

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, February 20, 2020***

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

#### **Pedro Martinez keeping an eye on Eduardo Rodriguez**

Eduardo Rodriguez

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Pedro Martinez paid close attention to Eduardo Rodriguez early Wednesday afternoon.

It was the second time this spring that Rodriguez threw batting practice to hitters, and Martinez made sure his Hall of Fame presence was felt. Between pitches, Martinez would offer his input. Rodriguez would respond, then try to apply the information to the next pitch.

“We want to make sure he’s right on top of his legs and lands the proper way,” Martinez said. “Because he can’t afford to tweak anything else with the [injury] history he has. But he did it last year. Finished strong. Right now, he looks strong.”

Rodriguez had a breakout season in 2019, winning 19 games with a 3.81 ERA. There’s still room for improvement, though, and the rotation will rely heavily upon Rodriguez again — perhaps even more than last season. So, when an all-time great such as Martinez offers his help, Rodriguez knows it’s imperative to listen.

“It’s been amazing,” Rodriguez said of having Martinez at camp. “Now, I’m used to having him around. I’ve known him for, what, five, six years already, every time he’s here he has something new, and I’m asking questions all the time.

“Even if I have to repeat the same question I did from last year, I do it.”

Rodriguez pitched 203⅓ innings last season, easily a career high. Martinez is noticing a different Rodriguez this year, one who knows he belongs and is willing to put in the work.

“He’s picking up exactly where he left off,” Martinez said. “He’s confident. That’s what you see. Every time he throws a pitch, you see where he’s locating around the plate, he’s doing it with confidence.

“It could be the cutter. It could be the changeup, or fastball he elevates well. It’s a very good sign of maturity.”

It takes time

J.D. Martinez knows spring training is all about progression. It typically takes longer for hitters to find a rhythm. Pitchers, on the other hand, look as if they’re in midseason form.

Martinez stood in against pitchers Wednesday morning and even took some swings, drilling one pitch to the center-field wall. However, if you ask him how his swing feels, his answer isn’t surprising considering the time of year.

“It’s awful right now,” Martinez said with a smile. “But that’s how it is every year. It’s not saying much. Every year is like that. I hate spring training, just because you go out there and you’re like ‘How do I hit again?’ I was talking to the pitchers today, ‘You guys come in here and probably feel good, huh?’ ”

J.D. Martinez said Wednesday his swing was “awful” at the moment, but he added that’s pretty much par for the course this time of year.

J.D. Martinez said Wednesday his swing was “awful” at the moment, but he added that’s pretty much par for the course this time of year. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF  
Martinez said he typically doesn’t start to feel like himself until the last week or two of spring training. He’s always meticulous in his work.

“These young guys, I always see it, every spring they come out and they’re hitting home runs every other night, and I’m like, ‘How do you do that?’ I just look awful,” he said. “I’m not a spring player. Even my friends, they make fun of me in our group chat, ‘I can’t wait to see J.D. go 2 for 40 this spring.’ That’s how I know it’s going to be a good year.”

Getting to know you

Jonathan Lucroy made a quick appearance in the clubhouse, just before his minor league deal was made official in the early afternoon.

A few lockers down was Kevin Plawecki, who, like Lucroy, is looking to earn the backup catcher spot. For Plawecki, it starts with getting to know the pitching staff. Live batting practice is one way to do that.

“I caught [Brandon] Workman and [Marcus] Walden today, and they both look really good,” Plawecki said. “I’ll continue to catch new guys every day and get used to all these guys before we get in a game setting.”

Plawecki is used to catching talented pitchers. During his time with the Mets (2015-18), the pitching staff included Jacob deGrom, who has won the last two National League Cy Young Awards, as well as Noah Syndergaard, Matt Harvey, and Zack Wheeler.

Last season with the Indians, Plawecki caught Trevor Bauer, so, the experience is there, but camaraderie is also important.

“[I’ll need] to develop a relationship with them,” Plawecki said. “Off the field as much as I can, and as much as I can in here [in the clubhouse]. That way when we get in between the lines we’re competing and there’s that trust factor you can take into the games.”

Bogaerts is better

Manager Ron Roenicke said Xander Bogaerts is coming along after dealing with a sore ankle. “The foot feels better,” Roenicke said. “They’ll continue to try to press him that way, conditioning and everything inside.” . . . Rafael Devers recently became a father for the second time, which delayed his spring training arrival. The plan is for him to make it here by Thursday.

**We don’t expect sentimentality from the Red Sox, but we could use more clarity**

Chad Finn

Alex Verdugo shares many on-field traits with the popular Andrew Benintendi. Jose Peraza is just 25 and hoarded 49 extra-base hits two years ago. Jonathan Lucroy once finished fourth in the National League Most Valuable Player balloting, and not even that long ago.

I suppose it’s not out of the realm of possibility — heck, it may even be likely — that some of these newcomers Chaim Bloom and the Red Sox front office are bringing in during this winter of chaos could end up being helpful to a winning cause.

Perhaps one or two will even emerge as fan favorites.

That also goes for the seemingly dozen or so no-name pitchers Bloom has acquired, among them Martin Perez, Josh Osich, Austin Brice, and Jeffrey Springs. The Tampa Bay Rays, during Bloom’s employ there, had an uncanny knack for finding competent pitching at great value. The post-Dave Dombrowski Red Sox sure could use some of that.

Hey, maybe you'll like these new guys once they play some meaningful innings and accomplish a feat or two.

But I can understand why Red Sox fans aren't especially interested in hearing about any of them now, let alone getting excited for what they might bring.

It's not about who they are as ballplayers. It's about whom they're replacing, and the distinct lack of sentimentality the Red Sox have shown this offseason toward fan favorites.

We might like Verdugo, Peraza, and the rest. But we're not ready to, yet. Not when we're still getting used to the idea that the Red Sox have moved on from two of their most popular players of recent vintage.

Mookie Betts and Brock Holt are all-timers in Red Sox lore in different ways. We've spent a lot of words on Betts and the absurdity of trading him. So let's keep the synopsis brief: He's one of the best and most charismatic players in Red Sox history. Franchises go decades without developing a Mookie Betts, and it's a sad day when a player like that moves on.

Holt, of course, is only a fraction of the ballplayer Betts is, but he earned a place in Red Sox fans' hearts by playing hard, maximizing his ability, coming through in a few memorable spots (most notably when he hit for the cycle in the pivotal 16-1 win in Game 3 of the 2018 ALDS against the Yankees), and always representing the organization with grace. Holt was a rock for the Jimmy Fund. And anyone who wanted his autograph usually ended up getting it.

As a player, he's fairly replaceable. That doesn't mean he won't be deeply missed by people who care about this team.

I've been following the Red Sox since 1978 — I know, talk about your traumatic indoctrinations — and from my recollections, this is the most disheartening offseason since the winter of 1980-81, when Haywood Sullivan "forgot" to send Carlton Fisk his contract on time, paving the way for Fisk to depart for Chicago, then traded Fred Lynn, Rick Burleson, and Butch Hobson to the Angels in a pair of deals that brought back Carney Lansford, Mark Clear, and not much else.

Back then, the Red Sox gutted a championship-caliber team that could never quite get over the hump. This winter, they severely altered a roster that won just 84 games last year, but won 119 the season before en route to its fourth World Series title since 2004.

It's hard to say goodbye to that. But ownership (John Henry also owns the Globe) has struggled to explain their decisions, in particular why Betts was traded. What they really need to do is have Bloom, a likable, upbeat personality, explain in deep detail (but in layman's terms) why they felt it best to trade Betts and let Holt walk, and further communicate what the long-term plan is in terms of rebuilding the farm system and strengthening the margins of the roster.

Bloom knew what he was getting into when he took this job, and he's an extremely smart guy. I think he's going to be good at this, even if there's a swirl of roster turnover that will take some getting used to. But he needs to be the face and voice of this unwelcome change, right now.

The Red Sox have made moves this offseason that have turned off the fan base, and we don't know the new guys yet. All we know is that popular, winning players are gone, and that the new season feels like a bummer before it has begun.

Sometimes you wish front offices were more sentimental; I still can't believe Theo Epstein brought in Matt Clement and David Wells for Pedro Martinez and Derek Lowe after 2004. But sentimentality is best left to the fans. What the front office owes us, if they want our money spent at the ballpark, is deep, honest clarity on the baseball reasons for why they are doing what they do.

Right now, all we know is that Mookie Betts (and David Price too) is a Dodger, Brock Holt is a Brewer, Alex Verdugo has a bad back, and being a Red Sox fan feels like more of a chore than a passion.

### **At 15, D'Angelo Ortiz is already showing some pop in his bat — just like his famous father**

Stan Grossfeld

BRADENTON, Fla. — The repeated pings resonating from his metal bat are music to the ears of D'Angelo Ortiz as he launches one laser after another during batting practice.

The little kid who grew up in front of Red Sox Nation under the shadow of the Green Monster is now a strapping 6-foot-1-inch, 225-pound third baseman at IMG Academy.

“He’s got good thunder. He’s got power. He’s very good defensively,” says papi David Ortiz, when asked for a scouting report at a recent Red Sox Winter Weekend.

Besides the DNA, D'Angelo, a 15-year-old high school sophomore, has adopted the batting stance of his famous father and will don his No. 34 when the season starts. He wears a “Red Sox Nation” and a “Believe” wristband and is sporting a gold necklace that he borrowed from his father. But he doesn’t spit and clap his hands before each at-bat. He was a switch hitter until his father discovered he has more power from the right side.

Ask him what his goal is and he looks you straight in the eye.

“Better than my dad,” he says. “Once I get to the point where people stop calling me David Ortiz’s son, then that’s when I’m good enough.”

Mark Morawski, the varsity head coach of the IMG junior national team, says he is impressed with D'Angelo.

“He has the potential to be a big bat for us,” says Morawski.

Morawski says the other players flock to the charismatic kid.

“He’s a great ballplayer, a great teammate,” says Jimmy Koza, 16, of Chicago. “I mean, he does look exactly like [his father] but he doesn’t go around telling people, which is why everyone loves him. He’s just another kid.”

Batting-practice heroics don’t impress the young Ortiz, either.

“I don’t want to be a 5 o’clock hitter,” he says.

D'Angelo is still in a funk about a meaningless scrimmage the day before. He went 0 for 2, failing to hit the ball out of the infield. But he also made a nifty play at third base and scored the tying run in a come-from-behind victory.

“I feel like every game counts,” he says. “I’m just trying to get where I need to be. I don’t need to hit a home run every at-bat, but just hit the ball hard. That’s all I’m trying to do.”

Stars all around

D'Angelo Ortiz grew up in perhaps the greatest playground of them all: Fenway Park.

He was born around the All-Star break of the curse-breaking 2004 season. Abby Murphy, now Red Sox assistant director of media relations, used to babysit him in Weston.

“He was always ‘ball, ball, ball,’ ” says Murphy. “It was one of the first things he was communicating to me. He’d bring me the ball. And I’d throw the ball and he’d hit the ball with this big red bat.”

As he grew, babysitters would say, “I don’t think your mom wants you to play baseball in the house,” recalled his mother, Tiffany Ortiz. “And I’d be like, ‘No, we do. We play baseball everywhere.’ And he would hit Wiffle balls off lampshades and, like, we had dents in everything.”

His earliest Fenway memories are about the other children who hung out at the ballpark.

“My boys like Victor [Martinez] Jr., Manny [Ramirez] Jr., and, you know, people like that,” he says. “Just playing and having a good time.”

His grownup pals were ballplayers known by one name: Mookie, Manny, and Youk.

D’Angelo could imitate everybody’s batting stance. He would shag fly balls at the All-Star Game and ride on the duck boats after world championships. The players loved him, and D’Angelo ruled the kid contingent at Fenway.

“I didn’t ever want to step on anybody’s toes, but they were all, like, the coolest,” he says. “And it was just awesome.”

By 2014, he was in the outfield at Yankee Stadium when he saw a youngster in a Red Sox uniform shagging nearby.

“All of a sudden I see a guy smaller than me behind me and I’m, like, you can’t just be a new kid and come in here,” he says.

D’Angelo approached him.

“He’s like, ‘I’m Mookie.’ I looked at him and I’m, like, ‘Oh, he’s a player.’ ”

D’Angelo then recalled seeing on TV that the Sox had called up a “power hitter.”

“And I cannot lie to you, I swear to God, this is exactly what happened,” he says. “I said to him, ‘Are you the new power guy they just called up?’ He laughed and he goes, ‘Man, I wish. I am not a home run hitter. I hope I am one day.’

“And then I just went back to shagging fly balls. Come around two years later, he’s hitting right around where my dad is hitting. He’s fourth or third in the lineup and he’s hitting 30 [home runs]. So, I mean, that one guy, that gives you hope.”

D’Angelo hopes to follow in the footsteps of Vladimir Guerrero Jr., who hit 15 home runs last year in his rookie season in Toronto and has taught him to be patient.

“I have all these opportunities, and the reason I get so mad is I try to make sure I’m taking advantage of them,” says D’Angelo.

At the scrimmage, the stands are empty save for three people. Two of them are there for D’Angelo — Tiffany Ortiz, who drove up from their Miami home, and Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers, who also is working out at IMG.

“He’s big and strong,” says Devers. “He has a good swing. He’s very athletic at third base. He’s very good.”

Also at IMG, but playing on another team, is Kaz Uehara, son of former Red Sox closer Koji Uehara and also a relief pitcher.

Kaz says he can't wait for the time when he and D'Angelo reenact those glory days when Big Papi lifted Koji Uehara up after a save. "It's going to happen," says Kaz.

'The toughest summer'

D'Angelo remembers as a 12-year-old playing in a tournament at Baseball Heaven, a baseball complex on Long Island. It was the last inning, and he nearly got beamed.

"I hear a kid in the stands go, 'Uh-oh, you don't throw at Big Papi's son,' " he says.

It empowered him.

"I was like, man, I feel like a boss," he says. "Like, this is a good time for me."

He smacked a walkoff home run, just like you-know-who.

D'Angelo loves that his father can come to his games, but initially it was a distraction.

"I would take a pitch and look at him, take a strike, look at him," he says.

In one game, he was 0 for 2, but then got a clutch hit at the end and was feeling good about himself.

"Everyone was fired up," he says.

Everyone but his father.

"He's like, 'Why are you looking at me when you're hitting?'" D'Angelo says.

So he stopped looking.

Last summer, D'Angelo was enrolled at a baseball academy in the Dominican Republic when his father was shot on June 9. His mother phoned him with the news the next morning and he rushed to the hospital.

"The first time was emotional for me," says D'Angelo, who saw his father hooked up to wires and tubes after having surgery in the Dominican hospital.

Ortiz was airlifted to Massachusetts General Hospital, where he underwent two more surgeries during a nearly seven-week stay.

Only recently did D'Angelo fully grasp the severity of the situation.

"He asked me the other day, 'We could've lost him, right?'" says Tiffany Ortiz. "Yeah, a bunch of times."

"It was the toughest summer of my life," says D'Angelo. "But it made my family much tougher. Me and him are super close. It's like seeing a best friend get hurt, but like a best friend that is also your dad.

"When your friend gets hurt, you want to make him feel better, but you don't know how. And especially when he's the one usually taking care of you. It's hard to put that in reverse."

His father initially told him to stay in the Dominican Republic.

"Literally the day after, you know, he wanted me to keep training and playing baseball," says D'Angelo.

