

## ***The Boston Red Sox Friday, February 21, 2020***

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

**Jonathan Lucroy knew what the Astros were up to**

Julian McWilliams

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Jonathan Lucroy knew the Astros were cheaters.

“Everybody in baseball, especially that division, we were aware of the Astros doing those things,” said Lucroy, who was with the American League West rival Athletics in 2018. “It was up to us to kind of outsmart them, I guess you could say. But it’s kind of hard when you have a computer program that can break your signs.”

Lucroy said Thursday that he and his pitchers had to use multiple sets of signs when playing the Astros, even when runners weren’t on base. He described it as a mental challenge having to go through so many sequences, sometimes from pitch to pitch. The games dragged, Lucroy said, and if you had a young pitcher on the mound, it made it even more difficult.

That season, Lucroy said, the A’s reached out to the commissioner’s office regarding the Astros’ sign-stealing practices, but the league did nothing.

“They had just called [the Astros] and let them know,” Lucroy said. “They kind of just said something to them. They didn’t go through the whole investigation. It wasn’t until [former Astros pitcher Mike] Fiers came out publicly that they went and looked at it really hard.”

Thursday marked Lucroy’s first official day in Red Sox camp after he signed a minor league deal. It’s unfamiliar territory for the veteran catcher. His spot on the roster is not assured, and he is coming off possibly his worst season of his career. Lucroy hit just .232 with the Angels and Cubs last year.

“It’s a little strange, but it’s OK,” said Lucroy. “It’s just a part of the business side of baseball, and honestly, it’s what I deserve. I haven’t played good. It’s kind of where we’re at. You make your bed, you have to sleep in it.”

Over the winter, Lucroy underwent surgery for a herniated disk in his neck that he had played with for three seasons.

“I wish I could sit here and say that’s the reason I haven’t played good, but I’m not going to,” Lucroy said.

Lucroy is known for the way he works with pitchers. In 2018, he helped an injury-riddled A’s staff advance to the one-game playoff against the Yankees. He caught Chris Sale during his bullpen session on Thursday.

One familiar face with the Sox is interim manager Ron Roenicke, the manager in Milwaukee during Lucroy’s best years in the majors.

“[Lucroy] when I had him was a great offensive player,” Roenicke said. “Defensively, really good hands. The metrics on him were really high when they first started doing the metrics. I know those numbers have dropped, so we need to figure that out.”

Outfield shift

Kevin Pillar was in right field during drills on Thursday, with Jackie Bradley Jr. in center.

Pillar played some right field last season with the Giants, so that might not be an issue this year. The right field at Fenway Park shouldn't be that much of an adjustment either, since the outfield at Oracle Park in San Francisco is also large. The biggest adjustment will be playing alongside Bradley, who also covers a lot of ground.

"He had a great outfielder next to him in Mookie [Betts] who could go get it," Pillar said. "[The biggest challenge] is just understanding our range and limitations in the outfield. You have two guys who have primarily played center field in their career and are used to being the alphas out there. For me, getting used to getting called off and getting used to not being the alpha out there is going to be a little bit of a challenge for me."

Pillar and Bradley haven't talked much about how they envision working together. That's something that will come later in the spring.

"All my work and my mind-set is focused on being the best right fielder I could be," Pillar said.

Emotional goodbye

On Wednesday, his first day of spring training with the Brewers, Brock Holt shared how hard it was for him to make the move from the Red Sox.

"I was with Boston for so long, and I honestly never expected to wear any other uniform but a Red Sox uniform," said the 31-year-old utilityman, who signed a one-year deal with a club option for 2021 with Milwaukee after seven years and two championships with Boston.

"I loved it there. I loved playing at Fenway, I love the fans, I love the city," Holt said. "I was a huge part of the community. So, it was tough. It was tough for me to come to the fact that I wasn't going back.

"But . . . everything happens for a reason. I'm excited to be here."

Holt's interview came hours before an emotional Instagram post, in which he shared photos from the 2018 championship run, with his wife, Lakyn, and son, Griffin, and highlighting Holt's work with the Jimmy Fund.

"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!"

The Brewers come to Fenway for a three-game series June 5-7.

See you tomorrow

Rafael Devers still isn't at camp. He wanted to spend one more day with his newborn child, Roenicke said. The club expects him to be in camp on Friday, ready to go . . . Alex Verdugo threw a bit in the outfield . . . The Sox play Northeastern in their annual exhibition Friday at 1:05 p.m., with the game broadcast on NESN. Daniel McGrath will make the start for the Sox but will pitch just one inning. Walpole, Mass., native Cam Schlittler starts for the Huskies. Brian Johnson is scheduled to start on Saturday against the Rays. Regular position players won't play on Friday, but you can expect to see some vs. the Rays.

**Is Rob Manfred more likely to punish the Red Sox simply to save face?**

Christopher L. Gasper

Embattled Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred has unwittingly adopted the rallying cry of the 2018 Red Sox: “Do Damage.”

The more Manfred tries to engage in damage control to quell the outrage that has spread like wildfire across baseball regarding the Houston Astros sign-stealing scandal, the more damage he does to his credibility and that of the sport he presides over.

Now, to avoid absorbing continued public relations punishment Manfred might have to inflict one on the Red Sox to turn the tide.

The problem is that Manfred is treating the Astros’ brazen illicit sign-stealing operation during their World Series-winning 2017 season that involved a refuse percussion section, as well as additional impermissible sign-stealing in 2018, as a PR crisis. It’s more grave. It’s a crisis of public confidence in the legitimacy of the product. Most damning, that lack of faith in baseball’s competitive integrity extends to the players, Manfred’s biggest critics. Players feel defrauded by the Astros and have continued to lash out about the lack of player discipline levied by MLB for a cheating scheme Manfred stated was “player-driven.” If the players aren’t convinced MLB is dedicated to ensuring the games are on the up and up, why should we be?

It seems like every other day there is another revelation, bruising player statement, or tone-deaf quotation from Manfred that squirts more lighter fluid on the raging conflagration of a cheating scandal that has engulfed MLB. Degrading the World Series trophy as a mere “piece of metal” when pressed on stripping Houston of its World Series win was a nadir for Manfred, resulting in caustic player scorn and an apology from the commissioner.

Defending the punishments, Manfred sounds like the exasperated father justifying a decision with the well-worn parental trope “because I said so.”

All of this ties back to those 2018 Red Sox, purveyors of that catchy “Do Damage” slogan. The Sox remain under investigation by MLB for impermissible sign-stealing during their World Series-winning season. The Sox face allegations, first unearthed by *The Athletic*, that they used their video replay room to decode signs in violation of MLB policy during the 108-win joy ride. That was also one of the methods of sign-stealing the Astros employed in 2017 — before advancing to a monitor near the dugout and trash-can thumping — and in 2018. A verdict from MLB on the Sox is expected by next week.

The Red Sox have maintained innocence. They’ve asked us to reserve judgment. They remain confident they’ll be completely exonerated. But given the current climate in MLB, Manfred absolving the Sox of sign-stealing guilt isn’t going to play well at all, even if it’s supported by the facts.

Manfred and MLB have a credibility gap on this issue. New Sox catcher Jonathan Lucroy said Thursday that when he played with the Oakland Athletics in 2018, the A’s alerted MLB that the division-rival Astros were engaging in chicanery. Oakland GM David Forst told the *San Jose Mercury News* last week that the A’s lodged a formal complaint with MLB prior to A’s pitcher Mike Fiers, a former Astro, going public in November, triggering MLB’s investigation. Letting another World Series winner under suspicion walk scot-free isn’t going to help Manfred. Players appear to be in no mood to readily accept MLB’s word on sign-stealing because they feel Manfred wants to bury the schemes, not get to the bottom of them.

People will harp on the fact that the allegations stemmed from three people who were with the Sox in 2018, according to *The Athletic*. They’ll speculate that there was a quid pro quo for the Sox parting ways with manager Alex Cora, the sign decoding common denominator between the Astros and Boston. Cora was singled out by MLB as one of the architects of Houston’s 2017 sign-stealing operation as its bench coach.

Manfred might have to ding the Sox Green Monster-style to placate the hardball hordes assembling at his gate, no matter how small the actual impropriety in this case. He could justify a PR-guided punishment like a fine or docking draft picks by pointing out that the Sox were found guilty of violating rules on electronically-aided sign-stealing in 2017 in the Fitbit kerfuffle with the New York Yankees.

Manfred feather dusted the Sox with an undisclosed fine and a stern warning then. In a statement announcing that decision, Manfred said, "I have received absolute assurances from the Red Sox that there will be no future violations of this type." The Sox were back before MLB's court for allegations stemming from the next season.

None of this would be fair. But baseball folks want their pound of flesh and the Sox are on deck on the carving block. All-Stars Cody Bellinger, Kris Bryant, Nick Markakis, Mike Trout, Aaron Judge, and Giancarlo Stanton have all ripped the Astros while expressing dismay that MLB has allowed them to keep their ill-gotten spoils and failed to provide a greater deterrent for illicit sign-stealing.

Manfred and baseball are getting pounded like John "Way Back" Wasdin. Los Angeles Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner and former Sox pitcher and current Chicago Cubs ace Jon Lester both lambasted Manfred for his "piece of metal" quip, opining that the Commissioner's Trophy is debased by having Manfred at MLB's helm.

Ouch.

Stanton smacked the rhetorical equivalent of one of his mammoth home runs on Wednesday when he told reporters, "I don't think the punishments were harsh enough player-wise. At the end of the day, it gives more incentive to [cheat]."

Correct. If the only penalty for cheating in a manner that can boost your win total, your stats, and your paycheck is that your manager and general manager will get the gate if you get caught, that's a risk worth taking.

In fairness to Manfred, the MLB Players Association bears significant blame in this imbroglio as well. The commissioner needed the cooperation of the MLBPA to impose player discipline. Yes, inviting management punishment is anathema for any union, but ultimately a union serves the interests of its members, some of whom feel defrauded by the Astros. The union shouldn't repeat the sins of the PED era.

The MLBPA has stated it's not averse to player punishments moving forward as baseball engages in a comprehensive review of sign-stealing policy. But it made zero effort to enable Manfred to punish players during the Astros investigation. MLBPA head Tony Clark scoffed at the mere mention that player discipline should've been on the table, offering this nonsensical, political palaver:

"We believe that the rules that were in place independent of [immunity] players weren't going to be disciplined. As a matter of fact, the language suggests that only clubs and club personnel can be disciplined for whatever it is that a player may have done."

Read that back, Tony. Does that make any sense?

The baseball backlash over this botched operation isn't something Manfred can fix with conversational cosmetic enhancement in pressers and interviews. It's going to take action, and that could put the Sox in an uncomfortable position. They represent one way for Manfred to save face.

Either Manfred will have to continue to take damage to his reputation or the Sox will have to take a little bit of damage to theirs for the good of the game and the commish.

### **Glove story: The best defensive players in Red Sox history**

Chad Finn

Spring training is supposed to be for the renewal of hope and fresh beginnings and all of those warm clichés. But so far for the Red Sox, it's been a drag. Superstar Mookie Betts is a Dodger, fan favorite Brock Holt is a Brewer, the fourth starter had a 5.12 ERA for the Twins last year, and the fifth starter is Who The Heck Knows, Maybe We Should Try An Opener?

Not good times. Bad times. They'll probably get better. But that doesn't erase the lousy vibes right now.

So rather than pondering . . . well, whatever it is that the Red Sox are attempting to do, let's take today to just have a simple baseball conversation. We're overdue for one of those, that's for sure.

The topic, which was somewhat spurred by the acquisition of Kevin Pillar — a wonderful defensive outfielder who would be a nice defensive complement to Jackie Bradley Jr. if I didn't suspect he was actually here to replace him — is this:

Who are the best defensive players by position in Red Sox history?

I'll admit, this exercise was more subjective than I expected. There are plenty of outstanding candidates throughout Red Sox lore at almost — almost — every position. I also realized I should know enough to admit what I don't know. Old-timers swear by Jimmy Piersall in center field. His career ended two years before I was born, so I never saw him play, and Tony Perkins didn't exactly mirror his athletic grace in "Fear Strikes Out." I can't imagine he was better than Jackie Bradley Jr. But I'm here for your argument.

Also, I mention Gold Gloves a lot. We know they're not the perfect barometer since Derek Jeter won five of them, but they do help with context, at least when it comes to a player's defensive reputation in his time.

Got it? Good. Now let's imagine watching this nine spectacularly save some runs . . .

**CATCHER:** Carlton Fisk

This is one of the tougher ones to choose, and it probably comes down to personal and generational preference. Fisk (1972), Jason Varitek (2005), and Tony Pena (1991) each won a single Gold Glove with the Red Sox.

Unsentimentally, Pena would be a good choice. He finished 21st in AL MVP balloting in 1990 despite just a .670 OPS because . . . well, because we didn't know what OPS was then, plus he was a distinctive, superb catcher.

But as a child of the '70s, I'm going with Fisk, who masterfully guided the pitching staff and controlled the game. Children of the late '90s and early 2000s probably would say the same about Varitek.

Also: Don't give me any of that Christian Vazquez stuff. He has regressed as a catcher as he has improved as a hitter.

**FIRST BASE:** George Scott

The Red Sox have had some slick ones here: Kevin Youkilis (2007 Gold Glove) and Adrian Gonzalez (2011) as regulars, and the likes of Doug Mientkiewicz, J.T. Snow, and Mitch Moreland in supporting roles.

But I'm going with the inimitable George "Boomer" Scott, who was a Gold Glover for the Impossible Dreamers in '67 and again in '68, then won six more with the Brewers from 1971-76 before coming back to the Sox in '77.

**SECOND BASE:** Dustin Pedroia

Straightforward call, actually. Pedroia won four Gold Gloves, but he's also won four Fielding Bible awards, a more accurate and analytically driven representation of who truly stands out on defense. Those awards are voted on by a 12-person panel of experts and given to just one player at each position across both leagues, and they're growing in prestige.

