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*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox' decision to trade Mookie Betts could come within days, sources say

Alex Speier

A resolution regarding the fate of Mookie Betts may be nearing.

Major league sources familiar with the trade negotiations between the Red Sox and the Padres and Dodgers believe that a decision by the Red Sox could come within the next few days. According to the sources, both San Diego and Los Angeles have outlined multiple trade offers for the 2018 AL MVP, with talks with both teams at a relatively advanced stage – though according to a source with one of those teams, the Red Sox have not made a request for a last and best offer for their superstar right fielder.

Seven things to know about a potential trade of Mookie Betts

The Padres have been willing to assemble a trade package that includes young big league contributors in both the outfield (likely center fielder Manuel Margot or corner outfielder Josh Naylor) and the rotation (with a willingness to discuss righthander Cal Quantrill and lefthander Joey Lucchesi). Additionally, they'd also send prospects to the Red Sox in a Betts deal, likely headlined by catcher Luis Campusano, who was named the 2019 MVP of the High-A California League in 2019 as a 20-year-old.

However, in order to afford Betts, the Padres would need the Red Sox to take back Wil Myers. San Diego would assume some of Myers's remaining financial obligation over the final three years (\$61 million) of his contract, thus diminishing the financial flexibility that the Red Sox would achieve in such a deal. As such, San Diego would have to send more young, inexpensive talent – either prospects or big leaguers near the start of their careers – than the Dodgers in order to assemble the superior package.

The Dodgers have shown a willingness to anchor a trade package with 23-year-old outfielder Alex Verdugo, who hit .294/.342/.475 with 12 homers in 106 games during his rookie season for the Dodgers in 2019 – though he missed the final two months of the season with a back injury. The Dodgers have also shown a willingness to discuss additional prospects and/or big league players in return for Betts, and Los Angeles has also explored scenarios with the Sox in which they'd take David Price — and part of the remaining financial obligation to the pitcher, who is owed \$96 million over the three remaining years of his deal — in addition to Betts.

Some evaluators, however, believe that the Red Sox would be better served to separate Price from Betts in a deal — noting that if the lefthander returns to health this year, his trade value could be considerably higher in midseason than it is now, coming off a year in which he barely pitched over the final two months due to a wrist cyst.

Though the 27-year-old Betts is just one year from free agency and a contract that could land north of \$400 million, both the Padres and Dodgers see him as a difference-maker of such magnitude that he would justify a package of several young players. The four-time All-Star hit .295/.391/.524 with 29 homers and 16 steals along with a major league-leading 135 runs scored in 2019. He also turned in his fifth straight year of at least 65 extra-base hits — making Betts one of eight players (along with Miguel Cabrera, Albert Pujols, Alex Rodriguez, Hank Aaron, Joe DiMaggio, Joe Medwick, and Jimmie Foxx) to do so in five straight seasons between the ages of 22 and 26.

Mitch Moreland on returning to the Red Sox: 'It feels like home'

Peter Abraham

Mitch Moreland took a \$3 million guarantee to return to the Red Sox, turning down at least two other teams for a fourth season in Boston.

That the Sox don't yet have a manager didn't matter to him.

"I trust them to do the right thing and bring in a good person," Moreland said. "The biggest thing for me was I've enjoyed my time in Boston. It feels like home for us and there's a good group of guys. I'm comfortable there.

"It's a good family atmosphere, too, and that means a lot to me."

Moreland, 34, has a .782 OPS with the Sox and played strong defense at first base. His lefty bat will help balance the lineup. Moreland also will continue to be a good role model for players such as Rafael Devers, Michael Chavis, and Bobby Dalbec.

"I feel comfortable in that position," Moreland said. "It's something I bring to the table. I've had some experience and I want to pass that along."

Chavis and Dalbec were developed as third basemen, so having Moreland around to work with them defensively is a bonus. They're also righthanded hitters, which could lead to the Sox using a platoon.

Having Moreland around also makes it easier for the Sox to give Dalbec more time in Triple A. The 24-year-old played only 30 games for Pawtucket last year.

Moreland was surprised by the series of events that took down Alex Cora last month. He's known Cora since they briefly played together for Texas in 2010.

"He's been a friend of mine for a long time now," Moreland said. "He was great for us and he'll definitely be missed. Alex has a great baseball mind. I've talked to him some and it's a difficult thing."

Moreland needs one more season to have 10 years of service time in the majors, which would be an impressive milestone for a former 17th-round draft pick.

Teams usually throw a small clubhouse celebration for players who hit 10 years.

"It's meaningful because it's hard to do," Moreland said. "The life span of careers is getting shorter in the game. It's a nice thing to be able to say you did that. When I came up, it seemed like every team had a few guys who did it. It's rare now. It's nice for my family, too."

How nice? If players wait to collect their pensions at 62, they draw \$220,000 a year.

As for a manager, Moreland talked to chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran about the search and is comfortable they'll make a good choice. Moreland already has played for four managers in his career. One more is not going to affect him.

"You can't get caught up in that," he said. "I'm going to be the same person no matter what. The Sox know what they're doing and will make a good decision."

Moreland had 13 home runs and an .870 OPS through May 25 last season. Back and leg injuries then kept him out for two months.

"Injuries have always been something I've had to deal with," Moreland said. "But I know I can help this team. We're going to hit, I feel confident in that. I know some things have changed but we have a good lineup.

“This team is still in a great place. We can contend. If it wasn’t for the injuries we had last year with our pitching, we’d have been right there.”

In memory of the late Nick Cafardo, a ranking of baseball’s managers

Peter Abraham

The late Nick Cafardo made it a yearly exercise to rank the 30 managers in the major leagues. It was something he had fun doing and this seems like the right time to bring it back, especially with 10 teams having new managers for the coming season.

The role of the manager has changed considerably in recent years. In-game strategy is often obvious because it’s predicated on creating favorable matchups and reducing risk.

Front offices — analytics staffers, to be more precise — have an increasing influence on lineup construction, bullpen usage, and even when players should get a day off. Managers either listen or they’ll have somebody who will.

Managers are instead valued for how ably they can influence the clubhouse atmosphere, prepare for games, and guide what is a growing number of coaches.

The Red Sox used 47 players last season, nine of them rookies. They came from eight countries and had salaries that ranged from \$31 million to the minimum of \$555,000. They were as young as 22 and as old as 36.

That is fairly typical, and the manager is expected to find a way to motivate everybody in the group in addition to serving as the daily spokesman for the team to the media and public over the course of the season.

Here’s one view of where the managers stand:

1. Terry Francona (Indians) — As he enters his 20th season as a manager, Francona skillfully blends an appreciation for analytics with traditional views on how players should be accountable to each other and the team. He’s averaged 92.1 victories over the last 15 seasons, so it works. Francona is 18th all time in victories. Twelve of the men ahead of him are in the Hall of Fame and he’ll likely join them someday.
2. Rocco Baldelli (Twins) — Maybe this is too high after one year on the job. But Baldelli showed an advanced feel for handling in-game decisions and the clubhouse en route to 101 wins last season. A manager is never just one of the guys, but Baldelli has created an environment where he’s part of a collaborative group.
3. Dusty Baker (Astros) — It’s a good thing for baseball that Johnnie B. Baker Jr. is back after two seasons of an unwelcome hiatus. The Astros badly need the credibility and humanity that he will bring to the job. That organization doesn’t deserve him, frankly.
4. Bob Melvin (Athletics) — Oakland has had some managers who were functionaries under Billy Beane. But Melvin enters his 10th season with the Athletics having shown he can keep an ever-changing roster on the right path. Oakland has won 97 games each of the last two seasons and plays with a great sense of purpose.
5. Dave Roberts (Dodgers) — It’s impossible to argue with his 393-256 record and four division titles since taking over in 2016. Roberts has the ability to bring calm to the chaos that invariably happens over the course of a long season. Now, can he get this group to a championship?

6. Aaron Boone (Yankees) — He's a perfect example of what teams want in a manager. Boone comes from a deep baseball background, has the credibility of a successful playing career, embraces analytics, and isn't afraid to show his personality. He's won 203 games in two years.

7. Joe Maddon (Angels) — There will be bands in the clubhouse, zoo animals popping up from time to time, and an endless array of slogans emblazoned on T-shirts. Maddon and the Cubs broke up after last season, his methods losing their appeal. The Angels need life and he'll bring that.

8. Joe Girardi (Phillies) — This is a very smart guy who survived 10 years with the Yankees. Two years away from the dugout to reflect on how better to communicate with players should serve Girardi well. The Phillies will get better with him in the dugout.

9. Craig Counsell (Brewers) — "Don't forget Counsell," a scout said. "He makes his roster work even if the pieces don't always fit." Counsell has worked well with president of baseball operations David Stearns to get Milwaukee into contention. The Brewers play like a team that believes in what it's doing.

10. Kevin Cash (Rays) — Why the Rays bother to print rosters is a mystery. It's going to change the next day anyway. But Cash takes what he has and has made life uncomfortable for the Red Sox and Yankees. Tampa Bay will win a World Series with him eventually.

11. Brian Snitker (Braves) — He has unquestionably benefited from a wave of young talent and the shrewd guidance of underrated general manager Alex Anthopoulos. But the 64-year-old Snitker, who first joined the Braves in 1977 as a player, is a big part of their success.

12. Torey Lovullo (Diamondbacks) — Lovullo and GM Mike Hazen have managed to stay competitive while at the same time flipping much of the roster. That's hard to do and it's a testament to Lovullo's baseball acumen and ability to connect with players.

