both Mookie and David brought to our club, and are grateful that they will forever be Red Sox World Series Champions.”

Red Sox say they’re not punting on 2020, but big trade leans on long view

Alex Speier

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Chaim Bloom didn't want to sugarcoat what he'd done.

The trade that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, along with a commitment to pay \$48 million of the remaining \$96 million owed to Price the next three years, in exchange for outfielder Alex Verdugo and a pair of prospects — middle infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong — became official around 7:15 p.m. on Monday night. Minutes after that, the Red Sox chief baseball officer took stock of the deal and the motivation to complete it.

In Betts, Bloom said, the Sox gave up one of the best players and people ever to wear a Red Sox uniform. Price, meanwhile, was a central contributor to a championship in 2018. Their absence has obvious implications for 2020.

"I certainly think it's reasonable to expect that we're going to be worse without them," said Bloom.

So why do it? Why sacrifice the team's best player and one of its established starters — a veteran lefthander who, despite growing durability questions, has proven he can be a rotation anchor when healthy?

The answer, Bloom said, was a need to emphasize the long-term, both by adding young talent to the organization and by improving the team's financial flexibility — and thus creating more spending options — moving forward.

In recent years, the talent base in the upper levels of the minor leagues — the players who can impact the roster for several years, many with low salaries that permit additional spending on veterans — has thinned due to trades and prospects graduating to the big leagues. With Betts under team control for just one additional year before reaching free agency, the team saw an opportunity to infuse young talent into the big league roster (Verdugo) and upper levels of the system (Downs and Wong, both of whom will be in big-league camp).

"This trade is a very hard one to make. But our mission, our charge as a department, is to compete consistently year-in and year-out, and to put ourselves in position to win as many championships as we can. That's behind everything we do," said Bloom. "We can only accomplish that goal with a talent base at all levels of the organization that is deep, broad, and sustainable. Acquiring Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs, and Connor Wong represents a major step forward for our talent base and will help us win consistently for many years."

Meanwhile, dealing Betts and Price sheds \$42 million (for luxury tax purposes) in 2020, allowing the team to get its payroll below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold for the coming year.

The Sox led the majors in spending in both 2018 and 2019, with increasing luxury tax penalties as a result. By getting below the threshold in 2020, the team will significantly lower the penalties associated with spending past it in future years, in turn allowing it to channel more of future annual budgets into player salaries and less into taxes.

That reset of the luxury tax penalties, along with tens of millions of dollars in revenue-sharing rebates that would have been eliminated without getting below the luxury tax threshold every few years, will give the team more options and flexibility to spend moving forward.

But what of 2020? Bloom shook off the notion that the team was sacrificing the coming year.

"We fully expect to compete in 2020," said Bloom. "The frontline talent on our major league roster can play with anybody, and we've worked all winter to improve our depth so that we can weather the ups and downs of the season."

Bloom noted prior examples of extreme season-to-season divergences from projections. In 2013, the Sox were considered unlikely to contend after they dealt three key roster members (Adrian Gonzalez, Josh Beckett, and Carl Crawford) the prior August. That team won a championship. Likewise, the back-to-back years of 108 victories in 2018 and 84 in 2019 with a virtually unaltered roster highlighted how seasons follow unexpected arcs.

The Sox possess more talent, Bloom suggested, than last year's third-place finish. And if the roster coalesces in certain ways, then despite the departures of Betts and Price, the Sox feel the playoffs remain within reach in the coming year.

But that optimistic outlook is far from a guarantee. To the contrary, the deal was driven by the willingness to look beyond the immediate season and operate from a long-term perspective.

"Ultimately," said Sox GM Brian O'Halloran, "we have to make the best decisions for the Red Sox to compete both in 2020 and the years beyond, the next five to 10 years. We need to put ourselves in the best position to sustain success."

The Sox believe they've done that, but the process to get to that point wasn't smooth or direct. For much of the offseason, Bloom said, the Sox expected to keep Betts in 2020, and the team didn't actively shop him to other clubs. But later in the offseason, teams approached the Sox with improved offers — the sort that convinced the team that some short-term pain would be worth the improved long-term outlook.

Yet even once the Sox committed to going down the road of trading Betts as well as Price to the Dodgers, the late stages of the deal proved rocky. The Sox initially agreed last Tuesday to a three-team deal with the Dodgers and Twins that would have brought Verdugo and righthander Brusdar Graterol to Boston, with Los Angeles sending starter Kenta Maeda to Minnesota.

That deal fell apart after the Sox reviewed Graterol's medical file and deemed him less likely than expected to have a long-term future as a starter. The Sox and Twins tried unsuccessfully to adjust the deal with an additional prospect.

Bloom didn't go into specifics, but expressed some regret about the disruption to negotiations, which left the trade and several players in limbo from Tuesday until a revised agreement for two separate deals — between the Sox and Dodgers, as well as the Dodgers and Twins — was reached on Sunday.

"What was unique about this one was how publicly it played out," said Bloom. "Mostly, we just felt bad for the teams involved, and especially for the players involved."

Bloom took issue with suggestions that the initial three-team trade unraveled as a result of Red Sox ownership getting cold feet in response to an avalanche of negative public reactions to the initial deal.

"Absolutely untrue," said Bloom. "We had to prioritize what was right in the big picture for the Red Sox over the fan reaction. It certainly did not catch us off guard. . . . Obviously we know the type of player Mookie is, we know how much he matters to our fans. We knew it would hurt, and it's going to hurt for a little while, but again, the big picture was our biggest priority."

To the Sox, the big-picture view ultimately required the sacrifice of two players indelibly linked with the franchise's most recent championship — a gamble as bold and ambitious as it was painful.

Eduardo Rodriguez scheduled for arbitration hearing Wednesday

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Red Sox pitchers and catchers have their first workout Wednesday. But Eduardo Rodriguez is scheduled to be in Phoenix for his salary arbitration hearing.

Rodriguez is seeking \$8.975 million, while the Red Sox filed at \$8.3 million. Unless the sides come to an agreement beforehand, a three-person panel will hear testimony and choose one of the figures.

The Sox once were open to splitting the difference and avoiding the contentiousness of presenting evidence as to why their player deserved less while he sat there listening. But now, they will go to a hearing if the sides aren't able to agree.

The Sox also could sign Rodriguez to a multiyear contract, as was the case with Andrew Benintendi on Saturday. He avoided a hearing by agreeing to a two-year, \$10 million deal.

"Right now we'll see if [my agents] get a call from them," Rodriguez said. "We'll see what happens."

With Chris Sale and Nate Eovaldi coming off injuries and Martin Perez pitching to a 5.12 ERA for the Minnesota Twins last season, Rodriguez is a vital member of the rotation. The 26-year-old lefthander was 19-6 with a 3.81 ERA last season.

"Just wait and see," Rodriguez said when asked if he could repeat that performance.

Chavis feels ready

Michael Chavis was being developed as a corner infielder in the minors before the Red Sox called him up last April and put him at second base.

It was a risk that worked. Chavis started 40 games at second base and handled the position better than expected. He was minus-2 defensive runs saved, which isn't too bad; Brock Holt also was minus-2 at second base in 56 starts.

"It was a challenge physically because you have to do different things," Chavis said. "So I approached the offseason to prepare for that."

In anticipation of being used as a utility player, Chavis worked on his quickness and athleticism. He dropped some weight and focused on having better reactions.

"I think it'll help at second, third, first, or even the outfield if I play some games there," he said. "It was productive."

Chavis had a .766 OPS last season along with 18 home runs and 58 RBIs. He missed the final six weeks of the season with a sprained left shoulder.

"The biggest thing for me after the season was getting healthy," Chavis said. "However they want to use me, I feel ready."

Here they come

Along with Chavis, new arrivals to camp included Benintendi, Rafael Devers, Darwinzon Hernandez, and Christian Vazquez. The coaching staff arrived as well . . . Brandon Workman led the Sox with 16 saves last season. But he didn't arrive at camp assuming he would be the closer. "That's not my call," he said.

I guess it's time we accept that Mookie Betts is gone

Chad Finn

Now that we're past the fleeting hope that the deal would crumble and the Red Sox have gone and traded the marvelous Mookie Betts to the Dodgers (for real this time), I suppose we must come to the acceptance portion of the program.

I'm not suggesting there's anything resembling grief in the Red Sox' soulless, financially motivated decision — can we call it a mandate now that it's done? — to trade the most complete, like near-perfect player they've developed in generations as he enters his age-27 season.

To suggest there's anything to grieve about in baseball would be to reveal a woeful lack of perspective; baseball at its best is a satisfying shared experience, a sunny diversion from the frequent heaviness of life. Its effects should be only positive. I learned this lesson on Oct. 27, 2004, by the way.

But the seven stages of grief . . . well, they can feel familiar, in that much smaller way, when it comes to your sports teams letting you down. There was certainly denial, when rumors percolated months ago that the Red Sox might deal Betts to get under the luxury-tax threshold. I've written at least a half-dozen columns about Betts's status in recent months, and all of those were pocked with denial, anger, and bargaining.

But now it's done. Mookie Betts is a Dodger. Promising Alex Verdugo comes as his replacement in right field. And prospects Jeter Downs (a shortstop) and Connor Wong (catcher/infielder) arrive to bolster the Red Sox' thin farm system.

I've already spent many words before the deed was done on what Betts has meant to the Sox and why trading him is such an unfortunate twist. I'll spare you the full reiteration and just say this:

I think he was underappreciated by a lot of Red Sox fans. I think he was totally justified in asking for \$420 million, presuming that he did, since it would be the second-highest total salary in a contract to Mike Trout's \$430 million, and Betts is the second-best player in baseball. I think it's wise for the Red Sox to get under the tax threshold this season, but trading Betts should not have been the endgame before spring training even starts. I think it's a sad day when one of the best players the Red Sox have ever had becomes someone else's superstar. I think Jim Rice was telling the truth, and that Mookie told the truth to him.

And so, with the permanent caveat that it stinks that this happened, it's the hour of acceptance. We're moving on.

I'll say this about the reworked version of this deal, compared with the original one that would have brought pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins in a three-way deal:

I loathe it a little less.

Downs, who hit 24 homers and had an .888 OPS across two levels of the minors last year at age 20, is a legitimately excellent prospect who could end up the everyday second baseman in a year or two. He has said he emulates the player he is named after, and hey, that's worked out pretty well for Xander Bogaerts, an unabashed Derek Jeter fan.

I much prefer getting Downs (and lottery ticket Wong) to Graterol, who already has had Tommy John surgery and dealt with shoulder issues last year. It sounds to me like his best-case scenario is a Dellin Betances type of career, though it is interesting that the Dodgers made a separate trade to acquire him. Guess they weren't that worried about his medicals. I'm sure we'll track his career from afar, what with his brief, weird place in Red Sox history.

I do think it is telling that the Dodgers went out of their way to make this deal work by upgrading it to include Downs. They must have considered the first version of it a total heist. Maybe they still do. I mean, they have Mookie Betts on their side now.

But giving up one year of Betts (since the Red Sox weren't going to give him what he's worth) for five years of Verdugo (who should be pretty similar to Andrew Benintendi), one excellent prospect (Downs), and one somewhat interesting one (Wong), plus that desired financial wiggle room, is a difficult job well done by chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom.

He'll probably never face a more challenging decision (or, you know, mandate) in his tenure, and I think he did the best he could with this.

Trading Betts shouldn't have been necessary. But the only people who matter — the ones that run the Red Sox — disagreed. He's now a Red Sox great in the past tense.

It is so. And we move on.

See? I told you we've reached acceptance.

It might help if the new kid would change his name to Garciaparra Downs, though.

The Red Sox begin spring training this week. Here's who's already in Fort Myers

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran arrived at Red Sox camp Monday morning and did not offer comment on the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"Maybe later," Bloom said.

The trade, which was completed in Sunday, has not yet been officially announced. The Sox received outfielder Alex Verdugo and two prospects, infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong.

Related: Meet Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, the newest Red Sox prospects

The Red Sox also are waiting for Major League Baseball to reveal the findings of its investigation the 2018 team for allegedly stealing signs. That report could be released early this week.

The Sox also have yet to name a manager for this season. Bench coach Ron Roenicke, who also arrived on Monday, is in line for the job.

Pitchers and catchers report Tuesday with their first practice set for Wednesday. A large group of pitchers — Nate Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez, Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman among them — worked out on Monday.

Catcher Christian Vazquez was on hand as well.

Andrew Benintendi, Jackie Bradley Jr., Michael Chavis, and Rafael Devers also arrived at camp.

Benintendi agreed to two-year, \$10 million contract on Saturday.

Key dates

- Wednesday: First workout for pitchers and catchers.
- Feb. 17: First full-squad workout.
- Feb. 22: Sox open Grapefruit League schedule against Tampa Bay.
- March 24: Sox break camp after hosting Atlanta.
- March 26: Opening Day at Toronto.

Meet Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, the prospects the Red Sox acquired for Mookie Betts

Jenna Ciccotelli and Hayden Bird

The details of the Red Sox' trade of Mookie Betts to the Dodgers finally appear complete. In exchange for the superstar outfielder and pitcher David Price, the Red Sox will get Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs, and Connor Wong.

Verdugo is a known quantity; he appeared in 106 games with Los Angeles last season. But Downs and Wong are both prospects. Here's what you need to know about them:

Jeter Downs

Yes, his name is a reference to a Hall of Famer.

Downs, a middle infielder, was in fact named after Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter.

"When he came into the major leagues [in 1995], he was the name," Downs explained to MLB.com's Mark Sheldon in 2017. "He was the thing. He was shining. It was 'Jeter this, Jeter that.'"

"It was actually my mom's idea. My brother got Jerry from my dad [Jerry Sr.]. 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."

Downs tries to emulate the former Yankee.

"That's how I pride myself," Downs told Sheldon. "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."

He was a first-round pick.

Downs was taken 32nd overall in the 2017 MLB draft by the Cincinnati Reds. Born in Colombia, he grew up in Florida. Before being drafted and signing with the Reds, he had committed to play college baseball at the University of Miami.

His brother already plays in the Red Sox system.

Jerry Downs, Jeter's older brother, was selected by the Red Sox in the 15th round of the 2015 draft. In his five seasons at various levels, topping out in Double A Portland last season, Jerry has compiled a .331 on-base and a .695 OPS as a first baseman.

He's already been a part of a blockbuster trade.

In December 2018, Jeter Downs was sent from the Reds to the Dodgers along with Josiah Gray and Homer Bailey. In exchange, Los Angeles sent Matt Kemp, Yasiel Puig, Alex Wood, Kyle Farmer, and cash to Cincinnati.

He has the potential to become a power-hitting middle infielder.

In 2019, Downs played at two levels of the Dodgers organization, totaling 24 home runs with a .362 on-base and an .888 OPS as a 20-year-old.

Scouts also have praised his defense. Perhaps the best-case scenario for the Red Sox would be that he blossoms into a double-play partner for current shortstop Xander Bogaerts as a second baseman.

Connor Wong

He's relatively new to the position.

Wong, who was born in Houston and grew up in nearby Pearland, Texas, primarily played shortstop in high school, though his coach Anthony Scalise told the Houston Chronicle that he was a true utility player who also could throw more than 90 miles per hour on the mound.

As a true freshman at the University of Houston in 2015, Wong started 62 of 63 games at shortstop after earning a first-team all-state nod there as a high school senior.

As a college sophomore, he transformed into a utility player, starting in all 59 games between shortstop, third base, and behind the plate. That got the 6-foot-1-inch Wong noticed, and he was selected by the Dodgers in the third round (100th overall) of the 2017 draft.

“Who wouldn’t want a guy that can catch, play short, pitch, and play the outfield?,” Scalise told the Chronicle. “He doesn’t back down from any challenge. If you tell Connor he can’t do something, he’ll say, ‘Watch me,’ and then show you he can.”

The 28th-ranked Dodgers prospect in 2019, Wong has primarily caught, but seen time at second and third base during his professional career.

“Being versatile helps me get out on the field, even if there’s a guy that’s better than me at a certain position,” Wong told Dodgers Way in 2018. “Versatility gets you out there every day, and that’s what counts in the end.”

He packs a powerful swing . . . when he makes contact.

Splitting time between High A and Double A in 2019, Wong blasted 24 home runs while compiling a .281/.336/.541 slash line, with 24 doubles and 82 RBIs.

He also struck out 143 times, swinging and missing having plagued Wong since his first year in pro ball.

“Wong displayed some wiry strength, but used more of a controlled approach at Houston before turning his righthanded swing loose in pro ball,” his MLB prospect report said. “He aggressively looks to drive the ball now and does to all fields, though he’ll need to make some adjustments after striking out at a 32 percent clip in 2018.”

He helped the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes to a championship.

In 2018, the Quakes won the California League championship. Wong appeared in 102 games, hitting .269/.350/.480 in his first full pro season.

“We just had a really special team,” Wong said. “We came to the ballpark a lot of days and just knew we were going to win. It was that kind of confidence and chemistry that we had.”

He played in the Cape Cod League.

After a summer with the Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox in 2015, Wong returned to the Cape Cod League with the Bourne Braves in 2016 and was a starting catcher in the league’s All-Star Game.

In the Cape League, his versatility showed again. He was the starting left fielder for Bourne on Opening Day in 2016, and in 2015, he said he preferred pitching.

He wouldn’t be the first in his family to play in the majors.

Wong’s stepfather, Matt Maysey, had a brief MLB career. A pitcher, he appeared in 25 games for Montreal and Milwaukee in 1992–93, with a 5.55 ERA. He singled in his only at-bat, ending his career with that elusive 1.000 batting average.

“Connor’s stepdad has pounded baseball into him his whole life, and he understands the game,” Scalise said. “Throw in his God-given talent, his work ethic, and the fact that he’s a great kid, and he’s the perfect player to have on your team.”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Chaim Bloom prioritizes big picture behind decision to trade Mookie Betts

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — Chaim Bloom understood the risks involved in making this type of move. He knew that it would certainly make the team worse. And he expected the visceral reaction that came from the fans when he pulled the trigger.

And yet, the Red Sox’ new chief baseball officer, to borrow a line from Patriots coach Bill Belichick, did what he felt was in the best interest of the baseball team moving forward.

After nearly a week of waiting, reworking the original deal and finally finalizing it, the news officially came down here Monday night at JetBlue Park: Mookie Betts is officially no longer a member of the Red Sox, shipped west with David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for three young players: Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs and Connor Wong. Done deal.

Bloom’s first major move in charge of the Red Sox may be the biggest move he’ll ever make, and he understood the gravity of it all. Most of all, he did it with the future of the franchise in mind.

