

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, February 27, 2020***

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

#### **Red Sox lawyers argue team should not be held liable for alleged electronic sign-stealing**

Bob Hohler

Lawyers for the Red Sox contend in a federal court document that the Sox should not be held liable for their alleged electronic sign-stealing en route to the 2018 World Series title in part because a judge dismissed a complaint against Bill Belichick and the Patriots for allegedly engaging in similar misconduct in the 2007 Spygate scandal.

The Sox lawyers also argued that a class-action suit by fantasy baseball gamblers against the Sox, Houston Astros, and Major League Baseball should be tossed because aggrieved pay-for-view customers lost their bid to seek refunds after boxer Mike Tyson violated the sport's rules and was disqualified from a heavyweight title fight in 1997 for biting off a piece of his opponent's ear.

"Courts faced with similar claims repeatedly have rejected the notion that sports teams, participants, and organizers have a duty publicly to disclose even material information that could affect the quality, intensity or fairness of athletic competition," the Sox lawyers stated in a 27-page memorandum supporting their motion to dismiss the suit. They filed the document Feb. 21 in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York.

The lawsuit claims the Sox, Astros, and MLB defrauded DraftKings fantasy baseball customers through "manipulative and deceitful conduct" that involved the Astros allegedly electronically stealing signs in their 2017 championship season and the Sox purportedly engaging in similar deception en route to their title the following year.

Alex Cora, an alleged mastermind of Houston's sign-stealing scandal as the team's bench coach in 2017, is under investigation amid suspicions he led a similar scheme while he managed the Sox in 2018.

He and the Sox parted ways in January, after The Athletic reported the team's alleged cheating.

To date, the sign-stealing scandal has also cost the jobs of Houston's general manager Jeff Luhnow and manager A.J. Hinch; and New York Mets manager Carlos Beltran, who played for the Astros in 2017. MLB also fined the Astros \$5 million and ordered them to forfeit their first- and second-round draft picks the next two years. The results of MLB's investigation into Cora and the Sox are expected to be disclosed next week.

In the Spygate case, Belichick was fined \$500,000, the Patriots \$250,000, and the team was docked a first-round draft pick after the NFL ruled the Patriots had improperly videotaped New York Jets defensive coaches signalling plays.

At issue in the baseball case is whether the Sox and Astros, through their business partnerships with DraftKings, deceived consumers and affected the results of fantasy baseball competitions with their alleged cheating.

One plaintiff, Kris Olson, a reporter for Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly, is suing the Sox under the state's Consumer Protection Act for unspecified financial damages involving entry fees and lost prize money from games he wagered on after the start of the 2017 season.

“While luring fans to participate in these fantasy games, MLB member teams were engaging in secret corrupt and fraudulent conduct, in obvious violation of MLB official rules and other regulations,” the class-action complaint states. “This misconduct distorted players’ statistics, impacted the outcomes of MLB games, and changed the outcomes of fantasy baseball competitions.”

Even if that were true, the Sox lawyers assert in their motion, prior legal cases indicate the team should not be liable. Just as lawsuits against Belichick, the Patriots, and Tyson failed, the lawyers state, so did a class-action case filed by pay-for-viewers and closed-circuit distributors who alleged they were defrauded when promoters of a 2015 title fight between boxers Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather claimed Pacquiao entered the bout in “great shape,” when in fact his shoulder was seriously injured, diminishing his talent and contributing to his defeat.

The document filed by the Sox lawyers quotes a judge in the Pacquiao case as cautioning against “the ill effects of allowing our uniquely American brand of over-litigiousness to infect the province of competitive sports.”

Lawyers for the plaintiffs have yet to file responses to motions by the Sox, Astros, and MLB to dismiss the case.

### **Air of uncertainty hovers over Red Sox camp in Florida**

Christopher L. Gasper

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Camp Uncertainty. Camp Unease. Camp Unsettled. Call it what you want, but Red Sox spring training definitely has a strange feel to it this year.

The Sox are a team in flux, and like the Democratic Party, it’s unclear exactly where they’re headed in 2020.

Right now, they’re standing on the platform waiting for a transitional train to take them to parts unknown. The unknown is the theme of this spring training. The Sox are in wait-and-see mode on a number of fronts, which has put the actual baseball on the backburner a bit. Some teams need to find a closer during spring training. The Sox need to find some closure.

The Sox don’t know how their clubhouse is going to respond in the aftermath of the seismic trade that shipped outfielder Mookie Betts and pitcher David Price to the Dodgers just one day before pitchers and catchers reported on Feb. 11, a deal that stripped the Sox of their best player and part of their identity.

They’re still awaiting the all-clear from Major League Baseball on allegations that the 2018 World Series-winning team engaged in impermissible electronic sign-stealing using the video replay room, a charge first levied in a story by The Athletic, which unearthed the sign-stealing shenanigans of the Houston Astros that have rocked baseball. The investigation and possible punishment hang over the Sox like the Sword of Damocles as the inquiry drags on and the exculpatory silence from MLB becomes conspicuous.

Interim manager Ron Roenicke is a familiar face who has been thrust into an unfamiliar role. Roenicke has the unenviable task of replacing a popular and charismatic bilingual manager, Alex Cora, and no one knows whether the new skipper is more than a placeholder. Cora parted ways with the team on Jan. 14 after his name was splashed all over the commissioner’s report condemning the Astros’ sign-stealing scheme. Cora was Houston’s bench coach in 2017 before becoming Sox manager.

The uncertain milieu surrounding the Sox extends to ace Chris Sale, trying to return to form and health after a disappointing 2019 season (6-11, 4.40 ERA) that was cut short by elbow trouble. The Sox are exercising caution with Sale so far after he was slowed by a bout with pneumonia.

As they've declared repeatedly, the Sox still harbor visions of playoff contention even with Betts and Price sacrificed to the luxury tax gods. Sale is absolutely indispensable to any such plans. If there is one player the Sox can't afford to lose, it's the ace.

There was some positive news Wednesday as Sale threw an enhanced bullpen session — add this to the list of new baseball argot we could do without — that was moved indoors at Fenway South because of rain. Roenicke, with the team in Bradenton to play the Pirates, said Sale came through the session fine and is slated for live batting practice Saturday. Still, it's looking more and more doubtful that Sale will be built up enough for Opening Day in Toronto March 26.

Everything about the Sox just feels a little off and a little odd right now, including sparser-than-normal crowds for spring training workouts and games.

The Sox' belt-tightening following an 84-win dud of a season dulled enthusiasm and bred apathy. Fans seem both weary and wary of the club after the Offseason of Discontent. The team isn't writing off the season, but it feels like some Fenway Followers are writing them off.

The Sox announced that Tuesday's 3-2 win over the Orioles at JetBlue Park was played in front of a sellout crowd of 9,219. As colleague Peter Abraham pointed out, that seemed like a generous assessment. It was a good crowd, but there were noticeable patches of empty seats.

The fan presence at workouts — or lack thereof — has been a conversation piece since camp opened. It feels like the Sox have faded into the Boston sports background with the Tom Brady Watch and the playoff anticipation generated by the Celtics and Bruins.

In some respects, the Red Sox require a reintroduction to the masses. Three huge personalities and leaders who shaped the team have been excised: Betts, Price, and Cora. Boston effectively has a 36-year-old first-time general manager with a technocratic title in chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom. The only Green Monster this season is the famed left-field wall, as part of the plan for sustainability is to take a step back from a payroll standpoint.

That's a lot of change to process for those inside and outside of the organization.

"It's obviously different," said center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., part of a core of holdovers who won the World Series in 2018. "A lot of attention has been brought to our clubhouse with those big-name guys being gone.

"Yeah, it's going to be different. As we all know with this business, we have to continue to move forward. We have to continue to progress. Focus on the things that we can control and that's each other and being here and work on that."

While the feel around Fort Myers is different, Bradley indicated it has been largely business as usual for the players as they prepare for the season.

The team isn't worried about formulating a new identity. As Bradley pointed out, the Sox still have several players who came up through the organization together like him and Xander Bogaerts, and players like Sale and slugger J.D. Martinez, who have become linchpin pieces.

"You see new faces," said Bradley. "Luckily, we have a great group of guys here already. Guys who have been through our system from the minor leagues to the big leagues, a lot of us have played with each other every step of the way. We have great guys that we've brought in who have been with us for multiple years now. So, we're comfortable with a lot of the guys that are in here.

"I think that obviously knowing who you're going to war with every single day is also a pretty big advantage and having each other's back."

Still, it's going to take some time for the streamlined Sox to forge an identity that fans can gravitate to. This is not an easy team to project at this point.

There is still so much up in the southwest Florida air that needs to get settled.

These are strange days in the Fort, and the Red Sox can only hope that this doesn't represent the new normal.

### **Dave Bush well-armed for new challenge as the Red Sox pitching coach**

Alex Speier

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The “interim” tag still pinned on Ron Roenicke’s managerial title underscores the sense of change surrounding the Red Sox, yet the unanticipated departure of Alex Cora is not the only significant alteration to the Red Sox staff.

After the Red Sox posted a 4.70 ERA in a disappointing 2019 season, Dana LeVangie was reassigned from pitching coach to a scouting role. In his place, the Red Sox tabbed Dave Bush to oversee a group that could make or break their playoff hopes for 2020.

Bush’s rotation is also in a state of flux. David Price (trade) and Rick Porcello (free agency) are gone. Chris Sale and Nate Eovaldi are trying to bounce back from injuries. The fifth starter spot is wide open, and it’s unclear whether it will be filled by a traditional starter or an opener.

The Red Sox are placing their faith in a 40-year-old who made 187 starts in a nine-year major league career but is working for the first time as a full-time coach — a challenge Bush relishes.

“Trying to make the pieces fit and putting guys in the right situation to be successful is fun,” Bush said. “It puts some excitement into it to look short-term sometimes instead of long-term on the player development side.”

Bush is naturally cerebral, a trait that put him on a path not just to be a pitching coach but that helped him move to the mound in the first place. He was recruited to Wake Forest as a catcher, but quickly realized in his first season that his limitations as a hitter would keep him in a reserve role.

Though he had thrown just a handful of innings in high school, Bush recognized an opportunity to contribute more as a pitcher.

“There were no bad habits. There was a lot to learn,” Bush said. “I was really open-minded. I had to be.”

Red Sox vice president of scouting Mike Rikard coached at Wake Forest during Bush’s freshman season. He recalled the righthander as competitive yet humble, a good listener who asked sophisticated questions with “a really advanced understanding of the game.” On top of that, the arm strength that he had cultivated as a catcher played on the mound.

“He had this really, really unique fastball,” Rikard said.

“He would say, ‘Why would I throw anything else when no one has proven that they’ve been able to hit my fastball?’”

However, Bush didn’t have much else. He threw a slurvy breaking ball, but even as a freshman he recognized that opposing hitters weren’t getting to a mid-90s fastball that he could command. He slotted into the Wake Forest bullpen as a freshman, and over four years he emerged as one of the most dominant relievers in the country.

In 2002, the Blue Jays selected Bush in the second round of the June amateur draft, believing that the reliever could find a spot in their big league rotation.

“You knew he took his craft seriously. That part of it, his personality played in his favor,” recalled Giants executive J.P. Ricciardi, the Blue Jays GM when Bush was there. “A lot of guys get there and they just don’t figure it out. He was smart enough to figure it out.”

Bush reshaped his slurve, developed a slider, and improved his changeup. In 2003 — his first year as a starter — he went 14-6 with a 2.79 ERA in 158 innings in High-A and Double-A.

