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*** *The Boston Globe***

Sorry, but there is no explaining away the Mookie Betts move

Dan Shaughnessy

FORT MYERS, Fla. — In an attempt to clear the air and explain the motivations behind the trade that sent Mookie Betts to the Dodgers last week, Red Sox principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, and CEO Sam Kennedy delivered comments and answered questions for 32 awkward minutes Monday morning at JetBlue Park.

I would not say they stuck the landing. It went about as well as Deval Patrick's presidential bid and the quest to bring the 2024 Summer Olympics to Boston.

Little is likely to change in the wake of Sox management's effort to explain a salary dump that the club refuses to acknowledge is a salary dump. Folks who hate the Betts deal are unlikely to feel any better from what was said at the tense presser. The Red Sox seem to know this.

"I understand there is probably little I can say today that will change how you feel about this," Henry said, while reading a 6½-minute statement at the outset of the press conference.

He's right. The Sox are going into 2020 asking you to "root, root, root for payroll flexibility," and it's an impossible sell. It is the rally cry of the Tampa Bay Rays, not the Boston Red Sox.

All three Sox officials made an attempt to compare the Betts deal to the trading of Nomar Garciaparra at the deadline in 2004, but we all know that this is nothing like that. Garciaparra was injured, sulky, and a defensive drag on the championship-bound Red Sox. When that deal was made, many Sox fans were still angry at Nomar for not playing in a critical loss a month earlier at Yankee Stadium (the night Derek Jeter had to go to the hospital after diving into the stands, while Nomar sat and sulked in the visitors dugout).

Trading Betts in 2020 is nothing like trading Nomar in '04. Betts is a recent MVP, an ever-smiling World Series winner in the prime of his career who never had a bad day in Boston. Red Sox management's insistence that dealing Mookie was a "baseball deal" does not wash with the fans or with most of Baseball America.

Seated at a table between Werner and Kennedy, the low-talking Henry (who also owns the Globe) opened by reminding fans that he grew up a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals and star Stan Musial. The Sox owner acknowledged, "My heart would have been broken if Stan the Man had ever been traded, for any reason."

Good empathy there. But how would young John Henry have felt if the Cardinals swapped Musial for an unproven 23-year-old outfielder with a fractured back and two faceless minor leaguers, then explained to fans that it was a baseball deal that ultimately would benefit the Cardinals because of the club's new "payroll flexibility."

Young John Henry wouldn't have bought it then, and nobody around here is buying it now. And the Sox' insistence that this deal had nothing to do with Henry's desire to get under the competitive balance tax is bound to only further enrage Boston's savvy baseball fans.

Some Monday lowlights:

First question: How is this not a salary dump?

Kennedy: “It’s understandable that people could view this transaction as a way to rid yourselves of some salary obligations . . . We had a hard decision to make and we decided that it was in the best interests of the baseball operation to go forward with this transaction to get substantial value back in exchange for two great players . . . We’ve tried to be clear that this was not exclusively about the CBT.”

Second question: John, would you identify this as a baseball trade or a trade about finances?

Henry: “A baseball trade.”

Werner pointed out, “We’ve acquired talent that will be under club control for I think 17 years.”

Swell. The Sox have 17 years of “club control” of Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs, and Connor Wong while the Dodgers have Betts and David Price.

Henry said the Sox had made “legitimate offers” to Betts in three offseasons.

Henry and Werner were verbally pinned when Boston Sports Journal’s Sean McAdam asked why ownership allowed the megabucks signings of Nate Eovaldi and Chris Sale last spring when Henry claimed in September 2019 that the club had known for “over a year” that it would have to “reset” for 2020 with Betts coming into his walk season. This timeline simply does not work.

Henry passed. Werner said, “We’ve also said that [resetting] was a goal, not a mandate,” then dodged with a bag of words.

Regarding the troubled history of Verdugo, Kennedy said, “We did an extremely high level of due diligence with MLB and the Dodgers. We are comfortable with the decision. I had a chance to meet Alex in person this morning and let him know that the entire organization is here to support him.”

When Henry was asked if he could assure Sox fans that this is not a bridge year, he deferred to Werner, then added, “Don’t you think this would be a record payroll for a bridge year?”

When I asked Kennedy if there would be any consideration to rolling back ticket prices, company man Sam launched into a detailed, lengthy, and uncomfortable pitch to sell tickets (“Come to Fenway Park for nine dollars! We have affordable family options, includes food and beverage!”). It was like going to someone’s house for dinner and having them whip out a line of Tupperware they’re trying to sell.

After the session, Werner and Kennedy stuck around for smaller, informal interviews. The last thing I heard before I walked out of the room was Werner saying, “It wasn’t a salary dump. It was to give us flexibility. It was a wise trade.”

Whew.

The home opener is Thursday, April 2, against the White Sox at 2:05 p.m., and the Red Sox have 12 more frosty home dates in April. Seats are still available.

Red Sox owners insist that Mookie Betts trade was a baseball decision

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — A week after the trade that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers for three young players, the Red Sox tried again Monday to explain why it made sense.

This time, principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, and team president Sam Kennedy took a swing at it, insisting the deal was more about improving the team’s talent base than cutting payroll.

As the players went through the first full-squad workout of spring training, the owners defended a trade that has defined the season before it started.

“We traded Mookie Betts to get value back and set yourself up to win another championship,” Kennedy said.

“Maybe it was the wrong decision. But that’s why we made the decision.”

In previous years, the owners’ annual spring training news conference took place with Henry and Werner seated on a wooden bench outside the clubhouse. But this year the Red Sox moved the session to a dining room inside the ballpark and had Kennedy join Henry and Werner at a table.

In another break from tradition, Henry opened the session by reading a 783-word statement that explained his side of the trade.

The crux of the missive, and much of what followed, was that the Sox felt they received more value for Betts in the trade than they would have otherwise.

Related: Read John Henry’s opening statement

They also pushed back against the idea that the trade was made only to cut payroll to get under baseball’s competitive balance tax limit and reset the penalties for next year and beyond.

“There are clearly certain advantages by resetting and getting under,” Kennedy said. “But we’ve tried to be clear that this was not exclusively about the CBT and getting under that CBT threshold. There would have been other ways to do that.

“You don’t trade Mookie Betts to get under the CBT. We traded Mookie Betts and David Price to get substantial value for the return.”

If Betts played out this season with the Sox, became a free agent, and signed with another club, the only compensation would have been a draft pick. The Sox felt the three players from the Dodgers were a better return considering Betts was not open to a long-term contract.

“We made legitimate offers over three offseasons,” said Henry, who also owns the Globe. “I made it personally clear to him one-on-one that we wanted to see him in a Red Sox uniform for the rest of his life, if possible.

“We live in a different world today. Players spend so many years being underpaid in the system that we have that when they get to free agency they’ve earned the right to maximize their chances of being paid a maximum amount.”

Left unsaid, but occasionally hinted at, was that the Sox also saved \$75 million over the next three seasons and avoided what would have been another year of luxury tax payments.

“Hopefully we’ll look at this trade and see the benefits of it as time goes on,” Werner said. “In the short run, this is going to be painful. It’s painful for us. But it does give us flexibility.”

Part of that short-term pain has been angering the fan base over the loss of Betts, a multidimensional and personable 27-year-old who is arguably the best player the team has developed in decades.

Kennedy said ticket sales are off by 15 percent compared with the same point last year and that season-ticket renewals, which typically run 88-89 percent, are down to 82 percent.

The Red Sox raised ticket prices by an average of 1.7 percent on Oct. 8, only nine days after finishing 84-78 and 19 games out of first place. Kennedy acknowledged that they knew at the time that trading Betts was a possibility. Kennedy was asked if that was a poor decision in retrospect.

“I try not to look back and have a lot of regrets,” he said. “But I will say that we’ve made a lot of mistakes in our 19 years here. I think we’ve made a lot of good decisions. I’ll leave it at that.”

At one point during the news conference, Kennedy spoke for just over a minute promoting ticket deals at Fenway Park. He returned to that theme a few minutes later.

A few minutes after the news conference broke up in Florida, Betts emerged from the Dodgers clubhouse at their Camelback Ranch complex in Glendale, Ariz. A large crowd of fans greeted him with loud cheers.

J.D. Martinez wants to keep some in-game video

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Commissioner Rob Manfred has made it clear that baseball will restrict how much access players have to video during games this season in the wake of the Astros sign-stealing scandal.

J.D. Martinez hopes they don’t get carried away.

Martinez said reviewing video of his at-bats during games is part of his process and he doesn’t want that taken away.

“That’s who I am,” he said. “I think to go out there and take all video out, you’re not allowed to look at at-bats, I think it’s a little ridiculous in my opinion.”

Martinez said players of his generation were schooled in using video to adjust their swings.

“To all of a sudden take that away, it’s a little extreme,” he said. “If you want to delay it an inning, you want to do something. I promise you now the at-bats wouldn’t help anything in a sign-stealing type of deal.”

Martinez feels MLB should speak to players about how best to restrict video.

“For me, it’s what makes me me,” Martinez said. “I’m a very analytical guy, I like to study my swing . . . that’s the trend in the game. Everybody is like that.”

Martinez said the replay system used to challenge calls could be moved to the press box (as opposed to close to the dugout) to take away the opportunity for players to use it illicitly.

“Then you don’t have to worry about anything. They have to do a better job with that,” he said.

Martinez believes the scandal and the fallout will end illegal sign-stealing.

“I don’t think it will happen again after the consequences that were given out to Houston,” he said. “I think organizations are very aware. From here on out, it’s going to be a different message in the clubhouse.”

Martinez also admitted it’s difficult knowing that former Red Sox manager Alex Cora, somebody he greatly respects and considers a friend, was one of the ringleaders of Houston’s scheme to steal signs.

“When it happened I was very, kind of shocked by it,” he said. “I wasn’t aware of it. It obviously caught me off guard . . . He never influenced us in any way to do that. He never mentioned it. I didn’t even know [the Astros] were doing it.

“That doesn’t change my view in him and the way he treated me as a person.”

Waiting game

MLB’s six-week investigation into whether the 2018 Red Sox illegally stole signs has not included interviews with principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, or team president Sam Kennedy.

All three men said they have not been contacted. MLB’s investigation into the Astros included an extensive interview with team owner Jim Crane, based on the report issued by Manfred.

Henry is not surprised that the Sox investigation has gone longer than MLB expected.

“One thing we’ve learned from the Astros investigation, it’s that Major League Baseball is extraordinarily thorough when they do an investigation,” he said.

Due diligence

Kennedy said the Red Sox “did an extremely high level of due diligence” with MLB and the Dodgers regarding the character of Alex Verdugo, one of the players in the Mookie Betts deal.

“I actually spoke to [Manfred] directly about it myself,” Kennedy said.

Verdugo has confirmed his presence at a 2015 incident in Arizona that led to police investigating the alleged sexual assault of a minor by another player. No charges were filed.

The Red Sox, Kennedy said, did not speak to the woman involved.

Kennedy said he met Verdugo Monday and told him the organization would support him.

Sale gets going

Chris Sale threw off a bullpen mound for the first time since missing a week with pneumonia. “[He’s] really excited about it,” Red Sox manager Ron Roenicke said. “Just his bullpen and his being at full strength. He said he feels really good and doesn’t feel he’s that far behind.” . . . The Sox had their annual “company meeting” before the workout. Roenicke and Werner were among the speakers . . . Rafael Devers, who returned to the Dominican Republic for the birth of his second child, is expected back in camp Thursday. The same is true for outfielder Cesar Puello, who has been delayed by issues with his visa.

John Henry, Sam Kennedy explain Red Sox’ decision to trade Mookie Betts

Michael Silverman

Two driving forces led the Red Sox to trade Mookie Betts.

The first was realizing that extension talks with Betts, a free agent after the 2020 season, were not headed anywhere. That led to a determination to trade him before the season’s start as long as they could receive sufficient value in return.

“I think you go into every offseason where you have a strong potential free agent, you always, during an offseason, weigh what you might get compared with what you might wind up with if you do nothing,” Red Sox principal owner John Henry, who also owns the Globe, said last week. “And I think we were all probably surprised that there turned out to be a deal. I don’t think it was so much a question of us going out looking for a deal as just a normal course of an offseason where you’re looking at everything.”

Said president Sam Kennedy: “The value proposition was there. We weren’t sure we would get the value back that it would require us to make a move.”

Once the Red Sox realized an extension was unlikely, they were open to talks with other teams, some of whom had expressed interest in trading for Betts during the 2019 season. Last year’s talks never

progressed, since at midseason the Red Sox were still competitive and dealing away Betts was a no-win situation in every way.

Eventually, talks between the Dodgers and Red Sox resulted in a return package of outfielder Alex Verdugo, catcher Connor Wong, and infielder Jeter Downs for Betts and David Price.

Henry stressed that getting under Major League Baseball's competitive balance tax threshold was not a leading factor in trading Betts.

"Yes," said Henry in response to the question of whether the club would have traded Betts even if it had already dipped below the CBT by making other deals. "We had other avenues for getting under the CBT."

Related: Chris Sale's vision for baseball: 'We need to get back to playing a clean game'

One avenue might have been trading Price and Jackie Bradley Jr., and Bradley's name surfaced over the winter in trade rumors.

Henry said the reality of the economic system that rules Major League Baseball forced a team like the Red Sox to consider trading a player of Betts' caliber with a year of team control remaining.

"We also live in an economic system today in baseball that you can't just ignore," Henry said. "When I was growing up, you didn't have great players leaving their teams. We had a different economic system that did not work at all for the players. Over decades now, bargained between players and clubs, there's a system that we now live under that I think makes a lot more sense. But, you end up having to make difficult decisions as a result of the system. It's a continual thing for clubs and players."

Kennedy insisted the Red Sox' calculus in the Betts trade involved working with the economic system and still fielding a team that could be competitive in the near and long term.

"We have to be honest about why we made the decision to do what we did, and that's clear," Kennedy said. "We think it's the best interests of baseball operations. John mentioned the MLB system in which we operate and that requires really, really difficult decision-making, so we made our decision and we have to stand by it and now we have to move forward."

"We are not giving up on the 2020 season. We think we are built to be able to compete. We all of a sudden now have some flexibility and resources that can be deployed as we go forward here in the coming days, weeks, and months ahead. And we just added significant value for the long term, so it's a balancing act between that inherent conflict between short term and long term. There were baseball reasons for this deal, there were franchise reasons for this deal, which is we have an obligation to do everything in our power to win World Series championships as often as possible. That's how we see our mission and our responsibility."

Mookie Betts bids farewell: 'You were great to me, Boston'

Katie McInerney

Former Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts used social media to tell Boston how he feels.

"Nine years. Man, you were great to me, Boston," the outfielder begins in a video posted to his social media accounts on Monday morning.

"The way you welcomed me in, like family. The bonds that will last a lifetime, and the banner that will hang forever," he says, as clips of him dancing in the outfield and celebrating the 2018 World Series flash over the screen.

It was a fitting thank you to the city, fans, and team he called home for his entire career up until this month, when he was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The scene shifts from “GO SOX” shining in lights on the Prudential Center to the palm tree-lined streets of LA and a glimpse of the classic “Dodger Stadium” sign on Vin Scully Avenue.

“Over the years, I’ve realized we’re all a part of something bigger than one person or one city,” he continues.

Then the video shifts to classic moments many Boston or LA sports fans would recognize – the Dodgers winning the World Series, Kevin Garnett celebrating an NBA Finals victory, Zdeno Chara hoisting the Stanley Cup, Tom Brady fist-pumping into the air, Kobe Bryant jumping in joy after winning another title.

His final words:

“Los Angeles, it’s showtime.”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Former Red Sox utility man Brock Holt agrees with Brewers, per report

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox will not be bringing back popular utility man Brock Holt.

According to The Athletic, Holt is in agreement on a deal with the Milwaukee Brewers, pending a physical.

The 31-year-old was a nice addition from the Pirates as part of the Joel Hanrahan trade before the 2013 season. He burst onto the scene in 2014 and hit .281 while playing all seven defensive positions but catcher and pitcher for the Sox. He finished eighth in Rookie of the Year voting. In 2014, he was an All-Star.

An energetic player who showed a lot of personality on the field, Holt was also the team’s Jimmy Fund captain during his final years in Boston and played perhaps the largest role of anyone on the team when it came to community involvement.

The Sox signaled they were moving on from Holt early this winter when they signed a similar player, 25-year-old infielder Jose Peraza, to a one-year contract worth \$3 million. The younger Peraza could be a long-term solution as a utility man given he’d be arbitration eligible in 2021 if the Sox choose to keep him around.

Over seven seasons in Boston, Holt hit .270 with a .715 OPS while playing solid defense at every position.

Oh Henry! You have got to be kidding me

Tom Keegan

Here’s the first problem with the prepared statement about the Mookie Betts trade that John Henry read Monday in Fort Myers: Anyone smart enough to read it isn’t dumb enough to believe it. Literacy is all that’s required to be insulted by it.

For one thing, Henry equated trading Betts with shipping quirky Nomar Garciaparra out of town on July 31, 2004.

Betts is 27 and in the past five seasons with the Red Sox averaged more than 148 games a year. By the time Garciaparra was dealt, he was 31, had a bum Achilles tendon, had become a liability in the field, and

nobody was talking about his “great, great smile.” He wanted out, the Red Sox wanted him out, and the majority of fans who had once adored him weren’t sorry to see him go.

Those trades had about as much in common as the personalities and reliability levels of the squeaky-clean Mookie and Alex Verdugo, the outfielder with the bad back and checkered past who was the primary of three pieces coming from the Dodgers to the Red Sox in exchange for Mookie and talented, experienced, moody left-hander David Price.

Henry’s statement, which took him six minutes to read, also was designed to let Red Sox fans know he feels your pain. (Someone forgot to coach him to bite his lower lip and quiver when reading that part).

“So, on one level, when I say I understand how many of you feel about this trade with the Dodgers, I know many of you, particularly our youngest fans, are disbelieving or angry or sad about it,” he said. “I know it’s difficult and disappointing.”

Translation: Obviously, adults who know enough about baseball economics understand why he had to do this, but I do understand how the young and naive don’t get it. I was young and naive once, too.

Don’t fall for that for a second. You are not naive for hating this trade, regardless of your age. The Red Sox did not have to do this. In fact, they had to not do this.

Henry also painted himself as a champion of players’ economic freedoms today compared to when he was a boy idolizing Stan “The Man” Musial of his beloved Cardinals. Times were different then, he rightly said. Players didn’t have free-agent rights. You know what else was different? The value of ball clubs didn’t wildly appreciate back then. Forbes last year estimated the Red Sox net worth at \$3.2 billion and estimated the value of Fenway Sports Group at \$6.6 billion. The Sox were purchased for \$700 million.

And this is the thanks shown to the people who made that \$2.5 billion appreciation possible?

The prepared statement was bad enough. Naturally, the Red Sox kept digging.

Obviously, the trade was made in order to move the payroll under the so-called “competitive balance tax” threshold of \$208 million.

“You don’t trade Mookie to get under the CBT,” Sox CEO Sam Kennedy said.

No, you trade Mookie and make the Dodgers take Price and half of his remaining \$96 million salary for the next three seasons.