“This trade was a very hard one to make, but our mission and charge as a department is to compete consistently year in and year out, and to put ourselves in position to win as many championships as we can,” Bloom said as he opened his press conference announcing the trade Monday night. “That’s behind everything we do, and we can only accomplish that goal with a talent base at all levels of the organization that is deep, broad and sustainable.”

Multiple times, Bloom referred to the big picture when referring to the reasons behind making such a decision. The biggest reason for dealing Betts, beyond any uncertainty that may have existed in him not signing a long-term extension with the Red Sox next winter, was to get under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold for 2020, a goal the team publicly stated was an objective late last season.

But trimming payroll by dealing Betts, who was owed \$27 million this season, and Price, who the Sox will reportedly pay half his remaining salary, wasn’t the end-all, be-all behind the decision, according to Bloom. It was just a piece of the puzzle.

“The goal to get under the CBT is not an end in itself,” Bloom said. “It’s part of a larger goal, our biggest goal, which is to put ourselves in position to compete and win sustainably for as many years as we can, and using our resources effectively is a means to that end. It’s part of that goal. So we wanted to get under the CBT in service to that larger goal, and we weren’t going to do it in a way that wasn’t going to help us with that bigger goal.

“The CBT was not a major factor in us deciding to do this deal, as much as it was a goal for us this offseason.”

Bloom said the team explored several different moves over the course of the offseason in search of finding a means to that major goal.

“As difficult as it was and as difficult as it continues to be emotionally, we felt that where this trade positions us in terms of the big picture, in terms of our long-term future, was a large enough step forward that despite it being difficult, it was something that we needed to do,” Bloom said.

Betts has made no secrets about his intentions of testing free agency next offseason, and Bloom said last month that his expectation was that the 2018 American League MVP would be on the Red Sox' Opening Day roster. If there were any last-minute attempts to negotiate a long-term pact with Betts, Bloom wouldn't say, but the risk of losing him for nothing was certainly real.

"I will say this generally, I think when you have a star player that's approaching free agency, you know it's going to take a sizable commitment to keep them here, and those commitments obviously have a lot of positives, and they also have risks," Bloom said. "I think you have to assess the positives and risks of that in context of the larger picture of what you're trying to accomplish and how you feel it's going to impact that goal of trying to compete and win as much as we can over the course of that time.

"In the end, we felt what this move would be able to do for us toward that goal was the most impactful positive path for us."

When news first broke of a trade involving Betts last Tuesday, the fan reaction was expectedly strong. But Bloom said he and his staff "certainly anticipated" it, and contrary to reports, the reaction did not affect them or make them rethink doing the deal, Bloom said.

"It wasn't our No. 1 priority as a baseball ops department to be focused on what was going on externally," Bloom said. "We worried obviously about what we were working on, but it was very clear to us that this move would come with a lot of fan backlash. I think we had to prioritize what was right in the big picture for the Red Sox over the fan reaction. It certainly did not catch us off guard.

"As I said, we know how much, obviously we know the type of player Mookie is, we know how much he matters to our fans. We knew it would hurt, and it's going to hurt for a little while, but again, the big picture was our biggest priority. ...

"The big picture in how this fits into our chances to win as much as we can over the course of the next number of years, that had to take precedence. You can't be afraid to do something you think is right in the big picture."

Red Sox can't compete, should turn attention to the future

Jason Mastrodonato

Now that Mookie Betts and David Price are gone, there's a new question to ask as spring training kicks off in Fort Myers this week.

What's stopping the Red Sox from continuing to strip down the roster?

Few are naive enough to think the Red Sox will compete with the Yankees, Rays, Astros and Twins with the group they've got now.

The bridge year is a swell idea for a big market team that can't afford to lose its fanbase with a last-place finish. Or so the thinking goes. But if fans around New England can eventually come to terms with losing Betts, they can understand that sometimes a 70-win season isn't all that different from an 80-win season.

If there are some fresh faces with youthful energy suiting up at Fenway Park, the fans will notice.

Think back to 2015 for a minute.

Pablo Sandoval and Hanley Ramirez were the new faces in town, but the Sox didn't properly address their pitching problems after trading Jon Lester and John Lackey a season before.

It was supposed to be the staff of five aces. The Sox hadn't had as much as a pair.

Four months in, it was clear that the roster was a disaster. Rather than continue on with the mess they had, they took Ramirez out of the lineup and sent him home early. Pablo Sandoval, too, after he went his final 24 games hitting .190 without a home run.

The team got younger. Torey Lovullo had them playing with energy. Twenty-two-year-olds Betts and Xander Bogaerts stepped into leadership roles for the first time and played like the studs they were to become.

Over the final two months, the Sox were an enormously fun team to watch. Betts hit .340 and Bogaerts smacked .332. For the first time in his career, Jackie Bradley Jr. played to his potential, hitting .276 with 30 extra-base hits.

The Sox carried the buzz into 2016, when they increased their win total from 78 to 93 and reclaimed the American League East.

By ripping away the expectations, it freed up the young players of any pressure and gave them a chance to find confidence in the big leagues. It also gave management an opportunity to try new things.

Given a chance to play regularly, Travis Shaw showed the Red Sox that he was a reliable infielder while hitting .274 with 13 homers.

The Sox switched Matt Barnes out of his role as a starter and found gold with him in the bullpen.

They learned that Henry Owens wasn't cut out to be a big leaguer.

There are reasons to look at the 2020 season through the same forward-thinking lense.

Chaim Bloom can do the Rays thing and fidget with some openers.

Can Darwinzon Hernandez be a starter? The Sox have always wondered. Maybe he's good twice through the lineup and then fades. So what? It's 2020. A starter who only goes four innings is acceptable so long as the team is built for it with multi-inning relievers and a deep bullpen.

And what is the one position the Red Sox stacked up on this winter? Relievers.

Since he was hired in October, Bloom has been cutting the fat off the back-end of the Sox' bullpen and replacing departed names with new ones: Josh Osich, Chris Mazza, Austin Brice, Matt Hall and Jeffrey Springs, among others. Some have thus far been failures at the big league level but, for one reason or another, Bloom sees something in them.

As for the homegrown pitchers who have yet to make an impact, new pitching coach Dave Bush knows them well. He's been working with minor leaguers since he was hired in 2016. And he's on the record saying he thinks Hernandez can be a starter, having compared his path to that of Chris Sale, who also spent his first season in the bullpen.

New lefty Martin Perez has an option for 2021 precisely for this: if he unlocks his potential, the Sox get a bargain the following season at just \$6.25 million.

Jose Peraza was signed as the new utility man instead of someone like Brock Holt because Peraza is six years younger, the organization like his power upside and, like Perez, he could remain under team control. He'd become arbitration eligible next year.

Let's see what Bobby Dalbec can do at first base, if Michael Chavis can play the outfield and if Jonathan Arauz is worthy of a big league roster spot.

In reality, the Sox probably can't find suitable trades for expensive veterans like J.D. Martinez, Nathan Eovaldi and Bradley this late into the offseason.

Maybe it'll happen in July, when the Sox are inevitably out of it.

That's no reason to stop watching in 2020. We just have to look for new things. See how the team plays. Check in on their energy level. Look for youth to develop. And hope that they manage with one eye on the future, because 2020 doesn't look so bright.

Red Sox players react to Mookie Betts trade: 'You miss everything about him'

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — It was early on during Michael Chavis' rookie season with the Red Sox last season when he got some of his first bits of advice from Mookie Betts.

Chavis, then 23, was earning some attention for a strong start to his big-league career, and with that came many interviews with the media. Betts watched one and approached the rookie. His advice? Basically, just relax.

"Obviously I had done interviews before, but looking back at it, I was talking a million miles a minute, and I already talked fast already," Chavis recalled Monday at JetBlue Park, where the Red Sox gathered for a workout. "He came to me and was like, 'Bro, you don't have to speed through the interview, they're not going to attack you. Just take your time.'"

It's memories like that one that will stand out to Betts' now former teammates. Beyond how good of a player he was, which was obvious, the way he treated his teammates went a long way, and clearly meant a lot to Chavis, who said Betts took him under his wing.

Betts, who was traded with David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a blockbuster deal that brought three prospects back to Boston, will be missed inside the Red Sox clubhouse in more ways than one.

"You miss everything about him," Chavis said. "You miss his on-field performances as well, but I think he's as good of a guy, if not better, as a player, and I think that goes a long way for how good he is at baseball."

The trade of Betts and Price on the eve of spring training, which officially opens on Wednesday, has left a gaping hole on both the field and in the clubhouse. Chavis' reaction when he heard the news was simply one of sadness.

"D.P. and Mook, I was really close to," Chavis said. "D.P. was actually the first big-leaguer to ever reach out to me as a minor leaguer. Losing him and his personality and my personal connection to him was really sad. ...

"He's as good as it gets," Chavis added of Price. "Cares about the team. I think that sums it up the most. He cares about the team and cares about every single player and person in the clubhouse. Every single person in the clubhouse. Not even just every player. He cares about everybody. He's a genuine, caring person."

That was felt by others, too. Eduardo Rodriguez had a breakout season in 2019 and emerged as the Red Sox' best pitcher, and the left-hander attributed a significant part of his success to Price.

"He was a leader for us, especially pitching wise," Rodriguez said. "Him, (Rick Porcello) and (Chris) Sale last year and the years we played together. He was really a big part of the team. Every time somebody got in trouble or something like that, about the game situation, they were there. Darwinzon (Hernandez), guys like that, D.P. was a big part of that. He's a guy we're really going to miss."

But they also understand it's part of the business. The Red Sox have had to withstand plenty of drama over the last few weeks, with Alex Cora being dismissed as manager for his role in the Astros' 2017 sign-stealing scandal, an ongoing investigation into sign-stealing allegations against their 2018 team and now this trade.

They still arrived to camp on Monday, though, but with no manager and plenty more uncertainty hanging over them. It didn't seem to affect them much. There's certainly disappointment that Betts and Price won't be around anymore, but Chavis characterized the mood at camp as "calm."

"There's definitely a lot of background noise right now, but we'll do our best to block that out and focus on getting ready for the season," said Brandon Workman.

And they'll have to move on, even if the seismic losses of Betts and Price have drastically lowered expectations from the outside for this season. Inside, though, they still believe they can be competitive.

"It's impactful having them leave," Chavis said. "This would be my first full season in the big leagues so it's kind of tough to say exactly how impactful it could be but I think we have a good team, I really do. We have a lot of good players in there. We have a lot of good guys and as close as we are as a team, I really do think we're going to be solid."

On the outside, the sky might be falling around the Red Sox, but they still have confidence in themselves.

"We're out here to play our best, whether Mookie and Price are on the team or not, or anybody else," Workman said. "So we're going to do that, we're going to go out and try to win ballgames just the same as if they were here."

Red Sox notebook: Players approve of Ron Roenicke as new manager

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — Ron Roenicke is not officially the new manager of the Red Sox just yet, but the players seemed to be acting as if it's just inevitable.

If he is the choice, though, they're certainly in approval.

Roenicke, who's been the Red Sox' bench coach for the last two seasons, represents continuity and a comfortable and familiar voice within the clubhouse. With so much uncertainty and drama surrounding the Red Sox as spring training begins this week, the 63-year-old is a logical choice among the players.

"I love him, he's awesome, he's a good dude," said Michael Chavis. "Really knowledgeable about baseball and he's been around the game a long time so it's really cool to see his analysis. He has a nice combination, like, from the old school from his experience but he also has a good understanding of how the new game is developing and how baseball is changing. Just having those kind of different sides in one is very interesting."

USA Today was the first to report last week that the Red Sox were hiring internally to replace Alex Cora, who was dismissed in mid-January for his involvement with the Astros' 2017 sign-stealing operation, and it was reported by multiple outlets that they locked in on Roenicke.

The Red Sox may be waiting for Major League Baseball's investigation into their own allegations in 2018, which commissioner Rob Manfred said was hopeful would come before spring training, before making an announcement. Roenicke was spotted Monday at the Red Sox' spring training facility at JetBlue Park.

"It's a good team for us because we know him, we know how he does everything, he's been a big part of the family, too," said Eduardo Rodriguez. "So it's going to be good for us that he's going to be in charge now."

Added Brandon Workman: “Ron’s great. Everybody loves him. Great baseball guy. My experience with him mostly has been about the running game as a pitcher, but it’ll be exciting seeing him take charge.”

Cora ‘like a father’

Cora’s presence played a large role in Rodriguez’s breakout 2019 season, and that’s not lost on the left-hander. The former manager was particularly hard on Rodriguez going into last season as he demanded more of his pitcher, and the lefty showed Cora’s confidence in a big way.

“He was like a father to me,” Rodriguez said. “Every day. Every day I was throwing a bullpen, every time that I was getting on the mound, he was talking about games, situations, how to control games. Every time I was throwing a bullpen, he was out there with me. ... He helped me out a lot.”

Rodriguez stopped short of saying it’s unfair that Cora was dismissed before MLB’s report of the Red Sox came out.

“He was a huge part of us,” Rodriguez said. “Family, big personality with everybody in the clubhouse. So, it’s going to be hard for us losing him, but like I said, this is part of the business and we’re going to get ready for spring training and get ready for the season.”

Chavis had similar sentiments about Cora.

“I’ll miss Alex a lot,” he said. “I like Alex a lot as a person and as a manager. He took care of me. I can’t say enough about him. He made me comfortable. He knows how tough it is in the first season or just playing professional baseball in general so I was very thankful to have him as my first major league manager and I’ve talked to him about that many times. What has happened does not change my opinion as him as a person.”

Set for arbitration

Rodriguez, the Red Sox’ last unsigned arbitration-eligible player, said Monday that he has an arbitration hearing set for Wednesday in Arizona as he and the team decide what his 2020 salary will be. The Red Sox have reached deals with all of their other arbitration-eligible players this offseason, including coming to terms with Andrew Benintendi over the weekend on a two-year deal to avoid arbitration.

Rodriguez is looking to make \$8.975 million, while the Red Sox filed at \$8.3 million.

“We’re going there (Tuesday), I think the hearing is Wednesday and see what happens after that,” Rodriguez said.

Closer again?

Brandon Workman was one of the Red Sox’ best stories last season as he emerged as the team’s closer and one of the best relievers in baseball. But with mostly the same bullpen, he isn’t expecting anything and isn’t sure if he’ll return to that closer role.

“That’s not my call,” he said.

Either way, it figures to be a big season for Workman, who is scheduled to hit free agency next winter. But asked if he’d like to get that addressed now, he wasn’t worried about it.

“I’m just focused on getting ready for the season,” Workman said. “This time last year, I was trying to make the team. So, I’m just going to do my best to get ready and have a good year.”

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox, Dodgers make Mookie Betts-David Price trade official

Bill Koch

The trade sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers is finally official.

Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran formally announced the deal Monday night at the club's spring training complex in Fort Myers. Boston will send Betts, Price and \$48 million to Los Angeles for outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong.

Both Bloom and O'Halloran immediately acknowledged the obvious. Dealing a generational talent like Betts with one year of team control remaining was guaranteed to provoke a backlash among the Red Sox fan base. Both men insisted such a move was necessary for the club's long-term sustainability, a notion supported by chairman Tom Werner.

"Ultimately, we believe that this will set us up for sustained long-term success," Werner said in a statement. "I want to express our thanks to Mookie and David for the impact they had on our club and our community."

Principal owner John Henry said in September that checking in under the first threshold of the Collective Balance Tax was a "goal, not a mandate." This trade sheds some \$40 million from the Boston payroll, which now sits just south of \$190 million. The Red Sox could add nearly \$20 million in salary and still be in position to reset the CBT penalties they've been subjected to in each of the last two seasons.

"The goal to get under the CBT is not an end in itself," Bloom said. "It's part of a larger goal – our biggest goal – which is to put ourselves in position to compete and win sustainably for as many years as we can."

Betts captured the 2018 American League Most Valuable Player award and rewrote club record books during his five full seasons. The 27-year-old took home four Gold Gloves, three Silver Sluggers and reached four All-Star Games. Betts repeatedly stated his intention to test the market in free agency after the 2020 season, something Boston couldn't allow to happen without receiving significant value in return.

"I think when you have star player who's approaching free agency, you know it's going to take a sizable commitment to keep them here," Bloom said. "Those commitments obviously have a lot of positives, and they also have risks."

"When you have a player the caliber of Mookie you're not actively thinking about the moment you might have to trade him," O'Halloran said. "But we also know with any player, as the years of control diminish, there are different factors that come into play. Ultimately, we have to make the best decisions for the Red Sox to compete in 2020 and the years beyond that."

Price has three years remaining on the \$217-million contract he signed in free agency with the Red Sox prior to the 2016 season. The 34-year-old won his final three starts of the 2018 postseason, including the clinching A.L. Championship Series Game 5 against the Astros and the World Series decider against the Dodgers. Price has battled elbow and wrist injuries over the past three seasons, making just 63 total starts.

"David's arrival in Boston paved the way for a historic chapter for the Red Sox," Henry said. "His presence at the top of our rotation was critical to winning three consecutive (A.L. East) championships, and his 2018 postseason performance put both his talent and tenacity on full display."

The departure of Betts doubly stings considering his status as a homegrown player. He was a fifth-round draft pick out of a suburban Nashville high school in 2011 and progressed through the Boston system, transitioning from the infield to the outfield. Only Angels outfielder Mike Trout has been worth more in terms of FanGraphs wins above replacement since Opening Day in 2016.

“This is a real tough one for a lot of people in the organization to move on from Mookie,” O’Halloran said. “We’ve all seen him grow up here from when he was drafted. A lot of staff members, front office, coaching, medical, teammates – this is a tough one for all of us.”

The 23-year-old Verdugo was a consensus top-40 prospect who made his debut in 2017. He slashed .282/.335/.449 through his first 158 career games and won’t be eligible for free agency until after the 2024 season. Bloom also addressed off-field questions involving Verdugo, who was accused of but never criminally charged with being involved in a 2015 sexual assault during Dodgers spring training.

“The due diligence process there was extensive,” Bloom said. “Obviously that’s a topic we take very seriously, as everybody should. We researched it very thoroughly. At the end of the day we would not have moved forward with the acquisition if we had found anything disqualifying.”

Downs is a top-50 prospect per MLB.com and Wong immediately becomes the top catching prospect among Red Sox minor leaguers. Both players ended the 2019 season at Double-A Tulsa and hit 24 home runs across two levels. Downs is the younger brother of Jerry Downs, a first baseman who played at Class A Salem and Double-A Portland in the Boston system last year.

