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Red Sox agree to trade stars Mookie Betts, David Price to Dodgers in blockbuster deal

Alex Speier

Fewer than 16 months after Mookie Betts and David Price helped lead the Red Sox to a championship celebration in Dodger Stadium, the duo is poised to head back west — but this time, as members of the Dodgers.

According to major league sources, the Red Sox and Dodgers agreed in principle to a three-team blockbuster trade on Tuesday night. The deal would send Betts — the 2018 A.L. MVP and four-time All-Star who ranks as one of the greatest talents in Red Sox franchise history — and Price, a pitcher who came to Boston after the 2015 season on a record-setting \$217 million deal that has now become onerous for the Sox, to Los Angeles.

In exchange, the Red Sox will receive a pair of players who should be able to help them in 2020. The centerpiece of the deal is 23-year-old outfielder Alex Verdugo, who turned in an impressive rookie season for the Dodgers last year. The Sox also landed rocket-armed 21-year-old righthander Brusdar Graterol, who made his big league debut last season for the Twins. (The Dodgers agreed to acquire Graterol from Minnesota in exchange for pitcher Kenta Maeda.)

The Sox would also send money to the Dodgers to pay roughly half of the \$96 million that Price is owed over the next three years. As of late Tuesday night, the deal had not yet been finalized, as all teams were reviewing the medical records.

With the departures of both Price and Betts (owed \$27 million in 2020), the Red Sox will achieve their desired goal of getting below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold in 2020.

Betts seemed keen on getting to free agency at the end of the upcoming season.

Losing him leaves a huge gap in the lineup. He is a generational talent and will go down as one of the best players to ever put on a Sox uniform.

In six seasons, Betts compiled a .301 batting average with 139 homers and an .893 OPS. He has played in four All-Star Games and won three Silver Sluggers and four Gold Gloves. He was the American League MVP in 2018, when he batted .346 with 32 homers, 30 stolen bases, and a whopping 1.078 OPS while also becoming a World Series champion.

The Sox and Betts were never on the same page when it came to a long-term contract. In each of the last three offseasons, Betts and his camp declined the Red Sox' extension offers. Instead, the outfielder has chosen to bet on himself and is a firm believer that he can get what he feels he's worth in the open market.

When the Sox hired Chaim Bloom away from the Tampa Bay Rays — an organization that is known for making trades and finding wins within the margins — it made it easier to imagine a scenario in which Betts wouldn't return.

The Red Sox signed Price to a record-setting seven-year, \$217 million deal after the 2015 season, and he immediately gave credibility to the team's aspirations to go from back-to-back last-place finishes to contention. He helped the Sox win three straight A.L. East titles from 2016-18. And after a career of

struggles as a postseason starter, he emerged as a dominant force by the end of October 2018, claiming the win in the World Series clincher in Dodger Stadium.

But a succession of injuries — including multiple stints on the sidelines with left elbow issues, as well as a left wrist cyst that sidelined Price for most of the final two months of 2019 — cast uncertainty around Price’s contributions. Though he remained effective when healthy, Price averaged just 119 innings over the last three years. At age 34, his ability to stabilize the Red Sox rotation had come into question — while his average annual salary of \$31 million represented a sizable obstacle for a Red Sox team whose payroll had become inflexible with long-term commitments.

Now, the Sox must pick up the pieces and retool, something that’s not easy do without their cornerstone player.

Verdugo, who turns 24 in May, bats and throws lefthanded. He seems likely to claim an everyday outfield job.

When healthy, Verdugo shows an impressive ability to get the barrel on the ball (evidenced by his modest 13.0 percent strikeout rate) that translated to perennially high batting averages as he moved through the minors following his second-round selection out of high school in 2014. He’s also capable defensively at all three outfield positions.

The second player the Red Sox would receive, Graterol, features an eye-popping two-seam fastball that regularly exceeds 100 miles per hour. Graterol made 10 big league appearances down the stretch for the Twins, going 1-1 with a 4.66 ERA, after going 7-0 with a 1.92 ERA along with 9.0 strikeouts and 3.4 walks per nine innings in three levels of the minors. He threw 61 innings (11 starts, seven relief appearances) in the minors last year.

The 21-year-old’s huge velocity gives him an obvious chance at a plus or plus-plus fastball. He also flashes a slider with the potential to be a plus offering and a functional changeup. Based on that three-pitch mix, one evaluator sees him as having the ceiling of a starter who could be a No. 3 or better and there’s a floor of a late-innings arm or opener. Given the combination of his stuff and his proximity to the big leagues, he immediately becomes the Red Sox’ top pitching prospect.

The deal would position the Dodgers — who reached the World Series in back-to-back years in 2017 and 2018, then won 106 games in 2019 before losing in the NL Division Series — as favorites to win a championship in the coming season.

The Sox, meanwhile, acquired two players with profiles that weren’t present in their organization: young, inexpensive players with a chance to be above-average regular contributors at some point in 2020. Verdugo has already shown an ability to perform at a high level for a contender in the big leagues. Graterol has gotten his feet wet at the highest level, and he is more advanced and has a higher ceiling than virtually all of the Red Sox’ current inventory of pitching prospects.

Nonetheless, both players come with risk — a contrast to the near-certainty of stardom that accompanied Betts. While Verdugo and Graterol fit the Red Sox’ vision of sustaining contention with a balanced roster over the long haul, that outlook will do little to diminish the shock of life without Betts, a player whose electrifying all-around game had few precedents in Red Sox history.

Trading Mookie Betts means the Red Sox have given up on 2020 season

Dan Shaughnessy

There you have it. The Red Sox have officially given up on the 2020 season.

The Sox won’t tell you that, of course. They won’t even utter the toxic “bridge year” phrase. They will speak of being competitive and staying on message (last year’s promotional theme was “you can never

rest”), but make no mistake, trading Mookie Betts and David Price for prospects and salary relief is a white flag for 2020. And your ticket prices will not go down when you are asked to support a team that goes into the upcoming season with virtually no chance to compete with the Yankees.

Welcome to Tampa Bay North. Say hello to your Boston Rays. The Sox might as well borrow the Cape Cod Melody Tent and perch it over Fenway next summer so we can pretend Boston’s home games are being played in the Tropicana Dome. The 120-year-old Red Sox at this hour are being molded in image of the middle-market Rays.

On the 100-year anniversary of the sale of Babe Ruth to the Yankees, the Red Sox Tuesday night traded franchise player Betts, and veteran lefthander Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a deal that will impact the Boston franchise for the next decade. The Minnesota Twins are the third team in a blockbuster that (pending medical clearances) will bring Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins pitcher Brusdar Graterol to Boston in exchange for the 2018 American League MVP and Price, who should have been MVP of the 2018 World Series. The Dodgers are said to be picking up half of the \$96 million owed to Price over the final three years of his contract. The Sox will also save the \$27 million they would have paid Betts this year. This means that new baseball boss Chaim Bloom, in nifty Tampa fashion, has put the Sox under the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold for 2020.

The party line will be that the Sox are making this deal so that they can be competitive for the next five years. We will be reminded that it’s all about the long view, not the short-term satisfaction. The Sox will promote the notion that Mookie wasn’t going to stay here under any conditions so they had to get what they could before he walked in exchange for a mere fifth-round draft pick at the end of this season.

Swell. But we don’t really know that all that is true. The only way to establish that Betts won’t stay in Boston would be to let him play here this season, then try to sign him with everybody else in the winter of 2020-21. If the Sox had been willing to match any offer — and Betts still said no — then we would know that Mookie was never going to stay here.

Now we’ll never know. And it’s going to be a tough sell. Betts and Price for Verdugo and Graterol is impossible to measure today, but it’s highly unlikely that the Sox got value-for-value in this deal.

The bottom line on this is . . . the bottom line. The Red Sox just traded one of the best players in franchise history because they were unwilling to pay the hefty price for his future services. It’s clear that the Sox owners and their analytics folks decided they did not want to get into the \$350 million-\$400-million sweepstakes for Betts. They did not think he was worthy of being the second-highest-paid player in baseball (Mike Trout will rightfully remain No. 1). They elected not to compete financially for their best player. It’s a dubious narrative when you play to a full house every night, charge the highest ticket prices in baseball, and bombard fans with promotions and sales pitches.

Trading Betts is going to be a PR nightmare for the Sox. For years to come. Betts was a fan favorite on a par with David Ortiz and Pedro Martinez. He was easily Boston’s most marketable player. He’s only 27 years old and he’s already got an MVP award and four Gold Gloves. He’s a career .300 hitter with home run power. He’s a brand unto himself. Even his name is sprinkled with stardust. What kid doesn’t like cheering for Mookie? Fans are unlikely to be rational about Betts’s departure. Most are furious. Plus, the deal puts a lot of pressure on young Verdugo. Not every player responds well to the Boston baseball experience.

The Sox will remind us that the Washington Nationals won a World Series one year after losing Bryce Harper to free agency. Betts could flame out like Andrew McCutchen. Good luck selling those story lines. I’ve had fans tell me Betts is the best homegrown Sox talent since Ted Williams. I’ve had fans say they would abandon the team if Betts is traded (nobody ever follows through on that one).

In a strange way, the inclusion of Price bothers me most about this deal. It’s strictly a salary dump. Is it not something a club does if it intends to win this year.

Much as we disliked him, Price was 46-24 in his four troubled seasons in Boston. He was a pain in the butt with a giant chip on his shoulder the whole time, but he came up big in the 2018 postseason and was Boston's best pitcher in the early months of 2019. A lot of fans are quick to say "good riddance" to Price, but his departure does not help the 2020 team. Boston's starting pitching is thin. The Sox don't know what they are going to get from Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi. A healthy Price could have been the ace of this year's staff. Now the Red Sox simply do not have enough pitching.

So you have a team with not enough pitching, no manager, a depleted farm system, and potential sanctions coming when Major League Baseball rules of cheating allegations from the 2018 season.

At a time like this, it's always good to dump your best/most popular player and one of your best pitchers.

When the Red Sox parted ways with the much-loved Alex Cora last month, Sox owner John Henry said, "If I could give one insight into the people of this organization it is that virtually all of us see this organization as a family . . . It's how we approach holding each other accountable and to the highest standards with the highest goals. We will continue to move forward in that manner with what continues to drive all of us and that is the burning desire to host the World Series here in Boston."

Not this year. The Sox are on the five-year plan now. A plan that no longer includes Mookie Betts.

Not keeping Mookie Betts has to be considered an organizational failure

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — That the Red Sox arrived at a point where they believed the best option was to trade Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers on Tuesday night represents an organizational failure.

Betts was not simply their best player. He was the most valuable position player the franchise had produced since Ted Williams.

You build around a player like that. You don't trade him.

No blunder will ever top trading Babe Ruth to the Yankees 100 years ago. But dealing Betts to the Dodgers in the ignoble cause of resetting the penalties for exceeding the luxury tax limit means something went terribly wrong.

It starts with failing to sign Betts to a long-term contract after his third or fourth season in the majors.

Angels executives gained the trust of Mike Trout, convincing a player with deep East Coast roots that he had found a home in southern California.

The Sox never found a way to do that with Betts.

Theo Epstein, who drafted Betts, left the team amid controversy a little more than four months later. Ben Cherington, who promoted Betts to the majors in 2014, was essentially fired in 2015.

Betts flourished under Dave Dombrowski, who was fired in September.

Somewhere along the way, Betts turned down every offer the Sox made and decided his best option was to become a free agent after this coming season and let the market decide what he was worth.

If the Dodgers persuade him otherwise — and don't bet against that — this trade will look even worse for the Sox.

A year-by-year look at Mookie Betts's career with the Red Sox

There was never much rancor between Betts and the Sox. But they never got to a point where there was anything close to a partnership, either.

Some questionable deals along the way didn't help as the Sox committed large chunks of their payroll to Nathan Eovaldi, J.D. Martinez, and Chris Sale and soared over the luxury-tax threshold.

Eovaldi, who has pitched more than 154½ innings once in his career, landed a \$68 million deal after the 2018 season. He made only 12 starts last year.

Sale, who missed six starts with an elbow injury in '18 and was limited throughout the postseason, was awarded a \$154 million deal last March. He then missed eight starts with a shoulder injury.

Martinez has produced a ton of runs over two seasons. But committing an average of \$22 million to a designated hitter over what could be five years was bad business when the Sox had young stars such as Betts and Xander Bogaerts approaching free agency.

Don't blame Dombrowski. All of those deals were approved by ownership.

The Sox have four championships under John Henry and Tom Werner, four more than they won in the previous 86 years. The issue lately has been consistency and the lack of a long-term plan.

The Sox followed up the 2013 title with two last-place finishes and a series of terrible roster decisions. They jacked up the payroll to record levels to win another championship in 2018, and now they're starting over again with a new GM, a new manager (still TBA), and without Betts.

I'd have liked to see them take a shot at another championship with Betts and keep pushing to sign him. But new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom was hired to think beyond the next day and there's reason to believe he'll set the Sox on a straight course for a change.

Bloom did what he was hired to and waited patiently for a market to develop for Betts. Then he played the Dodgers off the Padres to get a package that included well-regarded outfield prospect Alex Verdugo and impressive 21-year-old righthander Brusdar Graterol, who the Dodgers got from the Twins to send to the Sox.

Eventually something had to be done. The Sox can't stay over the luxury-tax threshold forever given the financial cost and loss of draft picks. Trading Betts was the cleanest and quickest way to do it while maintaining what should be a competitive team.

If Eovaldi and Sale can be even reasonably healthy, the Sox have a shot at the postseason. This isn't a teardown.

But the Sox should still be embarrassed they became one of those teams who felt compelled to trade a homegrown star. They're no better than the Marlins giving away Christian Yelich or the Pirates parting with Gerrit Cole.

That Bloom convinced the Dodgers to take Price and pay off a reported half of the \$96 million remaining on his deal won't help the Sox this season but could down road.

Price turns 35 in August and has been on the disabled list with arm injuries four times in the last three seasons. Let the Dodgers worry about how he will age.

But there's no escaping how bad the overall picture is for the Sox.

In what proved to be his final act with the Red Sox, Betts drew a walk in the bottom of the ninth inning against the Orioles in the final game of last season and scored from first base on a ground single to right field.

Betts slid headfirst across the plate, let out a celebratory roar, and wrapped Bogaerts in a hug as the crowd at Fenway Park cheered.

Watching Betts play with so much passion in a meaningless Game 162 left me hopeful there was some way out of having to trade him.

Instead, it ended with a huge trade that left the Sox a lesser team.

Trading Mookie Betts marks one of the worst days in recent Red Sox history

Chad Finn

So, there it is. The dumb and detrimental deed is done. Call it one of the lousier days in 21st century Red Sox lore, and one totally self-inflicted.

Pending the medicals, Markus Lynn “Mookie” Betts is heading to the Los Angeles Dodgers, along with David Price and a stack of cash to pay part of the latter’s salary. The Red Sox have willingly turned themselves into a pretender to save a few bucks.

I can’t wait to hear it during for the home opener April 2 against the White Sox: “Welcome to Fenway Park, home of the Tampa Bay Rays North.” Hey, but Truck Day was cool. Did you see all those sunflower seeds?

All of those winter trial balloons about trading Betts, floated without nearly enough pushback from Red Sox fans, end with the most complete player they’ve developed in the draft era headed to the West Coast to play for a storied franchise that, unlike the Red Sox apparently, actually desires to win a championship in 2020.

In return for Betts, a former Most Valuable Player heading into his age-27 season, the Red Sox have acquired promising outfielder Alex Verdugo, who hit .294/.342/.475 with 12 homers in 106 games as a rookie last season but missed most of the final two months with injuries, and minor league pitcher Brusdar Graterol, a top-100 prospect who might end up being what Anderson Espinoza was supposed to be.

Neat. A pitching prospect. Guys, maybe the Sea Dogs can win the Eastern League this year!

Here, you can have my cup of Kool-Aid. Swig away if you’re buying any of this. Me, I’m not drinking this swill. You shouldn’t, either. This isn’t akin to selling Babe Ruth to the Yankees, because nothing is that. But it’s awfully close in concept to trading Yaz for prospects in 1968, or Jim Rice for a few scattered pieces in 1979.

If you can’t keep Mookie Betts, who does everything right, what are we doing here?

This bad day has been inevitable for a while now, or pretty much since we heard the absurd yet apparently accurate report that the Red Sox were considering taking on money from Wil Myers’s contract — he of the negative WAR last season and \$61 million remaining on his deal — in order to move Betts to the Padres.

When that rumor originated from San Diego, the Red Sox front office should have responded by saying, “That’s the dumbest idea since Bill Lee for Stan Papi. Not happening.” When they didn’t, well, that was confirmation enough that something was coming. That doesn’t make it any less disheartening now that it has.

Spare me the rationalizations for why this just had to be done. I’ve heard all of the excuses as the Red Sox have greased the skids for this, tried to be sell the idea that trading him for “assets” that will never come close to amounting to him is the only move, and I don’t want to hear them parroted to me by those of you who root for the financials over the ballplayers.

I'll say it again, and I'll keep saying it even now that the cause has been lost, because at the least we should remember to appreciate greatness around here rather than be willing to part with it so abruptly.

Betts, again, is the best position player developed by the Red Sox in the draft era, a five-tool player, better and more complete than Fred Lynn and Rice, better than even Dewey and Nomar. In five-plus seasons with the Red Sox, during which he converted from second base to right field and mastered the new position so fully that he won four straight Gold Gloves, Betts slashed .301/.374/.519 in 794 games.

He has finished first, second, sixth, and eighth in MVP voting over the last four years. His per/162 averages were 28 homers, 96 RBIs, 26 steals, 197 hits, and 125 runs. By WAR, he owns the second- and 11th-best seasons in Red Sox history. In 2018, his 10.9 WAR tied 1946 Ted Williams for the runner-up spot behind '67 Yaz (12.5 WAR), which was the best individual season any of us will ever see. In '16, Betts's 9.7 WAR tied '57 Teddy Ballgame for that 11th spot. He's 27 years old and already keeping company with the all-timers.

Oh, and he's also a low-key gem of a guy who does things like slipping out into darkness to feed the homeless after playoff games. That's not someone you trade for luxury-tax relief. That's someone you keep as the beacon of your organization.

Don't tell me that it's OK that Betts is gone because, hey, what has \$400 Million Man Mike Trout ever won? Trout hasn't won because the Angels have done a laughable job of surrounding him with talent. You know what the lousy Angels would be without Trout? Lousier. Much lousier.

Don't tell me that you knew Betts didn't want to be here. He's been as consistent with his statements on his status as he has been at the plate. He says he likes it here. He's also said he wants to maximize his value, which is his right. Countering the Red Sox' \$300 million offer — which they surely knew he was not going to accept — with a reported 12-year, \$420 million proposal was not a sign that he wants out. It was a sign that he was willing to stay, but it's got to be worth his while to give up his chance at free agency. But, of course, that won't stop the Sox from telling us he didn't want to be here and they just had to do something. Few popular ballplayers leave Boston without a management-induced scar.

Don't take offense to Betts asking for a huge contract, as ridiculous as the money in pro sports seems right now. Someone is going to pay it to him, and you know why? Because he's exceptional, worth it, and the teams can afford it. The Red Sox raised some ticket prices this year, just traded their best player, and you're on their side? Do you root against your buddies when they ask your boss for a raise, too?

Don't accept that Betts had to go because the Red Sox can't afford to pay him that much. He is collateral damage for the ill-considered contracts for Nathan Eovaldi and the premature extension for Chris Sale, but they still could pay him, and they didn't have to deal him now. They can get under the luxury tax any time during the season. This was a choice.

Don't tell me the Red Sox needed to do this to rebuild the farm system. They got one prospect, a 20-year-old fireballer who pitched in relief in Triple A and the majors last year. For Betts, they should have acquired three more just like him.

At least they found him a good home. The Dodgers won 106 games last year, have a loaded roster, a deep farm system, no foolish Eovaldian financial commitments, that great American Dave Roberts as their manager, and the deep desire to end a 32-year title drought.

And now they have Mookie, the most complete player developed since . . . well, you know. It's been awhile.

What a lousy day to root for the Red Sox. Around here, we used to chant to beat LA. After Tuesday's news that Betts is headed west, it's a whole lot more appealing to want to be LA.

Red Sox agree to trade Mookie Betts, David Price: Details of three-way deal with Dodgers, Twins

Katie McInerney

The Red Sox have agreed to trade Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Here are the details of the proposed trade:

- Mookie Betts, 27, will go to the Dodgers. In six seasons, the outfielder has been in All-Star Games and won three Silver Sluggers and four Gold Gloves. He was the American League MVP in 2018, when he batted .346 with 32 homers, 30 stolen bases, and a whopping 1.078 OPS while also becoming a World Series champion.
- David Price, 34, will go to the Dodgers. The pitcher joined the Red Sox in 2015 from the Toronto Blue Jays. He was on the mound for Game 5 of the 2018 World Series, starting what would be the title-clinching game and leaving in the eighth inning with a 5-1 lead.
- The Dodgers will also receive cash from the Red Sox as part of the deal.
- The Red Sox will add Alex Verdugo, 23, from the Dodgers. Verdugo, an outfielder entering his second year in MLB. As a rookie in 2019 for Los Angeles, he hit .294/.342/.475 with 12 homers in 106 games before he missed most of the final two months due to injuries (most notably a back injury).
- The Red Sox will also add Brusdar Graterol from the Minnesota Twins. The 21-year-old pitcher made 10 big league appearances down the stretch for the Twins, going 1-1 with a 4.66 ERA, after going 7-0 with a 1.92 ERA along with 9.0 strikeouts and 3.4 walks per nine innings in three levels of the minors.
- The Twins will receive Kenta Maeda, a pitcher from the Dodgers. Maeda, 31, had a 4.04 ERA for Los Angeles last season.

A year-by-year look at Mookie Betts with the Red Sox

Mookie Betts's most memorable moments with the Red Sox

While most Red Sox players have stayed quiet on social media about the deal, J.D. Martinez did share his disappointment on Twitter.

Mookie Betts's most memorable moments with the Red Sox

Andrew Mahoney and Alex Speier

The Red Sox have agreed to trade superstar outfielder Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Globe has confirmed.

Betts blossomed into a star with the Red Sox. There is no shortage of moments to choose from in his time with the organization. Here are a few that stood out.

April 3, 2014: On opening day for the Portland Sea Dogs, Betts hits a leadoff home run in the first inning and goes 4 for 4 with three runs.

June 29, 2014: Making his major league debut in New York against the Yankees, Betts goes 1 for 3 with a walk, an ill-advised attempt on a diving catch in right field that resulted in a triple, a caught stealing, and a double play.

April 13, 2015: In the 2015 home opener, he goes 2 for 4 with four RBIs, two steals on the same play, and a great catch to rob Bryce Harper of a home run.

Sept. 26, 2015: With the Red Sox heading toward another last-place finish, Betts makes a leaping grab and nearly tumbles over the bullpen wall to rob Chris Davis of a home run and preserve Rich Hill's complete-game shutout.

May 31, 2016: In a 6-2 win at Baltimore, Betts has his first three-homer game. He finishes the day with five RBIs and makes another great diving catch in what he calls afterward the "best game of my career."

Aug. 16, 2017: With the Red Sox trailing St. Louis, 4-3, and two outs in the ninth inning, Betts doubles to left field, scoring Chris Young and Jackie Bradley Jr. for a walkoff win.

July 12, 2018: Trailing the Blue Jays by a run in the fourth inning, Betts comes to the plate with the bases loaded and wears J.A. Happ down, connecting for a grand slam on the 13th pitch of the at-bat.

Aug. 9, 2018: In an 8-5 loss at Toronto, Betts becomes the 21st player in Red Sox history to hit for the cycle, and just the third to accomplish the feat as a leadoff hitter.

Sept. 26, 2018: Facing the Orioles in the first game of a doubleheader, Betts steals second base in the second inning to become only the second player in franchise history with 30 home runs and 30 stolen bases in a season.

Oct. 17, 2018: With the Red Sox leading Game 4 of the ALCS, 8-5, Tony Kemp leads off the eighth inning by stroking a line drive to right field. Betts fields the ball cleanly and fires a laser to throw out Kemp at second base.

Oct. 18, 2018: In the sixth inning of Game 5 of the ALCS, Alex Bregman lines a shot to right, and Betts sprints back and pulls it down, denying the Astros a possible home run or double.

July 26, 2019: A two-run blast in the fourth inning against the Yankees at Fenway Park makes it a three-homer game, the fifth of his career.

Sept. 29, 2019: In his final game with the Red Sox, Betts scores the winning run from first on a single by Xander Bogaerts.

As Red Sox begin to gather for spring training, not the usual anticipation

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The stories we write from the early days of spring training are some of the most popular the Globe publishes all year. No dateline is more anticipated than Fort Myers.