13. Mike Shildt (Cardinals) — At 51, he's a younger version of Snitker, an organizational man who was the right fit for a talented team. Getting swept in the NLCS was a disappointing end to a strong 2019 season.

14. Dave Martinez (Nationals) — He had a 114-118 record as of last June 15. Had Washington fired him, nobody would have been shocked. The Nationals finished 61-31 and then went 12-5 in the postseason. Now he's a big hero.

15. David Ross (Cubs) — It's not a reach to rank a first-time manager this high. Ross knows the personnel and the front office in Chicago and will charm the fans and media. But he's also demanding of those around him and driven to win. Forget the "Grandpa Rossy" image. He'll get tough with an underachieving group.

16. Don Mattingly (Marlins) — This will be his fifth year managing in Miami and perhaps it'll be a little more successful given the upgraded roster. Mattingly is grinding through a tough task.

17. Mike Matheny (Royals) — That the Cardinals took off after he was fired in 2018 was a bad look. But Matheny managed four playoff teams before that. Like Girardi, the time off to reflect should serve him well.

18. Ron Gardenhire (Tigers) — You have to respect his body of work. But the Tigers lost 114 games last season and are years away from contention as Miguel Cabrera battles time and injuries. No manager has a tougher job.

19. Bud Black (Rockies) — Colorado dropped from 91 wins in 2018 to 71 last season and now star third baseman Nolan Arenado is upset with the idea of being traded. Black, who has yet to win a playoff series in 11 years of managing, has work to do.

20. Scott Servais (Mariners) — Seattle dropped from 89 wins in 2018 to 68 last season after GM Jerry Dipoto blew up the roster. Servais deserves a team with a more cogent plan.
21. Gabe Kapler (Giants) — He was 161-163 in Philadelphia and the front office wanted him back before being overruled by ownership. Then the Giants hired him after a thorough search by president of baseball operations Farhan Zaidi. There's something there a lot of smart people like.
22. Chris Woodward (Rangers) — Young, smart, analytically inclined, and attuned to what the media wants, Woodward checked off all the boxes with the Rangers. As they move into a new park with a better roster, they need better than 78-84 in his second season.
23. David Bell (Reds) — Cincinnati is a sleeper in the National League Central as its roster improves. Bell is not a sleeper. He was ejected eight times last year.
24. Charlie Montoyo (Blue Jays) — The Blue Jays have a lot of young talent and better days are coming. After a 67-95 debut, Montoyo has a better rotation to work with this season.
25. Rick Renteria (White Sox) — Chicago is 83 games under .500 in three years under Renteria. As the roster improves, he'll have to show he's the manager to take the White Sox into contention.
26. Brandon Hyde (Orioles) — He could well be an excellent manager but is working with so little talent in Baltimore it's impossible to know. It could be even worse this season as the tanking continues at Camden Yards.
27. Derek Shelton (Pirates) — As a coach, he worked under Baldelli, Cash, Maddon, and John Gibbons. The Pirates are rebuilding under Ben Cherington and Shelton seems like a wise choice to take them through that process.
28. Jayce Tingler (Padres) — He was the minor league field coordinator for Texas after having experience on the major league coaching staff. The Padres are taking a chance, but it's one they believe will pay off.
29. Luis Rojas (Mets) — The Mets looked past him to hire Carlos Beltran, then went back to him after Beltran got caught up in the Astros scandal. Rojas has the approval of several key players at least, and has considerable minor league experience.
30. TBA (Red Sox) — Welcome to Boston. You're replacing Alex Cora, whom everybody loved, and your two most expensive players are cranky pitchers coming off injuries. Have fun!

BOSTON, YOU'RE MY HOME

Why Moreland returned to Sox

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Extra bases

Here’s to Curtis Granderson, who announced his retirement on Friday. Granderson, 38, had an .803 OPS over 16 seasons and hit 344 home runs. He could make an even bigger impact off the field considering his dedication to community service and bringing baseball to other countries and to Black kids in American cities. Commissioner Rob Manfred would be wise to find a role for Granderson within Major League Baseball . . . After trading center fielder Starling Marte to Arizona, Pittsburgh’s payroll as calculated for luxury tax purposes is \$66.9 million, the lowest in the majors. Chris Archer, at \$9 million, is the Pirates’ highest-paid player and he’s a good candidate to be traded if he pitches well . . . Now that he’s manager of the Astros, Dusty Baker is in line to manage the American League All-Star team in Los Angeles on July 14 . . . Red Sox scout Ray Fagnant and Yankees scout Matt Hyde work together every year to put on a showcase game at Fenway Park for amateur players. This year’s game will be dedicated to the late John Altobelli, one of the victims of the helicopter accident that also claimed the life of Kobe Bryant. Altobelli coached 27 seasons at Orange Coast College in California and had a three-year run with the Brewster

Whitecaps of the Cape Cod League. His son, J.J., is an amateur scout with the Red Sox . . . Happy birthday to John Tudor, who is 66. The lefty was 39-32 with a 3.96 ERA for the Red Sox from 1979-83, part of a 12-year career in the majors. Tudor was born in upstate New York but raised in Peabody and played for North Shore Community College. Tudor was 21-8 with a 1.93 ERA in 1985 for the Cardinals and finished second in the Cy Young voting to Dwight Gooden. Tudor was a remarkable 20-1 with a 1.37 ERA in his last 26 starts and had 10 shutouts. Nobody has had more than eight in a season since. Tudor's career included a World Series ring with the Dodgers in 1988.

Rafael Devers insists that Red Sox didn't cheat to win 2018 World Series

Stan Grossfeld

BRADENTON, Fla. — Sitting in the dugout at the IMG Academy, Rafael Devers seems to be perpetually smiling, save for the moment he is asked if the Red Sox cheated to win the 2018 World Series.

“No, no, I don't think so,” he says emphatically through an interpreter. “We didn't cheat. We have a lot of talent. We don't need to cheat, and we became champs without cheating.”

Major League Baseball is still investigating allegations of electronic sign stealing by the Red Sox in 2018, but Devers isn't worried.

“They can continue investigating, but that's why they haven't found anything, because we didn't cheat,” he says.

Devers says it was difficult to visit with former manager Alex Cora after Cora parted ways with the Red Sox on Jan. 14. Cora was implicated in an MLB report on the Astros' sign stealing when he served as the team's bench coach in 2017.

“I felt very sad when I saw him,” says Devers. “He's like my father. He taught me a lot in the two years that he was there. He let me play the game the way I want to play. He likes to have fun, so he would say, ‘Go, play your ball.’ ”

Devers, accompanied by his actual father for a three-day workout with Rep 1 athletes, is asked if he would like Sox bench coach Ron Roenicke to become interim manager, and for Cora to return after serving what is expected to be a harsh suspension.

“I would be very happy with that,” he says, flashing the broad grin again. “I hope it happens.”

He's also happy that the team re-signed first baseman Mitch Moreland, one of his closest mentors. But the smile quickly fades again when he talks about the rampant Mookie Betts trade rumors.

“I don't know,” he says. “We don't have the same agent and I don't talk to him that much, but I hope he stays. I've always said he's the best player in the league.”

Devers has been working out in earnest at the Yo Murphy Performance Compound in Tampa since November. He's all business during weight and performance training.

Devers looks spry taking ground balls and working on his range, but he swears (in English) when he occasionally boots a grounder.

Last year, he led major league third basemen in errors with 22, but he also improved greatly as the year progressed. He says getting angry at himself helps him get better.

He could always hit, but last season he became a budding superstar. Devers, 23, hit .311, led the league in doubles with 54, smashed 32 homers, and had 115 RBIs. But he's not resting on his laurels.

“I’m working on everything,” he says, adding that 40 home runs is a goal for this season. “I’m someone who likes to learn a lot. So I work on my batting and everything else.”

In 2017, Devers became the youngest Red Sox player (at 20 years, 275 days) to hit a home run since Tony Conigliaro in 1965, and then, against the Astros in the Division Series, the youngest Red Sox player to homer in the postseason.

“I don’t even remember those home runs,” he says. “I just play my game every day. I don’t really think about what happened in the past. I just try to have fun every day.”

Devers, who is arbitration-eligible after the 2020 season, isn’t worried about a contract extension, either.

“I don’t think about any of that stuff,” he says. “I just want to finish the season healthy.”

Despite all the uncertainty with the Red Sox as spring training approaches, he believes the team can contend.

“I think we can have a great season,” he insists. “We have one of the best teams right now, and we can play ball the way we’ve always played it, you know, have fun and whatever happens, happens.”

He believes that he and shortstop Xander Bogaerts, who also had a career year in 2019, can continue to improve.

“Let’s hope so,” he says. “We have to find a way to keep on getting better.”

He’s also more relaxed with fans, too. At the recent Red Sox Winter Weekend, he even took the microphone and sang a lullaby in Spanish after infielder Michael Chavis disclosed that he had the best singing voice on the team.

But don’t look for a Devers CD any time soon. This is a guy who is most comfortable in the batter’s box. Behind the smile is a young man comfortable in his own skin.

He says the tough Boston media have been fair to him.

“They know I don’t like to talk to them a lot,” he says. “They don’t pressure me when I don’t play well. That’s why I like them.”

And despite his childlike joy, he likes his space.

“I’m someone that likes to be alone, you know, unless it’s with my family,” he says. “I’m a bit of a loner sometimes.”

But the smile is genuine. Devers says he’s been smiling since birth.