“We are not giving up on the 2020 season,” Kennedy said. “We think we are built to be able to compete.”

And swampland well to the south of JetBlue Park is built for building nice winter homes. That might make a nice side business for the Red Sox. *Caveat emptor.*

Talk about placing unfair expectations on interim manager Ron Roenicke. The Red Sox won 84 games a year ago and swapped the 2018 American League MVP for a right fielder suffering from a back stress fracture. This is supposed to make them competitive? Price was injured for much of last season, but still went 7-5 with a 4.28 ERA, so it’s not as if subtracting him from the rotation will make them better.

If the Red Sox wanted their fans to begin looking ahead instead of licking their wounds from a historically bad trade, they needed to tell the world how many years and how much money they offered Betts to stay in Boston. Then everyone could decide for themselves how they feel about the trade.

The Red Sox failed to do so, leaving them only one grade for the day, which happens to match the grade for the trade: F.

Red Sox notebook: John Henry says team made ‘legitimate offers over three offseasons’ to Mookie Betts

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — Red Sox ownership was adamant Monday that getting under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold for 2020 was not the driving factor behind the decision to trade Mookie Betts to the Dodgers, and that receiving significant value for the superstar as he heads into free agency next winter was a primary objective.

Principal owner John Henry said that the team made “legitimate offers over three offseasons” in an attempt to hold on to Betts, who seemed to be intent on testing the free-agent market. The Red Sox did not reveal any details about their negotiations with Betts, but insisted they did not want to give him up.

“We made it clear to Mookie, I made it personally clear one-on-one, that we wanted to see him in a Red Sox uniform for the rest of his life if possible,” Henry said. “But ... we live in a different world today. Players spend so many years being underpaid in the system that we have that when they get to free agency they’ve earned the right to maximize their chances of being paid maximum amount.”

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy echoed that sentiment.

“Mookie and his representatives definitely knew of our desire to try to make Mookie Betts part of our Red Sox family for life,” Kennedy said. “That’s for sure. We’ll leave it at that and express our gratitude. He leaves Boston a World Series champion, an MVP, a great person and a great player.”

When Betts becomes a free agent next offseason, the Red Sox will ironically have the flexibility and the room they created by dealing him that would be necessary to bring him back to Boston. But when asked if that was a possibility, Kennedy didn’t answer directly.

“We can’t talk about a player with another organization but if you look back to 2002, the Red Sox have been in the top five of payroll,” Kennedy said. “This club will have a payroll at or above \$200 million. These guys have never, ever shied away from spending when appropriate, when strategic, for trying to win in October.”

Investigation length no surprise

The Red Sox still believe their 2018 championship was not tainted.

Asked if the team’s stance has changed due to commissioner Rob Manfred’s comments that the investigation has taken longer than expected because of a few new things he discovered, Henry said it hasn’t.

“I think if there’s one thing we learned from the Astros investigation it’s that Major League Baseball is extraordinarily thorough, so it’s not overly surprising that it’s not done yet,” Henry said. “But I don’t think anything from our standpoint has changed.”

Neither Henry, chairman Tom Werner nor Kennedy said they’ve been interviewed by MLB.

Kennedy was asked why the team has been so confident in the wake of the investigation.

“Again, I don’t know if we appear confident,” Kennedy said. “We’re going to respect the investigation. It’ll play out. Look, we’re responsible and accountable for everything that goes on in this organization, and so that’s our responsibility and one of our responsibilities is to ensure we’re cooperating fully with Major League Baseball.”

Werner said he's concerned about the current state of the game, with the Astros' sign-stealing scheme from 2017 generating a lot of buzz this spring.

"We're always concerned about baseball," Werner said. "We've talked about it being a great game, but there's too many headlines in the last month about off-field stuff. Like everybody I'm sorely disappointed in what happened in Houston. I think baseball handled that appropriately."

Opening message

Interim manager Ron Roenicke didn't want to get into the details of what he said to the team before its first full-squad workout on Monday morning, but the sense is that there's a little bit of a chip on their shoulder after last season's underperformance and all of the adversity that has hit the club this offseason.

"I definitely think a lot of guys are a little bit more hungry than last year in a sense," said J.D. Martinez. "I'm not saying that our team was complacent last year but I think we were just, in a sense, a little bit more relaxed coming in. I think this year, last year was kind of like a slap in the face, a reality check for us. I think a lot of guys are coming in a lot more determined and ready to go. The team we put on the field last year wasn't us, it wasn't our team. It wasn't our team." ...

Roenicke said he was "really excited" about Chris Sale's bullpen on Monday.

"He says he feels really good," Roenicke said. "He's sleeping really well and really doesn't feel like he's that far behind so he'll play catch the next couple days, probably thrown another bullpen and hopefully it continues to progress like that." ...

Roenicke said Rafael Devers, who is home in the Dominican Republic after the birth of his daughter, is scheduled to arrive to Fort Myers on Thursday.

J.D. Martinez doesn't regret staying with Red Sox, feels fresh for 2020

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — It was a simple, and at the time understandable reason why J.D. Martinez decided to opt in to his contract to remain with the Red Sox.

It was explained by his agent, Scott Boras, at the GM Meetings in early November and then again by Martinez later in the winter: the Red Sox designated hitter "wanted assurance of competition at a high level," Boras said.

"It's a competitive team," Martinez said on Jan. 18. "I want to win. I want to win championships. There's no guarantee that if I do opt out, I'm going on a competitive team. I know that this team is really competitive and this team has a chance to win next year."

But that was before the Red Sox made a franchise-shaking move that even chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom admitted makes them worse in the short term, as they sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

The Red Sox won 84 games last season with Betts and Price, and even though they felt like they underachieved, expectations are low in 2020. At best, they don't look to be nearly as competitive as Martinez thought they would be when he opted in.

So if Martinez knew then what he knows now, would he make the same decision? That's not as simple as one may think.

"When you're in that point of your life, that point and time, when you have to make a decision on what's in front of you, and to me, that's the decision I made," Martinez said. "That was the hand I had. They were

here, this and that. Obviously, you know, they're gone and I don't think this team is a bad team because they left. I still think this team is a really good team. I understand the organization, why they had to make the decision. I know we got some good guys for him. So I'm excited for the future and what's to happen."

When news broke that Betts was first traded, in the three-team deal that ultimately fell through, Martinez publicly shared his feelings by tweeting an emoji of a sad face. When the trade went through five days later, he tweeted that emoji again twice.

Martinez will certainly miss Betts, who he took on something of a mentorship role for when he arrived to Boston in 2018. He helped Betts reach new heights at the plate that culminated in him winning American League MVP. But while the lineup will obviously look a lot different without him, Martinez has plenty of confidence in those that remain.

"Mookie's a great player," Martinez said. "One of the best players in the game. Obviously you're going to feel it in a sense but I think we have a lot of really, really good players and you look at the guys who had breakout years last year, guys come back and I don't know what our numbers were offensively but I'm going to say top 3, top 4 offensive teams in baseball. Obviously it's going to take a hit but I really believe in the guys we have and if guys continue to get better, I think we're going to be really good."

That includes himself. After winning a Silver Slugger in 2018, Martinez's numbers, while still very productive (36 homers, 105 RBI, .304 average, .939 OPS), took a dip last season. A short offseason after winning the World Series may have contributed to that, but the 32-year-old said his body feels rejuvenated and fresher entering spring training.

"I felt like it was one of my better offseasons," Martinez said. "I think I came to camp healthy and it's kind of all I asked for this offseason is getting my body right, get healthy and enter the season ready to go."

There's a dark cloud hovering over baseball as the Astros' sign-stealing scandal rocks the sport, and the league is considering changes that could directly impact how Martinez performs.

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said Sunday that the league will likely pass a new policy that restricts access to video during games. Martinez, who is as detail-oriented as any player and frequently watches replays of his at-bats in order to make necessary adjustments, doesn't like the idea of removing video in-game altogether.

"I think to go out there and take all video out, you're not allowed to look through at-bats, I think is a little ridiculous in my opinion," Martinez said. "All these kids now, when I was in minor league, Double-A, Triple-A, we had video. It was something you grew up with. You kind of always go back and you can check something in your swing and it helps you throughout the game. To all of a sudden take that away is a little extreme I think."

Martinez offered some suggestions, such as moving video replay to the press box or delaying the live feed for an inning or two. But he fears the league will implement more extreme measures than that. He hopes the league will talk to players before making a decision, and normally not one to speak up, said he's thought about talking to Manfred himself.

"To sit there and take that away, for me it's what makes me, me," Martinez said. "I'm a very analytical guy, I like to study my swing, I like to study what my back foot is doing, my elbow, whatever it might be, and there's a lot of guys nowadays that are like that. That's the trend of the game, that's the way the game has gone. If you look the last couple of years, everybody is like that."

Red Sox ownership tries to explain Mookie Betts trade in awkward press conference

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — Things got awkward in a hurry.

In the middle of a press conference to announce what might be the most difficult trade the Red Sox will make under the current ownership group, team president Sam Kennedy made a strange decision that's unlikely to leave the minds of Red Sox fans (or the talk-radio airwaves) anytime soon.

Principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner and Kennedy sat in front of about a dozen cameras and two dozen reporters. Henry began with a two-page written statement that took six minutes to read.

In essence, his message was this: Henry grew up a Cardinals fan and loved Stan Musial. If they ever traded Musial, he would've been heartbroken. Thus, he understands what Sox fans are feeling. He understands why Mookie Betts wants to test free agency, but did not feel it was in the best interest of the Sox to meet his demands.

Adding salt to the wound, Betts released a minute-long video on Twitter on Monday to kindly thank Sox fans for his time in Boston and announce that "it's showtime" in Los Angeles. It came off as heartfelt and sincere, and it's probably worth watching.

The pain isn't likely to go away soon, but at least Henry was thoughtful and empathetic in his opening remarks.

"We at the Red Sox will remember this as one of the toughest, one of the most difficult, decisions we have ever had to make," Henry said. "We too love the young man, the great, great smile, the huge heart and the seemingly boundless talent he displayed here.

"We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path forward. We carefully considered the alternative over the last year and made a decision when this opportunity presented itself to acquire substantial, young talent for the years ahead."

The press conference was going about as good as one could expect under the circumstances, which is to say it was not very pleasant nor particularly eye-opening, but at least a reasonable mind could listen to the owners and understand where they were coming from.

Until Kennedy did something so distasteful, it's no wonder ticket sales are down 15% and season-ticket renewals are down almost 10%.

Kennedy used the press conference as an advertisement. He looked across the room, flashed his smile and tried selling tickets.

The question was simple: Have the Red Sox considered doing anything for the fans or rolling back the ticket-price increase for 2020?

"We've taken a very consistent approach over the last four, five years of a very modest ticket price increase," he said to begin a lengthy answer.

The Sox won 84 games in one of the most disappointing seasons in recent memory, fired the president, fired the manager and traded the franchise player, only to increase ticket prices by 1.7 percent.

"I'm glad you brought it up," Kennedy continued, "because I mentioned publicly the other day that we are pacing behind in ticket sales. There's been a big focus on affordability. There's actually a misconception still in the market that tickets aren't available, that every single game at Fenway Park is sold out. That's not the case. There are tickets available for our games in April and May."

OK, fine. Stop there. Nobody is asking if tickets are available. Excitement around the team hasn't felt this low in years. People are upset.

“For tier 5 games in terms of our pricing schedule, 60% of those tickets are priced at under \$40,” Kennedy said. “We have tickets for students, college kids, high school kids, middle school kids for every single game for \$9. So come to Fenway Park for \$9, you may get standing room tickets, you may get field box seats or loge box seats.”

It was supposed to be a somber morning. The Sox were saying a difficult goodbye.

And Kennedy put on his salesman hat and continued to ask fans for their money.

“We have affordable family options, \$99 for a family of four which includes four tickets, food and beverage,” he said. “We understand the commitment that our fan makes and every single dollar that our fans invest into tickets, food and beverage at Fenway Park goes back into baseball operations. It’s important that our fans understand that connection.”

In the end, the Red Sox might be right about not re-signing Betts. Alex Verdugo may turn into a perennial All-Star, as Werner suggested on Monday. And Betts could end up in the long line of overpaid stars who anchor franchises with decade-long contracts.

The owners said it didn’t matter whether or not the Sox signed Nathan Eovaldi or re-signed Chris Sale. They made it clear they didn’t want to go above and beyond to sign Betts, no matter the other contracts on the books. Maybe they’ve learned their lessons with David Price, Pablo Sandoval, Hanley Ramirez and Carl Crawford. And they were right to let Jacoby Ellsbury walk to the New York Yankees.

The trade itself could end up being a good one.

But the team continues to fail in their effort to message it.

Red Sox owner John Henry’s full statement on the Mookie Betts trade

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — Dressed in a navy blazer and white dress shirt, Red Sox principal owner John Henry addressed reporters at JetBlue Park on Monday morning for the first time since the team traded Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

He sat with chairman Tom Werner and team president Sam Kennedy to answer questions for about 25 minutes after delivering a seven-minute opening statement.

Below is a transcript of Henry’s opening statement:

This morning, before answering your questions I would like to begin by addressing Red Sox fans directly about this offseason. We are used to challenging offseasons, but this one has been particularly challenging.

So let me begin by saying that while they’ve been presented with extraordinary challenges this off-season, those of us sitting here today know that our baseball operations department under Chaim and Brian’s leadership has handled these challenges extremely well. We are confident and optimistic while at the same time cognizant of how all of these challenges affect you, Red Sox fans. We feel responsible to face whatever challenges arise in a way so as to protect the organization and move forward for the long-term whether it’s on the field or off.

Before Tom, Sam or I ever dreamed of owning a major league baseball club, we were baseball fans, like you. I grew up a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals. My favorite player was Stan Musial. My heart would have broken if Stan the Man had ever been traded – for any reason. Your parents or your grandparents surely felt the same way about Ted Williams and Yaz.

So, on one level, when I say I understand how many of you feel about this trade with the Dodgers, I know many of you – particularly our youngest fans – are disbelieving or angry or sad about it. I know it's difficult and disappointing.

Some of you no doubt felt the same way in 2004 when we traded Nomar, who like Mookie was a hugely popular, homegrown player. All of us in the organization hoped we could avoid ever having to go through something like that again. But most clubs face similar dilemmas from time to time.

I understand there is probably little I can say today that will change how you feel about this, but it is my responsibility to try.

The baseball organizations we compete against have become much more strategic and thoughtful about how and where they spend their resources in their quest for titles. We cannot shy away from tough decisions required to aggressively compete for World Series. That is what led to this trade.

Free agency plays into many decisions clubs like ours have to make. Today's players spend years in the minor and major leagues earning the right to be paid in a free market, earning the right to make choices. They make significant sacrifices to get there and they deserve what they receive.

Clubs also have choices to make as well in this economic system.

It's a system that has a few imbalances as all economic systems do, but it is a system overall that has led to labor peace and an amazing market for our best players. It is not the system's fault that the Red Sox ended up in this position. We were faced with a difficult choice. You can talk about dollars. You can talk about metrics and value. But in the end, even though we are consistently among the highest spending clubs in baseball – with this year being no exception – we have to make hard judgments about competing for the future as well as the present.

Over the last two decades in winning four titles, along the way we lost not only Nomar, but Pedro and Jacoby and Jon and Manny among others. We no longer live in the Musial or Williams era. Players have rights they should have had when Stan and Ted played. Those two great players were victims of an unfair system – one that gave them no choice but to stay put. At one point, Stan thought about going to Mexico in order to be paid his value. He was offered \$175,000 over 5 years in the Mexican League when he was making \$13,500 a year. The Cardinal owner went to Mexico to stop it.

In today's game there is a cost to losing a great player to free agency – one that cannot nearly be made up by the draft pick given. We've seen examples of this recently.

We at the Red Sox will remember this as one of the toughest, one of the most difficult, decisions we have ever had to make. We too love the young man, the great, great smile, the huge heart and the seemingly boundless talent he displayed here.

We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path forward. We carefully considered the alternative over the last year and made a decision when this opportunity presented itself to acquire substantial, young talent for the years ahead.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox owner John Henry still can't find the right words regarding Mookie Betts

Bill Koch

The Boston Globe is among the properties controlled by John Henry in his vast business empire, but he committed an act of journalistic malpractice Monday morning in Fort Myers.

The Red Sox principal owner was guilty of burying the lede. Henry waited until the final paragraph of a two-page prepared statement before cutting to the root cause of the trade that sent Mookie Betts to the Dodgers.

“We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path forward,” Henry said.

So, there it is. One of the richest franchises in baseball opted to travel the path often pursued by its cash-strapped peers. No extension for Betts prior to reaching free agency – similar to those signed last offseason by Chris Sale and Xander Bogaerts – led to the departure of a generational talent.

David Price also made his exit to Los Angeles. Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs and Connor Wong came to Boston. And that leaves Henry, despite his four championships and ending the seemingly interminable 86-year wait for a World Series title, as one of the least popular people currently walking the Back Bay.

Saving the real Betts rationale for last wasn't the only misstep made by Henry as he faced the assembled media at JetBlue Park. Let's take a look at a few other questionable passages from his first official remarks of the spring.

-- ‘Before Tom, Sam or I ever dreamed of owning a major league baseball club, we were baseball fans, like you.’

Henry is part of a triumvirate that oversees the Red Sox along with club chairman Tom Werner and president Sam Kennedy. They often seek a common voice on such important organizational matters.

The verb tense used here was interesting – ‘were baseball fans.’ As in, not currently. And yes, running a franchise requires a different thought process.

But any festering disconnect between Henry and those who inhabit Fenway Park's bleachers throughout the summer should come as no surprise based on this seemingly unconscious slip of the tongue. It's one more small fracture in a relationship that is being stretched to its breaking point.

-- ‘My heart would have broken if Stan the Man had ever been traded – for any reason.’

Henry grew up on a soybean farm in Illinois and was part of a generation of kids who listened to baseball on the radio. The Cardinals were broadcast on the mighty KMOX, an AM station whose reach extended throughout the Midwest. It wasn't uncommon for folks in Canada and Mexico to pick up the signal on a clear night.

That made several St. Louis players among the most popular of their era, and Stan Musial was one of them. The Man is one of the great hitters in baseball history and a one-club icon, playing only with the Cardinals from 1940-63. Betts no longer has the chance to be such a player in Boston, and it was ultimately Henry who had final say.

-- ‘Some of you no doubt felt the same way in 2004 when we traded Nomar, who like Mookie was a hugely popular, homegrown player.’

This is an apples and oranges comparison at best. Nomar Garciaparra was 30 years old entering the 2004 season and had posted a sub-.900 OPS in each of his three previous campaigns. The shortstop underwent wrist surgery that cost him all but 21 games of the 2001 season and had also battled issues with his Achilles tendon.

Betts is just 27. Only Mike Trout has been more valuable since 2016 in terms of FanGraphs wins above replacement. This is a premier player in baseball squarely in his prime, not one who was already showing signs of decline.

-- 'Over the last two decades in winning four titles, along the way we lost not only Nomar, but Pedro and Jacoby and Jon and Manny among others.'