But he returned to the Boston area to be close to his father. He also found a baseball league to play in.

“I was really proud of D,” says Tiffany Ortiz. “He obviously was taken out of this program that he was thriving in. He came home because we all had to be with David. I was pretty much living at the hospital and he found himself a baseball team in Boston.

“And he just really took it upon himself to do it because I couldn’t help him with it.”

Now he’s concentrating on the upcoming season. He hopes to get drafted in 2022.

He remembers as an 8-year-old signing a Red Sox contract for \$5 offered to him by former Red Sox CEO Larry Lucchino in 2012. Current chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom might want to check the fine print of that agreement.

“They want me for \$5? That’s fine. I don’t care,” says D’Angelo.

Back in New England, David Ortiz says he didn’t push his son to be a baseball player.

“People expect him to be good because of what I was,” says Big Papi with a shrug. “I don’t want to put too much pressure on him. He’s busy educating himself and playing ball at the same time.

“He loves it. We’d love it if he was a baseball player, but if it doesn’t work out, what can you do? Educate yourself, graduate, and have a life.”

## **\* *The Boston Herald***

### **Pedro Martinez thinks Red Sox LHP Eduardo Rodriguez has Cy Young potential in 2020**

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — Eduardo Rodriguez has finally experienced success. Now it’s about living up to expectations.

In Pedro Martinez, who helped mentor Rodriguez to a breakthrough season in 2019, the Red Sox lefty has someone who expects things from him like few others do.

“I’m talking about Cy Young, close to 300 strikeouts,” Martinez said of Rodriguez’s potential in 2020. “He has the stuff. Chris Sale’s always in the hunt. Right now, Chris Sale is the more experienced No. 1 and the stuff that Chris Sale has, I think matches right there with E-Rod. I’m not putting that pressure on him, but I think the way his stuff looks, he could reach those goals and be in the mix for a Cy Young or something like that.”

Rodriguez has arrived to camp with confidence that he can do what he did last season again, and Martinez has seen it firsthand. The Red Sox legend who now works as a special assistant with the club thinks the 26-year-old is just scratching the surface of his potential.

Last year at this time, the two set some goals together. Rodriguez, whose career at that point had been derailed by injuries, wanted to pitch 200 innings, make at least 30 starts and win 20 games. He came up short of that last one, winning 19 games, but he posted career highs with 203 ⅓ innings and 34 starts. His talent had been untapped. Martinez soaked it in with pride.

And he thinks it’s just the beginning.

“I think now he’s expecting to have the kind of season he had and even better,” Martinez said. “I think that if he hits the 30-mark when it comes to outings and he hits the 200 innings plateau, I think he’s going to be in the mix for many, many things, because his stuff plays. His fastball is overpowering, changeup is outstanding, breaking ball is coming right along with the changeup and the usage. I mean, the way he’s

using analytics, he's using everything to his advantage. It's just great to see. Now it's up to us to hopefully see him healthy and enjoy the ride."

Rodriguez finished sixth in American League Cy Young voting last season, but would have to improve drastically upon his 213 strikeouts to get close to 300. But either way, the expectations are starkly different surrounding Rodriguez than they were at this point last year.

Former manager Alex Cora demanded more from Rodriguez, who had been hampered by injuries and inconsistency and had never come close to reaching his ceiling. He reported to camp last year in the best shape of his life and worked hard to fine-tune his pitches, which even included a new breaking ball.

Most importantly, he stayed healthy, and as he racked up quality start after quality start, the confidence followed. He arrived to camp this year with a different mindset.

"The first thing he said was, 'I finished the season and I wanted to pitch even more,' " Martinez said. "I said, 'That means you finished fresh.' We were working out right now and he just said that he feels ready to go right now. I said you finished fresh and that's your body telling you, 'I'm ready.' Now he knows what it takes and he's confident he can do it again. ...

"I think he understands what he needs to do. He has a very good idea of where his body feels good. I'm extremely happy to see him so focused on the things he has to do, mechanically, and how clear of an understanding he has about his mechanics and his body, too."

And Martinez is excited to see what his protégé can do for an encore performance.

"I think for us, it's just like they say on the plane: Sit back, relax and enjoy the flight," Martinez said. "Hopefully he'll be healthy. If he's healthy, we're going to see many, many more games because the stuff that E-Rod shows every time out plays against anybody. Being a lefty, having the quality of pitches he has and the power he possesses, it's just unusual. It's very unusual."

Martinez has also been impressed by some of the other young arms on the Red Sox, particularly 23-year-old Darwinzon Hernandez, who made his debut last season and made a strong impression as a reliever.

On a staff starving for good pitching this season, Rodriguez and Hernandez may represent the two highest-upside lefties on the Red Sox.

"He's impressive. He's a great talent to watch," Martinez said of Hernandez. "Whatever role they use him, I think he's going to click. It's just a matter of keeping him healthy because he's such a baby. He hasn't pitched much in the minor leagues and that's my main concern. But as far as talent, he's right there. He's right where he needs to be. He's exciting to watch."

There remains uncertainty around what role Hernandez will have, whether it's as a starter or reliever, but Martinez likes him out of the bullpen.

"I think he's suited to be a starter, but I don't think we have to have the luxury to send him to the minor leagues to pile up the amount of innings he needs to become a starter," Martinez said. "If we want to use him in relief, I think he's ready to be a reliever."

### **Rusney Castillo, 32, 'locked in' as he nears the end of Red Sox tenure**

Steve Hewitt

FORT MYERS — It's been 1,344 days since Rusney Castillo's last big league at-bat.

Or about 32,000 hours; just under 2 million minutes.



In that time, Castillo has hit 38 home runs while batting .298 over 389 games with the Red Sox' Triple-A affiliate in Pawtucket, where both McCoy Stadium and Castillo will celebrate their final year in 2020.

The PawSox will move to Worcester.

Castillo hopes to move to a city with an MLB team.

"Since 2014 I've known I have what it takes to play in the big leagues," Castillo said through a translator at JetBlue Park on Wednesday. "I'm just focused on preparing and being out there with the guys. I know what I can do."

The countdown is almost over. Castillo can see the finish line.

"Mentally, this year I came in really focused, locked in, especially since this is the final year of my contract," he said. "Just trying to give my best to Boston and do as much as I can."

Then he's free.

Since he last sniffed the big leagues on June 16, 2016, when he struck out swinging against former Orioles pitcher Tyler Wilson (who is now playing his pro ball in South Korea), Castillo has cashed about \$40 million in paychecks.

He'll make another \$14.3 million in 2020 until the contract he and former Red Sox general manager Ben Cherington originally signed in 2014 finally expires at season's end.

"I've improved so much from when I got here," he said.

Does he remember his last big league appearance?

"Yeah of course," he said. "I've thought about it."

Castillo is physically bigger and stronger now, at 32, than he was then, at 28.

He played in just nine games in 2016, but had a longer audition in 2015, when he hit .253 with a .647 OPS.

As a 33-year-old who will test free agency next winter, Castillo profiles as someone who would be fortunate to get a big league invite on a minor league contract, unless he has a monster year in Triple-A.

"My goal remains the same: I want to make it to the big leagues," he said. "And if given the opportunity, give 100% to Boston. That's the goal, to get up there."

There's always a chance, however small, it happens in 2020.

As currently constructed, the Red Sox payroll has about \$16 million in space before it bumps against the \$208-million luxury tax threshold, according to figures calculated by Baseball Prospectus. Castillo's not on the 40-man roster, having been outrighted four years ago, and his contract does not count against the tax as long as he stays off the roster.

Let's say the Red Sox are out of contention by July and trade a few big leaguers before the deadline. That would surely free up enough space for Castillo to be called up without the Sox suffering penalties.

He crushed lefties during his brief big league stint, hitting .309 with a .783 OPS in 103 plate appearances against southpaws. He's solid in the outfield and pitchers like knowing he's playing behind them, said Sox righty Mike Shawaryn, who has spent much of the last two years with Castillo in Pawtucket.

“He works hard enough to (be a big leaguer),” Shawaryn said. “I think he has the dedication, mindset and drive to do it. Obviously there are extenuating circumstances, but he has what it takes.

“You just watch him. He understands a lot of the game. I think from that aspect, having him in the outfield and having those young guys see how he works and hits, he provides a good beacon for guys to watch and see how he prepares.”

While Red Sox fans haven’t seen Castillo play in four years, he’s become a fan favorite in Pawtucket, especially because most of the best prospects in the modern game, like Andrew Benintendi and Rafael Devers, jump directly from Double-A.

“Exactly,” said PawSox president Charles Steinberg. “We had Devers and we thought, ‘Oh, we’ll have Devers for a while.’ We had him for a week. We had Michael Chavis at the start of last season and thought, ‘Oh, there’s a guy we can really get our arms around.’ He was gone and up to Boston (in April) and never came back.

“But it’s OK, you’re marketing the fan experience. But with Rusney, he’s been a dependable name in the lineup. ... If you’re a good baseball fan, you know you’re watching a guy who has quite a story.”

Castillo has been a role model for younger players.

“I don’t think he’s ever denied any of the club things we’ve done,” Steinberg said. “He’s been a good teammate, a good fan connector, signs autographs and takes pictures. He’s quiet. I try to say hello in my broken Spanish. He’s very professional. Goes about his business and is a fun baseball player to watch.”

### **Red Sox DH J.D. Martinez: ‘I hate spring training’**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — J.D. Martinez has at least one thing in common with his predecessor, David Ortiz.

“I hate spring training,” Martinez said Wednesday after the Red Sox finished their workout at JetBlue Park.

Ortiz made his hatred for spring training vocal, too. He hit just .220 with a .679 OPS, 16 homers and 108 strikeouts in 450 career spring training at-bats.

Martinez has been a little bit better, but doesn’t feel like it.

“You go out there and it’s like, ‘How do I hit again?’ ” Martinez said. “You’re so lost. I was talking to the pitchers today, I’m like, ‘You guys probably come in here and feel good.’ They’re like, ‘Yeah, making these guys look dumb.’ They’re making everybody look foolish at the plate and we’re sitting there wondering how the heck we’re going to hit.”

The 32-year-old designated hitter opted to stay with the Red Sox this winter and will make \$62.5 million over the next three years.

His time to shine is not in spring training.

He said his swing feels “awful right now, but that’s how it is every year.” He’s a career .256 hitter with a .774 OPS in spring training.

Martinez said his swing doesn’t feel good until “probably the last two weeks. My swing is long. I’m different, man. Some guys come in, these young guys, every spring they come out and they’re hitting home runs every other night. And I’m like, ‘How the heck do you do that?’ I don’t get it. I just look awful. I’m not a spring player.

“Even my friends make fun of me in my group chat. They’re like, ‘I can’t wait to see J.D. go 2-for-40 this spring.’ That’s how I know it’s going to be a good year.”

Has it felt strange this spring with all the changes around the Red Sox clubhouse?

“I feel like it’s been a normal spring training,” he said. “You guys are the ones that have all the goodies you get to write about. For us, it’s normal.”

Martinez was asked what he’ll miss most about Mookie Betts.

“Definitely his ability on the field,” he said. “He was one of the best players in baseball, so what he brings to the table every day. When he goes out there you never know, this could be the day Mookie goes off. That’s the thing we’re going to miss the most.”

Happy in new gig

Interim manager Ron Roenicke talked at length Wednesday about his second chance at managing, something he wasn’t sure would happen again after he was fired as Brewers manager in 2015.

When Alex Cora was dismissed last month, Roenicke, who was his bench coach the last two seasons, really wanted the job.

“This is truly how I feel, I have never gone after a job harder in my life than this job,” Roenicke said. “I wanted it more than any other job at any time. Just because I thought it was right. I thought it was the right fit to get us through a period and also hopefully to get back in the playoffs.”

Roenicke admitted that he’s been too busy to think about what it means to have a second chance managing in the bigs, but he’s enjoying himself so far.

“I really love this job,” Roenicke said. “I love everything that goes with it. The players, the new guys and the discussions we have, but I really enjoy it. When I started doing this again, I really missed it. But saying that, too, it’s because it’s different circumstances, it’s a little bit different than it would have been if I got hired right after the season and had all this time and knew I was going to be here for three years or whatever. It’s different.”

Exciting arms

In addition to Eduardo Rodriguez and Darwinzon Hernandez, Pedro Martinez also mentioned a couple of other names who have stuck out to him so far in camp, including non-roster invitees Bryan Mata and Robinson Leyer.

“A lot of great arms this camp. Every one of them seems to be attractive,” Martinez said. “Mata is another kid that I think is full of talent. Leyer, when you see him 98, 99 mph, it’s just impressive to watch.”

Holt official

Brock Holt officially became a member of the Brewers on Monday, as he inked a one-year deal with a club option for 2021.

“You wish him the best wherever he goes,” J.D. Martinez said. “He was a character in here, fun to be around. You just wish him the best. That’s the business side of it.” ...

Roenicke said Rafael Devers, who was back in the Dominican Republic for the birth of his second daughter, is scheduled to arrive at camp on Thursday.

Lucroy signed

The Sox officially added catcher Jonathan Lucroy to the spring training roster as a non-roster invitee. The 33-year-old hit .232 last year in 101 games split between the Angels and Cubs.

## **The Red Sox could use a cheating scandal right about now**

Bill Speros

The Red Sox lasted nearly 48 hours without any disastrous news or self-inflicted wounds.

But the team streak of not making their current situation worse ended on Wednesday, when State Run Media itself — WEEI — reported that the team had contacted “social media influencers in and around Boston about promoting the Red Sox ... two days after the Mookie Betts trade.”

That storyline was quickly countered — by none other than WEEI.com.

Red Sox Chief Marketing Officer Adam Grossman not only copped to the practice but also told Rob Bradford that pitching social media influencers is standard operating procedure when it comes to hyping the Red Sox and was nothing new in reaction to the Betts trade.

“We’re really lucky because we have a lot of what we call first-name players. We’ve got Xander, we’ve got Benny, we’ve got Raffy. So those are huge assets for us in addition to Fenway,” Grossman said.

“We understand the emotional tie our fans have to Mookie. But it’s not like, ‘Oh my God, now what?’ . . . On the influencer side, there are a lot of different influencers and categories of influencers. It’s a wide spectrum. It’s not like we are saying, ‘We have to act right now!’ For us, it is a communication channel but it is not a reaction to last week.”

“Benny.” “Raffy.” “Xander.”

The other day, John W. Henry used the plight of Stan Musial and Ted Williams — who played before free agency — to justify the Betts deal. Williams bade the Hub adieu in 1960. Musial retired when John F. Kennedy was president.

The people in the Red Sox front office must think every fan is either 65 or a pink-hatted child.

Perhaps they are right.

Speaking of social media, on Wednesday the Red Sox posted a video taking fans inside the doings of picture day shot by newcomer Alex Verdugo.

Awkward.

Two years ago in this space, we wrote about the excitement and upbeat vibe surrounding the Red Sox that developed on picture day. Pictures are worth at least 1000 words and I only get 850 here. We dared to opine that the Red Sox — who had been bounced in the first round of the postseason the two previous years — might well be playing competitive baseball past Columbus Day.

There is no similar feel in 2020. The fallout of the Mookie Betts-David Price Salary Dump continues to drift across New England and permeate the hearts and souls of Red Sox fans in the Western and Eastern Hemisphere. The biggest concern across Lee County in Florida and on Jersey Street in Boston is “fan perception.”