Hall of Famer Bobby Doerr had some fine defensive seasons in his day, including a couple in which he had single-digit errors while playing virtually every day. Rey Sanchez might have been the flashiest second baseman the Sox ever had in 2002.

#### SHORTSTOP: Pokey Reese

Calvin “Pokey” Reese Jr. played just 96 games with the Red Sox, but I’ll say this without a second thought: He is the flashiest, most graceful, and rangiest infielder the Red Sox have had in my lifetime.

The final out of the 2004 ALCS was hit his way, and I can’t think of anyone else in this galaxy that I’d want fielding that history-altering ground ball. (Ozzie Smith? I hear you, but he was 49 years old at the time.) The bumper sticker of the time was right: “Pokey Would Have Had It.”

Others? Alex Gonzalez was excellent in 2006, and ’70s stalwart Rick Burleson had a better fastball than most members of the pitching staff. Don’t give me Jose Iglesias. I suspect anyone who voted for him also liked him better than Xander Bogaerts at the time.

#### THIRD BASE: Adrian Beltre

Like Reese, Beltre spent just one season with the Red Sox, 2010. But he’s the best defensive third baseman I’ve ever seen (I started caring about baseball the year after Brooks Robinson retired), and few players performed with his combination of joy, humor, intensity, and excellence. I wish he’d spent his entire career here.

Frank Malzone was a whiz in the ’50s, winning three straight Gold Gloves from 1957-59. Mike Lowell had the most accurate throwing arm from third base I can recall. Personal favorite Butch Hobson was somewhat less accurate (he made 43 errors in ’78, most of them of the throwing variety since Don Zimmer kept running him out there with a damaged elbow), but no one dived headfirst into a dugout quite like ol’ Butch.

#### LEFT FIELD: Carl Yastrzemski

Probably the easiest call we have, other than perhaps right field. Yaz won seven Gold Gloves, second-most all-time among Red Sox players, seemed to know every dead spot on the wall, and had a knack for making, as they say, a tremendous catch or two.

There’s not really any competition here. Ted Williams spent his time in left field practicing his swing. Manny Ramirez spent his time thinking about his favorite cartoon characters. Mike Greenwell spent his time plotting his next collision with Ellis Burks’s torso.

#### CENTER FIELD: Jackie Bradley Jr.

Another fairly easy call. Bradley is the most dazzling center fielder the Red Sox have had in my lifetime, and they’ve had some gems, most notably unabashed JBJ fan Fred Lynn. I remember Coco Crisp having a magnificent season, stacking highlight upon highlight, but I can never remember if it was 2006 or ’07. But he had a wet ramen noodle for an arm. Bradley has a howitzer.

#### RIGHT FIELD: Dwight Evans

Based on both anecdotes and awards, Evans is the greatest defensive player in Red Sox history. He won eight Gold Gloves (his first in ’76, his last in ’85), but remember: from 1961 until 2010, the award went to any three outfielders, rather than one at each position. So there were several years in which multiple center fielders got rewarded. In 1980, for instance, Fred Lynn, Dwayne Murphy, and Willie Wilson — all center fielders — were rewarded.

Had there been specific positional designations, Evans probably would have had a few more Gold Gloves.

The Red Sox have had some other excellent right fielders. Mookie Betts has won four straight Gold Gloves, Shane Victorino claimed one in 2013, and J.D. Drew was methodically excellent. But there's no one like Evans.

PITCHER: Mike Boddicker

Greg Maddux won 18 Gold Gloves in his career. Jim Kaat won 16. Meanwhile, Red Sox pitchers have collected just one in all the years of the award — by Boddicker, in 1990. So by something close to default, he gets the honor. What, you expected Matt Young?

### **David Ortiz chalks up Mookie Betts trade to the 'business side' of baseball**

Julian McWilliams

FORT MYERS, Fla. — David Ortiz thinks the Red Sox can win without Mookie Betts.

“They won without me,” said Ortiz with a smile Thursday in Sox camp. “So I’m not saying that Mookie isn’t a big piece of what we are here. But once that happened, you’ve got to move on.

“I was part of this ball club in 2016. And in 2018, we won. And I wasn’t playing. Yes, as a player, we are a big part of a team, but we also are replaceable.”

This offseason, however, has been particularly tough for the Sox. They not only traded Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, they also parted ways with manager Alex Cora.

Major League Baseball has taken its bumps and bruises, too, once it determined that the Houston Astros were involved in an illegal sign-stealing scheme during the 2017 season and part of 2018. It cost a general manager and three managers their jobs, including Cora, who was the bench coach for the Astros in 2017.

The Betts trade has had a negative impact on the Sox fan base, but Ortiz sees it differently. He believes they made a shrewd decision by adding Alex Verdugo, along with prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong. He described the move as just business.

“In Mookie’s situation, it’s hard to get rid of someone like him,” Ortiz said. “But on the business side, we also know that, specifically, Mookie is going to get a deal close to what Mike Trout has. I guess that’s the difference between having him here and having him go to LA.

“I know fans are hurting a little bit because you let a franchise player go somewhere else, but that’s the tricky part about baseball — you fall in love with players and sometimes the business side of it doesn’t allow the team to keep them.”

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

Trout finalized a 12-year, \$430 million deal just before the start of last season. Ortiz noted that if there weren’t a Trout, you could argue that Betts was the best player in baseball.

“Mookie has earned every single dollar that he’s going to get,” Ortiz said. “If I’m him, I’m not going to leave \$50, \$60, \$70 million on the table just because. We had a good offer for him, but from what I understand, somewhere else he’s going to get more.”

Ortiz said free agency can’t be taken for granted, that a lot of people might view squeezing every penny out of a club as greedy, but free agency, he said, only comes around once.

The Sox also remain under investigation for allegations of electronic sign-stealing in 2018. But the focus, for now, has been on the Astros and commissioner Rob Manfred granting players immunity in exchange for testimony.

“I don’t agree with him getting all the heat,” Ortiz said. “The reality is that not one player has come through and said, ‘Hey, it was me who started this up.’ Everybody is passing the ball. All the commissioner can do is have a team investigate what’s going on. Commissioner Manfred has been legit from Day 1.”

Ortiz added that the Astros, even without the sign-stealing scheme, have great players. What he didn’t like, though, was Mike Fiers outing his former teammates.

“I’m mad at him,” said Ortiz. “After you make your money and you get your ring, you decide to talk about it? Why didn’t you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn’t you say, ‘I don’t want no part of this.’ Now, you look like a snitch.”

### **Right now, Red Sox rotation does not look like the stuff of champions**

Dan Shaughnessy

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The 1971 Baltimore Orioles famously had four 20-game winners and advanced to the seventh game of the World Series. Jim Palmer, Dave McNally, Mike Cuellar, and Pat Dobson all made 30 or more starts and all pitched 224 or more innings. Three of them exceeded 280 innings.

The world champion 2004 Red Sox had five starting pitchers who never got hurt. Pedro Martinez, Curt Schilling, Derek Lowe, Tim Wakefield, and Bronson Arroyo each started at least 29 games and logged no fewer than 178 innings.

Fast-forward to 2020 and a Red Sox team with almost zero reliability in the starting rotation. More suspects than prospects.

These are not the Red Sox of “we have five aces.”

Since the end of last season, the Sox have said goodbye to two starting pitchers, Rick Porcello and David Price. That leaves Eduardo Rodriguez, Chris Sale, and Nate Eovaldi left from last year’s starting staff (we are not including meatball artist Andrew Cashner).

Yikes.

There has been a lot of noise in recent weeks about the salary-dump trade of Mookie Betts and Price, the MLB cheating investigation that darkens the spring skies over JetBlue Park, the gaping absence of Alex Cora, and new baseball boss Chaim Bloom bringing the magic of Tampa Bay to Fenway Park . . .

If we are going to bring the conversation back around to baseball, it has to be stated that the Red Sox do not have the starting pitching that normally is associated with a contending ball club. Not even close.

Rodriguez, who has battled weight, maturity, and reliability issues throughout his career, comes into the year as the staff anchor. He was a gaudy 19-6 with a 3.81 ERA in 203⅓ innings in 2019. The now-fiscally-conscious Sox rewarded this by beating Rodriguez in arbitration last week. Swell. More savings. They also said goodbye to his True North: Alex Cora.

Next up you have the once-and-possibly-future indomitable Sale, who is starting the first year of a five-year, \$145 million contract. Sale came down with pneumonia, and interim manager Ron Roenicke said the stringbean lefty might not be ready for spring training.

That’s minor. What’s major is that Sale is coming off a 6-11, 4.40 season in which he visited grim reaper Dr. James Andrews for elbow issues. Sale said his elbow feels great and he’s ready to return to form. If he does, the Sox will have a dominant, All-Star strikeout king. If he doesn’t, they can keep blaming Dave Dombrowski, even though ownership had to sign off on Sale’s deal.



In the third spot we have Eovaldi, who has a four-year, \$68 million contract because he pitched six great innings of relief in one game (which the Red Sox lost) of the 2018 World Series against the Dodgers. Ever-injured, Eovaldi was good for a 2-1 record and a 5.99 ERA in 12 starts in 2019. He pitched 67⅓ innings. Iron Joe McGinnity he is not.

The No. 4 starter would appear to be Martin Perez, a 28-year-old lefty who went 10-7 with a 5.12 ERA for the Twins last year. When he pitched for the Rangers in 2018, Perez's ERA was 6.22. In other words, this guy might make you long for the days of Cashner.

The Sox at present have no fifth starter. As in, "Daniel Simpson Day has no grade-point average. All courses incomplete."

Flamethrowing Darwinzon Hernandez, a 23-year-old Venezuelan lefty who fanned 57 with 26 walks in 30⅓ innings last year, is a fan favorite to fill the spot.

I asked Bloom if he's comfortable with his starting staff.

"I don't know if you're ever comfortable," said the young chief baseball officer. "You always want to upgrade them, and it takes so much pitching to get through a successful season, so we're always looking to add.

"I know that we obviously took a starter out of our rotation [Price], and we like a lot of the guys that we're eager to get a look at them as the spring rolls on, but you're always looking to add and thicken the group."

More likely, we are going to see a soft parade of Tampa-like openers — tall, faceless pitchers who throw 98 m.p.h. for one inning, then disappear into the ether. It is the Tampa Bay Way, and it's coming soon to a ballpark near you. If you like long games, The Opener is for you.

Regarding the dreaded openers, Bloom said, "It's a possibility. I know Ron has talked about that. You're going to want to do whatever you think gives you the best chance to win with the group that you have, but it's also on us that we're adding as much depth as we possibly can."

No doubt the Red Sox rotation and roster will look a lot different in April than they do right now. Sox clubbies need to prepare for a lot of locker-stall additions and stitching new names on old uniforms. The 2020 Red Sox will start pitchers you have never heard of, and many of them are not in Fort Myers this week.

This is what a bridge year looks like, people. Get used to it.

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

### **MLB commissioner needs to stand down and let vigilante justice rule**

Tom Keegan

Tough job Rob Manfred has as commissioner of Major League Baseball. It's on him to try to figure out a way for the sport to restore credibility lost from the sign-stealing scandal. And then there is the issue of player safety, which weighs on the minds of every commissioner in every sport.

With that in mind, Manfred weighed in on brush-back threats aired by pitchers frustrated over Astros hitters cheating via sinister electronic sign-stealing.

In a 45-minute interview with ESPN's Karl Ravech, Manfred recently said he was taking preventative measures against vigilante justice, baseball-style.

“We have been working on for some time a memorandum about being hit by pitches, intentionally throwing at batters,” Manfred told Ravech. “It’s really dangerous, really a dangerous undertaking, and completely independent of the Astros’ investigation we will be issuing at the beginning of this week a memorandum about hit-by-pitches, which will increase the disciplinary ramifications of that type of behavior.”

At first blush, that sounds like a reasonable stance for a commissioner to take. Nobody wants a sport to become more dangerous, even for blatant cheaters who to date have shown no genuine remorse for stealing the 2017 World Series.

But a deeper look at the ramifications of cracking down on players settling the score on the field leads to the inescapable conclusion that doing so would be rewarding the Astros for cheating and wouldn’t necessarily make the game any safer for anyone to play. In fact, it likely would make it more dangerous.

Unintended consequences bubble to the surface yet again.

Think about it: If penalties increase severely for throwing at hitters, the Astros will use that to their advantage, crowd the plate, dig in, swing for the moon and put pitchers at a disadvantage. It will take the place of sign-stealing, the difference being that it will be not only sanctioned, but created by the commissioner’s office.

Not only that, there is no greater risk of serious danger in baseball than when a batter is convinced he has no cause for concern in crowding the plate, knowing that the risk of suspension far outweighs the pitcher’s reward (sending a message). Such hitters are the least prepared to get out of the way of purpose pitches, which increases their danger. If on guard, they know how to get out of the way.

If left to themselves to mete out justice, players know how to do it in a safe way. They don’t throw at the head. They know to make it hurt, leave a bruise, perhaps even an impression of the baseball’s stitches, without hitting a player in the head.

Manfred, who clearly doesn’t view it that way, said he would discuss the topic with managers during his spring training visits.

“It is simply not appropriate to express whatever frustration you may have growing out of the Astros’ situation by putting somebody physically at risk by throwing at them,” Manfred said. “It’s just not acceptable.”

Careful. It’s not as simple an issue as it appears to be on the surface.

A hidden benefit of vigilante justice working its way into the 2020 season: It would bring topics surrounding baseball back to the field and away from the dreadfully dull discussions about launch angles and exit velocities.

On that topic, have you seen the laughter regarding Red Sox offseason acquisition Martin Perez, lefty starting pitcher, getting a lot of play in cyberspace? Hitters against Perez apparently had low exit velocities the past two seasons, so his bloated ERAs are to be ignored. He wasn’t hit hard, the thinking goes, just hit often. So he’s due to get luckier, and therefore better. That’s as good as it gets. Applying that same logic, it turns out the late Tony Gwynn wasn’t really all that good because he didn’t hit the ball that hard. He merely was extremely lucky that the balls he hit had consistently landed on outfield grass or squirted through the infield.