Again, Henry used popular Red Sox names in an attempt to obscure the truth. Garciparra (30), Pedro Martinez (33) and Manny Ramirez (36) were all on the wrong side of 30 when they played their respective final games in Boston. They can't possibly be considered in the same category as Betts.

Jacoby Ellsbury enjoyed one truly superb season in 2011, blasting 32 home runs and stealing 39 bases while posting a .928 OPS. But various injuries limited him to 18 games in 2010 and 74 games in 2012 – signing him to the seven-year deal he inked with the Yankees prior to 2014 was always going to carry more risk than retaining Betts.

Jon Lester isn't even really all that comparable. The Red Sox made a disastrous early effort to retain him, tabling an insulting opening offer that soured the negotiations for good. And really, Lester hasn't performed like a Hall of Famer in five years with the Cubs – two Cy Young Award top-10 finishes, two National League All-Star selections and a 3.54 earned-run average.

Lester's postseason performance in 2016 helped Chicago snap a 108-year championship drought of its own, but you could argue David Price did just as much for Boston during its own run to the 2018 crown. Neither pitcher has been worth the combined \$372 million they'll take home over 13 years – that's the premium often paid for starters on the open market. Betts was negotiating in a different bracket as a position player.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox, Jonathan Lucroy close to deal; veteran catcher is 2-time All-Star

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The Red Sox are close to a deal with veteran catcher Jonathan Lucroy, multiple sources confirmed Tuesday.

Lucroy will likely receive a minor league deal and join the Red Sox in camp this week. He'll provide a veteran depth option behind starter Christian Vazquez and backup Kevin Plawecki, who was signed to a one-year deal to replace Sandy Leon earlier in the winter.

Lucroy, 33, split 2019 between the Angels and Cubs, hitting .232/.305/.355 with eight homers and 36 RBIs in 101 games. The two-time All-Star (2014, 2016) was released by the Halos in mid-August, signed a minor league deal with Chicago a couple days later and played 24 games for the Cubs before the end of the year.

After spending the first 6 ½ seasons of his career with Milwaukee, Lucroy has played for five teams in the last three seasons, being traded twice and signing three free agent deals since 2016. He was a -0.1 WAR player in 2019 but was an All-Star just four years ago and was traded from Milwaukee to Texas in a trade deadline blockbuster that sent Lewis Brinson and Luis Ortiz to the Brewers.

Lucroy will be the seventh catcher in big league camp with the Red Sox. In addition to Vazquez and Plawecki, the club has Juan Centeno, Jett Bandy, Connor Wong and Roldani Baldwin on the major league side this spring.

Lucroy played for new Sox interim manager Ron Roenicke from 2011 to 2015 in Milwaukee.

Jeffrey Springs, new Boston Red Sox pitcher, went from 'minimum' \$1K signing bonus to big leagues; 'It's less than that after taxes'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Jeffrey Springs signed for only \$1,000 out of Appalachian State after the Texas Rangers selected him in the 30th round (888th overall) of the 2015 draft.

“Unfortunately it was the minimum,” Springs told MassLive.com about his signing bonus. “I think there’s a minimum. But it’s less than that after taxes, obviously. But all I was hoping for was a chance after I didn’t get drafted as a junior. I thought I had a pretty good shot there. It didn’t work out. But all things happen for a reason. It just kind of maybe adds a little extra fuel to the fire. I was very fortunate the Rangers gave me that opportunity, and I just tried to make the most of it day in, day out.”

The Red Sox acquired Springs, a left-handed reliever, this offseason from Texas for Sam Travis. He’s a member of the 40-man roster and should help the club as a reliever this year.

“It’s kind of weird. I’m not just saying this because I’m here, I grew up kind of liking the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry. I actually have some little Red Sox stuff.”

Springs had a Red Sox keychain and gym bag growing up.

“My mom actually sent me a picture of the little keychain. She’s like, ‘I found this in your room.’”

He enjoyed watching Jason Varitek and Pedro Martinez.

“Just the passion that they had for the game, for their team,” Springs said. “And all the little scuffles (with the Yankees) they had over the years. I thought that’s awesome. That’s baseball, I feel like.”

‘I was that guy running through the airport’

The 27-year-old made it to the major leagues just three years after signing for \$1,000. His debut came July 31, 2018, against the Diamondbacks in Arizona.

Springs received a call from Paul Kruger, Rangers director of minor league operations, at around 2 p.m. that day. He was in Round Rock, Texas, where he pitched for Texas’ Triple-A team.

“The trade deadline had just happened,” Springs said. “It was an off day. I was sitting there doing laundry, just kind of hanging out, enjoying the off day.”

“I hope you have dry clothes because you’ve got an hour and a half to get to the airport and meet the team in Arizona,” Springs said Kruger told him.

“I couldn’t even get words out,” Springs said. “All I could say was thank you. I couldn’t even say anything else.”

He rushed to the airport.

“I was that guy running through the airport, because if I miss my flight, there’s no more flights from Texas to Arizona,” Springs said. “But just like crazy emotions. Everybody talks about what it might be like. But when it happens, it surpasses anything you could ever imagine.”

He debuted that night in Texas’ 6:40 p.m. game.

‘There’s always that chance’

The southpaw said he took nothing for granted in the minors.

“Because you understand you might be on a shorter leash than other people,” Springs said. “So just trying to make the most of it.”

He always believed he’d pitch in the majors eventually despite being such a low draft pick.

"I truly believed that as long as I kept getting opportunities, I was able to go to college (for baseball). It was like, 'OK, now I'm here. Now it's the next step.' I believed once I got my chance, now it's just a matter of time."

He tried to learn as much as he could from all his coaches as well as teammates at every level of the minors.

"I believe in my heart 100% that as long as I do everything I can, there's always that chance," Springs said. "It was, 'I'm going to do everything I can and if it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be. And if it is — I feel like it is and I believe it is — then I'm going to will it to happen one way or another.'"

Springs worked multiple offseason jobs to keep his major league dream alive. Minor leaguers not on a 40-man roster earn extremely low salaries. Last year's major league minimum salary of \$2,983.87 per day is more than many minor league players earn in a month. Professional baseball players also don't receive a paycheck during the offseason.

His part-time offseason jobs included landscaping, working at the YMCA and giving pitching lessons to local kids around Charlotte,

"They (YMCA) gave me a free gym membership and I'd go work in the morning; more part-time but from like 8 to 2, 8 to 3. Whatever hours they had in the morning so I could work out, go home for a minute and go throw before dark. Every minor leaguer has to do it unless you're fortunate to sign (for a big bonus). So I'm not the only one who has done it. I know. But it's what you have to do. Like I said, it's part of it."

He didn't need to work the past two offseasons after making it to the majors in 2018.

"Which was kind of weird," Springs said. "But I still did some lessons with some people. It wasn't really for money."

He said it's about making sacrifices.

"As long as you love it, enjoy what you do, it's not a job. You don't do it as a job," Springs said. "So the part-time jobs in the offseason were just a means to an end to hopefully get where I wanted to be with baseball."

'Speed-'em-up, slow-'em-down'

Springs posted a 3.38 ERA in 32 innings his rookie year in 2018, but his ERA jumped to 6.40 in 32 ½ innings last year.

"For me, it's moving my fastball around," he said. "Changeup's my bread and butter. But to be able to move the fastball down to both sides. Sink it when I need to. And I love to elevate it. For me, it's kind of a speed-'em-up, slow-'em down game. The changeup like I said — if I can get guys on the front foot, I feel like I can throw fastballs by them and then vice versa. If they start cheating to the changeup, move the fastball. The breaking ball, the slider has gotten a lot better. I worked on it a lot this offseason. So I feel like it's still going to be an out-pitch for me. But for me, it's the front-to-back game, speed-'em-up, slow-'em-down."

He said he honestly has no idea why he didn't get drafted after his junior year.

"There's so many things that go into the draft. So many players that they have to look at. I don't know. I can't say one way or another. The only thing I can think of is everything happens for a reason. So I was able to go back my senior year, learn a little bit more about myself. That's when I felt like I really developed my changeup, which helped push me through the minor leagues, to be honest."

He said his parents instilled a strong work ethic into him and his two older brothers.

“You get everything you earn. You have to work for what you want,” Springs said. “Both my brothers are pretty successful. Probably most oldest brother, we’re kind of more similar. He played college baseball and everything. And growing up, eight years apart, I wanted to be like him. I wanted to dress like him, listen to the same music and all that. So it was probably imitating him.

“But he had some friends who were drafted and were able to go on and play (in pro ball). So I was fortunate enough to be able to work out with them when I was in high school. They were coming home, trying to throw, get ready for spring training. So I was able to learn a couple things that helped me along the way. Kind of helped take my game to the next level.”

Ron Roenicke, Boston Red Sox manager, built 14.5-foot dining room table out of slab of black walnut; ‘I have a lot of different hobbies’

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Ron Roenicke isn’t just the manager of the Boston Red Sox. He’s also a talented woodworker.

“I do everything. I guess the thing I probably like the best is I built a 14 ½-foot dining room table out of a slab of black walnut,” the 63-year-old Roenicke told MassLive.com.

“So my wife and I drove up to Oregon,” said Roenicke who’s from the Los Angeles area. “We rented a car trailer. I have a truck. And we got the slab I wanted and fork-lifted it on this thing and we drove it back down to California. And then I took it and I sanded it all down. Got it to where I wanted it. I have parties. ... It turned out really cool.”

The slab is three-inches thick.

“The wood grain in it is absolutely beautiful,” he said.

Related link: Boston Red Sox’s Ron Roenicke: ‘I think (Alex Cora) can be more critical in the press than I can probably be’

The Red Sox named Roenicke their interim manager last Tuesday. The interim designation likely will get lifted once MLB completes its investigation into the 2018 Red Sox for allegedly using their video replay room to decode signals.

Roenicke has built tables, entertainment centers, mantels and a wine cellar lined with cedar.

“I do cooking utensils out of wood,” Roenicke added.

Roenicke said he doesn’t really know how he learned to do it. He’s self taught.

“I took to it. I don’t want to say I read up on it that much because I didn’t,” Roenicke said.

He certainly keeps himself busy when he’s away from the ballpark.

“I fish. I hunt. I do woodworking,” Roenicke said. “I read a ton during the season. That’s mainly what I do is read. I golf.

“When I was home in Anaheim, I liked growing fruits and vegetables,” added Roenicke, who served as third base coach for the 2002 World Series champion Los Angeles Angels. “So I have a lot of different hobbies.”

He worked two stints for the Angels. He first served as their third base coach from 2000-05 and bench coach from 2006-10. He also returned for the 2016-17 seasons to serve as third base coach. He spent part of the 2015 season as Dodgers third base coach.

Roenicke and his wife Karen have enjoyed exploring New England.

“My wife and I like to drive up north. We like the coast up there. We’ve gone south, too. We’ve gone on the Cape. But I like up north.”

Not surprising Roenicke ended up coaching. He comes from a family of teachers. His parents and grandparents were teachers. His wife taught school. Their son Lance is a teacher.

Roenicke spent the past two years as Alex Cora’s bench coach, which made accepting the Red Sox manager position so late — during the first week of spring training — much easier.

“Say I wasn’t with Boston before the last couple years,” Roenicke said. “To step into this job (this late), I probably would have had some concerns. But I’ve been here and I’m comfortable with the players, I’m comfortable with my relationships with them.”

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy said, “Ron is an incredible person. He’s got incredible baseball instincts. Great humility. Great leadership ability. Known to the organization. I think of him as a stabilizing force during which was an unstable offseason.”

Roenicke admitted he’s not even the best baseball player in his family. He said his brother Gary was “way better” than him.

Gary Roenicke, who now participates in some Orioles fantasy camps, played 12 seasons in the majors for the Expos, Orioles, Yankees and Braves. He spent eight seasons with the Orioles and was inducted into the organization’s Hall of Fame. He bashed double-digit homers six times, including 25 homers in 1979 and 21 blasts in 1982.

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

Roenicke got released five times as a player. He said that experience helps him now.

“It’s a big advantage,” Roenicke said. “To be a bench player for a while, to know when you need to get ready and what could happen, and then to go to different teams — the advantage is you get to be with different managers and coaches. So you learn a lot there. To have all that stuff happen to you, even though it’s not good, it’s really hard on you, but it prepares you for discussions you have with people you may have to do that to.”

Boston Red Sox use annual spring meeting to shift focus to 2020 as Ron Roenicke puts ‘craziness’ of winter behind team

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- For the Red Sox, Monday represented an opportunity to start regaining a sense of a normalcy after two months in which the organization has undergone a tremendous amount of adversity.

Boston held its first full-squad workout at Fenway South shortly after holding the annual all-hands-on-deck organizational meeting that takes place on this day each year. And so the Red Sox, without Alex Cora, Mookie Betts, David Price, Rick Porcello, Dave Dombrowski and all the others who have left the club in recent months, began looking ahead to 2020.

Since Sept. 14, the Red Sox have fired their head of baseball operations (Dombrowski), lost their manager (Cora) after he was named as a key player in a scandal that has rocked baseball, traded their best player (Betts), lost two starting pitchers (Price and Porcello) and were implicated in their own sign-stealing scandal, which is still under investigation by Major League Baseball. Since pitchers and catchers started trickling into Fort Myers early last week, the team has traded Betts and Price to the Dodgers for three young players and hired a new manager, Ron Roenicke, to replace Cora.

The group that met Monday was missing a handful of people who, just a couple months ago, seemed like locks to be key members of the organization in 2020. But reality set in, changing the complexion of the Red Sox at all levels in one of the most dramatic winters in franchise history.

“What these guys have been through for the past month is a lot,” chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said on Sunday. “It’s almost unprecedented and maybe is unprecedented in recent history. With everything that’s been going on, with the loss of a manager and a very significant trade, they have been total pros. I’m not surprised, but just seeing it and living through it has been really impressive.”

Roenicke, who served as Cora’s bench coach for the last two seasons, was unsure of what he’d say to the team as of Sunday afternoon. The craziness of his promotion and the effects of the Betts trade kept him busy over the last week, meaning Roenicke didn’t have time to prepare as he did when he managed the Brewers from 2011 to 2015.

But Roenicke knew he wasn’t going to be able to ignore addressing how much things had changed.

“There are some things I think I should address about some of the craziness that happened,” he said. “I need to address that stuff.”

In addition to Roenicke, Bloom and team chairman Tom Werner addressed the players. Bloom, who was hired to replace Dombrowski in late October, took the opportunity to introduce himself to his entire roster for the first time.

“I think that will be only a small part of their meeting,” he said Sunday. “I’ve hopefully done a pretty good job of connecting with people individually and will continue to do that throughout camp.”

The meeting, according to those who attended it, wasn’t much different from powwows in previous years. Werner gave the players some perspective from the team’s owners, who later Monday defended the decision to trade Betts and said they expected the Red Sox to contend in 2020. Players -- including the 11 players on the 40-man roster who joined the Sox this winter -- introduced themselves to their new teammates.

“Just kind of the same it always is. Positive, just introducing everybody,” said slugger J.D. Martinez. “Talking about the upcoming season, what we expect from each other and what we’re looking forward to. Our goals.”

Before all the drama of the winter, the Red Sox drastically underperformed in 2019. Lost in all the theatrics is the fact that a team poised to defend its World Series title won just 84 games, missing the postseason with almost the exact same roster that won 108 regular season games and a World Series title a year earlier.

“I definitely think a lot of guys are a little bit more hungry than last year,” Martinez said. “I’m not saying our team was complacent last year, but I think we were a little bit more relaxed coming in. Last year was a slap in the face, a kind of a reality check for us. I think a lot of guys are coming in a lot more determined and ready to go. The team we put on the field last year wasn’t us. It wasn’t our team.”

Roenicke, against all odds, is charged with the tall task of guiding a Red Sox team that has been written off by many in the wake of the Betts trade. His role change from a key behind-the-scenes contributor to a front-and-center leader began in earnest Monday.

“I think it’s important the first day to set the tone on what you expect and what can get us to the point where we need to be,” Roenicke said. “I think that’s important. The ownership... I think they feel the same way. Things are a little bit different this year so the message might be a little bit different. Or it could be exactly the same. Ideally, you want it the same way because you want these guys’ mindsets to be the same and not worry about all the stuff that has happened outside of what we do on the field.”

Boston Red Sox ownership addresses sign-stealing investigation, Alex Verdugo, Ron Roenicke in spring training press conference

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox ownership spent most of their 30-minute spring training press conference discussing the trade that sent Mookie Betts and David Price on Monday, but a variety of other topics came up as well. Here are some leftovers from the session:

Sox still confident they’ll be found innocent in investigation

Like everyone else, Boston’s owners are eagerly awaiting the results of Major League Baseball’s investigation into the alleged improper use of a video replay room in 2018. Commissioner Rob Manfred said Sunday that a “couple of developments” have slowed the league’s ruling on the Red Sox and that a decision is not expected until next week.

Sox principal owner John Henry said the team has not changed its original stance that fans should “reserve judgment” on the club until the investigation concludes. Henry has hinted that the team’s leaders believe the league will find the Sox innocent in their inquiry.

“One thing we learned from the Astros investigation is that Major League Baseball is extraordinarily thorough with their investigations,” Henry said. “It’s not overly surprising that it’s not done yet. But I don’t think anything from our standpoint has changed.”

Henry, team chairman Tom Werner and president and CEO Sam Kennedy all said they had not been interviewed by Major League Baseball. Werner said the owners have been kept in the dark about the process.

“We don’t have any inside information,” Werner said. “We have not been talking to MLB. We know they’re continuing their investigation and we hope it concludes soon. I hope people reserve judgment until we know what the specifics are.”

Werner happy with Astros punishment

Werner commended Manfred for the punishments handed out to the Astros, who were found to have improperly used electronics to decode opponents’ signs throughout the 2017 season. Though the Houston scandal cost the Red Sox their manager (Alex Cora), Werner believes the harsh punishments -- which included a \$5 million fine, the loss of four top draft picks and year-long suspensions for then-manager A.J. Hinch and then-general manager Jeff Luhnow -- were appropriate.

“I think Rob has handled this appropriately,” Werner said. “This situation in Houston was not good for baseball. I think the penalties were fair.”

Werner is looking forward to the conversation in baseball circles shifting back to things that happen on the field.

“There’s too many headlines in the field about off-field stuff in baseball and I’m looking forward to spring training,” he said. “Hopefully, the focus will be on the field. Like everybody, I’m sorely disappointed in what happened in Houston. I think baseball handled that appropriately. As a fan, I’d rather talk about 2020 than what happened in 2017.”

Kennedy says Sox did due diligence on Verdugo

Kennedy said the Red Sox thoroughly vetted new acquisition Alex Verdugo, who recently discussed an incident that occurred during spring training in 2015 when he was a Dodgers minor leaguer. Boston's research -- which included a conversation between Kennedy and Manfred -- did not give the organization any reason to put its blockbuster trade with the Dodgers on hold.

"We did an extremely high level of due diligence with Major League Baseball and the Los Angeles Dodgers," Kennedy said. "I actually spoke to the commissioner directly about it, myself. We are comfortable with the decision. Otherwise, we would not have moved forward in that direction."