“The big picture and how this fits into our chances as much as we can over the next number of years, that had to take precedence,” Bloom said. “You can’t be afraid to do something you think is right in the big picture.”

The Red Sox agreed to a three-team deal in principle Tuesday that also involved the Twins, with Boston receiving Verdugo and right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol in return. The 21-year-old Graterol was ultimately traded to the Dodgers in a separate deal, as the Red Sox balked at the medical reports of a pitcher who had Tommy John surgery in 2015 and sat out two months with a right shoulder impingement in 2019. MLB Players Association executive director Tony Clark excoriated all parties involved in a Friday statement urging a swift completion to the deal.

“Mostly we just felt bad for the teams involved, and especially for the players involved,” Bloom said. “That’s not something anybody should have to go through. Unfortunately it’s just the way it happened.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Mookie Betts trade official: Boston Red Sox, Dodgers finalize blockbuster deal that sends Betts, David Price to Los Angeles

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The deal is done. Finally.

The Red Sox announced Monday that their blockbuster trade with the Dodgers is official. Mookie Betts, David Price and half of Price’s remaining \$96 million are headed to Los Angeles. Boston acquired Alex Verdugo as well as prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, as expected.

The Dodgers, Red Sox and Twins initially agreed to terms on a three-team trade Tuesday evening. The original deal had the Red Sox acquiring Verdugo and Twins right-handed pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol. But chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom wasn’t satisfied after a review of Graterol’s medical records showed the 21-year-old righty’s longterm outlook more as a reliever than a starter. Bloom held his ground, ended up with a better return and set the table for the Red Sox to spend in free agency next offseason.

“In trading a great player, a beloved player, we recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is,” principal owner John Henry said in a release. “While the organization in its entirety very much wanted to see Mookie in a Red Sox uniform for the length of his

career, we believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox. We thank Mookie for his incredible contributions, both on and off the field.”

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.

Downs is listed No. 86 on Baseball America’s top 100 and No. 44 on MLB Pipeline’s top 100.

The 21-year-old shortstop/second baseman 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 catcher, 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. He threw out 52% of base stealers (16-for-31) at Double A.

Mookie Betts trade: Boston Red Sox’s Chaim Bloom says notion that deal was slowed by ownership’s hesitation is ‘absolutely untrue’

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom strongly denied the notion that the team’s delayed announcement of the trade that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers was caused by hesitation on the part of the team’s owners.

Bloom, speaking shortly after the deal was announced Monday night, acknowledged reading reports that the weeklong delay between the deal first being reported and the official announcement was thought to be caused by the negative media reaction to the original return. On Saturday, The Athletic’s Ken Rosenthal reported that some parties involved in the trade talks “sensed that negative media reaction to Verdugo-Graterol return for Betts-Price gave Red Sox ownership pause” before pulling the trigger on the blockbuster.

“We did hear that report and that’s absolutely untrue,” Bloom said. “Unfortunately, when these things are going on and especially during the process, that’s not something we’re able to address. But that is not true.”

Originally, the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins agreed to a three-team deal that would have sent Betts, Price and cash to the Dodgers, outfielder Alex Verdugo and righty Brusdar Graterol to the Red Sox and pitcher Kenta Maeda to the Twins. While reviewing Graterol’s medicals, the Red Sox developed some concerns and asked for additional compensation. After five days of discussions, the teams agreed to two separate trades, with the Red Sox receiving infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong in addition to Verdugo instead of Graterol (who went from the Twins to the Dodgers)

It’s clear Los Angeles was much more comfortable with Graterol’s medical records than the Red Sox were.

“I do think in general, these things aren’t binary that you want a player or don’t,” Bloom said. “Everybody’s ascribing different values to different players. In deals where there’s a lot of moving parts, that makes a difference.”

Bloom expressed regret about how the trade progressed in its later stages, with multiple players spending a week in limbo after the original agreement was reported Tuesday night. The fact that the details leaked out before everything was finalized made for an awkward situation for all involved.

“I think what was unique about this one was how publicly it played out,” Bloom said. “Mostly, we just felt bad for the teams involved and, especially, for the players involved. That’s not something anybody should

have to go through. Unfortunately, it's just the way it happened. Our top priority throughout that was to keep the best interests of those other teams, and especially, those players, in mind."

The last week was a rollercoaster for Bloom and his lieutenants, who had to pull off a franchise-altering trade on two occasions (in the original form and then again in the revised one). Bloom admitted there were times when he doubted something would get done.

"Whenever you are dealing with something as complex as this one obviously was, there are usually — and this case was no exception — a lot of points along the way when things are in question," he said.

Though trading Betts was difficult, Bloom said he was proud of how his staff handled a tough week filled with rampant speculation and widespread negative backlash to the deal.

"I think it was difficult for me and difficult for everybody to have to stay silent when you hear your motives being questioned and things like that," he said. "If at the end of the day, what you care about the most is being ethical, being straightforward and keeping the interests in mind of players and other teams, that's the right thing to do. That's what we did. I know there was a lot out there about this. I just want to be very clear, especially for our fans, we prioritized acting straightforwardly and acting ethically at all times and still making sure we were acting in the best interest of the Red Sox."

John Henry on Boston Red Sox trading Mookie Betts: 'We recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Mookie Betts is no longer a member of the Boston Red Sox. He'll wear Dodger blue.

Boston and Los Angeles completed their blockbuster trade Monday evening. Betts and David Price are headed out west. The Red Sox acquired outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom held a press conference here at JetBlue Park on Monday.

Meanwhile, Red Sox owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner and president Sam Kennedy each made the below statements in a press release. Henry and Werner are expected to speak with the media here next Monday when the club participates in its first full squad workout.

Statements from Red Sox on Betts trade:

John Henry: "In trading a great player, a beloved player, we recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is. While the organization in its entirety very much wanted to see Mookie in a Red Sox uniform for the length of his career, we believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox. We thank Mookie for his incredible contributions, both on and off the field.

"David's arrival in Boston paved the way for a historic chapter for the Red Sox. His presence at the top of our rotation was critical to winning three consecutive division championships, and his 2018 Postseason performance put both his talent and tenacity on full display. We appreciate what both Mookie and David brought to our club, and are grateful that they will forever be Red Sox World Series Champions."

Tom Werner: "Today's trade illustrates the difficult decisions necessary to achieve our goal, which has remained unchanged since we became stewards of this franchise nearly two decades ago: to bring multiple World Series Championships to Boston. Ultimately, we believe that this will set us up for sustained long-term success. I want to express our enormous thanks to Mookie and David for the impact they had on our club and our community."

Sam Kennedy: “Both David and Mookie earned legendary status in Boston in 2018. Mookie, becoming the only American League player to win a World Series, MVP, Gold Glove, and Silver Slugger in the same year, and David, with his memorable postseason run as the winning pitcher who clinched both the AL pennant and the club’s ninth World Series Championship. Their time in Boston will always be remembered as historic.”

Mookie Betts, Red Sox-Dodgers trade: ‘The CBT was not a major factor in us deciding to do this deal,’ Chaim Bloom says

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Trading Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers decreased the Red Sox’s 2020 payroll to an estimated \$189.6375 million, more than \$18 million below the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold.

“The goal to get under the CBT is not an end in itself,” Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said Monday. “It’s part of a larger goal — our biggest goal, which is to put ourselves in position to compete and win sustainably for as many years as we can. And using our resources effectively is a means to that end. It’s part of that goal. So we wanted to get under the CBT in service of that larger goal. And we weren’t going to do it in a way that wasn’t going to help us with that bigger goal. So the CBT was not a major factor in us deciding to do this deal as much as it was a goal for us this offseason.”

The Red Sox certainly had financial motives to slash the 2020 payroll below the CBT. They will avoid paying a luxury tax in 2020. Exceeding the base threshold for a third straight year would have led to the highest tax penalties for Boston as a third-time CBT Payor. The Red Sox also will receive their full revenue sharing market disqualification refund in 2020 by staying under the base threshold. Boston’s refund will be higher next offseason because it will include the Oakland Athletics’ forfeited proceeds.

In terms of the larger goal, the Red Sox had baseball motives to slash payroll.

The Sox would have received only a 2021 compensation draft pick after the fourth round for Betts if they had kept him this season and the payroll stayed above \$208 million.

They instead received two prospects and a major league outfielder, Alex Verdugo, who had a strong rookie season and is under team control longterm.

By eliminating half of Price’s contract, the Red Sox also set the table to spend on a top free agent or multiples free agents next offseason. And by staying under the CBT in 2020, the Red Sox also would give up one fewer draft pick and save \$500,000 in international signing bonus money if they sign a qualified free agent next offseason.

“We felt knowing how great a player Mookie is, how important he’s been to us, that it had to be a high bar to consider moving him,” Bloom said. “And in terms of just the impact on the talent return that we got, the impact that return could have on our future, and the flexibility it allows us to build around it, this return met that bar.”

Boston Red Sox trade: Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs, Connor Wong meet ‘high bar’ for return in Mookie Betts, David Price deal

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom is excited about the return Boston received in the blockbuster trade that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

The Red Sox acquired three young players -- outfielder Alex Verdugo, infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong -- in the deal, which was announced Monday night. For Bloom, the trio represented a very strong start to his mission to rebuild a Sox farm system that has been down in recent years.

“We felt, knowing how great a player Mookie is and how important he has been to us, it had to be a high bar for us to consider moving him,” Bloom said. “In terms of the impact of the talented return we got and the impact that return could have on our future and the flexibility it allows us to build around it, this return met that bar.”

Verdugo, 23, has 158 games of major league experience and will immediately replace Betts in right field. The former second-round pick hit .294/.342/.475 with 12 homers in 106 games for the Dodgers last year, graduating from his status as a top-40 prospect in baseball.

“Alex Verdugo is a really talented baseball player on both sides of the ball,” Bloom said. “He can really hit and it’s not just power. He’s a really good hitter. Defensively, he can play all three positions. Tremendous arm, really showed himself last year in a very impressive full season debut. Showed himself as a very talented player. His instincts for the game are very good. He loves to play, loves to compete. He brings a lot of great things to the table.”

Downs and Wong are further away from the majors, both topping out at Double-A last year. Downs, ranked by MLB.com as the No. 44 prospect in all of baseball, is the prize of the group. Wong, a third-round pick in 2017, is a catcher who also has some experience at second and third base.

“These are two guys we’re really excited to acquire,” Bloom said. “Both of them, we think, have the potential to really help us at the big league level. Obviously, there’s still some development ahead of both of them. Everything we have heard on the human beings was just outstanding in both cases.”

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. His future role with the Red Sox might be at second base with Xander Bogaerts entrenched at shortstop.

“Jeter Downs is a middle infielder who is a good athlete and a really good baseball player who this year, took a really big step forward offensively,” Bloom said. “Digging into that performance as our group did, we were really excited by the strides he made. We think he has the chance to be a complete player that can really impact us. Great kid who plays the game with really good feel and calmness. Someone we feel will be really comfortable in the moment.”

Wong is the biggest lottery ticket of the three, having hit 24 home runs in 2019. He’s likely to begin the year at Portland and will immediately become the top catching prospect in the system.

“Connor Wong has also made a lot of strides offensively,” Bloom said. “He’s always had a good offensive approach and has come into some power. He’s a really good athlete behind the plate, so good that he has played second and third before. Those guys are hard to find. Sometimes, when you have really good athletes behind the plate, they can sometimes exceed what you expect of them. So far, he’s progressed really well.”

In a bit of a surprise, the Sox didn’t acquire any pitching in the final version of the deal after backing out of the first proposed deal, which would have netted them Verdugo and Twins pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol. Bloom still considers adding young pitching depth to be one of his top goals as he gets his feet under him in Boston.

“You’d always like to accomplish as many goals as you can in any given trade,” he said. “At the end of the day, we chose to prioritize talent. If you can maximize the talent on your team, it gives you more options and flexibility to fill holes and pursue whatever you don’t have.”

Mookie Betts trade: Boston Red Sox's Chaim Bloom says, 'There was never a point where we were pushing him out there or shopping him'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla.— Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom wouldn't say exactly whether the Red Sox or Dodgers initiated trade talks involving Mookie Betts.

Boston and Los Angeles' blockbuster trade became official Monday. Betts, David Price and half of Price's remaining \$96 million are headed to Los Angeles. The Red Sox acquired major league outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

"There was never a point where we were pushing him (Betts) out there or shopping him," Bloom said here at JetBlue Park on Monday. "We maintained privately the same thing that we did publicly: that we had to be open to all options. Obviously, over the course of the offseason, that included a number of teams checking in with us on him as happens with many players. Once it was clear that the Dodgers in particular were going to be very aggressive, it made sense to engage."

ESPN's Jeff Passan reported in early December "multiple executives" characterized a potential Betts trade as "unlikely to happen." Then Bloom said Jan. 15 he expected Betts to be a member of the 2020 Opening Day roster.

What changed? More teams expressed interest in Betts as the offseason progressed.

"We felt knowing how great a player Mookie is, how important he's been to us, that it had to be a high bar to consider moving him," Bloom said. "And in terms of just the impact on the talent return that we got, the impact that return could have on our future, and the flexibility it allows us to build around it, this return met that bar."

The trade allowed the Red Sox to gain significant financial flexibility to target top free agents next offseason. Price will count for \$16 million — instead of \$31 million — toward the Red Sox's Competitive Balance Tax in 2020, '21 and '22.

WEEI's Lou Merloni reported Jan. 28 the Red Sox offered Betts a 10-year, \$300-million contract last offseason (after his 2018 AL MVP campaign) and he countered with 12 years, \$420 million.

Bloom wouldn't say whether Boston made Betts one final contract offer this offseason.

"We certainly considered all of our options," Bloom said. "We had said for much of this offseason that our expectation is he would be with us this year. I don't think it's appropriate to get into whether or when we had any contract negotiations with Mookie or any player.

"I will say this generally: I think when you have a star player that's approaching free agency, you know it's going to take a sizable commitment to keep them here," Bloom added. "And those commitments obviously have a lot of positives and they also have risks. I think you have to assess the positives and the risks of that in the context of the larger picture of what you're trying to accomplish and how you feel it's going to impact that goal of trying to compete and win as much as we can over the course of that time. And in the end, we felt what this move was able to do for us toward that goal was the most impactful, positive path for us."

Mookie Betts trade: Boston Red Sox still believe they can compete but Chaim Bloom says it's 'reasonable to think we'll be worse without Betts, David Price'

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom still believes his team has a chance to compete in 2020 but acknowledged Monday that Boston faces an uphill battle now that Mookie Betts and David Price have officially been traded to the Dodgers.

“What Mookie and David are capable of on the field is a lot,” Bloom said. “I certainly think it’s reasonable to think we’ll be worse without them but we have real good talent coming back. We’ve added talent to the roster this winter. I think it’s important to point out that we felt at the beginning of the winter that this team had a lot more talent than the 84 wins it put up last year. We still think there’s plenty of talent here to compete.”

Boston finalized its blockbuster trade to send Betts, Price and cash to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo, infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong on Monday night. While Verdugo projects as the starting right fielder on Opening Day, both Downs and Wong will begin the year in the minors and likely won’t make an impact in Boston for a couple of years.

The deal represents two downgrades for the Red Sox, both in the outfield and the starting rotation. While Verdugo will directly replace Betts, there’s no clear option to take Price’s spot on the pitching staff.

“I think it’s fair to say you can’t expect in 2020, for what we received to make up for the contributions we would’ve expected of the two guys that are leaving,” Bloom said. “I don’t think that’s any surprise. But I will say this: we believe strongly enough in the talent level of this team as a whole to believe we can compete.”

Internally, the Red Sox still feel like they can improve on their 84 wins from last season. If Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi are healthy and other players (like Andrew Benintendi and Michael Chavis) step up, Boston has a chance of playing in October after a one-year layoff.

“You’ve seen clubs that are built to win right now have really disappointing seasons,” Bloom said. “You’ve seen clubs that nobody gave a chance — one of them, in 2013 — go and win the World Series. You saw the same team, two years running, win 108 games and 84 games (in 2018 and 2019). We know there’s a lot of variability about what can go on in a season. The important thing is that we feel the talent is there to compete. We’re obviously going to see how the season unfolds. We’re going to support the group as best as we can. But we feel really good about the talent level.”

Mookie Betts trade: ‘Very clear’ to Boston Red Sox ‘this move would come with a lot of fan backlash,’ Chaim Bloom says

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The Red Sox expected backlash from fans and media for trading Mookie Betts.

“We certainly anticipated it,” Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said here at JetBlue Park on Monday. “As we were going through this week obviously it was hard to have a true sense of it. It wasn’t our No. 1 priority as a baseball ops department to be focused on what was going on externally. We were worried about obviously what we were working on. But it was very clear to us that this move would come with a lot of fan backlash. I think that we had to prioritize what we thought was right in the big picture for the Red Sox over the fan reaction. It certainly did not catch us off guard.

“We know the type of player Mookie is,” Bloom added. “We know how much he matters to our fans. We knew it would hurt. And it’s going to hurt for a little while. But again, the big picture was our biggest priority.”

The Red Sox announced Monday their blockbuster trade with the Dodgers is official. Betts, David Price and half of Price’s remaining \$96 million are headed to Los Angeles. Boston acquired major league outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

Betts will be remembered as one of the most talented positional players in Red Sox franchise history. He won the 2018 AL MVP. The four-time American League All-Star has won four Gold Gloves and three Silver Sluggers.

How this trade turns out longterm could be viewed as career-defining for Bloom, who accepted the position of chief baseball officer in October. How does he feel about this being his first major trade?

“If you start thinking about that, it’s going to lead you down paths where you’re not doing the right thing for the organization,” Bloom said. “Every person here in this department, our jobs are to put the interest of the Red Sox first and foremost. And that’s what we had to do. To think about it in my own case that it’s the first big move or something like that, I think it would not be having my priorities straight.”

The Athletic’s Ken Rosenthal tweeted Friday “Some in talks sense that negative media reaction to Verdugo-Graterol return for Betts-Price gave (Boston) ownership pause” and led to the delay.

The Dodgers, Red Sox and Twins initially agreed to terms on a three-team trade Tuesday evening. The original deal had the Red Sox acquiring Verdugo and Twins right-handed pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol. But the Red Sox weren’t satisfied after a review of Graterol’s medical records showed the 21-year-old righty’s longterm outlook more as a reliever than a starter.