By 2004, Bush was in the Blue Jays’ rotation. He pitched in 211 major league games with the Blue Jays, Brewers, and Rangers, posting a 56-69 record with a 4.73 ERA.

“I was a back-end starter. I never felt secure. . . . I had to make adjustments. I didn’t have a lot of room for error,” said Bush. “Scouting reports and in-game adjustments, small tweaks, were really important for my survival.”

By the end of the 2013 season, the 33-year-old Bush was “exhausted” by that lengthy pursuit of survival, ready to spend time with his family in Bridgton, Maine.

“I just needed a break,” he said.

But by the end of 2014, Bush was ready to go back to work. A friend invited him to work with the baseball team at Bridgton Academy, and Bush quickly recognized that he enjoyed coaching and had something to offer.

He worked at Bridgton and with MLB International, coaching pitchers of varying levels of talent and experience in Maine, Europe, South Africa, and China. Language barriers represented a new challenge.

“The communication [in China] is really difficult,” Bush said. “I had to boil things down in such a way that the translator and player could understand what I was trying to say, in a place that’s not a traditional baseball country. It was a lot of problem solving. I guess that’s what I enjoyed about it.”

Still, Bush knew he wanted to work with higher-level pitchers, and to develop his understanding of some of the analytical concepts he had been studying independently in his post-playing career. In 2016, as the Red Sox began to search for coaches who could blend traditional pitching backgrounds with analytics, they hired Bush to work with minor leaguers.

Bush quickly found that his ability to work in a second language helped him communicate unfamiliar, data-driven concepts to young pitchers. And his major league experience allowed him to relate to players — something that 2017 first-round pick Tanner Houck benefited from when he was struggling early in 2018.

“He was very helpful,” Houck said. “He was saying, ‘You’re eventually going to figure it out. Everyone goes through something like this. It’s part of the game.’ ”

In 2019, Bush began spending time with the big league club, supplementing LeVangie’s work with data-driven insights.

When the Sox decided to go to a more data-driven approach, Bush quickly emerged as the leading candidate.

Despite checking all of the team’s numerous boxes, Bush’s task in 2020 is full of new challenges. Player development is now a secondary objective, with night-to-night results now at the forefront.

Big league pitching coaches have the shelf life of fruit flies. Only seven of 30 teams has a pitching coach entering his third full season on the job.

Yet for Bush, there is comfort in that sort of uncertainty.

“I love competition. That’s the one thing I miss the most about playing,” Bush said. “I go into it knowing that major league coaches don’t have the comfort of 10-year contracts and don’t make the money that players make, but I had that same edge as a player.

“I know what I’m stepping into. I know there will be some challenges. But I’m looking forward to that, stepping back on the field, and getting back into competition.”

### **Red Sox newcomer Martin Perez is taking Hall of Famer’s tips to heart**

Peter Abraham

BRADENTON, Fla. — Martin Perez had a chance to see Pedro Martinez throw a bullpen session when he was a minor leaguer back in 2009. But he was 18 then and too shy to speak to the pitcher he grew up idolizing.

Perez, now 28, finally had a chance to meet Martinez this month when the Hall of Famer arrived at Red Sox camp to help out with the pitchers.

They have spoken almost every day since, and Martinez has given Perez a few tips about using his legs to better stay in line with the plate as he gets into his delivery.

“Yeah, a lot,” Perez said when asked if that’s been helpful. “I think about it all the time. I like to talk to him a lot. He knows a lot when you ask him questions.”

Perez looked sharp in his spring training debut on Wednesday, giving up one unearned run in two innings against the Pittsburgh Pirates. He walked one and struck out three.

Manager Ron Roenicke said Perez was hitting 94 to 95 miles per hour with his fastball.

Perez was 7-1 with a 2.95 earned run average in the first two months of last season when he was with the Twins. He was 3-6 with a 6.29 ERA after that.

“It’s just a matter of him figuring out really how he can get back to where he was the first half of last year,” Roenicke said. “Or how do we help him with maybe a pitch mix that gets him beyond that.”

The Sox, who signed Perez to a one-year, \$6.5 million deal, want to see him use his swing-and-miss changeup more and cut back a little on using his cutter.

“His changeup is outstanding,” Roenicke said. “It’s a strikeout changeup.”

Perez is the No. 4 starter and the Sox need innings from him to shore up their questionable rotation.

Back to work

In Fort Myers, Chris Sale stayed out of the rain and threw 45 pitches over what amounted to two innings off a mound in the batting cages.

With pitching coach Dave Bush, assistant pitching coach Kevin Walker, head athletic trainer Brad Pearson, and sports sciences coordinator Mike Cianciosi watching, Sale worked with good intensity.

Roenicke said the next step would be for Sale to face hitters on Saturday. He likely would do that twice before being cleared for a game.

Sale missed the first week of workouts while recovering from pneumonia and the Sox have proceeded cautiously with their ace since.

There seems to be little chance he would be ready for Opening Day.

Crystal ball

Roenicke got to chatting about 23-year-old outfield prospect Jarren Duran before the game. Duran has a .376 on-base percentage and 70 stolen bases in two seasons since being drafted out of Long Beach State but only eight home runs in 802 at-bats.

“It’s learning his swing and learning the strike zone, trying to figure out what kind of hitter he’s going to be,” Roenicke said. “He’s a lot stronger this year than he was last year. So I don’t know, maybe he starts driving balls. Which would be great with his speed, to hit balls in the gap and watch him run.

“I would think down the road, he’s going to have power.”

Two hours later, Duran went the other way with a fastball and homered to left field off well-regarded Pirates prospect Mitch Keller.

Duran finished 2 for 3 with a stolen base.

Ready to roll

Catcher Jonathan Lucroy, who signed Feb. 19, is set to play in his first game on Thursday against Baltimore at JetBlue Park. He will be the designated hitter. Righthanded reliever Phillips Valdez, who was claimed off waivers from Seattle on Sunday, is scheduled to pitch in the same game. Valdez, 28, started his professional career with the Indians and has since bounced to the Nationals, Rangers, and now the Sox. He appeared in 11 games for Texas last season with a 3.94 ERA and, notably, 18 strikeouts over 16 innings. The Sox want Valdez to throw his slider more often and see where that takes him. Valdez has minor league options, which adds to the team’s roster flexibility . . . Rafael Devers, who missed a week when his daughter was born in the Dominican Republic, is scheduled to play his first game on Friday . . . Hall of Famer Bill Mazerowski, 83, took the lineup card to the plate for the Pirates and received a nice hand from the crowd of 4,886.

### **Red Sox’ efforts to ‘buy’ prospects from Padres seen as unlikely**

Alex Speier

More than 15 years ago, at a time when their farm system had been thinned by years of bad drafts and trades, the Red Sox approached the Reds with an idea: They wanted to buy a prospect. Cincinnati was receptive, but ultimately it was more of an idea than a reality, since the Commissioner’s Office signaled that it was unlikely to approve such a deal.

Still, the idea of “buying” prospects has been around for some time, and in recent years, it’s taken shape in the form of teams that are willing to give up a prospect in order to get a team to take on a high-salaried player in a trade.

In 2015, the Braves agreed to take on the salary of Bronson Arroyo (at a time when he was sidelined by Tommy John surgery) from the Diamondbacks, but to do so, Arizona also had to send pitching prospect Touki Toussaint to the Braves.

This past offseason, the Angels attached prospect Will Wilson (the No. 15 pick in the 2019 draft) to infielder Zack Cozart, trading both (and Cozart’s \$10.67 million salary) to the Giants. Roughly a month later, the Giants released Cozart.

The Red Sox, with newfound financial flexibility following the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, have shown interest in a similar arrangement. The San Diego Union-Tribune reported last

week that the Red Sox and Padres had discussed the possibility of a trade that would send Wil Myers to Boston, with San Diego picking up roughly half of the remaining \$61 million owed him over the next three years.

The purpose of such a deal would be salary relief for the Padres, in exchange for which they would send not only Myers but also young, inexpensive players to the Sox, perhaps prospects and/or major league-ready pitchers.

Because Myers's six-year, \$83 million deal counts for roughly \$13.8 million of payroll as calculated for luxury tax purposes, a \$30 million subsidy by the Padres over the next three years (\$10 million a year) would reduce that figure to about \$3.8 million, making it easy to absorb for the Red Sox given their current projected payroll of roughly \$195 million.

During their lengthy talks regarding a trade of Betts for Myers and several other players, the Sox and Padres discussed numerous players, including big league-ready starters such as Cal Quantrill and Joey Lucchesi as well as highly regarded prospect Luis Campusano.

However, while the concept is interesting for a Red Sox organization intent on replenishing its upper levels and young big league talent, two major league sources characterized any such trade as unlikely. One of those sources characterized the idea mostly as "tire kicking" by the Red Sox rather than a deal with real legs.

The Padres, after all, are trying to improve their chances of contention rather than simply shed payroll. Their goal in pursuing Betts wasn't to shed Myers's salary but to add an elite talent. As such, they have little motivation to give up prospects and/or potential big league contributors for the sake of moving Myers unless they could reallocate his salary to acquire another player (likely via trade) such as Francisco Lindor.

In short, a match between the two sides appears unlikely — and almost impossible to imagine in the absence of a separate blockbuster deal involving the Padres.

### **Why you shouldn't give up on this Red Sox season**

Chad Finn

In correspondence with Red Sox fans during this spring of discontent, I've heard two questions — or similar variations — more than any other:

Do they really think we're buying their excuses for trading Mookie Betts?

What are they going to do about that thin and injury-prone starting rotation?

The answers have not wavered in either case. Yes, any time they try to tell us that dealing Betts — and this is where I would normally insert three sentences detailing how he was a generational player who never should have been allowed to leave, but even I know that's getting repetitive — was a baseball rather than a financial decision, they're playing us for fools.

As for the rotation? Well, I suppose Eduardo Rodriguez and a reasonably healthy Chris Sale would form a pretty good two-man rotation. Those other three spots, currently occupied by Nate Eovaldi (46-54 career record, 4.30 ERA), Martin Perez (53-56, 4.72) and Most Likely An Opener To Be Named Later, leave a lot to be desired. The Red Sox probably should just leave their bullpen door open at all times, because there is going to be a parade of relievers to the mound on most days.

Lately, though, as we reluctantly settle into the phase of accepting this lousy trade, I've been getting a third question more often, and it's a tougher one to answer:

What needs to happen for the Red Sox to compete in the American League East?



I mean, the sarcastic answer is obvious: They should reach out to the Dodgers and see if Betts and David Price might be available. Those guys, now they could really help the cause.

The serious response? First, we have to define contending. Is it winning the AL East for the fourth time in five years and fifth time in the last eight? I can't see how that happens. The 84-win Red Sox finished third last year, 19 games back of the Yankees and 12 behind the Rays, with Betts having an excellent season (though not as good as his 2018 MVP performance) and Price making 22 starts.

Even if Rafael Devers, Xander Bogaerts, and J.D. Martinez all repeat outstanding seasons at the plate and Andrew Benintendi plays to his ability, this offense minus Mookie probably won't be as productive as last year's 901-run juggernaut. And did we mention that the starting pitching is such a mess that Matt Young, Dana Kiecker, and Tom Bolton currently look like appealing candidates for the fifth spot?

This team, right now, isn't as good as last year's. And despite its abundance of big-name talent, last year's wasn't very good.