Kennedy said the club did not contact the alleged victim in the incident as part of their due diligence. The owners met Verdugo on Monday for the first time.

"I had a chance to meet Alex in person this morning and let him know the entire organization is here to support him and all of our players," Kennedy said. "We're comfortable with the level of due diligence that we did."

Roenicke praised

Werner praised interim manager Ron Roenicke, who was hired to take over for Cora last week. The team's owners spoke with Roenicke earlier Monday and witnessed him address the team on its first day of full squad workouts.

"I think Ron is off to a terrific start," Werner said. "I think he's a great tonic for this team. Obviously, he's experienced. One of the reasons I'm excited about him is that he knows the organization and knows the players in the organization. The players that I've talked to are very pleased with that decision."

Roenicke's title will likely become permanent if the league finds that he did not break the rules in 2018.

"Hopefully that tag will be removed shortly," Werner said.

Other notes

Henry was asked if he regrets publicly declaring the club's intentions to get under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold back in September.

"You have to be honest with the media and you have to be honest with your fans, so no," he said.

The owners also disputed the idea that the Red Sox will not be competitive in 2020.

"I think (chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom) was very clear the club is built to compete in the American League East, but it's no doubt harder to get to that ultimate goal when you lose a player like Mookie Betts," Kennedy said. "No one debates that. But we're now in a position with newfound resources, newfound flexibility and a club that only won 84 games last year, that we felt underperformed. We do think we're in a position that, while more challenging, we do think we're in position in the American League East to compete given the players we have on our roster and the resources we do have."

J.D. Martinez says Alex Cora didn't influence Boston Red Sox to steal signs like Astros cheated; 'Never even mention it'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — J.D. Martinez didn't expect to see Alex Cora's name mentioned 11 times in MLB's investigation report on the 2017 Astros for stealing signs illegally.

Cora served as Astros bench coach in '17, then became Red Sox manager in 2018. Boston parted ways with Cora in January after the investigation named him as one of the ringleaders in Houston's cheating scandal.

"I was kind of shocked by it," Martinez said here at JetBlue Park on Monday. "I wasn't aware. I didn't even know. For as (many) times as he was mentioned, it obviously caught me off guard. I can ... go through any lie detector, when Alex came here he never influenced us in any way to do that. Never even mention it.

"I didn't even know they were doing it. I didn't find out until Mike (Fiers) mentioned it when he was in Oakland ... because I'm friends with him and he kind of brought it up to me because all the guys were giving him a hard time or whatever. That was the first time I ever heard of it."

Fiers, a member of the 2017 Astros, went on record with The Athletic in November, describing how the Astros used a center field camera and trashcan to steal and relay signs during 2017.

Fiers and Martinez are close friends. They played college baseball together at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

"I didn't know Alex was so involved in it," Martinez said. "Obviously people make mistakes. It is what it is. I think he's feeling it now. But that doesn't change my view on him and the way he treated me as a human and the way he treated me as a person."

Martinez said Cora texts him every now and then to "talk a little smack." They remain friends.

"Alex is the best manager I've ever had, the favorite manager I've ever had," Martinez said.

Boston Red Sox say Mookie Betts trade not a salary dump: 'You don't trade Mookie Betts to get under the CBT'

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox ownership defended the club's decision to trade star outfielder Mookie Betts on Monday, dismissing the notion that the deal was made primarily to cut payroll and get under the competitive balance tax (CBT) threshold for 2020.

Principal owner John Henry said the deal that sent Betts and lefty David Price to the Dodgers for three young players was a "baseball trade," adding that finances were not a primary motivation. Team president and CEO Sam Kennedy echoed that assessment.

"We tried to be clear that this was not exclusively about the CBT and getting under the CBT threshold," Kennedy said. "There would have been other ways to have done that. You don't trade Mookie Betts to get under the CBT. We traded Mookie Betts and David Price and we got back significant value in return."

The Red Sox lowered their 2020 payroll by \$43 million by trading Betts and Price to the Dodgers, getting their estimate significantly below the \$208 million threshold that would lead to penalties under the CBT system. Estimates currently have the Sox around \$195 million in projected payroll for next season, accomplishing the team's goal of resetting their status under the system and being able to pursue expensive free agents next winter.

Much of the focus on Boston's winter was related to the goal of getting under the CBT threshold. But both Kennedy and team chairman Tom Werner claimed that if cutting payroll was the team's main goal, other options would have been more palatable.

"It's understandable that people could view this transaction as a way to rid yourself of some salary obligations," Kennedy said. That goes along with it. But, as John mentioned, it was a determination we needed to make as we went into conversations with Mookie and his representatives. We had a hard decision

to make. We decided it was in the best interest of the baseball operation to go forward with this transaction and to get substantial value back for two great players."

The Red Sox shopped Price throughout the winter but were unable to find any team willing to take on the veteran lefty and the \$96 million he's owed through the 2022 season. Though Werner said the team could have "hypothetically" completed a trade involving only Price, the Sox didn't appear to come particularly close to a salary dump involving the lefty.

Instead, Boston shipped Betts, Price and cash to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo, infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong. Werner said he has heard from multiple people in other organizations who praised the young talent Boston acquired.

"It wasn't a salary dump," Werner said. "It was to give us flexibility. We could have moved in different directions. We could be sitting here saying Mookie is a member of our team this year. We made a strategic decision for what was in the best interest of the team this year and going forward that this was a wise trade."

Boston Red Sox 2020 ticket sales down more than 15% after price increase; 'We've made a lot of mistakes ... We've made a lot of good decisions'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Red Sox tickets sales are down a little more than 15% from this time last year, team president Sam Kennedy said Monday here at JetBlue Park.

"Some of that's demand. Some of that's pace of sale," Kennedy added. "We'll see as we get into March and April where that number shakes out. One the season-ticket holder front, we're usually in the high-80s in terms of a renewal rate; 88-89%. We anticipate finishing our season ticket renewals this year in the low 80s, maybe 80-82%. So down. We anticipated that."

The club missed the playoffs in 2019, posting 24 fewer wins than it did in 2018. That's likely a major reason for the decrease.

The Red Sox also announced back in October that ticket prices were increasing by an average of 1.7% in 2020. At that point, trading Mookie Betts was an option the front office was considering, Kennedy confirmed.

The Red Sox traded Betts last week, an unpopular move among fans that likely won't help increase ticket sales in February and March.

Do the Red Sox regret increasing ticket prices for 2020?

"I try not to look back and have a lot of regrets but I will say we've made a lot of mistakes in our 19 years here. I think we've made a lot of good decisions," Kennedy said. "So I'll leave it at that. We've made mistakes. We've done some things well. It will be for others to judge sort of how this ownership group and this management team is remembered."

JD Martinez, Boston Red Sox slugger, sounds off on proposed MLB in-game video restrictions: 'I think it's a little ridiculous'

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez is not in favor of Major League Baseball enforcing strict restrictions on the use of in-game video in the wake of the Astros' sign-stealing scandal.

Martinez, who frequently uses the video room to study his swing during games, believes the league is significantly underestimating the importance of in-game video to hitters.

“To go out there and take all video out so you’re not allowed to look at at-bats, I think is a little ridiculous, in my opinion,” he said. “When I was in the minor leagues in Triple-A and Double-A, we had video systems. They are something you grow up with. You always go back and can check something in your swing and it helps you throughout the game. To all the sudden take all that away, it’s a little extreme.”

Speaking at a press conference Sunday, commissioner Rob Manfred said the league’s investigations into sign-stealing practices by multiple teams (including the Astros and Red Sox) will likely lead to new rules in 2020. The league and the MLB Players Association are currently discussing potential adjustments.

“I do expect that we will, for 2020, have really serious restrictions on player and playing personnel access to video in-game,” Manfred said. “I think it’s really important to us to send a message to our fans that not only did we investigate and punish, but we altered our policies in a way that will help make sure it didn’t happen again.”

The Astros improperly used their video room to steal opponents signs in 2017 and 2018 in addition to installing a center field monitor and relaying signs to hitters by banging a trash can in the clubhouse tunnel. The Red Sox are being investigated for the alleged improper use of their video replay room in 2018.

At Fenway Park, the video replay room was moved into a larger space for the 2019 season, occupying the room that formerly served as the manager’s office. Players were frequently seen accessing the monitors in that room before and after games and had access to do so during games as well.

Martinez said the feed available to players is a live feed, similar to what viewers might see on NESN or other networks. The formats of those broadcasts, Martinez said, made it impossible for players to do anything other than study their swings.

“I promise you now that the at-bats don’t help anything (in relation to) sign-stealing,” he said.

Martinez believes Manfred should become more informed as to how players specifically access video during games in hopes that he gains a better understanding of the implications of strict restrictions. Martinez suggested a variety of potential remedies, including putting the video on a significant delay and moving team’s replay officials to the press box to prevent any temptation from players.

“You start taking angles away, you’re just making it harder,” Martinez said. “What does the commissioner want? He wants offense. That’s what keeps talking about, right? More offense. More offense. But you’re going to limit the hitters from doing that, I think it’s just tough.”

Martinez isn’t sure if he’ll speak directly to the commissioner about the issue but is clearly passionate about it. For a player who spends as much time as Martinez does watching film to tinker with his swing, the change would be a drastic one.

“It’s what makes me, me. I’m a very analytical guy,” Martinez said. “I like to study my swing -- what my back foot is doing or my elbow, whatever it might be. There’s a lot of guys nowadays that are like that. That’s the trend of the game and the way the game has gone. If you look back the last couple years, everybody’s like that.”

Martinez doesn’t think the entire league should be punished for sins that -- to this point -- have only been found to have occurred in Houston.

“All of the sudden, you’re going to take that away from all these hitters that have grown and developed on that? I think it’s a little harsh. It’s not fair,” Martinez said.

Boston Red Sox's Sam Kennedy: 'We've been accused of making decisions for PR or image reasons. You don't trade Mookie Betts if you're worried exclusively about image'

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — President Sam Kennedy said he and ownership knew the type of anger trading Mookie Betts would cause among Red Sox fans.

Boston traded Betts and David Price to the Dodgers for Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong last week.

“I expected the anger and the sadness,” Kennedy said here at JetBlue Park on Monday. “I heard it from my 16 year old. My 15 year old. My 78-year-old father, 70-year-old mother. So yeah, there’s a lot of anger in the nation. And there should be. Mookie Betts is one of the greatest players in the history of the Red Sox. One of the greatest players in baseball. If you don’t expect anger from parting ways with Mookie Betts, you’re out of touch.”

During a press conference here Monday, Red Sox ownership described the move as a baseball trade, not something they did for financial reasons.

MassLive.com explained both the financial and baseball motives involved in this trade. Some of the financial and baseball benefits are intertwined.

The Red Sox won’t pay a luxury tax in 2020 because the trade will allow them to stay under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold. The club also will receive its full revenue sharing market disqualification refund in 2020 by staying under the CBT.

Boston would have received only a 2021 compensation draft pick after the fourth round for Betts if they exceeded the 2020 CBT and he signed with another team in free agency next offseason.

Trading half of Price’s contract also sets up the Red Sox to spend in free agency next offseason. Price counts \$16 million toward the CBT each of the next three years instead of \$31 million. That gives the baseball operations department significant financial flexibility.

“We anticipated it anger and vitriol, Kennedy said. “Again if we were making the decisions, you wouldn’t have made this decision. One of the ironies is you get excused — My 19 years here we’ve been accused of making decisions for PR or image reasons. You don’t trade Mookie Betts if you’re worried exclusively about image and PR.

“You trade Mookie Betts to get value back and to set yourself up to win another championship,” Kennedy added. “And maybe it was the wrong decision. But that’s why we made the decision.”

The Red Sox feel the return — a combined 17 years of control for Verdugo, Downs and Wong — is more valuable than the compensation pick they would have received for Betts if he left via free agency.

Red Sox’s decision to sign Pablo “Panda” Sandoval was considered a possible move driven by PR/image. At the time, he seemed like a marketable player considering how much San Francisco fans loved him. Giants fans even wore Panda heads to games at AT&T Park.

Boston Red Sox made three ‘generous proposals’ to Mookie Betts before deciding to trade him to Dodgers

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The Red Sox repeatedly attempted to reach a long-term agreement with Mookie Betts before trading him to the Dodgers, the team’s owners said Monday.

“We made legitimate offers over three offseasons,” said principal owner John Henry. “We made it clear to Mookie and I made it personally clear, 1-on-1, that we wanted to see him in a Red Sox uniform for the rest of his career if possible.”

Betts, who spent the first six seasons of his career with the Sox, is scheduled to hit free agency after the upcoming season. The team tried to engage the former MVP and his representatives on an extension on multiple occasions but never came close to agreeing to terms.

“We made it clear, from our perspective, that we wanted Mookie a part of our organization for his entire playing career,” said team president and CEO Sam Kennedy. “Unfortunately, we weren’t able to get something done.”

The Red Sox first tried to engage after the 2016 season, reportedly offering Betts a five-year, \$100 million deal. A year later, the offer was reportedly increased to \$200 million over eight years. After Betts won the 2018 American League MVP award, according to WEEI’s Lou Merloni, the Sox expressed a willingness to go up to \$300 million but were met with a counteroffer of \$420 million.

The gap between the sides was too large to bridge, especially with Betts repeatedly stating that how his goal was to extract maximum value as a free agent. It appears the Sox never got into serious talks with Betts this past offseason before trading to the Dodgers last week.

“We live in a different world today and players spend so many years being underpaid in the system that we have, that when they get to free agency, they’ve earned the right to maximize their chances of being paid a maximal amount,” Henry said.

The Red Sox always considered Plan A to be a contract that kept Betts in Boston for years to come. Once the Red Sox realized that the chances of such a deal were slim, they moved on to the less popular option of swapping Betts for young players.

“I go to sleep at night thinking that maybe we could’ve made another offer to Jon Lester (in 2014) that maybe we would’ve bridged the gap,” team chairman Tom Werner said. “I think we made (Mookie) what we consider fair and generous offers.”

John Henry addresses Boston Red Sox fans about trading Mookie Betts; ‘We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason’

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Principal owner John Henry opened his press conference here Monday at JetBlue Park by reading a statement directed to Red Sox fans about trading 2018 American League MVP Mookie Betts.

Watch Henry deliver his full statement above. The complete transcript is below.

The Red Sox traded Betts and David Price to the Dodgers for Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

“I understand that there is probably little I can say today that will change how you feel about this,” Henry said during his 6-minute speech. “But it is my responsibility to try.”

He added toward the end, “We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path forward.”

Boston Red Sox’s Ron Roenicke: ‘I think (Alex Cora) can be more critical in the press than I can probably be’

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Former manager Alex Cora sometimes spoke critically about certain Red Sox players during press conferences. He likely used the tactic to try to motivate them.

For example, he voiced his displeasure with Eduardo Rodriguez's pitch efficiency after a spring training start against the Mets last March.

"We want him to go deeper into games," Cora told reporters. "With his stuff, he can do that whenever he feels like it. It's part of the learning process. He's old enough. He's been in the league for a long time. It's time for him to step up."

Cora showed Rodriguez tough love several times. The strategy motivated the lefty who went on to finish sixth for the 2019 AL Cy Young.

Red Sox interim manager Ron Roenicke — whose interim tag might be lifted once MLB completes its investigation into the 2018 Red Sox for potentially using their video replay room to decode signals — won't speak as critically.

"Alex is probably more open with you guys than I will be," Roenicke told MassLive.com on Sunday. "It's just his personality because he's younger. He's closer to these guys (the players). I think he can be more critical in the press than I can probably be. So I'm really not critical in the press."

Cora read articles and columns. He sometimes spoke to a reporter if he disagreed with his or her column.

The 63-year-old Roenicke spent the past two years as Cora's bench coach. He managed the Brewers from 2011-15, going 342-331 (.508 winning percentage).

Roenicke paid attention to storylines in Milwaukee.

"I think it will change (here)," Roenicke said. "When I was with Milwaukee, I paid attention to what was said for only one reason: If there was something that was said, and it affected a player on how I said things and it wasn't written up the same way, I paid attention to it."

He made sure the PR department reviewed the clips carefully to see if anything he said about a player came off too negatively.

"If it was just something that comes out negative that I have to connect with the player, I need to know," Roenicke said. "And the way that's going to change is I'm probably not going to read anything."

Roenicke went on to explain why.

"I don't want to have any negative thoughts on things," Roenicke said. "And the more I stay away from it, the easier it is for me. Because if you start picking apart every single thing — you guys have a job to do. And your job is to tell it like you see it. Like it is. That's not my job. My job really is to get the most out of the players. That's my job. How do I get the most out of my players? And if I get the most out of them, we're going to win. So it doesn't entail anything really beyond that. So that's why I don't want to look at stuff so critically: because that's your job to write that."

He said he understood when he accepted the position the Boston media market is much larger than Milwaukee's.

"So I knew it was going to be more than Milwaukee," Roenicke said. "But it didn't bother me."

The entire job is more demanding in a major market city like Boston.

“Say I wasn’t with Boston before the last couple years,” Roenicke added. “To step into this job (this late), I probably would have had some concerns. But I’ve been here and I’m comfortable with the players, I’m comfortable with my relationships with them. And I see you guys (reporters), I can say hi to you guys even though I don’t really know you because I wasn’t dealing with you all the time, it makes it more comfortable for me to do it.”

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Red Sox owner explains why Mookie had to go

Tom Caron

FORT MYERS, Fla. – The 2020 Boston Red Sox gathered as a complete group for the first time Monday. As usual, that gathering began with a sort of “State of the Union” address from ownership and management setting the expectations for the upcoming season.

The meeting is a good chance for players to look around and soak in who they will be playing alongside next season. This year the bigger concern was who wasn’t here.

Namely, Mookie Betts. The superstar, along with pitcher David Price, was wearing Dodger blue. Red Sox ownership is still trying to explain the deal to disappointed fans.

“Over the last two decades in winning four titles, along the way we lost not only Nomar (Garciparra), but Pedro (Martinez) and Jacoby (Ellsbury) and Jon (Lester) and Manny (Ramirez) among others,” said principal owner John Henry.

His point was clear. The team has made unpopular decisions before, and each time returned to win it all.

“We at the Red Sox will remember this as one of the toughest, one of the most difficult decisions we have ever had to make,” said Henry. “We too love the young man, the great, great smile, the huge heart and the seemingly boundless talent he displayed here.”

Mookie is a generational talent, one of the best players in the game. These owners knew this would hurt. Still, they believed losing him to free agency would hurt worse.

“We could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path forward,” said Henry.

For most fans, watching a star like Betts leave is a reminder that the business of baseball is often not aligned with the passion fans have for players. While the team achieved financial flexibility in this deal, owners still insist the deal was made because they thought losing Betts to free agency next fall would set the team back years. Instead, they got three young players they hope will help the team win for the foreseeable future.

In fact, Red Sox chairman Tom Werner told me they would’ve made the Betts deal even if the Red Sox were already under the competitive balance tax threshold.

Furthermore, he said the financial flexibility should allow the team to add talent this season if they are competing for a playoff spot.

None of that replaces Betts. His void will be felt all season at Fenway Park, where tickets sales and season-ticket renewals are down from last year.