As soon as the Super Bowl ends, thoughts in New England turn to baseball and how the Red Sox look. Reports about who's throwing off the mound or taking batting practice take on outsized importance.

We debate the Opening Day lineup and try to pick the last few spots in the bullpen. The last guy on the roster is a good story.

The anticipation is a little like the first day of school, only it lasts a few weeks.

But on Tuesday, when a small group of pitchers gathered for a workout at JetBlue Park, there was more a sense of dread than anticipation.

"This is definitely a weird time," righthander Matt Barnes said.

The Sox are actively trying to trade their best player, All-Star right fielder Mookie Betts, to achieve the ignoble goal of dropping their payroll under baseball's luxury-tax threshold.

Betts has a locker in the clubhouse at JetBlue Park, but the expectation is his equipment will soon be shipped off to the Dodgers or Padres.

The Sox also don't have a manager, their search for Alex Cora's replacement dragging into a fourth week. The first workout for pitchers and catchers is next Wednesday and it remains uncertain whether the Sox will promote bench coach Ron Roenicke or third base coach Carlos Febles into one of the premier jobs in sports or bring in somebody from another team.

Meanwhile, Major League Baseball's investigation into whether the 2018 World Series champion Red Sox broke rules by using video to steal signs is hanging over the organization like a sword.

That inquiry, now in its fifth week, is expected to be finished before the official start of camp.

Principal owner John Henry and team president Sam Kennedy are on the record saying the Sox were well aware of the rules and nothing happened that would taint the championship. If true, would that require five weeks of scrutiny?

It's possible — if not probable — that the Sox will trade Betts and get punished to at least some extent for their actions in 2018 all within a few days of hiring a new manager.

None of this will be the new guy's fault. But he'll be the one charged with convincing the players they can overcome these obstacles and mollifying a fan base that will be on the verge of revolt about the trade.

Meanwhile, Betts will be in Los Angeles trying on his new blue cap and hugging Dave Roberts. Or worse, he'll be joining forces with villainous Manny Machado in San Diego.

Spring training is supposed to be a time of renewal, a celebration of what's possible. Even hopeless teams can at least feign optimism for a few weeks.

But if Betts is traded now, the message to the rest of the players is that ownership decided this season isn't as important as the ones to follow.

Barnes and Betts were in the Red Sox' 2011 draft class and made their major league debuts in 2014. Barnes is not the star Betts is, but he has established himself as a valuable member of the bullpen.

Like you, Barnes never expected Betts would be on the trade market.

"Mookie's a great guy, a phenomenal player. One of the best in the world," he said. "But the front office is in charge of those decisions. I have no idea what's going to happen. We're all just waiting to see."

Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Nathan Eovaldi, Heath Hembree, and David Price were on the field on Tuesday. They are taking the approach of not worrying about something they can't control.

"We haven't talked about it," Barnes said. "I'm just going about my business. It's not really a topic. I'm trying to get my arm and body ready."

The Red Sox have nine coaches under contract for this season, including pitching coach Dave Bush and hitting coach Tim Hyers. If anything can be presumed about the coming days, it's that most of the coaches will be back, if not all of them.

That should make it easier for the players.

"The coaches are who you deal with on a day-to-day basis," Barnes said. "I've talked to [Bush] a few times this offseason about my plan and it's been good. It's pretty normal in that sense."

Even without Betts, the Sox would still have a lineup headed by Xander Bogaerts, J.D. Martinez, and Rafael Devers, and a strong rotation if Eovaldi, Price, and Chris Sale can stay healthy.

“We’re always going to compete for a championship every season,” Barnes said. “That won’t change. That’s our focus. If Mookie is with us, that’s great. If he’s not, we can still be great. We’re still a formidable team.”

Finally, some spring training optimism.

“What else can you do?” Barnes said. “We’re here to get ready for the season.”

A year-by-year look at Mookie Betts’s career with the Red Sox

Christopher Price

A look back at Betts’s career in the Red Sox organization:

June 2011 — Taken in the fifth round of the MLB draft out of John Overton High School in Nashville, Betts was the 172nd overall selection. He rescinded a scholarship offer from the University of Tennessee and signed a \$750,000 contract with the Red Sox.

2012 — After a brief stint with the Gulf Coast League Red Sox in 2011, his first full year of professional baseball came with the Lowell Spinners. He finished the season with a .267 batting average and 20 stolen bases in 71 games while playing shortstop and second base.

2013 — A big year for Betts, as he started to show real offensive prowess, all while moving from Low A Greenville to High A Salem. He finished the year with a combined .314 average, 15 homers, and 38 stolen bases. For his efforts, he was named Offensive Player of the Year and Breakout Player of the Year in Boston’s minor league system.

2014 — Betts started the year at Double A, but another fast start had him in the majors by the end of June. On June 29, he picked up his first big league hit, and connected for his first career homer a few days later.

He was up and down between Boston and Pawtucket for the rest of the season, but finished strong with the big club. A late-season push for playing time included his first career grand slam. At 21, he became the youngest Sox player to connect for a grand slam since Tony Conigliaro in 1965.

He ended up playing 52 games in Boston, hitting 5 homers and adding 18 RBIs to go with a .291 average.

2015 — In his first season as an everyday player at the major league level, he didn’t disappoint. Betts kicked things off in the home opener with a pair of steals, a homer, and a catch that robbed Bryce Harper of a home run.

He finished with 18 homers, 77 RBIs, a .291 average, and 21 steals, and finished 19th in the voting for AL MVP. Late in the year, he moved to right field full-time to allow Jackie Bradley Jr. to become the everyday center fielder.

2016 — A first-time All-Star, Betts was now undoubtedly one of the rising stars in the game, finishing runner-up to Mike Trout in the MVP voting. He finished the season with a .318 average, 122 runs, 31 home runs, 113 RBIs, and an MLB-leading 359 total bases.

2017 — In a season when his numbers took a slight dip — .264 average, 101 runs, 26 stolen bases, 24 homers, and 102 RBIs — he was still in the MVP conversation because of his defense (he won a Gold Glove) and his ability to get on base.

He also had a remarkable streak of 129 consecutive plate appearances without a strikeout, the longest streak by a Boston hitter since Denny Doyle in 1975.

2018 — The greatest year of his career to date, and one of the finest seasons by a Boston outfielder in franchise history. He had 32 homers, 80 RBIs, a .346 average, and 30 steals, as well as a Gold Glove, all while helping lead the Red Sox to a world championship. It was no surprise when he was named the AL MVP.

2019 — While the Red Sox were unable to replicate the magic season they enjoyed the year before, Betts was still one of the best in the game, ending the year with 29 homers, 80 RBIs, a .295 average, and 16 steals. He took home another Gold Glove and Silver Slugger, and earned his fourth consecutive berth in the All-Star Game. He finished in the top 10 in AL MVP voting for the fourth straight year.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Mookie Betts trade is cost of doing business

Jason Mastrodonato

No words will be able to (nor should they be able to) console any heart-on-the-sleeve Red Sox fan after the team agreed to trade Mookie Betts to the Dodgers on Tuesday night.

This one is going to hurt.

He was fun to watch. He was the American League MVP. He was the leadoff hitter that sparked the best offense in baseball to win the 2018 World Series.

He was a good second baseman who became a better center fielder who became a four-time Gold Glove right-fielder.

At one point, his arm was no good. He spent one winter working on it. Now he has a hose.

That's the kind of player Betts is — immense talent and always improving whatever part of his game he perceives to be flawed.

The Red Sox could've used him for the next decade. Of course, signing him to a 10-year contract at market value (he should push \$400 million with another great year in 2020) would've been a mistake. Smaller players tend to wear down. Speed and defense are a big part of his game. At some point he'll just be a good-not-great player with a quick bat.

Alas, it doesn't matter. The Sox couldn't (or wouldn't) extend him.

It's because there's a cost to going all-in.

Just ask Ben Cherington, or Dave Dombrowski, or Alex Cora.

Cherington went against his instincts to lay down big money for aging players. Dombrowski followed his instincts and did the same thing. Cora cheated.

They're all gone, too, victims of the Red Sox machine that prioritizes winning over everything else. And now the Sox are paying for their previous sins.

That's why they can't sign Betts.

Yes, it would behoove any big-market team to keep the star player and fan-favorite for the majority of his career, even if the contract isn't a smart one.

Unfortunately for Betts, Dombrowski arrived in Boston and dropped a record contract on David Price and then emptied the farm system for Craig Kimbrel and Chris Sale. It worked; the Sox won it all in 2018.

At some point, though, there's a limit to a team's spending.

J.D. Martinez said it best at the end of the year, when he told NBC Sports Boston, "it's kind of hard to have three guys making \$30 million on your team."

Just because Henry is rich doesn't mean he's going to pay everybody on the team \$30 million. That's not how it works.

When it comes to extending their own players, this is a team that hasn't been known to pay top dollar.

The Red Sox signed Dustin Pedroia long-term because he took a deal that was, at the time, considered a wild bargain. All he wanted was to play for the Red Sox for his entire career. He didn't mind if it came at a steep discount. Had Pedroia sent the same message as Betts, he would've been gone as soon as he hit free agency, just like Robinson Cano, Pedroia's contemporary who departed the Bronx for a 10-year, \$240-million contract with the Mariners. Pedroia will make about \$140 million over his career.

Xander Bogaerts took a discount too. In April he told his agent, Scott Boras, he wanted to stay in Boston. So while Boras got Anthony Rendon \$245 million over seven years in free agency this winter, he got Bogaerts \$120 million over six years to stay with the Sox.

Still, the Sox can't be accused of being cheap when they've been in the top-six in spending all 18 years Henry has owned the Red Sox and they've been in the top-3 in 13 of those 18 years.

They've simply made mistakes along the way.

Henry signed off on Dombrowski's big spending. He allowed Trader Dave to empty the farm. It worked for one special season.

Then he fired Dombrowski the following year and brought in Chaim Bloom from Tampa Bay to get younger and cheaper and smarter.

Why? To win again, not in 2020 but maybe in 2021 or 2022 or 2023.

The Sox are going to have problems competing in those years if they don't start finding young players who can grow into stars.

Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol, coming to Boston for Betts and Price, have good chances to do that.

The Dodgers bailed out Henry for Dombrowski's mistakes and now Bloom will try to take the team in a new direction.

It's not ideal, but it's the way it works. There's a cost to doing business the way the Sox have in recent years. At some point, it catches up with you.

Unfortunately for Sox fans, they won't get to watch Betts play anymore home games at Fenway Park.

Mookie Betts: A timeline with the Boston Red Sox

Steve Hewitt

Mookie Betts grew up into one of baseball's top superstars, and Boston had a front-row seat for the whole thing.

An 18-year-old when the Red Sox drafted him in the fifth round of the 2011 draft, Betts became a dynamic talent and one of the best all-around players in the game during his six seasons in Boston before being shipped out Tuesday to the Dodgers. One of the most exciting players in the sport, Betts developed into an MVP in 2018, and capable of a memorable performance or play on any given night, whether it was at the top of the order, in right field or on the basepaths.

It was a fun ride, but shorter than most fans hoped. Take a trip down memory lane with a timeline and highlights of Betts' Red Sox career:

June 29, 2014: An anticipated debut

Betts fast-tracked through the minors in 2014, blowing through Double-A and Triple-A in short order. At first an infielder, the organization transitioned him to the outfield in anticipation of his inevitable next step to the majors, and the hype grew louder.

The Red Sox called him up on June 28, setting the stage for an anticipated major-league debut the next day, on "Sunday Night Baseball" against the Yankees at Yankee Stadium. Batting eighth and playing right field, Betts collected his first career hit in his second career at-bat, a single up the middle off Chase Whitley in the fourth inning of the Red Sox' eventual 8-5 win.

April 13, 2015: Double steal vs. Nationals

Betts' playing time was irregular for the rest of his 2014 rookie year, but he became an everyday player for the Red Sox in 2015. Sometimes overlooked, his baserunning ability was one of his greatest strengths, and he gave us a glimpse of what was to come in an early-season game against the Nationals at Fenway Park.

With David Ortiz at the plate and the shift on, Betts showed incredible awareness for a 21-year-old. He stole second, and noticing third base was uncovered, he took off with his blazing speed, and he beat pitcher Jordan Zimmerman to the bag. After a quick review, he was ruled safe.

September 25, 2015: Game-sealing home run rob

Betts' glove was also elite, and that was on display in the final home series of the Red Sox' 2015 season. With a commanding 7-0 lead over the Orioles in the ninth inning, Chris Davis hit a deep drive to right field, but Betts was there, leaping over the fence and robbing a home run for the game's final out, preserving Rich Hill's complete-game two-hitter.

May 31, 2016: Betts breaks out

Betts seemed to put it all together in his third big-league season after a productive 2015. In 2016, he asserted himself as one of the best players in baseball. He was selected to his first All-Star Game as he erupted offensively, finishing with a .318 batting average, 31 homers, 113 RBI and an MLB-leading 359 total bases in 158 games. Betts also earned his first career Gold Glove, and finished second in American League MVP voting behind Mike Trout.

One of his signature moments came on May 31 at Camden Yards, where he blasted his first career three-homer game and drove in five runs in a win over the Orioles. He did it again in a win over the Diamondbacks on Aug. 14 at Fenway Park, and he's now in a six-way tie for the second-most three-homer games in MLB history with five of them.

July 12, 2018: A grand moment

Betts had a down season in 2017, but he came back in a big way in 2018. With new manager Alex Cora in the dugout, Betts was more aggressive at the plate and the results showed. Betts hit 15 home runs by May 21 and was the clear best player on the best team in baseball. With a .346 average, 32 homers, 1.078 OPS and another Gold Glove, Betts won the 2018 AL MVP in a landslide.

His signature moment came on July 12 in a home win over the Blue Jays. Betts finished an epic 13-pitch at-bat against J.A. Happ with a grand slam over the Green Monster, and the right fielder's emotion was apparent as he rounded first base. It's probably the most iconic homer of Betts' career.

"Since I've been in the big leagues, that's probably the most excited I've been," Betts said.

October 26, 2018: Character revealed

Though Betts may have never really embraced the spotlight that comes with being a superstar, he certainly used his platform to give back. Hours after Game 2 of the World Series, Betts and his cousin were spotted distributing several trays of hot food to the homeless outside Boston Public Library. Betts didn't look for any attention by doing it, but he earned widespread acclaim for the good deed.

"It's pretty cool," Betts said. "I've been blessed with everything I have, and I might as well share it."

October 29, 2018: A champion, too

Betts' postseason numbers haven't been great — in 21 games, his batting average is just .227 with a .654 OPS — but he did come up big in the Red Sox' clinching Game 5 victory in the 2018 World Series. The Sox led 2-1 in the sixth inning when Betts teed off on the Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw — now his teammate — with a solo homer that gave them a needed insurance run.

With the World Series triumph, Betts became the first player in American League history to win the World Series, MVP, Gold Glove and Silver Slugger in the same season.

September 29, 2019: His final play

Betts' 2019 season was mostly unmemorable, but his final play in a Red Sox uniform showed the type of performer Boston had become accustomed to seeing. Their season finale with the Orioles was tied at 4 in the bottom of the ninth inning and Betts was on first base with Rafael Devers at the plate. Devers hit a chopper that the second baseman misplayed, allowing Betts to reach third, but with the Orioles being lazy getting the ball back to the infield, Betts broke for home and scored to give the Red Sox a walk-off victory. He screamed as he stood up, celebrating what would eventually be his final Red Sox moment.

After the game, with speculation already beginning about what was next for him, Betts didn't put too much thought into his future but reflected on his Red Sox years.

"It's been amazing," he said. "I can't thank the fans and teammates and front office enough for everything. I'm still here. It's not like I'm gone until whatever. I'm not going to focus on that now."

February 4, 2020: The trade

With less than two weeks to go before spring training, the Red Sox wrestled with what to do with Betts — who had one season remaining before hitting free agency, and had shown no guarantee he would sign a long-term extension to stay in Boston — and whether to trade him to avoid the risk of losing him next winter for just a compensatory draft pick. New chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom ultimately pulled the trigger, reportedly sending Betts and pitcher David Price to the Dodgers in what will no doubt be one of the most debated deals in Red Sox history.

Red Sox agree to trade Mookie Betts to Dodgers in blockbuster deal, per reports

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox and Mookie Betts ended a remarkable nine-year tenure together on Tuesday evening, when the Sox agreed to trade their homegrown superstar to the Los Angeles Dodgers, according to multiple reports.

All winter the industry rumors pointed Betts in one direction: west.

And on Tuesday night, the inevitable came true as the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins agreed to a blockbuster trade that would send Betts and David Price to L.A. in exchange for Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol, a pair of young players that should help the Sox stay competitive for the foreseeable future.

ESPN.com's Jeff Passan was first to report that a deal was agreed upon, though the teams are awaiting the review of medical information. An industry source told the Herald that talks were ongoing and nothing was final as of late Tuesday night, though official word was expected as soon as Wednesday morning.

Principal owner John Henry made no secret about his desire to turn the Red Sox in a new direction when he fired Dave Dombrowski last August and signaled his desire for the Sox to get younger. He hired Chaim Bloom from the Tampa Bay Rays to get them there. And now Bloom is poised to pull the trigger on one of the most significant trades in club history.

Betts, owed \$27 million this year in his final year before free agency, will go to the Dodgers with Price, 34, who is still owed \$96 million over three years. The Sox are expected to pay a significant portion of that salary, the exact amount not yet known.

By losing both Betts and Price, the Sox should accomplish their goal of resetting their luxury tax penalties by getting under the \$208-million threshold for 2020.

Even if they kept Betts all year, the Sox would've received significantly worse draft pick compensation (after the fourth round instead of after the second round) as a penalty for staying above the threshold in the likely event they offered Betts a qualifying offer and he turned it down to sign elsewhere next winter.

Losing him will undoubtedly hurt their chances to compete in 2020, but shedding Price's contract from the books gives the Sox much-needed flexibility to better the roster for 2021 and beyond.

The American League MVP in 2018, Betts has made it clear he isn't interested in signing a team-friendly extension and wants to maximize his value in free agency. Repeated attempts by the Red Sox to sign him to a contract extension were fruitless. Betts is on the record saying it's important not only to him, but to the players who come behind him that he push the bar for free agent value when it's his turn to test the market.

With that in mind, the Sox didn't have an easy task this winter.

But the Dodgers, for the second time in a decade, were a perfect match to solve their problems.

Not only could the Dodgers afford to take on much of the salaries of Betts and Price in their search for their first World Series title since 1988, but they also entered the year with the third-best farm system in baseball, according to MLB.com.

Meanwhile, Baseball Prospectus released its latest list of top-100 prospects last week and surprise, surprise, there are no Red Sox on there.

In Verdugo, the Sox will receive a young outfielder who has already proven capable of hitting major league pitching.

Verdugo, 23, was considered "one of the best pure-hitting prospects in baseball" by MLB.com ahead of the 2018 season. He was ranked the No. 19 prospect in the game by Baseball Prospectus ahead of the 2019 season. He hit .329 with 10 homers in 91 games in Triple-A in 2018, and in his first taste of regular big league action in 2019 he hit .294 with 12 homers in 106 games.

His lefty-hitting line-drive approach to all fields could provide Adrian Gonzalez-like production if he's comfortable spraying the ball off the wall at Fenway Park for 40-plus doubles a year. Or, in the age of launch angle, perhaps the Sox will ask him to shoot for the stars and see how many he can deposit over the fences.

Here's an added bonus: joining a Red Sox team about to lose Jackie Bradley Jr. to free agency after the 2020 season, Verdugo has played center field adequately and has a plus arm on defense, giving the Sox flexibility if they want to use him in center or right.

A second-round pick in 2014, he had six outfield assists in just 756 defensive innings last year. In the minors, he's racked up 59 career assists, including 24 in the 2015 season.

Graterol instantly becomes the best prospect in the Red Sox farm system, as announced by Fan Graphs. It's a safe assumption considering the Sox are thin on prospects and Graterol throws a 99-mph sinker at just 21 years old.

Born in Venezuela and signed by the Twins as a 16-year-old in 2015, he excelled at every level before making his big league debut in 2019. In 9-2/3 innings, he struck out 10 and gave up five runs on 10 hits and two walks.

His young age and strong 6-foot-1, 265-pound frame should give the Sox plenty of reason to be hopeful that he can progress into a mid-rotation starter or an ace reliever.

Primarily relying on his 99-mph sinker and an 88-mph slider while mixing in a four-seam and changeup, Graterol tore up the minors with 230 strikeouts and a 2.48 ERA in 214 innings over four seasons. Of his 51 appearances, 41 were as a starter.

While losing an injury-prone No. 2 starter and their MVP leadoff hitter won't help the Sox compete in 2020, Verdugo and Graterol have the potential to be a pair of game-changing talents for the Red Sox, while Verdugo is under team control for the next five years and Graterol for the next six.

Red Sox setting themselves up for the Curse of Mookie Betts

Tom Keegan

Nobody needs to tell a Red Sox fan how to celebrate a World Championship. The franchise leads the 21st Century with four World Series titles. Yet, the Red Sox fans face a strange new challenge: What exactly is the proper way to celebrate fiscal responsibility?

In reportedly trading Mookie Betts, as well as David Price, half of his money and all of his baggage, the Red Sox have prioritized maximizing profit over winning pennants. No way around that.

One hundred years and 40 days ago, that didn't work out so well for the Sox, who had won five World Series titles in the first 18 years of the 20th century. Then they sent Babe Ruth to the Yankees, a financially motivated trade that put a hex on the Sox for the rest of the century. "The Curse of the Bambino," immortalized by Dan Shaughnessy's book of that title, showed what can happen when money, money,, money becomes more important than winning pennants.

Do you fear the Curse of Mookie Betts? Or, if you prefer, the Curse of MLB, aka Markus Lynn Betts? It's a fair question, not to mention a frightening one.

Bad karma ruled the night Tuesday and started the fade to oblivion. Can you say .500 ballclub?

Blindly loyal fans will want to find a way to like the idea of the Red Sox trading Betts. Good luck coming up with a reason to party like it's 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2018 because the Red Sox found a way to get under the luxury-tax threshold.

The Fenway Sports Group, headed by John Henry and Tom Werner, was a marriage arranged in profit heaven by former Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig. The professional marriage had served the fan base well, until now.

John Henry and Tom Werner purchased the Red Sox for \$700 million. In Forbes' most recent value estimate of professional sports franchises, the Red Sox checked in at \$3.2 billion. Forbes also valued Fenway Sports Group, which includes Liverpool Football Club, at \$6.6 billion.

To find the right means of celebrating the accounting-driven trade, perhaps it's best to study how accountants recognize their biggest day of the year. Shortly after April 15 passes, CPAs across the country rent limousines, let their hair down, and paint the town red in recognition of their hardest work being behind them for a year. Again, not the case here. Chaim Bloom's toughest days start the moment he trades Betts: That the Red Sox would make a salary-dump move 100 offseasons ago after they did so with Babe Ruth is more than a little eerie. It's downright frightening. The Red Sox won the World Series in 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2018.

The Red Sox won five World Series in the first 18 years of the 20th century and they won four in the first 18 years of the 21st century.

You have to strike when you have an abundance of talent and the Red Sox went in the other direction. They became worse when it was time to become better.

It's fruitless to hope that nobody will compare Alex Verdugo, a nice left-handed hitter who can make highlight catches here and there, to Betts. It's inevitable since Verdugo is the centerpiece of a money-motivated deal. The challenge for Verdugo will be to find a way to ignore Betts comparisons. Ignoring them doesn't mean resenting them, which would be the worst of all possible responses.

Oh well, at least for a while longer the Red Sox can boast of winning the most 21st century championships, just as they dominated at the beginning of the 18% of the 20th century.

The franchise that became known as the Red Sox in 1908 won the World Series in 1903, 1912, 1915 and 1916 and 1918. They might have had another in 1904, but the New York Giants, winners of the National League pennant, already had established that they would refuse to play in a World Series by the time the Boston Americans won the AL pennant.

Then the Red Sox did the unthinkable and traded Babe Ruth the day after Christmas in 1919. They have done it again. That's not to say Mookie is as dominant as the Babe, but bad karma is bad karma, not to be taken lightly.

Trading Mookie Betts sends Red Sox back to zero

Bill Speros

Back off, Bambino.

Make way, Carlton Fisk.

Step aside, Mr. Bagwell.

You too, Roger Clemens.

Another one of the greats has left town.

The Red Sox have reportedly dealt 2018 AL MVP and Face of the Franchise Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers for a bushel of potential and a basket of hope.

For the Boston Red Sox, 2020 will not be a bridge year. Rather, it will be Year Zero.

Everything begins anew from this point.

That David Price is also reportedly part of this mega deal only solidifies that truism.

Now the 2020 Red Sox are without Betts, Price or a manager.