“We did hear that report and it’s absolutely untrue,” Bloom said. “Unfortunately when these things are going on, and especially during a process, it’s not something we’re able to address. But that is not true.”

Mookie Betts, David Price traded: Boston Red Sox’s Michael Chavis sad to see mentors leave, will ‘miss both as people’

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The blockbuster trade sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers will mean the departure of two veterans who served as mentors for Red Sox infielder Michael Chavis throughout his rookie season.

Chavis, who arrived in Fort Myers for spring training Monday, said he was sad to see Betts and Price traded to Los Angeles in exchange for outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

“I think the biggest thing is that I like them as people,” Chavis said. “I think people get so caught up on the player standpoint, and how good they are as players. I understand that. It’s tough to not do that because they’re incredible players. I like them in the clubhouse, what they did for me and what they did for the team. Just being there, having their presence, looking out for guys. Helping people and being genuinely caring people. I think that goes further than everybody talking them as players. I’m going to miss them as people.”

Betts and Price, who have a combined 18 years in the majors, both looked out for Chavis after he was promoted to the majors last April. Price was the first major leaguer to ever reach out to Chavis when he was a top prospect. Betts, after noticing how Chavis was handling interviews early in his rookie season, offered some advice.

“Being in the big leagues, looking back at it, I was talking a million miles a minute,” Chavis said. “I talk fast already. He came up to me like, ‘Bro, you don’t have to speed through the interview. They’re not going to attack you. Just take your time.’ Just stuff like that, he helped me out.”

Chavis said he paid some attention to the trade rumors involving his teammates in recent weeks but tried not to get caught up in the details of the pending deal, which gained and lost momentum multiple times since it was reported to be agreed upon Tuesday night. He was hoping the Sox would find a way to keep Betts, their best all-around player.

“Any chance you get a chance to keep Mookie, you pull for that,” Chavis said.

Even with Betts and Price gone, Chavis still believes the Sox can contend in 2020. He said the news of the trade isn't as deflating to the team as it might look from the outside.

“It's impactful having them leave, but this would be my first full season in the big leagues so it would be kind of tough saying how impactful it would be,” Chavis said. “I think we have a good team. I really do. We have a lot of good players in there and a lot of good guys. As close as we are as a team, I really think we're going to be solid.”

Still, the effect of losing two of the team's leaders on the eve of spring training will require some adjustments to be made.

“Obviously, it's going to hurt seeing that kind of player and that kind of person go,” Chavis said. “I think we're going to piece it together.”

Chavis thrilled to see Moreland return

Chavis was happy the Sox re-signed first baseman Mitch Moreland, who served as another mentor in 2019.

“I'm excited for it,” Chavis said. “I learned a lot from Mitch last year. He's obviously played a very long time and knows an incredible amount of baseball. To get the opportunity to not just watch him, but to interact with him and be around him, I'm looking forward to that as well.”

Chavis will likely see time at both first base and second base, splitting time with Moreland at first and newcomer Jose Peraza at second. He said he still hasn't gotten a clear indication on how the Red Sox plan to use him.

Chavis mum on manager news

Chavis said he had received no indication of who the Red Sox planned to hire to replace Alex Cora. He praised bench coach Ron Roenicke, who is believed to be a leading candidate to take over.

“I love him. He's awesome. He's a good dude,” Chavis said. “Really knowledgeable about baseball. He's been around the game for a long time so it's really cool to see his analysis. He has a really nice combination of old school from his experience but he also has a good understanding of how the new game is developing and how baseball changes. Just having those different sides in one is very interesting.”

Chavis admitted it is a bit strange coming into spring training without a manager in place but cautioned that this spring was bound to be a unique one for him no matter what.

“I would say it feels odd, but this spring training feels different for me because it's the first time I've played in the big leagues,” he said. “Previous spring trainings, I didn't know what to expect or what to do in general. I didn't know if I was going to be in Boston, Double-A, Triple-A. Coming into this season having had some big-league experience, that's very different.”

Mookie Betts, David Price traded; Alex Cora dismissed; Boston Red Sox's Eduardo Rodriguez says, 'It's going to be hard for us' but team must look forward

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox will open spring training camp Tuesday not only without David Price and Mookie Betts, who were traded to the Dodgers. They also are without a manager. Boston dismissed Alex Cora in January because of his involvement in the Astros' 2017 cheating scandal when he served as Houston's bench coach.

Starting pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez said Cora's "big personality with everyone in the clubhouse" will be missed.

"It's kind of hard, especially for me because he was pushing me every time," Rodriguez said. "He was with me all the time. He knows what I was able to do. And he showed me how to do it every time, every day. He was like a father for me. ... He would speak to me in Spanish all the time. So he was a lot easier to understand when he tried to tell me (something). So it's going to be hard for us. But like I said, we've got to look forward."

He said the absence of all three is a big difference.

"But like I said, this is part of the business. This is how baseball is," Rodriguez said.

Both Cora and Price took Rodriguez under their wing and mentored him. The lefty said Cora watched every one of his bullpen sessions. Rodriguez called Price a leader for the entire pitching staff. He said he feels "sad" about losing him as a teammate.

"He was a really big part of the team," Rodriguez said. "Every time somebody got in trouble or something like that about a game situation, they (were) there," Rodriguez said. "Darwinzon (Hernandez) and guys like that all listened. DP was a big part of that. And he's a guy that we're really going to miss."

Rodriguez added about Betts, "He's a superstar. So that's going to be a real loss for our lineup. Like we say, we've gotta look forward."

Bench coach Ron Roenicke likely will take over as manager once MLB concludes its investigation into the 2018 Red Sox for allegedly using their video replay room to steal signs.

"It's a good thing for us because we know him," Rodriguez said about Roenicke potentially being named manager. "We know how he does everything. Everybody knows him. So he's been a big part of the family, too. So it's going to be good for us that he's going to be in charge now."

Boston Red Sox, Eduardo Rodriguez will go to salary arbitration hearing Wednesday

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez will attend his arbitration hearing in Arizona on Wednesday, he said Monday at JetBlue Park.

Rodriguez, who is Boston's last unsigned arbitration-eligible player, will face off against the team to determine his 2020 salary. When the sides exchanged figures last month, Rodriguez filed at \$8.975 million and the Red Sox filed at \$8.3 million.

"I've got to fly there tomorrow to Arizona and see what's going to happen," Rodriguez said. "That's all that I've got right now."

Boston settled with outfielder Andrew Benintendi over the weekend, avoiding arbitration with a two-year, \$10 million deal. The club's other eight arbitration-eligible players reached deals in January.

Rodriguez didn't sound confident about bridging the gap before the hearing despite a minimal difference (\$675k).

"I've got to go tomorrow," he said. "The hearing is Wednesday. We'll see what happens after that."

If the sides don't settle, Rodriguez will be the first Sox player to go to a hearing since Mookie Betts in 2018. Boston had zero hearings last year.

Mookie Betts, David Price trade: Boston Red Sox's Brandon Workman says, 'You don't expect guys like that to get traded'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Red Sox pitchers and catchers officially report to spring training tomorrow (Tuesday). The Mookie Betts trade is not yet official, although it likely will become official Monday.

Meanwhile, MLB's investigation into the 2018 Red Sox for allegedly using their video replay room to steal signs is not yet complete. MLB's report could drop at any minute.

Boston also remains without a manager. Bench coach Ron Roenicke likely will take over the position when MLB's investigation concludes.

"There's definitely a lot of background noise right now," Red Sox reliever Brandon Workman said Monday here at the JetBlue Park complex. "But we'll do our best to block that out and focus on getting ready for the season."

He said not having Betts and Price on the team will definitely be different. Betts and Price will head to the Dodgers for Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

"You don't expect guys like that to get traded," Workman said. "But that's what happens. So we'll go out and do our best."

The Red Sox's odds to win the World Series dropped to 33-to-1 after the news of Betts trade. Boston started the offseason at 12-to-1.

"We're out here to play our best, whether Mookie and Price are on the team or not or anybody else," Workman said. "So we're going to do that. We're going to try to win ballgames just the same as if they were here."

Workman also said about the blockbuster trade, "Losing those two guys who are more than just good baseball players, they were great teammates. So it will be tough seeing them go."

Workman is eager for MLB to conclude its investigation.

"That's something we'd like to get behind us as a team," Workman said.

The 63-year-old Roenicke would become Boston's sixth manager in the past 10 years.

"Ron's great," Workman said. "Everybody loves him. Great baseball guy. My experience with him mostly has been about the running game as a pitcher. But it will be exciting seeing him take charge."

Workman took over as the closer midway through 2019, but chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said in November he doesn't know yet how the relievers will line up and who will close.

"That's not my call," Workman said when asked about closing in 2020.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Spring training can't start soon enough for Red Sox

Tom Caron

Play ball. Please.

Never have the Boston Red Sox so desperately needed to get on the field and play. A tumultuous, depressing offseason finally comes to an end Wednesday morning when pitchers and catchers take the field in Fort Myers, Florida, for their first workout of the season.

Athletes often say getting on the field is the best way to block out the noise of what's going on off it. And there has been no lack of noise this offseason.

The Red Sox spent the last day before the first players reported to camp still officially in search of a manager. Reports surfaced late last week that it would be bench coach Ron Roenicke, but that the team was hoping to get the results of the Major League Baseball investigation into alleged sign stealing before it made the announcement.

The lack of a manager didn't bother fans as much as the trade sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo along with prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

Getting a player named Jeter in the deal only irritated Sox fans even more. And they were plenty irritated as it was, with one of the game's best players moving on.

Most baseball evaluators said the Red Sox did well in the deal, and that holding out for more in the wake of Brusdar Graterol's troubling medical reports worked out in their favor. Downs is a top infield prospect, and Wong is an athletic catcher who can play multiple positions.

What the Red Sox didn't get in return is pitching help. And with Price included in the deal, they are dangerously low on starting depth. One would expect the team to address that issue in the coming weeks.

The Red Sox weren't the only team in the news over the winter. The Houston Astros had even tougher issues when they were penalized in a scathing MLB report into their own cheating scandal. And over the weekend, things got worse as the Wall Street Journal reported that Houston's front office may have been far more involved than the MLB investigation had led us to believe.

That report took a little of the onus off Alex Cora, the Red Sox' former manager who "parted ways" with the team after he was named in the report. It's hard to paint Cora as the mastermind of the Astros system if the entire baseball operations group was involved in code-breaking.

Cora will still get penalized from the Astros report. That much is sure. What we don't know is whether or not he will face additional discipline after the investigation into Boston. If he doesn't, the team may want to consider bringing him back after his suspension if that penalty is one season or less.

Bringing Cora back could bring the Red Sox a little bit of good will after a winter of discontent. But it won't help them this summer. The 2020 Red Sox will try to return the playoffs without their marquee player and without a former Cy Young Award winner who had a terrific first half in 2019 before injuries plagued him.

The Red Sox won't be picked to win the AL East this season, but they still have enough offense to be a playoff contender if the pitching staff stays healthy. We'll be watching for signs of that as Grapefruit League games begin in just over a week.

Best of all, we'll be watching baseball. Some of us will be lucky enough to do it in the Florida sun, trying to avoid getting sunburned. That's a welcome change after an offseason that had the hot stove burning out of control.

*** *RedSox.com***

Sox deal Betts, Price for Verdugo, Downs

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The Red Sox had a week for it to sink in that they were going to trade superstar Mookie Betts to the Dodgers. This, thanks to the prolonged nature of the negotiations and the many hiccups along the way.

Yet, that didn't make it any easier for chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and his front-office assistants once the move became official on Monday night.

In fact, it was a tough pill to swallow for the entire organization and fan base, but one that Bloom and his staff deemed was necessary to make the franchise the best version of itself over the next several years.

Betts and lefty starter David Price are off to Los Angeles in exchange for a 23-year-old starting outfielder on the rise in Alex Verdugo, a highly touted middle-infield prospect in Jeter Downs (ranked No. 44 on MLB Pipeline's Top 100 Prospects) and a power-hitting catching prospect with defensive versatility in Connor Wong.

A member of the Red Sox's organization since he was drafted out of high school in Theo Epstein's last season as general manager in 2011, Betts saw his time with Boston come to an end on Monday. The sight of Betts wearing Dodgers blue is going to be tough for Boston fans.

"In his time in our uniform, Mookie has been one of the greatest to ever wear it," said Bloom. "Off the field, he represented us with class, always. In the last few months, I've been able to see how special he is to so many people in this organization and how much he means to them. He is as great a person as he is a player. Mookie means as much to our fans as he does to our staff. We all know that. This trade is a very hard one to make."

But the Red Sox didn't hire Bloom in October to be sentimental. Betts has a contract that will expire at the end of the season. Previous negotiations between Betts and the Red Sox had always shown a wide gap.

TRADE BREAKDOWN

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

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

There was also the matter of getting the payroll below the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold and avoiding the penalties that would have come with soaring above it for a third straight year. In the exchange, the Red Sox sent \$48 million to the Dodgers to cover half of the remaining salary that Price is owed over the next three seasons.

"It's worth reiterating, the goal to get under the CBT is not an end in itself," said Bloom. "It's part of a larger goal, our biggest goal, which is to put ourselves in a position to compete and win sustainably for as many years as we can and using our resources effectively is a means to that end, it's a part of that goal. So we wanted to get under the CBT and we weren't going to do it in a way that wasn't going to help us with that bigger goal. The CBT was not a major factor in us deciding to do this deal, as much as it was a goal with us this offseason."

For a combination of reasons, it was simply time to move on from Mookie.

"In trading a great player, a beloved player, we recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is," said Red Sox owner John Henry. "While the organization in its entirety very much wanted to see Mookie in a Red Sox uniform for the length of his career, we believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox. We thank Mookie for his incredible contributions, both on and off the field."

In his first major move for the Red Sox, Bloom did what he felt needed to be done to set his team up for sustained success.

“Our mission, our charge as a department, is to compete consistently, year in and year out, and to put ourselves in a position to win as many championships as we can,” said Bloom. “And that’s behind everything we do. And we can only accomplish that goal with a talent base at all levels of the organization that is deep, broad and sustainable.”

As recently as Jan. 15, Bloom had said he envisioned Betts would still be with the Red Sox on Opening Day. In other words, he wasn’t going to trade Betts or Price for that matter just to do so.

But after the Padres made a strong run at Betts later in January, the Dodgers ultimately came through with the return that made the move worthwhile for Boston.

“Acquiring Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs and Connor Wong represents a major step forward for our talent base and will help us win consistently for many years. We fully expect to compete in 2020,” said Bloom. “The front-line talent on our Major League roster can play with anybody. And we’ve worked all winter to improve our depth to weather the ups and downs of the season.”

Yes, Bloom thinks the Red Sox will be in the playoff hunt this season despite the ultra-talented position player and battle-tested pitcher he just dealt.

“I think it’s fair to say that you can’t expect in 2020 for what we’ve received, to make up for the contributions we would have expected out of the two guys who are leaving,” said Bloom. “I don’t think that’s any surprise, but I will say this: We believed strongly enough in the talent level in this team as a whole to believe that we can still compete, and you guys have seen it over the years, you’ve seen clubs that are built to win right now have really disappointing seasons and you’ve seen clubs that nobody gave a chance and you saw one of them in 2013 go and win the World Series.

“And you saw the same team two years running win 108 games and 84 games, so we know there’s a lot of variability of what can go on in a season and the important thing is we feel like the talent is there to compete. We’re obviously going to see how the season unfolds. We’re going to try to support the group as best as we can, but we feel really good about the talent level.”

Six days ago, the Red Sox had agreed with the Dodgers and Twins on a three-way deal. That one would have brought Verdugo from Los Angeles, and flame-throwing righty Brusdar Graterol from Minnesota.

But the Red Sox, according to sources, had concerns after reviewing Graterol’s medical files. Out of respect to the privacy of the player, Bloom didn’t much want to get into that at his press conference on Monday. Graterol wound up going to the Dodgers in a separate trade with the Twins that sent starter Kenta Maeda to Minnesota.

Once the first deal fell part, Bloom was able to make another one that brought Verdugo to Boston along with two prospects rather than one.

“Alex Verdugo is a really talented baseball player on both sides of the ball,” said Bloom. “He can really hit. He has power, but it’s not just power. He’s a really good hitter. And then, defensively, he can play all three positions and he’s a very talented outfielder. Tremendous arm.”

While Verdugo will slot into the starting lineup in place of Betts, Bloom said it’s too early to know how the club will replace Price in the rotation. The Red Sox officially start Spring Training on Wednesday.

The inclusion of Downs in the deal is one that could pay big dividends for the Sox in the coming years. 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.

“Jeter Downs, middle infielder who’s a good athlete, a really good baseball player who this year took a major step forward offensively,” Bloom said. “And digging into that performance as our group did, we were really excited by the strides he made and think he’s got a chance to be a complete player that can really impact us.”

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.

“I’ll just add that this is a real tough one for a lot of people in the organization to move on from Mookie,” said Red Sox general manager Brian O’Halloran. “We’ve all seen him grow up here from when he was drafted. As Chaim said, Mookie is not only one of the greatest baseball players that’s ever put on a uniform for the Red Sox, he’s one of the best people, a class act, as Chaim said, on and off the field. A lot of people here are going to miss him, so it’s a tough day from that standpoint.”

Though Price had some ups and downs and health issues over his four years in Boston, he was a huge factor in the team’s 2018 World Series championship.

“Both David and Mookie earned legendary status in Boston in 2018,” said Red Sox president/CEO Sam Kennedy. “Mookie, becoming the only American League player to win a World Series, MVP, Gold Glove and Silver Slugger in the same year, and David, with his memorable postseason run as the winning pitcher who clinched both the AL pennant and the club’s ninth World Series championship. Their time in Boston will always be remembered as historic.”

Up next for Sox? Hiring a new manager 'soon'

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Now that the swap of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers is at last complete, the Red Sox can now turn all their attention to that other pressing order of business: hiring a new manager.

Reports surfaced on Friday that the club will elevate bench coach Ron Roenicke as Alex Cora’s successor.

But chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom wasn’t ready to confirm those reports on Monday night. All he would say is that the Sox will look to fill the void quickly.

“No, no news on that front. We’re hoping to have news on that front soon but nothing on that right now,” Bloom said.

The timing of naming a manager could be tied to MLB announcing the results of the investigation into whether the 2018 Red Sox stole signs electronically.

“Until that process is done, we’re not going to have any comment on it,” Bloom said.

Commissioner Rob Manfred said last week at the Owners Meetings he would like to release the findings of that investigation before Boston’s camp officially opens. The Red Sox hold their first pitchers/catchers workout on Wednesday.