Ditto for Hall of Famer Wee Willie Keeler. A career .345 hitter, Keeler was famous for saying, “Keep your eye on the ball and hit ’em where they ain’t.”

Silly, Willie.

Keeler had no clue that exit velocity was far more important than batting average. If anyone figures out a way to go back in time and calculate the exit velocity of his hits, surely measures will be taken to remove his plaque from Cooperstown and we all can sleep so much more soundly.

As for Astros who express remorse with hollow words, a better path is available to them. The winning team's World Series share in 2017 was \$438,901.57. If each player who received a full share donated half of it to the Players Trust, the charitable arm of The Major League Baseball Players Association, that would say, "I'm sorry," far louder than any words. Pony up, 'Stros.

### **New Red Sox catcher Jonathan Lucroy knew all about Astros' scheme**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — The last time Ron Roenicke had Jonathan Lucroy for a full season was in 2014, when Lucroy hit .301 with 53 doubles and finished fourth in MVP voting for the Brewers.

When Roenicke picked up the phone to call Lucroy about a reunion, it was an easy decision.

"He called me and he wanted me to come," said Lucroy, the Red Sox' newest catcher who was signed to a minor league deal on Wednesday. "It was a big thing, 'You have an opportunity here. You can come here and have an opportunity to make the team.' Right now that's all you can ask for for a guy in my position."

Lucroy will likely compete with Kevin Plawecki for the opportunity to backup starting catcher Christian Vazquez, Roenicke said.

His numbers haven't looked good. The last three years he's hit just .248 with a .666 OPS. Roenicke said the defensive metrics don't look good, either.

But Lucroy, 33 years old with 1,091 big league games behind the plate, has been beaten up. He missed time with a concussion in 2019. He's had some "mechanical issues come up." And for the last three years, he's had a herniated disc in his neck.

Lucroy underwent offseason surgery in his neck and said he's almost back to 100%.

"Pretty close," he said. "It's been a huge increase in bat speed. We measured it. Before and after we measured it and it's huge. I feel pretty good."

Roenicke considers him a trusted backstop. Lucroy said he would routinely go to the manager's office and talk shop with Roenicke during his five years managing the Brewers.

It seems like a perfect match, should Lucroy make the team.

Roenicke wouldn't tip his hand other than to say he doesn't plan on taking three catchers and Lucroy will stay at catcher rather than first base, where he made nine appearances last year.

It's clear that Lucroy understands the modern game.

"I knew about (the Astros' sign-stealing system) two years ago, what was going on," he said. "I know it just recently came out, but everybody in baseball, especially that division that played against him, we were all aware of the Astros doing those things. And it was up to us to outsmart them, which is kind of hard when you have a computer program that breaks your signs."

Lucroy spent 2018 with the Oakland A's, who were rocked by the Astros' offense all season.

"They were stealing signs from first, too, from between your legs," Lucroy said. "So they had a very intricate system going on. We were well aware of it. It was a challenge."

“It was crazy some of the pitches they would take. It was like, ‘Man, these guys are the best hitters I’ve ever seen.’ It all made sense when I found out, when we found out how they were doing it. It all made sense. Then it was like, ‘What are you going to do?’ ”

Lucroy said the A’s communicated with MLB in 2018, but all the league office did was contact the Astros.

“They didn’t go through the whole investigation,” he said. “It wasn’t until Mike Fiers came out publicly that they went out and looked at it really hard.

“That’s how I found out. We knew they were stealing signs before because you would be back there catching and they would be whistling or yelling. I’m always listening for those things. Those guys do it all the time. If I set up outside they will whistle. They will whistle location. Or they will call their last name or their number for location if I go in or out. So you will see catchers setting up late so guys don’t have time to do that. But I knew they were doing all that, which a lot of teams do that. That’s OK. That’s on the field. On the field is one thing. That’s fair game. That’s part of it. But when you’re talking about it the way they were with the trash can, that’s pretty tough.”

How does MLB fix this?

“They talked about the earpieces and the radio transmitter, but the thing is that somebody is going to hack into that, too,” Lucroy said. “I’m sure there is some kind of CIA spy thing out there. Somebody is going to figure something out. We’ve talked about it as a union. We’ve talked about it among ourselves as players. There has to be something we can do to make it easier. The NFL does it with their quarterbacks.”

### **David Ortiz on cheating Astros: Why did nobody say anything in 2017?**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — David Ortiz doesn’t agree with most players who have been critical about MLB’s handling of the Houston Astros’ sign-stealing scandal.

The players are angry.

But Ortiz is no longer competing with the Houston Astros. He’s getting paychecks from Fox Sports as a commentator. He’s going on TV after World Series games where commissioner Rob Manfred is handing out the World Series trophy.

When asked about it on Thursday after his first workout with the Red Sox at JetBlue Park, Ortiz said Manfred is doing a great job. He said he hopes Jose Altuve hits .370 this year. He said Mike Fiers looks like a “snitch” and should’ve been vocal about what the Astros were doing back in 2017.

The retired Red Sox star had a lot of opinions.

“Many times I knew what pitch was coming and I still got myself out, to be honest with you,” Ortiz said, laughing. “I’ve been watching the whole thing. The commissioner is getting so much heat about this, like it was him who made that mistake, and I don’t agree with him getting all the heat. It’s because the reality is, not one player has come and said, ‘It was me who started this up.’ ”

Manfred offered players immunity in exchange for honest answers during his investigation and didn’t penalize any Astros players.

“Manfred has been legit since Day 1,” Ortiz said. “And I don’t think it’s fair for everyone pitching him questions and blaming things on him. We all know he has the power to suspend people and make decisions. But it’s only to a certain point. After that, he has no control over whatever happens in the investigation.

“I see players telling him what he needs to do. Hey, he don’t tell you how to hit or how to pitch. So let him do his job. He’s going to do what’s best for the game. He’s not the type that’s going to accept you screwing things up in the game. No, he’s good at making decisions. But people need to ‘chillax’ and let him do his job.”

Ortiz’s biggest point was that somebody in the Astros’ clubhouse should’ve put a stop to the trash-can banging and computer-code-breaking systems when they were going on in 2017.

“I still don’t know how come nobody was like, ‘That is wrong,’ ” Ortiz said. “I just don’t know how no one says something about it — during, not after. I was in the clubhouse for a long time and never anything like that comes up. But now they’re going to have to deal with that for a long time. It’s not only a situation that involved players. You’re talking about the whole franchise.”

Ortiz does not agree with Fiers, the former Astros pitcher whose on-the-record testimony to The Athletic was key to MLB’s investigation.

“I’m mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it, and let me tell you why,” he said. “Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it? Why didn’t you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn’t you say, ‘I don’t want to be no part of it?’ So you’re looking like a snitch. Why do you have to talk about it after? That’s my problem.”

Carlos Correa told The Athletic that Altuve didn’t like the trash-can banging and didn’t use it.

“Just by being part of the group that was doing it, you are guilty just like everyone else,” Ortiz said. “Altuve, to me, might be the best hitter in the game. I’ll tell you what, he’s going to hit .300 regardless. But I don’t know how he’s going to be able to deal with all the trash coming from fans and everybody every time he steps to the plate.

“So you might see him struggle this year, but I don’t think it’s going to be because he misses knowing what’s coming. Your mind plays a big role in the game. That might take place at some point. Who knows. Hopefully not. I hope he hits .370 this year so people understand he’s that good. But he’s in the group that was doing this type of thing. That’s what makes people angry.”

Ortiz retired in 2016, before the Astros began a three-year run in which they’ve won at least 101 games each season. He said he feels bad for the young players who were on the ’17 Astros team that was cheating.

“You’re not talking about a whole bunch of knuckleheads that have no talent,” Ortiz said. “When you talk about Altuve, Correa, my boy the third baseman (Alex Bregman), you’re talking about a group of kids that has talent. And their career is just brand new. Nobody on that team, with the exception of Justin Verlander, everybody’s career there is no longer than five years. Now, your career basically just begins, and you have to face the monster, and who knows what it’s going to take people to forget about it. I’m watching, and it just doesn’t feel right.”

### **David Ortiz: Red Sox decision to trade Mookie Betts ‘was perfect’**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — David Ortiz will miss Mookie Betts, but he knows enough about the Red Sox not to worry.

He’s seen this organization spend a lot of money to replace star players that leave in free agency or trade.

He watched them replace the greatest designated hitter in franchise history and win the World Series two years later.

“Sometimes it doesn’t take too long,” the 44-year-old Ortiz said Thursday from JetBlue Park. “I’m a really good example of me retiring, all of a sudden we have a guy like J.D. (Martinez) come in and it seems like I never left. The Red Sox are always good at it, covering those holes. This organization is in a big market, so you can just get a star. They always find a way to figure things out.”

Big Papi arrived Thursday to begin his annual spring training appearance with the Red Sox. He slipped into a pair of baseball pants and his signature blue Red Sox pullover, grabbed some batting gloves and hit the field.

He’s impossible to miss, always smiling and giving out advice to the current players. There’s a crowd wherever he goes. They chant his name and say things like “thank you” and “we love you.”

After the workout, Ortiz sat down and offered up 35 minutes of stories and opinions.

“Sometimes people think that as a player, we get greedy when it comes down to contracts,” he said. “But it’s only going to go around once. It doesn’t go around twice. It goes around once, and you’ve got to get what you have earned because nobody gives you anything in this game. You’ve got to earn it.”

Before he retired, Ortiz was a mentor to Betts in 2014, ’15 and ’16.

“Mookie has earned every single dollar that he’s going to get,” Ortiz said. “If I’m him, I’m not going to leave \$50, \$60, \$70 million on the table just because. It is what it is. We had a good offer for him. I understand that somewhere, he’s going to get more.”

“I think the Red Sox decision with him was perfect. You’re not just going to let a great player go after the season. Before the season even begins, you try to get something that you can have for a long period of time. For both sides, I think it was really good.”

Seeing Betts get traded to the Dodgers didn’t surprise Ortiz.

“In the business side, we also know that Mookie is going to be a guy that will get a deal closer to what Mike Trout has (12 years, \$426.5 million),” he said. “I’m pretty sure that’s going to happen at some point ... That’s the tricky part about baseball. You fall in love with players and the business side of it doesn’t allow people to keep up with it.”

Can the Red Sox win without Betts?

“They won without me!” Ortiz said, laughing. “So I’m not saying that Mookie isn’t a big piece of what we are here. But once that happened, you’ve got to move on. I was part of this ballclub in 2016. And in 2018, we won. And I wasn’t playing. Yes, as a player, we are a big part of a team, but we also are replaceable. I’m not saying that we’re going to replace Mookie tomorrow, but sometimes another player can show up and do things that can help you to win ballgames.”

Verdugo meets his idol

Alex Verdugo, acquired in the trade from the Dodgers, said last week he idolized Ortiz as a kid and would hug him when the two met.

“He did (hug me),” Ortiz said Thursday. “I had that great feeling about him and his attitude. I think he’s going to have a lot of fun here. I think it’s hard sometimes for a kid like him to be surrounded by so many superstars like he was in L.A. You never get to see how much value he brings to the table when you are surrounded by that many superstars over there. We’ve got superstars here but it seems like even the bench players over there are superstars.

“I think that’s one thing he’s really going to appreciate about being here. He’s going to be part of the center of attention. There are some players who know how to deal with it and others who don’t. I think he’s going to be good and I love his attitude.”

Sale looks nasty

Chris Sale threw a bullpen session and impressed new catcher Jonathan Lucroy.

“He’s nasty,” Lucroy said. “He comes at you. He’s coming at an angle. It’s weird. You have to almost line up toward second to get him straight on. He’s nasty, he always has been. I’m looking forward to hopefully catching him a lot this year.”

Games to begin

Daniel McGrath will start the first game of the spring against Northeastern on Friday, though none of the Sox’ regulars will play in the game, interim manager Ron Roenicke said. Brian Johnson will start the first Grapefruit League game on Saturday vs. the Rays and go one inning. Some regulars will play on Saturday.

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

### **Ortiz, Lucroy differ on cheating scandal**

Craig Handel

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Red Sox legend David Ortiz and catcher Jonathon Lucroy fed the fires on baseball’s cheating scandal Thursday during separate interviews outside JetBlue Park.

Ortiz and Lucroy went at it from different angles.

Big Papi is upset at pitcher Mike Fiers for bringing up the scandal in November instead of 2017, when he was with the Houston Astros. He said he believes the MLB commissioner, Rob Manfred, is being unfairly criticized and believes in Jose Altuve’s innocence.

“I heard [Astros shortstop Carlos] Correa say to [baseball writer] Kenny Rosenthal that Altuve had nothing to do with it,” Ortiz said. “I believe that. The problem is he’s just being part of a group, so he’s guilty as anybody. He’s gonna hit .300 regardless. But I don’t know how he’s going to deal with the trash talk every time he steps to the plate. If he struggles this year, I don’t think it’s because he’s doesn’t know what’s coming. The mind plays a big role in the game. I just hope he hits .370, he’s that good.”

Lucroy, who played with the Texas Rangers in 2017 and Oakland Athletics in 2018, said he believes the Astros have cheated.

He said it got to the point that he would change signals every pitch, which became mentally exhausting, and found it amazing that the Astros would be on fastballs while laying off well-thrown breaking balls in the dirt.

“Trying to outsmart them was kind of hard because they had a computer program that breaks your signs,” Lucroy said. “They were turning on 97-mph pitches; they were on everything. It was crazy because of the pitches they’d take. I was thinking, ‘These are the best hitters I’ve ever seen.’ It all made sense.”

Lucroy acknowledged that it’s fair game to have runners on base try to steal signals and relay them to teammates. It’s another thing, he said, when nobody is on base and cameras are showing his signs from different angles.

“I remember a game with Edwin Jackson pitching,” Lucroy said. “He’s a veteran, so I knew I could get real complicated on signs and he’d be OK. But it was a mental workout because we’d switch signs every pitch.