Truck Day threw all of New England under the bus Monday. And we didn't even get to the blue moving van that paid a visit to Tom Brady's house on the same day. Wednesday marks the one-year anniversary of the Super Bowl LIII champion Patriots Duck Boat parade. Here's hoping Brady won't be joining Betts and Price in La La Land come the fall.

Betts, 27, was not dealt because he was entering the "twilight of his career." Nor did the Red Sox botch his contract offer by mailing it too late. And he was not swapped for a future Hall of Famer — as far as we know — rather he's much more likely to be the latest future Hall of Famer who slipped through the fingers of the Red Sox.

The Red Sox sent Betts — and Price — to the West Coast for the simplest of all reasons: money.

The Red Sox were so focused on trimming payroll they reportedly paid the Dodgers to take Price off their hands.

It's been 100 years since the Red Sox parted ways with Babe Ruth — for purely financial reasons. Ruth launched the Yankees perpetual 20th Century dynasty. Betts has the same opportunity to finally deliver the Dodgers a championship in the 21st Century.

Curses!

Tom Yawkey bought the Red Sox in 1933. Yawkey triggered all those nightmares that tormented Henry for the first 15 years of his ownership. He also spent money. Lots of it.

The Red Sox always paid well, too well at times. They just never paid enough good players. Or black players, for that matter.

John W. Henry is not "cheap" for being unwilling to offer Betts a long-term, market-value deal. The Red Sox payroll was \$240 million in 2019. There's nothing "cheap" about that. Henry has spent lavishly both on talent and Fenway Park itself. Many of those hefty investments — including the likes of John Lackey, Price and J.D. Martinez — resulted in championships.

Others did not. The Dodgers bailed out the Red Sox in 2012, taking on Josh Beckett, Adrian Gonzalez and Carl Crawford. That deal defined the Red Sox until they won the 2013 World Series.

This Mookie Betts-David Price trade will also define the Red Sox until they win another championship. And 2004 may mark both 86 years since the Red Sox last won a World Series AND serve as the 100th anniversary of the most memorable team in the franchise's history.

Henry's ownership has enjoyed nearly a Score of Success — four World Championships — since first taking on the Evil Empire. His Red Sox enjoyed DH dominance of Big Papi, the madness of Manny Ramirez and delivered slices of Pedro Martinez and Curt Schilling at their September and October best.

The 2013 Red Sox, meanwhile, were indeed the epitome of "Boston Strong."

A spectacular core of young players — homegrown mostly — and led by Betts formed the foundation of the team that won a franchise-record 119 games in 2018 and a World Series championship — which may or may not come with an asterisk.

That nucleus was predicated as the foundation of the Red Sox into the 2020s. But when a team spends \$240 million to finish in third place, even the Bay State's most aloof billionaire realizes that is crazy.

Red Sox State Run Media has been in full Baghdad Bob mode for a month working to numb hearts and minds when it comes to Betts' exodus. The first step was to parrot the inevitability of a trade.

The deal had been imminent since the Patriots were eliminated from the playoffs. The next step was the selective leak that Betts' and his camp allegedly turned down a 10-year, \$300 million deal last offseason, instead seeking 12 years and \$420 million.

The billionaire paints the millionaire as greedy.

Finally, we were told by the baseball intelligentsia that Betts is bound to break down before his next long-term deal ends — probably true — and that the prospects that the Red Sox would get in return are actually better than Betts — insert meaningless stats here.

No matter what the Red Sox get in return for Betts, it will forever fail to replace him. The greats are always worth far, far, more than the sum of their parts. The Milwaukee Bucks traded Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for Junior Bridgeman, Dave Meyers, Elmore Smith and Brian Winters in 1975 and have yet to reach the NBA finals since.

Fenway Park will never be confused with Tropicana Field. The same may not be said about the two teams who play at those respective venues in 2020.

Alex Verdugo is the most notable name coming back to Boston. Dutiful members of Red Sox State Run Media who will christen him “the next Mookie Betts” by Thursday.

Unfortunately, the first “Mookie Betts” was already in Boston.

Until now.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox have set a terrible precedent with Mookie Betts trade

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- It's October 2021 and the Red Sox have just missed their third straight postseason.

Boston's multi-year rebuild staggers along with no end in sight. Prized prospects have disappointed and the Back Bay is growing restless. Attendance at Fenway Park begins to dip.

Then, a bombshell – Rafael Devers rejects a second contract extension proposed by Red Sox executives. The star third baseman publicly states his intent to test free agency following the 2023 campaign no matter what sort of price Boston is willing to pay. The Red Sox begin to engage in trade discussions regarding a player who projected to be one of their long-term cornerstones.

This scenario might make sense in a current baseball world where chasing value seems to be the only mandate. And the precedent for such a move was set late Tuesday night when Chaim Bloom executed his first blockbuster as Boston's chief baseball officer.

Mookie Betts and David Price were dealt to the Dodgers as part of a three-team swap, and it's the initial name included who will dominate the headlines. The marriage between Price and the Red Sox always seemed an arranged one, but Betts was the franchise's brightest homegrown talent in recent memory. His exit after winning an American League Most Valuable Player award, four Gold Gloves and three Silver Sluggers is nothing short of a shame.

There will be folks – many reputable, some less so – who will defend this trade as one Bloom had to make. The 27-year-old Betts declined on multiple occasions to commit his future to Boston beyond the 2020 season. Bringing back outfielder Alex Verdugo from Los Angeles, right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol from Minnesota and shedding upwards of \$45 million in payroll by moving the remaining three years on Price's contract will be rationalized as wise business.

What's missing? Any sort of legitimate attempt to contend this year. The Red Sox will exhaust a prime season of Devers, Xander Bogaerts, J.D. Martinez, Andrew Benintendi, Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez. That's just to name a few players who are either on the wrong side of 30 or one year closer to hitting the open market themselves.

This is certainly the kind of bold move Bloom could have made in Tampa Bay with little pushback. The Rays play in a toothless market with an underwhelming fanbase and have reached just one World Series since their 1998 founding. Their 186 victories over the last two regular seasons defied the odds, coming despite few expectations and one of baseball's lowest payrolls.

Boston will always be a more pressurized setting, particularly over the last two decades with all four major sports franchises capturing championships. The Red Sox have won all four World Series they've reached and topped \$184 million in payroll in each of the last five seasons. Those costs are inevitably passed on to the patrons, and their desire for victory is insatiable.

Betts and Price both chafed under that spotlight at times. Betts was frequently among the first Boston players to depart the clubhouse postgame, leaving teammates like Bogaerts to address the failings of 2019 and assume the de facto role as team captain. Price publicly feuded with NESN analyst Dennis Eckersley, one of several uncomfortable interactions with Red Sox media members.

Those are minor inconveniences compared with what Betts and Price had to offer on the field. And by any available measure, be it statistical or otherwise, Boston is a worse baseball team today than it was yesterday. Bloom has been in charge for barely three months and has already cemented his status as the perfect patsy for Red Sox ownership should this shift in philosophy blow up in their faces.

Boston's negligence in overseeing the spending of former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski helped lead to this moment. John Henry simply didn't exercise enough control, failing to monitor an executive who built a long track record of cutting the biggest check for the shiniest star. The combined \$430 million lavished by the Red Sox on Price, Sale and Eovaldi seems rather profligate indeed.

Bloom's hiring represented an overcorrection to what has been accepted as a more modern approach, and on nights like Tuesday it evoked a visceral reaction. It also brings about the maddening temptation to predict the future, one that has the likes of Devers being moved even earlier in his Boston career. An extra year of comparatively cheap team control for Betts might have persuaded the Dodgers to take all of Price's money or include an untouchable prospect like infielder Gavin Lux, right-handed pitcher Dustin May or catcher Keibert Ruiz.

What's to stop the Red Sox from making such a move again? If you can trade a generational talent like Betts, you can certainly do the same with Devers. We can have the same discussion in 2026 or so if Triston Casas develops into a superstar at first base.

Nothing should be unthinkable in Boston anymore.

Betts, Price traded to Dodgers

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Mookie Betts and David Price are bound for the city they helped defeat in the 2018 World Series.

What was a crowning achievement for the Red Sox less than two short years ago now feels like a distant memory. Boston swung a blockbuster deal with the Dodgers and Twins on Tuesday night, sending out two critical pieces from a season that rewrote franchise record books.

Per reports from ESPN and The Athletic, the Red Sox have traded Betts, Price and cash considerations to Los Angeles. Boston will receive outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol from Minnesota. Los Angeles will also send right-handed starter Kenta Maeda to the Twins.

Betts has been one of the premier players in baseball since 2016, trailing only Angels outfielder Mike Trout in wins above replacement per FanGraphs. Betts and Trout are two of only 10 position players with a WAR of 20 or better during that time frame. Betts posted a 10.4 WAR in 2018, better than any single season produced by Trout to this point in his career.

Price spent four seasons with the Red Sox after signing a seven-year, \$217-million deal in free agency prior to the 2016 campaign. He went 46-24 with a 3.84 earned-run average over 103 games, including 98 starts. The left-hander came up trumps in the 2018 postseason, exorcising prior demons by winning the clinching games against the Astros and Dodgers in the American League Championship Series and World Series, respectively.

Verdugo was a consensus top-40 prospect who made his Los Angeles debut in 2017. The 23-year-old has slashed .282/.335/.449 through parts of three seasons and 158 games. Verdugo took home just \$560,000 in 2019 and won't be eligible for free agency until after the 2024 season.

Graterol debuted with the Twins last season and possesses some of the most electric raw stuff of any young pitcher in baseball. The 21-year-old's fastball averaged 99.0 mph in 2019 per FanGraphs. Graterol was 1-1 with a 4.66 ERA in 10 relief appearances and doesn't exhaust his arbitration years until the mid-2020s.

Steady excellence has Betts in position to cash in as a free agent following the 2020 campaign. Trout is entering the second season of the 12-year, \$426.5-million extension he signed prior to 2019. Betts figures to approach Trout's compensation and could top the 13-year, \$330-million deal inked by Phillies outfielder Bryce Harper last offseason.

Price was approaching a significant season in his career in terms of player control as dictated by the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Completing 2020 in Boston would have granted the 34-year-old full 10/5 rights – 10 years of service time, five years with the same franchise. Reaching those milestones would have allowed Price to veto any future trades, making it even more difficult to move on from a contract that carries an average annual value of \$31 million in each of the next three years.

Removing Betts and a portion of Price's contract from the payroll would seem to allow the Red Sox to dip under the first threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax, thereby resetting any potential penalties for the upcoming 2020 season and beyond. Boston steamed through the third tax threshold in 2018 with the trade deadline acquisitions of Steve Pearce and Ian Kinsler, dropping 10 spots in the 2019 draft and paying a financial penalty of nearly \$12 million. The Red Sox stood pat at the 2019 deadline and, while owing more than \$13 million to Major League Baseball, avoided incurring a similar hit to their 2020 draft status.

“Our real intention is to be competitive every year, and we'll do whatever we have to do to do that,” Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said in September. “But it doesn't mean – the solution to that isn't always having the highest payroll in baseball.”

The Red Sox reportedly made Betts at least a pair of substantial contract extension offers during previous offseasons, but the 27-year-old has been steadfast in his desire to test the open market. Betts won a \$10.5-million award in arbitration prior to 2018 and settled with the team for a combined \$47 million ahead of 2019 and 2020. The firing of president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and an opportunity to negotiate with a new Boston executive – the Red Sox eventually hired chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom in late October – wasn't going to sway Betts in terms of his long-term thinking.

“It doesn’t really matter who’s there,” Betts said following a 10-5 loss to the Yankees on Sept. 9 at Fenway Park, the same night Dombrowski was dismissed. “It’s going to be the same answer. Nothing’s going to change. This is proof that this is a business.

“Like I said, I love it here. But, definitely, it’s still a business.”

Betts rewrote club record books through his 794 games in Boston, finishing inside the top eight of the American League Most Valuable Player voting in each of the last four seasons and winning the award in 2018. He also captured four straight Gold Glove awards for his superb defense in right field and was named to the A.L. All-Star team four consecutive times. Betts led the big leagues in runs scored, batting average and slugging percentage in 2018 and topped the majors again in runs scored in 2019.

Betts is one of eight Red Sox players with at least 100 runs scored in four straight seasons and one of three Boston players to collect five consecutive seasons of 40 doubles or more. He’s one of five players all-time to post four straight seasons of 40 doubles and 20 homers and one of nine players all-time with at least three seasons of 40 doubles, five triples and 20 homers.

Bloom turned to someone with whom he is familiar to execute his first major transaction in Boston. Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Freidman and Bloom worked together for nine years in the Rays organization, with Bloom beginning as an intern with the club in 2005 and Friedman ascending to executive vice president of baseball operations before departing for Los Angeles in October 2014. The Dodgers lost the World Series to the Astros in 2017 and the Red Sox in 2018 before being ousted in five games from the National League Division Series by eventual title winner Washington in 2019.

Betts signed for \$750,000 out of a Tennessee high school in 2011. He was a fifth-round draft pick by Boston in a superb class that also included future Red Sox teammates Matt Barnes, Blake Swihart, Henry Owens, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Noe Ramirez. Betts made his Boston debut in June 2014 and completed a transition from minor league middle infielder to spectacular everyday outfielder.

*** *MassLive.com***

Mookie Betts treated relationship with Boston Red Sox as a business, so by the end the team had no choice but to do the same

Chris Cotillo

When push came to shove, the Red Sox ended the Mookie Betts era by taking a page out of their star outfielder’s playbook. If Betts was going to treat his relationship with the team strictly as a business, Boston was going to do the same.

The standoff between Betts and the Red Sox ended Tuesday night, when Boston agreed to ship Betts, lefty David Price and a boatload of cash to the Dodgers for two young players (outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitcher Brusdar Graterol). No longer was there the possibility -- or the desire -- of Betts spending his entire career in a Sox uniform. All that was left the reality of a tough business and the memories of a brief but wildly successful marriage between one of baseball’s preeminent organizations and a slight, enigmatic kid from Nashville.

Looking back, it’s not a surprise the Sox and Betts got to this point. Plan A for the Red Sox, as team chairman Tom Werner said in September, was to lock Betts up for as long as possible. But Plan A for Betts was always to test free agency, maximizing his value and exercising his right to explore all of the collectively bargained options at his disposal.

Coming off a World Series title last winter, the Red Sox explored extensions with a handful of their key players who were inching closer to free agency. Lefty Chris Sale bluntly said his “phone was on” and that

he actively wanted to explore a deal, only to sign a five-year extension during spring training. Shortstop Xander Bogaerts called spring training a “perfect time” to explore a deal, admitted how weird it was to picture himself in another uniform and then signed a six-year deal shortly after Opening Day. But Betts always spoke differently, intertwining his professions of love for Boston and his teammates with an attitude that always seemed lukewarm, at best.

“Contract things are kind of tough to come up with,” Betts said last January. “Especially with both sides and how economics and all those things work. I love Boston, I love my teammates, I love the fans and all those types of things. We’ll just continue to see what happens.”

One month after making his debut in 2014, Betts watched the Red Sox trade Jon Lester, Jake Peavy and John Lackey shortly after they helped Boston win a World Series. Betts watched as the Sox changed general managers on two occasions, most recently by firing Dave Dombrowski and replacing him with Chaim Bloom at the end of last year.

Late on the night Dombrowski was fired, Betts was asked how the move would affect his future plans. The answer? Not at all. He was going to free agency no matter what.

“It doesn’t really matter who’s there. It’s going to be the same answer,” Betts said. “Nothing’s going to change. This is proof that this is a business. I love it here, but definitely it’s still a business.”

The Red Sox repeatedly made offers to Betts, only to be rebuffed every time. The gulf, according to WEEI’s Lou Merloni was more than \$100 million a year ago. Even if the Sox did increase their offer, there was skepticism within the organization that Betts would accept, especially considering he had gotten so close to the free agent promised land.

So Plan B -- trading Betts -- transformed from a bargaining chip into a legitimate option. Once Bloom was hired and tasked with reducing payroll to get under the competitive balance tax threshold, emotion was removed from the team side of the equation, too.

Yes, trading Betts and Price completely solves the CBT problem and gives the Red Sox a great deal of flexibility moving forward. But even if luxury tax penalties weren’t part of the rationale, the savvy move for a Red Sox team that had received zero assurances from Betts would have been to make sure he didn’t walk for nothing.

Even if the Sox felt like they had a good chance to bring Betts back in free agency, there would be no guarantees once the free agent games began. Betts will likely embark on a grand free agent tour, attempting to be wooed by teams all over the country in hopes of extracting maximum value. The Sox felt like they couldn’t risk sticking by him all season only to watch as a team like the Braves or Dodgers lured him away with a huge offer and perfect situation.

So they struck, forcefully and unemotionally in one of the least popular moves in recent franchise history. If the 2012 blockbuster deal with the Dodgers was viewed as a bailout, this one is viewed as a white flag.

It is -- sort of -- but not just in the competitive sense. The Red Sox, after waiting years for Betts to blink, finally conceded to the fact that he never will.

It’s a business, after all.

Mookie Betts, David Price trade: Boston Red Sox ownership had multiple financial motives to slash payroll, Chaim Bloom had baseball advantages

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins have agreed on a three-way trade that will send Mookie Betts and David Price to Los Angeles. Boston is set to acquire Brusdar Graterol from the Twins and Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers.

Principal owner John Henry made it clear during the final weekend of the 2019 regular season that the Red Sox planned to slash their 2020 payroll below the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold.

“This (coming) year we need to be under the CBT,” Henry said Sept. 27. “That was something we’ve known for more than a year now.”

The trade eliminates approximately \$43 million in salary that would have counted toward Boston’s Competitive Balance Tax. Suddenly, the Red Sox’s 2020 payroll is at an estimated \$189.6375 million, a little more than \$18 million under the base threshold..

What financial motives did Henry have?

The Red Sox would have exceeded the base threshold for a third straight year, leading to the highest tax penalties as a third-time CBT Payor.

But it’s about more than just avoiding the tax. MassLive.com pointed out in October, the Red Sox will receive their full revenue sharing market disqualification refund in 2020 by staying under the base threshold. Boston’s refund will be higher next offseason because it will include the Oakland Athletics’ forfeited proceeds. The 2020 season marks the first year the Athletics will be disqualified fully from receiving revenue sharing. The A’s proceeds will be shared by revenue sharing payor clubs such as the Red Sox, Yankees, Cubs and Dodgers.

All major market teams, including the Yankees, budget to be under the CBT every so many years as a way to reset their penalties. It’s become a common business practice in today’s game.

The Red Sox of course also just eliminated approximately \$43 million. That’s a lot of money that ownership keeps in their pockets, although chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom now has some flexibility to add to the 2020 payroll to improve the club. The Red Sox are in need of a fifth starter with Price gone.

Draft pick advantages when a team stays under threshold

Bloom had his own baseball motivations for slashing the payroll under the \$208 million threshold.

The trade makes the 2020 team worse. Betts posted a 17 fWAR in 2018-19 combined and Price was Boston’s top pitcher during parts of the past two seasons.

But the trade arguably makes the Red Sox better longterm. Betts didn’t want to sign a contract extension. He has made it clear he wants to explore his market in free agency. The Red Sox risked him walking away in free agency next offseason and receiving only a compensation draft pick after the fourth round of the 2021 Draft in return.

Bloom instead added two young players, Verdugo and Graterol, who are under team control longterm.

J.D. Martinez again has the ability to opt out and become a free agent after 2020. Jackie Bradley Jr. also is eligible for free agency after this season. By staying under the \$208 million CBT, the Red Sox will receive higher compensation draft picks if Martinez and/or Bradley leave via free agency.

Their compensation draft picks would immediately follow the final selection in second round (or in the Competitive Balance Round B).

If the Red Sox exceed the CBT, their compensation draft picks drop down after the fourth round.

By eliminating half of Price’s average annual value, the Red Sox also have much more payroll flexibility to sign free agents in next offseason’s class.

By staying under \$208 million in 2020, the Red Sox would forfeit just one draft pick (instead of two picks) if they signed a qualified free agent next offseason. They also would lose \$500,000 less in international signing money.

A CBT payor club that signs a qualified free agent must forfeit its second-highest and fifth-highest available draft picks. Its international signing bonus pool is reduced by \$1 million as well.

A club that stays below the threshold forfeits only its second-highest available selection. It has its international signing bonus pool reduced by \$500,000.

Could the Red Sox pursue Betts in free agency next offseason? Sure. It's a possibility, although the Red Sox probably again will consider Betts' asking price too high.

The Red Sox now also have much more payroll flexibility to negotiate extensions with Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez, who's eligible for free agency after the 2021 season.

Mookie Betts trade: David Price's Red Sox career defined more by turmoil than postseason heroics

Matt Vautour

Years from now, it'll be interesting to see how Boston remembers David Price. Is he the guy who conquered his past postseason demons to lead the Red Sox to the 2018 World Series or the guy who famously feuded with Dennis Eckersley?

Tuesday's seismic swap will always be remembered as "the Mookie Betts trade." The fact that Price is a cash dump throw-in, is a reminder of the bizarre path his Red Sox career traveled from beginning to end.

Whatever anyone thinks of Price personally, the Red Sox do not win the 2018 World Series if he didn't pitch the way he did in the postseason. Chris Sale was injured. Alex Cora didn't trust Eduardo Rodriguez yet and the bullpen was unreliable. Price was outstanding. He probably should have been the MVP. In some cities, he'd be a legend. But in Boston, nobody seems to be lamenting his departure.

He never connected with fans, who expected more out of him and he struggled with the media. Price wasn't nearly the pitcher in Boston he'd been elsewhere. He was paid like an ace, but most of the time pitched like a No. 2 or No. 3 starter. Even after his World Series heroics, he seemed more angry than elated.

Price was the latest newly rich player to arrive in Boston thinking he either could handle or wouldn't have to deal with the emotionally exhausting grind that is playing for the Red Sox. In Tampa, Toronto and Detroit, Price was highly-regarded by fans and teammates alike. He was known for his thoughtful and at times playful personality active social media and his French bulldog Astro. The Rays' younger pitchers described him as generous with his time and knowledge, a willing big brother.

He got jaded in Boston quickly, especially with the media. He shut off Twitter and Astro disappeared from public view.

Fans don't hold it against players for disliking the media, but his surprising war with Eckersley was another story altogether. He intentionally embarrassed the Red Sox Hall of Fame former pitcher turned broadcaster on a team flight in 2018 and rekindled the feud after a relatively innocuous comment by Eckersley a year later.

Tough exits are often the case in Boston. Roger Clemens, Wade Boggs, Mo Vaughn, Nomar Garciaparra, Terry Francona, Johnny Damon and Manny Ramirez all were beloved Red Sox before their relationship with the team and fans diminished on the way out.

Price's departure most closely mimics Josh Beckett's and that doesn't bode well for Price's legacy. Beckett was as valuable to the 2007 World Series winner as Price was in 2018. But Beckett's legacy in Boston is as much the chicken and beer scandal as anything he did on the field. The 2018 World Series has already lost some of its luster because of Alex Cora's connection to sign-stealing meaning more than likely, Price's strongest ties will forever be to his interactions with Eckersley.

Mookie Betts trade: Chaim Bloom's first major move for Red Sox might just define his legacy in Boston

Chris Cotillo

Chaim Bloom's first significant move as chief baseball officer of the Red Sox might just be the one that defines his legacy in Boston.

Bloom, who had previously spent all winter fine-tuning the back end of his roster, halted his inactivity with a nuclear bomb Tuesday night, shipping superstar outfielder Mookie Betts and starter David Price to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitcher Brusdar Graterol (who came from the Twins). Though the move was hardly surprising after weeks of rumors, it still presented a shocking reality: less than four months after being hired, Bloom had flipped the entire Red Sox organization on its head.

With the amount of questions facing the Red Sox after last season, Bloom took the job knowing the stakes were high. But it's still hard to imagine that this early in his tenure, he shipped out one of the most talented homegrown players in franchise history and the guy who, just four years ago, was given the most lucrative deal in franchise history.

Bloom was brought in to be unemotional and decisive, being saddled with the impossible task of building a competitor for 2020 while cutting payroll by more than \$25 million to get under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold. Make no mistake: that threshold was always a goal and never a mandate, despite how many times Bloom's bosses claimed otherwise.

After months of exploring more palatable options to get under that threshold, Bloom confronted his tough reality. No one was willing to take Jackie Bradley Jr., Nathan Eovaldi or any other package of the Sox' mid-range contracts to bail them out. Nobody was willing to take on Price and the remaining \$96 million on his deal, even if word of strong interest in the veteran leaked out during the Winter Meetings. The path to resetting -- er, sustainability -- as the Sox like to say, would have to include a Betts trade.

So Bloom looked west and got in touch with his old Rays boss, Andrew Friedman, who had failed in his attempts to land the Dodgers a star player all winter. After weeks of talks with the Dodgers and Padres, Bloom struck Tuesday, deciding that packaging Betts and Price for a combination of salary relief and good young players was his best option.