And the Big One has yet to drop. Major League Baseball delayed announcing its findings in regard to any Red Sox involvement in the current sign-stealing scandal thanks to recently discovered evidence.

From a marketing standpoint, there would be nothing better for the Red Sox than MLB ruling that the team cheated extensively during its 2018 World Series run.

If the Red Sox draw one-quarter the ire being thrust upon the Houston Astros, the 2020 season will become can't-miss-TV overnight.

Legal sports books are taking action on how many times the Astros players will be hit by a pitch this season — 83.5 is the over/under, according to William Hill. And SuperBookUSA posted odds on the first member of the Astros to get plunked this season. Alex Bregman is the favorite at +350.

You want “fan interest” in 2020? Let MLB slam the Red Sox for cheating and/or nefarious activities in 2018. You want “clubhouse unity”? Let baseball think the Red Sox broke the rules when they last won baseball’s “piece of metal.”

This situation would create the ultimate “Us vs. The World” narrative that has provided the Patriots Fan Base with emotional HGH since the Tuck Rule Game. The social media influencers would hashtag the living hell out of anyone who questions full allegiance to Red Sox Nation.

The Red Sox told us to “reserve judgment” as they “parted ways” with Alex Cora.

Right now, the Red Sox should be hoping for the worst when it comes to the toy hammer of Commissioner Rob Manfred.

Don't be fooled by the contrarian hype surrounding a potential Wil Myers deal. It would likely include the Red Sox picking up \$30 million or so in salary. Myers' right-field gaffe at Fenway during the 2013 ALDS created mockery that continues to this day. Myers has a career .239/.340/.391 slash line in Boston. He has done much better at Yankee Stadium, slashing .313/.345/.542.

The hidden value — we are told — in any major transaction involving the Red Sox are the prospects involved. If the Red Sox get lucky, they might end up with one player who is almost as good as Betts, in three to five years.

The more the Red Sox tell us the Betts-Price Salary Dump was about baseball and not money, the less competent the Red Sox appear.

As far as 2020 goes, only Manfred can save them now.

## **\* *The Providence Journal***

### **Red Sox players say there's no replacing Mookie Betts**

Craig Handel

FORT MYERS, Fla. — For years, the Boston Red Sox didn't rebuild.

They reloaded.

Trading away stars is what the Miami Marlins do. It's what other teams do.

“In the past, if they needed a starting pitcher, they got David Price,” NESN broadcaster Steve Lyons said. “When he has an OK season, you get Chris Sale. When he has a good first season, you get J.D. Martinez.”

But with Boston trading outfielder Mookie Betts and Price, much of Red Sox Nation is furious but also confused.

“We're not used to that,” Lyons said. “It's not as much fun.

“He's one of the best players in the game. Mookie was a reason to watch.”

Dealing those two players helped Boston's projected luxury tax payroll get below the \$208-million threshold for the competitive balance tax. And as Lyons noted, there's a ton of talent in a locker room that still has Major League Baseball's fifth-highest payroll — at \$180.4 million — according to spotrac.com.

“This team in '18 was overwhelming, and in '19, it was virtually the same team that didn't play well,” Lyons said. “It's a bunch of talented players who have to prove they can go out and win through some turmoil and a lot of change.”

Betts averaged 27 homers, 90 RBI, 24 stolen bases and a .300 average in five seasons for Boston while Price went 40-24 in the regular season while winning two games in the 2018 World Series and one in the American League Championship Series.

Newcomer Kevin Pillar said no one or two players will replace Betts and Price and added it has to be a collective effort in which everyone has to step up.

“The longer you've been around the game and in these walls, you understand baseball is business,” Pillar said. “And there are unpopular, tough choices that management and the front office has to make.

“There are some people who think I'm here to replace Mookie Betts. That's the furthest thing from my mind. I'm not filling Mookie's shoes. He's one of the top three players in baseball. I'm looking at it as an opportunity to learn from some of the best players and elevate my game to a place where it's never been.”

First baseman Mitch Moreland said Betts and Price are almost irreplaceable. “But at the same time,” he said, “we picked up good players and we have a lot of good players.”

J.D. Martinez said it's not just what Betts brings every day but what he could do in any game.

“You never know,” he said. “Could this be the day Mookie goes off, that kind of deal? That's what we'll miss the most.”

Catcher Kevin Plawewski, who played against Betts last season as a member of the Cleveland Indians, said he's always been a tough out.

“The numbers speak for themselves,” he said. “He'll be missed for sure. He's a very talented player.

“But we still have a great team. There is a ton of talent in this room. We have to pull together and keep going.”

While Lyons called Betts a generational talent, the All-Star's rebuttal of a \$400-million deal to the Red Sox \$300-million offer needs to be considered.

“History has shown you give all that money to one superstar and try to build around him doesn't work,” Lyons said. “The Red Sox have deeper pockets than most and they could sign other good players and win. But you don't want to have to keep doing that. Does it make sense to sign a guy for \$10 million, then be taxed another \$4 million? They're not going to do that.

“Let's face it. They hired [chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom] with two focuses — building a minor-league system and winning frugally, like he did in Tampa Bay.

“That's who they have here. That's what they've asked him to do for the next year or two.”

### **Roenicke, players say he's the 'right fit' as manager**

Craig Handel

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Just a little more than a week after being named the Boston Red Sox manager, Ron Roenicke has quickly realized something.

He missed being a manager.

“This is the place I really want to be,” he said. “I never have gone after anything harder in my life than this job. I wanted it more than anything.

“I thought it was right, the right fit to get through a period and, hopefully, to give back to the players.”

The Red Sox named Roenicke manager on Feb. 11. A month earlier, the Sox and former manager Alex Cora mutually parted ways after Cora was heavily implicated in MLB’s investigation into the Houston Astros cheating scandal.

Even though he knows the Red Sox managing job is a pressure cooker, Roenicke said he loves anything that goes with it.

“Even the media, sometimes they can get awfully tough,” he said.

Roenicke managed the Milwaukee Brewers from 2011-2015 and went 342-331, with the highlight being a National League Championship Series qualifier in his first season.

After the Brewers fired him, Roenicke said, he thought he would get another chance to manage right away.

“Obviously that didn’t happen, so as time goes on, you’re thinking, ‘Why am I not managing and why are people thinking that way? What do I do about that?’ ”

Through conversations, Roenicke said he realized that if he got a second chance, he would do things better.

Now, that means preparing players so they’re ready for the start of the regular season.

“Spring training used to be 9-4, a long day,” he said. “As you talk about injuries and getting through seasons, you think of ways to do it better. What were we out here today, two hours? Recovery is huge.”

NESN Red Sox commentator Steve Lyons said Roenicke seemed to be a natural for the job because he ran spring training the past couple of seasons.

“If Roenicke’s not here, everything would be chaos,” Lyons said.

First baseman Mitch Moreland said having Roenicke as manager creates a smoother transition. “He’s familiar with how we play, day-in, day out,” he said.

J.D. Martinez called Roenicke a stand-up, straightforward guy.

“What I like is that if you ask a question, you never catch him off-guard,” he said. “He always knows what he’s talking about, whether it’s my swing or a session with a pitcher or a situation. He’s always paying attention.”

Newcomer Kevin Pillar has noticed the pride Roenicke has when putting on the uniform.

“I feel that, too,” he said. “I understand and appreciate, when I signed here, the extremely rare opportunity it is to wear a Red Sox uniform.”

Martinez tough on self

When asked how spring training has started, Martinez used some self-deprecating humor.

“Awful right now,” he said. “Every year is like this. I hate spring training because I go out and say, ‘How do I hit again? I’m so lost. The pitching is so good.’ I talked to the pitchers and said, ‘You’re making everyone look foolish at the plate. How the heck will we hit?’ ”

Asked if he had taken some swings Wednesday, Martinez said, “Yeah, I swung today but it was like a prayer.”

That is hard to believe coming from the guy who has averaged more than 31 homers and 86 RBI in the past eight years and more than 39 homers and 117 RBI in his past two seasons with the Red Sox. But Martinez said he typically gets it going the last week or two of spring training.

“I bet some guys say, ‘I hope J.D. starts out 2 for 40 because you know it’s going to be a good year.’ ”

Around the bases

Catcher Jonathon Lucroy, 33, signed a minor-league deal with Boston. He appeared in the Red Sox locker room at the end of media availability but said he couldn’t talk. Lucroy is a 10-year major league veteran who has played with the Milwaukee Brewers (under Roenicke), Texas Rangers, Chicago Cubs, Los Angeles Angels, Colorado Rockies and Oakland Athletics. ... Rafael Devers, who celebrated the birth of his child, is scheduled to be in camp Thursday, Roenicke said. He first needs to get his physical. “We want to get that quickly so we can get him out there,” Roenicke said. ... Martinez said that infielder Brock Holt — who signed a one-year deal in Milwaukee with a club option for 2021 — will be missed. He had been with the Red Sox since 2013. “I wish him the best,” Martinez said. “He’s a character in here, fun to be around.”

### **Red Sox sign catcher Jonathan Lucroy**

Bill Koch

The latest Red Sox minor league signing and interim manager Ron Roenicke will require no introduction.

Boston officially announced the addition of catcher Jonathan Lucroy on Wednesday afternoon. The 33-year-old received a one-year deal and, per WEEI.com, will earn \$1.5 million should he leave spring training on the 26-man roster.

Lucroy worked out with the Red Sox earlier in the day but declined comment prior to the deal becoming finalized.

Roenicke managed the Brewers from 2011-15, winning 96 games and reaching the National League Championship Series during his debut season. Lucroy enjoyed his best days as a player with Milwaukee, earning N.L. All-Star selections in 2014 and 2016.

Lucroy split time with the Angels and Cubs last season, and Boston could be the seventh major league club for which he’s played. His career spans 1,202 games and has been largely defined by offensive production. Lucroy has slashed .274/.335/.416 with 216 doubles and 108 home runs.

The end of Lucroy’s time with the Brewers coincided with what has been a steady dip in offensive production. He was traded to the Rangers in August 2016 as the centerpiece of a five-man deal. Lucroy posted an OPS of .716, .617 and .660 in the following three seasons.

The Red Sox now have seven catchers in camp, with Christian Vazquez and Kevin Plawecki representing the 40-man roster. Vazquez enjoyed a career year in 2019 while Plawecki signed a one-year deal to join Boston from the Mets. Lucroy, Juan Centeno, Roldani Baldwin, Jett Bandy and Dodgers trade acquisition Connor Wong represent other Red Sox options at the position.



Vazquez made 119 appearances at catcher last season, clubbing 26 doubles and 23 home runs. Sandy Leon played in 65 games behind the plate and was traded to the Indians earlier in the offseason for minor league right-hander Adenys Bautista. Blake Swihart appeared at catcher in eight games before being designated for assignment and Centeno logged just five.

## \* **MassLive.com**

### **Ron Roenicke's unlikely journey to Boston Red Sox manager started with him accepting a life-changing challenge**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- As Ron Roenicke approached the twilight of his coaching career in 2017, the southern California native had a good idea of what his future would look like. At 61 years old, he was back with an Angels organization he had previously spent a decade with, getting the chance to again work with one of his best friends, Mike Scioscia, while living close to home.

After more than 35 years spent with 10 different organizations, Roenicke ending his career with the Angels would have made the most sense. Roenicke wasn't sure how long his second act in Anaheim would last but was prepared to ride the wave for as long as he could.

"I thought I'd be in Anaheim for probably a few more years," Roenicke said. "That's what I kind of thought was going to happen."

Roenicke's vision abruptly changed that October, when he got a call from one his former minor league players, Alex Cora. Cora, who had just been hired to manage the Red Sox, wanted a veteran coach with managerial experience at his side for his maiden voyage at the helm of a team. Cora primarily considered two of his former managers from his Dodgers years -- Roenicke and Jim Tracy.

Roenicke emerged as the top option and started seriously considering coming to Boston. Three factors led to him accepting the job: Cora, a conversation he had with then-president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and the allure of working for an organization as storied as the Red Sox.

"I wanted the challenge of making a difference and coming to a new place," Roenicke said. "By doing that, that kind of fulfills what you want to do as a coach. I know I was leaving Mike Scioscia, who is one of my best friends. I know I was leaving home. My wife was all for it. My son was all for it. We have a couple grandkids and everybody was all for it. So that made it easy for me."

So Roenicke made the cross-country trek to Boston and served as Cora's bench coach for the last two seasons. He won his second World Series ring in 2018, coached an underperforming team in 2019 and entered the winter expecting to be back for Cora's third year as manager.

Then, in mid-January, the Red Sox and Cora parted ways after he was implicated as a key player in the Astros' sign-stealing scandal. Roenicke was immediately rumored as a top candidate and soon found himself being interviewed by chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom.

The Red Sox considered a handful of candidates, including third base coach Carlos Febles, Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay, Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta and former Blue Jays manager John Gibbons. But Roenicke wasn't going to let his opportunity pass.

"I have never gone after a job harder in my life than this job," Roenicke said. "I wanted it more than any job that I've had."

In a tough period of transition for the organization, Roenicke believed he could provide a steady hand.

“I thought it was right,” Roenicke said. “It was the right fit to get us through a period, and also, hopefully, to get back into the playoffs.”

Roenicke, who had an up-and-down tenure managing the Brewers from 2011 to 2015, doesn't view his opportunity with the Red Sox as a traditional version of a second chance because of what happened to Cora. But he's rejuvenated by the chance and plans to remain on the field for as long as he can, even if he vows to be retired by age 75.

One week into a job that would have seemed unimaginable just a couple months ago, Roenicke is having a blast.

“I really love this job,” Roenicke said. “I love everything that goes with it. The players. I don't mind (the media) at all and the discussions we have. I know sometimes they get awfully tough. I really enjoy it. When I started doing this again, I really missed it.”

Baldelli expects bounceback year from Martin Perez

If you trust Twins manager Rocco Baldelli, new Red Sox lefty Martin Perez might end up being Boston's best pickup of the winter.

Baldelli, who managed Perez in Minnesota last year, believes Perez has a chance to be productive as a member of Boston's rotation in 2020. Though Perez posted an ugly 4.99 ERA in 29 starts, the Twins went 17-12 in his outings.

“Martin did a nice job for us,” Baldelli said. “He pitched us to opportunities to win games consistently. He competed very well. He was very open to making adjustments. And he's a really good teammate. There's really not much more you could ask for. I think there were some starts where things didn't play out they probably should have for him. If he continues to do what he has been doing and continues to make the adjustments he has been making, I would anticipate a very nice season.”

Perez, who drew interest from at least a half-dozen teams as a free agent before signing with the Red Sox in December, was the victim of some bad luck in 2019. Opponents' exit velocity against him (85.4 mph) put him in the top 4% in baseball (min. 400 batted ball events) and his 29.7% hard hit rate was top 7% in the league.

“I don't have all the numbers in front of me but the stuff was really good,” Baldelli said. “He came out of the chute last year throwing the ball pretty incredibly. But I think he's also still figuring out of what he's capable of and what his strengths are. When he takes advantage of those strengths, he's certainly going to give his team a chance to win.”

Perez introduced a cutter to his repertoire, tossing it 30.86% of the time last year. In his eighth big-league season, the southpaw began to reinvent himself.

“I always thought of him predominately as a two-seam pitcher and try to get ground balls,” Baldelli said. “Not that that's completely out of the realm of what he does, but he has so many other options that he's still experimenting with.”