But the Red Sox believe they did what they needed to do to create the next championship-caliber team in Boston. Only time will tell if they did. For now, they will do their best to put the memory of this shocking trade behind them as they move forward to the season ahead.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Double standard unfair to Red Sox owner

Bill Burt

In another region with passionate sports fans — say Cleveland, Seattle or Kansas City — John Henry would be a beloved king.

Within three or so years of taking ownership of the Red Sox, he delivered a championship, the championship of Boston championships, in 2004.

The greatest day in Boston sports history was when that ground ball went back to closer Keith Foulke, who under-handed it to first base to clinch the sweep in St. Louis. The 86-year wait between World Series titles was over for Red Sox fans.

That alone should've put Henry on a Mount Rushmore equivalent in Boston sports.

But there was more. Lots more.

Henry delivered three more championships and Duck Boat parades in 2007, 2013 and 2018, each with its own personality, style and memorable traits.

So where did they build the statue in John Henry's likeness?

New England sports fans get loads of credit for their passion, spending, expectations and love affair with their teams.

The last two decades around here have been unlike anything any region of the country has experienced. And it's not just the winning, but the contending. Every team, almost every year, is a championship contender.

Isn't that what New England fans demand, first and foremost, from our resident billionaire owners and then embrace them for it?

Not with Henry.

The rules are different for the Red Sox owner. He has never even slightly approached the Bob Kraft School of Love.

While their frequency of winning titles is almost identical — Kraft has 6 titles in 27 years of owning the Patriots (a .222 championship percentage) and Henry is 4 for 19 (.211) — Henry is easily considered the outsider, not a fan favorite.

Is it Kraft's charm? Is it the fact that Kraft owned season tickets in Sullivan Stadium and loved the Patriots long before owning them? Is it Kraft's relationship with fans, oftentimes high-fiving them at events?

Henry, personality-wise, couldn't be more different from Kraft, oftentimes uncomfortable in large public settings with fans or media.

You could make the argument that Henry's Red Sox winning titles with three different managers, three different general managers, and four completely different teams is more impressive than two decades of Bill Belichick, Tom Brady and whomever else was around.

The Red Sox have been able to, under Henry, re-invent themselves again and again.

Other than David Ortiz, who was a central figure in the first three Red Sox titles, it's been a roller coaster ride.

The Patriots, on the contrary, have been never wavered or faced an embarrassing “chicken-and-beer” losing season under Kraft, Belichick and Brady. Is that the issue — New England fans demanding consistency?

We often hear New England fans imply their teams should live in the moment more, go for the championships now, worry about future implications later.

Isn't that what Henry did when he brought in Dave Dombrowski as president? He mortgaged the future, depleting the minor league system while raising the payroll, to compete for a title in 2018.

That may have been the greatest Red Sox team ever assembled, winning 108 regular season games and then cleaning the Yankees, Astros and Dodgers' collective clocks to the tune of an 11-win, 3-loss playoff record that year, culminating in the World Series victory.

Now it's time to pay the piper, which meant trading away superstar Mookie Betts, who rumors are would not talk contract unless the first number started with a “400” — as in a \$400-plus million deal.

Two years ago, the Sox probably would have overpaid him – can't we agree that \$400 million is overpaying? – and cut corners in other places.

Trading Betts is risky. He's a Hall of Fame talent. Personally, I probably wouldn't have done it.

But fans playing the blame game after the trade, almost in a nasty way, and hurling it all toward Henry is a little lame.

Ticket sales for 2020 are down 15% from where they were a year ago. That's the best way to send a message, rather than the incessant whining we're hearing.

This Red Sox team is still going to be solid, maybe even good. We are a long ways away from the old “wait 'til next year” Red Sox.

And if anybody deserves the benefit of the doubt among sports team owners here in New England, John Henry is at the top of the list.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox owners explain 'tough' Mookie trade

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- In keeping with a tradition that started 18 years ago when they first took over the team, Red Sox principal owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner held court with the media just after the first full-squad workout of Spring Training got underway on Monday. And as he has for the last several years, team president/CEO Sam Kennedy also took part.

In previous years, the session has hit on a variety of topics in what essentially represented a state of the union address. But this year was different, and ownership knew it would be. Therefore, they set the tone from the beginning.

This would mostly be about Mookie Betts, and the franchise's reasoning for trading the man who had become the team's signature player in a post-David Ortiz world.

At no time during the Henry-Werner ownership has one transaction upset the fanbase this much.

So to begin the press conference, Henry read a prepared statement for nearly seven minutes directed toward those fans who are heartbroken by the trade.

Hours after Betts tweeted a thank-you video to the city of Boston, ownership spoke for more than a half-hour about the decision to trade him. In his statement, Henry tried to be empathetic but also informative.

"We feel responsible to face whatever challenges arise in a way so as to protect the organization and move forward for the long term whether it's on the field or off," Henry said. "Before Tom, Sam or I ever dreamed of owning a Major League Baseball club, we were baseball fans, like you. I grew up a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals. My favorite player was Stan Musial. My heart would have broken if Stan the Man had ever been traded -- for any reason. Your parents or your grandparents surely felt the same way about Ted Williams and Yaz."

However, baseball owners can't use sentimentality as a driving factor.

Betts was entering the final year of team control. And after several years of being unable to find common ground on an extension, the Red Sox had no interest in watching their superstar outfielder leave for nothing but a Draft pick as a free agent in November.

"I think we made legitimate offers over three offseasons," Henry said. "We made it clear to Mookie, and I made it personally clear one-on-one, that we wanted to see him in a Red Sox uniform for the rest of his life, if possible."

The Red Sox finally reached a point where they sensed it wouldn't be possible.

"We cannot shy away from tough decisions required to aggressively compete for World Series. That is what led to this trade," Henry said. "Free agency plays into many decisions clubs like ours have to make. Today's players spend years in the Minor and Major Leagues earning the right to be paid in a free market, earning the right to make choices. They make significant sacrifices to get there and they deserve what they receive. Clubs also have choices to make as well in this economic system."

Henry was referring to a financial environment where a club that goes over the luxury tax for a third straight season faces severe penalties. Re-setting the tax, on the other hand, brings about a competitive advantage.

So by trading Betts and David Price in that deal with the Dodgers, the Red Sox will get under the Competitive Balance Tax. That doesn't mean it was easy. Henry said that, at least when it came to Betts, the decision was made more to get something for him before he left as a free agent than CBT considerations.

"We at the Red Sox will remember this as one of the toughest, one of the most difficult, decisions we have ever had to make," Henry said. "We too love the young man, the great, great smile, the huge heart and the seemingly boundless talent he displayed here."

"We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him next offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path forward. We carefully considered the alternative over the last year and made a decision when this opportunity presented itself to acquire substantial, young talent for the years ahead."

It was Werner who noted that in Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, the Red Sox have added players who come with a combined 17 years of contractual control.

“I think we have to wait and see whether the evaluations of [chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom] and our baseball people are accurate,” Werner said. “I’ve talked to a lot of people outside this organization who are very enthusiastic about the talent that we’ve received.”

“We were faced with a difficult choice. You can talk about dollars. You can talk about metrics and value,” Henry said. “But in the end, even though we are consistently among the highest-spending clubs in baseball -- with this year being no exception -- we have to make hard judgments about competing for the future as well as the present.”

Henry later scoffed at the notion that the Red Sox -- who will still spend close to \$200 million on a 2020 roster that has plenty of talent -- are embarking on a “bridge year.”

“This would be a record payroll for a team in a bridge year,” Henry said.

Though the Red Sox admittedly thought more about the future than this season while making this trade, the goal is still to win. It’s just that the degree of difficulty got a little harder.

“I also believe this team can compete for a championship with the pieces we have,” said Werner. “You’re all smart, so you also know the Washington Nationals won a championship without Bryce Harper. I understand what Chaim said, that in some ways we’re not as strong without Mookie, and of course that makes sense, but we haven’t seen how this season plays out yet. So I’m optimistic that we’ll be very competitive.”

This post-Mookie world is going to take time to get used to, though, and the Red Sox owners didn’t hide from that.

“We also understand, as John said, that in the short run, this is going to be painful,” Werner said. “It’s painful for us. But it does give us flexibility.”

And ultimately, the executives have confidence that flexibility will lead to a fifth World Series championship in the Henry-Werner era.

Notes: Sox set 2020 goals; Roenicke impresses

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- During a Red Sox staff meeting prior to the first full-squad workout Monday morning, which included ownership, the front office, the entire roster and coaching staff, a clear feeling emanated.

And it’s one that could serve the Red Sox well heading into a season in which they are sure to be overlooked on the list of top contenders.

“You can sense in the room that there’s a collective chip on their shoulder,” said Red Sox president/CEO Sam Kennedy. “It’s been a difficult offseason.”

To recap, Mookie Betts and David Price were traded to the Dodgers. Manager Alex Cora mutually parted ways with the Red Sox due to his involvement in the Astros’ sign-stealing scandal. And the club itself remains under investigation by MLB, though players continue to express the belief they will be cleared.

It’s been a lot for everyone to digest. But if all of it leads to added motivation, they say that’s not a bad thing.

“I definitely think a lot of guys are a little bit more hungry than last year in a sense,” slugger J.D. Martinez said. “I’m not saying that our team was complacent last year but I think we were just, in a sense, a little bit more relaxed coming in.

“Last year was kind of like a slap in the face, a reality check for us. I think a lot of guys are coming in a lot more determined and ready to go. The team we put on the field last year wasn’t us, it wasn’t our team. Think about it, we had our two best pitchers go down. Really, you can’t do anything about that. We’re hoping this year everyone stays healthy and we go out there and we play the way we know how to play.”

Interim manager Ron Roenicke is thrilled to have the opportunity to take this team into battle.

“I think because they believe in themselves, I believe in them and we have some great players here,” Roenicke said. “They don’t have to be Superman but if they just do what they’re supposed to do, we’re going to have a good year.”

To be frank, the Red Sox are tired of hearing about all the subplots. They just want to play baseball.

“Everybody knows what’s going on,” said Red Sox left fielder Andrew Benintendi. “As players, there’s only so much you can do and worry about and that’s just to get ready for the season. That’s what we’re focused on. Everybody here today, all together, has one goal and that’s to get back to the playoffs.”

Rave reviews for Roenicke

Roenicke continues to get rave reviews for the way he is leading the team since being thrust into action last week.

During the staff meeting, Roenicke had a chance to address the entire group for the first time.

“Ron is off to a terrific start,” said Red Sox chairman Tom Werner. “He’s a great tonic for this team. He’s experienced. He knows the organization, he knows the players in this organization.”

And the players all believe in him.

“One, Ron managed before. He understands it,” said Martinez. “He was a big piece of Alex’s decision-making. He understood Alex. Alex always leaned on him. And he knows us and we trust him. He’s a familiar face and he knows the personalities in the clubhouse. He kind of knows how to handle everyone and I think it’s like the perfect fit.”

J.D. on in-game video

In recent days, Commissioner Rob Manfred mentioned that in-game video could be limited for players this season in light of the sign-stealing scandal for which the Astros were heavily penalized.

Martinez, who is a DH, hopes it doesn’t hinder his ability to break down his at-bats during the game.

“It was something you grew up with,” said Martinez. “You kind of always go back and you can check something in your swing and it helps you throughout the game. To all of a sudden take that away is a little extreme, I think. I think you can make it in a sense, if you want to delay it an inning or do something like that, it’s fine. I promise you now that [reviewing] the at-bats doesn’t help anything in a sign-stealing type of deal.”

J.D. says Cora didn’t influence Red Sox to break rules

Martinez was one of the many Red Sox players who loved Cora and said he was shocked when he heard of his involvement in the Astros’ sign-stealing investigation.

“Honestly, when it happened, I was very shocked by it,” Martinez said. “I wasn’t aware. I didn’t even know. It caught me off guard.”

Martinez was adamant in saying that Cora never devised any illegal sign-stealing schemes with the Red Sox. MLB's investigation into the '18 Sox, however, is ongoing. Manfred said he expects it to be complete by the end of the month.

"I can put my hand on any book, any lie detector, whatever," said Martinez. "When Alex came here, he never influenced us in any way to do that. He never even mentioned it. I didn't even know they were doing it [in Houston]."

"I didn't even find out until Mike [Fiers] mentioned it to me, when he was in Oakland, because I'm friends with him and all the guys were giving him a hard time, but that was the first time I ever heard of it."

"I didn't know that Alex [was] so involved. Obviously people make mistakes and it is what it is. I think he's feeling it now, but that doesn't change my view of him, and the way he treated me as a person and I still have great respect for him."

*** *ESPN.com***

Red Sox's J.D. Martinez thinks Astros bashing a bit much

Joon Lee

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The passionate reaction around baseball regarding the Astros' sign-stealing scandal continues to capture the attention of the sport, with stars such as Justin Turner and Mike Trout speaking out against MLB's punishment of Houston on Monday. But Red Sox designated hitter J.D. Martinez said he believes the discourse around baseball is "getting a little bit too much."

"I understand players' frustrations and stuff like that, but I think, in my opinion, it's already getting a little bit too much," Martinez said. "We have to move past it at some point. We can't continue to talk about it. I know it's frustrating right now. People want to talk about it, this and that, but it's 2020. I think teams are aware of everything that's kind of happened."

"... From here on out, it's going to be a different message in the clubhouses and a different environment with people, like steroids. The punishments were so harsh that people weren't going to attempt to think about doing anymore. I think it will get to that point."

Martinez, 32, a three-time All-Star and Silver Slugger Award winner, also defended MLB commissioner Rob Manfred's decision to grant the players immunity, saying that the facts of the situation would not have emerged otherwise.

"One hundred percent they wouldn't have," Martinez said. "That's the way it is. There was never any hard-core facts that were jumping out at you. If it weren't for players talking and getting that immunity, I don't think no one would have ever have said anything."

Martinez's comments come as the Red Sox await their fate in MLB's investigation of alleged sign stealing during their 2018 World Series title run. Manfred said Sunday that a decision could come within the next week.

"I think it's really important for us to send a message to our fans," Manfred said, "that not only did we investigate and punish, but we altered our policies in a way to help make sure it doesn't happen again."

Martinez did, however, take issue with the announcement from Manfred that MLB is in talks with the players' union to further restrict in-game use of video, such as when hitters go to the clubhouse to review their at-bats before returning to the dugout.

The Boston designated hitter uses video extensively in his preparation, recording every swing during batting practice and routinely breaking down footage to check for irregularities in his swing. That practice played a major role in his success following his release from the Astros before the 2014 season.

"He said there are going to be some restrictions, but I think to go out there and take all video out and you're not allowed to look at at-bats, I think, is a little ridiculous, in my opinion," Martinez said. "All of these kids now, when I was in the minor leagues, Double-A, Triple-A, we had video systems. ... You always go back and check something in your swing, and it helps you throughout the game. To all of a sudden take that away is a little extreme."

Martinez continued: "The way the at-bat system works is like you're watching the game live from NESN. You watch it on NESN, can you steal the signs? It's too hard. It's cutting in and out. There's a guy eating a sausage, and they're talking about him eating a hot dog and this sausage, and then all of a sudden ... there's the pitch. I think it's a little bit extreme to say all of that.

"Maybe they should become more informed on what exactly you can do and talk to players who have played. 'Hey, does this help? How can we monitor it?' If you want to delay it, delay it, whatever you have to do, but to sit there and take that away, for me, it's what makes me me. I'm a very analytical guy. I like to study what my back foot is doing, my elbow. There's a lot of guys who are like that, and that's the trend of the game and the way the game has gone."

Martinez also suggested that limiting access to video could diminish the offensive production on the field.

"You start taking angles away, you're just making it harder," Martinez said. "What does the commissioner want? More offense, more offense, but you're going to limit hitters for doing that? I think it's tough."

Red Sox owner John Henry says Mookie Betts trade was strategic, not financial move

Joon Lee

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Boston Red Sox owner John Henry addressed the media for the first time since his team dealt Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers, attempting to explain the move to a fan base that is incensed over the trade of the homegrown MVP.

"The baseball organizations that we compete against have become much more strategic and thoughtful about how and when they spend their resources in their question for titles," Henry said in prepared remarks. "We cannot shy away from tough decisions required to aggressively compete for the World Series. That's what led to this trade."

Henry, chairman Tom Werner and president Sam Kennedy all denied that the primary reason behind the trade was to cut payroll and get below the competitive balance tax threshold. Henry had expressed his desire for the team to cut payroll in September, before clarifying that it was a "goal," not a "mandate." A few days after Henry's initial comments, Kennedy said it would be difficult for Boston to keep both Betts and J.D. Martinez, who had an opt-out in his contract after 2019 for the 2020 season.

"I understand there's probably little I can say that will change how you feel about this," Red Sox owner John Henry told fans about the trade of Mookie Betts, "but it's my responsibility to try." Barry Chin/The Boston Globe/Getty Images

Henry has called the notion that the team was looking to get under the CBT a "media-driven" narrative. On Monday, he said that the team could not afford to let Betts walk away in free agency without getting a bigger return than a compensatory draft pick.

"In today's game, there's a cost to losing a great player in free agency, one that cannot nearly be made up by the draft pick given," Henry said. "We've seen examples of this recently. We at the Red Sox will remember this as one of the toughest, one of the most difficult decisions we've ever had to make. ... We felt we could not sit on our hands and lose him this offseason without getting value in return to help us on our path

forward. We carefully considered the alternative over the last year and made a decision when this opportunity presented itself to acquire substantial young talent for the years ahead."

Kennedy framed the decision much more simply.

"You don't trade Mookie Betts to get under the CBT," Kennedy said. "We traded Mookie Betts and David Price and got back significant value in return."

Boston found itself lacking payroll flexibility when former general manager Dave Dombrowski was granted autonomy in the baseball operations department before his firing late in the 2019 season. Following the World Series championship in 2018, Dombrowski signed World Series hero Nathan Eovaldi, who has undergone Tommy John surgery twice, to a four-year, \$68 million contract and Chris Sale to a five-year, \$145 million contract a year before he was scheduled to hit the open market. When asked if there was anything the team could have done to prevent the circumstances that led to the Betts trade, Henry kept his answer short.

"Yes," Henry said. "We could've signed him to a long-term contract, but short of that, I'm not sure what the answer is."

Boston made offers to Betts over three different offseasons. The last major offer was for 10 years and \$300 million, which Betts reportedly countered by asking for 12 years and \$420 million.

"We made legitimate offers over three offseasons," Henry said. "We made it clear to Mookie and I made it personally clear, one-on-one, that we wanted to see him in a Red Sox uniform for the rest of his career if possible."

The trade of Betts prompted backlash from fans, who are still steaming about the decision a week after the move to ship the right fielder to Los Angeles became official. Kennedy said ticket sales are down 15 percent versus where they were at this point in 2019.

The ownership group insisted that 2020 would not be a bridge year, with estimates for the new season's payroll clocking in around \$190 million.

"Don't you think it would be a record payroll for a bridge year?" Henry said.

Henry on multiple occasions made a point to compare the trade of Betts to the 2004 midseason trade of Nomar Garciaparra. There are differences, however. Betts is 27, in his prime, with little injury history. Garciaparra was 30 and had dealt with major injuries before his trade to the Chicago Cubs. And Betts, unlike Garciaparra in 2004, is a consensus top-five player in Major League Baseball.