If contending means being on the fringe of the wild-card race through the summer, having a chance to capture the second wild card in the final days of the season, and perhaps even stealing the thing, sure, I suppose that's possible.

The Red Sox finished 12 back of the Rays for the second wild card last year (the 97-win A's claimed the first one), so there's a significant gap to bridge. Tampa Bay should still be very good, and don't snooze on Toronto as a riser in the AL East, either. The Blue Jays won just 67 games last year, but they should be better as that core of second-generation stars — Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette, and Cavan Biggio — enter their sophomore seasons.

The Orioles? Are you sure they weren't relegated to the International League?

Forget catching the Yankees, even with the news that Luis Severino needs Tommy John surgery. He pitched 12 innings last year, they won 103 games despite setting a major league record for most players on the disabled list in a season, and they've added Gerrit Cole.

It's hard to believe just two years after the Red Sox won 108 games and hammered their way to the World Series, but the Yankees are on the next level right now, and it's unattainable for Boston.

There's kind of a 1981 vibe to this Red Sox team, in the sense that the departure of popular players — Betts now, Carlton Fisk, Fred Lynn, Rick Burleson, and Butch Hobson then — has left a malaise over the fan base before the season even begins. But I actually think this is a better situation.

The moves in '81 unnecessarily aged the Sox — 39 years later, I still have no idea why they took back 34-year-old Joe Rudi and sore-shouldered Frank Tanana in the Lynn deal, other than that Haywood Sullivan was petty and incompetent — while at least Chaim Bloom got young talent back for Betts.

I believe in Bloom, too. There's not a lot of evidence that we should yet, I know. And his first duty — get below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold, and go ahead and deal Betts too while you're at it — is about as thankless as it gets. But he's handled himself well through all of this, and if you look at those Rays teams he left behind, their rosters were filled with unheralded — heck, practically unknown — players who came in and produced.

This happens repeatedly with the Rays, and you wait and see, it's going to happen here with a couple of these assorted Austin Brices and Kevin Plaweckis that he's bringing in. There is going to be churn on the roster this year as Bloom tries to unearth some finds. We're going to get to know a lot of new players, sort of like with Dan Duquette's first Red Sox team post-strike in 1995. We may even end up liking some of them.

That '95 team, with all of its Arquimedez Pozos, Rudy Pembertons, and Pat Mahomeses (well, the dad, anyway), did have a few keepers amid all of the roster turnover (Tim Wakefield, Rich Garces, Troy O'Leary) and ended up being the surprise winner of the AL East.

This Red Sox team, as currently constituted, isn't coming close to a division title. But if Bloom can fill the obvious holes with some Duquette-in-'95-level discoveries, a legitimate quest for a wild-card berth should at least keep us entertained.

It's not the level of contention we're used to around here. But it can be a decent summer-long distraction while we wait for Betts and the Dodgers to beat the Yankees in the World Series.

### **Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodríguez warn new Red Sox pitcher about driving in Boston**

Peter Bailey-Wells

Red Sox starting pitcher Martín Pérez hasn't been shy about learning things as the newest member of the team's rotation, recently discussing his spring training tutelage at the hands of Pedro Martinez.

And amid the team's stint in Florida, Pérez's teammates spent a little time teaching him about one of the off-the-field effects of playing in Boston: the perils of driving in the city.

Between recent workouts at the team's Fenway South complex, starting pitchers Chris Sale and Eduardo Rodríguez filled in their new teammate about the "tiny" streets and aggressive drivers in Boston, who, in Sale's words, will "literally" run into you while you're parallel parked. The exchange was captured by team cameras as a part of "Red Sox: All-Access" on YouTube.

Rodríguez and Sale were discussing cars while standing next to a seated Pérez and Sale mentioned that he doesn't like to drive big cars in Boston despite owning larger vehicles. He said he bought an Audi just for driving in Boston.

"Hard to drive up there," Rodríguez agreed.

Sale then jumped in with a few warnings for Pérez.

"It gets tough," he said. "The roads are all tiny. ... When you parallel park and people literally just, like, run into you and they're like, 'eh whatever.'"

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

#### **Red Sox interim manager open to using "openers" as Plan B**

Tom Keegan

BRADENTON — In the event the pneumonia that led to delaying Chris Sale's start to spring training results in him opening the season on the injured list, or if nobody runs away with the competition for the No. 5 starter spot, the Red Sox could use "openers" to fill one of the spots in the rotation to start the season.

It's not interim manager Ron Roenicke's first choice, but he's open to the idea of openers.

"I think it's possible the fifth spot could be," Roenicke said. "I don't know. We kind of planned for this group of guys fighting for that one spot. But if we find out it's better to piggy-back two guys, maybe that's what we do. We're still kind of looking at what we have and see how it plays out."

It can put extra strain on a bullpen, but with four starters, that leaves nine relievers to share the workload. Major League rosters expand to 26 this season, and Roenicke said the Sox will go with 13 pitchers, the maximum allowed by the rules.

“It depends if you have a couple of guys who can give you some length,” Roenicke said of whether it’s a lot for the bullpen to handle. “So say you have two guys who can give you six innings, you’re in good shape. ... You see it so much now and Chaim’s certainly really used to it, so if we go that way, it’ll be easy to do.”

Chaim, of course, is first-year Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, who came to the Red Sox from the Rays, the organization that popularized the use of openers. Bloom, in fact, was in the room when Rays brass first discussed parting with the tradition of using five starting pitchers and a bullpen to start the 2018 season.

Who was the first to bring it up?

“Honestly, I don’t remember who was, except that a lot of what we did there was driven by (manager) Kevin Cash, (pitching coach) Kyle Snyder and our staff,” Bloom said. “It evolved out of conversations about how to best use our pitchers.”

As for the term openers, Bloom said he thinks that came from someone outside the organization.

“When we started that year, we started running a couple of bullpen days in our rotation, including that opening series against Boston,” Bloom said. “That’s just not that well remembered because I think it took on a whole different level of notoriety publicly when (then Rays closer) Sergio (Romo) started one of those days in Anaheim.”

He explained why the Rays took the controversial approach.

“It really was two things. We tried to put our pitchers in positions to succeed and use them in a way to allow us to win as many games as we could,” Bloom said. “I’ll always stay true to those two thoughts.”

Matchups?

“That’s part of it,” Bloom said. “Some of it also is setting up certain pitchers to have a role to have more success and not necessarily shoehorn every pitcher into trying to be a 200-inning starter or a 60-inning reliever. ... It was more just trying to put these guys in a position to succeed rather than be stuck to a structure that had been around for a while but might not have been suited to the strengths of our pitchers.”

Sale to face hitters

Roenicke said it was relayed to him that Sale’s bullpen session went well Wednesday and the veteran lefty is on course to pitch live batting practice Saturday. As for whether he expects Sale to be ready to open the season, the manager said he will speak to Sale on Thursday before going public with the plan.

Pedro talks, Martin listens

Regardless of whether the Sox use openers, they need No. 4 starter Martin Perez to pitch more like he did before the All-Star break (8-3, 4.26) of his season with the Twins than after the break (2-4, 6.27, 16 home runs in 70- $\frac{1}{3}$  innings).

A native of Guanare, Venezuela, Perez said he has improved this spring from his work with Pedro Martinez.

He said Pedro urged him to use his legs more and “stay on a line,” as opposed to throwing across his body. He also said he’s using his changeup more and cutter less. But most of all, he’s listening to one of his favorite former players.

“He’s too smart and he’s a Hall of Famer, so he’s got a lot of things I can learn from him,” Perez said. “He knows a lot. ... I talk to him every day. Good guy. I’m proud to have him here helping me.”

Perez pitched two innings Wednesday in the Red Sox 6-3, seven-inning win over the Pirates at Lecom Park. He allowed one hit, one unearned run, walked one and struck out three.

“It’s just a matter of figuring out, how does he get back to where he was first half last year, or how do we help him with a pitch mix that gets him beyond that,” Roenicke said.

Perez said the Red Sox are urging him to use his changeup more often.

“His changeup’s outstanding,” Roenicke said. “It’s a strikeout changeup.”

### **Things looking up for speedy Red Sox CF prospect Jarren Duran**

Tom Keegan

BRADENTON — Shortcuts don’t work in baseball. You can’t put a prospect’s tools in a microwave and speed up the development. But you can close your eyes, imagine the future, and like what you think you’re going to see.

The more Red Sox interim manager Ron Roenicke sees of fleet centerfielder Jarren Duran, the more he likes his future.

Talking about Duran before Wednesday’s exhibition game at Lecom Park, Roenicke even projected something the 2018 seventh-round draft choice has not yet shown much of in the minor leagues.

“I would think down the road he’s going to have some power,” Roenicke said. “As strong as he is and as quick as he can swing, I would think so.”

It didn’t take long for that prediction to take on some life. With the wind blowing out, the left-handed-hitting Duran took a Mitch Keller fastball the other way for a two-run home run in the second inning, which sent the Red Sox on their way to a 6-3 win over the Pirates in a game shortened to seven innings by a quick burst of rain.

A non-roster invitee, Duran is opening eyes with his speed and bat in the early days of Grapefruit League play. He’s 5-for-8 with a triple, a home run and has struck out once.

“Yeah, how about that,” Roenicke said when reminded of his power forecast. “He’s just got those quick-twitch fibers that you can’t teach. He’s born with it. If he starts squaring up balls, like I said, he is stronger this year than he was last year. He’s probably going to continue to get stronger for the next couple of years. And then you don’t know. I don’t know if that means he’s a home run hitter or if he’s a gap hitter. I don’t know what that means, but I know you get stronger and you have that kind of bat speed, it can be scary.”

Duran, 23, played second base at Long Beach State and didn’t get converted to the outfield until midway through his first professional season. If he progresses well this season, he could be in center field for the Red Sox as soon as next season in the event impending free agent Jackie Bradley Jr. signs elsewhere.

“I don’t really like to set goals because if I feel like if I don’t reach it, it’s like I failed,” Duran said. “I don’t want to put pressure on myself, like, ‘I have to do this this year.’ I think about playing good and playing loose and having fun each day and I’ll get here when I get here. When it’s my time, it’s my time. When they think I’m ready, I’m ready. It’s in their hands, so I’m going to just keep doing what I’m doing.”

Defensively, Duran hasn’t caught up to more experienced outfielders just yet.

“He’s got a ways to go,” Roenicke said of Duran learning the nuances of playing the outfield.

Roenicke shared the defensive scouting report on Duran that he received from the Sox Double-A manager, Joe Oliver.

“He’s great going to the corners and back in the gaps, great going side-to-side, really good coming in, it’s that ball going back,” Roencke said. “It takes a long time to get comfortable where you can turn your back and just run. . . . So he still needs to learn that part of it, but once he gets that part, I mean, you’re going to see a tremendous outfielder.”

If he hits enough to develop into an every day center fielder, Duran’s speed has the potential to make him a fan favorite. He remembers the last person to beat him in a foot race.

“My dad,” he said.

Duran has struck out 176 times and hit eight home runs in 802 at bats in the minors.

“I think it’s kind of learning the swing, and learning the strike zone, and trying to figure out what kind of hitter’s he’s going to be,” Roenicke said before the game of the strikeout totals. “He’s a lot stronger this year than he was last year, so I don’t know, maybe he starts driving balls more, which would be great with his speed to hit balls in the gaps, and just watch him run.”

Roenicke has been far from the only one buzzing about Duran this week.