If the managerial hire hasn’t taken place by then, expect Roenicke to essentially lead the team workouts.

“Ron, in the last couple years, he’s been integral in preparing for camp and he’s continuing to do that,” Bloom said.

Even Bloom couldn’t help but acknowledge it is awkward for the Red Sox to be this close to starting Spring Training without a manager in place.

“There are a lot of different things happening at once right now, and we know that. Certainly, the mix of all those circumstances is certainly not ideal,” Bloom said. “I will say one thing, and I know this feeling is shared by all of my colleagues, and it stood out to me coming here, getting to know our players, talking to them as we did, as a number of us did after the number of different things that have happened, including everything that happened with Alex, how well they took it, considering everything.

“These guys are pros and they’re resilient. I think Spring Training is a time for everybody to get ready for the season and they’re certainly going to take that very seriously.”

If Roenicke does wind up as the choice to become the 48th manager in club history, he will have a lot of support from the clubhouse.

In fact, some players spoke of the hiring of Roenicke as if it is inevitable.

“It’s a good thing for us because we know him, we know how he does everything,” said Red Sox lefty Eduardo Rodriguez. “He’s been a big part of the family, too, so it’s going to be good for us that he’s going to be in charge now.”

“Ron’s great,” said closer Brandon Workman. “Everybody loves him. Great baseball guy. My experience with him mostly has been about the running game as a pitcher, but it’ll be exciting seeing him take charge.”

Red Sox adjusting after 'impactful' departures

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- With a couple of days to go before Spring Training officially starts, Red Sox players were coming to grips with all that has changed in their world in a few short weeks.

Alex Cora is no longer the manager. Mookie Betts and David Price are officially members of the Dodgers after Boston finalized a deal that brings outfielder Alex Verdugo, top prospect Jeter Downs and Minor League catcher Connor Wong to Boston.

Meanwhile, the players -- many of whom reported early to camp -- are waiting along with everyone else for MLB to release the results of an investigation of sign stealing on the 2018 Red Sox.

“It’s definitely something we’d like to keep behind us as a team, so I think they said they’re going to come out with their stuff this week, early this week, so we’ll see what happens,” said Red Sox closer Brandon Workman.

Adding to the feeling of uneasiness is that Cora’s successor still hasn’t been named, though bench coach Ron Roenicke is the rumored candidate to replace him.

So, no, this doesn’t feel like a typical opening of camp for the Sox.

“I mean, I think the difference right now is we lost three people who were a really big part of us, which is Mookie, DP and AC,” said Red Sox left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez. “That’s what I think is a big difference right now. But like I said, this is part of the business. This is how baseball is, and we’ve got to get ready for Spring Training and the season.”

To lose both Cora and Betts is a lot to process at once, not to mention Price, a veteran all of the pitchers looked up to.

“It’s impactful having them leave,” said first baseman Michael Chavis. “This would be my first full season in the big leagues, so it’s kind of tough to say exactly how impactful it could be. But I think we have a good team, I really do. We have a lot of good players in there. We have a lot of good guys and as close as we are as a team, I really do think we’re going to be solid.”

If the reports are true and Roenicke becomes Cora’s successor, it will be a popular move in the clubhouse.

“I love him. He’s awesome, he’s a good dude,” Chavis said. “Really knowledgeable about baseball, and he’s been around the game a long time, so it’s really cool to see his analysis. He has a nice combination from the old school from his experience, but he also has a good understanding of how the new game is developing and how baseball is changing. Just having those kind of different sides in one is very interesting.”

“Ron’s great,” said Workman. “Everybody loves him. Great baseball guy. My experience with him mostly has been about the running game as a pitcher, but it’ll be exciting seeing him take charge.”

Nobody will miss Cora more than Rodriguez. Boston’s former manager prodded the lefty constantly in a way that worked.

“It’s kind of hard, especially for me because he was pushing me every time,” Rodriguez said. “As he got here, he was with me all the time. He knew what I was able to do and he showed me how to do it every time, every day. It’s kind of hard for us. He was like a father for me, he was a Latin person, too. He spoke to me in Spanish all the time, so it was a lot easier to understand what he tried to tell me and all that. It’s going to be hard for us, but like I say, we’ve got to look forward and start Spring Training and get ready for the season.”

At some point, the focus for the Red Sox will become purely baseball and becoming the best team they can be in 2020.

But right now, things just feel strange.

“There’s definitely a lot of background noise right now, but we’ll do our best to block that out and focus on getting ready for the season,” Workman said.

*** *ESPN.com***

Chaim Bloom says Red Sox prioritized 'big picture' over fan reaction in trading Mookie Betts

Joon Lee

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Boston Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom publicly addressed the blockbuster trade of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers for the first time Monday, saying that the trade of the star outfielder and pitcher represented the best move for the franchise in "the big picture."

"What Mookie and David are capable of on the field is a lot," Bloom said. "I think it's reasonable to expect that we're going to be worse without them. We have really good talent coming back, we've added talent to the roster this winter, and I think it's important to point out that at the beginning of the winter, this team had a lot more talent than the 84 wins we put up last year. We still think there's plenty of talent here to compete."

Monday's announcement confirmed the return package for Boston in the trade with the Dodgers, with outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong going to the Red Sox. Although owner John Henry's "goal" -- not "mandate" -- for Boston to get under the luxury tax threshold sparked rumors around the star right fielder months ago, Bloom said Boston would have considered trading Betts even if the dollar amount required to get under the threshold had been significantly smaller.

"The goal to get under the CBT was not an end in itself," Bloom said. "It's part of a larger goal, our biggest goal, to put ourselves in position to compete and win sustainably for as many years as we can. Using our resources is a means to that end. It's part of that goal. What we wanted was to get under the CBT in service of that larger goal, and we weren't going to do it in a way that wasn't going to help us or help us toward our goal."

Throughout the offseason, Boston did not actively shop Betts on the open market, with Bloom saying as recently as a month ago that he expected Betts to be on the Opening Day roster. Betts has consistently and repeatedly expressed his desire to hit free agency to maximize his value on the open market, citing in part a desire to expand the market for the rest of the MLB Players Association. Although Boston made efforts to extend Betts long-term, the discussions left the two sides far apart. In the weeks leading up to spring training, both the Dodgers and the Padres showed increased willingness and eagerness to get a deal done. The interest from both teams eventually led to a trade package that Boston thought was good enough to warrant trading its homegrown MVP.

"It was more just a question of, as the offseason went on, would teams step forward?" Bloom said. "We felt knowing how great a player Mookie is, how important he's been for us, it would have to be a high bar in order for us to consider trading him and in terms of the impact on the talent return, the impact that that return could have on our future and the flexibility it allows us to build around it. This return met that bar."

The trade of Betts sparked harsh backlash from Red Sox fans, with many viewing the move as a budget-slashing solution from an ownership group with deep financial pockets that continues to raise ticket prices. Bloom said the baseball operations department anticipated the negative blowback from fans, but it was not front of mind during the trade negotiations.

"It wasn't our No. 1 priority as a baseball ops department to be focused on what was going on externally," Bloom said. "We were worried about what we were working on, but it was very clear to us that this move would come with a lot of fan backlash. I think we had to prioritize what we thought was right in the big picture for the Red Sox over the fan reaction."

News of the potential deal surfaced over the past week, with an official announcement put on hold because Boston took issue with the medical status of pitcher Brusdar Graterol, who was initially reported to be coming to the Red Sox from the Minnesota Twins as part of the package. Bloom expressed regret that the process put a spotlight on the medicals of Graterol and that the delay in an official announcement put the futures of several players in limbo just as pitchers and catchers were scheduled to report to spring training.

"What was unique about this one was how publicly it played out," Bloom said. "Mostly, we just felt bad for the teams involved and especially for the players involved. That's not something we should have to go through, but unfortunately, it's the way it happened. Our top priority throughout that was to keep the best interests of those other teams and especially those players in mind."

Some have questioned the 23-year-old Verdugo's character and maturity, but Bloom said the team looked thoroughly into the past of every player involved in the deal.

"The due diligence process there was extensive," Bloom said.

Although Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran faced the media without ownership present, Henry addressed the trade in an emailed statement.

"In trading a great player, a beloved player, we recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is," he wrote. "While the organization in its entirety very much wanted to see Mookie in a Red Sox uniform for the length of his career, we believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox. We thank Mookie for his incredible contributions, both on and off the field."

"[Price]'s arrival in Boston paved the way for a historic chapter for the Red Sox," Henry also wrote. "His presence at the top of our rotation was critical to winning three consecutive division championships, and his 2018 Postseason performance put both his talent and tenacity on full display. We appreciate what both Mookie and David brought to our club, and are grateful that they will forever be Red Sox World Series Champions."

Chairman Tom Werner also addressed the trade in an emailed statement.

"Today's trade illustrates the difficult decisions necessary to achieve our goal, which has remained unchanged since we became stewards of this franchise nearly two decades ago: to bring multiple World Series Championships to Boston," Werner wrote. "Ultimately, we believe that this will set us up for sustained long-term success. I want to express our enormous thanks to Mookie and David for the impact they had on our club and our community."

Through the chaotic process of this trade unfolding, Bloom said that the baseball operations team made the right decision in trading Betts and that trading arguably the team's best homegrown player since Ted Williams and rebuilding the farm system while gaining financial flexibility best served the future of the franchise.

"As difficult as it was and as difficult as it will continue to be emotionally, we felt like where this trade positions us in terms of the big picture, in terms of the long-term future, it was a large step," Bloom said. "That despite being difficult, it was something that we needed to do."

*** *WEEL.com***

Red Sox make it official: Mookie Betts, David Price are now Dodgers

Nick Friar

The deal that was agreed to on February 4, and was then delayed, is now officially done.

The Red Sox have traded Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

In return, Boston acquired Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs, and Connor Wong.

"Alex Verdugo is a really talented baseball player, on both sides of the ball," Chaim Bloom said on Monday. "He can really hit. ... Defensively, he can play all three (outfield) positions."

Although he admitted the three players coming back in return won't make up Betts and Price's production in 2020, Bloom thinks "it is realistic" the Red Sox will still compete in 2020.

Bloom also added that the competitive balance tax "was not a major factor in us deciding to do this deal."

Eduardo Rodriguez viewed David Price, Alex Cora as father figures

Nick Friar

With David Price heading to the Dodgers — though the Red Sox have not made the move official yet — a lot more is going to be expected of Eduardo Rodriguez in 2020. Now, E-Rod has already dealt with

increased responsibilities before. He led the Red Sox in starts in 2019 and was the only pitcher to log over 200 innings.

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But now the lefty has to perform without two individuals who helped him develop over the last two seasons — one being Price.

“He (is) like a brother, like a father,” Rodriguez said of the lefty. “Because the first day that I got here in spring training, he was there for me all the time. He was there for me when I got hurt. Everything. I would say he (is) like a father to me.”

“Every day that I was throwing a bullpen. Every time that was I was talking about games, what situation, how to control games, every time I was throwing a bullpen, he was out there with me. Seeing what pitches I was throwing, location, everything. He helped me a lot.

The other was former Red Sox manager Alex Cora, who had a different approach than Price when it came to supporting Rodriguez.

“It’s kind of hard, especially for me. Because he was pushing me every time,” Rodriguez said. “As soon as I got here, he was on me all the time. He knew what I was able to do and he showed me how to do it. ... He was like a father (to) me.”

Having a manager whose first language was also Spanish made life slightly easier for E-Rod.

He’s also sad to see Mookie Betts go, but it was clear at Fort Myers on Monday that losing Price and Cora will have a more significant impact on Rodriguez.

“This is part of the business,” E-Rod said. “This is how baseball is and we got to get ready for spring training and the season.”

Eduardo Rodriguez's arbitration hearing set for Wednesday

Nick Friar

With Andrew Benintendi agreeing to a two-year deal with Boston, there is only one Red Sox player heading to arbitration. Eduardo Rodriguez.

The left-handed pitcher is set to depart from Florida on Tuesday for his hearing. The settlement will take place in Arizona on Wednesday.

Rodriguez is looking to make \$8.975 million. The Red Sox filed in at \$8.3 million.

Despite the slight difference — relative to the numbers that have been presented — it doesn’t sound like Rodriguez expects the matter to be resolved early.

“The hearing is Wednesday and (we’ll) see what happens after that,” he said when leaving the Red Sox facility in Fort Myers on Monday.

Michael Chavis on Mookie Betts: 'He took me under his wing'

Nick Friar

Although he doesn’t want to play general manager, Michael Chavis has no problem saying he will miss what Mookie Betts and David Price provided the Red Sox on the field. But, much like the rest of his teammates, Chavis will miss both Betts and Price’s presence in the clubhouse. He had his own unique

relationship with each of them — though both played similar roles, helping Chavis get acclimated to the organization.

“DP was actually the first big leaguer to ever reach out to me as a minor leaguer,” Chavis said. “So, just losing him and his personality and my personal connection to him was really sad, as well.”

Being a fellow position player, Chavis worked with Betts more than Price. Although both had an impact on the 2019 rookie, Betts taught Chavis quite a bit about life as a Major League Baseball player.

“He’s one of the first people who reached out to me and helped me become comfortable,” Chavis said. “He took me under his wing, honestly. No doubt about it. He did a lot to make me comfortable from the day-to-day aspect, but also (toward) growing as a player.

“One of the things that stands out to me is he talked to me about my first couple interviews in the big leagues. And, obviously, I’d done interviews before. But, being in the big leagues, looking back at it, I was talking a million miles a minute. And I talk fast already. So he came up to me and was like, ‘Bro, you don’t got to speed through the interview. They’re not going to attack you. Just take your time.’ But, just the day-to-day aspect, stuff like that. He took me under his wing. He helped me a lot.”

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Chaim Bloom admits one piece of reporting about Mookie Betts trade ticked him off

John Tomase

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Chaim Bloom typically projects an air of calm, but one question on Monday night clearly struck a nerve.

Facing the media just moments after finally announcing the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, Bloom was asked about a report that ownership had considered backing out of the deal based on negative fan reaction.

"I'm glad you asked," Bloom said. "We did hear that report. That's absolutely untrue. Unfortunately, when these things are going on and especially during a process, it's not something we're able to address. But that is not true."

The Red Sox certainly provided critics with plenty of ammunition. The team was savaged over the supposedly light return for Betts and Price, and then the deal nearly died over the medicals of Twins reliever Brusdar Graterol, who was supposed to come to Boston but ended up going to the Dodgers instead.

Meanwhile, fans fumed over giving away Betts in his prime.

"We certainly anticipated it," Bloom said of the negative reaction. "As we were going through this week, obviously it was hard to have a true sense of it. It wasn't our No. 1 priority as a baseball ops department to be focused on what was going on externally. We worried obviously about what we were working on, but it was very clear to us that this move would come with a lot of fan backlash.

"I think we had to prioritize what was right in the big picture for the Red Sox over the fan reaction. It certainly did not catch us off guard. As I said, we know how much, obviously we know the type of player Mookie is, we know how much he matters to our fans. We knew it would hurt, and it's going to hurt for a little while, but again, the big picture was our biggest priority."

That meant acquiring outfielder Alex Verdugo, with Dodgers prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong replacing Graterol in the final version of the deal.

Did Bloom ever think the trade might die?

"Whenever you are dealing with something as complex as obviously this one was, there are usually – and this case was no exception – a lot of points along the way where things are in question," he said.

As for whether the Red Sox have any regrets for the way the situation was handled, Bloom said they'd learn from the experience.

"Knowing how it played out, and how it played out so unfortunately in the public eye, there's always things I think you might look back and say you'd do differently," Bloom allowed. "But having been a part of a lot of trades over the years, I'm really proud of how our group handled this one both in terms of putting us in position to make a good decision and making sure we were prepared with all the information we needed, and then the due diligence.

"I think it was difficult for me and difficult for everyone to have to stay silent when you hear your motives being questioned and things like that. But if at the end of the day what you care about is being ethical, being straightforward, and keeping the interest of your players in mind, and also other teams, then that's the right thing to do, so that's what we did.

"I know there was a lot out there about this, but I just want to be very clear, especially for our team, that we prioritized acting straightforwardly and acting ethically at all times, and still making sure we were representing the interests of the Red Sox."

Chaim Bloom explains why Red Sox made Mookie Betts trade

Justin Leger

On Monday, the Boston Red Sox officially announced the trade that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The organization released a statement on the trade from members of the front office. Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran also addressed the media in Fort Myers.

After his opening statement praising Betts and Price for their contributions in Boston, Bloom explained why Red Sox brass felt the deal had to be made.

"There's obviously a lot of different moves that we explored over the course of the offseason and that we're always going to be exploring," Bloom said. "And I think you have to assess every move both in itself and also how it fits into the context of a larger roster.

"I think in this case, as difficult as it was and as it continues to be emotionally, we felt that where this trade positions us in terms of the big picture, in terms of our long-term future, was a large enough step forward that despite being difficult, it was something we needed to do."

Betts is scheduled to become a free agent following the 2020 season. Bloom acknowledged Betts' contract situation, noting it takes a "sizable commitment" to maintain a player of his caliber who's set to hit the open market.

In exchange for Betts and Price, the Red Sox received outfielder Alex Verdugo as well as prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

Updating Red Sox' top prospects for 2020 in wake of Mookie Betts trade

Darren Hartwell

The Boston Red Sox are getting worse in the short term by unloading Mookie Betts and David Price on the Los Angeles Dodgers.

But are they better positioned for future success?

The answer to that question rides on the three players Boston reportedly will acquire in return: outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong.

The 23-year-old Verdugo already is a major-league level player: He hit .294 with an .817 OPS over 106 games for the Dodgers last season and projects as the Red Sox' starting right fielder in place of Betts.

Downs and Wong -- who take the place of Minnesota Twins pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol after Boston balked at his medical records -- should improve a barren Red Sox farm system that ranked dead last in baseball as of last August.

How much, you ask? MLB.com ranks Downs as its No. 44 overall prospect for 2020 -- which makes him Boston's top prospect and gives the Sox two prospects in MLB.com's Top 100 instead of one.