“When we changed signs, their swings got worse. [Astros] guys were calling time when I put a sign sequence down. But their system worked because it slowed the game down and our guys were sitting out there in the field.”

Lucroy said he's glad Fiers came out with his comments and happy the cheating is in the open because things were getting out of hand.

"When I read it, I said, 'Oh, boy, here we go.' I would text people and say, 'Just so you know.' ... It got around baseball pretty quickly."

In contrast, Ortiz is upset at Fiers because he waited. "Why, after you make your money and get a ring, do you talk about it? Why not talk about it during that season? Now you look like a snitch."

Ortiz doesn't blame just Fiers. He wonders why elite players stayed quiet. "That's my problem — why nobody didn't say anything while it's going on. Nobody said, 'This is wrong.'"

"The Houston Astros have put themselves in a situation where they're going to have to deal with this for a long time. They're very talented. I'm not talking about knuckleheads. They have Altuve, Correa, my boy at third base [Alex Bregman]. Outside of [Justin Verlander], every guy has a career no longer than five years.

"But now they have to face this monster; and who knows what time it'll take for people to forget about this."

Ortiz also defended Manfred and said he's taking too much heat.

"We know he had the power to suspend people — but only to a certain point," Ortiz said. "He'll do what he thinks is best for the game. The players need to let him do what he thinks is best for the game."

Ortiz said players also need to chill because the negative talk is not good for baseball.

"It's gonna be a huge distraction for the game for a while and you don't want that," he said. "After I retired, I have so much fun watching this game because of the talent out there."

### **Red Sox Journal: Sale 'looked good' in first spring session**

Craig Handel

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Based on the fist bumps he engaged in with teammates and Red Sox pitching coaches, left-handed pitcher Chris Sale had a good opening session on the mound Thursday at the Fenway South practice fields.

With a black band covering his left elbow, Sale threw about 25 pitches before stopping. After some throws, he talked with the coaches. After leaving the field for about 20 minutes, Sale returned and did about a half-dozen light wind sprints. He had a slight cough as he recovers from pneumonia and the flu.

For the first time in seven seasons, Sale, in 2019, did not finish in the top six in Cy Young voting or have a double-digit-win season. The left-hander went 6-11 with a 4.40 earned-run average. He struck out 218 and walked 37 in 147 innings. That's the least amount he has pitched since 2011.

An ailing elbow forced Sale to shut it down in August but he didn't need offseason surgery.

Sale did not make himself available to the media after the workout but newly signed catcher Jonathan Lucroy was impressed after handling Sale's throws. "He was feeling pretty good," Lucroy said. "He started a little slow; they have him on a little slower count. He kind of pumped it up at the end, said he really felt good. He looked good, honestly.

"He's nasty. He comes at you and sets that angle. It's weird — you almost have to line up to second base to get straight up.



“Hopefully, I’ll catch him a lot.”

The Red Sox now are up to seven catchers in camp with Lucroy signing a minor-league deal Wednesday.

Lucroy’s best season occurred in 2014 when he had 13 homers, 69 RBI, 54 doubles and a .301 batting average for the Milwaukee Brewers. Those numbers, combined with his catching skills, helped him finish fourth in MVP voting.

Over a 10-year career with the Brewers, Texas Rangers, Colorado Rockies, Oakland Athletics, Los Angeles Angels and Chicago Cubs, he compiled 108 homers, 545 RBI and a .276 batting average.

Lucroy said he’s feeling better after dealing with a herniated disc for three years.

“[Manager Ron Roenicke] called me and wanted me to come,” Lucroy said. “Look, I got an opportunity here. That’s all I can ask for for, a guy in my position.”

Devers in camp

Third baseman Rafael Devers joined the team after missing the first few days of camp while celebrating the birth of his daughter.

Devers hit .311 with 32 homers, 115 RBI and eight stolen bases last season. The 22-year-old third baseman finished 12th in the MVP voting.

“His numbers were sick last year,” said David Ortiz, who made a visit to the Red Sox training complex. “I really watched a lot of games, and when I sat at home, it seemed every day the guy will do some damage. I couldn’t wait for him to come and hit. He’d hit a rocket at somebody. When he wasn’t giving away at-bats, I said, ‘Bro, this guy is at another level.’ ”

Mind-body recovery

Red Sox players might not be on the field nearly as much as they used to for spring training but they’re finding other ways to prepare.

Roenicke said that with recovery gaining importance, a key is keeping workouts around two hours so players are off their feet. “We figured out there’s a better way to do things,” he said.

Outfielder Kevin Pillar said players are working more with sports psychologists, doing more visual training, breathing and getting massages from therapists.

“And this might surprise you but there’s an amount of guys who take a ball home, their bats home and take dry swings or dry throws,” he said. “At the end of the day, everyone understands we have a job to do.

“We’re competitive and want to be the best version of ourselves. We’re just doing things that are less taxing.”

Workman at work

Closer Brandon Workman, who went 10-1 with a 1.88 ERA and 16 saves, said he threw live bullpen Thursday and is tentatively set for another session on Sunday.

Regarding the task of closing, he said, “I like that job. It’s a lot of adrenaline.”

**\* *MassLive.com***

## **Boston Red Sox comeback story: Roldani Baldwin goes from broken ankle to big league camp alongside catching idol, Jonathan Lucroy**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Roldani Baldwin broke his ankle during spring training 2019, sidelining him for almost the entire season. He appeared in just eight games late in the year.

“It was tough at first, obviously,” Baldwin told MassLive.com through translator Bryan Almonte. “But I got a new motivation: to try to be able to get back healthy.”

Spring training 2020 looks much more encouraging. The 23-year-old catching prospect not only is participating in his first big league camp. His comeback story also includes working alongside his catching idol, Jonathan Lucroy.

Boston signed Lucroy, a two-time All-Star, to a minor league deal. He arrived at camp Wednesday. He has a strong chance to make the team.

“I found out through social media he was going to be here,” Baldwin said. “It was great because I never thought I’d have that opportunity to be so close to him. ... Lucroy was someone that I was always seeing from afar. So having him here now, being so close, it’s something that I think is pretty cool.”

Baldwin, a Dominican Republic native, signed at 17 years old in November 2013. He showed his offensive upside in 2017 when he bashed 14 homers, 35 doubles, one triple and drove in 66 RBIs in 95 games for Low-A Greenville. He then showed his strong arm for High-A Salem in 2018, throwing out 24 of 53 (45.3%) base stealers.

“Especially when I came over here, that’s when I started to hear a lot about Lucroy,” Baldwin said. “And then I just went on YouTube and I started following him and just watching his games. And I just loved watching it.

“What I would watch is the way he would receive,” he added. “I thought he was just really good at that. A lot of us are trained to make it look like a strike. He’s really, really good at doing that — painting and stuff like that.”

He said he loves the way Lucroy prepares and plays the right way.

“And how he would block balls and how he would receive, that’s something I used to watch a lot,” Baldwin said. “That’s something that really motivated me and that’s what I love about his game.”

Baldwin also admires Yadier Molina and Christian Vazquez.

Baldwin said about Vazquez, “He’s just someone that motivates me because the way he plays the game. He’s just fearless. He just has this look about him. He looks like someone you’d be afraid to be facing as well.”

The Red Sox invited Baldwin to major league spring training late in January.

“Of course it surprised me,” Baldwin said. “It was announced so late that I would be in big league camp, that’s something that took me by surprise. And especially because I didn’t play as much last year. But I was still ready to go. I was always preparing to get to this point.”

Baldwin fractured his ankle running the bases.

"It was like a nine out of 10 in terms of pain," Baldwin said. "When it happened to me, it was a shock to me. I was just trying to bear with it. Afterwards, when I got home and I was icing it, that's when it really hurt the most.

"I went to the hospital the following day and took some tests," he added. "And then in like 10 days, that's when they operated on me."

His rehab was painful at times.

"The massages would really hurt," Baldwin said. "That's something you're not used to. At first, when you're doing it, it's so hard that your body almost comes into shock. But then the next hardest part was actually running eventually."

His returned Aug. 21 for the Gulf Coast League Red Sox. He went 6-for-14 (.429) with one homer and three RBIs in five games, then played in three games for Short Season Lowell.

"It was huge, especially the rehab process and going through that," Baldwin said about stepping back on the field for the first time. "It was an important moment for me. And when I was doing my rehab here ... my goal was to get to Lowell to help them reach the finals."

Slowing down the game behind the plate is something he plans to work on this season.

"Coaches have talked to me about just trying to slow it down because I'm really energetic, and I can get amped up a lot," Baldwin said. "But just trying to take a step back and process everything as opposed to trying to speed everything up."

### **Boston Red Sox notebook: Chris Sale throws side session, Daniel McGrath and Brian Johnson to get starts over weekend**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- A collection of leftover notes from Thursday at Fenway South, where the Red Sox prepared for their spring training opener against Northeastern on Friday:

Sale impresses in side session

Lefty Chris Sale threw a side session to new catcher Jonathan Lucroy, tossing about 25 pitches in the bullpen. Sale, who missed the first few days of camp due to illness, is progressing quickly and could begin to face live hitters soon.

Interim manager Ron Roenicke didn't watch Sale's bullpen but got positive feedback from the lefty and pitching coach Dave Bush.

"Really good," Roenicke said. "When you see a smile on that guy's face, you know things are going well. He felt really good."

The session represented the first time Lucroy got to catch Sale. The newest player in camp enjoyed the opportunity to catch one of the game's best pitchers.

"He's nasty," Lucroy said. "He comes at you. He sets that angle, he's coming at an angle that's weird. You almost have to line up toward (where the second baseman plays) to get him straight on. He's nasty. Always has been. I'm looking forward to hopefully catching him a lot this year."

Pitching set for Friday, Saturday

Roenicke said lefty Daniel McGrath will start Friday against Northeastern, going one inning. Southpaw Brian Johnson will get the start Saturday afternoon at home against the Rays.

For the spring opener against the Huskies, the Sox will use a bunch of non-roster invitees to complete the seven innings. The Sox have 67 players, including 33 pitchers, in camp.

“You usually have to borrow a bunch of guys from minor league camp but not too much tomorrow, so that’s good,” Roenicke said.

Regulars will debut Saturday

None of Boston’s regulars will play Friday against Northeastern but Roenicke said he’ll begin inserting them into the lineup for Saturday’s matchup with Tampa Bay.

“They told me they’re ready to go,” Roenicke said. “They feel good. We don’t want everybody in there the first day. You’ll try to spread them out a little bit.”

Most regulars won’t travel to Sarasota for Sunday’s matchup against the Orioles but a few could see action early next week. The Sox play against the Twins at Hammond Stadium in Fort Myers on Monday (in a split squad game) and are home Tuesday against the O’s.

Roenicke wants to make sure new outfielder Kevin Pillar plays alongside Jackie Bradley Jr. frequently before the end of camp.

“I know the important thing is Jackie and Pillar, when we get later in camp, we need to get them together to get them used to each other so we don’t have any collisions,” Roenicke said.

No news on bench coach search

Roenicke said chief baseball officer and general manager Brian O’Halloran are discussing who will be the team’s bench coach but declined further comment. Roenicke wouldn’t rule out the possibility of an external candidate being brought in and said a bench coach will be in place by Opening Day.

“They’re looking into that more closely and trying to get something done,” he said.

Houck’s role uncertain

Right-hander Tanner Houck threw live batting practice Thursday in front of Roenicke. The former first-round pick impressed.

“Pretty good,” Roenicke said. “I think everybody is supposed to be trying to work on stuff more, but I realize there are some guys that are trying to impress right away. So to try to mix in where we want him to be... I realize it’s tough because I was in that boat a lot. But he looked good.”

Houck converted from starting to relieving last year due to Boston’s bullpen need in the majors. He never got the call to the bigs.

Roenicke wouldn’t comment on Houck’s role moving forward.

“We’ve talked to the whole pitching staff and the catchers so they know what we’re thinking,” he said. “Some guys, where we’ve left it is, we’re not telling you you’re a starter or reliever. What’s happening is we’ll extend you out. Once we extend you out, we’ll have a better idea. If we want you to start, we’ll continue to give you more innings. If it’s a longer, multi-inning guy in the bullpen, we’ll decide that later on.”

Other notes

Rafael Devers' arrival in camp was further delayed because Devers wanted to spend more time with his newborn baby, but he's expected in camp Friday... Non-roster outfielder Cesar Puello still doesn't have a visa and hasn't come to camp yet... Xander Bogaerts (ankle) has had no setbacks and could get on the field soon.

### **Alex Verdugo meets David Ortiz, gives Boston Red Sox legend (his childhood idol) big hug as planned**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — New Red Sox right fielder Alex Verdugo, who Boston acquired in the Mookie Betts trade, couldn't wait to meet his childhood idol David Ortiz.

"I'm telling you, when I see David Ortiz here I'm giving him the biggest hug. I might even tear up, man," Verdugo said Sunday.

Ortiz arrived here at Red Sox spring training camp Thursday. Verdugo, indeed, hugged the Red Sox legend.

"I have that great feeling about him; about his attitude. I think he's gonna have a lot of fun here," Ortiz said.

"That's one thing he's really going to appreciate about being here and it's that he's going to be a part of the center of attention."

### **Jonathan Lucroy vying for Boston Red Sox backup catcher job after call from Ron Roenicke: 'To try out is definitely a huge honor'**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- After an offseason of waiting for the right opportunity, veteran catcher Jonathan Lucroy saw his luck begin to turn around when the Red Sox hired Ron Roenicke as their interim manager earlier this month.

Roenicke, who managed Lucroy in Milwaukee from 2011 to 2015, believed the two-time All-Star had a chance to make Boston's Opening Day roster. So he called the 33-year-old and pitched him on coming down to Fort Myers to give it a shot.

"You've got an opportunity here if you come here," Roenicke told Lucroy. "You've got an opportunity to make a team."

Lucroy accepted the offer, signed a minor-league deal with the Red Sox and arrived at Fenway South on Wednesday. He'll get a chance to compete to be Christian Vazquez's backup behind the plate, squaring off with fellow newcomer Kevin Plawecki in one of the team's most heated position battles of the spring.