Baldelli will see plenty of Perez and the Red Sox in spring training, as the Twins and Sox both train in Fort Myers and will match up five times before camp breaks.

10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. Jonathan Lucroy will be the 67th player in major league camp for the Red Sox, and it's beginning to get crowded in the home clubhouse at JetBlue Park. Temporary lockers have already been brought in.

2. Chaim Bloom vowed after trading Mookie Betts and David Price that he wasn't done tinkering with the roster. Since, he's added Lucroy and Kevin Pillar and is still discussing other moves.
3. Bold prediction: Lucroy beats out Kevin Plawecki for the backup job by the end of camp. Lucroy will have a fan in Roenicke, his former manager, and has a higher ceiling than Plawecki. Plawecki's only advantage is that he's on a major-league deal while Lucroy is not.
4. Any trade sending Wil Myers to the Red Sox will be complex, so be sure to read the details before judging at face value. If something happens, it'll basically be a way for the Sox to buy prospects. Myers' involvement is largely incidental.
5. Rob Manfred's press conference in North Port the other day was embarrassing. The worst part was his catty attack on Wall Street Journal reporter Jared Diamond, who broke the "Codebreaker" part of the scandal.
6. Looks like Mike Trout has some personality after all!
7. Brock Holt is as beloved as any bit player in Red Sox history. His return to Fenway Park with the Brewers in early June will be something to look forward to for Sox fans.
8. The money on Holt's deal is still not reported, but the industry speculation is that it's something in the \$3 million range. That will come as a tough blow to Sox fans after seeing Boston sign Jose Peraza for \$2.85 million.
9. Ian Kinsler's comments on the Red Sox' sign-stealing scandal were as expansive as anyone's on the matter so far. Kinsler was thoughtful during his few months with Boston in 2018.
10. Top five remaining free agents: Yasiel Puig, Brian Dozier, Collin McHugh, Russell Martin and Scooter Gennett.

### **Boston Red Sox notebook: J.D. Martinez explains why he 'hates' spring training, Eduardo Rodriguez working with Pedro Martinez to build off strong 2019**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Some leftover notes from Wednesday at Fenway South, where the Red Sox had their team photo day before working out in advance of their spring opener against Northeastern on Friday.

Roenicke won't share rotation plans

Interim manager Ron Roenicke is letting pitching coach Dave Bush map out the team's pitching for this weekend and isn't sure what he has planned for the game against Northeastern.

"Bushy put it on my desk but I have not looked at it," Roenicke said with a laugh. I know when Eddy (Rodriguez) is going. I know when Nate (Eovaldi) is going. But that first game, I'm not real sure."

Roenicke declined to discuss when his regular starters (Rodriguez, Eovaldi, Chris Sale and Martin Perez) will get in their first games. He previously said the plan was to get each pitcher six starts before Opening Day.

Martinez 'hates' spring training

Slugger J.D. Martinez, who was an All-Star in his first two seasons with the Red Sox, never feels like one this time of year.

Martinez called his current swing "awful" but says that's how he feels in spring training every year.

“I hate spring training just because you go out there and you’re like, ‘How do I hit again?’” he said.

Martinez, who arrived in camp Sunday, took live batting practice Wednesday but didn’t feel comfortable in the box. The veteran said he usually starts very slow in camp before getting things into gear in the last two weeks.

“I’m different, man,” he said. “There’s some guys who can come in here, like these young guys, every spring they come out and are hitting home runs every other night. I’m like, ‘How the heck do you do it?’ I don’t get it. I’ve never been able to do it. I just look awful. I’m not a spring player.”

Martinez might not look like himself in Grapefruit League games, but don’t fear. That’s normal for him.

“Even my friends, they make fun of me in my group chat,” Martinez said. “I can’t wait to see J.D. go 2-for-40 this spring.’ That’s how I know it’s going to be a good year.”

E-Rod a hot topic of discussion

Eduardo Rodriguez threw live batting practice Wednesday, marking an important first step in which he’ll be a vital part of the Sox’ rotation.

Rodriguez took a major step forward in 2020, finishing sixth in American League Cy Young voting after going 19-6 with 3.81 ERA. Without David Price and Rick Porcello, the Red Sox will rely on Rodriguez even more in 2020.

One of Rodriguez’s mentors, Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez, is working with the lefty in camp. Martinez is doing what he can to make sure Rodriguez doesn’t get complacent after a year of success.

“Imagine how E-Rod went back during the winter,” Martinez said. “Once he laid his head on the pillow, he said ‘I did my job.’ That’s what you want to have when you go home. The sensation that you tried hard, you did what you were supposed to and you did your job. Earned your salary.”

Rodriguez, whose work ethic has been questioned at times throughout his career. He received tough love from Price, Porcello and manager Alex Cora, who have all departed the organization in recent months.

Even without those forces around him, Martinez believes Rodriguez will be motivated in 2020. That drive might come from within.

“Now he’s confident. He knows that having success is so, so fulfilling for someone like him,” Martinez said. “How do you keep him (successful)? Baseball is a humbling sport. Today you’re on top, tomorrow you could be at the bottom. You just keep him focused on the work he has to do. Keeping him excited about the things he does on the field. And actually appreciating the things he does right.”

Other notes

Roenicke said Rafael Devers (birth of a child) is flying to Florida on Wednesday and will be in camp Thursday... Non-roster outfielder Cesar Puello (visa issues) had a meeting in the Dominican Republic to try to secure permission to come to camp... New minor-league signee Jonathan Lucroy arrived in camp but declined to speak with reporters because his deal was not yet official. It has since been announced by the team... Xander Bogaerts (ankle) still hasn’t joined the team for workouts, instead doing conditioning drills inside. Roenicke said Bogaerts is progressing well and should be on the field soon.

**Red Sox sign stealing scandal: Ian Kinsler says investigation ‘won’t find anything substantial,’ Boston just had ‘very good system of relaying from second base to home plate’**

Chris Cutillo

Former Red Sox infielder Ian Kinsler is the latest member of the 2018 team to publicly claim Major League Baseball's investigation into the team's sign-stealing practices will turn up empty.

Appearing on 1310 The Ticket in Dallas, Kinsler said the Red Sox legally stole signs from second base in 2018 but did not do anything like the 2017 Astros, who were found to have use a center field monitor to decode signs that were relayed to batters in real time.

"I don't know what (the league) is going to find, but in my opinion, it's not anything close to what's going on (in Houston), Kinsler said. "The Red Sox were just a very tight-knit group. When I was injected into that team in the middle of the season, it was a lot like the Rangers clubs I was on, where it was just a very tight-knit group and their system was flawless. They just had a very good system of relaying from second base to home plate. That was it. Honestly. We'll see what happens with the commissioner's report."

Kinsler was traded from the Angels to the Red Sox at the 2018 trade deadline and played 37 games for Boston in the final two months of the season. The Sox have been accused of improperly using their video replay room to decode opponents' signs in 2018, when they won the World Series.

Kinsler said "most teams" steal signs the old fashioned way, with runners on second base relaying them to hitters. The now retired second baseman believes the advent of technology in baseball has created a gray area in how video is use during games.

"If there's a video and you're going to check out your at-bat and while you're checking out your at-bat, there's a runner on second base also, and you look through your at-bat to see your personal flaws and what you're trying to fix for the next time... I'm going to go back again and check out the signs and see if I can crack them," he said. "If I can, I can. If I can't, I can't."

Kinsler said that bad teams, which usually have significant turnover on their roster throughout the season, rarely change signs to avoid sign-stealing. Good teams -- especially those that make the playoffs -- put safeguards on their sign systems so that opponents can't steal anything.

"You get to the playoffs, all the teams are really good teams," Kinsler said. "They all know what's happening. So they are, on the defensive side of the ball, aware of what's happening. They're constantly changing and constantly making it very difficult for the other team.

"We got a game into the playoffs with the Red Sox. We couldn't run our system," he added. "It was just too difficult."

Kinsler, who played for the Padres last year and retired over the winter, didn't say if he had been interviewed by league investigators. Like former teammates Andrew Benintendi, Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez, Kinsler doesn't believe the Sox will be hit hard when MLB releases its report later this month.

"I'm interested to see what happens with this whole report because I truly believe they're not going to find anything that's substantial," he said. "They might throw a small punishment out there because they did a report. I don't know. I don't know where they stand on this whole thing. We saw where they stood on the Astros thing. I just really don't see any form of punishment coming to the Red Sox. It was a very good team."

### **Boston Red Sox trade rumors: Potential Wil Myers trade could involve three teams with Reds included**

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox and Padres still are discussing a trade involving outfielder Wil Myers, Kevin Acee of the San Diego Union-Tribune reported Tuesday.

Trade talks actually have involved a third team, the Cincinnati Reds, Dennis Lin of The Athletic reported Wednesday. Lin wrote Myers would head to Boston and the Padres would receive Nick Senzel. It's unclear who the Padres would receive in a potential three-way trade.

The Red Sox would assume half of Myers' remaining \$61 million and receive at least one young player. Boston is interested in pitcher Cal Quantrill, catcher Luis Campusano and shortstop Gabriel Arias, per Acee.

The 21-year-old Campusano batted .325 with a .396 on-base percentage, .509 slugging percentage, .906 OPS, 15 homers, 31 doubles, one triple and 81 RBIs in 110 games at High A.

Arias is a 19-year-old shortstop who slashed .302/.339/.470/.809 with 17 homers, 21 doubles, four triples and 75 RBIs in 120 games at High A in 2019.

Quantrill, a 25-year-old righty and the eighth-overall pick in 2016, posted a 6-8 record with a 5.16 ERA, 1.30 WHIP and 4.28 FIP in 23 outings (18 starts) for the Padres last year.

### **Xander Bogaerts, Boston Red Sox star: 'I don't think it was the right thing for (Rob Manfred) to say' about World Series trophy**

Christopher Smith

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred angered many players across the league when he recently called the World Series trophy "a piece of metal."

Xander Bogaerts addressed the commissioner's comment Wednesday during a lengthy interview with WEEI's Lou Merloni.

"You play 162 games trying to have the best record in the division," Bogaerts said. "You're just going to say that? I don't think it was the right thing for him to say, obviously. But I think he apologized. It might take a while for a lot of people to let that sink in. Obviously he could have chose some different words. It wasn't the right and the nice way to say it. We work so hard as baseball players just to get one ring and to call it like that, I think it wasn't nice."

Manfred apologized Tuesday at spring training media day in Arizona.

"I referred to the World Series trophy in a disrespectful way, and I want to apologize for it," Manfred told reporters, per the Associated Press. "There's no excuse for it. ... It was a mistake to say what I said."

### **Brock Holt bids farewell to Boston Red Sox fans on Instagram: 'You turned a Texas body into one of your own'**

Chris Cotillo

Fan favorite Brock Holt bid farewell to Red Sox fans with a heartfelt Instagram post Wednesday afternoon after his new deal with the Brewers became official.

"Boston. You turned a Texas boy into one of your own," Holt wrote. "It has been my absolute honor to play for your team and be a part of your city. Baseball is just that. Baseball. It doesn't last forever. The relationships I've built will. I became a husband, a father, and a champion while playing for you. I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone who has been a part of this chapter with us. And thank you for letting me be a part of yours. It was a damn good time!"

Holt, who spent the last seven seasons with the Red Sox, signed a one-year deal with the Brewers that includes a club option for 2021. The versatile infielder appeared in 615 games with the Sox, being named an All-Star in 2014 and being named the club's recipient of the Roberto Clemente Award four times.

Holt's Brewers will visit Fenway Park for a three-game series beginning June 5.

### **With Brock Holt gone, who will J.D. Martinez hug? 'Whoever's there,' Boston Red Sox slugger says**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Over the last two seasons, Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez has always had Brock Holt waiting to hug him when he returned to the dugout after hitting a home run.

That won't happen this season now that Holt is the newest Milwaukee Brewer. So who will Martinez hug after his home runs in 2020?

"That's a good one," Martinez said Wednesday. "Whoever's there. I don't know."

Martinez and Holt started the tradition in May 2018 during a day game in Toronto, as Holt told MassLive's Chris Smith. After dreaming that Martinez hit a home run wearing his necklace, Holt gave Martinez his necklace to wear in that day's game against the Blue Jays. Martinez homered and Holt hugged him, starting a tradition that carried through the end of last season.

"Every time he hits a home run I go down to the end of the dugout and wait for him to give us high-fives and give him a big hug and then kind of jump around a bit," Holt said back then. "Just something I started doing when we were in Toronto. Just get excited when he hits a home run now. And down there waiting for him whenever he gets there."

Holt's hugs were reserved for Martinez, with Martinez returning the favor whenever Holt hit a rare home run. That tradition will end now that Holt has left Boston.

"You wish him the best," Martinez said. "He was a character in here. He was fun to be around. You wish him the best, but that's the business side of it."

### **Jonathan Lucroy deal official: Boston Red Sox add catcher to spring training roster**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Jonathan Lucroy was here at JetBlue Park on Wednesday and passed his physical.

The catcher's minor league deal with the Red Sox is official. He certainly has a chance to make the Opening Day roster. He'll compete to be Christian Vazquez's backup with Kevin Plawecki who signed a one-year, \$900,000 major league deal this past offseason.

According to WEEI's Rob Bradford, Lucroy will earn \$1.5 million if he makes the majors. MassLive's Chris Cotillo first reported that the Sox were close to a deal with Lucroy on Tuesday.

The 33-year-old Lucroy, known as a strong receiver and game-caller, has a career .274/.335/.416/.751 line in 10 major league seasons (1,202 games).

He's one of seven catchers in spring training camp, joining Vazquez, Plawecki, Jett Bandy, Juan Centeno, Connor Wong and Roldani Baldwin. Everyone but Baldwin and Wong have major league experience.

### **Pedro Martinez recommended Ron Roenicke for Red Sox manager: 'We couldn't find a person better suited for the job'**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- As the Red Sox vetted Ron Roenicke for their managerial opening after parting ways with Alex Cora, they did due diligence that went back almost 30 years. In the process of gathering information about Roenicke as a potential fit, Boston consulted someone who played for Roenicke in 1991, when he was the hitting coach of the San Antonio Missions.

That player was Pedro Martinez, who made 12 starts for the Dodgers' Double-A affiliate that season. The Hall of Famer, who is now a special assistant with the Red Sox, gave Roenicke a glowing recommendation.

"I certainly suggested that he was a great candidate to be a manager, especially being under Cora the last two years," Martinez said. "He understands the tendencies from the players-- how they think, what they like and what they like to hear. He communicated well with everybody. We couldn't find a better suited person from this job."

Roenicke, who played parts of eight big league seasons with six different clubs, made his major league appearance with the Reds in 1989 and spent 1990 in Triple-A with the Rangers. He started coaching in 1991, rejoining the organization that drafted him out of UCLA and first brought him to the majors in the early 1980s. For Roenicke, his post-playing career served as a bit of a homecoming.

"With the Dodgers when I grew up, it was the Dodger Way," Roenicke said. "The Dodger Way was great. It was a great way to learn to play the game of baseball."

In his first year as a coach, Roenicke met Martinez, a 19-year-old pitching prospect from the Dominican Republic. Though Roenicke's job was to focus on the team's hitters, he spent time with Martinez, who was trying to understand offensive approach as a way of fine-tuning how he pitched.

"He was already talking to me about how you pitch guys and how you set them up," Roenicke said. "At that time, nobody was talking about that. Just far advanced. Mentally -- he had all these physical tools -- but mentally, this guy was fantastic at how to pitch and how to get out hitters and set them up."