Here's an updated list of Boston's top 10 prospects, with Nos. 3 through 10 based on SoxProspects.com's rankings as of February 10, 2020:

1. Jeter Downs, 2B/SS (No. 44 overall)
 2. Triston Casas, 1B/3B (No. 77 overall)
 3. Bryan Mata, RHP
 4. Jay Groome, LHP
 5. Gilberto Jimenez, OF
 6. Bobby Dalbec, 3B
 7. Jarren Duran, OF
 8. Tanner Houck, RHP
 9. Noah Song, RHP
 10. Thaddeus Ward, RHP
- TBD. Connor Wong, C

Wong, 23, ranked 15th on Baseball America's list of top 30 Dodgers prospects, so he should slot just outside the top 10 in Boston's new-look farm system. He'll likely begin the 2020 season with the Double-A Portland Sea Dogs, while Downs should start in Portland as well but possibly could crack Boston's major-league roster by the end of the season.

You can check out both of their minor-league numbers here, but here's ESPN prospect expert Kiley McDaniels' take on each prospect in the wake of Sunday's revamped deal:

Downs: "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."

Wong: "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."

The Red Sox still don't have a top-100 pitching prospect in their farm system, which is cause for concern for a big-league club already thin on starting pitching.

But Downs' addition by itself improves Boston's crop of prospects immediately, and if all goes well, the Red Sox could have a compelling "infield of the future" in Triston Casas (first base), Downs (second base), Xander Bogaerts (shortstop) and Rafael Devers (third base).

Why Red Sox' return in Mookie Betts trade with Dodgers isn't as bad as you think

Nick Goss

The Boston Red Sox didn't hit a home run in their reworked trade with the Los Angeles Dodgers that will send superstar outfielder Mookie Betts and starting pitcher David Price to California.

Perhaps the biggest issue with the trade is the Red Sox didn't acquire a starting pitcher of some kind in the deal, and that position arguably should have been Boston's top priority in negotiations with the Dodgers.

That said, the deal isn't as bad as you might think. The Red Sox did receive some quality players from the Dodgers, and getting rid of more than \$40 million in salary owed to Price over the next three years should give the team a little more financial flexibility going forward.

What's the sense around baseball regarding the quality of the return for the Red Sox in the Betts trade? Here's what The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal tweeted Sunday night.

Downs, in particular, is an exciting prospect for the Red Sox. He has the ability to hit for average and power, and his stats in the minor leagues last season were impressive. Downs hit .276 with 24 home runs, 86 RBI and 24 steals in 119 games between High-A and Double-A in 2019.

The Red Sox' fate in 2020 likely will come down to pitching, and there are real question marks in both the rotation and bullpen. The Betts trade was a great opportunity to alleviate some of the pitching concerns, but now chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom will have to look elsewhere to fortify those positions.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Red Sox cite sustainability – and not luxury tax – as prime motive for blockbuster deal

Sean McAdam

FORT MYERS, Fla. — When Chaim Bloom was hired as the Red Sox' chief baseball officer last fall, it was with the stated intention of ending the franchise's cycle of boom-and-bust — winning two World Series from 2012 through 2018, but also finishing last three times in that span and missing the playoffs four times — and creating a more consistently, competitive team on the field.

So perhaps it shouldn't have come as any surprise that when the Red Sox finally got around to making their mega-trade with the Los Angeles Dodgers official, they framed the deal not as a cost-cutting measure, but rather, a way to create sustainability for the club.

So, it was out with two star players, and in with increased payroll flexibility and a deeper pool of prospects for the future.

That might not sound like much of a marketing slogan, but it does adequately explain the organization's thinking.

“This trade is a very hard one to make,” acknowledged Bloom as the Sox shipped Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers in exchange for outfielder Alex Verdugo, infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong. “But our mission, our charge as a department is to compete consistently — year in, and year out — and to put ourselves in position to win as many championships as we can. That's behind everything we do. And we can only accomplish that goal with a talent base at all levels of the organization that is deep, broad

and sustainable. Acquiring (these players) represents a major step forward for our talent base and will help us win consistently for many years.

“The goal to get under the CBT is not an end in itself. It’s part of a larger goal, our biggest goal, which is to put ourselves in position to compete and win sustainably as many years as we can. Using our resources effectively, is a means toward that end. So we wanted to get under the CBT in service of that larger goal and we weren’t going to do in a way to help us with that bigger goal. The CBT was not a major factor in us deciding to do this deal as much as it was a goal for us this offseason.”

Intended consequence or not, the move does reduce the Red Sox’ payroll by \$43 million in 2020 — \$27 million for Betts and \$16 million (half of his \$32 million salary). At the end of last offseason, the Sox stated that getting under the first CBT threshold of \$208 million was “a goal, not a mandate.” The team’s payroll obligations for the upcoming season now stand at just over \$190 million.

In announcing the deal, Bloom also said the Red Sox “expect to compete in 2020,” and noted that within the organization, there’s the belief that the 2019 edition of the Sox had more talent than their 84-win total reflected.

But later, Bloom acknowledged that the team might expect a step backward in the near future.

“I certainly think it’s reasonable to expect that we’re going to be worse without (Betts and Price),” he said. “But we have real good talent coming back. The main purpose of today’s trade is to help us compete and win as much as possible for many years.”

It may, indeed, take a while to field a playoff-caliber team again. But the allure of five-tool outfielder like Verdugo, and a middle infielder like Downs with both power and base-stealing capability, proved too enticing, especially since the Sox are getting a combined 11 seasons of control for the two young players.

(Wong’s projection is less definite, though at very least, he provides some necessary depth in the organization currently woefully thin at the catcher position).

Bloom said that as hard it was for the team emotionally to part with Betts, “in terms of the big picture, in terms of our long-term future, was a large enough step forward that despite it being difficult, it was something we needed to do.”

It’s here that the organization’s ability to evaluate and project talent will hold the key to the success of the deal. If Verdugo plays at an All-Star level for the duration of the next five years and Downs becomes the team’s everyday second baseman and delivers pop and speed, it will be easier to justify.

Still, it’s hard to escape the notion that this deal was largely money-driven. Maybe the Red Sox got decent return and control in exchange for Betts, but Bloom hinted that the kind of deal the outfielder was seeking — perhaps as much as \$420 million over 12 years, by some reports — was too problematic.

Bloom would not directly answer if the Sox made one last effort to get Betts signed to an extension before engaging teams in trade talk.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate to get into whether or when we had any contract negotiations with Mookie or any player,” he said. “But I will say this generally: I think when you have a star player that’s approaching free agency, you know that’s it going to take a sizable commitment to keep him here and those commitments obviously have a lot of positives and they also have risks.

“And I think you have to assess the positives and the risks of that in the context of the larger picture of what you’re trying to accomplish and how you think it’s going to impact that goal of trying to compete and win as much as we can over the course of time. In the end, we felt what this move was able to do for us towards that goal was the most impactful, positive path for us.”

Time, of course, will tell.

Red Sox Notebook: Sox insist they've done their homework on Alex Verdugo's past

Sean McAdam

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Alex Verdugo was the primary piece coming back to the Red Sox in exchange for Mookie Betts and David Price. Though the trade took six days to complete and had two iterations — one with a third team, one without — Verdugo was always the centerpiece.

But the outfielder also comes with some considerable baggage attached.

For one thing, coaches and teammates with the Dodgers had to reprimand Verdugo for his sometimes indifferent attitude and poor work habits.

Far more seriously, Verdugo, while in the minor leagues, was at one point in the same Arizona hotel room where a sexual assault is alleged to have taken place. Some reports had Verdugo present at the time of the assault; others indicate that it happened after he left.

Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom insisted that the Red Sox did their due diligence on the matter.

“I don’t think it would be appropriate for us to go into a ton of detail on that specific incident,” said Bloom, in announcing the oft-delayed, reconfigured deal Monday night. “The due diligence process there was extensive. Obviously, that’s a topic you take very seriously, as everybody should.”

“We researched it very thoroughly. At the end of the day, we would not have moved forward with the acquisition if we had found anything disqualifying.”

Bloom had nothing to offer on the team’s search for a new manager to replace Alex Cora, who mutually agreed with the team to step down last month after he was implicated in the Houston Astros’ 2017 sign-stealing scandal.

“No news on that front. We’re hoping to have news on that front soon, but nothing on that right now,” said Bloom.

The Boston Globe has reported that the team intends to promote bench coach Ron Roenicke to the role of manager once Major League Baseball releases the results of its investigation of the Red Sox’ own sign-stealing scandal in 2018. Reportedly, the Sox want to make sure that Roenicke isn’t implicated in the report.

But Bloom would not publicly tie the managerial announcement to the release of MLB’s findings.

“Again just what I said — until the (hiring) process is done, we’re not going to have any comment on it,” he said.

Connor Wong was in Red Sox camp Monday and both Jeter Downs and Verdugo are expected Tuesday.

Verdugo is on the team’s 40-man roster. Downs and Wong are not, but both will take part in major league spring training as invitees.

On first day of spring training, Red Sox players react to changing landscape

Sean McAdam

FORT MYERS — Even as they get ready for the start of a new season, Red Sox players already in camp are dealing with change.

Their previous manager is gone, and a replacement has not yet officially been named. Two veteran star players have, after a false start, finally been traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers. And the team still awaits word from Major League Baseball on its punishment for a 2018 sign-stealing scandal.

In short, there's a lot to deal with at a time when the start of spring training is supposed to signal a return to normalcy. Indeed, the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price served as a reminder that, above all else, this is first and foremost a business.

"It definitely is," acknowledged reliever Brandon Workman. "There's definitely a lot of background noise right now. But we'll do our best to block that out and get ready for the season. We're out here to play our best whether Mookie or Price are on the team or not, or anybody else. So we're going to go out and try to win ballgames, just the same as if they were here. You don't expect guys like that to get traded, but that's what happened, so we'll go out and do our best."

It seems strange to consider that, a year ago at this time, the Red Sox were trying to figure out how to repeat as champions. Now, their roster has taken a major hit and, for the time being at least, don't have a manager.

"I think the difference right now is that we lost three people who were a really big part of (our success) — Mookie, DP and AC (Alex Cora)," said Eduardo Rodriguez. "That's a big difference right now. But that's part of the business. This is how baseball is and we've got to get ready for spring training and get ready for the season."

For some players, the loss of Betts and Price was personal. In addition to losing them as contributors, they'll also be missed for their impact as teammates.

"(Price) was like a brother or father to me," said Rodriguez. "The first day I got here in spring training, he was there for me all the time — when I got hurt, everything. Every day I was throwing a bullpen, every day that I was getting on the mound, he was talking about games, situations. Every time I was throwing a bullpen, he was out there with me, seeing what pitches I was throwing, location and everything. He helped me a lot to have success last year."

Michael Chavis recalled that Betts took him under his wing almost immediately and urged him to slow down and be less nervous in interviews with the media.

"Top-notch, incredible," said Chavis of Betts. "He did a lot to make me feel comfortable — not just in the day-to-day aspect but also just growing as a player. I think he's as good a guy as he was a player. And DP was actually the first big leaguer to reach out to me as a minor leaguer. So losing him and his personality and my personal connection to him is sad."

Meanwhile, there has been a report that bench coach Ron Roenicke will be the choice to replace Cora once the results of MLB's investigation are known.

"Ron's great. Everybody loves him," said Workman. "Great baseball guy. My experience with him has mostly been about (controlling) the running game, as a pitcher, but it will be exciting seeing him take charge."

"It's out of my control," shrugged Chavis of the managerial search. "I did like Alex. I can't say enough about him in terms of how he helped me as a player and and as a person. (But) I love Ron. He's a good dude. Really knowledgeable about baseball. He's been around the game a long time. He has a nice combination of like the old-school stuff but he also has a good understanding of how the game is developing and how baseball is changing."

Meanwhile, the players are eager for the investigation to be complete so they can move forward and not be bothered with the distractions.

“It’s definitely something we’d like to get behind us as a team,” said Workman.

In time, the routine of spring training will take over.

“Getting ready for the season’s always fun,” said Workman, “and we’re getting back into the swing of things, so I’m excited for it.”

Even if, this spring, everything is different.

*** *The Athletic***

Sixty-three thoughts on the 63 players on the Red Sox’ spring training roster

Chad Jennings

Pitchers and catchers report to Red Sox spring training on Tuesday. Position players will join them five days later. There should be 63 players on the spring roster this week. Here’s a little bit about each one:

Catchers

1. Christian Vázquez (starter) — If he maintains last year’s offensive strides, Vázquez is a top-10 catcher and a real boost to the lineup. Amazing that 10 months ago it seemed his contract extension might have been a mistake. At this point, the Red Sox absolutely need him.
2. Kevin Plawecki (backup) — Non-tendered when the Indians traded for former Red Sox backup Sandy Leon, Plawecki ultimately signed to be Leon’s replacement in Boston. Backup catchers, man. They sure do come and go.
3. Jett Bandy (non-roster depth) — Veteran backstop has played parts of four seasons in the big leagues and hit for some power in the minors. He’s an obligatory experienced third catcher who will likely end up stashed in Triple A, one of two the Red Sox signed for that role.
4. Juan Centeno (non-roster depth) — A late signing being officially added to Red Sox camp this week. He’s rarely played much, but he’s been in the big leagues every year since 2013, including seven games with the Red Sox last season. Lack of organizational depth at the position means the Red Sox legitimately need him and Bandy for depth, and they especially needed them before this week’s blockbuster trade.
5. Connor Wong (new guy invited to camp) — The least-heralded part of the Mookie Betts trade is a 23-year-old who filled a gaping hole in the Red Sox system: He instantly became their top catching prospect. Wong has a powerful bat, and the Red Sox believe he can stick at catcher, though he’s played some infield as well.
6. Roldani Baldwin (non-roster prospect) — Further evidence the Red Sox needed Wong, and needed a guy like Bandy: Baldwin was the only organizational catching prospect originally invited to big-league camp, and he’s a 23-year-old who missed most of last season with a broken ankle and still hasn’t played a game above High A.

Corner infielders

7. Rafael Devers (third baseman) — Became one of the best young hitters in baseball last season. Could very well be the best player on the team this season. A bright spot amid all of the turmoil.
8. Mitch Moreland (platoon first baseman) — Signed with the Red Sox for the third time in four years. Strong defender. Good left-handed bat. Clubhouse leader. Has had some trouble staying healthy, but still a bargain at \$3 million.

9. Michael Chavis (projected first baseman/second baseman) — Not necessarily the everyday guy at any one position, but could play regularly at first and second base and back up at third base, and might even get some time as a right-handed outfielder (something the Red Sox don't have at the moment). Key piece of the puzzle, just unclear how exactly he fits.

10. Bobby Dalbec (big prospect everyone's talking about) — Loads of power, enough glove to play third base, with a better opportunity to take over at first base sometime this summer. Most notable on-the-verge prospect in the system.

11. Josh Ockimey (non-roster ... prospect?) — Had the most walks and second-most home runs in the Red Sox minor-league system last year, yet he's gone unselected in the past two Rule 5 drafts. Defensive limitations and a .204 batting average have something to do with that. Ockimey's left-handed power might play in the big leagues under the right circumstances, but it's unclear how many doors would have to open for that to happen.

12. Tommy Joseph (non-roster first base depth) — Signed last year out of South Korea, the former Phillies first baseman has a pair of 20-homer seasons in the big leagues. He's also 28 and hasn't played in the big leagues since 2017. Not bad for a worst-case-scenario right-handed platoon partner for Moreland.

13. Jantzen Witte (non-roster invitee, finally) — A 24th-round pick in 2013, Witte is 29 and spent his entire career in the Red Sox system, yet this is his first invitation to big-league camp. Pretty cool that he'll be there.

Middle infielders

14. Xander Bogaerts (shortstop) — Signed a six-year contract extension last spring, then finished fifth in MVP voting. Without Betts, he's one of three men basically vying for the title of best player on the team.

15. José Peraza (second baseman/ utility infielder) — At just \$3 million, the 25-year-old tied Moreland for the Red Sox' second-largest free-agent contract of the winter. He had a nice 2018 in Cincinnati but declined in 2019, and the Red Sox are banking on a bounce back. Could split time at second base and backup at shortstop. Has some speed, too.

16. Jonathan Arauz (Rule 5 pick) — Kind of a typical utilityman's profile, except he's only 21 and has only 28 games of experience above High A. Not much to lose here. The Red Sox will give him a look, and if he's not good enough to make the team, they can just send him back to Houston.

17. C.J. Chatham (prospect depth) — Added to the 40-man roster this winter, Chatham could compete for a job in spring training but seems more likely to return to Triple A as readily available depth. Good glove at second and short. Has consistently hit for average. Played in the Fall League and for Team USA this offseason.

18. Jeter Downs (new prospect depth) — Upon his arrival in the Betts/David Price trade, Downs became the top middle-infield prospect in the Red Sox system, and he's one of the best in the game. The 21-year-old shortstop might end up at second base, where his bat suggests everyday potential. Might be a year away from competing for a big-league job, though.

19. Tzu-Wei Lin (out of options) — This could be the last stand for a popular glove-first utility man who's rarely hit much, but did hold his own as an unexpected call-up in 2017. He's played parts of the past three seasons in the majors. Can play just about anywhere, including center field.

20. Marco Hernández (non-tendered, re-signed, designated, outrighted) — He's been taken off the roster twice this winter, but Hernández will be back in camp as a non-roster invitee. He looked great through his first month in the big leagues last season (.360/.373/.560), but looked pretty bad after that (.194/.233/.224 in his last 98 at-bats).

21. Chad De La Guerra (non-roster depth) — Third big-league camp, but this one comes after a career-best .901 OPS in Triple A last season. That's in only 61 games, but still pretty good for a guy who can play second, third and shortstop. Never a touted prospect, but perpetually doing enough to stick around and give himself a chance.

22. Dustin Pedroia (future unclear) — Pedroia's career trajectory has been uncertain for a few years now. There was a glimmer of hope when it seemed he would be back in spring training with hopes of playing this season, but that glimmer faded with the January news that he'd had yet another setback in his troublesome left knee. Still technically on the roster. Little sense printing his resume here. You know who he is.

Outfielders

23. Andrew Benintendi (left fielder) — Benintendi's chase rate went up last season and, little surprise, so did his strikeouts. His line drive percentage went down and so did his sprint speed. The Red Sox have said Benintendi worked this winter to get back to his athletic self. This would be a good time for a return to the player he was in the first half of 2018.

24. Jackie Bradley Jr. (center fielder) — Through all of his ups and downs, Bradley wound up with pretty consistent numbers the past three years. Roughly a .725 OPS, worth 2 to 3 WAR. Through constant trade speculation, he's stayed with the Red Sox into his final season of team control.

25. Alex Verdugo (presumptive right fielder) — The new guy does a lot of things well. He rarely strikes out. His arm is so strong some thought he would become a pitcher. He had a 114 OPS+ last season, which would have ranked fifth on the Red Sox. But he's also the primary return for Betts. Could anyone live up to that distinction?