"Anytime you get an invite to try out for the Boston Red Sox, it's definitely a huge honor," Lucroy said.

Lucroy was an All-Star as recently as 2016, when he posted an .855 OPS in 142 games for the Brewers and the Rangers. Since the end of that season, he has bounced around with five different clubs, posting a .666 OPS over three seasons while his defensive metrics began to paint an unfriendly picture.

Lucroy ended 2019 with the Cubs, going 10-for-53 (.189) with a homer in the season's final seven weeks. He hit free agency for the third straight winter and negotiated with a few clubs who backed out of deals at the last minute.

“Analytically, I’ve been terrible,” Lucroy said. “Seriously. I’m not trying to make excuses. I’m not surprised I didn’t get a big league offer.”

Lucroy’s struggles may have been -- at least partially -- related to his health. He played with a herniated disc for the last three years before having surgery to correct the issue early in the winter.

“I’d like to sit here and make excuses and say that’s the reason why I haven’t played good but I’m not going to,” Lucroy said. “It did affect me but I got it taken care of. I feel a lot better than I have in a long time.”

Lucroy now feels close to 100% and has seen an increase in his bat speed since the procedure. He’s looking to get back to being the offense-first catcher Roenicke got to see first-hand in Milwaukee.

“When I had him, he was a great offensive player,” Roenicke said. “He hit 50 doubles or close to it one year, and he can really hit.”

Roenicke also appreciates how Lucroy works with pitchers and had him catch ace Chris Sale in a side session Thursday. Though Lucroy played some first base last year, the Sox are looking at him exclusively as a catcher.

Roenicke will be able to take 26 players to Toronto for Opening Day but doesn’t see a scenario in which he carries three catchers. That means either Plawecki -- whose one-year, \$900k deal is guaranteed -- or Lucroy will be cut at the end of camp.

Despite not having a job a week ago, Lucroy seems to have a legitimate chance of making the team if he impresses Roenicke and the rest of the organization in spring training. For a player who has had a successful career, being in a position battle represents an unfamiliar reality.

“It’s a little strange,” Lucroy said. “This is the first time I’ve had to do that. It’s OK, it’s just part of the business side of baseball. Honestly, it’s what I deserve. I haven’t played good. It’s just where we’re at. You make your bed, you’ve got to sleep in it.”

Lucroy is excited to be reunited with Roenicke, who is getting a second chance of his own in Boston.

“We had a lot of good times together,” Lucroy said. “He was a really good guy and a really good manager. He’s a quality pickup for the Red Sox.”

### **Mookie Betts contract: David Ortiz says Red Sox made ‘good offer,’ Betts will receive deal close to Mike Trout’s \$430M**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — David Ortiz said the Red Sox made Mookie Betts “a good offer” and the 2018 AL MVP eventually will receive a contract near Mike Trout’s \$430 million deal.

Boston traded Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers for major league outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong.

“Unfortunately this game, it’s not just a game. It’s business,” Ortiz said. “Mookie’s situation, it’s hard to get rid of someone like him, someone like David Price. What they bring to the table is more than enough. But the business side, we also know that Mookie is going to be a guy that’s gonna get a deal close to what Mike Trout has. I’m pretty sure it’s going to happen at some point.

“I guess that’s the difference between having him here and having him go to LA,” Ortiz added. “We all understand that. I know fans are hurting a little bit because you let a franchise player go somewhere else. That’s the tricky part about baseball. You fall in love with players and the business side of it sometimes

don't allow the team to keep up with 'em. And there's always the one time where you have to say goodbye like the organization say to Mookie and David Price."

Ortiz said the Red Sox always will appreciate what Betts and Price did here. The former DH said he understood the business side even when he was a player.

Betts is eligible for free agency after the 2020 season. He will earn \$27 million in 2020 and has strongly indicated he plans to test the free agent market and not sign a contract extension.

"Sometimes people think that as a player we get greedy when it comes down to (a) contract," Ortiz said. "But it only goes around once. It doesn't go around twice. It goes around once and you've gotta get what you earned. Because nobody give you anything in this game. You've gotta earn it. And Mookie has earned every single dollar that he's gonna get.

"So if I'm him, I'm not gonna leave \$50, 60, \$70 million on the table just because," Ortiz added. "It is what it is. We had a good offer for him but I understand that he, somewhere else, is gonna get more. So I think the Red Sox's decision with him was perfect because you're not just going to let a great player go after the season. Before the season even begins, you try to get something in exchange that you can have for a long period of time. For both sides I think it was really good. Plus, we all know that we're trying to reduce payroll."

Ortiz said isn't surprised the Red Sox traded Betts.

"I wasn't expecting it this early, but I know that something was going to happen," Ortiz said.

Ortiz thinks the Red Sox can win without Betts.

"They won without me," Ortiz said.

### **Jonathan Lucroy sounds off on Astros sign stealing: 'I knew about it two years ago,' new Boston Red Sox catcher says**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- To new Red Sox catcher Jonathan Lucroy, the news of egregious cheating by the Astros came as no surprise when it came to light this winter. In Lucroy's mind, it was just a matter of time before someone went public with Houston's cheating methods.

Lucroy, who joined the Sox on a minor-league deal earlier this week, played for three American League West teams (the Rangers, Athletics and Angels) in the last three seasons. He said Thursday that he first learned about Houston's scheme back in 2018, when his Oakland teammate (and future whistleblower) Mike Fiers informed him of Houston's infamous trashcan-banging system after Fiers was traded from the Tigers to the A's in August.

"I knew about that two years ago, that it was going on," Lucroy said. "I know it just recently came out. Everybody in baseball, especially in the division playing against them, we were all aware of the Astros doing those things. It was up to us to outsmart them, which is kind of hard when you have a computer program that breaks your signs. We actively changed signs, almost every pitch. You had to because they had them, they were relaying them from second and stealing them from first, too, from between your legs. They had a very intricate system going on. We were well aware of it."

Lucroy said the A's told Major League Baseball about their suspicions back in 2018 but said the league did nothing but warn the Astros. Last week, Athletics general manager David Forst confirmed to The Mercury News that Oakland had complained to the league well before MLB began its thorough investigation in November.

“Some of the pitches they would take, it was like, ‘Man, these guys are the best hitters I’ve ever seen,’” Lucroy said. “It all made sense whenever we found out how they were doing it. Then, it was like, ‘What are we going to do?’ I was with Oakland then, and we had let MLB know and they had just called and said something. They just said something to them. They didn’t go through the whole investigation. It wasn’t until Fiers came out publicly that they looked at it really hard.”

Lucroy said Houston’s methods were not a well-kept secret in baseball circles. When he first saw Fiers had spoken to The Athletic about the Astros in November, he knew a firestorm was about to begin.

“Whenever I saw it, I read it and was like, ‘Oh, boy. Here we go,’” Lucroy said. “And people were calling me and I was like, ‘Look, I’ve known about this for two years.’ When guys were playing against them, I’d text them like, ‘Just so you know, this is what’s going on.’ It got around baseball pretty quick.”

Throughout his 10 major league seasons, Lucroy has seen teams employ plenty of systems to steal signs. Almost all of them included methods within the game’s rules, like relaying signals from second base or whistling to alert hitters of incoming pitches. But the use of electronics, like what went on in Houston, crossed a clear line.

“If they’re out there breaking these complex set of signs with no one on base and they’re doing that, there’s something wrong with that,” Lucroy said. “That’s not right.”

Lucroy said he never specifically heard a trashcan being banged at Minute Maid Park but said he would have never been listening for one. Once Fiers told him what was going on in 2018, he began to mix up his signals even more.

“It was a mental workout,” he said. “We were switching signs every single pitch, because you had to. If you didn’t, they were going to get it and they were going to go up there and take advantage of it.”

Though Lucroy is glad Major League Baseball finally stepped in and punished the Astros, he’s unhappy with how Houston’s players have handled the backlash. Shortstop Carlos Correa and other players have defended some of the team’s methods in response to criticism

“I’m hearing a lot of excuses in the media,” Lucroy said. “That’s what I’m hearing. I think that they could do a better job at being humble about it.”

Lucroy has a hard time understanding how all of Houston’s players went unpunished as a result of the league’s findings. Every player interviewed by the league was granted immunity for cooperating with investigators.

“Guys do steroids, they get punished,” he said. “Guys cheat, they get punished.”

**David Ortiz ‘mad’ at Mike Fiers: Boston Red Sox legend says Astros whistleblower looks like ‘snitch’ because he waited until after he got money, WS ring**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Red Sox legend David Ortiz isn’t happy with Astros whistleblower Mike Fiers, who went on record with The Athletic in November to tell how Houston used a center field camera and trash can to steal and relay signs in 2017.

“I’m mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it,” Ortiz said here at JetBlue Park on Thursday. “And let me tell you why. Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring you decide to talk about it. Why don’t you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn’t you say, ‘I don’t want to be no part of (this)?’ Now you look like a snitch. You know what I mean? Why do you have to talk about it after? That’s my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?”



The 34-year-old Fiers pitched for the 2017 World Series champion Astros, then signed with Detroit in December 2017. He now pitches for the Athletics.

The Astros organization received a severe punishment from Major League Baseball. Both GM Jeff Luhnow and manager A.J. Hinch were fired after the league suspended them for the 2020 season.

The Red Sox also fired manager Alex Cora for his involvement in the Astros' sign stealing scheme. Cora served as Houston's bench coach in 2017.

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

### **Big Papi weighs in: Mookie, Astros, more**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The booming voice and howling laugh gave it away. David Ortiz made his grand entrance into Red Sox camp on Thursday.

Though his playing career ended four seasons ago, Big Papi's presence still creates a buzz.

In his role as an advisor, the former slugger got right to work in the cage, surveying Andrew Benintendi's swing and talking a lot of hitting with J.D. Martinez.

Just eight months after he was shot in the Dominican Republic and spent most of the summer at Massachusetts General Hospital, Ortiz is back to 100% in mind and body.

Full of energy, Ortiz spoke to reporters for more than 30 minutes about various Red Sox issues, and, of course, the controversy swirling around the Astros.

Here is Big Papi unplugged from his Thursday session.

#### Life without Mookie

In the late stages of Ortiz's career, he played a big role in mentoring Mookie Betts and took great pride in watching the outfielder turn into a star. But he understands from a business standpoint why the Red Sox made the move and thinks they will be able to thrive without him, though he did acknowledge there could be an adjustment period.

Can the Sox win without Mookie?

"They won without me," said Ortiz, citing Boston's 2018 World Series championship two years after his retirement.

"So I'm not saying that Mookie isn't a big piece of what we are here, but once that happened, you've got to move on," said Ortiz. "Yes, as a player, we are a big part of a team, but we also are replaceable. I'm not saying that we're going to replace Mookie tomorrow, but sometimes another player can show up and do things that can help you to win ballgames."

As an example, Ortiz cited the signing of Martinez two years after he retired.

"Mookie put a big hole in our lineup, but I'm pretty sure the front office will find out at some point, they will figure out how to cover some of the hole that we're going to have because Mookie was good [at] hitting, he was good defensively and he was good off the field," Ortiz said. "I think -- that takes time to replace that. But this organization I know is good at that -- at replacing things and moving forward."

Mookie, Sox both made right decision

For those who were critical of Betts for not signing an extension to stay in Boston, Ortiz stuck up for his former teammate.

“Sometimes people think that as a player, we get greedy when it comes down to contract,” Ortiz said. “But it’s only going to go around once. It doesn’t go around twice. It goes around once, and you’ve got to get what you have earned, because nobody gives you anything in this game. You’ve got to earn it.

“Mookie has earned every single dollar that he’s going to get. If I’m him, I’m not going to leave 50, 60, 70 million on the table out there just because. It is what it is. We had a good offer for him. I understand that somewhere he’s going to get more. I think the Red Sox’s decision with him was perfect.”

#### Big Verdugo fan

A few days ago, when Alex Verdugo did his meet-and-greet with the Boston media, he noted that David Ortiz was his favorite player growing up and that he might hug him once they finally meet. And that is exactly what happened when they met on Thursday.

As it turns out, Ortiz is also a big Verdugo fan.

“I think he’s going to be good and I love his attitude. To be honest with you, he was one of the players that caught my attention,” said Ortiz. “Everybody was focused on [Cody] Bellinger, the third baseman [Justin Turner] and [Clayton] Kershaw. But he is someone who takes pressure away from the big guys.

“I see this kid banging everywhere and I’m like, ‘Man, where did he come from?’ I’m so glad we got him. Now that Mookie is not here, I think he’s going to be a really good [player] for us.”

#### All-in on Devers

Ortiz obviously was unable to do much last summer as he recovered from his surgery, so he watched a lot of baseball and became one of Rafael Devers’ biggest fans. Perhaps Ortiz watches the young third baseman and is reminded of his own prowess at the plate.

“True story, his first year they went to play the Marlins in his first full season, I was sitting right next to Derek Jeter,” said Ortiz. “And I asked Derek, ‘Hey, which one is the player in the lineup that scares you the most?’ And he said, ‘Devers.’ And I totally agreed with him because he was fearless. That’s when you know that a hitter is going to be dangerous. What he did last year, it was not surprising to be honest with you. I saw that coming.”

The way Ortiz looks at it, you don’t leave the room or your seat in the stadium when Devers is at the plate.

“Now, to be honest, I understand why I have people coming to me and telling me, ‘Bro, I couldn’t wait for you to come to hit. I was always expecting something out of you.’ I have the same feeling about him,” Ortiz said. “I couldn’t wait for him to come to hit. Because if he gets himself out, he was fighting. He was hitting a rocket at somebody. It was a pitcher making a nasty pitch on him. It was not a giveaway at-bat at all. I saw more than 250 at-bats coming out of him [last year], and I was saying, ‘Bro, I’m telling you this guy is on another level.’”

#### Standing up for the Commissioner

Like everyone who follows baseball, Ortiz has been following the fallout from the Astros’ sign-stealing scandal, and one thing he wanted to make clear is his belief that Commissioner Rob Manfred has been wrongly criticized.