Martinez made 12 starts for the Missions that season, posting a 1.76 ERA and earning a promotion to Triple-A by the end of the year. He debuted for Los Angeles in 1993 -- when Roenicke was on the major league staff -- before being traded to the Expos for Delino DeShields in November.

Roenicke wasn't in a position to give his input on the trade back then. But if he was, he might not have argued for the Dodgers to keep the future three-time Cy Young winner.

"Even though I had Pedro and I knew how special he was, I couldn't at that time tell you this guy was going to be a Hall of Famer," Roenicke said. "I would say there were some guys in the Dodgers organization that had him more that would have said that."

Like Roenicke, Martinez used what he learned in his early years with the Dodgers to inform how he approached the game in later years. The family atmosphere created in the organization in the early 1990s led to a relationship between two men who, because of their specific roles on opposite sides of the ball, weren't natural fits to work closely.

"I saw Ron a lot of times," Martinez said. "Very dedicated. Someone that was always nice, willing to help you. They all were nice. I remember in the Dodgers system, they wanted better men than players. That's unusual. People want to see performance. They had a very unusual approach about it. They wanted us to be better human beings than we were players. Ron falls right in with that."

"Ron was always helpful, always teaching me different things," he added. "He's very interesting to talk baseball with."



Now, as Boston's interim manager, Roenicke relies on Martinez to help his pitchers. Martinez plays an active role as an instructor during spring training and has taken guys like Eduardo Rodriguez under his wing in recent years.

"He's more vocal, more willing to jump right in," Roenicke said. "He doesn't sit back, look at it and think he's going to wait to talk to them. He just jumps in. His knowledge is tremendous."

That knowledge began to form in 1991, with the help of a young coach named Ron Roenicke. For both Martinez and Roenicke, it would have been hard to imagine back then that they'd both have such vital roles with another one of the game's premier organizations in 2020.

"I was talking to him about it, the other day, going back to our days in the Dodgers," Martinez said. "I said, 'Wow, how ironic. Look where you are.' We were talking about (those moments) I had there. It is great to actually go back in time and get back to those memories."

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

### **Verdugo to don No. 99, in nod to Manny**

Dawn Klemish

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Alex Verdugo saw it as a chance to put his own spin on things; to stand out from the crowd, if you will.

As the blue-chip return in the Mookie Betts trade, Verdugo will have many eyes on him this season. Slotted to take the beloved Betts' place in the outfield after the Feb. 10 swap with the Dodgers, the 23-year-old has some pretty big shoes to fill.

And now, Verdugo has an equally big number on his back. He recently switched from his club-assigned No. 12 to become the first player to wear No. 99 in Red Sox history.

"I looked through the roster," Verdugo said, "and that was the one that kind of stood out the most to me.

"It's just a number, but I think it doesn't look too bad."

There was a little more to it than that, though. The talented outfielder wore No. 27 during his Dodgers tenure, but those digits were retired by the Red Sox in 2000 to honor Hall of Famer Carlton Fisk. Boston, in turn, issued Verdugo No. 12, a solid consolation prize and a strong number worn by Hall of Famers Roberto Alomar and Wade Boggs.

That was precisely why Verdugo didn't like it.

"I didn't want to wear a number that a player had just previously worn, either," Verdugo said Tuesday. (Brock Holt wore No. 12 for Boston for the past seven seasons.) "This is kind of a little bit unique. It's not like everybody's number, so it just stands out a little bit more."

Although the largest number in baseball has gained recent popularity since Verdugo's outfield rival Aaron Judge chose it for the Yankees, just five Major Leaguers currently sport the double nines: Verdugo, Judge, the Angels' Keynan Middleton, the Blue Jays' Hyun-Jin Ryu and the Mariners' Taijuan Walker.

And then there was that one other guy...

"Manny Ramirez went from Boston to the Dodgers, and he wore 99," said Verdugo, who admitted the number choice was also a nod to the 19-year Major Leaguer who played left field and slugged 555 career home runs.

While it's too early to say whether Verdugo's star will continue rise as Ramirez's did, his outlook is certainly bright. MLB Pipeline had high praise for the left-handed hitter, who rates as a plus-plus arm with plate discipline beyond his years, in a 2018 scouting report that had him ranked as the 10th-best outfield prospect in baseball:

"One of the best pure hitting prospects in baseball, Verdugo recognizes pitches and controls the strike zone better than most players his age. He uses the whole field, repeatedly barreling balls with a quick left-handed stroke geared for line drives. Though he homered just seven times in 132 games last season, his hitting ability, bat speed and strength should translate into average power if he adds some loft to his swing."

Verdugo appears to be on the right track. As a rookie with L.A. in 2019, he slashed .294/.342/.475 with 22 doubles and 12 home runs in 106 games. Verdugo is also enthusiastic, a trait Red Sox interim manager Ron Roenicke is eager to see in action.

"Verdugo has tremendous energy, and you're going to see it right [away]. That's just who he is," Roenicke said. "He gets excited, he shows it, and I think that's part of the reason I really look forward to him getting out there, because I think the fans are going to like him right away."

As Verdugo begins to make an impression with the Red Sox, he is mindful of the tradition he carries on the front of his jersey. And he's ready to add to the history of the number on the back.

"I've never gotten to meet Manny," Verdugo said. "Hopefully one day I'll finally be able to introduce myself and say hi."

"Hopefully I'll do the number justice for him."

#### **Notes: E-Rod fit for takeoff; J.D. adjusts to spring**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- For the last several years, Eduardo Rodriguez had the chance to absorb the leadership and experience of fellow lefties David Price and Chris Sale. He was also able to lean on the ultimate professional in righty Rick Porcello.

But as Rodriguez comes into this season without Price or Porcello, interim manager Ron Roenicke thinks the lefty is ready to take off on his own.

"We're with each other every single day. We're with each other more than with our families," Roenicke said. "He had parts of four seasons with [Price]. He's had all the time he's wanted to talk to David, to talk to Chris as a left-hander and learn what to do and how to go about it."

Rodriguez, who was Boston's best starting pitcher last season and won 19 games, fired off two innings of live batting practice on Wednesday.

"He had a good up and down today," Roenicke said. "His command is the main thing on why he is so good. It's just slowly progressing."

With Grapefruit League games set to start on Saturday, Roenicke said he knows when Rodriguez and Nathan Eovaldi will make their first spring starts. However, he wasn't ready to share that information just yet.

J.D. on Spring Training: 'How do I hit again?'

Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez looks like a natural while putting up huge numbers every season, but he hardly feels like one during Spring Training.

As usual, Martinez has felt like a fish out of water in the early days of camp.

“Awful right now, but that’s how it is every year [for me],” Martinez said. “That’s not saying much. Every year is like that. I hate Spring Training just because you go out there and it’s like, ‘How do I hit again?’ You’re so lost.

“I was talking to the pitchers today, I’m like, ‘You guys probably come in here and feel good.’ They’re like, ‘Yeah, making these guys look dumb.’ They’re making everybody look foolish at the plate and we’re sitting there wondering how they heck we’re going to hit.”

Martinez hit during live BP in Wednesday’s workout and described it like this.

“I swung today, but I was just swinging with a prayer,” he said.

When does Martinez finally start to feel like himself in Spring Training?

“Probably the last two weeks. I’m long,” Martinez said. “I’m different, man. Some guys come in, these young guys, every spring they come out and they’re hitting home runs every other night and I’m like, ‘How the heck do you do that?’ I don’t get it. I just look awful. I’m not a spring player.”

Devers to arrive Thursday

One star player has been missing in the early days of camp for the Red Sox and for good reason. Third baseman Rafael Devers was in the Dominican Republic witnessing the birth of his daughter.

The lefty masher flew to Fort Myers on Wednesday and will take his physical on Thursday with the hope it’s over in time that he can participate in the team workout.

Plawecki keeps focus away from Lucroy

Kevin Plawecki came into camp sure to be the No. 2 catcher for the Red Sox. But that’s no longer such a sure thing with veteran Jonathan Lucroy having finalized a Minor League contract that includes an invite to Spring Training. Lucroy underwent his physical on Wednesday and will start working out with Boston on Thursday.

When Roenicke managed the Brewers from 2011-15, Lucroy was there the entire time.

“It’s baseball,” Plawecki said. “Every team has competition. It’s part of the game. I try not to worry too much about it. Just go out there and do what I know I’m capable of doing. I can’t control anything. It’s just up to me to focus on what I need to do to get prepared and ready for the season. You can’t think too much about it. It is what it is.”

### **Lucroy joins Boston catching mix on spring invite**

Dawn Klemish

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox camp grew by one on Wednesday as Boston agreed to a Minor League deal with an invite to Spring Training with veteran catcher Jonathan Lucroy. He is expected to work out with the club on Thursday.

The deal brings the number of catchers in camp to seven. While declining to comment on Lucroy on Tuesday because the deal wasn’t yet complete, interim manager Ron Roenicke admitted that there’s no such thing as too many options behind the plate.

“I’ll just answer it this way on that: Depth is huge. Catching depth is huge,” Roenicke said. “So whatever you do there to help your depth is good.”

Lucroy, 33, is a two-time All-Star who has seen his offensive production decline the past two years, hitting .232/.305/.355 with eight homers and 36 RBIs in 101 games with the Angels and Cubs last season. Over 10 big league seasons, Lucroy has 108 home runs, 545 RBIs and a career .274/.335/.416 slash line.

He will compete to back up Boston starting catcher Christian Vázquez, who broke out at the plate last season with a career-best 23 homers and a .798 OPS.

Lucroy's main competition is Kevin Plawecki, who signed with the Red Sox as a free agent on Jan. 2. Plawecki, a five-year veteran, appeared in 59 games for the Indians in 2019 and slashed .222/.287/.342. He's out of Minor League options, but if Lucroy impresses this spring, that could be rendered moot as Boston picked up Plawecki for just \$900,000.

Bye, bye Brock

Brock Holt, who elected free agency after the 2019 season, agreed to a deal with the Brewers on Monday. The veteran utility man slashed .270/.340/.374 during his seven seasons with the Red Sox, numbers that ballooned to .333/.422/.648 in 65 appearances as a pinch-hitter throughout his career.

"I thought he was a fantastic hitter," Roenicke said. "He's coming in there facing the best relievers in the game, the nastiest stuff, and he's coming in there in the eighth, ninth inning trying to do some big things against them. And that is without a doubt the hardest job in baseball. And there are very few I can tell you that are good at it. Brock is good at it."

Holt was an All-Star in 2015 and a member of the '18 World Series championship team, but perhaps his biggest legacy in Boston was his community involvement. Holt was a constant presence at Red Sox charity events and a champion of the cancer-fighting Jimmy Fund. His efforts earned him a Roberto Clemente Award nomination in four of the past five years.

Holt's is a face, Roenicke said, that will definitely be missed around the clubhouse.

"He's a great guy," Roenicke added. "Everybody liked him."

Hernandez off on the right foot

Darwinzon Hernandez earned a mention from Roenicke after his live batting practice session, during which he faced three hitters. None fared very well against the big lefty, who fanned 57 hitters in 30 1/3 innings (29 games) last season as a rookie.

"He always looks impressive," Roenicke said. "He left a couple of balls up on his breaking ball, but his bullpens have been good, and I thought he threw the ball well. I don't think our hitters are too excited about being in there with Darwinzon."

### **Projecting Sox's 2020 Opening Day roster**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- In just over five weeks, the Red Sox will be in Toronto ready to kick off their 2020 season.

Until then, the battle will be waged for roster spots as the team tries to rebound from a disappointing 84-win season.

Here's an attempt at imagining what the 26-man roster will look like on Opening Day against the Blue Jays.

Catcher (2): Christian Vázquez, Kevin Plawecki

There is no question who owns the No. 1 spot. That would be Vázquez, who had a breakout season at the plate last year while improving his rapport with the pitching staff and displaying his cannon arm once again

behind the plate. Plawecki, who was signed as a free agent in the offseason after the Indians non-tendered him, has the inside track on the backup spot.

But a new wrinkle has been added thanks to the Sox agreeing to terms on a Minor League deal with veteran Jonathan Lucroy that includes an invite to Spring Training. The right-handed hitter belted 26 homers in 2016, but he hasn't been nearly the same offensive player in the last three years. If he can prove his bat still has life in it, defensive specialist Plawecki will have a battle on his hands. With a 26-player roster, there's also a chance Boston could carry all three catchers.

First base (3): Mitch Moreland, Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec

Look for gritty veteran Moreland to get the bulk of starts against right-handers, especially early in the season. But Chavis will have a chance to earn himself more playing time if he hits like he did in the early weeks of his debut last season. Chavis will also bounce over to second base at times, and there's even talk of him learning the outfield at some point in camp. With Alex Verdugo expected to start the season on the injured list, it could open up a spot for highly-touted prospect Dalbec, who can play both corners, to break camp with the team.

Second base (1): José Peraza

The Red Sox signed the 25-year-old with the idea he could provide stability at second base -- a position that has been a revolving door for the last couple of years thanks to Dustin Pedroia's chronic left knee woes. If Peraza can hit like he did two years ago, the Sox have themselves a bargain at one year and \$3 million. Peraza's ability to play shortstop will give interim manager Ron Roenicke the chance to work in some days off for Xander Bogaerts. Chavis can slide over to second as well.

Shortstop (1): Xander Bogaerts

With Mookie Betts gone, the case can be made that Bogaerts is now the best all-around player on the Red Sox. If 2018 seemed like his breakout season, Bogaerts proved that wrong by having an even better '19. He is also an emerging leader in the clubhouse. Roenicke will try not to run him into the ground, and Peraza and Jonathan Arauz can spell him at times.

Third base (1): Rafael Devers

Much like shortstop, the Red Sox don't anticipate any competition at this spot for many years. Devers, at the age of 23, is already a monster at the plate. If he can gain a little more plate discipline, he will truly be a devastating force. Chavis and Arauz can back him up on those rare days he is not in the lineup. But if Dalbec can make the team, he would be the top choice to spot Devers.

Utility (1): Jonathan Arauz

It was unusual for the Red Sox to take a pick in the Rule 5 Draft, which shows you how much they like Arauz. The athletic switch-hitter made 281 starts at short, 86 at second and 32 at third in his Minor League career with the Astros. It will be interesting to see if Boston adds outfield to his resume as well.

Outfield (3): Andrew Benintendi, Jackie Bradley Jr., Kevin Pillar

It is strange to type a starting Boston outfield trio that doesn't include Mookie Betts. At least for the start of the season, the trio won't include the main acquisition piece in that trade: Alex Verdugo, who is recovering from a stress fracture in his back. Fortunately, the Red Sox signed a proven replacement in Pillar. J.D. Martinez will play the outfield at times, but the Red Sox would prefer to limit that to keep him as healthy as possible. This is where it could be beneficial for Chavis to learn the ropes in the outfield -- so he can spot the starters when necessary.

Designated hitter (1): J.D. Martinez

The Red Sox are a rare team these days that has a set DH -- and one who mashes. Expect Martinez to once again put up monster at-bats in this spot for Boston.

Starting rotation (4): Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez, Nathan Eovaldi, Martin Pérez

At some point in Spring Training, chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom could go out and get a starting pitcher to fill the fifth spot in the rotation, either via trade or free agency. But until then, expect the Sox to

use an opener, because there aren't a lot of proven candidates in position to start. Sale began Spring Training with the flu and pneumonia, and Roenicke mentioned that it could force him to miss Opening Day. Because it is Sale, who cringes at missing time, we'll wait a while before replacing his roster spot for the start of the season.