26. Marcus Wilson (prospect depth) — Who was the last intriguing outfield prospect the Red Sox had stashed in Triple A? Unless you count Rusney Castillo (or converted catcher Blake Swihart), it might have been Bradley, who was in Pawtucket a half-decade ago. Wilson is not necessarily a system standout — no one is touting him as the future of the organization — but he is the kind of player the Red Sox have lacked in recent years. After an .811 second-half OPS in Double A last season, he was added to the 40-man roster in November and could be at least a fourth outfielder who chips in this season.

27. John Andreoli (non-roster veteran depth) — Andreoli graduated from Saint John's High School in Shrewsbury. His father played linebacker for the Boston Breakers of the USFL and spent time in the Patriots organization. His cousin is former Red Sox reliever Daniel Bard. He's 29 and signed a minor-league deal this winter, and he'll likely serve as experienced depth in Pawtucket.

28. Jarren Duran (top outfield prospect) — Seventh-round pick in 2018 flew through the lowest levels of the minor-league system before hitting his first rough patch in Double A last year. Remains one of the most fascinating prospects in the organization and is a top-20 center field prospect, according to Baseball America. Won't make the team, but should be the center of considerable spring training attention.

29. Nick Longhi (back in the system) — The Red Sox' 30th-round pick in 2013 wound up traded for international pool money in 2017 only to sign a minor-league deal to rejoin the club this season. The outfielder/first baseman is the rare left-handed thrower who bats right-handed, and he crushed lefties in Triple A last season.

30. Rusney Castillo (still in the system) — The same \$72.5 million deal that gave him a big-league opportunity in 2014 has now trapped him in Triple A since 2016. Castillo has put up solid numbers in Pawtucket and might profile as a bench candidate, but until his contract runs out at the end of this season, he seems destined to stay in the minors.

Designated hitter

31. J.D. Martinez (might play some outfield) — Did you know he ranked sixth in OPS, seventh in slugging percentage, and eighth in wRC+ in the American League last season? The guy just keeps hitting.

Starting pitchers

32. Chris Sale (presumptive ace) — He hasn't started a major-league game since Aug. 13, and in his past 10 starts, he had a 5.84 ERA (with 88 strikeouts but also with 13 home runs). Last season was the worst of Sale's career, from a winless April to a season-ending elbow injury. This year has to be better, right?

33. Eduardo Rodríguez (presumably reliable) — Notorious for his inconsistency, Rodríguez became the Red Sox' most reliable starter last season and nearly won 20 games. Now he's coming to camp as the guy they're counting on for rotation stability.

34. Nathan Eovaldi (presumably healthy) — Fastball still humming at 97 mph. Elbow still barking from time to time. Eovaldi has long been a tantalizing talent slowed by injuries and inconsistency. After signing him to a four-year, \$68 million deal last winter, the Red Sox are still waiting for the playoff hero to reemerge.

35. Martín Pérez (presumptive back-end starter) — Believing he was a good buy-low candidate, the Red Sox gave Pérez a \$6.5 million deal on the heels of back-to-back 5.00-plus ERA seasons. With Price traded, he's moved up a spot in the pecking order.

36. Brian Johnson (off the roster) — Removed from the 40-man roster this winter, Johnson went unclaimed on waivers and wound up outrighted to the minor leagues, but he could pitch his way back into the mix now that the Red Sox have a rotation spot wide open.

37. Ryan Weber (still on the roster) — Reminiscent of Marcus Walden a year ago, Weber seemingly spent all winter as a DFA candidate but survived the offseason, suggesting the Red Sox see the 29-year-old journeyman as a solid candidate, either as a starter or a long reliever.

38. Hector Velázquez (go-to swingman?) — We'll find out this year whether that "go-to" description still applies. Velázquez was invaluable as a versatile piece of the puzzle in 2018, and he got the benefit of the doubt as a spot starter early last season, but he wound up back in the minors and finished 2019 with a 5.43 ERA.

39. Tanner Houck (touted prospect) — One evaluator already has pegged Houck, the 2017 first-round pick out of Missouri, as a guy worth considering for the Red Sox' open rotation spot. He pitched well as a Triple-A reliever last season, but the Red Sox plan to keep developing him as a starter.

40. Kyle Hart (surprise prospect) — A year before the Red Sox drafted Houck to much acclaim, they selected Hart as a little-known 16th-rounder out of Indiana. Since then, he's pitched to a 3.13 career ERA in the minors, forcing his way onto the radar and onto the 40-man roster. Made 15 Triple-A starts last year, so don't rule him out.

41. Bryan Mata (up-and-coming prospect) — It's probably too early to consider Mata, 20, a candidate for the big-league rotation, but he has some of the best pure stuff in the minor-league system and his ceiling is that of a major-league starter. A build-from-within focus can only enhance his chances of landing on the fast track.

42. Chris Mazza (waiver claim) — Working the fringes of the roster, the Red Sox made a series of relatively small pitching moves this offseason, and Mazza was one of the first. Claimed off waivers from the Mets, the 30-year-old has pitched well as a minor-league starter, though his nine big-league appearances were all out of the bullpen.

43. Daniel McGrath (best Australian player in camp) — Born in Melbourne and signed out of the Australian Baseball League, McGrath is kind of like Hart in that he's pitched his way into this situation. The 25-year-old lefty got a non-roster invitation to big-league camp after a 1.68 ERA in Double A last year.

Right-handed relievers

44. Brandon Workman (incumbent closer) — A year ago, he was nearly released at the end of spring training, but went on to be one of the better relievers in the American League (ranked fourth in ERA and third in fWAR). He will presumably retain his ninth-inning role.
45. Matt Barnes (go-to setup man) — He pitched 70 times last season, often in high-leverage situations against dangerous hitters, and still had the second-most strikeouts-per-nine in the majors (only Josh Hader had more). A lot of walks, but a legitimate bullpen weapon.
46. Heath Hembree (experienced middle reliever) — Unheralded and perhaps underappreciated, Hembree has been a steady bullpen presence the past three-plus seasons (for a while, he was Alex Cora's go-to choice with runners on base). Might have to work his pregame crossword puzzles alone now that Price is gone.
47. Marcus Walden (feel-good story) — He didn't get any Rookie of the Year votes, but Walden turned 31 in September having put together a rather surprising rookie season. He pitched the fifth-most innings on the Red Sox staff, had the same ERA as Rodríguez and had a lower WHIP than everyone but Workman, Sale and Josh Taylor. Could have quit the game years ago. Now he'll come into camp as a favorite to make the team.
48. Ryan Brasier (onetime closer) — After his stunning 2018 season — when he went from Japanese castoff to vital piece of a championship bullpen — Brasier got ample opportunities to close early last season only to pitch his way out of the role and back to the minors. He'll try to rediscover that old magic.
49. Colten Brewer (still competing for a job) — Only 7 percent of the league limited hard contact as well as Brewer did last season. His cutter/curveball combination intrigued the Red Sox enough to keep him on the roster most of last season, despite his underwhelming FIP and WHIP. He'll be one of several vying for the final bullpen spots.
50. Austin Brice (traded from Miami) — In a minor January trade, the Red Sox added an out-of-options 27-year-old who had pretty solid numbers with the Marlins last season (3.43 ERA, 1.23 WHIP, .214 opponents' average, more than a strikeout per inning). Just one more guy trying to win a job in a crowded bullpen.
51. Mike Shawaryn (starter turned reliever) — Maybe he'll go back into the rotation this year, but Shawaryn was almost exclusively a reliever the past four months of last season. He ranked as a top-10 organizational prospect the previous two years, and he's had some good moments, but he has yet to prove himself one way or the other.
52. Trevor Hildenberger (name worth knowing) — An obscure minor-league free agent, Hildenberger has nonetheless made at least 20 big-league appearances with the Twins each of the past three seasons. He made their Opening Day roster the past two years. Career minor-league ERA: 1.90 with fewer than one baserunner and more than one strikeout per inning.
53. R.J. Alvarez (non-roster veteran) — He hasn't pitched in the majors since 2015, but teams keep stashing him in Triple A as bullpen depth. These anonymous non-roster guys get dismissed every year, but also every year, at least one of them ends up in the big leagues. If not Alvarez, maybe it will be ...
54. Domingo Tapia (non-roster veteran) — Back in Red Sox camp for a second consecutive year on minor-league deal, Tapia didn't exactly blow the doors off in the Pawtucket last season (5.18 ERA, 52 strikeouts in 66 innings) but the Red Sox brought him back. He's 28 and still waiting for his big-league debut. Kind of like ...
55. Robinson Leyer (non-roster veteran) — Signed with the Red Sox in the middle of last season and pitched well in 15 outings with Double-A Portland (2.66 ERA; allowed only five runs after a two-run debut). Eight years in the minors but fewer than 20 innings in Triple A.

Left-handed relievers

56. Darwinzon Hernández (emerging weapon) — Born two months after Devers, he was the youngest player the Red Sox last year. Baseball America has ranked him as a top-10 organizational prospect three straight seasons — always a potential starter, but with a high likelihood of ending up in the bullpen. That seems to be where he's landed after striking out nearly 17 batters per nine innings in his debut last season.

57. Josh Taylor (roster favorite) — The player to be named later in the 2018 Deven Marrero trade, Taylor emerged from relative obscurity to become a key piece of the Red Sox bullpen in 2019 (only Workman had a lower WHIP). Largely unknown a year ago, he now seems to have a leg up for a bullpen job.

58. Josh Osich (waiver claim) — Chaim Bloom's first roster move was claiming Osich off waivers from the White Sox in late October. The 31-year-old has more than 200 big-league appearances and pitched a career-high 67 2/3 innings with a 1.14 WHIP last year, but he does have pretty extreme career splits. The new three-batter minimum for relievers might hurt him.

59. Jeffrey Springs (traded from Texas) — Designated for assignment by the Rangers, the Red Sox acquired him for up-and-down first baseman Sam Travis. Springs has options remaining and could be useful depth. He got to the majors pretty quickly for a 30th-round pick.

60. Matt Hall (traded from Detroit) — Two days after they traded for Springs, the Red Sox traded for Hall, another left-handed pitcher with options remaining. One key difference: Hall worked often as a starter in the minors, so he could be rotation depth as well as another left-handed relief option.

61. Bobby Poyner (off the roster) — After pitching for the Red Sox the past two seasons — and pitching particularly well for a while in 2018 — Poyner was designated for assignment after the Red Sox acquired Springs. That suggests Poyner is lower in the pecking order than some of the new guys.

62. Yoan Aybar (on the roster) — Stuff rather than polish was enough to get Aybar added to the 40-man roster and protected from the Rule 5 draft this winter. Still just 22, he signed as an outfielder in 2013 and actually generated some prospect hype, but his bat just couldn't keep up. He only moved to the mound in 2018 and he's never pitched above High A, but his fastball hums in the upper 90s.

63. Mike Kickham (non-roster veteran) — Another guy who provides depth and experience as both a starter and a reliever, Kickham is a 31-year-old who last pitched in the majors in 2014. He's since done one stint in independent ball, but mostly he settled in as upper-level pitching depth for the Marlins the past three years.

Preaching the 'sustainability' of the future, Red Sox brass admit the compromises of the present

Chad Jennings

FORT MYERS, Fla. — For two and a half minutes, Chaim Bloom spoke, because it was his job to speak. He spoke of Mookie Betts' iconic place in Red Sox history and of David Price's unforgettable performance in the 2018 World Series. He said Betts represented the Red Sox organization with class, and he called Price "the ultimate competitor." He praised the passion, the grit and the intensity of both players.

For two and a half minutes, Bloom spoke, not because he'd known those players the longest or understood them the best but because he'd been in charge on the day they were traded. Bloom had not shared in Betts' development as a ballplayer, nor had he weathered Price's ups and downs with the organization, but in the opening statement of Monday's long-awaited press conference, Bloom summed up their collective history while representing all of the scouts, coaches and teammates who had experienced it with them. He was a part of it, if only for that moment.

And then Bloom had to explain why he'd let it all go.

History matters in baseball. It's celebrated by even the least accomplished franchises, but it is given real weight with an organization like the Red Sox. Legacies matter. Connections matter. Traditions matter. Bloom spoke of all those things Monday.

Yet the Red Sox hired him as chief baseball officer only three months ago, and so even as Bloom spoke of a shared history, he made clear that he brings a different future. The blockbuster trade of Betts and Price to the Dodgers for three young players and some \$40 million in salary relief was a sign of a new focus, a new approach, a new way of doing business.

"This trade is a very hard one to make," Bloom said. "But our mission, our charge as a department, is to compete consistently, year in and year out, and to put ourselves in a position to win as many championships as we can, and that's behind everything we do. And we can only accomplish that goal with a talent base at all levels of the organization that is deep, broad and sustainable."

It was that last word, it seemed, Bloom wanted to emphasize. Time and time again, he went back to it. As he answered questions, as he touted his young prospects, even as he admitted — twice! — that trading Betts and Price made the Red Sox weaker in the short term.

"I certainly think it's reasonable to expect that we're going to be worse without them," he said.

And then, a few minutes later:

"I think it's fair to say that you can't expect in 2020 for what we've received to make up for the contributions we would have expected out of the two guys who are leaving. I don't think that's any surprise. But I will say this: We believed strongly enough in the talent level in this team as a whole to believe that we can still compete, and you guys have seen it over the years — you've seen clubs that are built to win right now have really disappointing seasons, and you've seen clubs that nobody gave a chance; you saw one of them in 2013 go and win the World Series. And you saw the same team two years running win 108 games and 84 games."

That last sentence was a reference to the Red Sox team Bloom inherited, a team that had won a record number of games in 2018, kept the roster almost perfectly intact, then missed the playoffs in 2019. The Red Sox championship before that was in 2013, a season sandwiched between a pair of last-place finishes. Before that was a title that came immediately after a third-place season. And before that, a championship that broke an 86-year curse.

Maybe Bloom had a point, except that four titles in 15 years suggests some sustainability was already in place.

By trading Betts and Price, Bloom cleared enough payroll to get below the competitive balance tax threshold. That had been a stated goal of Red Sox ownership, but Bloom insisted that avoiding the tax was not the driving force behind the trade. It was a factor, Bloom acknowledged, but not the primary objective.

"The goal to get under the CBT is not an end in itself," he said. "It's part of a larger goal, our biggest goal, which is to put ourselves in a position to compete and win sustainably for as many years as we can. And using our resources effectively is a means to that end. It's a part of that goal."

That was not the way of Bloom's predecessor, Dave Dombrowski. Hired as president of baseball operations in 2015, Dombrowski's opening salvo had been to trade four prospects for Craig Kimbrel and then to sign Price to a record \$217 million contract. Those might not have been sustainable or effective uses of resources, but Kimbrel, Price and the Red Sox won a championship together three years later. Now Kimbrel, Price and Dombrowski are gone.

On Tuesday, Bloom will open his first spring training as chief baseball officer having just made a radical, largely unpopular trade as the first major move of his tenure. He said he tried not to think about that fact,

knowing that considering the trade in that context might have rearranged his priorities and led him to a decision against his principles.

“I think if you start thinking about that, it’s going to lead you down paths where you’re not doing the right thing for the organization,” Bloom said. “Every person here in this department, our jobs are to put the interests of the Red Sox first and foremost.”

Bloom has entered into the history and tradition of this organization, and he’s forging his own way forward.

On the complicated Mookie Betts trade, and what comes next in Boston

Peter Gammons

Former Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski is expected to stay in Naples, Fla. this spring, a half-hour from the Red Sox spring training facility. Several people associated with the Red Sox live there, and in March the streets are lined with New Englanders. It might be tempting for some fans, but to blame Dombrowski for Mookie Betts’ departure isn’t fair.

Look, no one likes that Mookie Betts is gone. He’s not only one of the three to five best players in the game; he is also an extraordinarily good person. Remember after Game 2 of the 2018 World Series when he was distributing food to homeless people sleeping on the steps of the Boston Public Library at 1 a.m.? And remember that he was disappointed when word of it got out? Later, in L.A., he said, “that makes it look like a photo op, and that just damages the self-esteem of those unfortunate people who need self-esteem even more.” He’s one of those people who doesn’t live in the me.

I get the fans’ displeasure. John Henry and Tom Werner were listed in Forbes magazine as the third richest ownership in sports. The Red Sox have the highest ticket prices, and with the boom this ownership created in The Fens neighborhood, parking could be \$100 this season.

But this is a complicated story, one not that different from the availability of star third basemen Kris Bryant and Nolan Arenado. Start with this: The reason the Yankees could sign a great pitcher like Gerrit Cole for \$324 million, and the Dodgers can trade for Betts and think they have a chance to sign him long-term, is because in previous seasons they closed their ears to criticism and shaved their payrolls under the luxury tax, which in practice serves as a de facto salary cap.

It is far more difficult to get perceived value when a player is a year from free agency; ask the Indians, as they listened on Francisco Lindor. Should the Red Sox have been more cautious with the Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi contracts? In hindsight, perhaps. But if indeed the Red Sox did offer Betts \$300 million last spring, and if reports are correct that his agent asked for more than \$400 million, maybe there was no real chance to avoid him reaching the free-agent market at the end of the 2020 season.

Dombrowski was brought in to replace Ben Cherington and to win, which he did, giving this ownership a total of four world championships in 15 seasons. Cherington had won as well, and was fired. Theo Epstein won two, had a bizarre exit, and moved on to Chicago win another championship. Five of the last 16 World Series have been won by these three general managers.

So if Dombrowski wants to go to a Red Sox game or five in Fort Myers, fans should thank him; he should be able to soak up the sun or sit in Henry’s box. This is not Pinky Higgins.

Ownership genuinely did want Betts to be the long-term face of the franchise. Mike Trout, Derek Jeter, Clayton Kershaw, Buster Posey, Miguel Cabrera were franchise faces who were retained at any cost, and, OK, Cabrera hasn’t worked so well. But these are the Red Sox. Ted. Yaz. Big Papi. Pedro Martínez. Mookie.

In 1981, the Red Sox traded Fred Lynn to the Angels because they felt they couldn’t sign him, a play in the running battle between owner-GM Haywood Sullivan and agent Jeremy Kapstein. So Lynn was traded for

Joe Rudi, Frank Tanana and Jim Dorsey, none of whom were still with the Sox by 1982. David Laurila on FanGraphs pointed this out about Lynn and Betts' final three seasons with the Red Sox:

LYNN	STAT	BETTS
.311	BA	.299
.396	OBP	.389
.540	SLUG	.535
73	HR	85
148	OPS+	141
3	Gold Gloves	3

In the four seasons after Lynn's trade, Boston finished third, sixth, fourth and fifth in their division — until Roger Clemens emerged as a superstar, went 24-4 and they made the World Series. Clemens and fellow starter Bruce Hurst changed the culture to emphasize pitching for a short period of time; 10 years later, Clemens was allowed to leave and sign with Toronto.