“Oooh, always,” he says. “You can ask my dad. I do it because I like it.”

He grabs his brown maple bat and heads for the batting cage. The high-voltage smile is back, and his father, a former catcher, is watching proudly from the dugout. Devers looks up, smiles, and winks.

Red Sox to interview Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta for managerial vacancy

Alex Speier

The Red Sox have been granted permission to interview Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta for their managerial vacancy, according to a major league source. Urueta is the first known external candidate to interview for the Red Sox job that opened in mid-January with the departure of Alex Cora.

Urueta, a 39-year-old native of Colombia, has a wide variety of experiences in the game. Though he grew up thinking of a career in soccer, according to a profile by La Vida Baseball, countryman Edgar Renteria's walkoff single in Game 7 of the 1997 World Series led Urueta to reimagine his future.

Urueta played five years in the Diamondbacks and Cardinals organizations, then spent three years playing in Italy. He served as a coach, manager, and coordinator in the Diamondbacks system from 2008–17, then joined Torey Lovullo's big league staff as a coach in 2018.

Urueta also has experience as a winter league manager in both Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

He managed Colombia in the World Baseball Classic, and he served as general manager for Tigers del Licey in the Dominican Winter League in the 2017–18 offseason.

"His communication skills and his ability to relate to players is really, really off the charts," Lovullo said by phone. "He is bilingual and has the ability to communicate with just about any player on the field. He's very comfortable stepping into normal conversations and very difficult conversations. I think those are some of the qualities that some of the best managers that I've been around possess."

Many around the Diamondbacks credited Urueta with a significant role in the development of Ketel Marte into an MVP candidate.

Lovullo had high praise for Urueta as a strategist — someone whose brain he picked both before and after games — and said that in his capacity as major league coach (a seventh member of a staff who typically wasn't on the bench for games) the last two years, he played a critical role in the team's advance scouting and gameplanning for opponents. He's also shown an independent interest in furthering his education in statistics and analytics.

"He understands a lot of analytical aspects of the game, yes, but he also takes it upon himself to look at what he can get on his own, to get as much information to pass along to the player or in this case myself," said Lovullo.

Urueta has been a hot name in the coaching world for some time, and the Diamondbacks promoted him to bench coach in part because they feared that he'd be hired elsewhere if they didn't. (Indeed, the Rays, when current Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom was still with them, tried to interview him after the 2018 season.)

Lovullo, the former Red Sox bench coach and interim manager, believes Urueta's experiences have left him prepared for a managerial opportunity, including the Red Sox job.

"Boston is a very unique place, but I know that his game clock is on. He'd be prepared and ready for that challenge," Lovullo said. "He's a very good baseball man."

"He is fearless in his ability to keep moving forward and learning about the game, never sitting still. And he's managed in some high-pressure situations. He had his team in the WBC on the verge of advancing to the final round, so I know he gets a good response from players."

"I feel very comfortable knowing that he follows the flow of the game and he's able to reach players. I can't speak from any experience of him being in the dugout as a field manager — I haven't been with him — but he's always really ready. And I think he's ready to go."

*** *The Boston Herald***

Time for Red Sox to pull the trigger with Mookie Betts

Jason Mastrodonato

It's time.

Since Friday afternoon, the Red Sox have appeared to be on the verge of sending Mookie Betts to California. Though nothing is certain, there's a sense among those in the industry that the former American League MVP will be in a Dodgers uniform on Opening Day.

The Dodgers have a deep pool of prospects to replenish a Sox' farm system that was pillaged by Dave Dombrowski, they have payroll flexibility to bail the Sox out of a bad contract (David Price, again via Dombrowski) and they have the motivation to acquire an elite player.

Will the trade be a good one for the Red Sox? We'll find out.

For now, let's talk about a subject that many in New England hate to confront: Is Mookie Betts overrated?

The term "overrated" is used too loosely when talking about athletes. First we need to establish a baseline of what his rating is. And we usually do that with dollar signs.

At \$27 million this year, Betts is far from overrated. He's actually quite underrated given the low risk involved in a one-year contract. If any team had the chance to sign Betts on a one-year deal in an auction with 29 other clubs, chances are he'd be making upwards of \$40 million.

So in that sense, no, he's not overrated.

But there will be discrepancy about just how much money Betts is worth next offseason. He's always said he wants to maximize his value and feels it's in the best interest of the players that come behind him to set a new bar in free agency.

If it happens, and if Betts is paid more or equal to Mike Trout, then you bet he's overrated.

Betts has benefited greatly from playing his home games at Fenway Park, where doubles and triples tend to skyrocket (based on ESPN's park factors over the last six years), and that's why using OPS-plus, a number adjusted for league and ballpark, is the easiest way to compare Betts to his peers.

In five of his six seasons, Betts has posted an OPS-plus between 108 and 135. The outlier was while playing for the 2018 Red Sox, a team currently under investigation for using their replay video room to steal signs, when Betts posted an OPS-plus of 186.

It was a remarkable year, the sixth-best by OPS-plus since steroid testing got serious in 2005. Betts went bonkers, hitting .346 with 47 doubles, 32 homers and 30 stolen bases while winning a Gold Glove in right field.

A player who does that every year is worth \$40 million a year or more.

In his other five seasons he's averaged .293 with 36 doubles and 21 homers.

Even with the electric defense and baserunning ability, that's closer to a \$25-million player.

Trout has had an OPS-plus between 168 and 198 every single season in the big leagues. He signed a 10-year, \$360-million extension last year.

Too often Betts and Trout are compared, and it doesn't seem fair.

Betts isn't Trout and he isn't close. Nobody is. Trout is a generational player. It doesn't mean Betts isn't a great player — he obviously is. But in reality he falls closer to being ranked in the teens among the game's best players, not at No. 1 or No. 2.

Here's where Betts ranks in the past five years: 23rd in homers (134), first in doubles (217), 10th in average (.302), 16th in OPS (.898) and 16th in OPS-plus (134).

Players who have had a higher OPS-plus than him and signed contracts in the last five years include Trout (10 years, \$360 million), J.D. Martinez (five years, \$110 million), Nelson Cruz (two years, \$26 million), Bryce Harper (13 years, \$330 million), Josh Donaldson (four years, \$92 million) and Paul Goldschmidt (five years, \$130 million), among others.

Look at the past three seasons comparing Betts to slick-fielding third baseman Anthony Rendon, who just signed a seven-year, \$245-million contract with the Angels.

Betts: .299, 85 homers, .924 OPS and 141 OPS-plus.

Rendon: .310, 83 homers, .953 OPS and 143 OPS-plus.

The players aren't far away in offensive value. Rendon didn't even eclipse \$250 million in free agency this winter.

It remains staggering to think 10 years and \$300 million wouldn't be enough to keep Betts in Boston.

Perhaps as an industry we've become too obsessed with WAR charts.

The WAR charts, for example, will tell you that Betts was worth 6.8 WAR in 2019 and shortstop Xander Bogaerts was worth just 5.2 WAR. But most of us who followed the games closely all year long would tell you Bogaerts was a more valuable player from March through September.

The Red Sox will miss Betts when he's gone, there's no doubt.

But cool the jets on the Trout comparisons. Betts is likely to get paid more than he'll be worth next winter. And if the Sox can get good value for him now, the organization will be better off saying goodbye one year early.

Red Sox to interview D-backs' Luis Urueta for manager opening

Jason Mastrodonato

The search for the next Red Sox manager has been quiet until now.

New chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom has tried to keep the process under wraps, but ESPN Deportes reported Friday that Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta will be interviewed for the position.

It is unclear if Urueta is the first external candidate to interview, but he is the first whose name has leaked publicly.

An industry source confirmed to the Herald that Urueta is a "definite manager candidate" and expects to be a solid option for the Red Sox in their search to replace Alex Cora.

Like Cora, Urueta speaks Spanish and English. And like Cora, he has the potential to be a groundbreaking hire given there's never before been a Colombian-born manager in Major League Baseball.

An industry source called the 39-year-old Urueta a "great guy" who is "very bright," having made his way through the coaching ranks in fairly quick order.

He was originally signed as a player in 1998, when he became the first Colombian-born player to join the D-backs organization. He lasted four seasons in the minors, then played another minor league season with the Cardinals before playing professionally in Italy for four years.

He's been in the D-backs organization in some capacity now for 18 seasons. He was a minor league instructor, coach and manager until 2017, when D-backs skipper Torey Lovullo added Urueta to his bench as a big league coach.

After the 2019 season, Lovullo announced at his end-of-year press conference that Urueta would become the bench coach in 2020.

"I feel like it's my responsibility to bring along staff members and teach them, tutor them, mentor them, and allow them to grow," Lovullo told reporters at the time. "And I just felt like the growth aspect for (Urueta) was really enticing for me. And I think he's loaded with potential. And I didn't want to keep him in the position that he was in without allowing him to reach his full potential."

Lovullo also said Urueta has a "tremendous personality" and "deals with people very well."

Also similar to Cora, Urueta has some manager and general manager experience in the winter leagues.

He managed Leones de Monteria in the Colombian Winter Leagues from 2011 to 2016, then managed Licey in '17 and '18. He was Manager of the Year three straight years (2014-16) and won back-to-back championships (2015-16).

While Urueta is known as an intelligent young coach who connects well with players, the only question the Red Sox need to answer is whether or not he could handle the intense baseball environment in Boston.