“The Commissioner is getting so much heat about this, like it was him who made that mistake, and I don’t agree with him getting all the heat,” Ortiz said. “It’s because the reality is, not one player has come and said, ‘It was me who started this up.’ Everybody is passing the ball like when you’re playing basketball.

“All the Commissioner can do is have a team investigate what’s going on and do what we all know he knows how to do. The Commissioner, Manfred, has been legit since Day 1. And I don’t think it’s fair for

everyone pitching him questions and blaming things on him. We all know he has the power to suspend people and make decisions.”

The 2018 Red Sox are also under investigation for stealing signs, and Manfred said he expects to release the result of it by the end of February.

“He’s going to do what’s best for the game. He’s not the type of guy that’s going to accept you screwing things up in the game,” Ortiz said. “No, he’s good at making decisions. But people need to chillax and let him do his job. Players need to let him do what he thinks is better for the game and stop putting him on the spot and telling him what to do. That’s what I think should happen.”

Why didn’t anyone put a stop to it?

The one thing that baffles Ortiz the most about the 2017 Astros and their trash-banging system is that nobody put a stop to it.

“I still don’t know how come nobody was like, ‘That is wrong.’ I just don’t know how no one says something about it, during, not after,” said Ortiz. “I was in the clubhouse for a long time and never anything like that came up. But now they’re going to have to deal with that for a long time. It’s not only a situation that involved players. You’re talking about the whole franchise.”

Ortiz said he would have respected Mike Fiers if he had said something while the cheating was going on. But he doesn’t like that the Athletics righty -- who was with the 2017 Astros -- exposed the sign-stealing system in an interview with The Athletic that came out nearly two years after Houston won the World Series.

“I’m mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it, and let me tell you why,” said Ortiz. “Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it? Why didn’t you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn’t you say, ‘I don’t want to be no part of it?’ So you’re looking like a snitch. Why do you have to talk about it after? That’s my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?”

### **Notes: Lucroy, Roenicke reunion; Sale strong**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Still without a job as of a few days ago, the soothing voice of Ron Roenicke never sounded better to Jonathan Lucroy.

The catcher played for Roenicke for parts of five seasons in Milwaukee. And Roenicke, now Boston’s interim manager, called to personally encourage him to come to Red Sox camp and earn a spot on the roster.

“Look, he called me and he wanted me to come,” said Lucroy. “It was a big one. He’s like, you’ll get an opportunity to come here and make the team. Right now, that’s all you can ask for with a guy in my position.

“I’ve known Ron for a long time. He was my manager in Milwaukee for five years. We had a lot of good times together. He was a really good guy, a really good manager. He’s a quality pickup for the Red Sox. Speaking from experience with him, he’s a huge positive for the Red Sox.”

Lucroy passed his physical on Wednesday and officially signed a Minor League deal with the Red Sox that included an invite to Spring Training.

By Thursday, Lucroy was right in the mix, catching a side session from ace Chris Sale.

“Luke, when I had him, he was a great offensive player. I think he hit 50 doubles or close to it one year,” Roenicke said. “He could really hit. Defensively, really good hands. I think the metrics on him were really high when they first started doing the metrics. I know those numbers have dropped so we need to figure that out. Great guy, cares about the pitching staff, works as hard as anybody. Just a really solid guy.”

A two-time All-Star who belted 24 homers in 2016, Lucroy is trying to battle back from an offensive decline the past two seasons.

“Yeah, absolutely,” Lucroy said. “I’ve had some mechanical issues come up, I’ve had some injuries that have happened and I’m working on breaking those things right now, those bad habits, and I’m feeling really good about it.”

The Red Sox don’t need Lucroy to be an All-Star. They just need him to be a solid backup catcher for Christian Vázquez. Kevin Plawecki is also competing for that spot.

“It’s part of the business side of baseball and honestly it’s what I deserve,” Lucroy said. “I haven’t played good so it’s where we’re at. You make your bed and have to sleep in it. So this is something I have to deal with. It’s part of life.”

Devers takes another day

The Red Sox thought Rafael Devers would make his first appearance in camp on Thursday, but the third baseman delayed his arrival so he could spend one more day with his newborn daughter in the Dominican Republic.

He is now expected on Friday. The Red Sox play their first Grapefruit League game on Saturday against the Rays, but Devers will be delayed at least a few days before getting into games.

Sale looking good

Ace Chris Sale is quickly getting over the flu and pneumonia that plagued him entering Spring Training.

The lefty threw his second side session of the week on Thursday.

“I didn’t see him but talked to him with [pitching coach Dave Bush] and it was really good,” Roenicke said. “So when you see a smile on a guy’s face you know things are going well. He felt really good. Physically he feels great.”

The next step could be for Sale to throw live BP.

“I didn’t check with Dave to see what the next step was, but I would think so,” Roenicke said.

The old college try

The Red Sox do have a game on Friday against Northeastern University. But Roenicke isn’t expecting to deploy any of his regulars on the mound or at the plate.

Prospect Daniel McGrath, a lefty, will make the start and go one inning. The game will be seven innings.

Brian Johnson, a non-roster invitee this year, will start Saturday’s Grapefruit League opener.

## **9 must-see Red Sox artifacts on display at Hall**

Bill Ladson

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum has started a series called Starting Nine that features nine cool artifacts highlighting the team history of all 30 teams. The Red Sox, of course, have a wealth of history from Ted Williams’ hitting exploits to Carlton Fisk’s World Series home run against the Reds in

Game 6 of the 1975 World Series, so one can imagine how long it took for the curators to pick the best artifacts.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum's collection of more than 40,000 three-dimensional pieces contains artifacts that tell the story of the game's legendary players, moments and triumphs. Beginning in late March and running through 2020, the Museum will share some of those memorable artifacts through a new limited time experience: Starting Nine which features nine artifacts from each of the 30 current MLB franchises.

Whether you've visited before, or you've always wanted to check it off your family's bucket list, now is the perfect time to plan a visit to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum -- the spiritual home of America's Pastime -- in beautiful Cooperstown, New York.

1. Roger Clemens' shoes

Where: One for the books

Fun facts: On April 29, 1986, Boston's Roger Clemens wore these shoes when he became the first Major League pitcher to strike out 20 batters in a nine-inning game as the Red Sox defeated the Mariners, 3-1. Clemens won both the Cy Young and Most Valuable Player Awards that season, becoming the first Red Sox pitcher to sweep the honors.

2. Ball thrown by Bill Dinneen

Where: One for the books

Fun facts: On October 13, 1903, when the Red Sox were called simply the Boston Americans, right-hander Bill Dinneen struck out the Pirates' Honus Wagner with this ball, ending the World Series and making Boston the first modern World Champions.

3. Carlton Fisk's bat

Where: Whole New Ballgame

Fun facts: It was the shot heard around Boston. It was Game 6 of the 1975 World Series. Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk clouted the game-winning home run by swinging Rick Burleson's bat and waving the ball fair with his hands. The 12th inning walk-off home run clanged off the left-field foul pole and sent the Reds and Red Sox to a winner-take-all Game 7.

4. Pedro Martinez's jersey

Where: Whole New Ballgame

Fun facts: At the 1999 All-Star Game, Martinez wore this jersey while striking out five of the six batters he faced at Fenway Park. The dominant performance helped the AL to a 4-1 victory and earned Martínez the game's MVP Award.

5. David Ortiz's bat

Where: Autumn Glory

Fun facts: What a postseason Red Sox slugger David Ortiz had in 2013. Ortiz used this bat during the 2013 postseason, hitting .353 with five home runs, 13 RBIs and a .706 slugging average. Ortiz was at his best during the World Series against the Cardinals, hitting .688 and winning the World Series MVP.

6. Jim Rice's bat

Where: Whole New Ballgame

Fun facts: Wielding this bat at Fenway Park on September 29, 1978, Red Sox slugger Jim Rice collected a second-inning single for his 400th total base of the season. He became the first American Leaguer to reach that mark since Joe DiMaggio notched 418 total bases in 1937.

7. Dave Roberts' spikes

Where: Whole New Ballgame

Fun facts: Red Sox pinch-runner Dave Roberts wore these spikes as he stole second base in Game 4 of the 2004 ALCS against the Yankees. His ninth-inning theft eventually led to an extra-inning 6-4 victory, the first of eight straight wins that gave the club its first World Championship in 86 years.

## 8. Ted Williams' strike zone

Where: Timeline

Fun facts: Ted Williams was arguably the best hitter in baseball history and his iconic strike zone diagram first appeared in the July 8, 1968, issue of Sports Illustrated and later graced the cover of Ted Williams' and John Underwood's 1971 book, *The Science of Hitting*. This three-dimensional version was created for a 1982 episode of *The Baseball Bunch* television series starring Johnny Bench.

## 9. Cy Young's Trophy

Where: Timeline

Fun facts: On August 13, 1908, Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Eben Draper presented this silver loving cup to Red Sox pitcher Cy Young, who was known as the "The King of Pitchers." The Boston Post newspaper had collected donations from the pitcher's many fans in order to have the majestic trophy made in time for the celebration dubbed "Cy Young Day" at Boston's Huntington Avenue Grounds.

## \* **ESPN.com**

### **Catcher Jonathan Lucroy says he was changing signs every pitch vs. Astros**

Joon Lee

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- As a catcher who spent parts of four seasons playing in the American League West between 2016 and 2019, Jonathan Lucroy found himself in a unique position to observe the sign-stealing tactics of the Houston Astros while needing to plan against the scheme.

Lucroy, who is now with the Boston Red Sox, played for the Oakland Athletics, Texas Rangers and Los Angeles Angels in the AL West during that span. And, as a division rival, he saw up close the effectiveness of Houston's actions.

"I knew about that two years ago, that it was going on," Lucroy said Thursday. "I know it just recently came out. Everyone in baseball [knew], especially in that division that played against them. But we were all aware of the Astros doing those things and it was up to us to outsmart them, I guess you could say.

"It's kind of hard when you have a computer program that breaks your signs. We actively changed signs. Every single pitch, we were changing signs. You had to because they would relay them to second, stealing them from first, too -- from between your legs. They had a very intricate system going on. We were well aware of it, and it was a challenge. It was a mental challenge to really overcome that. It's easier said than done. But it's a shame, and I'm glad it came out and it came to light."

Lucroy said that Mike Fiers informed him of Houston's tactics once they became teammates in Oakland in 2018. The revelation led Lucroy, who signed a minor league deal with Boston earlier this week, to create more and more intricate sign-calling patterns to preemptively fight any tactics used by the Astros. Working with different pitchers called for different tactics as well.

Lucroy added that he never heard the banging of a trash can, but he would not have been listening for it in the first place.

"[Pitchers] don't want to sit there and try to think about decoding your signs and thinking about your indicators and all the different things that you're doing," said Lucroy, a 10-year major league veteran. "They want to sit there and just worry about executing. Some guys can handle it and some guys can't. It was very difficult to do.

"The guys were calling time and stepping out of the box as you take time to put your sign sequence down, and it was making games long and leaving guys out there. Their system, not only did it work with them having the signs and being able to see them, but it made our guys sit out there longer. You had to put down

a more complex set of signs and everything. I'm glad it's been taken care of. It was out of hand and it affected the games in a lot of different ways."

According to Lucroy, the Athletics informed Major League Baseball about their experience with the Astros, but no investigation was started until Fiers went on the record with The Athletic in November.

Athletics general manager David Forst confirmed to The Mercury News last week that Oakland complained to the league well before MLB's investigation commenced.

Word began spreading quickly about the Astros, and Lucroy said he would text others around the league about what he had learned.

"It was crazy, some of the pitches they would take," Lucroy said. "It was like, 'Man, these guys are some of the best hitters I've ever seen.' It all made sense when I found out how they were doing it. Then it was like, 'What are we going to do?' I was with Oakland, and we had let MLB know, and they just called and said something. They didn't go through the whole investigation. It wasn't until Fiers came out publicly that they went and looked at it really hard."

Catcher Jonathan Lucroy said one game in particular with Edwin Jackson on the mound was "a mental workout" because they were switching signs so much against the Astros. "Every single pitch," Lucroy said, "because you had to." Troy Taormina/USA TODAY Sports  
Paranoia played a massive role in shaping Lucroy's preparation for Houston. Sign stealing has always been a part of the game, but Lucroy said Houston's efforts extended beyond what he had seen. At times, Lucroy said, players would look out into the outfield to see if anyone in the bullpen had binoculars.

"I remember a game with Edwin Jackson. He's a guy I've been around a long time, so I knew that I could get real complicated on signs and he would be OK," Lucroy said. "It was a mental workout. We were switching signs every pitch -- every single pitch -- because you had to. If you didn't, they were going to get it and go up there and take advantage of it."

While Major League Baseball has discussed new technology to allow pitchers and catchers to communicate without putting down signs, Lucroy has been skeptical about its effectiveness and its ability to not be hacked.

"They've talked about the earpieces, the radio transmitters, but the thing is, someone is going to hack into that, too," Lucroy said. "There's some kind of CIA-spy thing out there where someone will figure something out. I don't know. We've talked about it as a union, amongst ourselves as players, and there's gotta be something we can do to make it easier. The NFL does it with their quarterbacks. There must be something we can do."

Commissioner Rob Manfred gave Houston's players immunity from punishment in order to extract as much information as possible about the scandal, but Lucroy said Astros players deserve punishment for their actions, echoing the massive wave of player comments across the league in spring training.

Lucroy, who was teammates with Ryan Braun when the Milwaukee Brewers outfielder was suspended for using PEDs, said Astros players deserve punishment similar to what steroid users have received.

"Guys do steroids and they get punished. Guys cheat with steroids and get punished. I saw that in 2011 with the Brewers with that whole situation there," Lucroy said. "That guy [Braun] got punished. For me, the hardest part, and everyone else has been saying this, you're taking money.

"Guys are out there on the mound -- and it may be a Triple-A up-and-down guy and he gets rocked because you're stealing signs like that and gets sent down and never plays again. Or a guy who gets his career ended 'cause he goes out there and gets rocked. This game is a business, and if you're not performing, you don't play. Guys have families and have kids. That's the hardest part for me.