It's a move that will be wildly unpopular among Red Sox fans, especially coming less than 18 months after Betts and Price played key roles in the most successful season in franchise history. The blowback will be greater than anything Bloom ever faced in Tampa, even after trading a couple of his own homegrown stars in Evan Longoria and, in a bizarre coincidence, Price.

In fact, the deal that sent Price (a No. 1 overall pick who won a Cy Young award for the Rays in 2012) might have informed Bloom's decision-making this time around. It's something he alluded to back in December.

"David certainly was one of those both with what the player means to the organization and the fans and what he means to us personally," Bloom said. "Especially if it's someone you drafted and developed. Both of those things would combine to make it really, really hard. You still need to do what is best for the organization. But that doesn't mean you don't feel all those emotions. You do."

“You just have to remember that your responsibility is to do what’s best for the organization. ... There have been times over the years where we’ve had to do things that from a personal level were very difficult. And I think when you’re doing that you just need to keep a clear head. Make sure you’re putting the organization first.”

In this case, putting the organization first might have caused Bloom to put his reputation second. Needless to say, the pressure to get this one right was immense.

Now that the Red Sox have moved on from Betts and Price, Bloom will be judged by what he does next, in addition to how both Verdugo and Graterol perform in the future. After having their hands tied by financial constraints all winter, Bloom and his lieutenants suddenly have all the flexibility in the world -- along with the tall task of getting the Sox back into contention in short order.

For the Red Sox, the possibilities are endless. All that seems certain is that Boston will build around a core of Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez and be a major player in free agency next winter. If the Sox are contenders this summer, Bloom will be able to add pieces to make a run at October. If they’re not, he can keep shedding pieces and payroll and position his club for what should be a very active, aggressive winter.

Considering how early it is in his tenure, Bloom will have a few more years to fully form his reputation in these parts. But for now, he’s the guy who, for better or for worse, arrived in Boston and almost immediately traded Mookie Betts and David Price. It’ll take a while -- and more than a few good moves -- for people to view him in a different light.

Mookie Betts trade: Boston Red Sox will forever regret not keeping superstar in his prime

Matt Vautour

Despite all the warning signs and hints that this trade was coming, the idea that the Red Sox, whose contracts have set the market in the past, could get rid of their best player for financial reasons was hard to believe.

But on Tuesday it happened. Boston traded Mookie Betts, the most popular player on their roster and the most complete player in franchise history and they’re going to regret it.

In the 16 months since they walked off the field at Dodger Stadium as World Champions, the Red Sox have made bad decision after bad decision, but none of them worse than dealing one of the sport’s best players just entering his prime on Tuesday.

A decade of contract decisions ranging from questionable to downright dumb crashed into this moment. Boston bound itself up so much financially that when Betts is a free agent next year, they won’t have the money to pay him. It’s a sad consequence that could have been avoided.

Betts should have been the face of the franchise for another decade-plus, the longterm heir to David Ortiz. His number 50 should have someday hung on the facade in right field and his plaque someday in Cooperstown with a Red Sox hat. Betts was already terrific and just beginning his prime, the type of player teams dream of trading for, not trading away.

Boston isn’t a small-market team. The Red Sox have the revenue streams to compete for any and every free agent who comes on the market. That doesn’t mean they should, but Betts is a break-the-bank worthy talent. Instead, he’s headed west and the Red Sox are headed south.

Good luck getting people to pay increased ticket prices now.

At least sending him to Southern California means he’ll be posting MVP-level numbers in games that start too late for most Boston-based fans to watch.

This isn't a surprise. The Red Sox have been leaking information and softening the ground for months trying to convince their fans they had no choice. But trading a quarter for two dimes and a nickel almost never works out for the team dealing the larger coin.

The fingerpointing should first be aimed at fired general manager Dave Dombrowski, who seems like the type of guy who'd use a high-interest credit card to pay above sticker price for the shiniest car on the lot. He left the payroll bloated and the farm system starving. But the ownership let it happen. They need to own some of this, too.

Dombrowski's moves hamstring replacement Chaim Bloom, who actually got a better deal than most people expected. Procuring pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins gives them a higher-end prospect than many figured was possible for only one guaranteed year of Betts.

But it won't matter. Bloom is going to spend the first several years of his tenure living down the fact that he traded Betts even if ownership gave him no choice. Still being Bloom will be easier than being Alex Verdugo, who has the unenviable task of replacing Betts.

Former Red Sox great Dwight Evans wore 24 as a professional in honor of Willie Mays, his childhood hero. So when he called Betts "a little Willie Mays" after working with him during his rise through the minors, he didn't do it lightly.

Betts isn't Willie Mays. Nobody is. But his skills aren't that far off, and he's certainly the closest Boston has ever been to having that kind of player since Tom Yawkey turned down the chance to sign Mays in 1949, a decision that set the franchise back decades.

Betts was a star African-American player for a franchise whose poor history with African-American players is well-documented. Betts' success seemed to mark unspoken progress. His race was rarely mentioned and never an issue publicly as Boston embraced him as a man and a player.

Red Sox management should be rooting for Betts to sign a monster deal next summer. They have to be. If he gets 10-plus years and more than \$400 million, there'll be champagne corks popping on Jersey Street. The only way they come out looking good is if Betts' contract is so absurd that everyone questions its wisdom.

Even that won't be enough to earn them blanket absolution. Every year Betts thrives for somebody else while the Red Sox aren't playing in October is a year when fans are angry.

There could be plenty of those coming up.

Mookie Betts, David Price trade: Boston Red Sox's 2020 payroll estimated at near \$190M or about \$18M under CBT after three-team trade

Christopher Smith

"This (coming) year we need to be under the CBT," Red Sox principal owner John Henry said Sept. 27. "That was something we've known for more than a year now."

The Red Sox's 2020 payroll dipped approximately \$18 million below the \$208 Competitive Balance on Tuesday when they agreed to trade Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers. Boston is set to acquire Brusdar Graterol from the Twins and Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers in the three-team trade. The trade isn't official yet. It is pending a review of medical records.

Betts will earn \$27 million in 2020, his final year under team control. The Red Sox are expected to pay about half of the remaining three years, \$96 million left on Price's contract, per MLB Network's Jon Heyman.

Price's average annual value is \$31 million. Price's contract, therefore, will count for about \$16 million toward Boston's CBT. That number isn't official yet.

And so the Red Sox slashed approximately \$43 million off their 2020 payroll by trading Betts and Price.

MassLive.com estimated the payroll now is at \$189.6375 million. Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom has plenty of flexibility to add to the 2020 team. He might want to sign or acquire a starter to replace Price. He also has tremendous flexibility for next offseason's free agent class.

Red Sox 2020 estimated payroll breakdown:

Guaranteed contracts: David Price (Red Sox expected to pay around \$16 million of his \$31 million AAV), Chris Sale (\$25.60 million), J.D. Martinez (\$23.75 million), Xander Bogaerts (\$20 million), Nathan Eovaldi (\$16.88 million); Dustin Pedroia (\$13.3 million), Christian Vazquez (\$4.52 million), Jose Peraza (\$3 million), Mitch Moreland (\$3 million), Martin Perez (\$6.5 million), Kevin Plawecki (\$900,000). Total: \$133.45 million

Arbitration contracts negotiated: Jackie Bradley Jr. (\$11 million), Brandon Workman (\$3.5 million), Matt Barnes (\$3.1 million), Heath Hembree (\$1.6125 million). Total: \$19.2125

Arbitration contracts unsigned: Eduardo Rodriguez (\$8.975 million projected), Andrew Benintendi (\$4.15 million projected). Total: \$13.125 million.

Split contracts: Josh Osich (\$850,000 in majors). Total: \$850,000.

Pre-arbitration players: Yoan Aybar, Ryan Brasier, Colten Brewer, Austin Brice, Matt Hall, Kyle Hart, Darwinzon Hernandez, Chris Mazza, Bobby Poyner, Denyi Reyes, Mike Shawaryn, Jeffrey Springs, Josh Taylor, Hector Velazquez, Marcus Walden, Ryan Weber, Jonathan Arauz, C.J. Chatham, Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec, Rafael Devers, Tzu-Wei Lin, Marcus Wilson. Approximate Total: \$8 million.

Other costs: Add another approximately \$15 million for medical costs, health benefits, spring training allowances, moving and traveling expenses, etc. That's all included in the CBT. Approximate Total: \$15 million.

Total: \$189.6375 million.

Boston Red Sox trading David Price means glaring hole in starting rotation; who fills it? Brusdar Graterol, Tanner Houck, Darwinzon Hernandez among potential candidates

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have agreed to trade Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, pending medical reviews. Boston is set to acquire Brusdar Graterol from the Twins and Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers in the three-team trade.

Trading Price creates a glaring hole in the Red Sox starting rotation with spring training six days away. Who will fill it?

Earlier this week, before the trade, Nathan Eovaldi discussed how Price and Chris Sale "are both huge" to the pitching staff.

"As long as they stay healthy, we're going to be able to compete with everybody," Eovaldi said.

Price performed when he was healthy. He was Boston's top starting pitcher during the second half of 2018 and into the postseason as well as during the first half of 2019. He recorded a 2.90 ERA in 35 outings (34 starts) from July 12, 2018 to July 14, 2019. Those numbers include the 2018 postseason.

Potential candidates to replace Price include Graterol, Tanner Houck, Darwinzon Hernandez, Kyle Hart, Mike Shawaryn, Ryan Weber and Hector Velazquez.

Houck, a 23-year-old righty, has made adjustments to both his delivery and pitch mix since Boston drafted him in the first round in 2017 out of Mizzou. He recorded a 3.65 ERA in his 15 starts for Double-A Portland last year. He then pitched well in relief (2.05 ERA, 22 innings) at Triple-A Pawtucket. The Red Sox view him as a starter and he'll return to that role in 2020.

The Red Sox view Hernandez more as a reliever, but maybe they now will give him another opportunity to start. He has a terrific slider and powerful four-seam fastball that averaged 95.5 mph last year, per Statcast.

Graterol, a 21-year-old from Venezuela, went 5-0 with a 1.89 ERA, 1.05 WHIP and .188 batting average against in nine starts (47 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings) at Double A during 2019. He made the jump to the big leagues as a reliever. He hurled 9 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings for the Twins, allowing five runs, 10 hits and two walks while striking out 10.

He throws hard. His 71 sinkers averaged 99.0 mph and his 26 four-seam fastballs averaged 98.8 mph during 2019, per Statcast. He threw 44 sliders with an average velocity of 88.3 mph.

Graterol still could use more development time in Triple A.

The 27-year-old Hart has gone from a 19th-round pick who signed for only \$5,000 in 2016 to one of the Red Sox's top depth starters entering 2020. Boston added him to the 40-man roster in November. He recorded a 3.52 ERA, 1.17 WHIP and .233 batting average against in 27 outings (24 starts) for Portland and Pawtucket during 2019. He doesn't throw hard but his slider has led to impressive minor league stats.

Bryan Mata was the top pitching in the organization (before Graterol was traded to Boston). He has a 95-98 mph fastball and added a slider to his repertoire last year. The 20-year-old is a non-roster invitee to big league camp, but he isn't ready to compete for a spot in the Opening Day rotation.

The Red Sox still could pursue a free agent. The Diamondbacks non-tendered Taijuan Walker after he missed the 2019 season because of Tommy John surgery. Aaron Sanchez, Collin McHugh, Jason Vargas, Marco Estrada and Clay Buchholz remain available in free agency.

Boston also could use an opener every fifth day. Velazquez, Shawaryn and Weber are candidates to open.

Boston Red Sox projected roster: How Mookie Betts, David Price trade affects 26-man group heading to spring training

Chris Cotillo

With Mookie Betts and David Price heading to the Dodgers, the Red Sox roster is about to look very different than it has in recent years. Betts' departure will leave a massive void in right field while the losses of Price and Rick Porcello will leave the Sox with two new starters in 2020.

Both players acquired in the Betts/Price blockbuster -- outfielder Alex Verdugo and right-hander Brusdar Graterol -- will compete to make the Opening Day roster. Here's how the 26-man roster now projects with a week to go before pitchers and catchers report to spring training:

STARTING LINEUP (9):

C Christian Vazquez

1B Mitch Moreland

2B Jose Peraza

SS Xander Bogaerts

3B Rafael Devers

LF Andrew Benintendi

CF Jackie Bradley Jr.

RF Alex Verdugo

DH J.D. Martinez

BENCH (4):

INF Michael Chavis

C Kevin Plawecki

INF Jonathan Arauz

UTIL Tzu-Wei Lin

ROTATION (5):

LHP Chris Sale

LHP Eduardo Rodriguez

RHP Nathan Eovaldi

LHP Martin Perez

Opener (potentially RHP Brusdar Graterol)

BULLPEN (8):

RHP Brandon Workman

RHP Matt Barnes

LHP Darwinzon Hernandez

LHP Josh Taylor

RHP Marcus Walden

RHP Heath Hembree

RHP Austin Brice

RHP Colten Brewer

Mookie Betts trade: Boston Red Sox to acquire outfielder Alex Verdugo, Brusdar Graterol, 21-year-old hard-throwing righty

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins are in agreement, pending the review of medical records, on a three-team deal that would send 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts to LA, per reports.

The Red Sox are expected to receive outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins, according to The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal.

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

Alex Verdugo, outfielder

Verdugo, a 23-year-old left-handed hitter, batted .294 with a .342 on-base percentage, .475 slugging percentage, .817 OPS, 12 homers, 22 doubles, two triples and 44 RBIs in 106 games for the Dodgers during 2019.

Both Baseball America and MLB Pipeline ranked him No. 35 on their top 100 lists entering 2019. Baseball Prospectus ranked him 19th.

Verdugo might not be ready for Opening Day because of an injury to his back, oblique and core. MLB.com provided an injury update Jan. 3:

"The outfielder said his 'goal' is to be ready for Opening Day, certainly leaving open the possibility that he won't. He suffered a back/oblique/core injury that cost him the final two months of the regular season and the Dodgers' National League Division Series loss to the Nationals.

"Verdugo went on to say that as he continues to rehab, he has not resumed any baseball activities. Maybe that's why the Dodgers haven't dealt Verdugo or Joc Pederson from a position where the Dodgers have a surplus. Club officials say there is no concern with the 23-year-old's health long term, but initially nobody thought his injury was this serious."

Alex Verdugo

Dodgers' Alex Verdugo stands in the dugout during a game against the Nationals, Saturday, July 27, 2019, in Washington. The Dodgers won 9-3. (AP Photo/Nick Wass)AP

Brusdar Graterol, right-handed pitcher

The 21-year-old from Venezuela ranked No. 55 on Baseball America's 2019 preseason top 100. He enters this year ranked No. 60.

Baseball America recently noted, "Graterol has two paths to success. With a little more seasoning, he could be a force in the middle of the Twins' rotation. With no more seasoning at all, he could jump into the back of the bullpen and overpower hitters with his power arsenal."

Graterol made his major league debut in 2019. He pitched 9 2/3 innings out of the Twins bullpen, allowing five runs, 10 hits and two walks while striking out 10.

He threw 71 sinkers that averaged 99.0 mph and 26 four-seam fastballs that averaged 98.8 mph during 2019, per Statcast. He threw 44 sliders with an average velocity of 88.3 mph.

Betts batted .295 with a .391 on-base percentage, .524 slugging percentage, .915 OPS, 29 homers, 40 doubles, five triples, 80 RBIs, 16 steals and a league-leading 135 runs in 150 games during 2019.

He slashed .346/.438/.640/1.078 with 32 homers, 47 doubles, five triples, 80 RBIs 30 steals and a league-leading 129 runs during his MVP season in 2018. His batting average and slugging percentage also led the league.

The Red Sox drafted him in the fifth round (172nd overall) of the 2011 draft out of John Overton High in Nashville, Tenn.. In 794 games with Boston over six seasons, the right fielder posted an .893 OPS, 139 homers, 229 doubles and 26 triples.

Boston Red Sox manager search: Carlos Febles, Ron Roenicke have interviewed for opening

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox have interviewed two internal candidates — third base coach Carlos Febles and bench coach Ron Roenicke — for their managerial opening, sources confirmed Tuesday.

Febles and Roenicke are the third and fourth candidates known to have interviewed to replace Alex Cora, who was let go last month after the league determined he played a key role in helping the Astros improperly steal signs from opponents in 2015. Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta and Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay have also spoken with Sox brass in recent weeks, though the San Francisco Chronicle reported Tuesday that Kotsay is no longer in the running for the position.

Febles, 43, has been with the organization for 13 seasons, managing over 900 minor league games before being promoted to the major league staff before last season. The former major league infielder managed Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Rafael Devers and others in the minors and expressed interest in replacing Cora last month.

“If you want to manage in the big leagues, this is the team that you want to do it, the Boston Red Sox,” Febles said during the team’s Winter Weekend event in Springfield. “Not just because of the talent we have, but the organization and the fan base. You put all the perspective together, this is the perfect scenario for any manager to come in. Because this is a real special organization. An organization that they’re willing to win every year. Year in and year out.”

Roenicke, 63, managed the Brewers from 2011 to 2015, leading Milwaukee to a 342-331 record. He joined the Sox at the beginning of 2018, providing a veteran voice in Cora’s first year as manager.

If the Red Sox choose to hire an internal candidate, Febles and Roenicke appear to be the top two options. Special assistant Jason Varitek is considered a longshot.

Any internal hire might be delayed by the league’s ongoing investigation into alleged electronic sign-stealing by the Red Sox in 2018. Though new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said the investigation would not have a direct impact on his search, it stands to reason that Bloom will want to make sure his choice is not implicated by the league before making a hire.

“Given that we don’t really know exactly when that process is going to wrap up, it’s not something we’re trying to connect with this,” Bloom said on Jan. 23. “Obviously, it’s a really important process. The findings will be really important. But it’s not something we can control other than facilitating it fully. So we’re trying not to have it have bearing on this.”

Boston is likely considering other candidates, with Nationals first base coach Tim Lincecum, White Sox bench coach Joe McEwing and Phillies executive Sam Fuld among the potential other external options. It’s unclear when a decision will be made, though team brass has said it would be “ideal” to have a manager in place before pitchers and catchers report to spring training next Wednesday.

Nathan Eovaldi: Boston Red Sox’s 2020 starting rotation has ‘chip on our shoulder’ and ‘a lot of things to prove’ after injuries in 2019

Christopher Smith

The Boston Red Sox ranked 20th in the majors in starter ERA (4.95) during 2019. Their earned run average increased more than a run from 2018 (3.77).

Injuries led to underperformance last season. David Price, Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi combined to spend 153 games on the injured list.

WBZ's Jonny Miller interviewed Eovaldi in Fort Myers this week and sent MassLive.com the recording. The righty stressed the starters have something to prove in 2020.

"We've kind of all got that chip on our shoulder where we want to go out there and be healthy the entire season," Eovaldi told Miller. "Got a lot of ground to make up, I feel like. We've got a lot of things to prove. We all know how talented we are and how talented we can be and the potential we have."

Eovaldi spent 78 games on the injured list after surgery to remove loose bodies from his elbow.

Price spent 22 games on the injured list with a left wrist cyst. He returned in September but made just one start before the Red Sox shut him down for the remainder of the season.

Sale spent 39 games on the IL with elbow inflammation.

"Him (Sale) and Price are both huge to our pitching staff," Eovaldi told Miller. "We've gotta cover a lot of ground without them. Both of them guys coming back, as long as they stay healthy, we're going to be able to compete with everybody."

Eovaldi feels better this offseason than he has felt in a long time, he said. He mentioned he might have tried to rush back too quickly after his surgery.

"I didn't listen to my body as well as I should have," Eovaldi said.

"Health-wise, I'm doing great right now," Eovaldi added. "I had a really good offseason. I did some different workouts, different exercises."

Eovaldi said every member of the staff is healthy and ready to go. Pitchers and catchers officially report to camp next Tuesday.

"I think with myself, Price and Sale healthy, ready to go now, you saw how successful we were in '18 when the starting rotation stayed healthy," Eovaldi added. "And I think that's the key."

The starters pitching deeper into games will help keep the relievers fresh, he said.

"It's going to take a lot of pressure off the bullpen and the bullpen's going to be good again," Eovaldi said. "I think it all revolves around the starting pitching. If all the starters stay healthy, everything will fall in line. You see how great our offense is."

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Babe Ruth revisited?

Bill Burt

The last time the Boston Red Sox dealt a probable future Hall of Famer, in the early part of his prime, to another baseball behemoth, they paid dearly for it.

It was exactly 100 years and one month ago, on Jan. 5, 1920, when the Red Sox dealt Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees. It not only jump-started one of the greatest dynasties of the 20th century, but it also represented 86 years of anguish and “The Curse.”

This time, Mookie Betts, 27, maybe the game’s most dynamic all-around player, was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers, along with high-priced pitcher David Price.

The Red Sox will be getting back outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers, who is only 23 and hit .294 in 104 games last season. They will also be getting back hard-throwing minor league reliever Brusdar Graterol, 21, of the Twins as part of the three-team deal, and possibly another player.

But, in reality, the reason this deal was made is the Red Sox get financial relief. Betts was set to make \$27 million (he was awarded it in arbitration last month), and Price had three more years and \$96 million remaining on his 7-year, \$217 million deal.

The Red Sox were about \$20 million over the luxury tax threshold of \$208 million in 2020. This puts them well under it with more deals pending.

Why does \$20 million in luxury tax matter when the franchise is nearly five times more valuable in worth and equity, at \$3.2 billion, after buying it 19 years ago for \$700 million?

Good question.

Owner John Henry was not enthralled with how the last championship was won, dealing away most of the minor league assets and signing more than \$500 million in free agency under former president Dave Dombrowski.

Henry is a baseball geek, an analytics guy, who seems to have wanted to go back to his roots, rebuilding the franchise from the bottom-up, sort of like Theo Epstein & Co. did soon after buying the franchise in 2001.

While Price never seemed to fit in here with the media and fans, he was productive when healthy, toting a 46-24 record over his four seasons. His postseason run, which included two dominating wins over the Dodgers in the World Series, helped change the cloud hanging over his head as an October “choker.”

But this trade isn’t about Price. It’s about Betts.

Betts was born and bred as a pro by the Red Sox, drafted out of high school in Nashville, Tenn. The five-tool athlete flew through the Red Sox system, hitting .291 in 52 games as a 21-year-old rookie.

He appeared to be willing and able to handle the baton passed by David Ortiz, who had won three World Series titles (2004, 2007 and 2013).

When money was mentioned though, he and the Red Sox were mum, with neither overtly expressing a desire to make it happen.

Betts’ last four seasons have bordered on legendary, finishing first and second in the MVP balloting, while adding a 7th and 9th place finish in the other years.

He could hit for power and run like a deer. An infielder while coming up through the system, Betts also played right field as good as any that ever played there, including Dwight Evans. He won four straight Gold Gloves from 2016 through 2019.

Rumors were Betts wanted to be the second-highest paid player behind Mike Trout and his 12-year, \$430 million deal. The Red Sox were reportedly around 10 years, \$300 million, and Betts wanted more years with an extra \$100 million.

Who could blame him? He probably is the second best player, and the Red Sox are a big-time franchise.

It honestly seems like this was a two-way street, with both Betts and the Red Sox respectfully agreeing to disagree.

The timing may have been bad for a deal. The Red Sox are in a state of flux with a new president, Chaim Bloom, and soon-to-be new manager.

And getting nothing for Betts after this season just wasn't going to happen. Adding Price to this deal, with the Red Sox throwing in nearly \$50 million in cash, probably sealed the deal.

But it could be argued the Red Sox have the capital to pay a player \$36 million per year over 12 years with some of the most expensive ticket prices in all of baseball.

Betts is a superstar. Nobody debates that. He not only added value, but he had a bubbly personality when he was on the field (very dull off it).

The Red Sox have some young firepower on offense, with Rafael Devers, only 23, appearing to be an immediate MVP candidate (.311, 32 HRs, 115 RBI last season).

Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez are considered stars, too. So the cupboard isn't bare. Verdugo could also be a middle of the lineup sort of guy, with Andrew Benintendi making some noise. But let's be honest, it won't be the same without Mookie Betts.

Hall of Famers don't come around too often.

*** *RedSox.com***

Verdugo headed to Sox in Betts deal (source)

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- After weeks of contemplation, the Red Sox have at last taken the bold step to move forward without star right fielder Mookie Betts. Not only that, but veteran lefty starter David Price is headed to the Dodgers with Betts in a blockbuster deal that also includes the Twins.

None of the three clubs involved in the trade have announced it, but the exchange has been agreed upon and is pending the completion of medicals, MLB.com confirmed Tuesday night.