Bloom reportedly tried to interview Urueta for a Rays opening in 2018 but it did not go anywhere.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox truck day comes under cloud of uncertainty

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox equipment truck will take off for Fort Myers on Monday, signaling one of the only events that feels normal in an otherwise atypical February for baseball fans in New England.

What the truck's longtime driver, Al Hartz, finds when he pulls into Fenway South later this week is anyone's guess. By the time the truck arrives, will the Sox have a manager? Will Mookie Betts still be on the team? Will the organization be reeling from harsh punishments as the result of a league investigation into alleged electronic sign-stealing in 2018?

These are the questions that face the Red Sox just over a week before pitchers and catchers are due to report to Fort Myers. It's hard to fathom a season starting with more uncertainty than this one.

Truck Day -- which is annually held less than 24 hours after the Super Bowl -- usually marks a rite of spring in these parts. A year ago, hundreds of fans turned out on Jersey Street to send the truck off, hoping the Sox would defend their title and keep up with the Patriots, who had defeated the Rams just a few hours earlier. This time around, as Patrick Mahomes heads to Disney World, Sox fans are wondering if their own MVP will suit up in the shadows of Disneyland come April.

Simply put, it's hard to envision Red Sox fans getting too excited for the 2020 season. Once John Henry publicly announced Boston's intention to significantly cut payroll for luxury tax purposes in September,

drumming up interest was going to be a tall task. Add a hike in ticket prices, an offseason filled with trade rumors about Betts, David Price and others and two league investigations that ultimately cost the Red Sox their beloved manager, Alex Cora, and it doesn't look like many fans will be actively counting down the days until Opening Day.

Three years ago, the Sox tried to improve a division-winning team by acquiring one of the game's best pitchers in Chris Sale. Two winters ago came one of the game's best sluggers, J.D. Martinez. Even a year ago, it was hard not to be excited about the idea of the winningest team in franchise history getting the chance to run things back and defend its World Series title.

Now? The only good news that has come from Jersey Street since the end of the season was the impressive hire of new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom. Since then, the Sox have said goodbye to fan favorites (Rick Porcello, likely soon to be joined by Brock Holt), watched Gerrit Cole sign with the Yankees, been unable to crawl out of their luxury tax debacle, been involved with two separate cheating scandals, given Cora the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge and added a handful of complementary parts to fill out the back end of the roster.

That's not Bloom's fault, as the sharp executive is doing his best to thread the impossibly small needle of trying to build a contender while cutting payroll by more than \$25 million. It's clear that what he's tasked with now -- moving the team's best player, hiring a manager from a limited pool of candidates and reacting on the fly to potential punishments for a scandal he wasn't involved in -- was not what he signed up for when he took the job in October.

Even if the Red Sox enter spring training with Betts and all of their other key players all on the roster, it's hard to envision the group staying together all season. If significant moves are made, it's hard to see the Sox keeping up with the Yankees -- who added Cole to an 103-win team -- and the Rays, who won 96 games last season.

The images of early spring training will be different this year. Yes, you'll likely see Chris Sale throwing a bullpen in a bright red jersey against a plush green backdrop. But you're also likely to see an introductory press conference for a manager, which hasn't happened in Fort Myers since 2002. The spring opener against Northeastern will be broadcast on NESN, but it might come shortly after Bloom has to explain why exactly he traded one of the very best players in the league. Tons of parents will surely bring their kids down to southwest Florida for February vacation, only to have to answer questions on how to properly use a video replay room.

Truck Day is here, so spring must be right around the corner. It sure seems like the shadow of a gloomy winter isn't leaving anytime soon.

Mookie Betts trade rumors 2020: Is a Dodgers' deal for Red Sox star 'inevitable?' (report)

Chris Cotillo

Multiple executives around baseball believe a deal sending Red Sox star Mookie Betts to the Dodgers is 'inevitable,' according to a report from MLB Network's Peter Gammons.

Gammons suggests a return of outfielder Alex Verdugo, infield prospect Jeter Downs and a pitcher (potentially lefty Caleb Ferguson) but WEEI's Rob Bradford cites two sources who believe that deal "is not realistic at this time."

While the package might need some hashing out, it's clear the Dodgers have emerged as one of the clear favorites to acquire Betts. The Red Sox are known to be shopping the 2018 American League MVP in recent weeks and have also been engaged in serious talks with the Padres.

Talks between the Red Sox and interested clubs have hit a "relatively advanced stage" and Boston is expected to make a final decision on a move within "the next few days," according to Alex Speier of the

Boston Globe. Speier previously reported the Red Sox were likely to move Betts before the beginning of spring training.

Any package headed back to Boston would likely include Verdugo, a 23-year-old former top prospect who would likely be Betts' immediate replacement in right field. The Sox are also reportedly looking for a young pitcher who is close to major-league ready and have been trying to get the Dodgers to take on David Price, who is owed \$96 million over the next three seasons.

Betts, who entering his last season before free agency, has repeatedly rebuffed extension offers from the Red Sox and seems intent on hitting the open market. Boston has increased its efforts to deal him in recent weeks in an effort to dip below the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold.

Josh Osich destined for Boston Red Sox? Reliever's wife from Andover introduced him to Boston sports in Idaho, father-in-law sold popcorn, soda at Fenway Park, Garden

Christopher Smith

Red Sox left-handed reliever Josh Osich grew up watching Pedro Martinez on television and trying to emulate the Hall of Famer's nearly unhittable changeup.

"We don't have a baseball team in Idaho, so growing up we just kind of got to watch anybody and everybody," Osich said. "I always remember watching Pedro Martinez and always wanted to be like him. ... I always tried to throw my changeup like him."

The 31-year-old Osich — whose changeup is so crucial to his success against right-handed hitters — paid close attention to the entire professional Boston sports scene, not just Martinez and the Red Sox thanks to high school sweetheart Jessica — now his wife.

Jessica and her family from Andover, Mass., to Idaho, because Jessica's father worked for Albertsons, headquartered in Boise, Idaho.

"I met her in high school, actually," Osich said. "So I've been a Bruins, Boston area fan for a while."

Osich, who starred at Bishop Kelly High in Boise and then Oregon State, began throwing his cutter more last year. He also regained the feel of his changeup and added a curveball late in 2019, leading to a 2.96 ERA in 23 outings (27 1/3 innings) for the White Sox during August and September. He's ready to help the 2020 Red Sox bullpen.

He and his Jessica live in Kennebunk, Maine. Osich is an avid outdoorsman who planned to ice fish Friday.

Jessica's parents also returned from Idaho to New England. They live in the same town. Osich obviously was excited when the Red Sox claimed him Oct. 31.

"A lot closer than going all the way over to the West Coast," said Osich, who pitched for the San Francisco Giants from 2015-18.

"It makes it pretty easy that I live up here," he added. "And I can go to Bruins games and Celtics games and watch the Pats."

His in-laws grew up in Medford and Watertown, he said. His father-in-law worked at Fenway Park and the Boston Garden.

"Back in the '60s," Osich said. "He sold popcorn and soda."

Jessica — who has aunts and uncles still living in the Boston area — received a master's degree from Simmons University and doctorate degree in elementary education from the University of New England.

“We have a lot of ties over here,” Osich said.

Osich has put himself in a strong position to perform well in 2020 season after struggling, mainly vs. right-handed hitters, during the first few months of the 2019 season.

He held left-handed batters to a .171 average, .200 on-base percentage, .351 slugging percentage and .551 OPS in 115 plate appearances last season. But right-handed hitters slashed .297/.344/.559/.903 in 157 plate appearances vs. him.

“I feel fine facing righties,” Osich said. “Last year, I struggled a little bit against them because I kind of lost my changeup. But I feel like I’ve gotten that back. So it will be different now. I didn’t really have a weapon against a right-hander last year. I was basically just throwing fastballs and cutters and that’s just about it. I started throwing a curveball toward the end of the season, too. So in August and September my numbers were pretty good.”

He sometimes threw his curveball first-pitch to get ahead in the count.

“Then they see the cutter one less time,” he said. “I feel like most hitters don’t swing at the first pitch. So I went to that as a way to get ahead.”

Osich threw his cutter 66.8% last year, a dramatic increase from 17.6% in 2018, per Statcast. Meanwhile, he used his four-seam fastball — which averaged 94.4 mph — 10.2%, down from 48.5% in 2018.

He decided to throw the cutter more to decrease his walk rate — and it worked. He averaged just 2.0 walks per nine innings during 2019, down from 5.5 walks per nine innings his previous two seasons (55 ⅓ innings).

He has struggled throughout his career to throw his four-seam fastball for strikes as often as he’d like, he said.

“That’s why I increased the usage (of the cutter): so I could get ahead and stay ahead, basically,” Osich said. “I saw that my fastball gets hit a lot more often than I would like. So I tried to cut back on it.”

A new three-batter minimum rule will exist in Major League Baseball during 2020. A pitcher must face at least three batters per appearance or pitch to the end of a half inning (barring injury). The new rule could have an affect on the usage of left-handed specialists, specifically a LOOGY (left-handed one-out guy).

“There’s still going to be somewhat of a lefty specialist, I would believe,” he said. “If there’s already one out and two lefties are coming up, they (a team) would take their chances of getting those two lefties out. And then the inning is over and your day is done. So you wouldn’t have to face three hitters technically.”

He pointed out a southpaw also could be used for the final out of an inning vs. a left-handed hitter as long as the pitcher he replaces has faced three batters during his appearance.