Bullpen (9): Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Heath Hembree, Darwinzon Hernandez, Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Ryan Weber, Austin Brice

A nine-man bullpen? Yes, given the possibility of an opener. Unlike this time a year ago, the Sox have a set closer in Workman, who became a dominant reliever in the second half of 2019. Barnes was over-used early last season -- especially in high-leverage situations -- and it affected his consistency. Look for the righty to return to being a consistent force in the eighth inning.

Taylor was the most underrated reliever the Red Sox had last year as a rookie, and he could figure into an opener situation. The same goes with Hernandez, who has an electric arm and could still revert to becoming a starter down the line. Weber doesn't wow anyone on the radar gun, but he knows how to pitch and the Sox think he can make a leap with some minor adjustments. A return to the 2018 version of Brasier would be huge. Brice was one of the many depth pitchers Bloom acquired in the offseason, and he put up solid numbers for the Marlins (3.43 ERA) in 43 appearances last season. The final two to three spots could be wide open. Josh Osich, Brian Johnson, Colten Brewer, Hector Velazquez, Chris Mazza, Jeff Springs and Matt Hall are others who could pitch themselves on to the team.

## **\* *ESPN.com***

### **Players who could be surprise additions to Opening Day MLB rosters**

Craig Edwards

Spring training provides opportunities for players both young and old to make their mark and change their future outlook. Some young players are trying to do enough to make the team. Veterans who have bounced around and might not have a contract are doing the same. Meanwhile, former stars and once-heralded prospects might be working their way back from injury to take a spot that's far from guaranteed. The players below are all fighting this spring for a place on the roster, or in the rotation or starting lineup, but their performance this spring is worth a look as it will decide their fate once spring is over and the season begins.

National League

Arizona Diamondbacks: RHP Jon Duplantier

With Mike Leake expected to return before Opening Day, and Luke Weaver already also coming back from injury, there will be opportunities for a young starter like Duplantier in camp. After injuries in 2018 and a tough 2019 bouncing between levels and roles, the big right-hander will try to get back the stuff that made him a good prospect a few seasons past.

Atlanta Braves: 1B Yonder Alonso

A role as a lefty-hitting first baseman is already taken up in Atlanta with Freddie Freeman, and that makes Alonso a curious camp invitee. Alonso was good as recently as 2017, average in 2018, and was bad with the White Sox before a brief stint with the Rockies. The new rules allowing a 26th roster spot could benefit a player like Alonso as a late-inning pinch hitter particularly if LOOGYs are used in fewer numbers with the new rules. He'll have to actually hit in spring, though.

Chicago Cubs: INF Nico Hoerner

The veteran comeback to watch on the Cubs comes from Jason Kipnis, but the player to watch is the one who could make Kipnis' performance irrelevant. Hoerner got a taste of the majors last year after just a half-season in Double-A, and a good spring might get the versatile righty in the starting nine on Opening Day.

Cincinnati Reds: RHP Nate Jones

The former White Sox reliever has already had one comeback season, putting together an excellent 2016 campaign after missing most of the previous two seasons. In the three seasons since, Jones has amassed just over 50 mediocre innings. There's not much reason to think Jones is going to make it to the season healthy, but he's worth keeping an eye on.

Colorado Rockies: RHP Ubaldo Jimenez

Rockies fans might remember Jimenez from a three-season run from 2008 to 2010 where he was one of the best pitchers in baseball. It has been a decade since Jimenez was at his peak, and he hasn't pitched in the majors since 2017, but Colorado is giving the 36-year-old another shot to prove he's not quite finished.

Los Angeles Dodgers: RHP Jimmy Nelson

It has been a few years since Nelson had his breakout in Milwaukee, but in 2017, he was one of the better pitchers in baseball before injuries kept him out of 2018 and most of last year. His 6.95 ERA in 22 innings was pretty ugly, but he closed the season strong. He will have a lot of competition on the Dodgers for a place on the staff, but he's still a pitcher worth watching to see if he still has it.

Miami Marlins: CF Lewis Brinson

Brinson isn't really a long shot to make the roster, but his production at the major league level over the past two seasons has been disastrous. Putting up nearly three wins below replacement level due to a hitting line that looks good only for a pitcher (.189/.238/.294). Brinson played decently well in Triple-A last season, but he needs to start producing or he's going to be surpassed by other, younger Marlins outfielders.

Milwaukee Brewers: 1B Logan Morrison

In 2017, Morrison hit 38 homers. In 2018, he signed late with the Twins, struggled, was hurt and his hip problems forced a delay to his 2019 season where he mashed in Triple-A, but never got much time in the majors. If Morrison is healthy, he still might have a bunch of power that could play well in Milwaukee, but there's an admittedly tough path to playing time with all of the Brewers' other first base options like Ryan Braun, Justin Smoak and Ryon Healy.

New York Mets: OF Yoenis Cespedes

Any other pick for the Mets would be a "boar." In 2015, Cespedes played in 159 games and his yearly total has dropped in every year since: 132, 81, 38, and zero last season. Even as his health has declined, he has still been able to hit when he has taken the field. Whether his health will permit that to happen in 2020 might depend on his getting through the spring.

Philadelphia Phillies: 3B Alec Bohm

The third overall pick from 2018 tore up three different minor league levels last season ending up at Double-A for most of the year. The real question on Bohm is whether he can stick defensively at third base. Rhys Hoskins is blocking Bohm at first, but at third he's up against Scott Kingery, who can move around the diamond. If Bohm can play third at an adequate level, he might be ready for the majors.

Pittsburgh Pirates: RHP Chad Kuhl

In 2017, Kuhl was a league-average starter after a promising 2016 debut, but a poor 2018 that ended with Tommy John surgery kept Kuhl off a mound all of last season. Kuhl comes to camp with full clearance to throw and potentially compete for a spot in the rotation.

San Diego Padres: RHP Garrett Richards

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The Padres guaranteed Richards \$15.5 million last offseason knowing he wouldn't be able to contribute in 2019. He made only three unmemorable September appearances and hasn't pitched 80 innings in a season since 2015. This spring, he will get a shot at returning to the rotation and helping the Padres compete for a playoff spot after a lengthy drought.

San Francisco Giants: CF Billy Hamilton

The Giants probably won't be good in 2020, but one of the fastest players in the sport would make them a bit more interesting. Steven Duggar is currently slated to start in center field, but he hit like Hamilton last year without the stellar defense and baserunning. The Giants could do worse than letting Hamilton run all over the big outfield in San Francisco.

St. Louis Cardinals: OF Dylan Carlson

The entire Cardinals outfield is worth monitoring this spring given the large number of candidates coming to camp with uncertain futures, but the player with the most promise is the 21-year-old, switch-hitting Carlson. He'd have to absolutely crush the competition in spring to force his way on the Opening Day roster, but he just might cash in on those long odds.

Washington Nationals: RHP Wil Crowe

There's not much intrigue with the defending World Series champions, but the fifth starter spot might provide some competition between Joe Ross, Austin Voth and Erick Fedde. One pitcher who could get himself in the conversation is Crowe. He pitched well repeating Double-A last season but struggled on promotion to Triple-A. He has a solid fastball and changeup, and a solid spring could get him in the rotation sooner rather than later.

American League

Baltimore Orioles: SS Richie Martin

A year ago, Martin was the no-brainer Rule 5 pick for the Orioles after a very good 2018 season in the A's organization. Up with the big league club all year, Martin's .260 on-base percentage meant he rode the bench for half the season. He's likely to start the season in the minors, but a positive spring could end with the 25-year-old shortstop getting a role in Baltimore.

Boston Red Sox: RHP Tanner Houck

With the Mookie Betts/David Price trade thinning out an already short rotation, there are opportunities available for pitchers who can start games. The big righty was the team's first-round pick in 2017, and though his future might be as a multi-inning relief pitcher, the sinker-throwing Houck could pitch his way into Boston's rotation this year.

Chicago White Sox: RHP Tayron Guerrero

Last seen with the Marlins, Guerrero can throw 100 mph. Unfortunately, he hasn't yet been able to translate that into success in the majors with way too many walks and not enough strikeouts. Maybe the White Sox



saw something in Guerrero that makes them believe they can turn that velocity into outs. The White Sox were active filling holes in the offseason, but there's always a spot in the bullpen for a pitcher with a good spring.

Cleveland Indians: OF Bradley Zimmer

Cleveland has spent a second straight offseason failing to fix holes in the outfield. They have a lot of options, but few good ones. Zimmer was a top prospect before the 2017 season, but struggled in his rookie season. Injuries have prevented him from playing much the past two years, but if he's healthy in spring, he could play his way back on the team.

Detroit Tigers: RHP Matt Manning

The Tigers won't contend this season, but they have some exciting young players in the minors who should be part of the next winning Detroit club. While he was not the No. 1 overall pick like Casey Mize, Manning might have surpassed Mize as a pitching prospect. The 6-foot-6 righty should be ready for the majors at some point this season, but his spring should be monitored to see just how big of a jump Manning is ready for.

Houston Astros: RHP Jared Hughes

In 2017 and 2018, Hughes was a ground ball-inducing dynamo with the Brewers and Reds, giving up only eight homers in 138 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings with a 64% ground ball rate. In 2019, he gave up 13 homers and was below replacement level for the Phillies and Reds. If he can get that sinker working again and keep the ball in the park, he might be an effective reliever for Houston.

Kansas City Royals: Stephen Woods

In the Rule 5 draft, the Royals picked a pitcher who has yet to pitch above A-ball but needs him to stick in the big leagues all year to keep him. Woods has a fun curveball, but he'll need more than that for Kansas City to roster him all season. He might end up back with the Rays before spring is out.

Los Angeles Angels: OF Jo Adell

The question on Adell isn't if he'll be called up, but when. The outfield has an opening for Adell as soon as he's ready with journeyman Brian Goodwin currently projected for the starting lineup. One of the top five prospects in all of baseball, Adell struggled a little on promotion to Triple-A last year, but if he proves those struggles are behind him in spring, the Angels might decide that they need him right away.

Minnesota Twins: RHP Jhoulys Chacin

Chacin went from top playoff starter in Milwaukee at the end of 2018 to the waiver wire last season. He'll look to regain what made him successful in Milwaukee this spring for the Twins, and with Rich Hill and Michael Pineda unable to start the season with the club, there is an opening for a fifth starter.

New York Yankees: 3B Miguel Andujar

After a promising 2018 season, Andujar played in only 12 games in 2019 because of shoulder surgery and saw his replacements excel in his absence. This year, Andujar is going to have to be a little more versatile in trying to get playing time at third base, first base and the outfield as well as designated hitter. If he can't find a way to break into the lineup, the once-top prospect might find himself dealt to another organization.

Oakland Athletics: INF Jorge Mateo

Mateo looks like the odd man out in the battle for time at second base with fellow youngster Franklin Barreto beating him to the majors. The club also added Tony Kemp and has Sheldon Neuse as well, but

Mateo is out of options and needs to make the club, pass through waivers or end up with another organization. After a disastrous 2018 season, Mateo hit better in 2019 while repeating Triple-A. The 24-year-old needs to take another step up to earn playing time in the majors.

Seattle Mariners: RHP Taijuan Walker

After one good season followed by a total of 14 innings across the next two seasons in Arizona, Walker is headed back to Seattle where he made his debut just after his 21st birthday in 2013. Walker had only one appearance last season and it wasn't enough to make the Diamondbacks offer him arbitration, but with Seattle rebuilding, he should get every opportunity to show that his injuries are behind him.

Tampa Bay Rays: RHP Brent Honeywell Jr.

Honeywell struck out five batters in five shutout innings in his Triple-A finale in September 2017 and he hasn't pitched in a game since. He missed 2018 after Tommy John surgery and then fractured a bone in rehab a year ago that caused him to miss 2019 as well. He was one of the best prospects in the game two years ago, and his stuff returning would be great news for a Rays' team looking to get back to the playoffs and potentially challenge the Yankees for the division.

Texas Rangers: 1B Greg Bird

Bird never seemed to find his spot with the Yankees after posting great numbers in his 2015 debut. He was often injured, and even when he did make his way into the lineup, he hit at a below-average rate. He'll get a new opportunity to show he has something left on a Rangers team that could use a little more talent in the lineup.

Toronto Blue Jays: INF Joe Panik

The former Giant was an average player as recently as 2017 and played pretty well for the Mets down the stretch last season. He always has made a ton of contact with a 9% career strikeout rate, and his below-average power from the left side was made even worse by playing his home games in San Francisco. He's still only 29 years old and might have enough to offer Toronto to make the team.

## **\* *WEEI.com***

### **Source: Jonathan Lucroy to make \$1.5 million if he makes Red Sox**

Nick Friar

On Wednesday, the Red Sox announced they added another catcher to their spring training roster as a non-roster invitee. Ten-year veteran Jonathan Lucroy.

A source informed WEEI.com's Rob Bradford that Lucroy will make \$1.5 million if he makes the Red Sox.

The two-time All-Star began last season with the Angels and finished it with the Cubs. He hit .232 and had a .660 OPS.

### **Xander Bogaerts on commish's comment: Not nice or right**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- In a 15-minute sit-down with WEEI's Lou Merloni Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts touched on variety of topics, including one the more newsworthy items the last few days: MLB commissioner Rob Manfred "a piece of metal."

"I saw a couple of guys saying how he should take his name off of the trophy," Bogaerts said. "You play 162 games trying to have the best record in the division. You're just going to say that? I don't think it was the right thing for him to say. I think he apologized. It might take a while for a lot of people to let that sink in. Obviously he could have chosen different words. It wasn't the right and the nice way to say it. We work so hard as baseball players just to get one ring and to call it like that, it wasn't nice."

Bogaerts also discussed if he was concerned that the Red Sox might face similar kind of backlash as the Astros are dealing once MLB's report on Boston is released.

"I don't think it will be the same case with us," he said. "Obviously, we went out there and we had the best team and we proved it to everyone. Last year we dealt with a couple of injuries or else I think we would have been in a better situation. But that's the way the game is. You can't always have everyone healthy. The other team was the best one last year. We'll see how it goes this year. We're excited for the new year."

### **The most bizarre contract year belongs to Rusney Castillo**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Rusney Castillo's locker hasn't moved from the far end of the Red Sox' clubhouse at JetBlue Park. The names around him have revolved since that first spring training with the big-league club in 2015 -- when Castillo was fighting for a starting spot against guys like Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. But that one spot has been a constant.

This figures to be the last year.

After joining the Red Sox in 2014 after signing a seven-year, \$72.5 million deal in 2014, Castillo's time with Boston has one season left. After predictably not taking the opportunity to opt-out of his contract following the 2019 season, he will be making \$13.5 million to play the entire season at Triple-A Pawtucket.

"I understand that I have to go out and have the best year I can because it is a contract year for me," Castillo told WEEI.com through a translator. "Whatever happens afterwards, happens but I'm just preparing myself to hopefully get a chance to be up in the major leagues.

"I'm really just focused on this season. I'm focused on the present and whatever happens after I'm trying to get that contract. But what I'm more focused on is now and whatever comes after will get settled when it does."

The story of why Castillo won't be able to find his way back into the major leagues for the first time since 2016 is well-documented. He is simply not valuable enough for a team to allocate that much money against its payroll, particularly for a part-time role.