“Hell of a ballplayer,” said second baseman Michael Chavis, who tagged a home run that flew over the left field fence in a blink. “I don’t remember who I was talking to in the dugout, but I said I would think he’s one of the best minor league players I’ve seen. He’s special. Fun ballplayer. Good personality. One thing that’s interesting is he’s got pop, but you can’t teach that speed. That’s what makes him a special player, and he’s fun to watch.”

How quickly that speed lands him in the majors has become an interesting development to track.

### **David Ortiz estate sale has some bizarre finds, including Red Sox memorabilia**

Bill Speros

Exhausted by the Tom Brady Watch?

Out of patience waiting for Major League Baseball to dispense justice upon the Boston Red Sox?

Completely forgotten that the NFL has yet to lay down its punishment for SpyGate II?

Well, if you want action, we got you covered.

Just bring cash or credit cards.

Hundreds of items in the David Ortiz household in Weston will be sold off Saturday in what is being billed as an “all-star estate sale” by Exceptional Estate Sales of Sudbury.

“In addition to some exceptional sports memorabilia, you’ll find beautiful furniture and decor, designer ladies clothing . . . and more!” the sale’s website says.

The sale is set to run from 8 a.m. through 4 p.m. Saturday. The address will be released on estatesales.net on Friday at 9 a.m. Numbers for entry will be given out on Saturday at 7:30 a.m. Ortiz’s Weston home was listed for sale at \$6.3 million in February 2019.

The 349 entries cataloged on the site are as varied as Pedro Martinez's pitching repertoire. But most are neither as unique nor as priceless.

David Ortiz's Wally lunchbox is tops on my list.

That's item No. 308.

Dibs.

Imagine digging into a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich toted in a metal container that once graced the home of David Ortiz?

Chills.

I'm also calling the Ortiz Bruins jersey. That's No. 264.

The sale offers a forensic glimpse into the life shared by Ortiz, his wife, Tiffany, and their family.

The couple is "downsizing," reports Boston Magazine.

Ortiz retired from the Red Sox after hitting 541 major-league home runs, winning three World Series rings and accumulating tons and tons of stuff.

Several objects for sale — including a custom door wreath (item No. 1) and a Red Sox table (No. 95) — appear to be home-made gifts from fans and other well-wishers.

The Ortiz family welcome mat (No. 2) has enjoyed better days, as has much of the furniture and many of the cooking items and small appliances being sold.

They include a pasta maker (No. 338), a juicer (No. 339), a Cuisinart food preparation system (No. 340) and a Red Sox toaster (No. 336).

The Red Sox toaster is not listed as a metaphor for the 2020 season. But it very well could be.

Some of the furniture should bring a nice return. Ortiz's red leather chair, ottoman (No. 26) and a matching seat (No. 27) would add a lovely touch to your gender-neutral cave. And who doesn't need a neon Rolls Royce sign (No. 104) for the office?

The family dining room set (No. 3) seats eight and tweaks the imagination into envisioning Ortiz holding court during various holidays.

Ahh, if only the table could talk.

Other furniture for sale includes a Big Papi-sized Chaise lounge (No. 31), multiple bureaus, chests and cabinets.

There's enough home décor, kitchenware, cups and plates available to stock the Crate and Barrel on Boylston Street — if it wanted to go early 2000s Goodwill.

Like so many of us, Ortiz is overstocked when it comes to exercise equipment. Those looking to get into shape can purchase a Trek bicycle (No. 118), a First Degree Fitness S500 Fluid machine (No. 158), a Cybex arc trainer (No. 161) and/or a Reebok RB 310 recumbent bike (No. 163).

Some of this would be called "junk" if it were in our home.

A drawer full of wine charms, a weather-beaten asparagus rug, a faux plant, a plastic drink tray and a well-trod rooster door rug are all being offered.

An unopened Northface tent (No. 345) is also for sale, as is a still-in-the box Kingsford grill (No. 107) and a 2002 HP All-In-One Printer, complete with ink cartridge, (No. 346).

The printer should fetch at least \$1.

During his farewell tour in 2016, Ortiz joked about how he needed an extra garage to store the items being gifted to him by other 31 major-league clubs. None of that stuff appears to be for sale Saturday.

The baseball/memorabilia items being include various autographed baseball hats (No. 129), random T-shirts (103) and multiple magazines and framed newspapers.

Among the sweetest swag up for grabs: a framed 2007 All-Star Game jersey (No. 289), Ortiz's shoes from the 2005 All-Star Game (No. 262), a nifty piece of canvas art signed by Ortiz (No.135) and a personalized wine bottle signed by Rick Porcello celebrating the pitcher's Cy Young Award from 2016 (No. 273).

Porcello will be pitching for the Mets this season.

His sentiments are now expendable in the Ortiz household.

As is pretty much everything else.

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

### **Red Sox say they did not quarantine Taiwanese pitcher**

Bob Rathgeber

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The Boston Red Sox have not quarantined minor league pitcher Chih-Jung Liu for fear of the coronavirus, the team's vice president of media relations Kevin Gregg said Wednesday.

Erroneous reports Wednesday stated that the team had quarantined the 20-year-old Taiwanese right-hander after he had arrived in Fort Myers from his Asian homeland last week.

"He was never quarantined," Gregg said. "He's not sick, has never been sick. No one is at risk."

Gregg explained that the team asked him to delay reporting to spring training at JetBlue Park until Saturday in "an overabundance of caution." Liu had flown from Taiwan to San Francisco and then on to Fort Myers late last week. As of Wednesday, 32 coronavirus cases had been reported in Taiwan.

"The only restriction was we asked him not to come to camp until Saturday," Gregg said. That's when minor leaguers are to take their physicals. In fact, Gregg said, Liu has been outside running.

Red Sox infielder Tzu-Wei Lin, who also is from Taiwan, spent a day away from the team before returning to normal practices.

And before that, the Sox kept pitcher Chris Sale from reporting to camp because of pneumonia. He stayed at his home in Naples and worked out there.

Liu wrote on social media that he is being delivered three meals a day, doing some weight training and going for an occasional run, but otherwise is spending his time online, "watching information about the team" and reading, according to The Boston Globe.

The Florida Department of Health in Lee County stated no cases of the coronavirus have been reported in Florida.

“The Department is coordinating closely with our local partners to investigate, confirm, contain and report any suspected cases, should they occur,” department spokeswoman Tammy Yzaguirre wrote in an email.

Sox sink Bucs

Jarren Duran, Michael Chavis and Josh Ockimey hit home runs to help the Red Sox beat the Pittsburgh Pirates, 6-3, Wednesday in Bradenton, Fla.

Colton Brewer got the win after throwing two innings, allowing a run on one hit, walking two and striking out one.

The Red Sox will host the Phillies at 1 p.m. Thursday.

## **\* *MassLive.com***

**Connor Wong, Boston Red Sox catching prospect from Mookie Betts trade, not only has power; he threw out 52% at Double A, has some speed**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Connor Wong blasted a grand slam vs. the Orioles in Grapefruit League action Tuesday, showing off his power swing that led to 55 extra-base hits (24 homers, 24 doubles, seven triples) and a .541 slugging percentage in 111 minor league games during 2019. He has bashed 48 home runs in 241 minor league games.

“In batting practice, I stand out there and balls really jump off his bat,” interim manager Ron Roenicke said.

Wong, the catcher who the Red Sox acquired from the Dodgers in the Mookie Betts trade, also showed off an impressive arm during 2019 after his promotion to Double-A Tulsa. He threw out 25-of-81 (31%) of base stealers at High-A Rancho Cucamonga, but then threw out 16-for-31 (52%) of base stealers at Tulsa.

“I’ve always thought throwing guys out is a three-part play,” Wong said. “The pitcher does his job, then I do my job, then the middle infielder does his job or (the third baseman). So I think as you go up a little bit, if you’re a good thrower, then it might get easier for you. And I see myself as a good thrower. I’m not saying I didn’t have good players in the middle infield (in High A) but (had) guys with more experience picking balls and making tags (at Double A).”

The Red Sox’s farm system lacks talent at the catcher position. Baseball America (pre-Betts trade) ranked no catchers among Boston’s top 30 prospects in its 2020 Prospect Handbook.

The 23-year-old Wong immediately became Boston’s top catching prospect once the Sox acquired him with Alex Verdugo and Jeter Downs for Betts and David Price.

MLB Pipeline has yet to release its 2020 Red Sox top 30, but SoxProspects.com listed Wong as Boston’s No. 12 prospect overall.

“I want to be elite at every aspect of catching,” Wong said. “I take pride in everything we do early and getting in the work. So I think it will be interesting to see how I develop from here on out, for sure.”

Swing-and-miss is an issue right now. He struck out 143 times and drew 32 walks in his 111 games last year.



Wong, who played college baseball at the University of Houston, grew up about 25-30 minutes away from Minute Maid Park in Houston. He still resides in Houston. He learned about the trade to the Red Sox during his own housewarming party after he bought a house there this offseason.

“Growing up, it was the Astros with the Killer B’s (Craig Biggio and Jeff Bagwell),” Wong said. “I remember watching them a lot. And then kind of when those guys started to retire, my favorite player growing up was Josh Hamilton. And playing shortstop in high school and growing up, I really liked Elvis Andrus and Adrian Beltre, the relationship they had. So I was kind of a Rangers fan there for a little bit.”

Wong was unaware that Bagwell’s career began in the Red Sox organization, but he did know the slugger grew up in Connecticut.

Wong’s stepfather Matt Maysey pitched for the Montreal Expos in 1992 and the Milwaukee Brewers in 1993. He hurled 24 ½ innings over two major league seasons. He posted a 4.14 ERA in 11 minor league seasons from 1985-96.

“I met him when I was anywhere between 4-6 years old and since then, there’s really big shoes to fill,” Wong said. “I don’t use that as motivation because I’ve been dreaming about this since I was a little kid. So that’s kind of the motivation. But having him and all the support from my family really helps.”

“He was out of baseball at the time I met him,” Wong added. “But just the knowledge that he had, the advice he had for me growing up was more than I could have asked for.”

He and his stepdad still discuss the game frequently.

“Mostly we talk about the mental game now,” Wong said. “How to come back from bad days. How to stay focused on what I’m trying to do. Just the little things more so now that I’m in pro ball and I have really good coaches around me. A lot of the mechanics can be taken care of by them. So if anything, we just kind of talk about the game after it’s over.”

Wong’s dad Rick Wong is a civil engineer who worked in Dubai.

“Which is pretty cool,” Connor Wong said. “I never got to go because I was too young but but he got to work in Dubai when that place kind of boomed.”

His mother Rachel Maysey has worked as a fifth and sixth grade special education for more than 23 years.

Rick graduated from Texas A&M. Rachel graduated from the University of Houston.

“It was kind of between those two,” Wong said. “I followed A&M a little bit more (growing up\_ because they’re a bigger school and broadcast a little better. In the grand scheme of things, I’m happy with my decision (to play at Houston).”

Wong made a big jump offensively from freshman to sophomore year. His on-base percentage increased 95 points from .320 to .415. His slugging percentage, meanwhile, increased 112 points from .382 his freshman year to .494 his sophomore year.

“You see better pitching more often,” Wong said. “I attribute some of the adjustments to playing summer ball in the Cape League (for the Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox). Seeing really good talent every single day. You’re either gonna make it or you’re not. I think some of it was just due to seeing stronger competition on a regular basis and adjusting to them.”