"I know it's difficult and disappointing," Henry said. "Some of you no doubt felt the same way in 2004 when we traded Nomar, who like Mookie, was a hugely popular homegrown player. All of us in the organization hoped that we would never have to go through something like that again, but most clubs face similar dilemmas from time to time. I understand there's probably little I can say that will change how you feel about this, but it's my responsibility to try."

Ultimately, Boston says its future was best served with the return of outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and catching prospect Connor Wong, believing that the financial flexibility presented by the trade of Betts and Price to the Dodgers presented the best long-term outcome for the organization, as opposed to taking the risk of keeping Betts through the 2020 season and losing him for a compensation draft pick.

"Today's players spend years in the minors and major leagues earning the right to be paid in a free market, earning the right to make choices. They made significant sacrifices to get there, and they deserve what they receive," Henry said. "Clubs also have choices to make in this economic system. It's a system that has a few imbalances as do all economic systems, but it's a system overall that has led to labor peace and an amazing

market for our best players. It's not the system's fault that the Red Sox ended up in this position. We were faced with a difficult choice."

*** *WEEL.com***

Brock Holt won't be returning to the Red Sox

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The overhaul of the Red Sox continues.

One more familiar face will not be part of the 2020 Red Sox with Brock Holt headed to the Brewers. The 31-year-old had been in the Boston organization since being traded from Pittsburgh after the 2012 season.

While he only played in 87 games, Holt is coming off of one of his best offensive seasons, having hit .297 with a .771 OPS. The infielder was also known as an important piece of the Sox' clubhouse, having served as the Jimmy Fund player representative the past few years.

During his Red Sox career, Holt played every position except for pitcher and catcher.

The Red Sox' replacement for Holt is Jose Peraza, a 25-year-old who has started for the Reds the past three seasons. Michael Chavis also figures to offer some of the versatility Holt represented.

The Athletic was first with the news of the agreement.

Message to Red Sox: Desperation isn't a good look

Rob Bradford

It's OK.

Sometimes expectations change. Ticket sales aren't always great. Narratives can get uncomfortable. Popular players leave. Unknown players come in.

This is the Red Sox existence. So be it. Some will get that reality, others won't. But there is one entity that is expected to come to grips with this new reality: the Red Sox.

Let's just say they are having a hard time with this.

The Red Sox have had a pretty good run since this ownership took over, in large part because money was always willing to be spent. When you're willing to spend in order to fix your mistakes, mistakes are usually going to be fixed. But this one is different.

Monday's press conference was a reminder of that.

The Red Sox are simply a bit too desperate. That's how the ownership's 30-minute get-together with the media suggested.

It started with a prepared statement from John Henry:

It isn't complicated why Henry took this tact. With the trading of Mookie Betts, it was perceived as an important moment in the franchise's history. He viewed this as no time for introductory improvisation. OK. Fair enough.

The problem was that nobody wanted to compare this Betts stuff with some Stan Musial story. Same goes for the eventual parallels drawn to when the Red Sox traded Nomar Garciaparra in 2004. This was about Betts, a unique player in a unique situation.

Here's what the opening statement should have said:

"We tried for the past three years to sign Mookie Betts to a long-term extension but could not come to an agreement with Mookie and his representatives regarding his market value. We have no regrets in terms of the financial heights we presented Mookie each step of the way. It was simply a difference of opinion and Mookie has always been firm in his willingness to reach free agency if his evaluation wasn't met.

"If we could not get what we perceived a satisfactory return in a trade for Mookie we would have been content to enjoy at least one more year of Mookie's presence while continuing to explore common ground on a contract.

"In terms of my statement regarding getting below the CBT, that always remained a goal for obvious reasons: In order to best position our franchise for the future while having the opportunity to make a run at significant free agents next season that is our most logical path. Normally such goals aren't publicized due to competitive disadvantages. I am sometimes honest to a fault. This might have been one of those occasions. This motivation served as part of the impetus behind including David Price in the trade."

"Questions?"

A lot of this Henry, Tom Werner and Sam Kennedy ultimately got to, although often times doing the dance that might keep their all-in persona alive.

Then came Kennedy's reminder regarding ticket packages. It started and it seemed odd, but somewhat understandable considering the need to remind everyone this is still a business and business wasn't booming like in years past. But then it kept going.

By the end of the statement all that was missing was Kennedy offering the opportunity for those in attendance to give his Square cell phone credit card reader a swipe.

It's clear they are all stung. The ticket sales. The diminished interest. The replacement of one of the game's most popular players with someone (Alex Verdugo) whose only mention in the press conference was due to an assault case. The Major League Baseball investigation. All of it.

Make no mistake about it, it is a weird feeling. Walking into the clubhouse and there is undeniably more names the average fan never heard of than recognizable professional ballplayers. For a Red Sox locker room, that is unheard of.

Ron Roenicke is doing his best to offer some normalcy, but the fact that he can't even name a bench coach (or get interim off his title) until that MLB ruling goes down next week is bizarre.

It is what it is.

This isn't changing any time soon, even with a favorable investigation. The Red Sox could get off to a great start and the Josh Osich's of the world might be the kind of diamond-in-the-roughs Chaim Bloom is being counted on to uncover. But remember, when the Red Sox surprised with their overachievement in 2013 fans didn't buy into the team until late August. This is what awaits ... best case scenario.

These desperate times don't call for desperate measures. It's too late for that.

Red Sox notes: Andrew Benintendi likely to get first crack at leading off

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Now that Mookie Betts is gone there no easy answers when it comes to the top spot in the Red Sox' batting order.

But listening to interim manager Ron Roenicke Monday it certainly appears as though Andrew Benintendi is going to be first in line when it comes to serving as the Sox' leadoff hitter.

"We'll see what happens. Benny is always a guy I bring up because he did it last year because he's an on-base guy. I know he can hit, he's a really good hitter and has a really good eye," Roenicke noted. "He takes pitches, he does everything you need as a leadoff hitter and he can steal bases too so I like him in the leadoff spot we'll see in camp - I'm sure I'll have a conversation with him and if he's good with it, we'll try and see how it goes and see how everybody else fits in."

Benintendi began the 2019 season as the team's leadoff hitter but struggled in that role.

As the first batter for a game, the lefty hitter managed just a .119 batting average (5-for-42) with five walks in 48 games. Overall, in the top spot he hit .256 with a .767 on-base percentage.

As for other candidates, Alex Verdugo hit leadoff just once for the Dodgers in 2019, while Kevin Pillar manned the top of the Giants' order four times.

- If you were wondering why the Red Sox put the interim tag on Roenicke's job description, that has become clear: They are waiting for the findings of the MLB investigation before fully committing to a full-time position.

"Ron is off to a terrific start," said Red Sox chairman Tom Werner. "He's a great tonic for this team. He's experienced. He knows the organization, he knows the players in this organization." He then added when asked about the interim identification "Hopefully that tag will be removed shortly."

- J.D. Martinez is not happy about the prospects of eliminating in-game video, as has been suggested by Commissioner Rob Manfred.

"One hundred percent. That's who I am," the Red Sox slugger said when asked if he was worried that MLB was going to take such an action. "I heard that too and he said there's going to be some restrictions, but I think to go out there and take all video out, you're not allowed to look through at-bats, I think is a little ridiculous in my opinion. All these kids now, when I was in minor league, Double-A, Triple-A, we had video. It was something you grew up with. You kind of always go back and you can check something in your swing and it helps you throughout the game. To all of a sudden take that away is a little extreme I think. I think you can make it in a sense, if you want to delay it an inning or do something. I promise you now that the at-bats doesn't help anything in a sign-stealing type of deal."

He added, "The way the at-bat system works, you're kind of watching the game live, like from NESN. You watch it on NESN, can you steal the signs? Exactly, it's too hard. It's cutting in and out. There's a guy eating a sausage and they're talking about him eating his hot dog and the sausage and everything and then all of a sudden the pitch. I think it's a little bit extreme to kind of just say all that, I think they should maybe become more informed on what is exactly you could do and actually talk to players who have played and hey, does this help, does this and that help. If you want to delay it, delay it. Whatever you have to do. But to sit there and take that away, for me it's what makes me, me. I'm a very analytical guy, I like to study my swing, I like to study what my back foot is doing, what my elbow, whatever it might be and there's a lot of guys nowadays that are like that. That's the trend of the game, that's the way the game has gone. If you look the last couple of years, everybody is like that."

- Rafael Devers, who has been in the Dominican Republic after the recent birth of his second child, is slated to be ready for the Thursday workout while minor-league free agent Cesar Puello (Visa issues) is slated to join the team Wednesday.

Was Mookie Betts situation repeat of Jon Lester fiasco? John Henry says no.

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Did the Red Sox offer Mookie Betts enough money?

It is a pertinent question considering where the two sides landed, with the Sox needing to trade Betts to the Dodgers after recognizing there was a good chance he was headed to free agency after the 2020 season. And considering it was just about one year ago that Red Sox principal owner John Henry told the assembled media on the first day of spring training that his organization had messed up the Jon Lester negotiations leading into the 2014 season, it was worth asking if history had repeated itself.

"I think we made legitimate offers over three offseasons but I really don't want to — I'll follow Sam's point about not getting into what happened," said Henry, referencing team president Sam Kennedy while addressing the media Monday morning at JetBlue Park. "But we made it clear to Mookie, I made it personally clear one-on-one, that we wanted to see him in a red sox uniform for the rest of his life if possible but as I went through in my opening statement, we live in a different world today. Players spend so many years being underpaid in the system that we have that when they get to free agency they've earned the right to maximize their chances of being paid maximum amount."

"I go to sleep at night thinking that maybe we could've made another offer to Jon Lester that maybe we would've bridged the gap," added Red Sox chairman Tom Werner. "I think we made (Mookie) what we consider fair and generous offers. As John said, I think it was all right for Mookie to want to test the market."

The ownership group made it clear throughout the press conference that efforts had been made to lock up Betts to an extension. League sources put the Red Sox offer last spring training at 10 years, \$310 million with WEEI's Lou Merloni reporting the outfielder countered with a 12-year, \$420 million deal.

Betts talked to WEEI.com in September about the first time the Red Sox approached him with an extension offer, the year before he was arbitration-eligible.

"That was a really emotional time because I was like, 'Mom, we've never seen this amount of money.' She was like, 'OK, cool. It's a lot of money. I think we know it's a lot of money. So let's focus on the facts. Let's focus on what is real and we took the emotions out of it.' The first one was definitely the hardest," said Betts, who agreed to a one-year, \$20 million deal last offseason. "At the time we had never seen anything like that."

Leading into the 2014 season, the Red Sox lowballed Lester with an offer of four years, \$70 million. For fear of a high counter-offer being leaked the Lester camp instead waited for the Red Sox to come up with their offer to closer to market value. That never happened. Lester would later explain during an appearance on WEEI that he would have taken a deal in the vicinity of five years, \$120 million.

Sam Kennedy: Red Sox did due diligence on Alex Verdugo

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- A big part of the Mookie Betts trade is Alex Verdugo. And a big part of Verdugo is his past.

The former Dodgers outfielder has come under scrutiny for a reported incident in which an underage girl was assaulted, with three members Dodgers minor-leaguers present. According to a post written by Jessica Quiroli on the blog "All Heels on Deck" Verdugo was present during the 2015 incident, which took place in Arizona. Specific names were not mentioned in the police report because no charges were filed. (For more on the case, [click here.](#))

Speaking to the media last week, Verdugo said, "With that incident, there's a lot of reports and, obviously, my name being mentioned in the allegations, you know, it hurts. It really does hurt. It's hard. And I don't want Boston fans, I don't want people to judge me for something they have read or seen posted. For me, it's just, you know, I know who I am. I know what I believe in. I know my family values and, like I said, it's extremely hard to have to deal with that. You obviously have a lot of mixed views on it, but there was — I was cleared of any wrongdoing, of anything. And with that being said, it was a terrible thing that happened. But, I'm really just — it was in my past. It's something that, I've grown from it. I've learned from it and I've stayed active in my community with the Dodgers. Showing face and being very out there with the fans and interacting with people. I want to give back to my community. I want to show people that I am a good guy. I care a lot about this game, and I have a big heart. I want people to judge me for, obviously, the way I play. The way I go out there and what I bring out to the field: the energy, the hard work, the giving a hundred percent. That's what I want to be known for. Obviously, not something that happened several years back."

Speaking to the media on the matter for the first time since Verdugo's arrival with the Red Sox, team president Sam Kennedy explained the organization's view on the matter.

"I can address that we did an extremely high level of due diligence with Major League Baseball and with the Los Angeles Dodgers," Kennedy said. "I actually spoke to the commissioner directly about it myself. We are comfortable with the decision, otherwise we would not have moved forward in that direction. I had a chance to meet Alex in person this morning and let him know the entire organization is here to support him and all of our players. We're comfortable with the level of due diligence that we did."

When asked if anyone with the Red Sox attempted to contact the young woman involved Kennedy said, "No, we did not track down the woman in question."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Five things it would've been nice to hear Red Sox ownership say about Mookie Betts trade

John Tomase

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- After listening to Red Sox ownership wax sentimental about Stan Musial, long for just one more peek at Mookie Betts' dreamy smile, and remind fans that \$99 tier five family packs are available right now, so get 'em before they're gone, I found myself wishing they could've demonstrated a little more humility and candor on Monday morning.

In truth, they had little chance of satisfactorily defending a move most fans consider indefensible. But had we the opportunity to shoot up owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, and CEO Sam Kennedy with a little sodium pentothal, here are five things I wish they had said.

1. "This was about the CBT."

If there's a truly head-scratching aspect of the Betts trade, it's ownership's insistence that the media has someone misconstrued the organization's intentions. Even Henry's meandering opening statement, which he billed as "addressing Red Sox fans directly," suggested that reporters have somehow failed the fanbase by noting the obvious truth that the Red Sox wanted to drop the payroll below \$208 million to reset their luxury tax penalties this season.

There are a host of reasons to do so. It protects the team's spot in the draft, it reduces the amount it must pay for exceeding various thresholds, and it positions the club to spend again, a la the Yankees and Dodgers this winter.

But nope. They're still clinging to this defiant notion that the trade was about talent and not clearing the books. OK.

2. "This was a salary dump."

I'm not sure why "salary dump" is such a dirty phrase. In moving half of David Price's remaining \$96 million off the books, the Red Sox not only ditched a player who's unlikely to justify his paycheck, but they created the opportunity to replace him with someone younger, and youth is the most valuable currency in today's game.

The Yankees and Dodgers are the two highest-profile examples of big-market teams who slashed payroll in order to build around youth, and it has worked out smashingly for each. The Yankees created the flexibility to sign Gerrit Cole to the largest contract ever given a pitcher, while the Dodgers had room to absorb both Betts and Price. Each team is also coming off 100-win seasons.

Werner was asked why financial flexibility couldn't be a justifiable end in and of itself.

"It can be," he said. "But if we had simply wanted to have a salary dump, there would've been other ways to do that. It wasn't a salary dump. It was to give us flexibility. We could've moved in different directions. We could be sitting here saying Mookie is a member of our team this year. We made a strategic decision for what was in the best interests of the team this year and going forward, that this was a wise trade. We followed Chaim (Bloom's) recommendation, but there would've been other ways to have a salary dump than the path we went forward with."

Werner added it was "hypothetically" true the team could've traded Price alone, but I'm skeptical another club would've eaten half of his remaining money without Betts being attached.

Sox ownership takes heat for comparing Betts trade to Nomar deal

3. "We've mismanaged our payroll."

When the club explained why it fired former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski in September, Henry noted that he knew shortly after the World Series parade that the two men did not share the same vision moving forward. Dombrowski wanted to spend, Henry wanted to cut.

So it's fair to ask why Henry allowed Dombrowski to sign pitchers Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi to contracts totaling more than \$200 million last offseason, a question that ownership batted away.

"These decisions, there are a lot of hypotheticals here," Werner said. "We are pleased with the value we got back from the Dodgers. We might not be having this discussion, we might have preceded under different scenarios, but we are where we are based on the proposal that we agreed to."

Based on his injury-riddled 2019, Sale would not have cashed in for \$145 million this winter. Based on his injury history, Eovaldi shouldn't have been signed to a \$68 million contract based on two strong weeks in the playoffs.

But they were and here we are. The bloated Red Sox payroll cost them Betts as much as anything else.

4. "We've mismanaged our roster."

Band-Aids are how you end up becoming the New York Knicks. At some point, a team must be willing to take a step back, make some hard decisions, and set a course for the future. Throwing money after a top-heavy roster with zero depth might keep the Red Sox in marginally better playoff contention, but it won't address the hard truth that, with or without Betts, they're not a realistic World Series contender.

The once-strong farm system has been pillaged, the back of the roster is a mess, and there's little in the pipeline that suggests hope. The Red Sox need a reset while there's still time to build around the Xander Bogaerts-Rafael Devers-Andrew Benintendi core, but the sooner they start that process, the better.

5. "We're going to spend again."

This is a factual statement that is on the team's side, and yet no one thinks to just come out and say it. Criticize Henry and Co. all you want, but they're not shy about spending. The money they save this year will go right back into the roster, and it shouldn't surprise anyone if they boast the game's highest payroll within a year or two.

So say it! "We're only two years removed from spending more on players than any team in baseball," Henry could've said, "and I want the fans to hear this directly from me: we will spend that much again."

Instead, unfortunately, we got a bunch of sentimentality about Stan the Man, a misleading comparison to Nomar Garciaparra, and an embarrassing plea to buy student tickets for nine bucks. When it comes to getting out of their own way, Red Sox ownership always seems to end up in a heap.

J.D. Martinez says players' frustrations with Astros are 'a bit too much'

Justin Leger

Several players around Major League Baseball have expressed their displeasure with the Houston Astros and the lack of discipline handed down to players involved in their sign-stealing scandal.

Superstars Cody Bellinger, Justin Turner, and Mike Trout are among those upset with how MLB has handled the situation. But as more and more players pile on, Boston Red Sox designated hitter J.D. Martinez just wants to put this all in the past.

Martinez shared his thoughts on the outrage around the league on Monday.

"I understand players' frustrations and stuff like that, but I think in my opinion, it's already getting a little bit too much," Martinez said, per ESPN's Joon Lee. "We have to move past it at some point. We can't continue to talk about it. I know it's frustrating right now. People want to talk about it, this and that, but it's 2020. I think teams are aware of everything that's kind of happened.

"... From here on out, it's going to be a different message in the clubhouses and a different environment with people, like steroids. The punishments were so harsh that people weren't going to attempt to think about doing anymore. I think it will get to that point."

Martinez also believes MLB commissioner Rob Manfred granting players immunity in exchange for information on the scandal was the right move.

"If it weren't for players talking and getting that immunity, I don't think no one would have ever have said anything," Martinez said.

A member of the Astros from 2011-13, Martinez was teammates with two-time MVP Jose Altuve, who's at the center of Houston's scandal.