Outfielder Alex Verdugo, a 23-year-old left-handed hitter with upside, is the key return that the Red Sox will acquire in the trade with the Dodgers. Boston will also receive right-hander Brusdar Graterol from the Twins. Graterol is ranked as MLB Pipeline's No. 83 overall prospect, and he will slot in as Boston's No. 2 prospect when the deal is official. Graterol has an explosive fastball which hits 100 mph at times and made his MLB debut as a September callup last season.

TRADE BREAKDOWN

RED SOX GET: OF Alex Verdugo (from LAD), RHP Brusdar Graterol (MLB Pipeline's No. 83 prospect, from MIN)

DODGERS GET: OF Mookie Betts, LHP David Price, cash (all from BOS)

TWINS GET: RHP Kenta Maeda (from LAD)

In a vacuum, the Sox never would have chosen to move Betts, who is one of the finest all-around players in the game -- not to mention the franchise's 119-year history. But there were other variables. Betts is entering his walk year, meaning he can become a free agent at the end of the upcoming season.

The Red Sox discussed long-term contract extensions with Betts in past years, but the two sides could never find common ground.

Dating back to Spring Training in 2019, Betts repeatedly stated that he planned on measuring his value in free agency rather than signing an extension with the club that drafted him in 2011.

Another big factor is that Betts will earn \$27 million in 2020 -- a record for an arbitration-eligible player -- and carrying that salary would have made it tough for Boston ownership to reach the stated goal of getting the team's payroll below the Competitive Balance Tax threshold of \$208 million.

Though Boston will absorb roughly half of the \$96 million owed to Price over the next three seasons, according to MLB Network contributor Jon Heyman, putting both players in the deal will allow the Sox to get below the CBT for the first time in three years. Any money sent by the Red Sox to the Dodgers to offset Price's contract will count toward Boston's CBT payroll, prorated annually over the three years remaining on the deal.

The Padres had also been deep in talks with the Red Sox regarding Betts. Already a strong contender to reach the World Series without Betts and Price, the Dodgers now have an elite table-setter at the top of their lineup and a battle-tested weapon in their rotation as they chase their first championship since 1988.

In his first major transaction as the chief baseball officer of the Red Sox, Chaim Bloom was able to strike a deal with the man he worked under for many years in Tampa Bay in Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman.

Verdugo slashed .294/.342/.475 with 22 doubles, 12 homers and 44 RBIs in 106 games in 2019. His season ended in early August with a back injury. He can play all three outfield positions and the Red Sox are excited about his projectability. The 23-year-old was picked by the Dodgers in the second round of the 2014 Draft.

Verdugo, who also throws left, made a needed impact over the first half for the Dodgers when A.J. Pollock was injured. He took over in center, showed more power than he had in the Minor Leagues, brought energy to the lineup and was clutch.

But he injured his back playing on the artificial turf in Tampa in May, tried to play through it as his production dipped and didn't play a game after Aug. 4.

Verdugo's cannon arm will come in handy assuming he fills the spot in right vacated by Betts. Fenway's right field is one of the most challenging in the game. A strong arm is considered a requirement to playing the position at a high level there.

As a hitter, the Red Sox are excited about Verdugo's projectability. They are optimistic that his gap-to-gap swing will play well in Fenway Park, which is known for being a great venue to hit doubles.

While Verdugo can replace Betts in the lineup, it will be interesting to see how Boston fills the void left by Price in the rotation.

The rotation currently consists of Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez, Nathan Eovaldi and Martín Pérez.

Given Bloom's history with the Rays, it would not be surprising to see the Sox deploy an opener.

Though it is jolting for the Sox to lose a player the caliber of Betts, they will try to find a way to be a postseason contender in 2020. The Nationals won the World Series last year after losing Bryce Harper to free agency, so the Sox believe they can rebound similarly well without Betts.

However, it won't be easy, particularly for fans. In many ways, Betts had become the face of the Red Sox franchise since the retirement of David Ortiz in 2016.

Now they move forward into a new era with the front office being led by Bloom. In this offseason of major transition, the Red Sox will also soon hire a new manager to replace Alex Cora, who mutually parted ways with the club last month after being named in MLB's findings from its investigation of the Astros' sign-stealing allegations in 2017.

Though Betts is gone, the Sox still have a strong nucleus on offense that includes J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers and Andrew Benintendi.

As for Betts, he, quite simply, was a force for the Red Sox in every way. In 2018, he won the American League's Most Valuable Player Award for a team that won the World Series, slashing .346/.438/.640 with 32 homers, 80 RBIs and 30 stolen bases.

While he wasn't as consistent last year, Betts was still an All-Star, putting up a solid line of .295/.391/.524 with 135 runs, 40 doubles, five triples, 29 homers, 80 RBIs and 16 stolen bases. He also won his fourth consecutive Gold Glove Award for his excellence in right field.

In his career with Boston, Betts played 794 games, hitting .301 with 613 runs, 229 doubles, 26 triples, 139 homers, 470 RBIs and an OPS of .893.

Though it seems highly unlikely, there's always a chance the Sox could re-acquire Betts once he reaches free agency in November.

Betts will be remembered for his lightning-quick wrists at the plate and his tremendous instincts in the outfield. He will also be remembered for his work in the community. After Boston won Game 2 of the '18 World Series, Betts provided a large quantity of hot meals for homeless people outside of the Boston Public Library.

When the Sox selected Betts in the fifth round of the 2011 Draft, he was a scrawny middle infielder fresh out of John Overton (Tenn.) High School.

Perhaps he would have made a fine second baseman in the Majors. But in 2014, with Dustin Pedroia at the time entrenched at that position, the Sox moved Betts to the outfield and he was called up in June of that season.

For the final couple of months of '14 all the way through the end of the '19 season, Betts was a fixture in Boston's lineup.

Through the years, Betts achieved feats that seemed unfathomable when he was drafted, such as hitting three homers in a game five times, surpassing Ted Williams for the all-time franchise record. And Betts was just as dominant on defense.

In four seasons with the Red Sox, Price was 46-24 with a 3.84 ERA. Price will best be remembered in Boston for his postseason heroics in 2018, when he pitched the Red Sox to clinching wins in Game 5 of the American League Championship Series against the Astros and Game 5 of the World Series at Dodger Stadium. He will also be remembered for some run-ins with the media.

Graterol is 21 years old and hails from Venezuela. He pitched in 10 games for the Twins last season, all as a reliever, posting a 4.66 ERA.

Not only does Graterol bring the heat, but he does so with plenty of movement. His slider is a solid secondary pitch right at this point but the changeup is a work in progress.

He could make an instant impact in Boston's bullpen, in which roles are still up for grabs.

While Boston will have plenty of time to see what they have in their two newcomers, it will take Red Sox Nation some time to process the loss of Betts, a dynamic all-around player who gave the Fenway faithful their share of thrills.

* **ESPN.com**

Here's what's next for Red Sox after trading Mookie Betts, David Price

Buster Olney

For all practical purposes, the brick and mortar beneath the Mookie Betts trade was laid the day Gerrit Cole agreed to a \$324 million deal to be the ace of the New York Yankees, and the construction accelerated when the Boston Red Sox fired manager Alex Cora. Once Boston's primary rivals got the ace they needed, and once the Red Sox lost their most important staffer, the Red Sox situation gained clarity: It's going to be a year of turnover, the crossroad to the next big thing.

Without Cora, without Betts, Boston could still compete for a playoff spot in 2020, and if everything went right for the Red Sox and everything went wrong for the Yankees and Tampa Bay Rays, it's possible that the Sox could win the American League East. That latter scenario would require, for starters, many, many injuries manifesting in New York and Tampa Bay and Rafael Devers delivering an MVP performance.

But it's much more likely that this will be remembered as the year the Red Sox reset and took a turn back to consistent relevance, just as the Yankees did in 2016, when they traded Andrew Miller and Aroldis Chapman, extracted Gleyber Torres from the Cubs and introduced Aaron Judge to the big leagues.

Betts and left-hander David Price, heroes of 2018, are gone, and they won't be the last to be moved. Inevitably, the Red Sox will trade center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., perhaps in the middle of the pennant race; some teams were surprised the Red Sox tendered him a contract last fall. They'll continue to look to move right-hander Nathan Eovaldi in a deal, an effort that would be aided if Eovaldi pitches well early in 2020 and reestablishes some value. The 31-year-old Brandon Workman, who started throwing his curveball over and over and sprouted into one of baseball's best relievers, should be traded to sell high in the volatile bullpen market.

Over the past four seasons, J.D. Martinez has batted .312 with 146 homers and a .985 OPS in 535 games. But he is 32 and owed \$62 million for the next three seasons, and unless the idea of a universal designated hitter is resolved before the current collective bargaining agreement expires in December 2021, the Red Sox will be greatly limited in where they might deal him. A lot of National League teams are wary of his defense.

Xander Bogaerts and Chris Sale are each signed for the next four seasons, and presumably, the Red Sox will try to work out an extension with third baseman Devers, who led the AL in doubles and was second in hits last season and might be Boston's next batting title winner. Outfielder Alex Verdugo goes into the everyday lineup in place of Betts -- at a much lower cost -- and right-hander Brusdar Graterol augments an already improving farm system.

But there is a long way to go for Boston to get back to serious contention with the Yankees, a collection of matured stars and big-money acquisitions, and the Rays, with their strong rotation and preeminent ability to develop productive big leaguers on the cheap. The Blue Jays might be ahead of the Red Sox as well as Boston goes through its renewal, now that Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette and Cavan Biggio have reached the big leagues.

The Red Sox will need more than talent to challenge the Yankees consistently. Betts is a transcendent talent capable of lifting Boston, and he is a worker, someone who fretted about his performance and swing constantly, obsessing about getting better. The Angels have that in Mike Trout, the Dodgers have it in

Clayton Kershaw, and the Indians in Francisco Lindor. To have that in the best player on the team won't be easy to replicate.

Rival executives and staffers believe that Cora's departure also represents a tangible loss for Boston because of his ability to connect with players, to coax the best out of them. He convinced Betts to hunt fastballs and be more aggressive in the count, encouraged Martinez to lead hitters' meetings that became so important, nudged Devers in his work and helped Bogaerts to relax.

The makeover that has started will be so extensive that the timing is right for the Betts deal, and it avoids what would've been a really complicated decision if the Red Sox happened to hang on at the edge of the wild-card race in July. But there is more to be paid on the credit card bill and the win-now spending that helped to create the World Series contender of 2017 and 2018, and it might be a while before Boston is anything close to what it was.

Did the Los Angeles Dodgers just win the winter? How bad is this for the Boston Red Sox? Grading the Mookie Betts trade

Bradford Doolittle and David Schoenfield

We have a legitimate blockbuster trade, as the Los Angeles Dodgers acquired Mookie Betts and David Price from the Boston Red Sox.

Winners of seven consecutive National League West titles but still looking for their first World Series championship since 1988, the Dodgers added one of the top five position players in the game, although Betts can be a free agent after the 2020 season.

ESPN baseball writers Bradford Doolittle and David Schoenfield break it all down:

So who went where on Tuesday night?

The Dodgers, Twins and Red Sox made a three-team trade, and the Angels and Dodgers completed a separate deal -- here's where everyone involved landed.

Los Angeles Dodgers get:

Mookie Betts

David Price

Luis Rengifo (in separate deal)

Boston Red Sox get:

Alex Verdugo

Brusdar Graterol

Minnesota Twins get:

Kenta Maeda

Los Angeles Angels get:

Joc Pederson (in separate deal)

Did the Dodgers just make the biggest move of the offseason?

Doolittle: Everything we say here is prefaced by the fact that we have to look at this as a one-year proposition for the Dodgers. Betts, 27, has been adamant about going into the open market after this season and given the possibility of a contract in the \$300 million-\$400 million range, and who could blame him? The Dodgers will be as likely to land Betts as anyone, but we can't assume that this is anything more than a one-year marriage.

That being the case: I don't think this trumps the Yankees' signing of Gerrit Cole as the biggest transaction of the winter. I'd also rate the impact of the Angels' signing of Anthony Rendon ahead of this. In both cases, those teams were getting many years of impact production. For the Dodgers, it's all about whether Betts gets them over the hump this year so they can end that championship drought.

Schoenfield: As much as I love the acquisition for the Dodgers, the answer is no. The Dodgers were already heavy favorites in the NL West. They won the division by 21 games last year and I projected them about 12-13 wins better than the Diamondbacks before the trade, so the Dodgers could probably still win the division with Mookie Wilson in right field (and he's 63 years old).

I go with Gerrit Cole. Even though the Yankees will be heavy favorites in the American League East, the Rays project as a more formidable chaser there than the Diamondbacks in the NL West. A starting pitcher can make a much larger impact in the postseason, so Cole also increases the Yankees' odds of winning the World Series more than Betts does for the Dodgers. You could even argue that a player who will most help a team win a close division race is the "biggest" move -- say Josh Donaldson in Minnesota if the AL Central is tight.

What does L.A.'s Opening Day lineup look like with Betts in it?

Doolittle: Since the Dodgers open against the Giants, they'll probably get to roll out their primary lineup since San Francisco's top starter candidates are all righties. So we're looking at:

RF Mookie Betts
1B Max Muncy
3B Justin Turner
CF Cody Bellinger
SS Corey Seager
LF A.J. Pollock
2B Gavin Lux
C Will Smith

As it happens, I just did some rating of lineups, and adding Betts does indeed vault the Dodgers over Houston for the best everyday lineup in the majors. No doubt that was one of their primary motivations for pulling off the deal. Getting an everyday right-handed hitter in Betts does give the Dodgers more of a fixed lineup, though Muncy, Bellinger, Seager and Lux are all lefties.

Schoenfield: Frightening. I think this has a chance to be one of the best lineups in National League history. The Dodgers led the NL with 886 runs last season and think of the potential improvements for 2020:

-- A full season of Mookie Betts in the outfield.

Where Lindor, Arenado or Betts trade would rank among MLB's winter blockbusters

-- A full season of Gavin Lux at second base, and even though he's a rookie, he has All-Star potential. Dodgers second basemen hit .239/.327/.440 last season. Not bad, but I'll take the over for Lux.

-- A full season with Will Smith as the starting catcher. Dodgers catchers hit .228/.322/.412 -- boosted by Smith's impressive .253/.337/.571 line in 196 plate appearances. Dodgers catchers will be better in 2020.

--Possibly a better season from Corey Seager as he's another year removed from his Tommy John surgery. He had a 113 OPS+ last year, above average, but he was at 134 in 2016 and 126 in 2017. He could be 20 runs better at the plate.

You do lose Joc Pederson's 36 home runs, but you still have Chris Taylor, A.J. Pollock, Enrique Hernandez and Matt Beaty for left field. Plus maybe the best bench in baseball (Taylor, Hernandez, Beaty, Austin Barnes). The Dodgers' 886 runs last season was the most by an NL team since the 2007 Phillies scored 892. With Betts and full seasons from Lux and Smith, they might score 900.

The Dodgers won 106 games last year. How much better does Betts really make them?

Doolittle: There's no doubt that Betts is an upgrade. However, it might not be one that's apparent in the standings, because the Dodgers were and remain a team likely to win 95 to 105 games or so. To me, any notion that L.A. might have needed to make this splash because of the goings-on in San Diego or Phoenix is silly. The range of possible 2020 outcomes overlapped for all three of those teams already, but not by very much. Now the overlap is even more narrow. Still, the bottom line has not changed: The Dodgers are overwhelming favorites to win and, likely, dominate the NL West. This trade will ultimately be judged by what happens after the Dodgers clinch another division crown. And because he's a pitcher, it would be less than shocking if Price ends up tipping the scales more this autumn than Betts.

Schoenfield: According to BaseRuns, the Dodgers should have won 110 games last season. So despite losing Hyun-Jin Ryu in free agency, they might have improved anyway! Of course, it would be foolish to predict 106 wins again -- the over/under before the Betts trade was 98.5 from one betting site -- but Betts projects as about a 4-win upgrade in right field.

So this move is for October, right? How much will Betts help L.A. in the postseason?

Doolittle: As mentioned, the trade gives the Dodgers more of an everyday look since there is no real weakness in Betts' game and manager Dave Roberts won't have to do as much shift-changing during games as if he were Joel Quenneville. This makes L.A. a tougher postseason matchup from just an X's and O's standpoint. More than that, though, Betts is a real catalyst who will put pressure on opponents from the opening pitch in a way that the occasional Pederson leadoff splash doesn't. Betts doesn't just make the Dodgers' lineup better; he should make it more consistent. They gain in batting average, contact ability, speed, defense, you name it. All of those things can tip a short series.

Price gives L.A. a big October three of Clayton Kershaw, Price and Walker Buehler, though it can also use Dustin May if he continues his emergence. That would free Price up to become the stretched-out, super-starter-reliever hybrid he was for Boston in 2018. And, sure, it's possible that the Red Sox are getting out from under Price at just the right time. But he struck out 10.7 batters per nine innings last season and has a decade's worth of ace pedigree. That's not nothing.

Schoenfield: I think the key is Betts helps bring some right-handed balance to the lineup. Is that a big deal? It should help. Consider the Dodgers' performance against right-handers and left-handers in the postseason over the past three Octobers:

RHP: .216/.310/.412

LHP: .235/.326/.369

OK, they haven't done that well against either side, although they have hit with a little more power against right-handers and they've faced some tough righties along the way (five hits in 12 innings against Justin Verlander in the 2017 World Series, nine hits in 12 innings off Stephen Strasburg in last year's National League Division Series). It's worth noting, I suppose, that Betts hasn't been a great postseason performer, hitting .227/.313/.341. Which maybe means he's due.

The Dodgers did give up a lot for one year of Betts. Grade this trade for L.A.

Doolittle: The Dodgers have more than enough depth to repopulate their roster in upcoming seasons, and if Betts leaves after one year, they'll get a solid compensatory draft pick and will be able to reinvest his salary slot in another star-level player. In the short term, the Dodgers aren't giving up anything that meaningfully affects their 2020 World Series chances. Was the trade necessary? Not really, and that holds true for both Betts and Price. But there was also no reason not to do it, especially because it has the added benefit of

keeping Betts away from San Diego and Arizona, who were both buzzing around him in the rumor mill.
Grade: A.

Why Trout still hasn't won a playoff game

For all his awesomeness, Mike Trout hasn't had much of a chance to shine on baseball's brightest stage.
How have the Angels failed him?

Schoenfield: There's no doubt the Dodgers' reluctance to make a big offseason move in recent years has irritated Dodgers fans, but they did trade for Yu Darvish at the 2017 deadline and Manny Machado in 2018. And let's be honest: If Kenley Jansen and Kershaw had performed better at various spots in October, they might have won a couple of World Series the past three years. Anyway, I love the trade, as the Dodgers have plenty of organizational depth and their payroll flexibility in upcoming years means they might even consider re-signing Betts as a free agent. Grade: A.

What about the Red Sox: What's their ceiling for 2020 without Betts?

Doolittle: It's looking mediocre. Given the lack of depth and health concerns around their rotation, the Red Sox still profiled reasonably well because of a lineup that looked dynamic. Now, not so much. This deal knocks my ranking of their everyday lineup from eighth down to 13th. That's with Verdugo playing mostly every day. The area the Red Sox needed to be special in is now middle of the pack. And the rotation, which already looked thin, is a big question mark. This was a move to create flexibility for a future run. Boston can certainly make a run at a wild card, but this trade hurts the Red Sox in the short run more than it helps the Dodgers.

Schoenfield: Given the uncertain health of Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi, winning the division was always going to be a difficult task. Minus Betts, those odds go way down, even if Sale and Eovaldi can somehow deliver 60 starts.

The offensive core is still strong, however, and while I have Boston behind the Yankees and Rays, I wouldn't rule out the possibility of 90 wins and a potential wild card. A lot will have to go right for that happen, but it's likely that second wild card in the AL will be a tight race among three or four clubs.

Grade this trade for the Red Sox. Did they get enough?

Doolittle: Getting out of Price's deal is a big financial reprieve for the Red Sox. Given what the front office clearly saw as a likely Betts departure, I'd give this a solid B-plus. You can't get value-for-value on a one-season basis for a player like Betts. My usual beef with this kind of a deal is that you should never punt a season in which you have a reasonable chance to make the postseason. This deal isn't an out-and-out punt, but there are a lot of question marks about the Red Sox right now, and the decision to secure the value Betts represents tells me they saw those same questions.

At the same time, I keep coming back to the thought that without the luxury tax structure in place right now in baseball, this would not have happened. The Red Sox ought to be able to top the market to keep Betts in place while also throwing money to fill other holes. Was incurring the value-salvaging move of dealing a marquee player like Betts away from the only team he's known -- one of baseball's flagship teams -- really what we want the luxury tax to be doing?

Schoenfield: Verdugo was a 3-win player in 377 plate appearances last season, so it's not silly to project him as a 4-win or even 5-win player as a full-time regular. You'll definitely take five years of that for one of Mookie Betts given that you weren't going to re-sign Betts.

The nice thing about Verdugo is that he's definitely a plus glove in right field, but good enough to move over to center when Jackie Bradley Jr. departs as a free agent (or is traded). But the big bonus is getting Brusdar Graterol from the Twins, a pure upside play with his upper-90s velocity. It's the kind of arm you love to gamble on, and given what the Red Sox are trying to do, betting on a high ceiling is the way to go, even if it doesn't work out. So you have Verdugo, who has a high floor, and Graterol with a high ceiling. I give Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom an A.

Sources: Red Sox agree to trade Mookie Betts, David Price to Dodgers in 3-team deal

Jeff Passan

The Boston Red Sox and Los Angeles Dodgers have agreed to a blockbuster deal that will send former MVP Mookie Betts and left-hander David Price to Los Angeles for a package that includes outfielder Alex Verdugo, sources tell ESPN.

The trade includes a third team, the Minnesota Twins, with the Dodgers sending starter Kenta Maeda to Minnesota, which in turn will ship hard-throwing pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol to Boston, sources said, confirming a report by The Athletic.

The deal is pending medical reviews.

'The '20s are going to be the Dodgers' decade': L.A. starts new chapter with Mookie Betts trade
With the bidding for Betts heating up between the Dodgers and the National League West rival San Diego Padres in recent days, Boston chose to deal with Los Angeles and improve the team that lost in the division series to the Washington Nationals, the eventual World Series champions.

The 27-year-old Betts is coming off a season in which he hit .295/.391/.524 and finished eighth in American League MVP voting. He won the 2018 MVP, hitting .346/.438/.640 during the Red Sox's championship-winning season.

Throughout the winter, Boston entertained offers for Betts, whose free-agent haul following the 2020 season could exceed \$400 million. Betts will make \$27 million this year. And as Boston tries to dip beneath the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold, clearing its books of Betts and Price will go a long way toward reaching that goal. Price has three years and \$96 million remaining on his contract.

Still, dealing Betts was far from a certainty for Boston, particularly after watching him develop from a fifth-round pick in 2011 and become one of the best players in baseball. In fewer than 5½ seasons with the Red Sox, Betts piled up 42.0 wins above replacement, according to Baseball-Reference.com.

The Dodgers coveted him, even knowing he could leave via free agency after one season. The Dodgers' depth allowed them to stomach the potential value given away and take comfort in the knowledge that they'll add Betts to a lineup that already includes reigning NL MVP Cody Bellinger, Justin Turner, Max Muncy and top prospect Gavin Lux.

For most of the winter, the Dodgers had been quiet, watching top free agents Gerrit Cole, Anthony Rendon and Stephen Strasburg sign elsewhere. Los Angeles' only free-agent signings this winter have been one-year deals for reliever Blake Treinen (\$10 million) and starters Alex Wood (\$4 million) and Jimmy Nelson (\$1 million). San Diego looked to keep the Dodgers from making a big acquisition, hoping Boston would take one of its offers, which were centered around top catching prospect Luis Campusano and major league players. Boston preferred Los Angeles, as Chaim Bloom, the team's chief baseball officer, made his first big trade with Dodgers president Andrew Friedman, with whom he worked while running the Tampa Bay Rays.

Los Angeles, which hasn't won a championship since 1988, lost in back-to-back World Series against the Houston Astros and Red Sox. The 2017 Astros, who beat the Dodgers in seven games, cheated during that season by stealing signs and warning hitters what pitches were coming by banging on trash cans, according to a report from Major League Baseball. The 2018 Red Sox also are under investigation for using technology to steal signs.

Both the Astros and Red Sox fired their managers in the wake of the controversy, and Boston still has not named a manager, with pitchers and catchers reporting to spring training on Feb. 11.

Verdugo, 23, hit .294/.342/.475 with a 2.2 WAR in 377 plate appearances for the Dodgers last season. He took over in center field when A.J. Pollock was out.

Verdugo didn't play after Aug. 4 because of a back injury he re-aggravated while on a rehab assignment in September.

He is excellent against left-handed pitching and is under team control through the 2024 season. He will make the MLB minimum of \$563,500 in 2020. He's also a member of the Mexican national team.