“Obviously if you don’t get him out, you’ve got to stay out there,” Osich said. “But they’ll come in, bring you in, try to get that lefty. And if you get ‘em, then your day is done. A lot of people think you have to face three hitters. It’s face three hitters or the inning’s over.”

His success against left-handed batters often is because of his ability to read hitters.

“Left on left, I feel like I read the left-handed swing really well,” Osich said. “So I can tell what somebody’s trying to do when they’re standing in the box. And I can throw my cutter to both sides of the plate. And I can kind of throw a sweeping slider off the plate. Or I could throw a curveball. So just different actions. And I feel like if the guy clears his front hip to try to get to the inside cutter, then anything down and away he’s not going to be able to hit. And if I feel like he’s trying to go the other way on me, I just

throw it right at his front hip and it breaks the inside part of the plate. And there's no real way for him to get his hands extended to that. It's more about me just reading the hitter than it is anything else."

Regaining the feel of his changeup should help him vs. right-handed hitters.

"I have a big variation between my fastball and my changeup," he said. "So the speed difference, they can't cheat to that fastball if I throw in to them anymore. And last year, I didn't have that. So they could just cheat to the fastball. And obviously my stats against righties weren't very good. So that shows how big of a difference that changeup makes."

Rafael Devers says Boston Red Sox innocent in sign-stealing investigation: 'We didn't cheat' (report)

Chris Cotillo

Rafael Devers became the latest member of the Red Sox to proclaim the organization's innocence Friday, telling Stan Grossfeld of the Boston Globe that the league's investigation into alleged electronic sign-stealing by the club will turn up nothing.

"We didn't cheat," Devers told Grossfeld. "We have a lot of talent. We don't need to cheat, and we became champs without cheating.

"They can continue investigating, but that's why they haven't found anything, because we didn't cheat," he added.

Major League Baseball is investigating the Red Sox after a report from The Athletic cited multiple sources who claimed Boston improperly used a video replay room to steal opponents' signs during the 2018 season. The inquiry came on the heels of the league's lengthy investigation into similar practices by the Astros in 2017, which resulted in three managers -- Boston's Alex Cora, Houston's A.J. Hinch and the Mets' Carlos Beltran -- losing their jobs earlier this month.

Members of the Red Sox organization have publicly claimed the league's investigation won't find them responsible, with owners John Henry and Tom Werner asking fans to "reserve judgment" before a ruling is reached and designated hitter J.D. Martinez adamantly denying any wrongdoing.

"I'm excited for the investigation to get over with," Martinez said at the team's Winter Weekend event on Jan. 18. "Just so they can see that there was nothing going on here."

Results of the investigation are expected to be announced in the near future, potentially before pitchers and catchers are due to report to spring training on Feb. 12. If the league finds the Red Sox violated any rules, potential penalties could include suspensions, fines and the loss of draft picks.

Boston Red Sox manager candidates: Luis Urueta, Diamondbacks bench coach, interviewing (report)

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have provided very few details about their late-offseason search for a new manager.

MassLive.com's Chris Cotillo reported earlier this week that former Red Sox player Mark Kotsay, a quality control coach for the Athletics, is believed to be in the running.

The latest report has Diamondbacks bench Luis Urueta as a candidate. Urueta is interviewing via phone Friday, ESPN's Enrique Rojas reported.

The 39-year-old native of Colombia played in the low levels of the minor leagues for the Diamondbacks and Cardinals from 2000-03, then spent time in the Italian Baseball League.

He has spent 18 years in the Diamondbacks organization, including the past two seasons as Torey Lovullo's bench coach.

He managed Team Colombia in the 2017 World Baseball Classic. He also served as general manager for the Tigres del Licey of the Dominican Winter League during 2017-18.

*** *RedSox.com***

Boston to interview Urueta for manager (source)

Jessica Camerato

More than two weeks into their managerial vacancy, the Red Sox are interviewing D-backs bench coach Luis Urueta for the role, a source told MLB.com's Mark Feinsand. The club has not confirmed the news. The position has been open since the team parted ways with Alex Cora on Jan. 14 after he was named in Major League Baseball's investigation into the Astros' 2017 sign-stealing allegations.

Urueta, 39, works on Arizona's staff with manager Torey Lovullo, who spent four seasons as the Red Sox's bench coach. Urueta has two years of experience on the D-backs' Major League staff and 18 in the organization. His previous roles include D-backs field coordinator (2017), Short-Season field coordinator (2008-12, '16) and Triple-A Reno coach ('15).

Urueta has a lengthy resume in offseason competition, including general manager, interim manager and bench coach for Tigres del Licey in the Dominican Winter League, manager of Team Colombia in the 2017 World Baseball Classic and manager of Leones de Monteria in the Colombian Winter League.

A first baseman and outfielder, Urueta became the D-backs' first Colombian player when he signed in 1998. He spent four seasons in Arizona's Minor League system and was a member of St. Louis' organization in 2003. Urueta went on to compete in the Italian Baseball League.

The Red Sox have kept their managerial search quiet during the process. The Astros and Mets, the other teams affected by the report, have hired new managers in Dusty Baker and Luis Rojas, respectively.

*** *ESPN.com***

Mookie Watch: What we're hearing as Betts-to-Los Angeles Dodgers (or San Diego Padres) trade rumors swirl

David Schoenfeld

The Mookie Betts trade rumors, after festering all offseason, have reached new heights in recent days, with speculation that a deal between the Red Sox and Dodgers -- or maybe the Red Sox and Padres -- is inching closer to completion. While free agency moved rapidly this offseason, it has been a slow market regarding trades -- Tommy Pham and Starling Marte have been the two best players traded -- but maybe we'll finally get that superstar trade we've been anticipating all winter.

Let's do a quick Mookie Watch Q&A to review what's going on with the 2018 American League MVP as the baseball world waits to see whether a blockbuster deal will come to fruition.

Why do the Red Sox want to trade him?

Betts is entering his final season before entering free agency, and there was never any momentum for Betts to sign a long-term extension. Betts will be entering his age-28 season in 2021, and given his age and the recent contracts for Bryce Harper, Manny Machado and Gerrit Cole, he's poised to be the next \$300 million player.

As one of the sport's most prosperous franchises, the Red Sox could certainly afford that -- assuming Betts even wanted to stay in Boston -- but they have a bigger issue they've chosen to stare down: They want to get under the competitive balance tax threshold. Their projected CBT payroll right now, according to Cot's Contracts, is \$227.9 million, nearly \$20 million above the \$208 million threshold. Betts will earn \$27 million in 2020. As Buster Olney wrote Thursday, "Rival executives think it's inevitable that the Red Sox will trade Betts before the July 31 deadline."

Obviously, Betts' contract is not the problem. David Price is owed \$32 million a year the next three seasons, and it is a distinct possibility he will be included in any Betts deal. Chris Sale will make \$145 million over the next five years. Nathan Eovaldi has three years and \$51 million left on his deal. All three missed time with injuries in 2019. Even Dustin Pedroia has two years left on his contract.

The Red Sox also have one of the weakest farm systems in the majors, so trading Betts could bring back some much-needed (and inexpensive) young talent. It seems weird that a rich team is trying to dump a superstar, hurting its chances of making the playoffs in 2020, but the Red Sox believe trading Betts will help improve their chances at long-term success (given that Betts is likely leaving anyway).

Exactly how good is Betts?

He's arguably the second-best position player in the game behind Mike Trout. He beat out Trout for MVP honors in 2018, when he hit .346/.438/.640 with 32 home runs and 30 stolen bases and won a Gold Glove. That season was worth a remarkable 10.9 WAR, and while he didn't hit as well in 2019 -- .295/.391/.524 -- he was still worth 6.8 WAR, and over the past four seasons he trails only Trout in total WAR:

Trout: 35.5

Betts: 33.8

Max Scherzer: 28.0

Justin Verlander: 27.5

Nolan Arenado: 25.0

So what are the potential trades?

It looks like the Dodgers or Padres are the two primary suitors, with the Dodgers the betting favorite -- although new Red Sox GM Chaim Bloom is certainly hoping to play the two NL West rivals off each other to improve the offers.

The Dodgers don't need Betts as they'll remain heavy favorites to win the division even without him. The 106-win season of 2019 ended in playoff disappointment, however, and the feeling could be that adding new superstar blood could be the final ingredient to finally get them over the top. Plus, a little roster turnover is a good thing and adding Betts could simply provide a mental lift to the organization in addition to his on-field value.

A Red Sox-Dodgers trade would likely center on outfielder Alex Verdugo, who hit .294/.342/.475 with 12 home runs in 343 at-bats in his first full season at age 23. Verdugo is a high-contact hitter who had excellent defensive metrics while playing all three outfield positions. In his part-time role, he was worth 3.1 WAR, so it's not inconceivable to see him as a 4- or 5-win player, especially if he adds a little more power. He's under team control through 2024.

Like the Dodgers, the Padres also have a deep farm system to deal from, although, much like the Dodgers won't be trading Gavin Lux (and probably not pitcher Dustin May), the Padres will not be trading top pitching prospects MacKenzie Gore or Luis Patino. Catcher Luis Campusano, who hit .325/.396/.509 at age 20 in winning co-MVP honors in the California League, could be the prime attraction for Boston. The Padres could also include a couple of young major leaguers with a prospect, such as outfielder Manuel

Margot (a former Red Sox farmhand), first baseman Josh Naylor or a pitcher such as Joey Lucchesi or Cal Quantrill.

It's worth noting that Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman was Bloom's boss when the two worked together in Tampa Bay for about 10 years, so that relationship could help facilitate a trade.