He became the first University of Houston player since 2008 to hit 10 or more home runs and steal 20 or more bases in a single season, per the school’s website. He bashed 12 homers and stole 26 bases as a junior. So he has more speed than most catchers. He stole 11 bases between High A and Double A last year.

Wong — who enjoys fishing and video games (Fortnite, Call of Duty, Rocket League) — is versatile as well. He also has made 22 starts at second base and eight starts at third base during his minor league career.

“I played everywhere (growing up),” Wong said. “And I like playing everywhere, too. I think seeing the field from different positions is a lot of fun.”

The 6-foot, 181-pound right-handed hitter has enjoyed working on his defense in camp with longtime Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek.

“One of the things that I’ve noticed is — and he preaches this all the time — is attention to detail,” Wong said. “Seriously, as a catcher you really have to pay attention to everything that’s going on. And I think he does a good job of hammering that into us.”

Roenicke added, “If he can continue to progress as a catcher— He’s real calm back there. He’s got real good hands. He’s got a strong arm. And I think it’s a matter of just keeping him back there. Hopefully everything just kind of cleans up. And this guy can be a really nice player.”

He’ll likely start the 2020 season at Double-A Portland.

“Same goals as I have every year: work hard and I’m really gonna focus on getting to know the (pitching) staff better,” Wong said. “Figure out how to work with them. And I think offensively, just stick to the approach. Just to do a better job with that. Ultimately, play good ball and have fun.”

### **Coronavirus fears prompt Boston Red Sox to quarantine prospect Chih-Jung Liu in ‘overabundance of caution’ (report)**

Chris Cotillo

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The Red Sox are keeping Taiwanese pitching prospect Chih-Jung Liu away from the team’s spring training facility to protect against the coronavirus, Pete Abraham of the Boston Globe reported Tuesday. A team spokesman confirmed to the Globe that Liu -- who has not shown symptoms of illness -- is being quarantined out of an “overabundance of caution” and is expected to report to the team’s complex Saturday.

Liu, 20, arrived in Florida for spring training last week and was instructed to remain in his hotel room and not report to Fenway South. According to Abraham, the Sox also briefly quarantined Taiwanese infielder Tzu-Wei Lin, who has since joined the Red Sox and has appeared in major league spring training games.

The virus, which has killed thousands in mainland China, has spread throughout Asia. There were more than 50 confirmed cases in the United States as of Tuesday.

Liu, who signed to a \$750k bonus in November, was ranked by MLB.com as Boston’s 17th-best prospect in the site’s most recent rankings. SoxProspects.com ranks Liu as the No. 26 prospect in the system.

Teams sending players away from their teammates to combat the potential spread of illness is not uncommon, especially during spring training when hundreds of players are in close proximity to each other for six weeks. Starter Chris Sale was kept away from the facility with the flu and walking pneumonia earlier in the month and the Sox have instructed team employees who came down with similar illnesses to quarantine themselves in recent weeks as well.

### **Austin Brice, new Boston Red Sox pitcher without options: ‘I go into every camp thinking I don’t have a job’**

Christopher Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Austin Brice, who the Red Sox acquired from the Marlins in January, is out of minor league options. That means he must make Boston's Opening Day 26-man roster (barring an injured list stint) or else be designated for assignment, exposed to waivers or traded.

The 27-year-old right-handed reliever is treating this situation simply like he has every other spring training.

"I go into every camp thinking I don't have a job," Brice said here at JetBlue Park. "That's it. At the end of the day, I don't really spend a whole lot of time making myself comfortable. So I just try to go out there and stay level-headed and just do whatever I need to do to compete."

Brice put together a solid 2019 season. He posted a 3.43 ERA, 1.23 WHIP, 4.87 WHIP, .214 batting average against, seven holds and 9.3 strikeouts per nine innings in 36 outings (44  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings) for the Marlins.

It marked the best season of his major league career to date. He had posted a 5.68 ERA in 70 outings (84 innings) from 2016-18.

Still, the Marlins designated him for assignment in January. They then worked out a trade with Boston, which sent minor league shortstop Angeudis Santos to Miami.

Was he surprised the Marlins designated him?

"Yes and no," Brice said. "I know they're making a lot of changes over there. Like I said, I didn't really have many expectations when it comes to where I'll be the next year because I know I'll just be competing for a job regardless. So it didn't bother me too much. I know they're making changes and they're making changes for the better. Just gotta just turn the page and move on."

The Red Sox's 40-man roster experienced heavy pitching turnover this offseason. Boston acquired five pitchers — Brice, Matt Hall, Chris Mazza, Josh Osich and Jeffrey Springs — via waiver claims or minor trades. The Sox also claimed right-handed pitcher Phillipp Valdez off waivers from the Mariners on Sunday.

Brice features a four-seam fastball, curveball, sinker and changeup. He uses the changeup mainly vs. left-handed hitters.

"I mix some things around," Brice said. "It just depends. The season's always changing. So usage changes and how you approach batters changes."

His curveball usage increased from 28.1% in 2018 to 44.7% in 2019 while his four-seam fastball usage increased from 19.8% to 31.5%, per Statcast. Meanwhile, his sinker usage dropped from 48.5% to 19.5%.

"The usage wasn't really anything on purpose," Brice said. "It was just how I approached certain guys. I guess it's just the way the numbers turned out at the end of the year."

Born in Hong Kong

Brice was born in Hong Kong. His dad was working there at the time.

"He's always been in construction. So at the time they were building a waste management plant. He was just helping with the contracting of it."

**\* *RedSox.com***

**Red Sox hope Duran can develop into superstar**

Ian Browne

BRADENTON, Fla. -- As a young boy growing up in Southern California, Red Sox prospect Jarren Duran expended energy in a manner similar to many other kids his age.

He challenged his friends to races.

"You know when you're younger, all you want to do is race? And I kind of won a lot so that's when I started to realize I was kind of fast," Duran said.

A trend started to develop: Duran won every single time. The exception was when he'd race his father, Octavio, a former basketball player in high school who also had the gift of seemingly running on a motor.

But the younger Duran has made his presence felt in the early portion of his first Major League Spring Training.

On Wednesday in Bradenton against the Pirates, hours after interim manager Ron Roenicke expressed confidence that Duran will grow into some power as he gets older, the left-handed hitter lofted a two-run homer over the wall in left during the second inning of Wednesday's rain-shortened 6-3 win vs. the Pirates.

"I'm not going to try and hit more home runs, but I still feel like a baby," said the 23-year-old. "Hopefully when I get a little older, I'll get my man strength or something, and it will come."

Center fielder of the future?

Three days ago in Sarasota, Duran made a tremendous catch at the wall in right-center and used every bit of his blazing speed by roaring into third with a stand-up triple.

It's not a stretch to say he could be Boston's center fielder of the future. MLB Pipeline will release its new rankings for each club for 2020 later this week, and Duran is once again expected to be in the Top 10 for the Red Sox. He is their best outfield prospect.

And with Jackie Bradley Jr. eligible for free agency at the end of this season, that future could come fast if Duran develops swiftly enough.

"I don't really like looking at that because at the end of the day, Jackie is my teammate," Duran said. "I don't want to wish anything on him. I hope he stays here for more years to come and dominates the outfield some more. That's what I wish on people. My time will come. If it happens, it happens. If it doesn't, then it doesn't, I had a fun ride. But I really hope Jackie stays and continues to do what he does, because he's one of the best outfielders."

Learning from the best

This Spring Training -- his first in big league camp -- Duran has had the opportunity to not only participate in outfield drills with Bradley, but other gifted defenders like Andrew Benintendi and Kevin Pillar.

To watch that up close has been perhaps more fun for Duran than the highlight reel he has produced in early Grapefruit League games.

What sticks out the most about those morning drills?

"How loose they are," Duran said. "They do it like it's second nature. I guess I'm still getting used to it but just the way they go about everything is so smooth and so clean. That's something I want to do. The more comfortable you become, the easier it gets for you."

At this stage, Duran tries to learn by observing.

"It's been awesome," Duran said. "I talk to them every once in a while but I try not to bother them. I'm still a young pup. Just watching them, what they do, it's kind of amazing watching what they can do in the outfield. They're all really good outfielders. I'm kind of blessed to be behind them and watch them."

Bradley said he will gladly offer any advice Duran wants.

"I hear he can run. I wish I had seen [the triple on Sunday]," Bradley said. "I can see running in the outfield, that he has a lot of fast-twitch muscles. Yeah, I'd be happy to help anybody."

#### Adapting to the outfield

Although Bradley has played center field for pretty much his entire life, the position is still fairly new for Duran, who was drafted as a second baseman by the Red Sox in the seventh round of the 2018 Draft. After playing mostly infield at Class A Short Season Lowell to start his pro career that summer, Duran transitioned to the outfield full-time upon his move to Class A Greenville later that season.

Don't expect him to move out of center field any time soon. According to Roenicke, the biggest key for Duran on defense will be him improving on going back on the ball.

"It's that ball going back, it takes a long time to get comfortable where you can turn your back and get there," said Roenicke. "He made a nice play the other day going back for a ball. It's a little different because with the sky sometimes, you don't want to take your eye [off the ball], but ideally you turn your back and you just fly and then you turn around and pick it up. He still needs to learn that part of it but once he gets to that part, I mean, you're going to see a tremendous outfielder."

#### Leading off

For the last several years, the Red Sox had an elite leadoff hitter in Mookie Betts, but that ended when he was traded to the Dodgers. Benintendi is expected to hold down that position this season, but in a perfect world he is probably a No. 2 hitter.

If Duran develops as the Red Sox expect, he should be a natural for the leadoff spot. In 132 games in the Minors last season -- split between Class A Advanced and Double-A Portland -- Duran stole 46 bases. He hit .303 and got on base at a .367 clip while scoring 90 runs and hitting five homers.

He profiles like two former Red Sox center fielders who batted lefty and could run at the top of the order: Johnny Damon and Jacoby Ellsbury.

"Yeah, but, then again, they played in The Show, I haven't made it yet," Duran said. "I don't want to drive them down by saying I'm going to be compared to them. Because they've been there, they've done that. Maybe if I can make it, then I can be like, 'Oh yeah, I'm like them.' I haven't earned that title yet."

But it will be fun watching the former Long Beach State player try to get there.

"Exciting player. Tool-wise, as good as it gets," said Roenicke. "And that type of player, he's thrilling to watch. He's just, [with] the tools, he's just one of those special guys. You know if it all comes together, you've got a superstar."

#### **Notes: Pérez getting tips from hero Pedro**

Ian Browne

BRADENTON, Fla. -- Lefty Martín Pérez's strong Spring Training debut for the Red Sox on Wednesday included incorporating some recent advice from his idol, who happens to be a new work colleague.

For Pérez, the biggest perk to being a member of the Red Sox -- the team he signed with as a free agent in December -- is being able to pick the brain of Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez.

“Pedro, he wants me to use more of my legs, staying on-line,” said Pérez. “Every time when I finish a pitch, I see the line and everything is perfect. Every day we have a drill with the towels, so it’s been working good and working with where I want to be.”

During his youth in Venezuela, Pérez made sure he found a way to watch Martinez whenever his start was televised.

Martinez, a special assistant for the Red Sox, is a frequent presence at Spring Training. Meanwhile, Pérez simply can’t believe his good fortune.

“Finally, my dream come true, now here with this team and they have a big history,” said Pérez. “Pedro’s story in baseball is amazing. To be part of this organization, it’s big for me and for my family. I’m going to do all I can for the fans and my teammates.”