Graterol, a hard-throwing, 21-year-old right-hander, pitched 9 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings last season in the majors, going 1-1 with a 4.66 ERA. In the minors last season, the Venezuelan was 7-0 with a 1.92 ERA across three levels. He was rated the No. 83 overall prospect for 2020 by MLB pipeline.

With news of the trade, the Dodgers' World Series odds went from 7-1 to 4-1 at Caesars Sportsbook, while their odds of winning the NL pennant went from +300 to +150 and their projected win total went from 99 to 100. The Red Sox's projected win total went from 87.5 to 86.5, while their World Series odds went from 20-1 to 25-1.

The other fantasy fallout from Boston's big trade

Tristan H. Cockcroft

Mookie Betts might be the headliner and David Price is certainly a well-known name to fantasy baseball managers, but it's the other parts in these deals who became a lot more interesting as a result of Tuesday night's trade.

Joc Pederson, dealt by the Dodgers to the Los Angeles Angels in a separate, yet related, transaction (straight-up for infielder Luis Rengifo) is the most interesting name on the move. Pederson, whose 36 home runs and .319 isolated power against right-handers in 2019 both ranked in the top-five in baseball, should immediately take over as the team's leadoff man against right-handed pitchers, giving the team an absurd top three of Pederson/Mike Trout/Anthony Rendon in those games (which will be in the majority, considering the game's greater number of RHP). Angel Stadium has played better for left-handed power since the team lowered the home-run line on the fence in right- and right-center fields before the 2018 season, which also helps Pederson's cause. In the wake of the trade, he's now a member of my top-50 outfielders for 2020.

Kenta Maeda, dealt by the Dodgers to the Minnesota Twins in the Betts trade, should experience a similar boost. Since finishing 19th among starting pitchers on the 2016 Player Rater and 47th among starters in Wins Above Replacement that season, Maeda has averaged 24 starts, 11 relief appearances and 138 innings pitched over the past three years, bouncing back and forth between rotation and bullpen to make his management in fantasy leagues more difficult. In Minnesota, he should be a full-time starter capable of 30-plus starts and 170-plus innings. Considering his 2016-19 FIP ranked 36th (3.71) and his WHIP 24th (1.15) out of 164 qualifiers, that should make him a pretty good one. That will vault him up a couple of spots among my starting pitchers, to No. 45.

The Boston Red Sox should also present greater opportunities for the two players they acquired: OF Alex Verdugo from the Los Angeles Dodgers and right-handed pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol from the Twins. Verdugo, who batted .294/.342/.475 in 106 games before suffering an oblique injury in August, should take over for Betts in right field in Boston and has .290-20 potential if he's granted everyday at-bats and can stay healthy. Certainly he's a more interesting fantasy option now than fellow Red Sox OF Jackie Bradley Jr. Verdugo belongs in the top 70 at the position in the same general area where you'd find a Kole Calhoun or Franmil Reyes.

Graterol, meanwhile, has a 100-mph sinker and a solid slider. It's not unusual that the Twins regarded him as more of a reliever than a starter when they auditioned him in the majors late last year. It's unclear yet whether the Red Sox might return him to a starter's role, but they now have an open spot in the rotation and

could always shuffle him back to the bullpen if they have a need there. He should factor for the big-league club sooner than later in 2020, and has enough upside to be a late-round pick if he's shaping up as a rotation candidate -- or a sleeper stash if he opens the year in the bullpen.

If there's a drawback to this trade, though, it's one that is sure to frustrate the prospect-lovers. Slugging OF Jo Adell no longer has a perfectly clear path to the majors whenever he's ready for it in 2020. That shouldn't preclude you from drafting him, being that elite prospects often get their call when they're ready, not to mention that Pederson has his flaws against left-handed pitching and Justin Upton has had his share of injury woes in recent years. Things can always work themselves out, but if you've been dreaming of Adell being to 2020 what Juan Soto was to 2018, temper those expectations now.

*** *WEEI.com***

Don't blame Chaim Bloom for this Mookie Betts debacle. He did his job after others didn't.

Rob Bradford

Mookie Betts is gone. Let that soak in. Markus Lynn Betts. One of the best players ever to wear a Red Sox uniform is no longer wearing a Red Sox uniform.

He is in the prime of his career. He was actually fun to watch. He gives food to homeless folks. He is a good teammate. He still wants to be better than best. And he is really, really good at baseball.

That should sting if you're a Red Sox fan. As should the notion that a legitimate top-of-the-rotation pitcher in David Price is also heading West for no other reason than he makes too much money. This isn't supposed to be how things happen in these parts.

And what are you left with? Two people named Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol.

The optics, as some might say, are uncomfortable.

But this conversation isn't as easy as simply asking and answering who won and lost this trade. For that, you can thank the missteps of all those who came before Chaim Bloom while measuring exactly how much you can tolerate not living the existence Betts' represented.

First off, don't blame Bloom. He did about as well as you could with what he was presented.

The only way Betts was going to be traded prior to the 2020 season is if there was legitimate talent to be had in return. In Verdugo (a legitimate major league center fielder with some pop) and Graterol (Minnesota's top pitching prospect who throws a 100 mph sinker) the Sox' chief baseball officer got exactly that.

Price's payoff was piggy-backing on Betts' value in order to free up enough money to not be paralyzed by the luxury tax threshold. (Are we to still believe this CBT narrative was a media-driven pile of shenanigans, Mr. Henry?) Now Bloom can actually do some business, such as get into serious extension talks with Rafael Devers or take a gander at a free agent the likes of starter Aaron Sanchez.

Bloom was asked to do a job and he did it. The fact that he was asked in the first place is another story entirely.

No pitchers were at the ready from the minors to step in, making the Red Sox desperate to sign Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi to contracts that are scheduled to eat up \$47 million in 2020. The pipeline for no-doubt, young, controllable position players had started to dry up after Andrew Benintendi and Rafael Devers. Hence the need to leverage Betts for the likes of Verdugo.

And finally, there was the unwillingness to reach a level of financial commitment that it would take Betts to budge off of his asking price of \$420 million.

It all led up to Tuesday night.

Betts is about as good a baseball player as you're going to find and he was drafted, developed and rolled out into this world by the Red Sox. What is supposed to happen for a player and person like this is either a long-term commitment to making him the face and the foundation or some colossal screw-up when it comes to the final stretches of contract negotiations.

No, this one was just an organization slowly realizing a mistake here and a mistake there had led to this unavoidable parting of ways. We all saw the punch coming, but that doesn't mean you're going to avoid getting the wind knocked out of you. And that's exactly what happened in the case of this Betts trade.

When it comes to sports, New England fans really, really don't like being classified as second-class citizens. Left hoping and praying that there will be a run on Boston babies with the name "Brusdar" five years from now sure seems like that kind of existence.

It is what it is. And what it is the last round of uneasiness in what has been the most uncomfortable offseason in Red Sox history.

Why Red Sox traded Mookie Betts to Dodgers, not Padres

Ryan Hannable

The Red Sox made a blockbuster trade Tuesday night by reportedly sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers with the Twins also getting involved.

Boston got Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins top pitching prospect Brusdar Gratero. In addition to sending Betts and Price to L.A., they also sent a ton of cash to pay some of Betts and Price's salaries.

While the deal was made with the Dodgers, they weren't the only team the Red Sox were talking to in recent weeks.

The Padres were in the mix as well, but ultimately they didn't go as hard as the Dodgers did because they did not feel like Betts would re-sign after this year, so it would essentially be a one-year rental.

Also, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune, getting rid of Wil Myers and the Red Sox taking on approximately three-quarters of his \$60-plus million contract was essentially a requirement for San Diego, but they were not willing to do that.

Some prospects who were discussed in a potential deal with San Diego included Cal Quantrill, Manuel Margot, Luis Campusano and Gabriel Arias.

"We were not going to trade on our future," one team official said to the paper. "We're in for the (long haul), not one year."

San Diego does feel by getting involved it forced the Dodgers, a division rival, to give up more than they would have otherwise.

In the end, the Dodgers had more to offer the Red Sox, especially with Gratero being included from the Twins, and for the Dodgers they really didn't have to give up much thanks to GM Andrew Friedman getting Minnesota involved.

L.A. gets more pieces to win this season, while the Red Sox shed some salary, got two prospects, and are in a better position to win in the future than they would have been otherwise.

*** NBC Sports Boston**

Mookie Betts and David Price are gone; what does it mean for the Red Sox?

John Tomase

Let the gnashing of teeth begin over how a big-market team like the Boston Red Sox could cry poor and jettison a homegrown superstar, but this is the right deal.

Here's why: Mookie Betts planned to leave next fall and the Red Sox managed to land not only a promising replacement in highly touted 23-year-old Alex Verdugo, they're also unloading David Price (more on him in a minute) and what should be a decent chunk of the \$96 million remaining on his contract.

The New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers have proven over the last few years what happens when one of the game's financial behemoths resets a bloated payroll -- it puts itself in a position to dominate.

The Dodgers lopped nearly \$100 million before building the club that has averaged over 100 wins the last three years, while the Yankees famously sold off a number of veterans at the 2016 trade deadline in advance of 100 wins in 2018 and 2019.

This isn't about the Red Sox suddenly cheaping out because they want to be the Tampa Bay Rays. It's a pragmatic decision that's looking beyond 2020, and it will serve them well in the long run, especially when Betts signs elsewhere next winter.

Gun to my head, do I believe Betts wanted to stay in Boston beyond this season?

No.

And if that's what the Red Sox think, then there's little point in keeping him in the hopes that an 84-win team suddenly discovers its mojo despite major question marks up and down the rotation. Better to get something now while they can.

The Price aspect shouldn't be underplayed. Removing (Some? Half? Most of?) his \$96 million from the payroll means the Red Sox can begin contemplating free agents again next winter after sitting out this class.

Details on the Red Sox Mookie Betts, David Price trade
The clubhouse will also benefit from his absence.

Price may be considered a good teammate by David Price, but jumping Hall of Famer Dennis Eckersley on a team flight and dressing down a reporter in the bowels of Yankee Stadium just because he could illustrated bullying tendencies that should ratchet down the grievance level as the Red Sox build a new culture around Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers, two far more fun-loving players.

Price was not hard to read when it came to why he signed in Boston -- "They offered me the most money," he "joked" more than once -- and this trade is a lifeline for him. It removes him from a situation he only tolerated and never embraced, and it didn't cost him a penny to do it.

So what to make of the players coming back, Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol?

Verdugo is the bigger name in the deal. He's a promising young outfielder who profiles similarly to Andrew Benintendi's best-case scenario, if that makes sense: a high-average left-handed hitter with line drive power to all fields.

Unlike Benintendi, the former pitcher also boasts a cannon arm that makes him an ideal candidate to play right field in Fenway Park.

He hit .294 with 12 homers and an .817 OPS in 106 games with the Dodgers last year, when he began the season as a consensus top-35 prospect in baseball. The 23-year-old does come with a couple of red flags: he has admitted not paying enough attention to conditioning and nutrition, and of more concern, he's still rehabbing a back injury that cost him the final two months of last season.

Still, as far as centerpieces go, he's a talented one, and he should ease the loss of Betts, even if he'll never replace him.

Red Sox' projected lineup, starting rotation after Mookie Betts trade

Darren Hartwell

The Boston Red Sox need a new leadoff hitter.

That's one very simple takeaway from Tuesday's stunning news that the Red Sox are sending superstar outfielder Mookie Betts and pitcher David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers as part of a three-team blockbuster.

Boston reportedly gets two players in return: outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and pitching prospect Brusdal Graterol from the Minnesota Twins. (More on them here.)

And while losing Betts will sting for Red Sox fans, there's still a 2020 season to play: Pitchers and catchers report to Fort Myers for spring training next Tuesday.

As Sox fans come to grips with Life after Mookie, here's a look at the lineup the team's (still-unknown) manager may roll out on Opening Day:

Just kidding. Let's try that again:

Andrew Benintendi, LF
Rafael Devers, 3B
Xander Bogaerts, SS
J.D. Martinez, DH
Mitch Moreland, 1B
Alex Verdugo, RF
Michael Chavis/Jose Peraza, 2B
Christian Vazquez, C
Jackie Bradley Jr., CF

Benintendi likely will replace Betts in the leadoff spot, while Devers and Bogaerts -- who should be Boston's two best players in 2020 -- could flip between the second and third slots.

Verdugo moved around the Dodgers' lineup in 2019 but hit sixth in 24 of the 106 games he played last season and would benefit from the protection of Martinez and Moreland ahead of him.

Tomase: This Betts/Price trade isn't as bad as you think
Betts is a massive loss at the top of the lineup, but this starting nine still should score plenty of runs in 2020 after tallying 901 runs (fourth in MLB) last season.

The Red Sox' pitching is a bit more suspect. Here's the projected starting rotation without Price in the fold:

Chris Sale, LHP
Eduardo Rodriguez, LHP

Nathan Eovaldi, RHP
Martin Perez, LHP
TBD

That's right: The Sox currently don't have a legitimate fifth starter, as Graterol likely will begin his tenure in either the minor leagues or the bullpen.

Hector Velazquez could be an occasional spot starter, while Chaim Bloom also could take a page from his old Tampa Bay Rays club and roll with an "opener" every fifth game.

What the Red Sox payroll looks like with Mookie Betts, David Price gone

Jacob Camenker

The Boston Red Sox made a massive decision on Tuesday night. They elected to trade Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in order to cut their 2020 payroll.

Betts was slated to be a free agent next offseason and it seemed possible that he could leave the Red Sox, as the two were rumored to be far apart in contract negotiations. They managed to get two good prospects in return for Betts and Price, Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol, but fans will still likely be unhappy with the return given that Betts is, undoubtedly, one of baseball's top-five players.

That said, the Red Sox did accomplish their goal of getting under the luxury tax. In fact, they cut \$43 million from their payroll by trading the \$27 million owed to Betts and half of the \$32 million owed to Price in 2020.

As a result, the Red Sox now have a payroll number of \$178 million and projected tax allocations of about \$192 million, according to Spotrac.com. That will drop them \$16 million below the \$208 million tax line.

What we know about Alex Verdugo, Brusdar Graterol
And now, the Red Sox have just three players set to make \$20+ million in 2020. They are as follows:

P Chris Sale (\$30 million)

DH J.D. Martinez (\$23.75 million)

SS Xander Bogaerts (\$20 million)

Other players making eight-figures in 2020 include Nathan Eovaldi (\$17 million), Dustin Pedroia (\$13.1 million), and Jackie Bradley Jr. (\$11 million).

So, all told, it looks like the Red Sox have fixed their payroll issues. They won't have to pay luxury tax following the 2020 season and they still have a little wiggle room to add some low-cost free agents.

But will the Red Sox be able to stay competitive in 2020? They gave up their best overall player and their second-best starting pitcher. Their starting rotation looks particularly weak and will be especially dependent on Sale, who struggled amid shoulder and elbow injuries last season. So, they may be in for a rocky 2020 campaign.

Only time will tell if the Red Sox made the right move here. But for now, they accomplished what appears to be their biggest goal. They won't likely pay luxury tax after the 2020 season.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Mega deal may be good for bottom line, but is that the new standard for Red Sox?

Sean McAdam

From a business standpoint, the Red Sox accomplished what they set out to do this offseason in pulling off their three-team, five-player deal Tuesday night that cost them Mookie Betts and David Price while netting them outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol.

By slashing payroll and getting well under the first competitive balance tax (CBT) threshold of \$208 million, the Red Sox, lessened their future salary obligations, avoid paying any luxury tax for the first time since 2017 and take a big step toward their goal of creating a sustainable organization, one capable of competing for a championship on a consistent basis.

Swell.

But in the short-term, the loss of Betts (especially) and Price (less so) means the Red Sox are waving the proverbial white flag for 2020.

Sure, the team may well say that they expect to be competitive during the upcoming season, and if Chris Sale rebounds with better health and Nathan Eovaldi stays healthy, they could, indeed, be in the running for one of two wild-card spots.

But that's asking for a lot to go right. And usually, when a team needs a series of events or developments to take place in order to enjoy a good season, something goes off the rails. A .500 season is a far more likely outcome.

Meanwhile, the fun has been zapped out of Fenway. Gone is the five-tool excitement that Betts brought to the ballpark — the quick-twitch power, the explosive acceleration that he flashed as he rounded first on a ball hit to the gap, and the seemingly effortless manner in which he covered the vast expanse of Fenway's right field.

And those are just his obvious baseball skills.

Losing Betts also means something else, something harder to define. Betts was part of a homegrown nucleus the organization nurtured and developed into stardom. He was, in fact, the best part.

Now that he's gone, sacrificed at the altar of fiscal responsibility, an unsettling feeling looms over the franchise: Is this a sign of things to come?

Red Sox fans have to go back 40 years to find the last time the Sox rid themselves of stars for financial reasons, when Fred Lynn, Carlton Fisk and others were either traded or encouraged to leave in order for the club to save its precious resources.

Later, some star players — Nomar Garciaparra, Mo Vaughn, Roger Clemens — all saw their Red Sox careers end prematurely, but in nearly every case, there were mitigating factors involved.

The Red Sox didn't always win and they didn't always spend wisely, but spend they did on stars — Manny Ramirez, Hanley Ramirez and Price, to name just three.

The Sox were a big market team, and when things bottomed out, they would willfully spend themselves out of the hole into which they had fallen. They were a prototypical big-market team and could routinely be counted on to be among the top bidders for the game's biggest stars. There was no one who was too costly.

From 2010 through 2019, they spent more than any team in baseball. In 2018, which culminated in their last World Series, they spent more money than they ever had before.

Today, that seems like a very long time ago. Now, the buzzwords are "sustainability," and "resetting" — hardly the kind of talk that gets fans excited for the start of a season. Those are phrases that routinely get thrown around in Cleveland and Milwaukee and Kansas City, but not here.

Boston, meanwhile, was in a different class, thrown in with other financial behemoths in New York, Chicago, and, yes, Los Angeles. This was the big leagues, after all, and the Red Sox were going to spend like they belonged.

Maybe Verdugo, whom the Red Sox control for the next five seasons, will blossom into an All-Star outfielder. Maybe Graterol will emerge as a top starting pitcher, the likes of which the Red Sox haven't been able to develop for the last 15 or so years.

But it's doubtful that either will be the star that Betts was in Boston, a player who not only won an MVP but also finished in the Top 6 in AL MVP voting in two other seasons. He was, by consensus, one of the handful of best players in the game, perhaps even second-best to only Mike Trout.

And now he's a Dodger, traded because the Red Sox needed some return on an investment seemingly headed out the door, dealt for something better than a pick after the fourth round in the 2021 draft.

That's not a baseball trade. That's a face-saving trade, executed by a team suddenly more focused, for the time being at least, on the bottom line rather than what's between the lines — and that makes it a sad day in Red Sox history.

Red Sox set to deal Mookie Betts, David Price to Dodgers in three-team deal

Sean McAdam

Culminating months of speculation and weeks of intense trade talks, the Red Sox on Tuesday night were closing in on a three-team deal in which Mookie Betts and David Price would end up with the Los Angeles Dodgers with the Sox getting outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol from the Minnesota Twins.

The Dodgers would send Kenta Maeda to the Twins in exchange for Graterol, then include him as part of the deal with the Sox.

The Red Sox would also be sending significant cash to the Dodgers in order to offset Price's \$96 million due over the next three seasons.

Even with the cash sent to the Dodgers, the Red Sox would be accomplishing their goal — stated publicly at the end of last season — of getting under the first competitive balance tax threshold (CBT) of \$208 million. Betts alone reduces their payroll by \$27 million and ridding themselves of half of Price's \$32 million for 2020 chops off another \$16 million or so.

Such a reduction in salary obligation would take the Red Sox under \$200 million in payroll for the first time since 2017.

The deal is the first significant trade consummated by new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom — and is destined to go down as one of the biggest in recent franchise history.

Betts, the 2018 American League MVP, is a year away from reaching free agency and has vowed to go onto the open market to determine his full value. The Red Sox made numerous attempts to sign him to an extension over the last two years, made fell far short of what Betts looking to earn.

Desperate to reset their luxury tax rate and intent on building a team that could be sustainable for a number of years, they tried earlier this winter to move a starting pitcher before the talks shifted in January to Betts. Eventually, trade talks existed concurrently with the San Diego Padres and the Dodgers.

The Padres, however, wanted the Sox to assume the remaining contractual obligations of Wil Myers. Bloom, according to a source, wanted no part of taking on the Myers contract and eventually settled on the deal with the Dodgers.

Price signed, at the time, the richest free-agent deal ever for a pitcher when he agreed to a seven-year, \$217-million deal with the Sox. He went 46-24 with a 3.84 ERA in four seasons with the Sox, marked by injury, off-field turbulence and one superb October of pitching that culminated in a World Series win — ironically, over the Dodgers — in 2018.

Verdugo is the centerpiece of the deal. Ranked as one of the Top 20 prospects in the game at the start of last season, he appeared in 106 games for the Dodgers in 2019, with a slash line of .294/.342/.475. He's regarded as an excellent outfielder and will presumably take over in right field for Betts.

Graterol, 21, was ranked as the Twins' fourth-best prospect recently by MLB Pipeline. He throws a two-seam fastball that routinely hits 100 mph, though his strikeout totals have been somewhat modest in the minor leagues.

He appeared in 10 games with the Twins at the end of last season, working exclusively as a reliever, but is projected as a No. 2 or No. 3 starter by some evaluators.

*** *The Athletic***

Unpacking David Price's complicated legacy with Red Sox

Steve Buckley

Getting rid of David Price is the silver lining of the Red Sox decision to trade a Silver Slugger to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Mookie Betts was in fact a three-time Silver Slugger during his Boston years, as well as a four-time Gold Glove winner. And then there's the MVP Award, which Betts won in 2018. But he's gone now, and that's really bad. But Price is going with him, and for the Red Sox that's really good.

To his credit, Price emerged as a hero in the 2018 World Series. He was 2-0 with a 1.98 ERA in three appearances against the Dodgers — two starts, including the Game 5 clincher at Chavez Ravine, and a relief outing — and he absolutely, positively should have been the Series MVP. No disrespect to Steve Pearce, but Price flat-out chloroformed the Dodgers, especially in Game 5.

You'll recall that Price's postgame press conference that night at Dodger Stadium turned out to be a card game. Oft-criticized for his inability to win a postseason game as a starter prior to 2018, Price said, "To answer that question in spring training, day and day and day and day, and over and over and over and over . . . I hold all the cards now. I can't tell you how good it feels to hold that trump card."

It was Price's moment, and if that's how he wanted to play it — play that trump card, as it were — he had earned the right to do so.

But then everything went wrong after that — for the Red Sox, for Price. Because of elbow and wrist injuries, Price made just 22 starts in 2019, pitching 107 1/3 innings. He was 7-5 with a 4.28 ERA. As the season was slipping away for the defending World Series champs, Price chose to reignite his feud with Dennis Eckersley, the Hall of Fame pitcher who now works as a NESN analyst. Eck had done an interview with the Boston Globe's Chad Finn for a long feature that ran in the paper's Sunday magazine supplement, and, inevitably, Finn brought up Price. Eck simply batted away the question by saying, "I don't plan on saying a word to him, I don't plan on seeing him, never. I don't really really give a (expletive) one way or another. I don't think he really cares one way or the other."

For that — that one throwaway answer to one obligatory question in one very long piece that touched on many other topics — Price pulled the media together and went off on Eckersley. He went so far as to say,

“I saw his special on MLB Network. The one thing that definitely stood out to me, he had zero former teammates, not one, talking about him. It was him, talking about himself.”

OK, so it turns out that a number of former Eck teammates — Ron Darling, Mark McGwire, Bruce Hurst, Ray Fosse — took part in the special. And while Price may have overacted, he should have read the piece in full, or someone from the Red Sox should have briefed him, or . . . whatever. With the Sox on the verge of disappearing from playoff contention, it only illustrated, yet again, that Price has a way of getting sensitive and moody at the worst possible moments. He lost his next four starts following the Eckersley press conference and then went on the injured list.

And yet by all accounts his teammates loved him. In that spirit, don’t be surprised if Price turns around and delivers a fine season for his new team. But Red Sox fans would be wise not to take Price’s 2020 Dodgers numbers, whatever they are, and get all misty-eyed for the big lefty.

Price never seemed happy with the Red Sox. Boston is a stifling place — small park, tons of media, a hard-core fan base that goes into each season with an expectation of winning the World Series — but the idea, the assumption, the hope, was that Price would use his World Series heroics as a springboard to contentedness. That didn’t happen. His hard-earned trump card never made it out of Fort Myers.

It took a seven-year, \$217 million contract for the Red Sox to lure Price to Boston. He was going to be an ace in the Clemens-Martinez-Schilling mold, and it’s possible that Price, for all his talent, was never temperamentally suited for that kind of role.