What could hold up a trade?

The other parts. The Red Sox would love to include Price and his \$96 million in any Betts trade. Price has still been a quality starter when he's able to take the mound, but he has missed significant time in two of the past three seasons. He made 22 starts in 2019 and went 7-5 with a 4.28 ERA/3.62 FIP. He did strike out 128 in 107 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings, so the stuff is still there when healthy. He's probably worth about \$15 million per season on the open market, so the Red Sox would have to include some cash to pay down his salary if he's part of a deal.

On the Padres' side, they would love to dump Wil Myers, who is owed \$61 million the next three seasons and is coming off a minus-0.3 WAR season. According to Kevin Acee of The San Diego Union-Tribune, the Padres want the Red Sox to pick up half that contract. Note here that Myers' tax figure is much lower than his actual salary, at \$14 million per season (the CBT is based on the annual average value of the contract). So if the Padres pay down \$30 million of the \$42 million remaining tax amount, the Red Sox's tax hit is just \$4 million per season (but \$10 million actual cash). The bigger issue is whether the Red Sox actually want Myers or believe he can bounce back from a terrible 2019.

How will Betts hit away from Fenway?

Betts is a pull hitter, so his offensive game is perfectly tailored to Fenway Park. His career numbers:

Home: 1566 AB, .319/.387/.542, 65 HR, 135 2B

Away: 1637 AB, .285/.361/.497, 74 HR, 94 2B

He actually has homered a little more often on the road, but look at all those doubles -- Mookie loves playing pingpong with the Green Monster. While it's possible that some line drives turn from doubles into home runs, some fly balls will turn from doubles into outs.

On the other hand, maybe the bigger gaps down the left-field line and left-center gap will produce more hits -- Fenway left field giveth but it also takes away some hits. In general, Dodger Stadium and Petco aren't great hitters' parks, so I would guess Betts will lose a few home runs and some points on his batting average (which has jumped up and down all over the place the past four years anyway) if he's playing his home games on the West Coast in 2020.

* **WEEL.com**

Red Sox interviewing Diamondbacks' coach for manager job

Rob Bradford

We finally have an interview.

After weeks of silence regarding the Red Sox' search for a new manager, sources confirm an ESPN Deportes report that the Sox are interviewing Arizona bench coach Luis Urueta for the position as their next skipper.

"His communication skills and ability to relate to players are off the charts," said Lovullo by phone Friday.

The 39-year-old Urueta has coached in the Diamondbacks' organization since 2007 after a short-lived professional playing career. He managed his native Colombia to unexpected success in the most recent World Baseball Classic tournaments.

Urueta was promoted to coach on the major league staff under former Red Sox bench coach Torey Lovullo with the Diamondbacks starting in 2018. He had served as Arizona's seventh coach, not spending time in the dugout but helping monitor in-game decisions for Lovullo along with participating the advance scouting process before being promoted to bench coach this season.

It is the first known interview conducted for Alex Cora's replacement, with the Red Sox prioritizing the research of potential candidates before locking in on finalists for the job. The team still might wait for the ruling from Major League Baseball regarding its investigation into 2018 cheating allegations reported by The Athletic before naming a manager, with sources in baseball believing that decision will likely come down the first week of February.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

The time has come for Red Sox to make a decision on Mookie Betts

John Tomase

I have nothing left to say.

Not exactly the most enticing hook to keep reading, but the Red Sox have officially reached the (bleep) or get off the pot stage of Mookie Betts' future.

Trade him. Keep him. Stick him in carbonite like Han Solo. Just do something, because this storyline has dragged on long enough.

Spring training starts in a little over a week. It's unfair to the second- or third-best player in baseball to leave his fate still hanging, just as it's unfair to his teammates and fans.

I understand Chaim Bloom wanting to nail his first major transaction as chief baseball officer, but the longer this lingers, the greater the likelihood the Red Sox end up with nothing.

Since the season finale, I've written more than 20 columns about Betts, and I'd love to write about something else, but the appetite for Mookie news and opinion is insatiable, so typity-type-type.

I'm tempted to compare the following to a clips episode of a particularly lazy week of "Family Ties," but that reference is probably lost on half the readership. So let's describe it in 21st century Information Age terms, which is self-aggregation, a conceit that can be likened to a snake eating its own Google search ranking.

Whatever there is to say about a Betts trade as we sit on the cusp of February, I've already said it. I've consistently argued I wouldn't give anyone a 10-year contract, but that might be because I'm naturally risk-averse, which came in really handy when I opted against purchasing Amazon stock at \$17 a share in 2001 because who can afford that gamble?

That said, I'm comfortable with my position. I've argued that Betts should be traded to the Dodgers. Repeatedly.

I've laid out what the Red Sox could receive in return from L.A.'s loaded farm system, not to mention Atlanta's and San Diego's, too. I've made the case for packaging him with David Price for the long-term health of the franchise, and as a straight salary dump.

I've suggested the Red Sox should trade him right now. I've suggested they should trade him because he's too short, which sounds kind of ridiculous now that I read those words aloud, but my logic is sound, I swear. I've suggested they should trade him before it's too late.

I've given all I have in service of this interminable game of will they or won't they.

The time has come to make a decision, halt the endless speculation, and give us concrete news, because I'm done breaking down what might happen and ready to move on to the reality of whatever comes next.

MLB Rumors: Red Sox to interview Diamondbacks' Luis Urueta for manager opening

Darren Hartwell

We finally have a development on the Boston Red Sox manager front.

The Red Sox are set to interview Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta via phone Friday for their open manager position, ESPN's Enrique Rojas reports.

The Boston Globe's Alex Speier confirmed the Diamondbacks had accepted Boston's interview request.

The 39-year-old has been the bench coach for Arizona manager Torey Lovullo (a former Red Sox bench coach) since 2018. Urueta boasts managerial experience, as well -- he coached his native Colombia in the 2017 World Baseball Classic and managed the Licey Tigers in the Dominican winter ball league -- and was an aspiring soccer player before switching to a career in baseball in 1997.

Urueta reportedly will be the first external candidate to interview for Boston's manager spot vacated by Alex Cora, who stepped down earlier this month after being implicated in the 2017 Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal.

The Red Sox are the last major league team without a manager with pitchers and catchers set to report to spring training on Feb. 11.

Boston is still waiting on Major League Baseball to complete its investigation into allegations of sign-stealing during the 2018 season, which may affect the eligibility of some of the club's internal candidates.

But it appears Chaim Bloom and Co. are finally getting the ball rolling on the manager search -- with more interviews likely to follow.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

MLB Notebook: A look at some available Red Sox roster spots this spring; managerial search update

Sean McAdam

With less than a week and a half before pitchers and catchers report to Fort Myers for the start of spring training, the Red Sox are a team in limbo.

They do not have a manager, and for the time being, it's unknown whether their best player, Mookie Betts, will head to Fort Myers later this month or instead report to his new team somewhere in Arizona.

As such, it's difficult to project the Red Sox roster, since any trade of Betts would likely return at least one major league-ready player and scramble the team's outfield picture in a big way. If the Sox get Alex Verdugo in a package from the Los Angeles Dodgers, does he take over in right? If Wil Myers comes from San Diego, could the Sox put him in left, shift Andrew Benintendi to center and Jackie Bradley Jr. to right?

The options are seemingly endless.

But ignoring the uncertainty surrounding Betts, there are still some position battles and jobs open for competition separate from his status. Here's a look at how they might play out:

1. SECOND BASE/UTILITY INFIELDER

The Red Sox have every intent of giving Jose Peraza the chance to win the second base job. Signed as a free agent from Cincinnati, Peraza has the ability to fill in at short and third and can play the outfield, too. But, for now, he'll be the primary second baseman. He may have to improve his offensive game to retain that role, however.

If you cede Peraza the second base job for now, that slides Michael Chavis into a hybrid role, splitting time between first and second. Chavis showed surprising athleticism at second last year — as demonstrated by some defensive metrics. One issue: while it might make sense to have Chavis and prodigal first baseman Mitch Moreland in a rather strict platoon at first, that becomes complicated by the fact that Chavis performed slightly better against righthanders (.774) than against lefties (.742).

Beyond Chavis, the Red Sox can afford to carry another middle infielder. That spot could go to Tzu-Wei Lin, who would probably qualify as the team's best defender at short. Lin can also play second and third. Importantly, he's out of options, which means the Sox could risk losing him on a waiver claim if he didn't make the team out of spring training.

There's also Rule V pick Jonathan Arauz, who is advanced defensively but likely to be highly overmatched offensively, having played just 28 games above Single A. Arauz will have to display his defensive versatility to stick. It would seem a longshot that a team with designs on contending would carry a 21-year-old with little professional experience for the entire season, but maybe Arauz will surprise the Sox with his instincts and ability to learn quickly.

Another longshot option is C.J. Chatham, who is viewed by some as something of a sleeper. Chatham has hit at every level of the minor leagues and it's not impossible that he could be the team's starter at second at some point in 2020. Whether he can crack the roster as a backup in the spring — he also has experience at short — is another matter altogether.

2. BACKUP OUTFIELDER

For the past two seasons, the Sox have essentially gone with DH J.D. Martinez as their fourth outfielder. Martinez started a third of the games (57) in 2018, but that number dropped to just 37 last year as he battled some nagging back issues.

While Martinez enjoys contributing in the field, he remains a defensive liability and given the importance of keeping his bat in the lineup — a priority that would only be enhanced by a trade of Betts — there's the sense that the Sox would like to reduce his time in the field.