As a result of MLB's investigation, the Astros were penalized with a \$5 million fine and both manager A.J. Hinch and general manager Jeffrey Luhnow received one-year suspensions. Hinch and Luhnow were fired shortly afterward.

Alex Cora's two-year tenure as Red Sox manager came to an end after MLB's report named him as a central figure in the scandal while he served as the Astros bench coach in 2017.

Altuve, Alex Bregman, and other players involved have since apologized for their actions, though the sincerity of those apologies has been questioned.

As much as Martinez wants to move on, it's unlikely this mess will be cleaned up any time soon.

* ***Bostonsportsjournal.com***

In explaining trade of Mookie Betts, Red Sox ownership trips up badly

Sean McAdam

FORT MYERS, Fla. — “Follow the money” is always a handy bit of advice for anyone looking to get to the root of an issue.

It gets used from Watergate to Wall Street. Want to know why someone did what they did? Follow the money.

The Red Sox tried, without much success Monday, to present the opposite viewpoint. They insisted — time and time again — that the reason Mookie Betts is now sporting Dodger Blue and not Red Sox red had little to do with money and more to do with positioning themselves for the future.

“We cannot shy away from tough decisions required to aggressively compete for World Series,” said principal owner John Henry. “That is what led to this trade. We have to make hard judgments competing for the future as well as the present.”

More than anything, they wanted it known that it wasn’t about getting the payroll under the competitive balance tax (CBT) threshold of \$208 million.

Technically, this might be true. The Red Sox were in a position to afford the \$27 million salary for Betts in 2020 and dealing away David Price (due \$32 million each of the next three seasons) and making some other in-season cost-cutting moves could have helped them achieve that goal.

But they were unsure of their ability — or perhaps willingness? — to afford him past 2020. Henry, chairman Tom Werner and team president Sam Kennedy all noted that the team had made repeated attempts to get an extension done with Betts after the 2016, 2017 and 2018 seasons.

Some careful listening, however, would have alerted you to the fact that there was nothing mentioned about negotiations from this past winter, with one year of control remaining. Perhaps that was because, as has been reported, Betts had asked for a contract commensurate with the one given to Mike Trout, or, more than \$400 million.

Henry noted baseball’s current economic system is not without its flaws, before noting: “It’s not the system’s fault that the Red Sox ended up in this position.”

That much is true, of course. It’s their own fault.

Recall that, in September, when Henry let it slip that the Sox had a goal of getting under \$208 million for 2020, he also added that that was known “for more than a year.”

Yet despite knowing that some financial reckoning was coming, the Red Sox gave then-president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski the green light to hand out \$213 million worth of contracts to two pitchers — Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi — with durability issues, knowing they would soon have to address free agency for Betts.

“We’ve also said that was a goal, not a mandate (to get under the CBT),” said Werner. “The more important issue for us what is it that we can do to make the Red Sox strong in 2020, 2021 and 2022. There are lots of hypotheticals here. We’ve pleased with the value we got back from the Dodgers.”

Most fans, by contrast, are not. While the Sox did get a total of 17 controllable seasons for the three players — Alex Verdugo, Jeter Downs and Connor Wong — what are the odds that any of them becomes close to the player Betts was while here? Already, Verdugo is dealing with a stress fracture in his back and is doubtful for his first Opening Day as a member of the organization.

In attempting to rationalize the deal, Henry noted that some 16 years ago, the Red Sox dealt away Nomar Garciaparra “who, like Mookie, was a hugely popular homegrown player.”

Again, this was a poor comparison. At the time of the trade, Garciaparra was two years older than Betts and by then had become injury prone. Only three years earlier, he had been limited to just 21 games in 2001 and in 2004, he had played a mere 38 of the team’s first 101 games, while conveying to management he was unsure how much he would be physically available in the second half of the season.

Fairly or unfairly, Garciaparra had developed a reputation for being churlish, thin-skinned and, in terms of his skill-set, in decline. Worse, his unhappiness over a contract offer which was soon rescinded and the uncertainty over his future had turned him into a negative presence in the clubhouse, one the organization instinctively understood had to be removed for the betterment of the team.

It’s worth noting that after he was traded. From 2005 through the end of his career in 2009, he never played more than 122 games in a season, and only twice played more than 100. Only once — in 2006 — did he have a season in which he posted an OPS of better than .800, after doing so nine straight seasons while with the Red Sox.

He was selected as an All-Star just once after he was traded by the Sox. Just a hunch on my part, but I’d venture that Betts will do better than that.

The Garciaparra comp, then, completely missed the mark.

After all the energy ownership spent Monday desperately trying to convince everyone that Betts wasn’t traded because of the CBT or payroll, they failed to grasp the real issue. To wit: Red Sox fans don’t care why Betts was traded; they’re just furious that he was traded.

The Sox can spin this as they wish. They can explain, sympathize and hold counseling sessions for aggrieved fans and it won’t change the fact Betts — the best player the franchise had developed in decades — is no longer here.

Perhaps, unwittingly, the most on-point thing came almost as a throwaway line from Henry.

“I understand that there is little that I can say today that will change how you feel about this,” said the principal owner.

On that — and perhaps only that — we can all agree.

J.D. Martinez worried about losing access to in-game at-bats

Sean McAdam

FORT MYERS, Fla. — As part of the fallout from the sign-stealing mess created by the 2017 Houston Astros, and to a lesser extent the 2018 Red Sox, commissioner Rob Manfred said Sunday that Major League Baseball is in negotiations with the MLB Players Association to limit player access to in-game video in 2020.

And J.D. Martinez is not happy.

Few players use video as extensively as Martinez. He has one of the Red Sox’ video staff members film his daily batting practice sessions so he can review them. He uses video in the offseason to address hitches in

his swing or set-up. And he's constantly tinkering — sometimes in the middle of games — and making adjustments.

If Manfred's promised policy is enacted, it will change Martinez's preparation in a significant way.

"One hundred percent," said Martinez. "That's who I am. Obviously, I heard that, too. I think to go out there and take all video out and you're not allowed to look at at-bats, I think is a little ridiculous in my opinion. When I was in the minor leagues, Double A, Triple A — we had video systems. It's something we grew up with. You can go back and kind of check something in your swing. It helps you throughout the game and to all of a sudden take that away is a little extreme.

"If you want to delay it an inning, or you want to do something (else)...I promise you now that (watching) the at-bats doesn't help anything in the sign-stealing type-deal. The way the at-bat system works is kind of like you're watching the game live, like from NESN. You watch the games on NESN — can you steal the signs? It's too hard. It's cutting in and out (on the angle that shows the catcher's signs).

"I think they should become more informed on what exactly what you can do (with the video) and actually talk to players that played. 'Hey, what can we do? Does this help?' If you want to monitor or delay it. Whatever you have to do, but to take that away....For me, (watching at-bats) is what makes me me. I'm a very analytical guy. I like to study my swing, what my back foot is doing, my elbow...whatever it might be. And there's a lot of guys nowadays who are like that. That's the way the game has gone."

Part of the problem is that The Athletic reported that the Red Sox used the monitor in the video replay room to help decode opponents' signs. The signs would then be flashed by players in the dugout to baserunners in scoring position who would, in turn, convey the signs to the hitter.

That practice, coupled with the Astros' model in which a center field camera feed was shown on a monitor near the dugout, with staff members banging loudly on a trash can to alert hitters about what pitch was coming, has MLB looking to limit exposure to real-time video.

"You want to get rid of the replay (room)? Move the replay (room), move it up to the press box," said Martinez. "Put the (other team's video) guy and some security and close the door and you don't have to worry about anything. Follow the live feed. I think they've got to do a better job at that. And I think that's what they're going to do because it's kind of what they have to do.

Video is such an essential self-evaluating tool for hitters everywhere that Martinez believes it's untenable to restrict them from in-game use.

"All of a sudden, you're going to take that away from hitters who have grown and developed on that...I think that's a little harsh," said Martinez. "It's not fair."

Depending on the ballpark and the camera positioning, the angles are different for hitters.

"It's hard enough already," said Martinez. "This is what I do, I break down swings, and it's hard enough now with the angles that we can get. There's certain places where you get a specific angle. For example, in Toronto, you get (an overhead) angle. You don't get that everywhere. All of a sudden, you might see something from that angle and say, 'Wow — I didn't know I was doing that.'

"The point being if you start taking angles away, you're just making it harder. And what does the commissioner want? He wants offense — that's what he keeps talking about, right? But you're going to limit the hitters from doing that. It's just tough."

*** *The Athletic***

Will the Red Sox regress this season? Numbers suggest that might not be a sure thing

Chad Jennings

The Red Sox just traded Mookie Betts. They paid half of David Price's salary to get him off the roster, they let Rick Porcello leave via free agency, and they elected not to re-sign Brock Holt.

So how much worse will they be in 2020 than they were in 2019?

According to one set of statistics, maybe not much.

Using FanGraphs' version of Wins Above Replacement, as well as their Depth Charts method of predicting upcoming performance, it seems the Red Sox might have built a roster nearly identical to last year's, and it's entirely possible some parts of the roster are quite a bit better. Other aspects are clearly worse.

With veteran outfielder Kevin Pillar added to the mix, FanGraphs projects the 2020 Red Sox position players to be worth 27.5 wins above replacement. That's exactly the level at which they produced last year, and that predicted consistency comes without Betts and despite both Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers projected for meaningful steps backward.

As for the Red Sox pitching staff, it's projected to be worth 16.1 WAR this season, another number very similar to – but, in this case, slightly worse than – the 2019 team, which had a pitching staff valued at 16.5 WAR.

All told, the statistical outlook for 2020 looks virtually the same as the reality of 2019. The Red Sox ranked sixth in the majors in offensive wins above replacement last season, and they ranked 12th in pitching wins above replacement. For 2020, they're projected to rank fifth in offensive wins above replacement and 15th in pitching wins above replacement. Their total projected WAR of 43.7 is tied with the Rays for seventh-best in the majors and fourth-best in the American League behind the Astros (55.1), Yankees (50.5) and Twins (45.7).

Clearly, this is an inexact science. Projections are inherently flawed, and myriad factors can change what actually happens during the season, but here's a look through last year's numbers and this year's projections, showing where the analysis predicts drop-offs and surprising opportunities for improvement.

Catcher

Last season: Christian Vazquez (3.5 WAR), Sandy Leon (-0.2), Juan Centeno (-0.1)

Projected 2020: Vazquez (2.8), Kevin Plawecki (0.6), Centeno (0.0)

Net difference: +0.2

The end result here is pretty close to a break-even projection behind the plate. The numbers even slightly favor 2020 despite FanGraphs predicting Vazquez will play in 29 fewer games and slug nearly 60 points lower than last season. The site is a bit bullish on Plawecki, who's only once before been worth more than 0.3 WAR but projects as a slight upgrade over Leon, who projects to be worth 0.5 WAR in Cleveland.

First base/second base

Last season: Brock Holt (1.3) Mitch Moreland (0.7), Michael Chavis (0.7), Marco Hernandez (-0.4), Sam Travis (-0.9), Steve Pearce (-0.9), Eduardo Nunez (-1.0)

Projected 2020: Chavis (1.1), Moreland (0.8), Jose Peraza (0.6), Jonathan Arauz (-0.1)

Net difference: +3

Because of Chavis, it helps to lump these two positions together (although it gets a little murky because the WAR totals include some outfield playing time for some of the guys).

Ultimately, FanGraphs is predicting remarkably similar production at the top of the depth chart for the right side of the Red Sox infield, but the overall picture suggests a considerable improvement because last year's backups and platoon players performed so poorly.

FanGraphs had the Red Sox first and second basemen as a net negative in 2019. Pearce and Nunez were particularly disappointing platoon options. Projections for 2020 don't see a repeat of that. We're listing only players expected to have at least 75 plate appearances, but depth options Arauz, C.J. Chatham, Tzu-Wei Lin and – yes – Dustin Pedroia – are projected to perform collectively right at replacement level, chipping in rather than dragging down the group. If you're curious, the site projects Pedroia to play in 10 games and hit .264.

If you're feeling glass-half-full, there are actually a few reasons to think FanGraphs might be underestimating this year's first basemen and second basemen.

1. The site predicts Peraza will return to his 2018 level of hitting – when he was a 2.6-win player – but it also predicts only 273 at-bats, bringing down his total value. If he does hit like that, he could play more and be worth more.
2. The system predicts 43 home runs combined for Moreland and Chavis. Seems logical, but that's only six more than they hit last year when neither played in 100 games.
3. Slugging prospect Bobby Dalbec is lumped into that Arauz/Lin/Chatham group of backups and predicted to finish with just 0.1 WAR while playing in only 13 games, but the upside for Dalbec is quite a bit better. He's Triple-A depth like Chavis was a year ago. If the Red Sox need him, there's a chance Dalbec could be well above replacement level at either first or third.

Shortstop/third base

Last season: Xander Bogaerts (6.8), Rafael Devers (5.9)

Projected 2020: Bogaerts (4.8), Devers (4.7)

Net difference: -3.2

Again, easiest to lump these two together. FanGraphs does not predict anyone else getting significant playing time on the left side of the infield – only a handful of at-bats for Chavis at third base, and roughly a dozen at-bats for Peraza and Arauz as backup shortstops – so it's all down to whether Bogaerts and Devers can repeat last season.

FanGraphs projects a decline of more than 3 wins for the two of them, from a combined 12.7 WAR last season to 9.5 WAR this season.

For Devers, the system actually predicts fairly similar offensive numbers – OPS down just 15 points – but it has his defense quite a bit worse. For Bogaerts, it's the bat that's projected to decline quite a bit. FanGraphs is predicting Bogaerts' OPS to be 72 points lower than last season, much closer to his 2018 level of production. That's still awfully good, but it doesn't put him back in the MVP conversation.

Center field

Last season: Jackie Bradley Jr. (1.4)

Projected 2020: Bradley Jr. (2.0)

Net difference: +0.6

Aside from occasionally playing their corner outfielders in center field, the Red Sox had a true bench player in center for only 17 innings last season (16 for Gorkys Hernandez and one for Tzu-Wei Lin). FanGraphs is predicting something similar this year.

For a while, the site expected Pillar to get more playing time in center than in either of the corners, but that projection has changed with confirmation of Alex Verdugo's back injury. The site now sees Pillar getting just 77 plate appearances as a center fielder, plus 21 for Andrew Benintendi, leaving the rest to Bradley, who's expected to see a light improvement both at the plate and in the field.

Outfield corners

Last season: Mookie Betts (6.6), Andrew Benintendi (2.0)

Projected 2020: Alex Verdugo (2.9), Benintendi (2.5), Kevin Pillar (0.7)

Net difference: -2.5

If you're curious – and we know you are – FanGraphs predicts Betts falling to 5.8 WAR this season, making him twice as good as his Red Sox replacement in right field.

FanGraphs predicts a mild uptick for Benintendi. Not nearly to the 4.4 WAR he posted in 2018, but at least a little better than his disappointing 2019. The projections show a slightly higher batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage – but not to a superstar level.

As for Verdugo, he was a 2.2 WAR player last season according to FanGraphs (Baseball Reference had him at 3.1), so they're predicting a little more than a half-win increase with 162 additional at-bats. Verdugo's predicted offensive numbers are actually better than what he posted last season – projected OPS up by more than 25 points – but his defensive value is predicted to take a hit. He was expected to be worth 3.2 WAR when spring training started, but that projection has gone down in the wake of his health issues.

Pillar's expected production, meanwhile, has gone up a bit with the news that he could open as the regular right fielder while Verdugo is likely to be sidelined. Pillar, actually, is projected to have some of the best offensive numbers of his career, presumably because he's expected to platoon against lefties, limiting his at-bats but potentially increasing his success.

Somewhere in here might be a best-case scenario in which Benintendi and Verdugo improve enough to make up for the loss of Betts, but the projection doesn't suggest that's likely. When a team trades a player like Betts, it comes at a cost, and it's showing up in these numbers.

Designated hitter

Last season: J.D. Martinez (3.2)

Projected 2020: Martinez (3.8)

Net difference: +0.6

Predicting even fewer plate appearances as an outfielder than he had last season, FanGraphs also sees an uptick in Martinez's slugging percentage, which brings with it more home runs, RBIs and runs scored. The system is not predicting a return to Martinez's incredible 2018, but rather another really great year from one of the game's most consistent hitters. His projected outfield playing time is minimal, just 28 at-bats total as a left fielder and right fielder. Utility infielder Peraza is expected to see the same amount of time in the outfield corners.

Rotation

Last season: Eduardo Rodriguez (3.7), Chris Sale (3.6), David Price (2.3), Rick Porcello (1.8), Nathan Eovaldi (-0.3), Hector Velazquez (0.2), Brian Johnson (0.0), Jhoulys Chacin (-0.2), Andrew Cashner (-0.1)

Projected 2020: Sale (4.9), Rodriguez (3.0), Eovaldi (2.0), Martin Perez (1.8), Matt Hall (0.9), Velazquez (0.2), Tanner Houck (0.2), Kyle Hart (0.1), Michael Shawaryn (0.0)

Net difference: +2.1

If you're curious – and, again, we know you are – FanGraphs predicts a nice little bump for Price up to 3.0 WAR this season. It predicts more of the same for Porcello, who's at 1.9 WAR with the Mets.

But back to the actual Red Sox pitchers.

The list for last season doesn't include everyone who started a game in 2019, only the ones who started at least five times. And the listed WAR for guys like Eovaldi, Cashner and Velazquez includes their work as both a starter and reliever.

But all told – including every spot starter, measuring strictly their work out of the rotation – FanGraphs pegged the 2019 Red Sox starting pitchers at a combined 11 WAR for the season.

The current prediction for 2020 has nine different starters combining for 13.1 WAR. The site predicts more than 200 innings from Rodriguez, a good-not-great 3.21 ERA for Sale, and basically an underwhelming repeat of last season for Perez (who's projected at roughly the same value as Porcello, the pitcher he's essentially replacing in the rotation).

And if you're wondering, who the hell is Matt Hall? He was acquired from the Tigers in a minor trade last month, and FanGraphs is predicting he'll make 13 starts plus 10 relief appearances and finish with a 4.59 ERA. The projected ERAs for Triple-A prospects Hart and Houck are above 5.00. They're projected to combine for 21 starts.

Bullpen

Last season: Brandon Workman (2.1), Matt Barnes (1.3), Marcus Walden (1.0), Josh Taylor (0.9), Darwinzon Hernandez (0.5), Ryan Brasier (0.3), Heath Hembree (0.1), Colten Brewer (0.0)

Projected 2020: Barnes (1.3), Workman (0.8), Taylor (0.5), Hembree (0.1), Hernandez (0.1), Walden (0.1), Brewer (0.0), Austin Brice (0.0)

Net difference: -2.4

Last season's list shows the top eight pitchers in terms of relief innings. More valuable was Ryan Weber, who was worth 0.3 WAR as a starter/reliever. All told, last year's Red Sox bullpen was worth 5.5 WAR according to FanGraphs.

The site's projections for this year's bullpen totals just 3.1 WAR. That's a drop almost as large as the difference between Betts and Verdugo. Bullpens are notoriously unpredictable, but a few things stand out about the Red Sox relief projections.