"These guys were essentially taking money away from players and their families and their kids. That's the hardest thing for me to swallow. I just think we should play the game the right way. If you want to steal signs, put them on second -- and I've been on teams that have done that. That's normal and part of the game. Doing it illegally? That's tough, especially with how it affects your livelihood."

### **David Ortiz: Mike Fiers looks like a 'snitch' for exposing Astros scandal**

Joon Lee

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox legend David Ortiz expressed his displeasure with Oakland A's pitcher Mike Fiers, the whistleblower in the sign-stealing scandal that has engulfed baseball for the past few months, saying that the former Astros hurler should have said something in the moment about the infamous trash-can banging scheme instead of waiting until he was on another team.

"I'm mad at this guy, the pitcher who came out talking about it," Ortiz said at JetBlue Park on Thursday. "And let me tell you why. Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it. Why don't you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn't you say, 'I don't want to be no part of it? So you look like you're a snitch. Why you gotta talk about it after? That's my problem. Why nobody said anything while it was going on?'"

Ortiz said he did not understand how nobody in the Astros clubhouse spoke out earlier about the cheating schemes being developed in Houston.

"The Houston Astros, I know they put themselves in a situation and I just still don't know how come nobody was like, 'That is wrong.' I just don't know how no one say something about it," Ortiz said. "During, not after. I was in the clubhouse for a long time and never anything like that comes up. Now, they're going to have to deal with that for a long time because it's not only a situation that involves players. You're talking about the whole franchise."

Fiers pitched for the 2017 World Series champion Astros before leaving for the Tigers, and now pitches for Oakland. Ortiz, who's a special assistant to the general manager for Boston and is also a broadcaster for Fox, added that he thinks commissioner Rob Manfred is receiving too much criticism for his handling of the scandal, saying that he doesn't "agree with him getting all the heat."

"To be honest with you, I've been watching the whole thing and the commissioner has been getting so much heat like it was him that made that mistake," Ortiz said. "I don't agree with him getting all the heat and the reality is that not one player came through and was like, 'Hey, it was me that started this up.' Everyone is passing the ball like when you're playing basketball. All the commissioner can do is have the team investigate what is going on and do what he knows how to do."

Ortiz continued his defense of Manfred's handling of the scandal, saying that people are criticizing him like he was directly involved in the sign-stealing scheme.

"The commissioner Manfred has been legit since day one and I don't think it's fair for everyone pitching him questions and blaming him on things," Ortiz said. "We all know that he has the power to suspend people and make decisions, but it's only until a certain point. After that, he had no control whatever happened in the investigation. I saw an interview that he did the other day. I feel bad for him because people are asking him questions like he was the person who started this s--- up. Like I see players trying to talk about what he needs to do. He don't tell you how to hit or how to pitch, so let him do his job. He's going to do what is best for the game. He's not the type of guy who's going to accept you screwing things up in the game and tell you where to go. People need to chillax. People need to let him do his job. People need to let him do what he thinks is better for the game and everything else. Stop putting him on the spot and telling him what to do. That's what I think."

**\* *WEEI.com***



## David Ortiz is not happy with Mike Fiers

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- It was just about 30 minutes after Jonathan Lucroy had sat on the JetBlue Park bench, letting it be known he was very happy Mike Fiers publicly exposed the Astros' cheating ways. Sitting in the spot in front of the identical grouping of media, David Ortiz had a very different view.

"I'm mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it, and let me tell you why," said Ortiz, referencing Fiers. "Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it? Why didn't you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn't you say, I don't want to be no part of it? So you're looking like a snitch. Why do you have to talk about it after? That's my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?"

"All those things that are going on right now, it's not out there, because it's going to be a huge distraction for the game for a while, and you don't want that. I retired, it's going to be four years now, and I have so much fun watching this game because of the talent out there. There is incredible talent right now. You watch the game, and the speed, physically the guys are in unbelievable shape, everyone's in their 20s. It's fun to watch. Then this thing comes in and I think it's going to be a distraction for the whole season, and we need to avoid that."

It was a similar tone taken by Ortiz's former teammate Pedro Martinez, who also voiced his displeasure when it came to Fiers when appearing on WEEI at Winter Weekend.

Both Ortiz and Martinez can't understand why Fiers or someone else didn't come forth with the information on the Astros while the cheating was going on.

"I still don't know how come nobody was like, 'That is wrong.' I just don't know how no one says something about it, during, not after," Ortiz said. "I was in the clubhouse for a long time and never anything like that comes up. But now they're going to have to deal with that for a long time. It's not only a situation that involved players. You're talking about the whole franchise."

"I feel bad myself, and let me tell you why. I have watched those kids playing. They're very talented. You're not talking about a whole bunch of knuckleheads that have no talent. When you talk about (Jose) Altuve, (Carlos) Correa, my boy the third baseman (Alex Bregman), you're talking about a group of kids that has talent. And their career is just brand new. Nobody on that team, with the exception of Verlander, everybody's career there is no longer than five years. Now, your career basically just begins, and you have to face the monster, and who knows what it's going to take people to forget about it. I'm watching, and it just doesn't feel right."

"There's more people involved in this than we think and let me tell you why: If you heard all the banging every day, you heard everything going on every day, people are not stupid. If I'm a fan that comes to that stadium every home game, at some point, I'm going to hear that banging, and I'm not talking as a fan. Like, 'How come there's this banging going on every time we're hitting?' It came to the point where it was obvious to everybody, it was too obvious."

One person Ortiz doesn't have a problem with is Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred.

"I've been watching the whole thing," he said. "The commissioner is getting so much heat about this, like it was him who made that mistake, and I don't agree with him getting all the heat. It's because the reality is, not one player has come and said, 'it was me who started this up.' Everybody is passing the ball like when you're playing basketball. All the commissioner can do is have a team investigate what's going on and do what we all know he knows how to do. The commissioner, Manfred, has been legit since Day 1. And I don't think it's fair for everyone pitching him questions and blaming things on him. We all know he has the power to suspend people and make decisions. But it's only to a certain point. After that, he has no control

over whatever happens in the investigation. I saw an interview he did the other day and I feel bad for him because people are asking questions like he was the one who started this shit up. No, man, I'm here to make sure you guys as a fan -- like I see players telling him what he needs to do. Hey, he don't tell you how to hit or how to pitch. So let him do his job. He's going to do what's best for the game. He's not the type of game that's going to accept you screwing things up in the game. No, he's good at making decisions. But people need to chillax and let him do his job. Players need to let him do what he thinks is better for the game and stop putting him on the spot and telling him what to do. That's what I think should happen."

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

### **David Ortiz blasts 'snitch' Mike Fiers for ratting out Astros' sign-stealing**

John Tomase

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Mike Fiers bravely put his name to reports that the Astros stole signs with a trash can in 2017, but he shouldn't expect any hugs from Red Sox legend David Ortiz.

Speaking at JetBlue Park on Thursday, Ortiz singled out Fiers for blowing the whistle on the Astros and plunging baseball into scandal.

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"I'm mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it, and let me tell you why," Ortiz said. "Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it?"

"Why didn't you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn't you say, I don't want to be no part of it? So you're looking like a snitch. Why do you have to talk about it after? That's my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?"

Ortiz criticized the Astros for perpetrating the scheme, and noted his sadness that superstars like Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa, and Alex Bregman have tainted their accomplishments.

But he's looking at the big picture and what this means for the sport.

Jonathan Lucroy has interesting perspective on Astros sign-stealing

"All those things that are going on right now, it's going to be a huge distraction for the game for a while, and you don't want that," he said. "I retired, it's going to be four years now, and I have so much fun watching this game because of the talent out there.

"There is incredible talent right now. You watch the game, and the speed, physically the guys are in unbelievable shape, everyone's in their 20s. It's fun to watch. Then this thing comes in and I think it's going to be a distraction for the whole season, and we need to avoid that."

### **Why never meeting Kobe Bryant will 'haunt' Red Sox's Kevin Pillar**

John Tomase

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Kevin Pillar grew up in Los Angeles in a family of five: his mother, father, brother, and Kobe Bryant.

Such was the bond Angelenos felt with the NBA superstar. Pillar's family ate dinner to Laker games. They sat on the couch together to watch Laker games. They watched Bryant grow up over 20 years in L.A.

"It's a crazy thing to be so connected to a professional athlete," the Red Sox outfielder said. "I felt like he was the older brother of me and my brother. He felt like part of the family. It's hard to understand if you didn't grow up with him on your television screen, and it's weird to say, but that's just how we felt about him."

When Pillar and his wife Amanda were expecting their first child, a daughter, in 2017, they wanted to give her a K name so she'd have the same nickname — KP — as her dad.

They eventually narrowed their choices to two: Kennedy and Kobie. They went with the latter, in honor of Bryant.

"We want to be the best at whatever we do, whether it's being a professional athlete, a reporter, a journalist, the way I attack being a dad, the Mamba mentality is with me," Pillar said. "The name just seemed fitting. In some small way it was a tribute to Kobe Bryant, more so it was a K name that we just thought was cool. We kind of always thought that the boy name or unisex name was cool for a daughter. I would love nothing more as my daughter grows up to have the same passion for sports that I did."

The name feels tragically poignant now, thanks to the helicopter crash that killed Bryant and his daughter, Gianna, last month. Pillar got the news while at a park with his wife and daughter and hoped against hope it wasn't true.

"I'll have that memory as long as I live," he said.

Pillar never met Bryant, but he had hoped they would cross paths during Bryant's epic second act, which included an Academy Award for the animated short film "Dear Basketball," opening the Mamba Academy, and becoming a fierce champion of women's sports.

"It's been a slow process, the healing process," Pillar said. "Even more so now with him gone, a lot of his greatness has surfaced. I probably watched three or four hours of Kobe Bryant games on NBA TV last night, and I still end up in tears, because I feel for him, I feel so much for his family, just how much he gave to that sport, and he was entering that second chapter of his life and being a full-time father and loving every second of it, and his passion for women's sports is something that I guess immaturely, I never really thought about a whole lot until I had a daughter of my own.

"You have a girl and you want to be able to give her the world and you want to be able to see gender equality in sports, but more importantly in life."

Pillar always viewed Bryant as a fully formed person, not just an icon. The 2003 sexual assault charges that complicated his legacy are a part of his story.

"What I started to realize as I got older is he's flawed and he's a human being and he owned up to his mistakes, and it's how you rebound from them," Pillar said. "In the second act of his career, he had that Mamba mentality and the desire to be the best at whatever he does, and that's something that transcends sports. People apply the Mamba mentality to anything they're doing. In some ways, if you're not applying that to your profession, your life, you're cutting yourself short."

Bryant co-authored a number of children's books after his playing days, and Pillar had wanted to pitch him on a series about baseball, but now he'll never get the chance.

"That conversation's never going to happen," he said. "That's going to haunt me for the rest of my life."

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

**What we've learned about Red Sox at start of spring training**

Jen McCaffrey

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Even though spring training is well underway, the first games beginning this weekend, baseball's sign-stealing scandal isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Compared with Trevor Bauer, Cody Bellinger and Aaron Judge, Red Sox players have been relatively understated in their comments about the Astros' illegal sign stealing. That's at least partially due to the still-open MLB investigation on the Red Sox themselves, but it's noticeable nonetheless.

The newest addition to camp, Jonathan Lucroy, was among the most vocal players in camp while adding another target of frustration: a league office that didn't react until pitcher Mike Fiers blew the whistle.

Lucroy played for the Angels, Rangers and Athletics the past few seasons and said it was well known, especially in the AL West, what was happening in Houston. Lucroy was teammates in Oakland with Fiers, the former Astros pitcher who went on the record with The Athletic to reveal how Houston's system worked.

"It all made sense when I found out, when we found out how they were doing it," Lucroy said. "It all made sense. Then it was like, 'What are you going to do?' I was with Oakland (in 2018) and we had let MLB know, and they had just called and said something to them (Houston). They didn't go through the whole investigation. It wasn't until Fiers came out publicly that they went out and looked at it really hard."

Lucroy's frustration fits with comments earlier this week from J.D. Martinez and Chris Sale, who seemed to think of the scandal in terms of a league-wide, bigger picture and the ramifications for the game itself as the season progresses.

"I think from here on out it's going to be a different message in clubhouses," Martinez said. "The punishments were so harsh that people aren't even going to attempt to even think about doing that anymore."

Sale added: "I think I was more mad at the game as a whole. I'm a part of this, too. This is my era of baseball. My team, my teammates, all of our names are attached to this forever. It's like the steroid era. Anybody who played in that time is going to be questioned."

David Ortiz, who arrived in Red Sox camp Thursday, was asked about the situation. In usual fashion, he had a lot to say. He directed his ire toward Fiers while defending commissioner Rob Manfred.

"I'm mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it, and let me tell you why," Ortiz said of Fiers. "Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it? Why didn't you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn't you say, I don't want to be no part of it? So you're looking like a snitch. Why do you have to talk about it after? That's my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?"

It's a question that likely will remain unanswered for a while.

Picked up around JetBluePark

- The Red Sox play in their first game of the spring Friday in a seven-inning exhibition match against Northeastern. Lefty Daniel McGrath, the Australia native who split time between Portland and Pawtucket last year, is scheduled to start. The Red Sox will have seven pitchers toss one inning each in the game, and no regular Red Sox players are expected to play. The regulars should start to appear in games Saturday when the Grapefruit League schedule opens against Tampa. Brian Johnson is scheduled to start that game. Xander Bogaerts is still receiving treatment on a sore left ankle, so he likely won't see game action for at least a few more days. And Rafael Devers has not arrived in camp yet following the birth of his daughter last weekend, but he's expected to arrive Friday. Because of his late start, he likely won't appear in games until he's had a few days to work out.

- Manager Ron Roenicke said he had a conversation with chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran on Wednesday about his bench coach vacancy. Roenicke wouldn't say whether they're considering internal or external candidates but that they'll have someone within the next couple of weeks.