Backed by more power in his legs, Pérez fired two strong innings, allowing one hit and one unearned run while walking one and striking out three in Boston’s 6-3 rain-shortened win over the Pirates.

So Martinez’s advice helped?

“Yes, a lot,” Pérez said. “He’s too smart and he’s a Hall of Famer. He knows a lot of things, and we can learn from him and improve during the game. I like to talk to him a lot. He knows a lot. I just need to ask him questions and whatever he says, just do it in the game.”

Pérez had never met Martinez until this spring. But he vividly remembers observing him up close as a Minor Leaguer in 2009. At the time, Pérez was a Rangers prospect and Martinez was ramping up to join the Phillies at midseason.

“It was in New Jersey. I told him, ‘Hey Pedro, I saw you in 2009.’ He was like, ‘I remember you. You were the only guy who was watching me from your dugout.’ I was like, ‘I want to be like you some day.’ Now having him here and learning from him is a big opportunity for me to do what he was doing in baseball,” Pérez said. “Now we talk every day.”

Originally, the Sox signed Pérez to be their fifth starter.

But the trade of David Price to the Dodgers has already moved him up one slot. And with the chance that Chris Sale could start the season on the injured list, Pérez could take on even more responsibility early in the season.

“Obviously, [Pérez is] a big part and hopefully we get him to where everything he has, we can maximize,” said Red Sox interim manager Ron Roenicke. “And we know our analytics department, they see certain things and they talk to them. Anything to just try to fine-tune that stuff he has. He has that good cutter and if he can get everything working right, he could really help us.”

Not open and shut

Roenicke continues to be open-minded about how he will deploy the back of his rotation.

The opener remains in play.

“I’m not going to say it’s going to happen, but it’s possible that fifth spot could be [an opener],” Roenicke said. “We have this group of guys who are fighting for this one job, the fifth starter, and they’ll fight that out, but if we find out that it’s just kind of better to piggyback two guys, maybe that’s what we do. We’re still kind of looking at what we have and how it plays out.”

Sale ready for live BP

Sale took another step forward on Wednesday when he threw two innings in the bullpen. In total, Sale threw roughly 45 pitches. The lefty had a late start to camp due to the flu and pneumonia.

Roenicke expects Sale will throw live batting practice for the first time this spring on Saturday. Sale will likely have to do that multiple times before pitching in a Grapefruit League game.

The Red Sox are expected to reveal their Spring Training progression plan for Sale in the next day or two. All signs continue to point to Sale starting the season on the IL, though Roenicke wants to confer with his ace before finalizing a plan.

#### Devers debut

The Red Sox will get an added boost of excitement on Friday, when third baseman Rafael Devers expects to play in his first Grapefruit League game. The emerging star arrived four days late to camp following the birth of his daughter.

Shortstop Xander Bogaerts (left ankle) hasn't played yet either, but he's likely still a few days away.

Non-roster invitee Jonathan Lucroy, who is in a battle with Kevin Plawecki for the backup catcher's spot, could make his debut on Thursday with a couple of at-bats as the DH.

#### Up next

The Red Sox will go with arguably their top starting pitching prospect for Thursday's home game against the Phillies as righty Bryan Mata makes his first start of Spring Training and second appearance. Most of the regulars should be in the lineup, including Andrew Benintendi, J.D. Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr. First pitch is scheduled for 1:05 p.m. ET.

### **Liu to report after precautionary quarantine**

Ian Browne

BRADENTON, Fla. -- Red Sox No. 17 prospect Chih-Jung Liu didn't have the start he wanted to for his first Spring Training in the United States.

The Taiwanese righty flew from Taiwan to Fort Myers, Fla. (via San Francisco) last week, but he was told by Boston's medical staff to stay at his hotel rather than come to the park to guard against the coronavirus.

To be clear, said a Red Sox spokesman, Liu does not have the virus. The Red Sox have kept him quarantined for the past week as a precaution. The team has been providing him with three meals a day, and Liu is staying in shape by lifting weights and running.

The Boston Globe's Peter Abraham was first to report that Liu was quarantined upon his arrival in Fort Myers.

Earlier in camp, Red Sox ace Chris Sale was kept away from the team as he dealt with the flu and pneumonia.

Liu is expected to report to camp on Saturday and take his regularly scheduled physical along with the rest of players in Minor League camp. The Red Sox inked Liu to a \$750,000 signing bonus last October.

International travel has become a big concern during the recent outbreak of the disease, which is why the Red Sox have taken precautionary measures.

**\* *WEEL.com***

**Meet the very early-spring training star of Red Sox camp, Jarren Duran**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Jarren Duran got thrown out stealing in Bradenton Wednesday. He is human after all.

Duran has undoubtedly surfaced himself as the player to watch through the first few days of spring training games, as we were reminded during that game against the Pirates in which he whacked an opposite-field homer while whacking another single to make him 4-for-6 with a couple of standout catches.

"Exciting player. Tool-wise, as good as it gets," said Red Sox interim manager Roenicke. "And that type of player, he's thrilling to watch. He's just, (with) the tools, he's just one of those special guys. You know if it all comes together, you've got a superstar."

There are always a few early-spring training performances that break up the monotony of semi-meaningless baseball. In 2013 Jackie Bradley Jr. was that guy, with a pitcher named Allen Webster popping the radar gun at 99 mph to add to the conversations.

The point is, it's early. That's OK. If nothing else Duran is giving a taste of what the big-league team can count on in 2021.

The reason the 23-year-old is in major league camp is because of what he has shown leading up to this spring training. With the exception of a brief downturn upon being called up to Double-A, all Duran has done as a pro is hit.

In 50 Single-A games last season, he managed a .387 batting average and .998 OPS. And after admittedly trying to do too much with Portland, Duran finished his season claiming hits in seven of his last eight games.

"I learned to trust myself," Duran told WEEI.com. "I kind of got in my own way doubting myself a little bit. I think everyone goes through it. But believing I belong was the biggest thing for me. This was the first time in Double-A and everyone struggles. I just started trusting myself. I felt like I had to do more than I was doing in Salem and that hurt me. I was trying to do too much instead of playing my game. I thought I had to get more hits, maybe hit more home runs, drive in more runs, just do more. I ended up in a spot I was happy with."

There is a way to go before anointing to him the heir apparent to Mookie Betts or Jackie Bradley Jr., but right now the former second baseman (who once aspired to be a Navy SEAL) has offered some hope.

"I don't know if it's a long swing. I think it's kind of learning his swing and learning the strike zone and trying to figure out what kind of hitter he is going to be," Roenicke said. "He's a lot stronger this year than he was last year. So I don't know, maybe he starts driving balls more, which would be great with his speed to hit balls in the gap and just watch him run. And I would think down the road, he's going to have home run power. As strong as he is, and as quick as he can swing, I would think so."

### **Red Sox clubhouse missing big dose of Dustin Pedroia**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS -- The locker sits in the most prominent spot in the Red Sox clubhouse, on the position player side at the end of the row of regulars. It was where David Ortiz set up shop for so many years and now Dustin Pedroia's name is attached to it.

It looks like any other, with a uniform hanging and various equipment littered throughout. That hasn't changed, and it won't.

But don't expect anything in the space to be touched. Pedroia hasn't been here and won't be any time soon.



The locker is a reminder of what is being missed in this well-meaning but undoubtedly much more subdued clubhouse. In this different world of the Red Sox this season, this has been one of the more noticeable alterations.

"I was texting him the other day, checking on him. Just told him we missed him, getting in here early morning and him having him lit this place up already. As he calls it car-washing people. It's little bit different not having him," said Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland, whose locker resides right next to Pedroia's. "He's always been smooth with me. I will get it once or twice, but not every day like some guys. He is definitely missed."

The Red Sox have identified who will be replacing Pedroia at second base, locking in on Jose Peraza and Michael Chavis to most likely get the majority of repetitions at the position. But what they haven't done is find a solution to what the 36-year-old offers in that clubhouse.

While there are veterans and hold-overs, most of the position-player personalities aren't the wake-you-up-in-the-morning type. Moreland. Xander Bogaerts. Jackie Bradley Jr. J.D. Martinez. Christian Vazquez. In fact, the vibe is one dominated by the presence of younger and new participants, certainly more than in previous years. Take out Pedroia -- and really also Brock Holt and former manager Alex Cora -- and you are left with an evolving identity and decibel level.

"He was here doing this a lot longer than I have been here," Moreland said of Pedroia. "All these guys came up with him and realize his expectations and how he likes it to be done and how he is going to do it, day in and day out. Pevey set the mold how the game should be played here with all these guys from Day 1. It's tough not having him here right now but at the same time they know he's going to hold everybody accountable. He's not but a phone call away. If something happens he's going to find a way to let you know. He's that kind of guy. He cares. He's not here because he doesn't want to be, I can tell you that."

"All these guys in here kind of have that blue-collar mentality when it comes to playing the game. We go out and do what we have to do to win. We've been that way since I've been here. I think that's something Pevey probably put in place and it has just carried over. I think we will continue to do that, for sure. If I can help pass it along I will for sure."

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

### **Conditions aligning for J.D. Martinez to opt out of Red Sox contract and cash in this fall**

John Tomase

If the words "J.D. Martinez opt-out" send shivers after a season of constant speculation that finally ended with the slugging DH staying put, we've got some bad news: prepare for a reprise.

While Martinez elected to remain in Boston this winter for reasons beyond his control, conditions will be ripe for his departure in the fall. Martinez actually negotiated opt-outs after each of the next two seasons, but there are a number of reasons why 2020 represents the sweet spot.

Before we get to them, though, it's worth backing up.

Had the market broken differently this winter, Martinez would've opted out in October. He and agent Scott Boras, however, made a realistic calculation that no contenders with money needed a DH. Martinez wanted to avoid a repeat of 2018, when the Red Sox were the only team to bid on him, never budging off the five-year, \$110 million contract he ended up signing.

This time around, though, Martinez couldn't even count on the Red Sox to be there waiting if no other deals materialized, because the team's stated desire to cut payroll meant it would almost certainly wave goodbye.

Martinez had to know that he'd in effect be cutting himself, and that furthermore, saving his \$22 million against the luxury tax was, in fact, the team's desired outcome, no matter how essential his bat is to the middle of the order.

So he exercised pragmatism and returned for a third season, hoping to maintain the numbers that have made him a two-time All-Star in Boston, where he has averaged .317 with 40 homers, 118 RBIs, and a .985 OPS.

That's elite middle-of-the-order production that isn't as widely valued as it should be, since Martinez is 32 and largely limited to DH. So what might change this winter?

For one, Martinez's salary drops from \$23.75 million to \$19.35 million in each of the next two seasons. While that doesn't impact his AAV, it does decrease his real-world dollars and make it easier for a new deal to surpass what's left on his old one — in this case, as little as two years and \$40 million would equal a raise.

Then there's the landscape. A contender like the Twins could be in the market for a DH next winter if Nelson Cruz is not re-signed at age 40. The same is true of the White Sox, who just signed Edwin Encarnacion to a one-year deal, but could make a significant splash if their young talent develops as promised and they become full-bore contenders in 2021.

We also shouldn't discount the Red Sox, not after they slashed payroll in order to reset their luxury tax penalties, which means they'll have money to spend next winter. Because Martinez will be 33 and can no longer play the field full-time, his price in baseball's current system shouldn't be exorbitant.

The real X-factor, however, is the future of the DH.