Problem is, there isn't a proven backup outfielder currently on the 40-man. Lin has played center field extensively at Pawtucket and could presumably handle either of the corner spots, too. But he's yet to demonstrate that he can hit at the major league level (.706 OPS in 75 games).

Marcus Wilson is another possibility. Athletic, he profiles — for now — as the perfect fourth outfielder, with strong defensive skills and above-average speed. He may not hit a lot initially, but as the fourth (or fifth) outfielder, that wouldn't be much of an issue. And with 18 homers last year between Single-A and Double-A, he might run into one every once in a while.

3. LAST TWO BULLPEN SPOTS

Admittedly, there will be lots of fluctuation in the bullpen over the course of the season and the relievers who make the Opening Day roster are hardly guaranteed permanent spots. No roster spots undergo more churn than the back end of a major league bullpen.

Let's concede that as many as six spots are spoken for: Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Heath Hembree, Darwinson Hernandez, Marcus Walden and Josh Taylor. Workman and Barnes are self-explained locks and both Hernandez and Taylor flashed lefty power arms over the second half of 2019. Hembree is out of options and Walden took a quantum leap forward with his performance a year ago.

That likely leaves two spots open for competition from among Ryan Brasier, Colten Brewer and Mike Shawaryn and a group of newly-acquired relievers from this winter: Chris Osich, Chris Mazza, Austin Brice, Matt Hall and Jeffrey Springs.

Osich has the most experience from the group of newcomers, but with Taylor and Hernandez, the Sox don't necessarily need a third lefty — especially given the new three-batter minimum rule which might limit the appeal and utility of a lefty specialist like Osich.

Many of the remaining newcomers are, frankly, fungible. Look for most — if not all — to see some time with the big league club at some point over the course of the season. To project one over the rest, however, would be an exercise in futility. They're each here because the organization saw something — velocity; the action on a certain pitch; a repeatable delivery — that made them attractive as low-cost options.

For now, beyond that, who knows?

The report from ESPN Deportes Thursday night that had the Red Sox receiving permission from the Arizona Diamondbacks to interview Luis Urueta tells us a few things about Chaim Bloom's managerial search.

For one thing, it suggests that Bloom is placing a priority on someone who is bilingual. Urueta, a native of Colombia, speaks Spanish as his native language, as his potential predecessor Alex Cora did. That's a factor that shouldn't be easily dismissed in a game where nearly one-third of the players speak Spanish.

Secondly, Urueta's background — he was a star soccer goalie and has a varied resume in both soccer and baseball — hints that Bloom is looking for someone with lots of different life experiences. Urueta has managed both in winter ball and in the WBC, as well as managing and coaching at the minor league level and serving on the Diamondbacks coaching staff the last three seasons.

"I think he's loaded with potential," gushed Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovello. "(He has) a tremendous personality (and) deals with people very well."

Urueta's career path and upbringing is hardly prototypical.

Then again, the game is rapidly evolving and executives are unafraid to consider candidates with less traditional work experience. The NHL's Buffalo Sabres hired Ralph Krueger last spring. In addition to his hockey background, Krueger wrote a best-selling book about leadership, participated in the World Economic Forum in Davos and was once chairman of Southampton FC of the Premier League.

Having worked for Arizona the last few seasons, Urueta is well versed in the analytics that are central to the Red Sox' evaluations and game preparations.

That he doesn't have major league managerial experience is hardly noteworthy. Cora had none, and neither did Aaron Boone or Rocco Baldelli. But each managed to win at least 100 games in his first year of managing in the big leagues.

Again, it would be premature to anoint Urueta as the front-runner in the Sox' managerial sweepstakes. But the fact that he's being considered at all gives us a bit of a roadmap.

This isn't to suggest that the move was made solely for public relations purposes, but the Houston Astros' decision to hire Dusty Baker as their manager was a masterstroke in improving the franchise's image and helps the franchise earn back some goodwill.

Almost overnight, the Astros went from arrogant scoundrels to, well, a troubled group but one that is far more respected. You could almost hear people around the game saying, "Well, how bad could they be if they brought in Dusty?"

The Astros are in desperate need of a makeover. Already held in contempt by many across the sport, Baker brings respectability, stability and accountability.

They'll need all of that in more, starting in spring training. The Astros' spring training home in West Palm Beach, Fla. will be Ground Zero for all national writers seeking to take the temperature of the scandal-ridden A.L. champs.

Baker will patiently answer all questions, inject some humor and humanity into the proceedings, protect his players and offer guidance when they encounter the inevitable taunting that's still to come. He'll spin stories, entertain and wax philosophical, all the while chomping on his trademark toothpick.

The two need one another. The Astros need someone to guide them through something that no team has ever experienced and Baker needs the Astros to burnish his managerial legacy. He's never won a championship despite nine trips to the postseason.

Some of his losses have been among the most excruciating in recent history, including — but hardly limited to — the blown lead in Game 6 of the 2002 World Series to the Bartman game the next fall at Wrigley.

Baker has never before inherited a team this talented. If he somehow gets the Astros back to the World Series for the third time in the last four years, some will be mighty conflicted this postseason as they watch someone whom everyone loves manage a team that most despise.

Hot Stove Lunch: Blockbuster trade possibilities serve as intro to spring training

Sean McAdam

Ordinarily, this is the quietest time on the baseball calendar.

Spring training is on the horizon, and usually, most of the news stories would focus on equipment trucks getting ready for Florida and Arizona. Or aging free agents signing minor league deals with hopes of one more season in the big leagues. Or roster projections.

But not this year.

This year, the focus is on trades. Big trades.

On the final day of January, at least three of the game's biggest stars could still change teams: Kris Bryant, Nolan Arenado and, of course, Mookie Betts.

If you assembled a list of the top, say, dozen position players in the game, it's likely that all three players would make the list.

The Rockies, just a year into a huge extension for Arenado, have determined that it might not make the most sense for a medium-market team to sink so much into one player. The Cubs, having waited all winter for the outcome of an arbiter to rule on Bryant's service time, think that dealing him could accelerate their rebuild. And the Red Sox are intent on cutting payroll and have perhaps come to the decision that Betts can't be re-signed.

Add it all up and you get three huge players being dangled as February arrives.

Of the three, it would seem that Betts has the best chance of being moved. Talks with the Los Angeles Dodgers have intensified in recent days and it appears that the teams are uniquely positioned to get a deal done. The Dodgers believe that Betts could put them over the top, aren't concerned about having just one year of control guaranteed and have plenty of prospects they can sacrifice to make a trade work.

The Cubs, as noted, are getting a late start, but there are a handful of contenders (Nationals, Braves, Rangers) who have an obvious need at third base.

Moving Arenado might be more problematic, if only because of the huge money (seven years, \$234 million) due to him. That's a tremendous amount of salary obligation to move on the eve of spring training, when the vast majority of teams have their budgets already set.

It's possible that all three will, for the time being, end up staying put. In the meantime, the trade talk for these three is a fascinating prelude to pitchers and catchers reporting.

*** *The Athletic***

Red Sox Truck Day is here. But is anyone really excited this year?

Steve Buckley

It's an annual tradition for Red Sox fans to show up at Van Ness Street on the appointed morning to cheer and holler as an 18-wheeler laden with baseball equipment roars to life and begins its pilgrimage down I-95 to Florida.

Red Sox Truck Day, which arrives Monday, means baseball season is just around the corner, and there's a two-tiered Groundhog Day feel to it all.

There's Groundhog Day, as in the unofficial holiday that gives us an indication as to how close we are to spring.

And then there's "Groundhog Day," as in the movie about a television weather forecaster who keeps living the same day over and over and over.

(And if I may: Thank you, thank you, thank you, Bill Murray, for lending your acting skills and precision comedic timing to that spectacular Jeep Gladiator commercial that was set to air during Super Bowl LIV. "Groundhog Day," we can all agree, is one of the funniest movies ever made. And for you to pop out of bed at exactly 6:00 a.m. in a reprisal of your Phil Connors role ... well, again: Thank you.)

But, yes, Red Sox Truck Day is a lot like "Groundhog Day." The day never changes, right down to the press release that reveals the secrets of what's inside the truck: 1,100 bats, 400 T-shirts, 20 cases of bubble gum, 60 cases of sunflower seeds, and so on. I've always felt the bit about the sunflower seeds is a particularly nice touch, as it invokes a pleasant Rockwellian image of some hopeful, aw-shucks rookie tossing a handful of the tasty kernels into his mouth as he emerges from the dugout on a sun-splashed Florida morning.

If it sounds like I'm mocking Truck Day, no, no, no, no, no. While there is a sameness to Truck Day, the idea of Truck Day is beyond reproach. Though the Red Sox have predictably tricked it out over the years — such as having JetBlue as “presenting sponsor” — Truck Day evolved organically and still has meaning.

And yet this year it is a little different.

This time, the truck may or may not contain the equipment used by one Markus Lynn “Mookie” Betts, the best all-phases-of-the-game outfielder the Red Sox have had since Fred Lynn.

This time, the truck may or may not have an actual Red Sox manager waiting for it when it arrives at JetBlue Park.

It's a horrible thought for Red Sox fans, but it's very possible the truck will ship out of Port Fenway with its Mookie cargo and then receive an urgent call from Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom to pull off the highway somewhere in the middle of Delaware after the Betts-to-the-Dodgers-or-Padres deal is announced.