After playing that final game on June 16, 2016 against the Orioles it was determined by then-president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski that Castillo's spot on the 40-man roster was no longer viable. Since then the outfielder has played in 427 minor-league games without a single return to the majors.

The 32-year-old is perceived by most as a serviceable major league outfielder, coming off a year with Triple-A Pawtucket that saw him hit .278 with a .769 and a career-high 17 homers. And we will get another look at Castillo this spring training, where the outfielder has excelled in years past (.368 batting average in 2017, .317 in 2018).

But really it's going to be the same old, same old for the affable Cuban. For one more year, anyway.

"At first, it was a bit frustrating but it doesn't change the way I go about my business," said Castillo of his lot in life. "I try and work hard and try and take advantage of the opportunity I have in Triple-A and if they give me that opportunity to get back in the majors, I'm just always ready for that moment."

## **Red Sox explain their Instagram influencer strategy**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- When it comes to positive publicity, the Red Sox have been fighting an uphill battle of late. The more recent issue the organization had to fend off, of course, was trading away one its more popular players Mookie Betts.

So when Rich Keefe of the Dale & Keefe Show reported the news that the Red Sox had reached out to local Instagram influencers lately in order to siphon some positive vibes, it offered some intrigue.

Talking with WEEL.com Wednesday morning at JetBlue Park, Red Sox Chief Marketing Officer Adam Grossman clarified the club's approach.

"For influencer marketing it's been something we've been doing for years," Grossman said. "Given how the importance of social media has grown over the past several years we want to make sure we're connecting through various channels, whether that be advertising our own social media platforms others. Across baseball and frankly across brands in general the influencer marketing space has grown over the past several years. As recently as our meetings with MLB this fall, it's been a more important channel to drive awareness and ticket sales. So we've been doing this for a while and it was not in response to the Mookie trade at all.

"We started probably about seven years ago. In some ways, it has always been there. Celebrity-driven marketing ... We have fans like Matt Damon or Cardi B, we want to attach ourselves to those. But also as social has taken off these individuals who have become influencers have become more important. What we started to do about seven years ago was connect more to parents. With parent bloggers and influencers. We have had meetings with them about seven years ago when we created this Red Sox Mom's Group. That was at it's early stages about seven years and it has expanded. Again, as we look at all of the assets we have influencers are a channel in that."

Grossman said the Red Sox have had to adjust their marketing and advertising strategy, but it was a plan put in place well before the recent trade.

"We knew toward the end of last season that going into this season was going to be a different environment that we had in the past," he said. "With marketing, we don't know what the transaction is going to be and what is going to happen. But we knew from a ticket sales, from a business standpoint, we were going have to do things a little differently. So we're expanding our advertising footprint. We're putting more marketing assets. So I would say there are some things we're doing differently going in, but fundamentally we're still trying to get as much content as we can with our players through our guys. We're really lucky because we have a lot of what we call first-name players. We've got Xander, we've got Benny, we've got Raffy. So those are huge assets for us in addition to Fenway.

"We understand the emotional tie our fans have to Mookie. But it's not like, 'Oh my God, now what?' Even with Ortiz we always knew there was going to be day he is not here and we still do the things we need to do. There are some adjustments but they aren't specific to one player. On the influencer side, there are a lot of different influencers and categories of influencers. It's a wide spectrum. It's not like we are saying, 'We have to act right now!' For us, it is a communication channel but it is not a reaction to last week."

## **Could Darwinson Hernandez be a 5th starter? Kind of.**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Darwinson Hernandez is an interesting piece the Red Sox' puzzle. After listening to Red Sox interim manager Ron Roenicke Tuesday the pitcher's existence only got more intriguing.

Hernandez is undoubtedly slated to start the season in the Red Sox' bullpen, a place he thrived in 2019. But one part of that job might include helping out starting games every fifth day. Yes, talk of Hernandez performing the role of an 'Opener' has been broached.

"I think when you continue to stretch him out and he does things, yes, he can do something like that," said Roenicke when asked if Hernandez could fill the role. "Kind of like (Ryan) Yarbrough was with Tampa, something like that."

It's no accident that Yarbrough's name was surfaced. Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom was part of the decision-making process when it came to using the 28-year-old in the capacity of an Opener. What happened with the Tampa pitcher, however, was that he ultimately morphed in a traditional starter at season's end, starting in his last nine appearances while averaging, pitching fewer than five innings just twice.

"We kind of know what we want to do," Roenicke said when it comes to Hernandez. "Where this leads, whatever, down the road, I don't even want to say a time. But next year, a year after, I don't know where that leads to. We'll just plan on doing this for him like he was last year and then see where it goes."

The 23-year-old has picked up where he left off in terms of leaving an impression, opening eyes with his first live batting practice session Tuesday.

"He always looks impressive," Roenicke said of Hernandez, who appeared in 29 games in 2019. "He left a couple balls up on his breaking ball but his bullpens have been good and I thought he threw the ball well. Unfortunately we can't match these up right with the hitters and I don't think our hitters were too excited about being in there with Darwinzon. We had two left-handers and then J.D. and that makes it tough for those guys so they were just kind of tracking today. But Darwinzon threw well again."

## **\* *NBC Sports Boston***

### **Pedro Martinez practicing tough love with Red Sox' Eduardo Rodriguez**

John Tomase

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Pedro Martinez took no prisoners as a player, be it nearly no-hitting the Rays after Gerald Williams charged him, olé-ing Don Zimmer in a brawl with the Yankees, or demanding someone wake up the damn Bambino so he could "drill him in the ass."

Since retiring and becoming a pitching consultant with the Red Sox, however, Martinez has taken the more genial approach, tooling around camp like a younger Luis Tiant, offering wisdom and encouragement to Red Sox pitchers of all ages and abilities, happy to impart some of the knowledge that made him not just the most feared pitcher of his generation, but a first-ballot Hall of Famer.

Martinez is particularly proud of left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez, who finally harnessed his considerable talent last season en route to a career-high 19 wins and sixth-place finish in the AL Cy Young Award voting. Had the rest of the starting staff stayed healthy, E-Rod's emergence may have positioned the Red Sox to repeat as World Series champions.

Instead, injuries to Chris Sale, David Price, and Nathan Eovaldi left the rotation in tatters and the Red Sox out of the playoffs.

While Martinez may operate at age 48 with a perpetual grin, he can still provide tough love when it's warranted, and Rodriguez is a player he and others in the organization haven't hesitated to ride when they feel his focus slipping.

"There were times I had to be hard on him," he said. "He took it like a man. He took it from Price. He took it from [Rick] Porcello. He learned discipline. He wanted to do all the things he needed to, including having those hard times to hear us say hey, 'Strap it on right now.' He took it. He did it the right way, and right now it's paying great dividends."

The test for E-Rod following his breakout campaign will be repeating it. As Martinez noted, Price and Porcello stayed on Rodriguez practically from Day 1 of spring training last year, and former manager Alex Cora rode him, too.

Rodriguez, the Venezuelan who turns 27 in April, will need to be more self-motivated this season with all three of them gone.

"Now he's confident," Martinez said. "He knows that having success is so fulfilling for someone like him. How do you keep him [motivated]? Baseball is a humbling sport. Today you're on top, tomorrow you could be on the bottom. Just keep him focused on the work he has to do, keep him excited about the things he does on the field, and actually appreciating the things he does right. When you fall in love with doing things right, normally you're going to strive for success."

Rodriguez threw live BP on Wednesday under Martinez's watchful eye. Like the other pitchers on the roster, he's expected to make six starts this spring so he can hit the ground running on Opening Day, March 26, in Toronto.

In the bigger picture, though, the question is if he can avoid complacency and do it again. Martinez is ready with a message on this subject.

"Imagine how E-Rod went back during the winter, once he laid his head on the pillow," Martinez said. "He said, 'I did my job.' That's what you want to have when you go home — the sensation that you tried hard, you did your job, you earned your salary, everybody is at peace with you, everyone wants a piece of you, everybody wants to see you. It is a great feeling."

"That's how we keep him motivated. We keep him thinking about those great moments, and striving to be better every single day."

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Potential trade with Padres an example of how Red Sox should be operating**

Sean McAdam

Having shed \$43 million in payroll with their massive five-player trade with the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Red Sox successfully got under the competitive balance tax (CBT) threshold of \$208 million for 2020, with room to spare.

Since then, the Sox have been reinvesting some of the money saved. Days after the deal, they spent \$4.25 million on outfielder Kevin Pillar.

And now, the Red Sox are again involved in trade talks with the San Diego Padres that would see them take on Wil Myers while also enabling them to obtain some elite prospects. (Myers had previously been part of discussions between Boston and San Diego when the two franchises were involved in negotiations surrounding Mookie Betts. Now that Betts has been sent elsewhere, the talks have re-started, albeit in a different form).

Myers himself is of limited value to the Red Sox. Last year, he posted a .739 OPS, his lowest figure since 2014. He's 29 and is an underwhelming defender. Worse, he's due \$68.5 million over the next three years.

So how does that make sense for the Red Sox? Why take on a player with declining skills who's set to earn an average of almost \$23 million in each of the next three seasons?

Two reasons:

The money isn't what it seems to be.

Myers' deal with the Padres was heavily back-loaded. His current six-year, \$83 million deal paid him just \$7 million in each of the last three years.

However, under baseball's somewhat arcane accounting rules, his salary for CBT purposes is just \$13.8 million. And because the Padres are reportedly ready to hand the Red Sox approximately \$30 million toward his deal, the Red Sox would be paying Myers a little less than \$13 million per season if they obtained him.

But wait – it gets better still for the Red Sox.

Any money the Padres give the Sox would also reduce the CBT number for Myers. So, on the books, the Red Sox would be paying Myers just \$3.8 million.

In order to make the deal, the Padres would have to sweeten it by including some prospects.

Here's where we get to why the trade would benefit the Sox: they're, in essence, buying themselves two very promising young players.

Among the names being mentioned: pitcher Cal Quantrill (son of former Red Sox pitcher Paul Quantrill); catcher Luis Campusano; and shortstop Gabriel Arias.

Quantrill, who made his major league debut last season, would presumably step in immediately and serve as the Sox' No. 5 starter. A former No. 1 pick out of Stanford, Quantrill was 6-8, 5.16 as a rookie, but projects as a middle-of-the-rotation arm.

Campusano would further bolster the team's catching depth after the Sox also acquired Connor Wong as part of the Dodgers deal. No position in the Sox' organization is thinner than catcher and Campusano would give the team an elite catching prospect at Triple-A.

Arias had a breakout year last year offensively, belting 17 homers at High Single A. Arias won't turn 20 until later this month and is considered an outstanding defender. True, the Sox have Xander Bogaerts under control through at least 2025, but a talented middle-of-the-field athlete like Arias could always be moved to another position if he remains blocked at short.

It's unclear how Myers would be used. He could platoon with lefty Mitch Moreland at first, freeing up Michael Chavis to platoon at second, or turn into the Sox' utility infielder, capable of filling in everywhere but shortstop. Myers could also occasionally get playing time in left, where he profiles as a tick better than league-average.

Also unknown: what the Padres would be seeking in return, but given the salary relief they'd be receiving, it's not expected to be significant.

But the real value, of course, would be the Sox adding two very good young players to their core for the cost (as computed for CBT purposes) of less than \$4 million.

Such a move — essentially taking advantage of the team's status as a big-market club with enormous resources to purchase top young talent — is exactly the kind of transaction that was expected of Bloom when he was hired last October.

It's far less expensive and far more efficient than buying veteran free agents, who, by definition, are older and a lot more costly, fraught with risk and, sometimes, a troubling injury history.

And not incidentally, it would send a signal to an aggrieved fan base that the Sox aren't looking to permanently transform themselves into a team which values reduced payroll over fielding a competitive product on the field.

When Bloom and ownership talk about sustainability and building a roster good enough to compete for years to come, it's this sort of move to which they're referring.

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

### **As Daniel McGrath fights for Red Sox job, his heart is in fire-ravaged Australia**

Steve Buckley

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Daniel McGrath did a quick scan of the Red Sox clubhouse at JetBlue Park, as though he were reading all the nameplates affixed to the dressing stalls.

“Yes,” he then said, pausing for a moment and then adding, “Most of the players have asked me about it. I think Chris Sale was one of the first players to ask me.”

He paused again and then pointed to the dressing stalls directly across from his.

“Those guys, they're buddies of mine and they asked me about it right off,” he said, casting a glance at the dressing stalls on the opposite side of the room — No. 72, Josh Taylor, and No. 73, Mike Shawarzyn.

The “it” of which many speak, and ask about, is the ongoing crisis in McGrath's native Australia, where rampaging bush fires have destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of land, with the skies, as described by CBS News, “turning marmalade in the middle of the day.”

More than thirty lives have been lost — including three American firefighters who went to Australia to help battle the blazes — and estimates are that more than a billion animals have perished.

It is a crisis that has caught the attention of people throughout the world.

That so many of them have reached out in Australia's time of need is comforting to McGrath, a 25-year-old lefty from Melbourne who is entering his eighth season in the Red Sox organization. He considers every speck of Australia to be his home. His attitude, then, is that if you are asking him about his native land, even in a casual, roundabout way, you are doing your part to help raise awareness about an issue that's mighty important to him.

“A lot of people are asking, which is a good thing,” he said. “It's getting a lot of broadcast time because, I think, as of three weeks ago, it was already four times worse than the Amazon fire that happened few years ago. So it's important that it's getting news coverage and that it's helping to raise money.

“So, ask. It's OK. Ask. Honestly, the more awareness, the more money is raised. Any coverage is great. People can just search for it online — just Australia fire appeal — and they can see what's there.

“And if fans want to look into that, really, any donations of any kind would be great. It's a huge thing that everyone is trying to deal with. We have fires every year, but these fires are the worst.”

McGrath has been kicking around the Boston farm system for nearly a decade, with stops at short-season Lowell, the Single-A clubs in Greenville, S.C., and Salem, Va., and Double-A Portland. He had his best season last year with the Portland Sea Dogs, posting a 7-1 record and 1.98 ERA in 29 appearances, including 16 starts. He also made two appearances at Triple-A Pawtucket, the first time his feet have touched the doorstep to the big leagues.



And during all those years, the routine has been unchanged in one regard. “I just move here, there, wherever, and then I go back to Australia for the offseason,” he said.

It’s not that McGrath has anything against Lowell, Salem, Greenville, Portland and Pawtucket. It’s just that Melbourne is his home, always has been, and it’s where he’ll settle down whenever his playing-professional-baseball-in-North America thing has ended, wherever it ends.

“I love Australia,” he said. “I could never leave. I’ll always live in Australia, and Melbourne is a great city. We’ve got 5 million people and we’re one of the most cultural cities around.

“But when you read the stories and all that ... there are people at the train stations, heading out because they can’t breathe the air. This is a place that I love, and I do worry.

“So when people are talking about it, any coverage is good. Any of the news articles about it gets people thinking, and anything donated is a great thing. The firefighters are risking their lives, and anything that’s helping them is great.”

The bad pun machine inside my head keeps hoping McGrath will eventually make it to the big leagues with the Red Sox, and that he’ll be a mainstay in the Boston bullpen.

Because then we can refer to that stretch of Fenway between the right-field fence and the pitcher’s mound as ... wait for it, wait for it ... the McGrath Highway.