He won’t have to deal with that as a member of the Dodgers. To use a Hollywood analogy, Price is but a supporting player in this trade —if this were “Joker” he’d be Robert De Niro to Mookie Betts’ Joaquin Phoenix — and there are advantages to that. Assuming they can find that old Manny Ramirez sign and send it out to the shop for some adjustments, Dodger Stadium in 2020 is going to be Mookieland, not Priceland.

And, anyway, the Dodgers aren’t banking on Price to be the ace. Not on a team with the likes of Clayton Kershaw and Walker Buehler.

Red Sox fans should thank David Price for his service, give him one more high five for Game 5, and be very, very happy that he’s gone.

Mookie Betts, not so much.

Suddenly the Red Sox have a new look, with so many questions about their fate this season

Jen McCaffrey

At some point, it became a matter of time, a mere formality despite the enormity of the consequences surrounding such a trade.

Tension isn’t a tangible thing, but in the last few weeks and days and hours leading up to Boston’s blockbuster deal, the tension was present in texts and tweets and sports talk radio.

On Tuesday night around 9 p.m., the Red Sox pulled off a franchise-altering deal sending Mookie Betts, David Price and cash to the Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol. The Dodgers sent starter Kenta Maeda to the Twins to complete the three-team trade.

There are significant questions not just about the Red Sox roster itself, but of the identity and chemistry of a Red Sox team that’s lost two of its biggest stars and still doesn’t have a manager in place just days before spring training.

It goes without saying what the Red Sox are losing in trading Betts. The 2018 AL MVP and Gold Glove right fielder with immense talent and arguably their greatest homegrown player in decades. The Red Sox will need a new leadoff hitter (perhaps Andrew Benintendi) and a new right fielder (likely Verdugo), but no one player will be able to replace what Betts brought to the Red Sox on a daily basis.

And for as much as Price sparred with the media and frustrated fans, he had an immense presence in the Red Sox clubhouse as one of its most well-respected teammates. To lose both Price and Rick Porcello in the same winter should not be overlooked, especially for someone like Eduardo Rodriguez, who relied heavily on both of them in his development.

The health of Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi is more important now than ever with two spots in the rotation in flux. Newcomer Martin Perez likely will take over one spot, but his 5.12 ERA after 29 starts with the Twins last season left a lot to be desired. And what of the fifth starter? Do the Red Sox slot their other Twins newcomer, Graterol, into the rotation? The 21-year-old appeared in just 10 games last season in addition to one game against the Yankees in the division series when he struck out two of three batters. Graterol has been groomed as a starter relying mostly on an upper 90s fastball and a slider in addition to a changeup that needs work. The Twins called him up as a reliever, but his long-term future appears to be as a starter. Whether the Red Sox feel he needs more refining in the minors is something to be determined in spring training. He ranks as MLB's 60th-best prospect by Baseball America.

If Graterol isn't starting the season in the majors, it's possible the Red Sox use an opener until he's ready. A slew of arms on the 40-man roster, including newcomers Jeffery Springs, Josh Osich, Chris Mazza, Austin Brice and Matt Hall provide options if that's the route the Red Sox opt to pursue.

Meanwhile Verdugo, who turns 24 in May, appeared in his first full season for the Dodgers last year hitting .294 with a .784 OPS, 22 doubles and 12 homers in 106 games. He'd previously totaled 52 games over the previous two seasons in LA as he bounced back and forth from the minors. He was a consensus top 20-30 prospect heading into 2019. He played 61 of his 106 games in center field in 2019, while seeing 25 games in right and 22 in left. Verdugo is a tremendous defender with a strong arm (a pitcher in high school, he easily clocked 95 mph), so he likely won't have much of an issue in Fenway's cavernous right field. It's also possible he takes over center field duties with Jackie Bradley Jr. moving to right — where he'd be more familiar than Verdugo.

There are more questions than answers at this point, an unsettling feeling days before spring training. This trade could derail their season before it even starts or it could galvanize a fractured group that's already been written off in many circles.

Chaim Bloom has already defined his Red Sox tenure, for better or worse

Chad Jennings

Chaim Bloom could lead the Red Sox front office another 30 years and not experience a defining moment quite like Tuesday night.

The question of Mookie Betts' future had hounded Bloom's new colleagues and current bosses for years. Bloom's predecessor had offered extensions with no luck. Betts' arbitration eligibility had run out. Years of team control had dwindled to a lone remaining season.

Bloom, the Red Sox first-year chief baseball officer hired in October, was going to preside over the final chapter one way or another, and the conclusion happened sooner rather than later. After three months on the job, Bloom traded Betts and David Price to the Dodgers in a three-team deal that netted highly touted outfielder Alex Verdugo, hard-throwing right-hander Brusdar Graterol and millions of dollars in salary relief. While the exact figures aren't known, it's clear the Red Sox payroll will be below the luxury tax threshold for the first time since 2017. Their competitive balance penalties will be reset, two promising young players have been added to the organization, and the burden of Price's contract has been mitigated for the future.

All at the cost of a generational talent.

The blockbuster trade is a stunning, franchise-altering move — an in-his-prime All-Star traded for salary relief by one of the highest-profile, highest-spending organizations in the game — yet the idea of trading Betts had been discussed and debated since at least 2018, when he became an MVP and left little doubt he intended to become a free agent as well.

Even as other star players — Mike Trout, Nolan Arenado, Paul Goldschmidt, now-former teammates Xander Bogaerts and Chris Sale — signed long-term extensions, Betts maintained a sense that he preferred the open market. It never seemed personal. Betts' drive toward free agency was a calculated gamble, a business decision meant to maximize his value while he had the chance to do so.

In trading him, the Red Sox made the same choice.

Betts is the organization's greatest homegrown player since Dustin Pedroia, if not since Roger Clemens. He was the team's fifth-round draft pick in 2011, became a perennial all-star in 2016, and with one more typical season, he would have passed Lefty Grove and Jim Rice to rank 12th in career WAR with the franchise.

The team's top decision-makers, from principal owner John Henry to past president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski to Bloom himself, had all expressed a desire to keep Betts in Boston for the long haul. WEEI reported the Red Sox offered 10 years, \$300 million, and Betts countered at 12 years, \$420 million — a massive divide.

While there seemed to be no real questions about Betts' elite talent, local popularity, and long-term projectability, there were genuine questions about what to do with his final year of team control if no extension could be reached. Perhaps the Red Sox could make one last run with him on the roster, or move him at the trade deadline, or they could trade him here and now if the return were good enough. Bloom decided the long-term value of this deal — with its young players and payroll implications — was worth the short-term loss of such a defining talent.

Trade talks seem to have intensified in mid-January when sources told The Athletic that the Padres were heavily involved, perhaps even the favorites to make a deal. At one point talks had progressed enough, sources said, that some within the Padres organization believed they could have a deal completed relatively soon.

Red Sox sources, though, said such confidence was premature. There were other possibilities on the table, multiple teams involved, myriad factors to consider.

The Dodgers, in particular, were key players in the quiet drama, even though another source insisted late last week that there were mystery teams involved. By Thursday afternoon, multiple sources began pointing to the Dodgers as the new favorites. Sources throughout recent weeks indicated there were multiple possibilities on the table, different directions the Red Sox could go.

And it was all happening within the haze of managerial interviews to replace Alex Cora. The two massive decisions were happening literally side-by-side, with the Red Sox meeting to discuss potential managers even as other teams waited to hear back about trade proposals.

“A lot of us are contemplating a lot of big calls,” one source said during the back and forth.

Calls don't get much bigger than this one.

For the Dodgers, the trade is a bold step in their pursuit of an elusive championship. Their projected payroll was well below \$200 million, leaving them room to absorb two large contracts.

For the Red Sox, the trade is a measured move toward sustainability. It is at once a salary dump and a rebuild of the minor league system. Although Verdugo gives them a major-league ready talent who can fill Betts' void in right field, it's hard to label this trade any sort of addition-by-subtraction. For 2020, it is simply subtraction.

Verdugo is a 23-year-old who played all three outfield positions with a 3.1 WAR in 343 major league at-bats last season. Graterol is a 21-year-old with a 98-mph fastball, and though the Red Sox feel he was rushed to the big leagues last season, they think his upside is considerable. Graterol ranks No. 60 on Baseball America's current Top 100 Prospects list. Verdugo ranked 35th on that list last year.

By giving up one year of Betts, the Red Sox gained at least 11 years of team control over those two. By resetting their competitive balance penalties, they could be in a position of strength to attempt to re-sign Betts next winter, but one source said such a signing seems unlikely. What's known for sure is Betts' immediate talent, and that's what the Red Sox gave up.

It might not wipe out their ability to contend this season — the Red Sox still have Bogaerts, Sale, Rafael Devers, J.D. Martinez and others — but even if each prospect coming to Boston reaches his full potential, it's hard to imagine either of them matching Betts' singular production. And even if every other big-spending team has reset its luxury tax penalties at some point, it's jarring to see such a cost-cutting measure involve such a defined and beloved talent.

For better or worse, for now and well into the future, Chaim Bloom will always be the guy who showed up and immediately traded Mookie Betts.

Roundtable reaction: Mookie Betts, David Price to the Dodgers in a 3-way deal

The Athletic Staff

After a winter of speculation, it finally happened, just a week before spring training: The Red Sox will trade star outfielder Mookie Betts, 27, and pitcher David Price, 34, to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex Verdugo, pending medical reviews. As part of the deal, pitcher Kenta Maeda will head to the Twins, who will send right-hander Brusdar Graterol to Boston.

Betts, who debuted with Boston in 2014, is a four-time All-Star and four-time Gold Glove winner. In 2018, he led the league in runs and slugging percentage, won a batting title and received the AL MVP Award in addition to winning a World Series ring. Last season, Betts again led the league in runs, and over the past three seasons, he has been worth more wins above replacement than any player other than Mike Trout. He will be a free agent after the 2020 season, and the Red Sox were unable to sign him to an extension.

The Athletic's MLB Boston, L.A. and Minnesota writers offer their initial thoughts on the deal.

Ken Rosenthal, The Athletic MLB
Oh, I have thoughts!

- Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman pulled off the neatest of tricks with his maneuverings, acquiring Betts and Price while retaining all of his top prospects and possibly staying under the luxury-tax threshold.

The amount of cash the Dodgers will get from the Red Sox is not yet known, but the initial estimate of their luxury-tax payroll from Rosterresource.com in the wake of Tuesday night's deals was \$222.8 million. To stay under the threshold in 2020, the Dodgers would need the Red Sox to cover \$17.2 million per season of Price's \$32 million salary — and the number will be in that range if the Sox are paying about half, as initial reports indicated.

Meanwhile, the Dodgers lost only outfielder Alex Verdugo and right-hander Kenta Maeda, players who became expendable with the additions of Betts and Price. They kept Gavin Lux, kept Dustin May, kept

Tony Gonsolin, kept Jeter Downs and every other one of their coveted youngsters while also working a separate deal with the Angels to add a 23-year-old infielder, Luis Rengifo, for outfielder Joc Pederson.

Oh, and one other thing: If Betts rejects a qualifying offer and signs with another team in free agency, the Dodgers will gain a draft pick at the back end.

- Price is 34. He has averaged only 119 innings over the past three regular seasons due to injuries. But if he is healthy, don't be surprised if the move from Boston to Los Angeles rejuvenates him.

Going from the American League to the National League and from Fenway Park to Dodger Stadium should help. Leaving Boston and the pressure of fulfilling his \$217 million contract should help. Joining a team that figures to turn him into a glorified Rich Hill might help, too.

The Dodgers can manage Price carefully, using him for, say, 25 starts and 125 to 150 innings before turning him loose in October. Walker Buehler will be perhaps the only Dodgers starter to carry a full load. The team can slot everyone else — Clayton Kershaw, Alex Wood, Julio Urías, May, et al. — in and out.

- A trade for one year of Betts never made sense for the Padres, even if it would have enabled them to send outfielder Wil Myers to the Red Sox and escape a chunk of the \$61 million they owe him over the next three seasons.

The inclusion of Myers would have required the Padres to give up significant prospects, and to what end? They were a 70-win team last season. They would have stood no chance of retaining Betts after signing Eric Hosmer and Manny Machado for a combined \$444 million the previous two winters.

Many in the industry suspected Padres general manager A.J. Preller was trying to save his job by acquiring Betts. However, such a move might only have hastened his demise. Preller's best chance of fulfilling his contract through 2022 is if the Padres continue developing their young talent. Short passes, instead of the Hail Mary that Betts represented.

- The Twins failed to sign either of their top free-agent pitching targets: right-hander Zack Wheeler and lefty Hyun-Jin Ryu. But they rebounded by securing free-agent third baseman Josh Donaldson on a four-year, \$92 million deal, and the addition of Maeda continues their modest pitching buildup.

José Berríos and Jake Odorizzi will be at the top of the rotation. Homer Bailey is expected to fill another spot. Maeda is under contract for \$3 million per season through 2023. Michael Pineda will return from a PED suspension in early May. Hill is on track to return from elbow surgery in early June. Jhoulys Chacin, coming to camp on a minor-league deal, represents another option.

The Twins will be heavily favored to repeat as AL Central champions, and the only significant prospect they have traded is right-hander Brusdar Graterol, who went to the Dodgers for Maeda and then the Red Sox as part of the package for Betts and Price.

In Baseball America's most recent assessment last August, the Twins farm system ranked seventh in the majors. Their depth of young talent should enable them to trade for a starter at the deadline, if necessary.

Jayson Stark, *The Athletic* MLB

It was three teams — four if you count the Angels. It included a bunch of players zipping around to three time zones. It had major ramifications for multiple franchises not named the Dodgers. But we can kick around all those other details some other time, because there are seven words here that matter more than anything else:

The Dodgers just got Mookie Freaking Betts!

And let's recognize exactly how rare that is. Players like Mookie get traded, what, once in a generation maybe? I got mixed up in a conversation about that very topic Tuesday night with an astute NL executive

and a longtime NL scout. We were trying to decide how many players as good as Betts we've seen traded. The names that came up were Griffey ... the young A-Rod ... Frank Robinson ... icons. And now this guy.

I don't need to tell you how storied a franchise the Dodgers have been, right? OK, now digest this: According to the Baseball-Reference.com WAR computations, Betts has run off four consecutive seasons as at least a 6.4-win player. You know the last Dodger position player who had four seasons as at least a 6.4-win player over any span of time? That would be Duke Snider, from 1953 to 1956. You know how many Dodgers hitters in history have had at least four seasons that good? Precisely two: the Duke and Jackie Robinson (who had five in a row, from 1949 to 1953).

Betts has also already had two seasons worth at least 9.7 wins. Ready for a list of all the position players in the past 80 years who have had at least that many? Willie Mays, Barry Bonds, Ted Williams, Mike Trout, Mickey Mantle, Rickey Henderson, Cal Ripken Jr. and Carl Yastrzemski. Whoever they are. But you know how many Dodgers position players have ever had a season that good? That answer is zero.

I surveyed a couple of guys who work for NL West teams as this deal got close. The best word I could use to describe them was "depressed." They know what this means. As one of them said, "This isn't good for anybody — especially not us."

Still, even after winning their division seven years in a row, the Dodgers needed to do something huge this winter. They just did it. So they've made themselves a monstrous favorite — to win the NL West, to win the National League, very possibly to win the World Series. They're a team with almost no holes. But then again, they already were. Except then this happened:

The Dodgers just got Mookie Freaking Betts!

Marc Carig, The Athletic MLB

It's hard to improve on a 103-win team. But the Yankees signed Gerrit Cole. It's hard to improve on a 106-win team. But the Dodgers traded for Mookie Betts and David Price. It's hard to improve on a 101-win team, but the Twins capped a strong winter by acquiring Kenta Maeda. Yes, baseball's offseason felt reinvigorated because great teams looked to get even better. That's not to mention the likes of the White Sox and the Reds, newcomers to the party.

A bunch of teams acted desperate to win now. The Yankees haven't won a World Series in a decade, a century in Bronx years. The Twins haven't won since 1991 (partly because they keep running into the Yankees), the Dodgers since 1988. The White Sox and Reds are tired of perpetual rebuilding. This is terrific for the sport.

But for all those positive vibes, it's hard to overlook the troubling signs out of Boston. All the Red Sox did was get under the salary cap. So, they'll enjoy their financial flexibility pennant, at the expense of relegating themselves to the game's second tier. The Red Sox get a big-armed prospect in Brusdar Graterol from the Twins and Alex Verdugo, a 23-year-old talent with plenty of team control from the Dodgers. But mostly, this was about getting under the salary cap (officially known as the luxury-tax threshold). When deep-pocketed marquee franchises shed salary, it's never a good look.

Betts is precisely the kind of difference-maker the Dodgers needed to reshuffle the deck. A talent deficiency has never been the issue in L.A., but perhaps a shake-up was warranted, especially after their first-round exit. Price bolsters the middle of the rotation. And while the Twins parted with a highly regarded prospect in Graterol, they gain Maeda at a team-friendly salary. Yes, Graterol has the kind of big arm that's fun to dream on. But Maeda is without a doubt a big-league starter, while Graterol might not be.

Andy McCullough, The Athletic MLB

Thirty-one seasons have passed since the Dodgers won a championship. Five of those seasons occurred under the watch of president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman. The drought agitates fans and vexes the organization. Friedman understood both emotions as this winter began. He weighed his thirst for

improvement against his distaste for reducing future flexibility. In the end, he was able to satisfy both cravings.

The Dodgers acquired Mookie Betts and David Price without emptying their well-stocked reserve of talent. They kept infielder Gavin Lux, and they kept pitcher Dustin May. Friedman demonstrated the same restraint with Corey Seager and Cody Bellinger and Walker Buehler and Will Smith. All will be crucial to the team's run in 2020. So will Betts. And so will Price.

The Dodgers awoke Tuesday morning as the presumptive favorites in the National League. They ended the day in an even more commanding position. Friedman did his part. It will be up to the players, a group that now includes Betts and Price, to end the drought.

Eno Sarris, *The Athletic* MLB

This one doesn't make a ton of sense, at least from one team's perspective.

Sure, you can point out that the Red Sox front office probably had a directive to cut salary. Given the way injuries have robbed David Price of his stuff and production over the past three years in Boston, it's probably fair to say three years and \$93 million would be too high a price to demand on the open market. Teams have a hard time moving salary like that — that's what a group of executives told me anonymously at this year's Winter Meetings — so the Red Sox attached Mookie Betts to the Price deal and did the best they could, young player-wise.

Alex Verdugo is a young player, yes, but he's never put up 550 plate appearances in a season, and he ended up injured again last year. Brusdar Graterol throws 100 mph and looks the part ... of a reliever, perhaps. Poor command and an unimpressive changeup had the Twins putting him in the bullpen this year. For Betts, who is projected to be the second-best player in baseball next year, a league-average corner outfielder and a reliever seems like a light return, years of control or not.

So you throw Price into the deal and it makes more sense ... until most recent reports say the Red Sox paid down half of Price's remaining salary. Would a team go to three years and \$45 million for a pitcher with Price's lengthy track record? Dallas Keuchel just got three years and \$55 million, so the guess here is yes. Now Price isn't quite a salary dump and the deal becomes a little light for the Red Sox.

The Twins? They get a top-50 starter in Kenta Maeda, and one with four pitches. Perhaps they see one that could be tweaked for more success going forward. Even if not, they seem to have decided that Graterol was a reliever, and for that reliever, they get Maeda, who becomes their third-best starting pitcher and one who has proved he can move to the bullpen when someone like, oh, Rich Hill gets healthy. And Maeda comes on a cheap, incentive-laden deal that rewarded him only around \$8.5 million last year for 150 better-than-league-average innings.

Maybe the Twins paid a hefty price for that upgrade in the middle of their staff, but they need to win now. Maybe Graterol or Verdugo will be long-term assets for a Red Sox team convinced Betts wouldn't sign with them. Maybe they'll forget this trade in Boston eventually. Maybe.

But there's one definite: The Dodgers, who have been so close to winning it all, just got a top-five player in baseball, and they didn't give up one of their best young players for that pleasure. This is a definite win for them.

Chad Jennings, *The Athletic* Boston

The best player Chaim Bloom inherited as Red Sox chief baseball officer was also his most fraught complication. Mookie Betts had become a perennial MVP candidate, but he'd also made clear he intended to become a free agent. And so the dilemma: Keep Betts in pursuit of one more title, or trade him in search of long-term stability? After three months on the job, Bloom chose the trade.

By packing Betts with David Price, the blockbuster became an unmistakable salary dump. The Red Sox got two promising young players, and they moved below the luxury-tax threshold after spending the past two years as the highest-spending organization in the game.

It's a shocking move. One that had been debated by fans and media for months, if not years, but shocking just the same. Boston's best homegrown player since Dustin Pedroia — if not since Roger Clemens — was traded away because the Red Sox couldn't sign him and wanted to cut payroll.

Jen McCaffrey, *The Athletic Boston*

The loss of Mookie Betts is undoubtedly a significant blow to the Red Sox on the field and among their fan base. In an offseason in which the team has been embroiled in scandal and is still without a manager days ahead of spring training, to deal away a franchise cornerstone player is an aggressive move.

Boston's efforts to sign Betts to a contract extension before he hits free agency next winter seemed to have all but stalled, with Betts continuing to make clear his desire to test the open market. The night the Red Sox fired former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, Betts was asked how it might affect his extension talks with the team.

"It doesn't really matter who's there; it's going to be the same answer. Nothing's gonna change," he said. "This is proof that this is a business. Like I said, I love it here, but definitely this is still a business."

On Tuesday night, the Red Sox removed emotion from the equation and struck a business decision they felt put them in the best position for the future, shipping Betts and David Price to the Dodgers. Price's departure similarly leaves a hole in the Red Sox rotation, one that already lost Rick Porcello earlier this winter. But in return, the Red Sox are getting two young, controllable players as well as the financial flexibility ownership had set as a goal (not a mandate) in September.

Outfielder Alex Verdugo will not be expected to fill Betts' shoes one-for-one, but his potential is promising after one full year in the majors in 2019 in which he hit .294 with 22 doubles and 12 homers in 106 games. Right-hander Brusdar Graterol was among the top 50 prospects in baseball when he debuted for the Twins last year, appearing in 10 games with a 9.3 K/9 over 9 2/3 innings. He could eventually slot into the Red Sox rotation.

The only certainty of this blockbuster trade, whether it ultimately proves brilliant or regrettable, is that it will define the career and legacy of Chaim Bloom, Boston's new chief baseball officer.

Pedro Moura, *The Athletic L.A.*

The Dodgers did what their fans wanted. They added a superstar. The cost was hefty, but not outrageously so. And the important thing is that Mookie Betts gives them, pretty clearly, the best odds in baseball to make the World Series. They now look a lot like a 100-win team in a National League that might not produce another 95-win team.

The two players the Dodgers surrendered are safe bets to provide surplus value but poor bets to produce superstar-caliber campaigns. And in pursuit of one of baseball's best, the Dodgers could afford to sacrifice a few above-average players. Young outfielder Alex Verdugo fits that bill. Kenta Maeda, who heads to Minnesota, does too. But Andrew Friedman once again held on to the team's top prospects and preserved its starting-pitching depth.

Fans have long complained the Friedman-era Dodgers care more about the future than the present. This is a deal made with only 2020 in sight.

Aaron Gleeman, *The Athletic Minnesota*

Minnesota's offseason-long quest for impact pitching didn't go as planned. It wanted to sign Zack Wheeler but instead wound up pivoting to a much different kind of big splash by handing the largest free-agent deal in team history to third baseman Josh Donaldson. That move signaled the Twins were focusing on the short

term and willing to be aggressive in a way they never were under the previous regime, and this shocking follow-up trade checks both of those boxes again.

Graterol has the best raw stuff of any Twins prospect ever, combining a 103 mph fastball with a devastating slider. However, last week Twins officials said they now see the 21-year-old phenom as a reliever, hinting that they didn't believe in Graterol's ability to hold up as a starter. He's very capable of becoming an elite reliever, but if the team no longer sees him as a future impact starter, that sheds some light on why it'd make such a controversial, seemingly uncharacteristic trade.

This is a move for right now, and you don't spend \$92 million on a 34-year-old to not push more chips into the middle. Maeda will step into the rotation's third spot, behind José Berríos and Jake Odorizzi, with Michael Pineda and Rich Hill slated to join midseason. Not only has Maeda been a very good, versatile pitcher for the Dodgers, but his unique, team-friendly contract (\$3 million per year, plus incentives, through 2023) was also no doubt part of why he appealed to the Twins so much.

This offseason, the Twins have signed a superstar free agent, traded away an elite prospect, gone all-in for 2020 and been one of the most aggressive teams in baseball at every turn. That'll take some getting used to for a fan base accustomed to the exact opposite, but it's more evidence that, for better or worse, this isn't the old Minnesota Twins.