It seems inevitable that the National League will adopt the rule in time for the next CBA, which begins in 2022. Former GM Jim Bowden recently reported that multiple NL GMs believe the change could happen as soon as next season, which would suddenly make Martinez one of the most desirable names on the market.

Very few NL rosters currently boast one-dimensional sluggers, for obvious reasons. Give Martinez 15 new job openings, and he'll have no trouble finding suitors. He could even land another nine-figure deal, his veteran bat and presence remaking the lineup of, say, the Braves or Phillies.

It's also worth noting that if the Red Sox fall from contention, Martinez could fetch a considerable return at the trade deadline as an impact stretch-run bat. He has a limited no-trade clause of three teams which are unidentified, though AL clubs make the most sense if Martinez's goal is to limit Boston's ability to move him.

Even a midseason trade would improve his market, though, because it would remove draft pick compensation from the equation should he choose to enter free agency.

For that to happen, he'll have to opt out, which means we haven't heard the last of those two words as they relate to the Red Sox slugger.

Not by a longshot.

**\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

**Red Sox Spring Report: Team open to various solutions for No. 5 starter spot**

Sean McAdam

1. Red Sox open to experimenting with the No. 5 starter spot.

The Sox have four rotation spots spoken for with Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez and Martin Perez claiming the first four. The fifth spot could go to a number of different candidates from holdovers (Brian Johnson, Hector Velazquez) or newcomers (Chris Mazza, Matt Hall, Austin Brice).

Or, as Ron Roenicke suggested Tuesday, the Red Sox could take a mix-and-match approach to the spot by using two pitchers to divide up the innings.

“We have this group of guys who are fighting for this one job — the fifth starter,” Roenicke told reporters. “And they’ll fight that out. But if we find out that it’s just better to piggyback two guys, maybe that’s what we do. We’re still kind of looking at what we have and how it plays out.”

Around the game, teams are exploring different ways to fill starting spots. The New York Mets, for example, are considering identifying a number of back-end starters and then using matchups to determine who pitches against certain opponents.

There’s still a month left to evaluate the candidates for the fifth spot, but it’s clear the Sox are keeping their options available.

## 2. Sox taking precautions

Across the world, governments are being cautious when it comes to the coronavirus and all of its implications. The Red Sox are no different.

Over the winter, the Sox signed a two-way player from Taiwan, Chih-Jung Liu. (Liu has been both a pitcher and shortstop, those indications are the Sox envision him as a pitcher only).

Liu arrived in Fort Myers earlier this week, but according to the Boston Globe, the Sox have restricted him to his nearby hotel, while a team representative delivers three meals to him daily.

A team spokesperson said the Sox were exercising an “overabundance of caution” by keeping Liu quarantined from the team. He’s expected to join other minor leaguers in camp this weekend.

## 3. Duran impresses

Jarren Duran’s game is speed. He has plus-plus speed in the outfield and on the bases, capable of tracking down balls in the gap, or sprinting around the bases at an incredible pace.

One thing he hasn’t shown in pro ball — at least not yet — is a lot of power. In 519 at-bats last year between Single-A Salem and Double-A Portland, Duran had just five homers. He profiles somewhat like Jacoby Ellsbury — if you subtract Ellsbury’s outlier of a season in 2011, when he hit 32 homers. In 11 other seasons, Ellsbury reached double figures in homers just one other time.

Anyway, Wednesday morning in Bradenton, Roenicke told reporters that he thought Duran’s power would improve over time.

Then, as if to make his manager look extra smart, Duran went out and hit an opposite-field homer off Pittsburgh starter Mitch Keller in the second inning.

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

### **Red Sox roster projection: Who should be in, and who will be out?**

Jen McCaffrey

The last roster projection we did came just after the trade of Mookie Betts and David Price. While it remains relatively early in spring training, games are underway and there's a teeny bit more roster clarity than back in early February.

The fifth spot in the rotation remains the biggest question mark and likely will be all spring. Will someone emerge to fill that role? Will the team opt for an opener? Will the Red Sox trade for a bonafide starter by the end of camp? For now, we'll make an educated guess on what they might do and take a look at some of their other options.

Here's a stab at how the Red Sox's 26-man roster might shape up (keep in mind the new MLB rule that has expanded rosters from 25 to 26 active players):

#### Lineup (9)

1: Andrew Benintendi, LF

Benintendi struggled for the first few months out of the leadoff spot last season, and ultimately had a rough 2019 overall. But he put work in over the winter on his swing and leaned out a bit to improve his speed. Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers visited him twice in St. Louis, where Benintendi resides and works out in the winter. With Betts gone, manager Ron Roenicke has said Benintendi is the leading candidate for the leadoff spot, where he's hit the first few games this spring.

2: Xander Bogaerts, SS

Bogaerts started camp with a sore ankle and is still a week or so away from appearing in games, but will have plenty of time by the end of spring to ramp up. The Red Sox want to take their time ensuring Bogaerts' ankle is 100 percent given that he's an integral piece of the team's offense. He'll need to maintain close to the career-best numbers he posted in 2019 (.309 average, .939 OPS) to keep the Red Sox lineup churning.

3: Rafael Devers, 3B

Like Bogaerts, a repeat of 2019 would be welcome. The 23-year-old hit .311 with a .916 OPS last season and needs to maintain that power this season, likely hitting ahead of J.D. Martinez. Devers missed the first week or so of camp while at home for the birth of his daughter, but is expected to appear in his first game this weekend. Devers (129) trailed Betts (135) for the second-most runs scored in the majors last year so maintaining that clip will be key for the offense.

4: J.D. Martinez, DH

Martinez remains the cleanup hitter, but he'll need Benintendi, Bogaerts and Devers to do some work in front of him with Betts no longer here. There's little reason for concern that Martinez's consistency the last two seasons (.317 average, .985 OPS) won't carry over.

5: Mitch Moreland, 1B

Moreland signed a one-year deal this winter and likely splits time at first base with Michael Chavis, or perhaps later in the season Bobby Dalbec. For now, Moreland probably sees most of the reps at first when right-handers are starting. He hit .262/.887 OPS against righties last year and will likely get days off when the Sox face lefties.

6: Christian Vazquez, C

Like last year, Vazquez will serve as the team's everyday catcher, but he will have a new backup this year. Vazquez started last season strong offensively, but tailed off toward the end of the year. He'll seek more consistency in 2020, but managing the staff will always be more of a priority for him.

#### 7: Kevin Pillar, RF

Pillar will receive significant playing time early with Alex Verdugo likely to miss the first month or so of the season recovering from a stress fracture in his back. The Red Sox hope Verdugo gets into spring games by mid-March, meaning a mid-to-late April debut isn't out of the question. In the meantime, it's Pillar's job. The Red Sox were lacking a fourth outfielder before the veteran signed in mid-February. He's yet another strong defensive outfielder who offers the team flexibility. Last season, Pillar hit .264 with a .735 OPS in 156 games for San Francisco.

#### 8: Jose Peraza, 2B

Another newcomer, Peraza figures to get most of the reps at second base this season with Chavis is the mix as well. Though he's coming off a rough year in Cincinnati where he hit .239 with a .631 OPS, he's averaged .273 with a .686 OPS over five seasons in the majors.

#### 9: Jackie Bradley Jr., CF

Bradley is mostly a known commodity at this point: likely to maintain his streakiness at the plate, while providing stellar defense in the outfield. Getting Pillar (and eventually Verdugo) up to speed in right field will be a task for Bradley this season, but shouldn't be too much of an issue for him.

#### Bench (4)

##### Jonathan Lucroy, C

Lucroy would need a spot on the 40-man roster, but that shouldn't prevent him from joining the big league roster if the Red Sox believe he's the best option. Lucroy previously played for Roenicke in Milwaukee and is known for having a strong feel for a pitching staff. He'll need to get up to speed with Red Sox pitchers, but was catching Chris Sale on the first day he arrived in camp. Lucroy struggled at the plate the last few seasons while dealing with a herniated disc in his neck, but had surgery this winter to fix it and is hopeful to return to something close to the .284/.784 OPS hitter he was from 2010-16. The Red Sox also signed Kevin Plawecki in January, but the addition of Lucroy might bump him out of the major league mix given Lucroy's experience. The Red Sox aren't likely to carry three catchers, especially if neither is a strong bat off the bench. Plawecki doesn't have options left, though, so he'd have to pass through waivers in order to begin the year in Pawtucket. The Red Sox would likely prefer to keep him as depth, but if Lucroy emerges as a stronger candidate they'll have to risk letting Plawecki go.

##### Michael Chavis, INF

Chavis figures to bounce around the right side of the infield splitting time between first and second base like he did last season. Entering his second year in the majors, he'll need to work on reducing his strikeout rate, which became a problem especially in the second half of 2019.

##### Tzu Wei Lin, INF

Lin has played 75 games with the Red Sox over the last three seasons as one of the club's go-to call ups for infield depth. He hasn't quite had a chance to latch on, averaging .248 with a .706 OPS in those games but he has played second, third and short, and can help in the outfield if needed.

##### Marco Hernandez, INF

Hernandez is no longer on the 40-man roster, but that doesn't prevent him from making the cut. Like Lin, when healthy, Hernandez has been a go-to call up for Boston. He's played second, third and short in parts of three seasons for the Red Sox. Last year, he hit .250 with a .617 OPS in 61 big league games. It's possible the Red Sox give CJ Chatham a chance for this utility infielder spot, if he emerges with a strong spring. Chatham is already on the 40-man and hit .298 with a .741 OPS between Portland and Pawtucket last year.

The Red Sox do have infielder Jonathan Arauz on the roster as well. They selected him in the Rule 5 Draft this winter meaning he has to remain on the 26-man roster all season or be sent back to his original team, Houston. Arauz is only 21 and hasn't played above Double-A. Last season he hit .249 with a .707 OPS.

Meanwhile, Alex Verdugo is expected to join the Red Sox sometime in late April or early May, at which point one of these bench players would likely be out. Assuming the Red Sox will want to carry 13 pitchers at all times, especially if they're using the opener, a four-man bench (with Pillar moving to a reserve role) would be the way go.

#### Starters (5)

##### Chris Sale

Sale dealt with pneumonia at the outset of camp that set him back about two weeks. He's been throwing bullpens and has progressed to simulated games with a chance of appearing in his first game next week. He likely won't be able to pitch the six spring training starts Roenicke said he'd like all his starters to make. Whether that means he needs to stay back for another week or so when the season starts will be determined as he builds up over the course of the next month.

##### Eduardo Rodriguez

Rodriguez fell while warming up for a simulated game last week and tweaked his left knee (not the one he's previously had surgery on), but he's returned to throwing and scheduled to make his first start this weekend. Sale may be the most veteran pitcher on the Red Sox staff, but Rodriguez has made the most starts in a Sox uniform now that David Price and Rick Porcello are gone. He's transformed from the youngster on staff to a vital piece of the rotation, especially coming off a year where he threw 200 innings, notched 200 strikeouts and won 19 of his 34 starts.

##### Nathan Eovaldi

Eovaldi made his first start of the spring on Monday and hit 100 mph on the radar gun. Keeping him healthy will be the first task and harnessing his potential will be the second. The right-hander has a wealth of potential but the Red Sox haven't really seen enough of it since acquiring him in July 2018. If he can put together a healthy year, it would go a long way for the Sox staff.

##### Martin Pérez

Pérez made his debut for the Red Sox this week. Though he posted mediocre numbers in 2019 for the Twins with 5.12 ERA over 32 games (29 starts), with a 3.6 BB/9 and 7.3 K/9, the Red Sox think they can adjust his pitch mix and refine his cutter to make him more effective.