The story the Red Sox passed on was that Kapstein told them Lynn wanted to go back to Southern California because of the beach; four years later, he told me that wasn't true, that "I was never a beach guy." There was also a media storm propagated by Red Sox management in the wake of Clemens' departure.

There is already an undercurrent of "Mookie hates Boston" or "He is selfish — he wanted too much." He wanted his market value, determined by the market. What's wrong with that? Gerrit Cole has changed the market for all extraordinary starting pitchers. Bryce Harper probably helped Mookie. Frank McCourt ran the Dodgers into the ground and got \$2.1 billion and the parking lot rights with the Dodgers, and the value of virtually every team has skyrocketed.

There is no underestimating this ownership. Back in the 1990s, there was a Gold's Gym across Lansdowne Street from The Green Monster. Parking was easy, stepping around the garbage in the streets was not so easy. The only restaurant within walking distance was The Beer Works. Business? Nil. You could load up a parking meter with quarters on Beacon Street and go to a game.

Now The Fens is a boom area, dozens of restaurants, bars, stores, high rises. But if the Red Sox start 3-9 and it's 39 degrees and drizzling, Tom Werner isn't going to the front of the line at Dunkin' Donuts. With so many competing businesses now, one restaurant manager says, "when the Red Sox aren't winning, our business really gets hit. When they're winning, reservations are tough to get. Last September, business was down dramatically. It's a concern." If the Red Sox are in a battle with the Blue Jays for third place, you may not need reservations at Eastern Standard and Island Creek Oyster Bar.

This Betts deal had better be the beginning of a new rising, similar to what Brian Cashman did with the Yankees and Andrew Friedman has done with the Dodgers. There's a lot we do not know yet. What will the players coming back in this trade become? Will the emphasis on a different development program produce some young pitchers, something the team hasn't done since Clay Buchholz? Does resetting the luxury tax allow them to make some building trades and significant signings?

And all the while, another question looms: What will the commissioner's office do in terms of punishment in the sign-stealing scandals? The Red Sox don't think they're going to lose draft choices and get a penalty similar to the one Rob Manfred handed down to the Astros, but there are reports through the industry that they will get hit, and hard.

Jeter Downs is a top 100 prospect, and Alex Verdugo should be a good player, if being Mookie's replacement in a tough media market isn't overwhelming. Dodger scouts say Verdugo has exceptional baseball intelligence; Dodger coaches say his arm is not only as strong as that of any outfielder in the majors, but that his throws have carry and remarkable accuracy, perfect for Fenway Park. "He should hit a ton of doubles in that park," says one coach.

Now we learn if chants of "you're not Mookie" will get to him.

In many ways, this Red Sox ownership is a victim of its own success. They invested in restaurants and sidewalks and street lamps, saved and redid Fenway Park, and they reached a crossroads this winter where they had to decide whether or not to reset their compass. They need to start getting draft choices higher than the 30-40 range. They need to really spend internationally. They need to find talent in other organizations, something Chaim Bloom's Rays did exceptionally well.

NESN's ratings were down last season, and while the Bruins may well make a run at the Stanley Cup, they want people watching the Red Sox in June and August, not the sunsets. This move isn't going to sell in the short term. Will it work out so that the reset gets them back in the high life and lets them win a couple more championships by 2030?

There are 15-year-olds who have no clue what the number 86 means. They don't know Kevin Millar or Johnny Damon or Trot Nixon. They do know Mookie. John Henry, Tom Werner and Sam Kennedy are smart; they know they can't erase and replace, and ride Chaim Bloom forward past the noise they're going to hear in the 100th anniversary of Babe Ruth's first season as a New York Yankee.

Doing the math on the 'competitive balance tax,' and the Red Sox' motivation to trade Mookie Betts

Jayson Stark

I never wanted to be Alan Greenspan when I grew up. I never wanted to work for H & R Block. I never even wanted to fill out my own tax return myself.

I enjoy writing more than write-offs. And I'm pretty sure most of you relate to that, unless you're an actuary or something.

But there's one tax in the world I do know a few things about. Believe it or not, I know enough about baseball's Competitive Balance Tax, more often called the luxury tax, to understand exactly why the Red Sox were convinced it was worth their while to trade Mookie Betts and David Price. I can sum it up this way for you:

\$

I've done that math. I even ran it past people in baseball who work with this tax every day. And I can tell you that trading those two guys, and dipping under the tax threshold, could easily be worth hundreds of millions in savings off future tax bills. But...

I can also tell you that, in the midst of writing this piece, I spent the weekend in Boston, to attend Peter Gammons' fantastic Hot Stove Cool Music charity concert. So as a side benefit, I got to experience all the local Mookie Furor pretty much 24/7. Let's just say it was hard to miss. There was one song, for instance – at Friday's Hot Stove Jam – that was dedicated to “whoever the eff decided it was a good idea to trade Mookie.”

So do I expect anyone in New England to read all this and understand that making that trade was actually a brilliant and inspired idea, for tax reasons? Hahahahaha. No fan would, or should, ever care about that, because that isn't any fan's problem.

Still, that doesn't mean there isn't reason to lay out just how many dollars were at stake here, because, well, are you familiar with the importance of money in modern American life and sports?

I needed a lot of dollar signs above because the Red Sox potentially wouldn't just be saving a little money on their luxury-tax bill in this deal. We're talking about millions and millions and millions more than your average fan might realize – without doing the math, anyway. And that's why I'm here.

So I'm now going to try my best to explain exactly where those dollars would come from. I promise I'll try to keep it as simple as possible.

About that threshold

Here's the first thing you should know: There isn't just one luxury-tax threshold. Not anymore. There are three. That was a wrinkle that came out of the last labor deal. And if you've been asking why teams like the Dodgers, Yankees and Red Sox have all been more motivated to dodge those tax thresholds lately than your average hitter is to dodge an Aroldis Chapman fastball, that's why. These are the tax rates:

First threshold: \$208 million

Tax rate: 20-50%

Second threshold: \$228 million

Tax rate: 62%

Third threshold: \$248 million

Tax rate: 92.5-95%

So how exactly does this affect the Red Sox? Read on.

The alternative Red Sox universe

Say the Red Sox had decided to keep both Betts and Price. According to FanGraphs' Roster Resource, they were headed for an estimated payroll of about \$235 million, for Competitive Balance Tax purposes. That was down slightly from the \$242-million payroll they finished last season with, but still the highest payroll in baseball.

So they were going to be over the first two thresholds without this trade. And even a modest acquisition would have elevated them over all three thresholds. Hello, 95-percent land!

But now let's go all sci-fi and venture into an alternative universe. Let's say the Red Sox were not just hanging onto Betts and Price, but still going all in, in a Dave Dombrowski kind of way. Let's say they'd gone out this winter and signed Zack Wheeler for the same deal he signed with the Phillies – five years, \$118 million.

That contract works out to an average salary of \$23.6 million a year, right? Now add that \$23.6 million to the \$235 million payroll they would have had in our keep-Mookie universe. And what do you have? You have a \$258.6-million payroll.

So what happens to payrolls that high? I just laid that out for you. They zoom above every threshold in the baseball cosmos. And here's how that would affect the cost of Zack Wheeler:

When you add in all the taxes the Red Sox would be subject to, that \$118-million deal turns into nearly a \$185 million deal – because just the taxes add another \$67 million! So what's the actual cost of Zack Wheeler in our alternative universe? Let's use this fun comparison:

AAV* of Zack Wheeler: \$37 million per year

AAV of Gerrit Cole's Yankees contract: \$36 million per year

(*tax-adjusted AAV)

That's a little misleading because the Cole deal will force the Yankees to pay a tax bill, too. But you get the idea. In our alternative universe, the Red Sox wouldn't be paying Wheeler third-starter money. They'd be paying him Cy Young Waiting to Happen money. So file that away.

The alternative Mookie-signs-forever universe

But wait. There's more to our fun little baseball tax seminar. There's the What If They Signed Mookie portion of the seminar coming right up.

So here are the alternative-universe Red Sox, over all three tax thresholds. Now let's say that next winter, they decide to sign a free agent named Mookie Betts and give him, oh, Mike Trout money. Just for "fun," we'll project that they sign him for 10 years, \$400 million. Now they're way over all three thresholds, so they're subject to a tax rate that peaks at 95 percent.

Add in all the taxes they'd be on the hook for, and that \$400 million contract could turn into a \$714-million contract – if it pushed them above all three thresholds for the duration of the contract. Ever seen a \$71-million-a-year baseball player? You'd see one in Mookie under that scenario. Just so you know, that's \$10 million more than the average annual salaries of Trout and Bryce Harper put together.

So get the picture? When you circle the earth in the Perpetual Third Tax Threshold orbit, and you sign that superstar you just can't lose, you could find yourself paying more than \$300 million in tax bills simply for the right to keep him – and your great team around him.

Now let's count the savings

Remember, all that was in our alternative universes. Now let's look at what the Red Sox could very realistically save just because of this trade, in this universe – all because this trade would allow them to slip under the \$208-million threshold.

By dipping beneath the threshold even for one year, the Red Sox fulfill their accountants' greatest dream: They reset their tax rate.

It resets from 50 percent to 20 percent. And if you do that math, that's some serious cash they're saving. Let's lay it out for you.

Because they hit that reset button, their tax rate on that imaginary Betts deal next winter would be only 20 percent instead of 50 percent, at least in the first year. And that's without even calculating the tax bills from all those other tax brackets.

So if they're in the 20-percent bracket, they would save over \$20 million on Mookie's deal in the first year alone. Then, even though their rate could rise to 30 percent the following year, they'd still save another \$10 million in Year 2 of the contract. Their tax in the following years would depend on where their payroll is and what the rules look like. Nevertheless, that \$30-million savings is pretty much a lock.

But remember, in our alternative universe, they didn't just sign Mookie. They also signed Wheeler — and they'd be saving about \$67 million in taxes on his contract, too. So what's the windfall from showing the discipline to trade Betts and Price, as opposed to keeping them both and signing somebody like Wheeler? By our math, this adds up to about a \$97-million discipline deduction.

Plus the Red Sox would get to hang on to multiple draft picks and millions in international signing money. So there's even more value attached to this decision.

But what if they were to, say, find a way to trade Chris Sale or J.D. Martinez in the next year and then sign Mookie to that \$400-million Powerball ticket? Now they might be under the threshold again, even with his salary. And if Chaim Bloom then does what he was hired to do and works his creative magic, allowing them to stay under the threshold permanently, they could save all \$314 million of the potential tax bill on the Betts contract alone. That's more than the 2019 payrolls of the Indians, A's and Rays combined.

These are large numbers, ladies and gentlemen. And you don't have to be a C.P.A. to see that.

So does that help ease any Bostonian's pain?

All right, now that we have all that out of the way, how long has it been since I mentioned that no Red Sox fan will, or should, give two W-2s about any of that? Being a fan involves a whole different form of investment, one of shared, powerful emotion. So there's no reason for any fan to put aside that emotion at a time like this to dispassionately dissect the dollar signs at stake.

But those fans might also want to know that inside most baseball front offices, people get this deal and the reasoning behind it. They see a team that wasn't going to be better than the Yankees this year and knew it. They see a team that needed to upgrade its stockpile of young players in whatever way it could. And their understanding of the enormous tax benefits of getting under the threshold means they laugh at the names being hurled at Red Sox ownership.

"I know people are taking shots at them for being cheap," said an executive of one contender. "This has nothing to do with being cheap. You look at their payroll and where it was leading, and you can't operate like that. So they had to find a way to get under that threshold. And the only way to get under is: Trade Mookie Betts."

So there you go. It wasn't my intent here to justify why the Red Sox would want to trade Mookie — merely to explain it. You don't have to agree with it. I don't expect you to agree with it. But do you at least get it now?

Why did the Red Sox believe it was worth their while to trade away their man Mookie — and David Price to boot? It's simple.

\$ always talks.

*** *The New York Post***

Red Sox feeling pain of Mookie Betts blockbuster trade

Greg Joyce

FORT MYERS, Fla. — At last, the Red Sox' long national nightmare is over.

Six days after news first broke of a Mookie Betts trade to the Dodgers — with the time in between filled with fan backlash and reports over the original deal falling apart because of medical reviews — a reworked version finally became official Monday night. The Red Sox dealt Betts, their homegrown star who has become one of the best players in baseball, David Price and cash considerations to the Dodgers for young outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs, an infielder, and Connor Wong, a catcher.

"We knew it would hurt, and it's going to hurt for a little while," chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said Monday night at Fenway South, less than 48 hours before the first workout for pitchers and catchers at spring training. "As difficult as it was, and as difficult as it continues to be emotionally, we felt that where this trade positions us in terms of the big picture, in terms of our long-term future, was a large enough step forward that despite being difficult, it was something we needed to do."

The Red Sox entered the offseason hoping to get under the luxury-tax threshold after having baseball's highest payroll last season at an estimated \$242 million, per Fangraphs. Betts, a pending free agent, was set to make \$27 million this season while Price has three years and \$96 million left on his contract. The Red Sox are reportedly paying half of the money left on Price's contract, but the trade will allow them to reset their luxury tax, allowing for more flexibility in the future.

Despite the salary dump that sent their best player packing for Los Angeles, Bloom insisted the organization still believes it can compete in 2020.

"We think it is realistic," said Bloom, who was hired from the Rays in October. "Now look, what Mookie and David are capable of on the field is a lot. I certainly think it's reasonable to expect that we're going to be worse without them. But we have real good talent coming back, we've added talent to the roster this winter, and I think it's important to point out — we felt at the beginning of the winter that this team had a

lot more talent on it than the 84 wins it put up last year. We still think there's plenty of talent here to compete."

The initial iteration of the trade, which became public once it was agreed upon last week, included the Red Sox getting hard-throwing pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins as part of a three-team trade. But after a medical review, the Red Sox reportedly viewed Graterol as more of a reliever than a starting pitcher, which led to the revamped deal that subtracted Graterol and added Downs and Wong.

Verdugo is expected to replace Betts in right field while Downs, a top-100 prospect, could be Boston's second baseman of the future. But that won't be much solace to the fans in Boston, who have seen their team win four of the past 16 World Series.

"The big picture and how this fits into our chances to win as much as we can over the course of the next number of years, that had to take precedence," Blo

*** *Associated Press***

Dodgers, Red Sox finish deal; Betts and Price headed West

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP) — Mookie Betts and David Price are Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Boston Red Sox are tax dodgers.

Boston and Los Angeles finalized the on-again, off-again deal that will send the 2018 AL MVP and 2012 AL Cy Young Award winner to the West Coast on Monday night — just hours before the Red Sox are scheduled to open spring training.

The Dodgers hope the players will be the missing pieces after seven straight division championships all ended short of their first World Series title since 1988. The Red Sox have already achieved their biggest goal of the offseason: ditching more than \$70 million in salary to get under baseball's collective bargaining tax threshold for 2020.

"Our mission, our charge as a department is to compete consistently year-in and year-out, and to put ourselves in position to win as many championships as we can," Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said. "That's behind everything that we do. And we can only accomplish that goal with a talent base at all levels of the org that is deep, broad and sustainable."

The Red Sox acquired outfielder Alex Verdugo and two prospects: infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong. According to a person with knowledge of the deal, Boston will send cash to the Dodgers, reportedly half of the \$96 million owed for the next three seasons. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the financial terms were not public.

The Red Sox agreed to deal Betts and Price to the Dodgers last week, as part of a three-team swap that was to send Twins bullpen prospect Brusdar Graterol to the Red Sox and Dodgers starting pitcher Kenta Maeda to Minnesota. The Red Sox hesitated out of concern about Graterol's medical review, however, and the Twins and Dodgers eventually worked out their own deal. The Maeda-Graterol trade was also finalized on Monday night.

In order to make room on their 40-man roster, the Dodgers designated infielder Tyler White and outfielder Kyle Garlick for assignment.

In five full major league seasons, the 27-year-old Betts has received MVP votes five times, finishing as runner-up once and winning the AL honor in 2018; he is a four-time Gold Glove winner. But he will earn \$27 million this season, the last before he is eligible for free agency, and he has already turned down a nine-figure extension.

“With Mookie, there was never a point where we were pushing him out there, shopping. We had to be open to all options,” Bloom said at the team's spring training complex. “Once it was clear that the Dodgers in particular were going to be very aggressive, it made sense to engage.”

In a statement distributed by the team, owner John Henry acknowledged the backlash the Red Sox have received for jettisoning Betts.

“In trading a great player, a beloved player, we recognize how incredibly difficult this is for fans who fully understand just how special Mookie is,” Henry said. “While the organization in its entirety very much wanted to see Mookie in a Red Sox uniform for the length of his career, we believe in this decision as we are responsible and accountable for both the present and the future of the Red Sox. We thank Mookie for his incredible contributions, both on and off the field.”

Price, 34, is a two-time Cy Young runner-up and 2012 winner. He was also the runner-up for the World Series MVP when the Red Sox beat the Dodgers in 2018 after their franchise-record 108 regular-season victories.

But he made just 22 starts last season — two after July 30 — due to wrist injuries. By shedding his salary along with Betts', the Red Sox have dipped below the \$208 million threshold that allows them to avoid paying baseball's collective bargaining tax this year and lowers the rate if they go over it in 2021.

Henry said in September, after the team missed the playoffs for the first time since 2015, that the Red Sox “need to be under the CBT.” Team president Sam Kennedy later walked back the comments and said that was “a goal but not a mandate.”

“We fully expect to compete in 2020,” Bloom said Monday. “The front-line talent on our roster can play with anybody.”

Verdugo batted .294 with 44 RBIs and 12 home runs in 106 games before a back injury in August ended his season early. Downs batted .276 with 24 homers and 86 RBIs at Single- and Double-A last year.

“He's got a chance to be a complete player that can really impact us,” Bloom said.

Wong hit .281 with 24 homers and 82 RBIs in Single- and Double-A.

“He's made a lot of strides offensively,” Bloom said. “When you have really good athletes behind the plate, sometimes those guys can exceed what you expect offensively.”

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.

Red Sox pitchers and catchers are due to report to spring training on Tuesday.