Take away the bad Somerville-related puns and an even better story emerges: A stint by McGrath in the big leagues means he gets to take his message to the biggest stage in baseball, and to the most people.

Wherever you happen to run into McGrath this season, be it at Hadlock Field, McCoy Stadium or Fenway Park, ask him about what’s going on in his beloved Australia. He won’t mind a bit.

### **Missing ‘big brother’ David Price, Eduardo Rodriguez out to succeed his mentors**

Jen McCaffrey

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The departures of David Price and Rick Porcello have left an unfamiliar feel on a Red Sox rotation that hasn’t seen much turnover in recent years.

Just like that, Eduardo Rodriguez has become the longest-tenured Boston starter on the staff.

Chris Sale, of course, is the veteran of the group, entering his 11th season, but in terms of starts for the Red Sox, Rodriguez is the one with most innings under his belt.

Since 2015, Rodriguez has pitched in 127 games, including 122 starts, and logged 699 innings for the Red Sox. (Sale arrived in 2017 and has made 84 starts over 519 2/3 innings.)

Rodriguez, who turns 27 in April, has shifted from a promising young pitcher to a mainstay of the Red Sox rotation.

Over the past few seasons, the lefty often spoke about the influence Porcello and especially Price had on him as he continued to develop his game. It’s almost fitting that, coming off a breakout season during which he tossed 200 innings and registered 200 strikeouts for the first time, Rodriguez has now graduated to the next level and will be counted on to fill the shoes of those departed mentors.

“It was really hard for me to think he’s not going to be here this year anymore,” Rodriguez said of Price. “He was like a big brother to me in all aspects, as a player, as a friend, as in everything. We had a really

good, close relationship and now it feels weird, but this is how baseball is. Sometimes you grow relationships with guys and they're gone."

On Wednesday, Rodriguez threw live batting practice for the second time this spring under the watchful eye of Pedro Martinez and several members of the coaching staff and front office. Late last week, he tossed a one-inning, 15-pitch session, but as part of a natural progression this time he threw two 15-pitch innings to Christian Vázquez. He thinks he could be ready to pitch three innings in a game by next week, if all goes according to plan. Interim manager Ron Roenicke won't reveal just yet when Rodriguez (or any of his starters) will appear in games.

"His command is the main thing on why he's so good and he's trying to get his mechanics together, to where that great command will be there," Roenicke said. "It's just slowly progressing him to make sure that when we get to the start of the season he's there."

Rodriguez finished sixth in the American League Cy Young voting last year with a 3.81 ERA and 9.4 strikeouts per nine innings over 34 starts. It marked his first fully healthy season in the majors after knee and ankle ailments set him back the previous few seasons.

"That was my goal since I got to the big leagues and to be able to make it last year was really good for me," Rodriguez said. "Now I know how it is and how to get to that point, so it's something I need to get this year and try to do the same as I did last year. Go out there every five days and compete the best I can and throw six, seven innings all the time. That's the goal as a starter. I know how to do it because I did it last year, I've just got to go out there and do it again."

Despite Price and Porcello's absence, it's not as if Rodriguez has no one to lean on. Rotation newcomer and fellow Venezuelan Martin Perez is a longtime friend. Sale and Nathan Eovaldi also return, providing a level of consistency. But they are older, more established. Rodriguez remains a constant student, watching and trying to absorb information. When Sale threw off a mound for the first time this spring on Tuesday, Rodriguez watched intently from behind the mound.

Rodriguez also has an invaluable resource in Martinez, the Red Sox icon who's been his advocate since the day he arrived in Boston.

"Since I got here in Boston, first year he got me and talked to me all the time," Rodriguez said. "So I'm just used to having him around, and it's pretty good to have him all the time, even though I've known him for five, six years already, every time he's here he has something new. And I'm asking questions all the time. Even if I have to repeat the same question as I did last year, I do it, and he's there for us all the time."

The changes for the pitching staff also extend to the coaching ranks, with pitching coaches Dana LeVangie and Brian Bannister gone as well. But Rodriguez has worked with new pitching coach Dave Bush and assistant pitching coach Kevin Walker in the past, so the transition there won't be too difficult.

The pair knows Rodriguez's strengths well, where to push him and how to manage him.

"There are things he can get better at, he knows that," Bush told The Athletic this winter of Rodriguez. "He can limit his walks, he can still go more innings, he can still have more consistency. He can be really good. He's very talented. I think that's why, in some ways, people have been frustrated with his progress the last few years because they see flashes of talent and they see some stretches where he's really, really good then there's some regression and people wonder why. Well, that's just part of becoming a big leaguer. ... And (at 26) he's still not that old. He got to the big leagues pretty young, so that's just part of his growth as a player — learning how to do that every five days and for a whole season."

### **State of the Red Sox minor league system: When might these prospects be ready?**

Chad Jennings

FORT MYERS, Fla. – Sitting in the bleachers behind Field 2 of the Red Sox spring training complex, vice president of player development Ben Crockett rarely took his eyes off the field. Some of his younger prospects were taking batting practice on an otherwise quiet afternoon, and he seemed to catch every swing even as he spoke for nearly half an hour about his expectations for this season.

In recent years, the Red Sox have shown themselves to be flexible and open-minded with their minor leaguers. Overachievers have jumped from Double-A to the big leagues, low-round picks have leapfrogged bigger names to land on the 40-man roster, and long-term starting pitchers have prepared for short-term bullpen assignments just in case. Particularly at this time of year, when camp is getting started and some minor leaguers have not yet arrived, every plan is subject to change.

And so, even as Crockett spoke to The Athletic at length, his overwhelming message was one of wait-and-see. With Bobby Dalbec, Tanner Houck, C.J. Chatham and Kyle Hart having graduated to Triple-A, the system is well-positioned to impact the major league roster this season, and another wave of notable prospects – Jarren Duran, Bryan Mata, Jeter Downs and Connor Wong among them – is right on their heels.

Minor league opening day is about two months away, but here's where things stand with the improved Red Sox farm system.

Getting to know the new guys

For the next few weeks, Downs and Wong – the two prospects acquired in the Mookie Betts/David Price trade – will be in big league camp getting most of their reps with the major league staff. But inevitably they will be reassigned to the minors. While Crockett wouldn't commit to where those two will open the season, both finished last year in Double-A and seem likely to be back there come April.

“It wouldn't be surprising if that's where they start,” Crockett said.

Downs, 21, was primarily a shortstop in both the Reds and Dodgers minor league systems, and while his future might be at second base, Crockett said he expects Downs to keep playing shortstop for the time being. Doesn't mean he won't get some time at second, but the team sees no reason to move him off shortstop right now.

“If that's where he's comfortable, he'll probably see the most reps there,” Crockett said.

Downs' OPS jumped from .753 in 2018 to .888 in 2019, and Crockett said Red Sox scouts and analysts agreed that the improvements were not a fluke. They saw mechanical changes at work and believe in Downs' upside as an everyday infielder.

The Red Sox also believe in Wong as a catcher. The 23-year-old played some second base and third base for the Dodgers, but the Red Sox acquired him to catch (Wong has said he thinks of himself as a catcher who's capable of playing elsewhere when necessary).

“He's working with our catchers right now, and that's the primary focus at this point,” Crockett said. “I think anything beyond that would be a conversation and consideration later on down the road. He's been a primary catcher but has the athleticism and history to be able to do other things. That's always great, and versatility is great, but we're definitely excited about him behind the plate.”

Although the 6'1", 181-lb Wong isn't particularly bulky, Wong has shown good power in the minor leagues, and although he's struck out a lot, he's also gotten on base at a good clip.

“Any time you have the chance to impact the ball from that position, it's an important skill,” Crockett said.

Versatility and flexibility in Triple-A

Right now, Dalbec's most obvious path to big league playing time is at first base, and so the Red Sox began giving him considerable playing time at that position a year ago. But assuming he's back in the minors on Opening Day, Dalbec will remain a third baseman by trade.

He will continue receiving "significant exposure" at first base — "Getting his comfort level up at first base to match where he is at third is definitely important," Crockett said — but third base will remain his primary position, even though he is clearly blocked by Rafael Devers. One key reason is the Red Sox don't want to lose him as immediate depth at the hot corner, where Dalbec remains a good defender. He will move around, though.

That versatility will be something of a theme in Pawtucket, where Crockett said there will be no such thing as an everyday lineup. Nearly every non-catching position player on the projected PawSox roster will play multiple positions.

- Chatham, a shortstop who began to play second last season, has since been exposed to the outfield and could "potentially" get some third base reps in preparation for a utility role.

- Marco Hernandez, who was mostly a second baseman and third baseman last season and again in winter ball, will return to shortstop occasionally, again preparing for a utility opening.

- Nick Longhi, the former Red Sox prospect signed as a minor league free agent this winter, will play first base and the outfield corners. Jantzen Witte can play every infield position except shortstop. Chad De La Guerra has played every infield position except first base. John Andreoli, Cesar Puello and Rusney Castillo have played all three outfield positions.

The depth-building versatility in Pawtucket should continue into the pitching staff where Tanner Houck and Kyle Hart — assuming they don't make the big league roster — seem to be the only pitchers more or less locked into the rotation (and even those two could be relievers in Boston). Mike Shawaryn, Hector Velazquez, Brian Johnson, Matt Hall, Chris Mazza and Mike Kickham are among the candidates to round out the rotation, but all six could also be relievers or end up in the majors.

"We have a number of guys who can provide starter innings, bulk innings, provide multiple innings at a time," Crockett said. "I think a lot of this camp will be trying to make determinations of who's in the big leagues from that group, who's in Triple-A, and what sets us up best to protect the major league team and maximize the abilities of those individual guys."

And to be clear, although Houck finished last season as a Triple-A reliever: "We absolutely told him to come to camp expecting to start," Crockett said. "And that's why we sent him to the Fall League and to Team USA to keep adding to that innings bulk, to set him up this year to have a pretty solid innings total to jump from."

Immediate depth stretches to Portland

Outfielder Marcus Wilson had an .811 second-half OPS at Double-A last season and he has a spot on the 40-man roster this spring, but the Red Sox are at least considering the possibility of assigning him back to Portland to start the season. His assignment is "to be determined," Crockett said.

A return to Double-A also seems likely for Mata, arguably the team's top pitching prospect, who one scout singled out as someone who could fill the Red Sox major league rotation opening at some point this season.

"He was challenged by that (Double-A) level," Crockett said. "I think it was really good for him to be there, and I think there are still things in his game to continue to work on."

Add Downs, Wong, Duran and maybe Thad Ward, and the Portland roster could be prospect-heavy, but being one level removed from the majors would not keep those players from a big-league call up. Just ask Andrew Benintendi, Rafael Devers, Tzu-Wei Lin and Bobby Poyner, all of whom got to Boston in recent years with little-to-no Triple-A experience.

“We’ve certainly shown and believe this over the last couple of years, that Double-A is also kind of a launching ground to the big leagues,” Crockett said.

Some of these upper-level assignments will be about maximizing at-bats and innings for those who need it.

#### Wild cards on the mound

At the start of last season, the Red Sox were ranked as the game’s worst minor league system by Baseball America. Despite the graduation of Michael Chavis, and the lack of a first-round draft pick last summer, the Red Sox climbed to 20th on Baseball America’s list this winter.

Two wild cards that could push the system even higher are pitchers Noah Song (whose status is in doubt due to a military obligation) and Jay Groome (the former first-round pick returning from Tommy John surgery).

While Crockett had no update on Song’s status – “I wish I did,” he said – he was bullish on Groome’s future. After a healthy return late last season, Groome pitched through instructional league and is expected to be fully healthy this spring. Whether he breaks camp on an active roster is simply a matter of how the Red Sox choose to monitor his workload.

Groome hasn’t pitched many innings, so the Red Sox will limit him from time to time this season, but they plan to keep using him as a starter without a protective move to the bullpen.

“We’ll be monitoring overall total workload and take steps to keep that in check, but we’re excited to have him going,” Crockett said. “I definitely anticipate him being able to pitch early and pitch late.”

#### The other new guy

For now, there’s considerable attention on newly acquired prospects Downs and Wong, but the Red Sox are also anticipating the arrival of Taiwanese pitching prospect Chih-Jung Liu.

The 20-year-old signed this offseason, and he was a fascinating two-way player overseas. Although he’s been a good middle infielder, the Red Sox signed him to pitch. He has a huge fastball that reportedly sits in the mid-90s and tops out around 98 mph. He’s not in camp yet, but the Red Sox expect him to arrive this spring.

“We’re just really excited to get our hands on him,” Crockett said. “This guy has good stuff, and we know he’s athletic, and we’ve heard really good things about him as a person, too.”

For now, there are no plans to use Liu as a position player. Where he plays this season will depend on what the Red Sox see when he gets into camp. He’s young enough that opening in extended spring training would not be particularly unusual.

#### Challenges of expectation

Crockett was asked about three players facing unique challenges this season.

· The first was Jarren Duran, the 2018 fifth-rounder who so thoroughly dominated the lower levels that he rocketed into Top 10 Prospect status within the organization. When he got to Double-A in the second half of last season, though, he was finally challenged and – for a while – stymied. He hit just .216 his first month at that level.

“It was really good for him to get challenged like that, particularly so much right when he got there to Double-A,” Crockett said. “Your inclination is to try to change what got you there. Everybody is trying to get incrementally better, but you don’t want to change who you are, particularly when you’re having that level of success ... He’s shown some resilience, and still he’s open to the small tweaks that I think everyone needs to make as they’re going up the ladder rather than wholesale changes.”

· It's a very different challenge for Triston Casas, widely considered the top prospect in the organization, whose first full season of pro ball was so successful that he's received nothing but praise and additional attention this winter.

"We talk about listening to the feedback that the game is giving you," Crockett said. "Listening to the feedback that we're giving you, and being a good self-evaluator of what you need to do ... He's one of the most focused, consistent workers, routine-oriented guys that I've seen. Particularly for someone of his age and experience, he's incredibly routine-oriented and someone that isn't swayed by external factors."

· Reliever Durbin Feltman can relate to external expectations. Despite being drafted in 2018, the former Texas Christian reliever was widely seen as a big-league bullpen option for 2019. Instead, he pitched to an unsightly 5.26 ERA in Double-A last season and didn't get so much as an invitation to big league camp this spring.

"It was probably the first time in his life that he's had that level of adversity and challenge," Crockett said. "I think he was forced to make some adjustments, and he did from a pitch-mix standpoint over the course of the year, and I think he did from a routine standpoint over the course of the year. He kind of came in, and as we would do with anybody who's had a lot of success, we kind of try to let them ride that a little bit. He had some of his own routines in terms of game preparation and stuff like that that he made some adjustments with over the course of the year to try to get him prepared for just the grind of the professional year. Things that usually players are dealing with in their first full season, but they're often dealing with them at a low level. Doing that at Double-A was a little bit different, but he did."

"He made some adjustments. By the end of the year, even though the numbers didn't completely turn around, from an evaluative standpoint, just watching him pitch, there was a lot more consistency in what he was doing. The pitch shapes were better and more consistent than they were early in the year. And we were happy with that, and he carried that over into instructional league."

Healthy for now

Obviously, this will change. But Crockett said, as of now, the Red Sox system is relatively healthy. Aside from known lingering issues from last season – Groome working his way back from Tommy John, for example – there are few added medical concerns in camp. The most significant he could think of off the top of his head was Double-A infielder Jeremy Rivera fouling a ball off his foot in winter ball.