Perhaps you're one of those Red Sox fans who believe ownership is acting responsibly by trading Betts, that it's all part of a carefully orchestrated reboot that'll bring a collection of talented, can't-miss prospects to Boston and lay the foundation for the next World Series-contending team. Perhaps you're a Red Sox fan who is resigned to the reality that Betts doesn't want to remain, that his endgame is to file for free agency at the end of 2020 and see who comes a-callin.' But unless you're of the belief that Betts is simply overrated — and, really, I just don't get that — then you should be mourning what's likely to unfold after the truck leaves. Maybe the Red Sox can get JetBlue to be the presenting sponsor of the Mookie Betts trade.

And while history teaches us there was indeed a year when the truck departed Fenway containing the equipment belonging to a manager who nobody expected to still be in the employ of the Red Sox by Opening Day — we're talking here about Joe Kerrigan, 2002 — this is the team's first-ever Skipperless Truck Day.

It so happens that this edition of Truck Day falls on the morning after the Super Bowl. What a crisp transition — from football to baseball! Loading the truck was to begin at 7 a.m. Monday, with Milford native Al Hartz (the official driver of the official truck of the Boston Red Sox) honking the horn and turning the ignition key at around noon. WEEI's Dale Arnold suggested the Red Sox unveil their new manager by having him step outside Fenway Park to drive the truck, but that idea didn't get anywhere.

Given all the uncertainty about the makeup of the 2020 Red Sox — to say nothing of MLB's ongoing investigation into whether the team pulled a Houston Astros by cheating its way to a World Series championship in 2018 — I was worried the Red Sox might tone down this year's Truck Day. Or maybe send the truck off in the middle of the night, the way the late Robert Irsay did in 1984 when he spirited the Baltimore Colts to Indianapolis. As the Washington Post put it, “Under cover of darkness and heavy rain, the Baltimore Colts galloped out of town last night for points west, and boy, are Baltimoreans steamed.”

That's one of the few times in history that the transportation of sports equipment was considered controversial.

This isn't that, obviously. But it's a little goofy, because this edition of Truck Day, while always a fun event because it's a portal to Opening Day, is nonetheless a reminder, a somber reminder — OK, a slap in the face — that Mookie Betts might not be in the lineup when the Sox go to bat on March 26 in Toronto.

Who is Luis Urueta? A look at the latest Red Sox managerial candidate

Jen McCaffrey

Though much of the last week has centered around Mookie Betts trade talks, the Red Sox are also trying to make progress in filling their managerial vacancy.

On Friday, ESPN Deportes reported that Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Luis “Pipe” Urueta (Ooo-roo-etta) is scheduled to interview for the Red Sox job. The Athletic’s Diamondback reporter Zach Buchanan noted Urueta will interview via phone on Friday.

The 39-year-old Colombia native joined the Diamondbacks staff in 2018 as a major league coach and was named bench coach this winter for Arizona manager Torey Lovullo, a former Red Sox bench coach and interim manager. Urueta had spent the previous 17 years in Arizona’s organization as a minor league field coordinator and manager of the rookie level and short-season affiliates. Urueta also served as third base coach for the World Team in the All-Star Futures Game, managed Team Colombia in the 2017 World Baseball Classic in addition to serving as manager and general manager of Tigres de Licey in the Dominican Winter League.

Buchanan, the Diamondbacks reporter, spent time in the Dominican last winter with Urueta for a look a look at the hectic life of running a winter league team:

“For four months of the year,” Buchanan wrote, “from October through January, the 38-year-old Colombian is the heavily scrutinized general manager of one of the most heavily scrutinized teams in baseball. The Tigres del Licey are not just any winter ball team, but the winter ball team.”

His wealth of experience at a relatively young age makes him an intriguing candidate. If the Red Sox are looking for someone with a similar profile to former manager Alex Cora, it seems that Urueta fits that mold.

A profile on LaVidaBaseball.com notes: “Urueta’s style is clearly new school, steeped in analytics and clear communication. He’s articulate in English, Spanish and baseball.”

Urueta played four minor league seasons for the Diamondbacks from 1999 to 2002.

While internal interviews are believed to have taken place with Carlos Febles and Ron Roenicke, Urueta is the first official external candidate that has surfaced.

*** *The New York Post***

The evidence that could doom Red Sox in cheating scandal

Ken Davidoff

What did the 2018 Red Sox slug, and where did they slug it?

Those champion Sox remain under investigation by MLB commissioner Rob Manfred for illegal sign-stealing — the very crime of which their immediate predecessors, the 2017 Astros, have been convicted.

Alex Cora, the manager of the former team and the bench coach of the latter, stands as the common thread. Manfred identified him as a mastermind of the ’17 Astros’ scheme, and a suspension of at least one year appears quite likely. Cora and the Red Sox parted ways the day after Manfred released his report on those Astros.

The Red Sox owners and All-Star J.D. Martinez have intimated that their team will come out clean, and at the surface level, you can understand why. For starters, no one has put his name on these allegations as did ’17 Astros pitcher Mike Fiers, nor has a smoking-gun video emerged, as did those Astros’ trash can-banging against the White Sox and Danny Farquhar (courtesy of social-media detective @Jomboy_).

What about the statistics? The Athletic conducted a deep dive into the ’17 Astros that revealed how dramatically — and downright historically — that team improved at making contact. Most notably, their reduction in team strikeouts by 365 marked the most, by far, in the live-ball era (starting in 1920). And that

reduction resulted primarily from an improvement at home (down by 242 strikeouts, compared to 123 on the road), where the sign-stealing scheme was fully operational.

So let's turn to the Red Sox. They actually struck out more in 2018 (1,253) than in 2017 (1,224). They nevertheless became a superior offensive team, increasing their slash line from .258/.329/.407 to .268/.339/.453. They slugged .482 at home, compared to .412 in '17, and .426 on the road (.401 in '17).

The '18 Red Sox, like the '17 Astros (and the '18 Astros, too) hit tremendously well with runners in scoring position, interesting since the public allegations are that the '18 Bosox's scheme operated only with runners on base. As per the Elias Sports Bureau, with runners in scoring position, the '18 Red Sox slashed .300/.385/.524 at home and .274/.372/.453 on the road. In the same situations, the '17 Red Sox recorded a .287/.375/.430 slash line at home and .266/.354/.442 on the road.

These statistical splits don't scream anywhere as loudly as the '16-17 Astros, and remember that Boston added Martinez for the '18 season, quite a boon regardless of any illicit shenanigans. We'll find out shortly whether these numbers, combined with whatever else the investigators can find, speak loudly enough to result in a tarnishing of that crown.

David Ortiz knows how Red Sox's Mookie Betts ordeal ends

Mollie Walker

It's looking more and more like Mookie Betts will not be in a Red Sox jersey come Opening Day. Former teammate David Ortiz doesn't see it going any other way.

"Here's the thing," Ortiz told NBC Boston. "My boy Mookie is at the stage of his career where he has to get what he deserves. The Red Sox, we have a very high payroll and I don't think our owner wants to go past that.

"I trade him. I will get young talent [and] you will get whatever you want with Mookie. Unfortunately, that's the baseball business."

Boston's 2020 payroll is projected to be \$228 million. Moving Betts — who is set to make \$27 million this season in his final year before free agency — in exchange for prospects would move the franchise under the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold, resetting its tax rate for the next year it goes over.

Ortiz said Betts, who has enjoyed a decorated six-year tenure in Boston, is the most exciting player to watch in the league and someone the Red Sox ideally would not like to lose. However, Betts has been transparent about how he views his free agency and reportedly turned down a \$300 million extension offer from Boston last year. Betts is reportedly seeking a deal in the \$400 million range, and Ortiz was confident the Red Sox front office would not go to that level.

Betts, whom Ortiz referred to as his "little brother," is apparently drawing heavy trade interest from the Dodgers and the Padres. The Boston Globe described it as a "two-team race" for the four-time All-Star, four-time Gold Glover and three-time Silver Slugger.

"I could talk to you about Mookie forever," Ortiz said. "But the reality is, business-wise, this is going to be his last year [under contract]."

Red Sox are 'deep in talks' with Dodgers for Mookie Betts trade

Greg Joyce

Mookie Betts is going, going, and might soon be gone.

The Red Sox “are deep into talks” with the Dodgers about a trade for the 2018 AL MVP, ESPN reported Thursday.

The clubs are discussing different trade formats, according to the report, including potentially adding David Price to the deal. The Dodgers have major league-ready pieces to offer in outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitchers Dustin May or Tony Gonsolin, in addition to options from a deep farm system.

The Red Sox have also talked with the Padres about a deal for Betts, per the Boston Globe, which could net them the better prospect in catcher Luis Campusano, plus some mix of a major league-ready outfielder (Manuel Margot or Josh Naylor) and pitcher (Joey Lucchesi or Cal Quantrill). The Red Sox might also have to take on Padres outfielder Wil Myers (three years, \$61 million) to help offset the money.

There is some incentive for the Red Sox to finalize a trade for Betts before spring training begins — pitchers and catchers report on Feb. 11 — so that it’s not hanging over the team’s head, ESPN and the Globe reported.

Red Sox owner John Henry has said they are hoping to cut payroll to get under the luxury tax threshold of \$208 million. Unloading Betts’ contract (one year left at \$27 million) is the easiest way to do that, even if it costs them one of the best players in baseball.

The Red Sox made some efforts to keep Betts, offering him a 10-year, \$300 million deal last spring, according to WEEI’s Lou Merloni. Betts’ side reportedly countered with a 12-year, \$420 million deal.