- Roenicke mentioned earlier this week that they're still working on the outfield alignment. Alex Verdugo has the arm strength and speed to handle right field but likely will miss the start of the season recovering from a stress fracture in his back. That means Kevin Pillar will get a lot of playing time. Pillar has played 732 of his career 836 career games in center field while Jackie Bradley Jr. has manned center field for the Red Sox for 726 of his 808 career games. Bradley, however, has much more familiarity with right field at Fenway, so it's possible he handles right field until Verdugo returns. Roenicke mentioned wanting to get Pillar and Bradley a lot of playing time this spring so that they could get a feel for each other in the outfield.

- Lucroy joins a catching group in camp that includes Christian Vazquez, Kevin Plawecki, Juan Centeno, Connor Wong, Jett Bandy and Roldani Baldwin. However, it was noteworthy that on his first day in camp, Lucroy caught a Chris Sale side session.

The current tandem is Vazquez and Plawecki, but Lucroy is likely to compete with Plawecki for that backup spot. Lucroy played for Roenicke his entire time in Milwaukee from 2011 to 2015, but that's not the only reason a Boston minor-league deal was enticing for the 33-year-old catcher.

"Working with Jason Varitek was a big thing," he said. "Obviously, he's very respected in the catching world, and that's someone I wanted to get around and get some knowledge from for sure."

Lucroy split time between the Angels and Cubs last year, hitting just .232 with a .660 OPS. He had surgery this winter to fix a herniated disc in his neck but says he's close to 100 percent.

"I'd like to sit here and make excuses and say that's the reason I didn't play good, but I'm not going to," he said. "It did affect me. But I got it taken care of, and I feel a lot better than I have in a long time."

- Sale, after missing two weeks while recovering from pneumonia, threw two bullpen sessions this week. He's wearing a black compression sleeve on his left arm when he throws, which is something he hasn't worn in the past and seems to be related to the elbow inflammation he suffered last summer that put him on the injured list. Roenicke said he anticipates Sale's next outing will be live batting practice. Eduardo Rodriguez and Nathan Eovaldi have each thrown two live BPs already, so Sale has some catching up to do but doesn't appear to be too far behind schedule. Roenicke said he'd hoped each of his starters would make six starts this spring. Sale's schedule will likely be adjusted after his illness.

- This has been school vacation week in Massachusetts, and usually the free workouts at JetBlue Park mean the grounds are packed to the gills. There was still a sizable crowd this week, but it did feel noticeably smaller than in past years and less crowded overall.

- With Ortiz in camp Thursday, he of course was asked for his perspective on the deal that sent Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers and on the future of the Red Sox without two of their key players.

"Sometimes people think that as a player, we get greedy when it comes down to contracts," he said. "But it's only going to go around once and you've got to get what you have earned. Because nobody gives you anything in this game. You've got to earn it. Mookie has earned every single dollar that he's going to get. If I'm him, I'm not going to leave \$50-60-70 million on the table out there just because. It is what it is. We had a good offer for him. I understand that somewhere he's going to get more. I think the Red Sox decision with him was perfect. You're just not going to let a great player go after the season. Before the season even begins, you try to get something that you can have for a long period of time. For both sides, I think it was really good. Plus we all know that we're trying to reduce payroll. It's just something that wasn't surprising. I respect him. I wasn't expecting it this early. But I knew that something was going to happen. And it happened early enough. But like I said, it's business. It is what it is."

Can the Red Sox win without Betts?

“They won without me,” Ortiz said with a laugh. “So I’m not saying that Mookie isn’t a big piece of what we are here, but once that happened, you’ve got to move on. I was part of this ballclub in 2016. And in 2018, we won. And I wasn’t playing. Yes, as a player, we are a big part of a team, but we also are replaceable. I’m not saying that we’re going to replace Mookie tomorrow, but sometimes another player can show up and do things that can help you to win ballgames.”

### **It’s hard to pin down David Ortiz’s thoughts on Astros scandal**

Steve Buckley

FORT MYERS, Fla. — It was supposed to be a cheery catch-up session with David Ortiz, an opportunity for the most important player in Red Sox history to stretch his legs on the shady bench out behind the third-base clubhouse at JetBlue Park and answer questions about such topics as the Mookie Betts trade, the ascent of Rafael Devers and that big hug that Big Papi planted on newly acquired outfielder Alex Verdugo earlier in the day.

And for the most part, that’s how things played out. Ortiz even twirled a fungo bat as he spoke, as if to reinforce the point that he is an ex-player now, a special spring training instructor and a Fox baseball analyst, and not the clutch, slugging Big Papi of days gone by.

But then the ongoing fallout over the Houston Astros’ sign-stealing scandal crept into the conversation, and that’s when Ortiz didn’t need the fungo bat anymore. The words he spoke made it clear he’s not an active big-leaguer anymore.

He is, in fact, far removed from the feelings, the emotions, the rhythm of the big-league clubhouse.

While current players throughout the game have been criticizing the Astros and MLB commissioner Rob Manfred’s handling of what has turned into one of the biggest crises in the game’s history, Ortiz not only launched a full-scale defense of Manfred but also criticized former Houston pitcher Mike Fiers, whose on-the-record comments to The Athletic about his former team’s illegal sign-stealing activities en route to winning the 2017 World Series set all of this in motion.

“I’m mad at this guy, the pitcher that came out talking about it, and let me tell you why,” Ortiz said. “Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it? Why didn’t you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn’t you say, I don’t want (any) part or not. You look like a snitch. You know what I mean?”

“Why are you going to talk about it after? That’s my problem, you know? Why did nobody say anything when it was going on?”

Ortiz said the case is going to be “a huge distraction for the game for a while, and you don’t want that.”

As for Manfred, Ortiz said, “I’ve been watching the whole thing, and the commissioner is getting so much heat like it was him who made that mistake. And to be honest with you I don’t agree with him getting all the heat.”

In the view of Ortiz, “Manfred has been legit since Day 1. You know what I’m saying? And I don’t think it’s fair for everyone pitching him questions and (blaming) him.

“I saw an interview that he did the other day and I feel bad for him because, you know, people are asking him questions like he was the one who started the shit up.

“I see players trying to tell him what he needs to do. Hey, he (doesn’t) tell you how to hit or how to pitch. So let him do his job, you know, he gonna do what is best for the game.<

“People need to chill-ax. People need to let him do his job. Players need to let him do what he thinks is best for the game and everything else. Stop putting him on the spot and telling him what to do.”

It was an “OK, Boomer” moment for Ortiz, even though at age 44 he is not, by definition, a baby boomer.

Just as Ortiz is coming to Manfred’s defense, it’s worth noting that the commissioner came to the defense of Ortiz at the close of Big Papi’s career.

Appearing at Fenway Park on Sunday, Oct. 3, 2016, the day of Ortiz’s final regular-season game, the commissioner touched on a 2009 article in The New York Times naming the Red Sox slugger as one of the more than 100 players who had tested positive for a banned substance in 2003 during confidential testing by MLB and the Players Association.

But Manfred distanced Ortiz from those findings. “We were not certain it was a banned substance, as opposed to something that was available over the counter and legal,” he said. “What I do feel is unfair that in situations where it is leaks, rumors, innuendo, not confirmed, positive tests results, that is unfair to the players. I think that would be wrong.”

Manfred went so far as to use his own name that day. “Even if Rob Manfred’s name was on that list, he might have been one of those 10 or 15 where there was probably, or at least possibly, a very legitimate explanation that did not involve the use of a banned substance,” he said.

Ortiz’s criticism of Fiers, coupled with his staunch support of Manfred, places the former slugger at odds with himself. Manfred, in an interview with ESPN’s Karl Ravech, said, “Mike Fiers, in my view, did the industry a service. He opened the door here. Without that opening of the door, we would not have been able to conduct the effective investigation that we did.”

And in launching a defense of the Astros, Ortiz places himself at odds with current players who have been adamant in their belief the 2017 World Series champions have not been sufficiently punished.

“They are talented,” Ortiz said of the Astros. “You’re not talking about a whole bunch of knuckleheads (and) they have no talent. When you talk about guys like (Jose) Altuve, (Carlos) Correa, my boy the third baseman (Alex Bregman), I mean, you’re talking about a group of kids that have talent. In their career, they’re brand new. Nobody on that team with the exception of (Justin) Verlander is longer than five years. So your career is basically just beginning and you have to face this monster.”

Well, no. These are not kids. They are seasoned major-leaguers. Altuve was in his seventh big-league season when Houston won the 2017 World Series, and he’s now entering his 10th season.

Ortiz also defended Altuve to this degree: “I heard Correa the other day say to Kenny Rosenthal that Altuve had nothing to do with that because he doesn’t like it. I believe that. But let me tell you what the problem is. Just for being part of the group that is doing it, you are guilty as much as anyone else. Altuve, to me, might be the best hitter in the game.

“He’s going to hit .300, regardless. But I don’t know how he’s gonna be able to deal with all the trash coming from fans and everybody, every time he steps up to the plate. So if you might see him this year struggle, I don’t think it’s going to be because he’s missing knowing what’s coming.”

It’s hard to pin down exactly where Ortiz is coming from here. He defends Manfred but criticizes Fiers, who is being defended by the commissioner. He defends Astros players for a “mistake” at a time when players on other teams are seething.

Maybe it's a Manfred thing. Or perhaps it's no more complicated than Ortiz being out of touch with today's players.

## **\* *The New York Post***

### **David Ortiz slams 'snitch' Mike Fiers for exposing Astros' cheating**

Justin Tasch

Add David Ortiz to the list of people who think Mike Fiers was wrong to blow the whistle on the Astros' cheating scandal.

The former Red Sox slugger told reporters Thursday in Fort Meyers, Fla., that he thinks Fiers is a "snitch" for revealing the Astros illegally stole signs in 2017 en route to winning the World Series.

"I'm mad at this guy, the pitcher who came out talking about it," Ortiz said, according to MassLive. "And let me tell you why. Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring you decide to talk about it? Why don't you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn't you say, 'I don't want to be no part of (this)?' Now you look like a snitch. You know what I mean? Why do you have to talk about it after? That's my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?"

Jonathan Lucroy, who just joined the Red Sox, said Fiers told him about the scheme two years ago, according to MassLive, and said the Oakland Athletics called MLB about it, but the league didn't do anything. Lucroy, who was Fiers' teammate on the 2018 A's, said when he saw The Athletic report in November that blew open the sign-stealing scandal, he thought, "Oh boy."

Ortiz was reported by the New York Times in 2009 to be one of 104 players who failed a survey drug test in 2003 administered by MLB ahead of the league implementing a new drug-testing program.

Last month, Ortiz's former Red Sox teammate Pedro Martinez called Fiers a "bad teammate" for exposing the Astros' cheating scheme. Both Martinez and Ortiz are currently Red Sox special assistants.

ESPN's Jessica Mendoza, who has since left her role as a Mets special advisor, also ripped Fiers last month for going public, saying it "didn't sit well" with her.

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred has praised Fiers for revealing the scheme. Manfred wants to protect Fiers, but the pitcher says he'll defend himself from potential retaliation.

## **\* *The USA Today***

### **David Ortiz calls ex-Astros pitcher Mike Fiers a 'snitch' for going public about sign-stealing**

Steve Gardner

The way baseball's sign-stealing scandal became public doesn't sit well with former Boston Red Sox star David Ortiz.

The legendary slugger, who retired after the 2016 season, said he didn't like the way pitcher Mike Fiers went public with details about the scheme two years after the Houston Astros won the World Series.

"After you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it?" Ortiz said Thursday at the Red Sox's spring training camp in Fort Myers, Florida.

"You look like you're a snitch. Why you gotta talk about it after? That's my problem: Why nobody said anything while it was going on."



Fiers pitched for Houston in 2017 before leaving as a free agent. He's currently a member of the Oakland A's. His on-the-record comments to The Athletic in November led to an MLB investigation that resulted in a one-year suspension for Astros manager A.J. Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow. The team later fired them both.

Former Astros bench coach Alex Cora was also implicated in the scheme. He was fired as manager of the Red Sox after the report was released.

Ortiz also said he didn't agree with MLB commissioner Rob Manfred "getting all the heat" for his handling of the scandal.

"I see players trying to talk about what he needs to do. He don't tell you how to hit or how to pitch, so let him do his job. He's going to do what is best for the game," Ortiz said. "He's not the type of guy who's going to accept you screwing things up in the game and tell you where to go.

"People need to chillax. People need to let him do his job."

## **\* *Associated Press***

### **Ortiz: Fiers 'looking like a snitch' in Astros cheating**

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP) — Retired Boston Red Sox slugger David Ortiz said that Astros pitcher Mike Fiers was “looking like a snitch” for disclosing the team's cheating scandal only after he had left the team.

“Oh, after you make your money, after you get your ring, you decide to talk about it?” Ortiz said after arriving at the Red Sox spring training complex on Thursday. “Why didn't you talk about it during the season when it was going on? Why didn't you say, ‘I don't want to be part of it?’

“So you're looking like a snitch,” said Ortiz, who works for the Red Sox under the title special assistant. “Why do you have to talk about it after? That's my problem. Why did nobody say anything while it was going on?”

The Astros were found to violate baseball rules by using video to steal opponents signs during their World Series championship season of 2017. After Fiers blew the whistle to The Athletic this offseason, Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow, manager A.J. Hinch and bench coach Alex Cora — who had moved on to manage the Red Sox — all lost their jobs in the wake of the scandal.

Ortiz did defend Commissioner Rob Manfred, who has been criticized for failing to punish any players for cheating. Major League Baseball is also investigating reports that the Red Sox had a similar scheme when they won it all in 2018.

“People need to chillax and let him do his job,” Ortiz said. “Players need to let him do what he thinks is better for the game and stop putting him on the spot and telling him what to do. That’s what I think should happen.”

Ortiz was also asked whether the Red Sox can win without Mookie Betts, who was traded rather than signed to a long-term contract or allowed to leave as a free agent.

“They won without me,” Ortiz said.