##### Ryan Weber

Since we wrote this week how highly the Red Sox think of Weber, we'll slot him into the spot for now.

To be honest, however, this spot is still very much up for grabs. Roenicke has acknowledged that Weber is in the mix and that they are considering an opener if one pitcher does not emerge. Roenicke also mentioned if they go the opener route, they might employ a few pitchers who could switch off to fill that role. Since they'd only be throwing an inning or two, the openers would need work in between their five days to stay fresh.

"If you just do one opener you have to figure out 'OK, whoever that person who comes in, how does he fit in in those days between when that opener goes his fifth turn again?'" Roenicke said last week. "I think if you have a couple openers it may be easier because you can actually set up something where you have two guys that fill in on these two days. So I'll have to figure that out and it helps, I think, having Chaim (Bloom) to be really familiar with that type of scenario. So we'll continue to look at it. There's advantages to not having maybe a lot weaker fifth starter but we'll have to see how that plays out at the end of camp."

Again, this is the biggest roster question and will continue to gain clarity as the spring evolves.

#### Bullpen (8)

##### Brandon Workman

With so much uncertainty in the rotation, the bullpen feels like less of a question mark – and yet there are still questions. Workman will pitch in the back end, though the Red Sox still aren't calling him their closer. It seems, like last year, they'll give Workman a majority of the save opportunities, but leave the door open for others (perhaps Matt Barnes or Darwinzon Hernandez) to seal the game if they like the matchups better.

##### Matt Barnes

Barnes will continue to pitch late in games with matchups dictating whether that's in the seventh or eighth innings. He was reliable last year until he wasn't — because he was admittedly overused and lost effectiveness. The Red Sox are hoping they've learned from their lessons last year and added more reliable arms to help spread the innings load.

##### Darwinzon Hernandez

Hernandez had a strong rookie campaign with a 16.9 K/9 last year. Though there was some talk of using him as an opener, at least as of now, it seems like Hernandez will remain in the late innings role.

##### Josh Taylor

Like Hernandez, Taylor also had a strong rookie year with an 11.8 K/9 over 52 appearances and should be another weapon this season with a spot that's his to lose.

##### Marcus Walden

Walden saved the staff last season making 70 appearances in his first full year in the majors with an overwhelmingly consistent approach. His 1.19 WHIP was fourth-best on the Sox staff and he'll certainly be looked to for more important innings this season.

##### Heath Hembree

Hembree's 2019 season left a lot to be desired. He spent time on the injured list and then had an extended stay in Triple A, tossing fewer than 40 major league innings. He's proven reliable in the past, especially with runners on base, so if he can limit the walks (he posted a 4.1 BB/9 each of the last two years), he may have a spot on the team, though a slew of arms in camp means he doesn't have a lot of wiggle room. The one thing working in his favor is that he's out of options so if he doesn't make the roster, he'd have to be put on waivers where he'd likely be scooped up by another team. Still, that might not matter to the Red Sox if they like one of the relievers they acquired this winter.

##### Chris Mazza

We haven't seen enough of some of these new arms acquired by Bloom this offseason to determine if or where they fit on the roster. But it was notable that Mazza, a righty, served as the opener on Sunday in place of Rodriguez, who was scheduled to start before tweaking his knee. Roenicke admitted Mazza was part of the mix they're considering for the fifth starter/opener role. Mazza allowed one run on three hits in two innings in that first game, but it was just one outing. He made nine appearances for the Mets last season in his big league debut but posted good numbers in Triple A last year with a 3.67 ERA with a 1.09 WHIP. Keep an eye on how he progresses (or doesn't) this spring.

##### Austin Brice

The Red Sox traded minor leaguer Angeudis Santos to Miami for Brice, another righty, this winter and he struck out four batters in his first 1 2/3 innings this spring. Again, that doesn't mean much at this stage of the spring, but it should be noted he has no options left, so he'd be designated for assignment if he doesn't make the roster cut.

Josh Osich, Matt Hall and Jeffrey Springs were all acquired this winter by Bloom as well. All three are on the 40-man roster and have options so anyone from this group could very well start the year in Pawtucket but be up in Boston sooner than later. Colten Brewer had flashes of success in 2019, and Ryan Brasier, who struggled with command in 2019, both remain options. Lefty Kyle Hart earned a spot on the 40-man after a strong season (1.17 WHIP over 156 innings) between Double-A and Triple-A and is among those vying for an opener spot. Brian Johnson, Hector Velazquez and even Mike Shawaryn remain depth pieces. Tanner Houck and Bryan Mata are getting looks this spring, but likely aren't ready yet for the big league club.

Part of the reason the bullpen struggled and Barnes and Workman wore down last season was because they didn't have enough depth. All of these new faces are meant to prevent that from occurring again. But the Red Sox also believe that most, if not all of these pitchers might have more to offer, if the Sox can find the right tweak.

"The reason we have them in camp is because our pro scouts have seen something in these guys and maybe what their recs say about how they should be pitching," Roenicke said. "We think this guy could be way more successful if he, instead of just going 15 percent cutters, maybe if he goes to 30 percent cutters, maybe it changes this guy's whole game. We try and listen to why we get these guys in camp, what we see, what our analytics department can do to help us in terms of what they see works better. And then you talk to that player and he buys into it and we get something different, maybe all of a sudden he becomes the piece that we're looking for."

### **Questions from Red Sox camp that need answers one month from Opening Day**

Chad Jennings

FORT MYERS, Fla. – After a relatively simple workout amid a light falling rain, Xander Bogaerts was sitting quietly in the Red Sox clubhouse late Wednesday morning when he sprang suddenly from his chair and went literally leaping, skipping and laughing out of the room.

Guess his ankle was feeling better.

Bogaerts' card game win against Darwinzon Hernandez sparked one of those small bursts of activity that seemed meaningful only within the dull monotony of spring training. It was like the moment earlier in the day when Chris Sale cursed at himself because he wasn't happy with a particular pitch in the bullpen. If Sale was still feeling sick, it wasn't enough to diminish his expectations for himself on the mound.

Opening Day is a month away, which means there's plenty of time for the Red Sox to base their final evaluations on more than leaps and shouts, but for now, here's where things stand with the biggest decisions in camp.

A rotation spot (or two) for a pitcher (or three)

Nathan Eovaldi started on Monday and threw 100 mph. Martin Perez started on Wednesday and went two innings. Eduardo Rodriguez is expected to start on Saturday. Those three are on track to open in the Red Sox rotation. Whether Sale will join them out of the gate seems up in the air.

After a successful bullpen on Wednesday, Sale could throw live batting practice as early as Saturday, but manager Ron Roenicke said Sale might need a second live BP before throwing in a game. That means Sale might not pitch a Grapefruit League inning until next weekend, or the week after, giving him roughly three weeks before the opening series in Toronto. That's enough time for four starts stretching Sale to five innings (give or take).



Whether that's enough to declare Sale ready might depend on the Red Sox' level of caution, which might be high given Sale's elbow issues last season. If they give Sale another week or so to get ready, they'll have two rotation spots to fill.

As it is, the Red Sox have made clear that Ryan Weber is a strong rotation candidate, a possibility only heightened by his two scoreless innings on Tuesday. Prospect Tanner Houck has also started a game this spring, so have more experienced pitchers Chris Mazza and Brian Johnson, and another prospect, Bryan Mata, is scheduled to start on Thursday. There also remains the possibility of an opener or a piggyback situation.

"We have this group of guys who are fighting for this one job, the fifth starter," Roenicke said. "And they'll fight that out, but if we find out that it's just kind of better to piggyback two guys, maybe that's what we do. We're still kind of looking at what we have and how it plays out."

#### An outfield injury and an infield competition

After the blockbuster trade that rocked the Red Sox roster, Alex Verdugo quickly became the presumptive replacement for Mookie Betts in right field. At least, until it was revealed the stress fracture in his back might keep him out of action at the beginning of the season.

Roenicke did say this week that there's a chance Verdugo could play in spring training games by the middle of March, but that's no sure thing. He's not swinging at the moment, and his status for Opening Day remains unclear.

"The first time (the training staff) had him out running outside was way better than what they thought," Roenicke said. "I think he's coming along quicker in those areas. I think we're just cautious on what the rotation can do in a swing. I really haven't asked. I don't know if that depends on whether he takes an (MRI) and the image shows that it's healed completely. I'm not sure."

If Verdugo can't go, veteran Kevin Pillar is the obvious stopgap as a fourth outfielder who can fill in every day. Who starts at second base is less clear and might still be a time split between Michael Chavis (who started at second and homered on Wednesday) and Jose Peraza (who was acquired this winter and is a better defender). The rest of the lineup regulars seem fairly cut and dry. Bogaerts' ankle injury is clearly progressing, and Rafael Devers could make his spring debut before the end of the week.

#### A bench of many questions

Only one bench role seemed up for grabs when camp opened. Now, only one seems set. Either Chavis or Peraza – whichever isn't playing second on a regular basis – should be one bench player, but the rest is subject to change.

Kevin Plawecki was the obvious backup catcher until veteran Jonathan Lucroy signed a minor league deal last week. Roenicke personally reached out to him, which suggests he has a real chance of beating the internal favorite.

Pillar was the obvious fourth outfielder before the extent of Verdugo's injury was revealed. Now it seems more likely he'll be in the starting lineup, prompting uncertainty about whether the Red Sox need a true fourth outfielder given J.D. Martinez's ability to play there (as he did on Tuesday) and the ability of a few infielders to play the outfield if necessary.

The utility infield role was the one bench job wide open from the very beginning, and that hasn't changed. Defensive specialist Tzu-Wei Lin is out of options, and Rule 5 pick Jonathan Arauz has to stay on the roster to avoid being offered back to Houston. If the Red Sox want to keep as much depth as possible, it might make sense to carry those two (and Lin can play the outfield if necessary). Prospect C.J. Chatham, though, is also worth consideration because he's a strong defender at second base and shortstop, and he's gotten his feet wet in the outfield. Marco Hernandez is also a familiar, capable and versatile defender.

There's also the worthwhile possibility of Bobby Dalbec, a corner infielder with big-time power who could step into the lineup whenever Mitch Moreland is on the bench or Martinez is in the outfield.

An optimal bullpen comes in many shapes and sizes

Let's assume five bullpen spots are set. In fact, let's assume six – Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Heath Hembree, Darwinzon Hernandez, Josh Taylor and probably Marcus Walden. That leaves two openings, and maybe three if the Red Sox don't carry a true fifth starter.

In one role or another, Weber seems to have the attention of the Red Sox. He pitched in a career-high 18 major-league games last season, and the team can't stop talking about how much they like him. He's in a crowd with Mazza, Houck, Hector Velazquez and Brian Johnson as guys who seem likely to be stretched out this spring, either to start or provide long relief. Mike Shawaryn, Kyle Hart and Matt Hall fit somewhere in that group as well.

If the Red Sox carry two of those multi-inning pitchers, they'll have room for one more traditional reliever. Austin Brice, acquired from the Marlins, is out of options, which means the Red Sox have either to put him on the roster or risk losing him on waivers. Right-handers Ryan Brasier, Colten Brewer, Phillips Valdez and Trevor Hildenberger stand out as alternatives, as do lefties Bobby Poyner, Josh Osich and Jeffrey Springs. Ton of possibilities, and it's too early for any to have really separated themselves.