1. Hernandez is projected to be quite a bit less valuable than last year, which seems hard to believe. FanGraphs predicts 50 innings with a much lower strikeout rate than in 2019. There's an obvious chance Hernandez will be underwhelming, but he certainly could outperform those projections.
2. Diminished projections for Workman and Walden subjectively make more sense. Maybe those two will repeat last year's career-best numbers, but it seems FanGraphs isn't buying it. That skepticism seems fair, but again, easily could be wrong.
3. Houck is projected for 10 starts but no relief appearances, but there's a chance he'll end up affecting the bullpen as much as he affects the rotation.

4. On the other hand, Weber is projected to make 20 relief appearances with no starts, but this spring he's been regularly mentioned as a leading candidate for the fifth starter spot, so it could be that he'll factor much more heavily into the rotation. For now, he's projected to finish at 0.0 WAR, exactly replacement level.

5. The names listed above are the eight relievers projected for at least 30 relief innings in 2020. FanGraphs lists eight more (Brasier, Weber, Hall, Velazquez, Shawaryn, Josh Osich, Trevor Hildenberger and Jeffrey Springs) for between 5 and 25 innings of relief. All are projected for 0.0 WAR.

J.D. Martinez has to be the man now — on and off the field — amid Red Sox tumult

Jen McCaffrey

FORT MYERS, Fla. — When J.D. Martinez arrived in Red Sox camp two years ago, it addressed the clear need for a big, veteran bat in the middle of their lineup following the retirement of David Ortiz.

The 2017 season had proven that Mookie Betts' bat alone couldn't carry the Red Sox, and Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers hadn't yet shown that they could be middle-of-the-order bats. Martinez's presence sparked an offense that was still struggling for a post-Ortiz identity.

Now, Betts' departure to the Dodgers this month leaves a newfound sense of uncertainty on a more mature lineup — one that should be fine, but that nevertheless is missing a significant piece at the top. Andrew Benintendi might fill that leadoff spot, but struggled last year in the role. Bogaerts and Devers are coming off breakout seasons, but their ability to repeat that elite production remains a question as well.

Newcomer Alex Verdugo had a strong rookie campaign, but in the National League and didn't face as intense a spotlight as he will this season. He's also recovering from a nagging stress fracture in his back.

For as much has been made about the turnover and health of the Red Sox rotation (all questions and concerns that are warranted), the changes to the Red Sox lineup are considerable. Martinez may very well be the source of the most reliability.

"Mookie's a great player," Martinez said Monday after the team's first full squad workout on the fields behind JetBlue Park. "One of the best players in the game. Obviously, you're going to feel it in a sense, but I think we have a lot of really, really good players and you look at the guys who had breakout years last year, guys come back and I don't know what our numbers were offensively but I'm going to say top 3, top 4 offensive teams in baseball (By runs scored, they were fourth). Obviously it's going to take a hit but I really believe in the guys we have and if guys continue to get better, I think we're going to be really good."

Martinez has been so consistent the last two years that his .304 average and team-leading .939 OPS with 36 homers last season was almost overlooked when compared to the breakouts of Bogaerts (who shared the same .939 OPS) and Devers (who registered a .916 OPS).

Though none of them admitted it last year, the Red Sox entered spring training a bit too casually coming off the World Series win. They fought the narrative they were unprepared for the season and it bled into the first few months. Now with hindsight and a fresh start, it's all a bit clearer.

"I definitely think a lot of guys are a little bit more hungry than last year in a sense," Martinez said. "I'm not saying that our team was complacent last year but I think we were just, in a sense, a little bit more relaxed coming in."

They enter this season knowing they have something to prove. They likely would have felt that way anyway coming off a disappointing 84-win campaign, but the events of these chaotic past few months have added to that sentiment.

“Last year was kind of like a slap in the face, a reality check for us,” Martinez added. “I think a lot of guys are coming in a lot more determined and ready to go. The team we put on the field last year wasn’t us, it wasn’t our team.”

Losing Betts and David Price, seeing Alex Cora dismissed as their manager, and knowing the MLB sign-stealing investigation is still pending — it all adds up, and outsiders could be forgiven for wondering how it will all impact this club in the win column. Martinez acknowledged that the Red Sox feel the doubt and have heard the skepticism about how competitive they can be this season. It was even part of interim manager Ron Roenicke’s speech to the team prior to the first workout.

Despite last year’s disappointment, Martinez opted to stay with the Red Sox when he decided on his contract opt-out in early November. He said he wanted to ensure he’d play for a competitive team — but of course, the \$23.75 million for 2020 didn’t hurt.

Yet Martinez couldn’t possibly have predicted what the rest of the winter would hold for the Red Sox, starting with losing Cora, whom he called “the best manager I’ve ever had, my favorite manager I’ve ever had.” He couldn’t have predicted the sign-stealing investigation (though Martinez still maintains that the Red Sox will be cleared of wrongdoing), and he couldn’t have been sure that the Red Sox would lose two key pieces of the team.

Would he have opted out had he known what was coming?

“That was the hand I had,” he said. “Obviously, you know, they’re gone and I don’t think this team is a bad team because they left. I still think this team is a really good team. I understand the organization, why they had to make the decision.”

Martinez thinks all of these questions will bring the team closer rather than force it apart. Maybe that will be the case, or maybe that’s just spring training optimism.

“I think we come more together,” he said. “I think because we’re all in it together, we’re a family here. When one of your family members are getting accused of something or you’re talked back about, everyone is going to kind of stick up and defend and come together. I think that’s kind of what it’s done for our team. I think we’re getting tighter by it. I know we’re excited just to move past this and get ready for the season.”

The few hits — and many misses — of Red Sox ownership’s day in front of the media

Steve Buckley

FORT MYERS — From Sam Kennedy all but selling tickets out of the back of an old station wagon to John Henry comparing the Mookie Betts salary dump to the long-ago Nomar Garciaparra trade, eyebrows were a-raisin’ from Fort Myers to Fort Kent Monday morning as the Red Sox held their annual Spring Training Executive Suite Press Conference.

This year’s presser was held in the dining room at JetBlue Park instead of the customary bench area out behind the home clubhouse. In addition to Henry, the Sox’ principal owner, and president/CEO Kennedy, the Power Table included Sox chairman Tom Werner.

My takeaways are as follows:

The Red Sox are sticking to their story that sending Betts and lefty David Price to the Dodgers was not part of a grand plan to get the payroll below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold.

Henry began by reading a prepared statement that the club deemed of sufficient weight that a transcript was immediately emailed to the media. Though eloquent and deeply committed to his words, Henry gaffed himself into the Stone Age when he said, “Some of you (fans) no doubt felt the same way in 2004 when we traded Nomar, who like Mookie was a hugely popular, homegrown player.”

This is history being rewritten before our eyes. Garciaparra, while indeed a popular presence in his first few seasons in Boston — I often wonder how many thirtysomething beer-league softball players are pulling up their batting gloves between pitches because they learned it from Nomar when they were kids — had grown testy and irritable by 2004. Then-Red Sox manager Terry Francona put it best when he said, “I think Nomar was Bostoned out.” Also, then-GM Theo Epstein had spoken of defense being a “fatal flaw” on the 2004 Red Sox.

Acquiring shortstop Orlando Cabrera and first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz addressed that flaw. As would be shown in the seasons to come, Garciaparra’s skills were on the wane. Does anybody feel that way about Betts? The Nomar comparison is a miss.

Henry deftly brought up his childhood hero, St. Louis Cardinals great Stan Musial, and Red Sox icon Ted Williams as a means to point out that part of the reason the trade was made is because of the millions that await Betts after this season.

“We no longer live in the Musial or Williams era,” he said. “Players have rights they should have had when Stan and Ted played. Those two great players were victims of an unfair system.”

This was a good play by Henry. In pointing out that Betts has rights never enjoyed by the likes of Stan the Man and Teddy Ballgame, he was able to speak to the reality of modern-day players seeking as much money as possible.

The Red Sox really need to stop raving about how thrilled they are to be getting outfielder Alex Verdugo and minor-leaguers Jeter Downs and Connor Wong in exchange for Betts and Price.

“We’ve tried to be clear that this was not exclusively about the (competitive balance tax), and getting under that CBT threshold there would have been other ways to have done that,” Kennedy said. “You don’t trade Mookie Betts to get under the CBT. We traded Mookie Betts and David Price and got back significant value in return.”

Said Werner, “I’ve talked to a lot of people outside this organization who are very enthusiastic about the talent that we’ve received.”

As if we needed the reminder, Major League Baseball is big business.

“We’re baseball fans first and foremost,” said Kennedy.

Well, no, they’re not.

They’re businessmen. They are, in fact, really, really, really good businessmen. But while Kennedy is a Brookline native who grew up a mile from Fenway and has institutional knowledge of the franchise that Henry and Werner lack, it’s pointless for him to play his fan card while discussing what was clearly a business decision.

We still don’t know what it would have taken to keep Betts in Boston.

Henry, Werner and Kennedy were asked a direct question: “Did they ever approach Betts and ask him, ‘We love you, what’s it going to take?’ and that you got that number in front of you and made a decision based on that?”

The Sox continue to avoid answering this one. The suspicion here is that it’ll get leaked at some point.

Not to keep beating up on Kennedy, but Sudden Sam had a bad day.

His plugs about ticket sales were so over the top that the only thing missing was a sandwich board. Consider this statement from Kennedy:

“There’s actually a misconception still in the market that tickets aren’t available and that every single game of Fenway Park is sold out. That’s not the case. There are tickets available for our games in April and May. For tier five games in terms of our pricing schedule, 60 percent of those tickets are priced at under \$40. We have tickets for students, college kids, high school kids, middle school kids, for every single game at nine dollars. So come to Fenway Park for nine dollars. You may get standing room tickets, you may get field box seats, or loge box seats. We have affordable family options — 99 dollars for a family of four which includes four tickets, includes food and beverage.”

After a while it was starting to sound like an old late-night appliance store ad. “With ticket prices so cheap we’re practically giving them away!”

- It appears Kennedy was designated beforehand to answer the inevitable question about Verdugo’s alleged involvement in a 2015 sexual assault case. “We did an extremely high level of due diligence with Major League Baseball and with the Los Angeles Dodgers,” he said. “I actually spoke to the commissioner directly about it myself. And we are comfortable with the decision, otherwise we would not have moved forward in that direction. Had a chance to meet Alex in person this morning, and let him know that the entire organization is here to support him and all of our players.”

Werner did some pivoting regarding a comment made last week by newly installed chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, who, in speaking of the Betts/Price trade, said, “... it’s reasonable to expect we’re going to be worse without them.”

“I read that,” said Werner. “I also think that Chaim said that he believes we’re going to be very competitive this year. We hope that he’s right. We sat here a year ago with a team that had won the World Series and we thought that we were going to get into the postseason and we didn’t. I think everybody in this room would say that baseball is somewhat inscrutable at times. I’m looking forward to this season.”

Werner would have had everyone rolling in the aisles had he said it was a rookie mistake by Bloom and that he’s still learning not to be so candid, but alas ...

No, Mr. Commissioner. Red Sox owners do not deserve the benefit of the doubt

Steve Buckley

NORTH PORT, Fla. — MLB commissioner Rob Manfred on Sunday addressed the biggest issue facing the Red Sox.

“There have been a couple of developments in the Boston thing that slowed us down,” he said, the “Boston thing” being MLB’s ongoing investigation into a report by The Athletic that the Red Sox illegally stole opponents’ signs during their 2018 championship season.

“People had to be re-interviewed as a result of things,” said the commissioner. “I’m still thinking by the end of next week we should be done and should have a decision.”

But what did not come up during his press conference here was the second biggest issue facing the Red Sox this spring: The trade that sent perennial MVP candidate Mookie Betts and lefty David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo and a pair of minor-leaguers, infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong.

Unable to squeeze the question into the press conference as time was winding down, I sidled up to the commissioner when it was over and asked him: Is there concern about how fans feel when a marquee team turns around and trades its marquee player in what appears to be a salary dump?

Here's what Manfred said:

“We want our fans to feel like all of our franchises are trying to compete. I think that given the track record of the management in Boston, the World Series that they've won, I think that they're entitled to the benefit of the doubt in terms of what they think they need to do in order to be as competitive as they can.”

Well, no, they most certainly are not entitled to the benefit of the doubt. Most Red Sox fans are upset about the Betts trade. Many of them are livid. Even scarier — and pay attention here, Mr. Manfred — some of them are sounding flat-out apathetic.

To borrow from Patriots coach Bill Belichick, last year is never, ever relevant to what's happening this year. That's why, even when the Patriots are coming off a Super Bowl-winning season, the arrival of a new training camp signals the departure of the last remaining specks of confetti. To pose questions to Belichick about the most recently played Super Bowl on the day the practice balls are being emptied out of the equipment bag is to risk being blasted by laser beams from the old coach's eyes.

It's true that Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner have been a godsend for Boston baseball fans. Their tenure has been highlighted by four World Series championships in 18 seasons, a renovated and clean Fenway Park and a continuation of the team's embrace of the Jimmy Fund. And let's not forget their support of the late Pete Frates and the fight to find a cure for ALS.

But when there appears to be a sudden change in management style — this happening in the immediate aftermath of a change in the person who runs baseball operations — it's not fair for the commissioner to more or less tell everyone to go home and play DVDs of old rolling rallies.

And when newly installed chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom introduces himself to Red Sox Nation by trading one of the best five-tool players the organization has ever produced, people are supposed to, what, shut up and like it?

Not that trading Betts is Bloom's “fault.” Even before he was hired to replace deposed president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, it was generally understood, or at least feared, that Betts was going to be traded. Bloom's first order of business was to pull the right sequence of levers in making that trade happen.

But even if you're a Red Sox fan who has studied up on luxury tax thresholds and understands the concept of resetting the payroll, you should be worried, saddened even, by a system that nudges a team toward trading its best player a year ahead of said player's impending free agency.

Bloom, as well as other front office execs and managers of big-league teams that hold spring training in Florida, was at Sunday's media availability, held at the Atlanta Braves' new facility an hour's drive north of the Red Sox' Fort Myers base of operations. When I told him what Manfred said about asking Red Sox fans to give the team the benefit of the doubt, he said, “I think it's a testament to what this ownership group has accomplished the last few decades that the commissioner feels that way and we hope our fans feel that way too.”

However, Bloom added this: “But for those fans who are frustrated, I get it. I know this is difficult. It's really difficult emotionally, and I can promise them that we're trying to do the right thing for the Boston Red Sox.”

As for the Belichick analogy about leaving past successes in the past, Bloom said, “I think that's fair. And for the folks who feel that way, as I said, I think they have the right to feel that way. And a lot of people feel really passionately about this team. It's not my voice to tell them to feel differently. All I can do is assure them as much as I can and hope that they take me at my word. That my only motive, as the head of this department, is to do what's best for the Boston Red Sox.”

Even though his first big move was to make a cold and numbers-driven trade, Bloom still has the ability to talk to Red Sox fans.

Manfred, by reminding Red Sox fans about 2004 and 2007 and 2013 and 2018, is talking at Red Sox fans.

*** *The New York Post***

Red Sox owner uses Nomar Garciaparra to rationalize Mookie Betts trade

Justin Terranova

Red Sox owner John Henry absolutely nailed one portion of his lengthy message to Red Sox fans on Monday explaining the thought process behind last week's Mookie Betts trade.

"I understand there is probably little I can say today that will change how you feel about this, but it is my responsibility to try," Henry wrote in a statement posted on the team's Twitter account.

It appears he did not change many minds.

Henry went on to explain how losing Betts in free agency next offseason and getting nothing in return (except a compensatory draft pick) was simply too much of a risk, even for one of the more higher-spending teams in baseball.

"The baseball organizations we compete against have become much more strategic and thoughtful about how and where they spend their resources in their quest for titles," Henry said. "We cannot shy away from tough decisions required to aggressively compete for World Series. This is what led to this trade."

Henry, however, may have lost Red Sox fans even before he got to this point. The 70-year-old tried relating Betts going to the Dodgers to the team's trade of Nomar Garciaparra to the Cubs before the trade deadline in 2004. This appeared to come off as disingenuous to Red Sox fans, given where Betts and Garciaparra were at their careers at the time of the moves.

Enlarge Image Nomar Garciaparra

Nomar GarciaparraGetty Images

Betts, 27, is one season removed from the American League MVP and leading the Red Sox to a World Series. Garciaparra, though a fan favorite in Boston, had just turned 31 at the time of the trade and was recovering from an Achilles injury that had severely limited his range at shortstop.

"Some of you no doubt felt the same way in 2004 when we traded Nomar, who like Mookie was a hugely popular, homegrown player," Henry wrote. "All of us in the organization hoped we could avoid ever having to go through something like that again. But most clubs face similar dilemmas from time to time."

Any lingering anger focused at Red Sox management quickly dissipated as the Red Sox won the World Series that year, the franchise's first championship in 86 years.

"That was a reach. Nomar was 30, wasn't one of top 5 players in the game at that point and had clearly soured on Boston," The Globe's Peter Abraham wrote.

"Comparing a breaking-down 2004 Nomar to a hitting-his-prime 2020 Mookie is an all-time GTFO," The Ringer's Bill Simmons wrote.

The Red Sox winning this year's World Series might be the only way for Henry to make Red Sox fans forget about this controversial Betts deal.

*** *Associated Press***

Red Sox owners speak for first time since Betts traded

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP) — Red Sox owner John Henry says he knows why Boston fans are angry the team traded Mookie Betts.

“When I say I understand how many of you feel about this trade with the Dodgers, I know many of you — particularly our youngest fans — are disbelieving or angry or sad about it. I know it’s difficult and disappointing,” Henry said Monday, reading from a statement on the first day of full-team workouts.

Henry answered questions for about 30 minutes along with chairman Tom Werner and team president Sam Kennedy. Half of them addressed the trade of Betts and David Price to Los Angeles for outfielder Alex Verdugo and two prospects: infielder Jeter Downs and catcher Connor Wong. Boston will send \$96 million to the Dodgers, which matches half of the \$96 million owed to Price for the next three seasons, and shed itself of Betts' \$27 million salary for this year.

“This trade gives us a lot of flexibility,” Werner said. “We have made unpopular trades — not all of them have worked out right.”

The trio tried to downplay it as a salary dump, even though it dropped Boston's projected luxury tax payroll below the \$208 million threshold for the competitive balance tax.

“We tried to be clear that this not exclusively about the CBT and getting under the CBT threshold,” Kennedy said. “There would have been other ways to do that. You don’t trade Mookie Betts to get under the CBT. We traded Mookie Betts and David Price to get substantial value for the return.”

The 70-year-old Henry used an example how he would have felt if Stan Musial, his favorite player growing up, been dealt by the St. Louis Cardinals.

“My heart would have broken if Stan the Man had ever been traded — for any reason,” he said, addressing fans. “Your parents or your grandparents surely felt the same way about Ted Williams and Yaz.”

Betts is eligible for free agency after this season. Werner insisted the team tried to sign Betts to a long-term deal many times.

“We had repeated conversations with Mookie over a number of years to try and hold onto him for the length of his baseball career,” he said. “They just didn’t get worked out.

“We also understand — as John says — in the short run this is going to be painful. It’s painful for us.”