Mookie Betts still has his eye on free agency, even if a trade changes the equation

Ken Rosenthal

For the sake of discussion, let's assume WEEI's Lou Merloni was correct in his report about the Red Sox's negotiations with Mookie Betts, correct in saying the team offered Betts \$300 million last offseason and Betts countered by asking for \$420 million.

Unbecoming as it might have been for those numbers to go public, they explain why the Sox felt compelled to trade their homegrown superstar and potential Hall of Famer to the Dodgers on Tuesday rather than keep him through his walk year.

If not \$300 million, Betts turned down some other astronomical sum, reinforcing that he wanted to determine his value on the open market. Heck, even if the number was \$300 million, that's the amount the Padres paid Manny Machado in free agency and \$30 million less than the Phillies paid Bryce Harper. Machado and Harper were free agents at 26. Betts will be two years older when he hits the market, but less flawed and more accomplished than both.

In other words, worth more.

He is going free. Players who attain six years of service, as Betts will by the end of the season, have a right to go free. Betts' rejection of the Red Sox's various overtures does not mean he disliked Boston (he has never indicated as much). Nor does it mean the Sox should have just thrown more money at him (some club officials thought \$300 million was a risk for a 5-foot-9, 180-pound outfielder who might wear down physically). But now the entire equation changes, for both the team and the player.

Some Sox players were less than thrilled at last year's trade deadline when former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski explained his decision not to add bullpen help by saying, "I think if we were closer to first place, I would have been open-minded to some of the other things." Dombrowski was not wrong about his club — the Sox entered July 31 nine games back in the AL East and finished 19 back. But if some players perceived his message as a concession, how will they view the trade of Betts by Dombrowski's replacement, Chaim Bloom, just a week before the start of spring training?

The Red Sox had perhaps only an outside chance to overcome the Yankees and Rays this season if they had kept Betts, and now that chance becomes almost minuscule. This time, management cannot simply play the greed card with the expectation that fans will accept Betts as the villain. For Betts, the 2018 American

League MVP, and left-hander David Price, the 2018 AL Comeback Player of the Year (though somewhat of a disappointment in Boston overall), the Sox will receive outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins, who will acquire starter Kenta Maeda from LA to round out the deal. As of Tuesday night, the trade was still pending medical reviews.

Some fans will understand the rationale. Many others will not want to hear the front office and ownership babbling about an infusion of young talent and an increased likelihood of getting under the luxury-tax threshold. The Sox, even if they felt compelled to make this move rather than lose Betts for only a draft pick at the end of the season, are just going to have to wear it.

But here's the thing about this unfortunate separation: Betts is going to have to wear it, too. The pressure of playing with a new team as he approaches free agency. The expectations of Dodgers fans who will expect him to be the missing piece for a team trying to win its first World Series since 1988. The nonstop chatter about his next contract that will only intensify now that his motives are clear.

While Boston can be a difficult place to play, the scrutiny of the media and fan base can enhance the appreciation of a player, too. Sox fans first became enamored of Betts' rare talent when he was in the minors, then embraced him as one of their own after he made his major-league debut in 2014. Betts earned their trust with the way he carried himself, both as a player and as a person. Had he stayed long-term, many fans would have celebrated him for his loyalty and given him at least some benefit of the doubt once he inevitably started to decline.

Dodgers fans might not be as demanding as Sox fans, but they are undeniably restless due to the team's 32-year title drought. Fairly or not, they will expect nothing less than brilliance from Betts — and if he somehow flops, they probably will not be forgiving. The same dynamic will be in effect if he departs as a free agent, joining his third team in three years. Fans of his new club will not care about what he achieved in the past. They will see only what is in front of them, and the size of his contract.

Betts repeatedly has shown he is poised and gifted enough to handle whatever challenges come his way. Sox people, however, will tell you that he is quite hard on himself, even when performing at levels most players will never attain. And while he is joining a team that led the NL in runs last season — a team featuring reigning NL MVP Cody Bellinger and seven others who hit 15 or more homers — it would not be shocking to see him go through an adjustment period in a new city, new league and new environment.

Then again, how bad can it possibly get? Betts' 2019 season was a step back from his MVP effort in '18, but he was still worth \$53 million according to Fangraphs' dollars metric (Wins Above Replacement converted to a dollar scale based on what a player would earn in free agency). Machado got his \$300 million after raising significant concerns about his style of play with the Dodgers during the 2018 postseason. Betts' numbers at Dodger Stadium might not be what they were at Fenway, but advanced metrics account for park effects, so it shouldn't diminish his value.

Some teams might worry that Betts, with his relatively slight build, will break down in his 30s from the constant pounding of playing 162-game seasons. But no one can predict the future health of any player, and Betts has been mostly durable, averaging 148 games in his five full seasons. He might not be considered as ideal a free-agent target as Gerrit Cole, who is a pitcher no less. But he should be pretty close.

Do not get caught up in the Mike Trout comparison: The argument that Betts isn't as good as Trout is not necessarily relevant to their respective contracts. Trout signed his extension — \$360 million in new money over 10 years — when he was not one but two years away from free agency. Imagine what he might have earned if he had remained eligible to hit the open market after this season, entering his age 29 campaign. Here's guessing his average annual value would have been more than \$36 million. His AAV should be more than \$36 million.

Or, to put it another way, if Cole could match Trout's AAV in free agency by signing a nine-year, \$324 million contract, why shouldn't an everyday player exceed it? Betts resisted one offer after another from the Red Sox knowing he was that player, knowing he could push the market.

He wanted to be free. He is going to be free. His trade to the Dodgers amounts to a slight detour, but his destination remains the same.

Goodbye, Mookie: Remembering Betts' best moments with Red Sox

Jen McCaffrey

After months — and really years — of trade speculation surrounding Mookie Betts, his time in Boston has come to an end.

The Red Sox dealt Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers as part of a blockbuster trade on Tuesday night. The Red Sox will receive a package that includes Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins pitcher Brusdar Graterol.

Through 815 regular and postseason season games, Betts captivated Boston with dazzling defense and eye-popping offensive numbers. He became the face of the Red Sox, won a World Series with them and ascended to the rarified echelon inhabited by only the premier players in Major League Baseball.

There's a reason he had nine full pages dedicated to his career accomplishments in the 2019 Red Sox media guide. Dustin Pedroia (having played more than twice as many years as Betts) is the only other player who took up that many pages.

Since his debut in June 2014, Betts leads baseball in runs (613) and doubles (229) is second in extra-base hits (394) and fourth in total hits (965). With four All-Star appearances, one AL MVP trophy and four straight top-10 MVP finishes to go with four Gold Gloves, Betts solidified himself as one of the game's best.

Yet his excellence was so often taken for granted that when he had a pedestrian start to the 2019 season before surging back in the second half, his year-end totals of a .295 average and .915 OPS were still considered something of a down year for him. He finished the year leading the Red Sox in WAR (6.8) for the fifth straight season.

Betts' place in Red Sox history is secure. He is already one of the best players in the roughly 120 year-history of the franchise. Now that he's been traded, however, we won't get to learn where he might have stood among the pantheon of franchise greats like Ted Williams, Jim Rice and David Ortiz, had he spent more years here. The Red Sox may still get an opportunity to recruit him back to Boston if he reaches free agency at the end of the season, but for now Betts is a memory around Fenway.

So, let's look back at some of the moments that defined the past six years for Betts in Boston:

June 29, 2014: Betts' debut

Drafted in the fifth round in 2011, Betts struggled through his first full year in the minors before taking off in 2013 and rising rapidly through the Sox system. As an undersized second baseman, there still wasn't much certainty about Betts' future largely because Dustin Pedroia was a Red Sox mainstay at the spot. Betts opened 2014 in Double-A Portland and hit .355 in 54 games, with box score check-ins on his progress a daily ritual that season. He started to play some outfield while in Portland before a promotion to Triple-A Pawtucket where he continued mashing — all but forcing the Red Sox to call him up in late June, after only a month in Triple-A. The Red Sox were in New York and Betts debuted in right field at Yankee Stadium, going 1-for-3 with a walk and a run scored. Though he returned to Pawtucket for a few more games in July and August, Betts had sparked life into a listless 2014 team and after he was called back up to Boston on Aug. 17, he never returned to the minors.

Sept. 25, 2015: Betts over-the-wall catch saving Rich Hill's shutout

The 2015 season was rough for the Red Sox, who finished last in the AL East with a 78-84 record. But Betts' first full season in the majors offered reasons to watch. The Red Sox had signed veteran pitcher Rich

Hill out of independent ball and were aiming to help him resurrect his career. During a September call-up, Hill impressed more every time he came to the mound. On Sept. 25, Betts kept Hill's gem at Fenway against the Orioles intact. Hill had allowed just two hits and a walk while striking 10 through 8 2/3 innings. But the complete-game shutout appeared to be no more with two outs in the ninth when Chris Davis launched a deep fly ball to right field. Betts raced back, flipped halfway over the bullpen wall and corralled the ball, ending the game and saving Hill's pristine line.

Aug. 14, 2016: Three home runs, eight RBIs

Betts had already started to make a name for himself as a force offensively over the first year-plus of his career, but his 2016 season really elevated him he hit .318 with an .897 OPS and 31 homers in 158 games. He finished second to Mike Trout for AL MVP. On Aug. 14 in a 16-2 thrashing of the Diamondbacks, Betts went 4-for-6 with his second three-homer game of the season, driving in a career-high eight runs. Two of those three homers came off Zack Greinke. At age 23, Betts became the youngest player with two three-homer games in a season. He and Ted Williams were the only Red Sox players to have hit multiple three-homer games in one year. Meanwhile, this game helped kick-start a Red Sox surge in the standings. They were in third place at the time, two games back in the division before finishing the year by winning the division up four games.

Sept. 23, 2016: Betts does The Carlton

Normally quiet and understated, Betts flashed some personality as part of the Red Sox outfield's Win, Dance, Repeat phenomenon in 2016 and 2017, where the outfielders would convene after each game on the outfield grass to perform semi-choreographed dance routines. Betts delivered perhaps his most memorable routine after a game versus Tampa that September, when he busted out The Carlton — the goofy, beloved, arm-swinging dance popularized by Alfonso Ribero's character, Carlton Banks, on the 1990s sitcom "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" — as Jackie Bradley Jr. and Brock Holt pretended to hold video cameras to record him.

Red Sox left fielder Brock Holt (12), center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. (25) and right fielder Mookie Betts
Betts and the Win, Dance Repeat routine became a staple for the Red Sox. (Kim Klement-USA Today)

July 12, 2018: 13-pitch grand slam

Betts' MVP season in 2018 was otherworldly as he finished with a .346 average to win the AL batting title, the first for a Red Sox player since Bill Mueller in 2003. The most memorable highlight in a year full of them, though, had to be Betts' 13-pitch grand slam at Fenway against Toronto starter J.A. Happ. It marked the first grand slam on the 13th or later pitch of an at-bat since the Cubs' Gary Scott on April 20, 1992. Betts hammered the fourth-inning grand slam (the fourth of his career) to left field to give the Red Sox the lead in a game where they would beat the Blue Jays 6-4.

Aug. 9, 2018: Hitting for the cycle

Given everything he'd accomplished in his first five years as a player, it's almost surprising it took Betts so long to hit for the cycle. In a game at Toronto, Betts singled in the first, tripled in the second, doubled in the fourth and homered in the ninth inning to become the 22nd player in Red Sox history to hit for the cycle.

Oct 18, 2018: Wild leap vs. Houston in ALCS

Widely considered one of the best outfielders in the game, Betts put those skills on display in Houston during the ALCS. In Game 4, Betts leapt to make a catch on a would-be Jose Altuve home run in the bottom of the first. He missed the ball, but officials called fan interference.

The Red Sox won the game 8-6. The following night, Betts made a nearly identical effort to reel in another would-be home run off the bat of Alex Bregman in the sixth.

Oct 24, 2018: Betts donates food to the homeless after World Series Game 2

For all his on-the-field accomplishments, one of the things he did away from the park was just as meaningful. Betts' family was in town for the World Series in Boston and had catered food after the game. Since they were leaving early in the morning for Game 3 in Los Angeles, they decided to donate their leftovers to a group of homeless people outside the Boston Public Library. Betts joined his family in

delivering the food. If the act hadn't been captured on Twitter, it's likely no one would have known about the act of kindness.

July 26, 2019: Yet another three-homer game

Betts added to his legacy in July with his fifth three-homer game, which gave him the most in Red Sox history (Ted Williams had three three-homer games). Betts joined just seven others in baseball history with as many as five three-homer games: Sammy Sosa (6), Johnny Mize (6), Joe Carter (5), Carlos Delgado (5), Dave Kingman (5), Mark McGwire (5), and Alex Rodriguez (5). Betts recorded his fifth three-homer game in fewer games (747) than any of those players. He also became the only player ever to hit three or more homers in a game five times prior to turning 27. In a season when Betts' numbers weren't as strong as his 2018 campaign, he extended his franchise records for most leadoff homers (20) and multi-homer games as a leadoff hitter (16).

Red Sox will one day be haunted by decision to trade Mookie Betts

Steve Buckley

It wasn't so much that the Red Sox decided to trade Mookie Betts. It's probably closer to the mark that they were resigned to trading him, this after concluding there was no way they'd be able to keep their perennial All-Star right fielder beyond 2020.

If you're a wise, ledger-savvy Red Sox follower with a grasp of the business side of baseball — and that's practically a requirement for all sports fans these days, is it not? — perhaps you'll make your peace with the deal, if only grudgingly. You'll agree, or hope, that the prospects Boston has received from the Los Angeles Dodgers for Betts and David Price on Tuesday — Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins pitcher Brusdar Graterol — become key ingredients in a rebooted Red Sox future. All teams need to rebuild. Maybe it's just Boston's turn. Right?

But wait a minute. While making this deal might work out on multiple levels — such as getting Betts' \$27 million salary for 2020 and Price's remaining \$96 million off the books, a big step toward shrinking the Boston payroll below the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold — it's also possible the Red Sox will one day regret what they've done.

And I am here to state, in no uncertain terms, that the Red Sox will one day be haunted by this trade — even if it's later disclosed that Betts planned all along to play it out in Boston, file for free agency and then move on.

There's a short-term reason and a long-term reason it's truly bad news the Red Sox traded Betts. The short-term reason is easily explained: With Betts in the lineup and Chris Sale and Price back to full health, the 2020 Red Sox could have been pretty good. The Yankees do look stacked, but this is baseball. Things happen.

The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal recently wrote: "The Red Sox could always move Betts at the deadline and perhaps get a return comparable to what they would receive now. Such a strategy, though, would entail risk. Betts might get injured or slump in the first half."

And that's true. But it's all risk, year in and year out. The Red Sox could have focused on a championship in 2020; instead, it looks like they're focusing on what comes after 2020.

I mentioned there's a long-term reason the Red Sox will rue the day they traded Mookie Betts. Here goes: I believe Betts, already one of the top players in the game, is on a trajectory toward being one of baseball's next iconic figures. His physicality suggests he is an athlete who takes care of himself, which is half the battle, and his away-from-the-game activities — geez, he enters bowling tournaments — suggest he's less likely to get old fast, which is the other half of the battle.

Then again, perhaps we should break it down to thirds: one-third of it is keeping in shape, one-third of it is staying out of trouble and one-third of it is luck. And Betts has been lucky so far in that he has not been a frequent flyer on the medic's table. We're talking offseason arthroscopic surgery on his right knee after the 2016 campaign, a 10-day injured list stint in 2018 because of a left abdominal strain ... and not much else. The man plays.

Had Betts remained with the Red Sox, he might have been Boston's next Yaz, its next Rice, its next Big Papi. I'm leaving Ted Williams off this list of nexts because of something the Splendid Splinter once put in writing: "A man has to have goals — for a day, for a lifetime — and that was mine, to have people say, 'There goes Ted Williams, the greatest hitter who ever lived.'"

Ted backed that up, all of it. David Ortiz was certainly the clutchiest of clutch hitters in Red Sox history, and I'll add that historically he's even more important to the franchise than was Williams, what with the three World Series championships, but nobody hit like Teddy Ballgame.

But I see Betts, and, yes, I see a Yaz — an all-phases-of-the-game superstar who electrified Fenway in the '60s and '70s and then did a few seasons of curtain calls in the early '80s.

That could have been Mookie Betts with Boston. He has already won a Most Valuable Player Award. He has, in fact, received MVP votes in each of his five full seasons in the big leagues. The converted second baseman has already won four Gold Gloves in right field. The Red Sox have had many solid defensive right fielders in their history — Tony Conigliaro, Reggie Smith, Trot Nixon and J.D. Drew, to name a handful — but Betts is second only to Dwight Evans, one of the best in the game's history. (And best of luck, Mr. Evans, when the Hall of Fame's Modern Baseball Committee meets again in December 2022.)

This will be Mookie Betts' age-27 season. For perspective, Carl Yastrzemski's age-27 season was his bust-out season, as he won the Triple Crown and MVP for the 1967 "Impossible Dream" Red Sox.

That Betts hasn't owned Boston the way Yaz did in the '60s or the way Ortiz did for a good chunk of this century is a baseball problem, not a Betts problem. It's one thing to be an All-Star, but baseball needs more stars, period, and Mookie Betts, I believe without any fancy stat to back it up, can be that star. He has the smile. He shows emotion on the basepaths. He already has the distinction of being instantly identified with the mere utterance of just one name. Mookie!

MLB, and the Red Sox in particular, keep talking about growing the game with kids. And in Boston, Mookie is the player all the kids know. Or used to, anyway.

He should have been a member of the Red Sox for life, or most of it. Now he's the 21st century equivalent of Carlton Fisk playing for the White Sox, except unlike Pudge, he didn't submit a singular defining moment (Game 6, '75 World Series) or play enough seasons in Boston to come back someday to get his number retired.

Maybe one of these Boston-bound prospects emerges as a future MVP. Maybe he'll win a bunch of Gold Gloves. Maybe he'll play on a World Series winner.

And maybe he'll play 12-15 years with Fenway Park as his home address and then go to Cooperstown wearing a Red Sox cap.

But probably not, because it doesn't work that way anymore.

I believe Mookie Betts will wind up in the Hall of Fame. When he gets there, he won't be wearing a Red Sox cap.

*** *The New York Post***

Red Sox trading Mookie Betts, David Price to Dodgers in blockbuster

Mark Fischer

The Yankees' path to a World Series just became a lot easier, but winning it might be a bit more challenging.

In a blockbuster trade Tuesday that had been in the works for weeks, the Boston Red Sox sent superstar right fielder Mookie Betts, pitcher David Price and cash to the Los Angeles Dodgers as part of a three-way deal that also includes the Twins, The Post's Joel Sherman confirmed.

The Red Sox acquired Dodgers' 23-year-old outfielder Alex Verdugo, who hit .294/.342/.475 in 106 games last season, and 21-year-old right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins. Graterol was among the Twins' top prospects, and is known for a fastball that can reach triple digits, according to MLB.com.

The Dodgers, who have played in two of the last three World Series, were looking to add a superstar after missing out on Yankees ace Gerrit Cole. This deal puts them right with the Yankees as the two favorites to win it all next season.

Betts, who agreed to a \$27 million salary for 2020 (a record for an arbitration-eligible player), will become an unrestricted free agent next offseason and there was no guarantee the Red Sox would be able to re-sign him to what could be a \$400 million contract (Mike Trout's 12-year, \$426 million deal with the Angels, signed last March, stands as the baseball record.)

That led the Red Sox to shop Betts with a focus on building for the future under new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, who helped turn the Tampa Bay Rays into a playoff contender.

The 27-year-old Betts won the American League MVP in 2018 and the World Series the same season. He also is a four-time Gold Glove winner.

Price, 34, is owed \$96 million over the next three seasons. After being a postseason hero with the Sox in 2018, Price struggled last season with a 4.28 ERA in 107 1/3 innings.

As part of the deal, the Twins acquired 31-year-old righty hurler Kenta Maeda from the Dodgers, who was 10-8 with a 4.04 ERA in 153 innings as mostly a reliever and spot starter.

In a separate deal, the Dodgers traded outfielder Joc Pederson and power-hitting outfield prospect Andy Pages to the Angels for infielder Luis Rengifo. Pederson, 29, hit .249/.339/.538 with 36 home runs and 74 RBIs in 149 games last season. The Dodgers and Pederson were headed to arbitration after not agreeing on a contract earlier this offseason. Rengifo, 22, hit .238/.321/.364 with seven home runs and 33 RBIs in 108 games with the Angels last season.

All deals are pending physicals.

Dodgers' brilliant Mookie Betts trade puts them on Yankees collision course

Joel Sherman

The Yankees bought Gerrit Cole — no worse than the second- or third-best pitcher in the world — and lost nothing devastating from a 103-win team. Now, the Dodgers have obtained Mookie Betts — no worse than the second- or third-best player in the world — and have taken few meaningful hits from a 106-win roster.

So if you are doing winners and losers this offseason, think about Fox Sports, which might just get the first Yankees-Dodgers World Series since 1981.

Yep, there is a long way from here to there, and how often do the overdogs fulfill their promise? But the coastal superpowers made the biggest scores of winter, adding prime-aged superstars to already stacked teams. The Yankees acted quickly by outbidding the Dodgers for Cole at the winter meetings. It took the rest of the offseason for Los Angeles to land its difference-maker, but Betts is no consolation prize.

The 2018 AL MVP will probably play in right next to the 2019 NL MVP Cody Bellinger in center. They will headline a dynamic lineup and elite defense, especially in the outfield. And the Dodgers obtained Betts and David Price without suffering a massive hit to their payroll or future, so this was a brilliant maneuver by a franchise that has won seven straight NL West titles, but no World Series since 1988.

The prospect the Dodgers sent to the Red Sox in this three-team deal that also involved the Twins was Alex Verdugo, a talented lefty-hitting outfielder. But the Dodgers have done such a brilliant job of developing talent that Verdugo was a price worth paying. They also moved Kenta Maeda to Minnesota and — in a separate deal — Joc Pederson to the Angels. The removal of Maeda and Pederson and the expectation that Boston is taking on about half of Price's remaining three years at \$96 million means Los Angeles might not even go over the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold.

If healthy — a huge if — Price would compensate for the Dodgers' biggest loss of the offseason, Hyun-jin Ryu (who signed with Toronto) and slot in with Walker Buehler and Clayton Kershaw atop the Dodgers' rotation. Los Angeles also has Ross Stripling and Alex Wood plus talented youngsters Tony Gonsolin, Dustin May and Julio Urias for depth. But the key is Betts, who is just 27. He helps make the division favorites even more so and gives the Dodgers a multifaceted offensive player to key a lineup that too often has swung and missed its way out of October.

Betts can be a free agent after the season and the Dodgers were planning on pursuing him then, but got him now. Boston determined Betts was gone in a year and decided to maximize his value, gauging an AL East in which the Yanks project better and so do the Rays. Boston's farm system is poor and could take a further hit if a sign-stealing investigation leads to draft-pick penalties, as it did with Houston.

Also believe what you hear folks say in an unguarded moment before public relations spin. Red Sox owner John Henry said at the close of last season that Boston would go under the tax threshold in 2020 before amending that it was not a mandate. It was. Boston without Betts and Price are now projected under \$208 million.

It came with substantial pain — Betts is the Red Sox's best homegrown prospect since perhaps Wade Boggs and Roger Clemens. But they did get Verdugo plus hard-throwing Brusdar Graterol from the Twins — think of it as 11 years of potentially high-end service time for one year of Betts. Plus, Boston still has lots of talent. The idea that will form now that the Red Sox cannot be at least a wild-card contender is wrong.

Minnesota is shooting for more than that, which is why it gave up Graterol for Maeda. But it feels like too much. Maeda is good, but a bottom-of-the-rotation starter, particularly out of the NL and Dodger Stadium. Graterol is a well-regarded prospect. But the Twins haven't won a playoff game since 2004 and a title since 1991, so they are playing for now.

The Angels needed pitching even more than the Twins, but in a separate deal landed Pederson, who brutalizes righties, for utility man Luis Rengifo. The Angels have a surplus of outfielders, particularly with top prospect Jo Adell nearly ready. So maybe there is a future trade for a pitcher to be made.

For now, though, the most important outfielder who moved is Mookie Betts, whose arrival in LA just super-sized the team already the favorite to win the NL pennant.

*** *The USA Today***

Opinion: For Mookie Betts, a glorious run with an unsatisfying end in Boston

Gabe Lacques

It will be a summer to savor for Los Angeles Dodgers fans, rich beyond their dreams with MVPs playing alongside each other in the Dodger Stadium outfield, Mookie Betts and Cody Bellinger putting on five-tool clinics every night in pursuit of an elusive championship.

Yet before we ponder the promise of Cody and Mookie and so much California love, it's worthwhile to pause a moment and consider the Betts era in Boston — and why the three-team trade that marked its end Tuesday night symbolizes the best and worst of the game.

Boston cannot ask anything more of Betts: He became an American League MVP and World Series champion there, a player far more dynamic and electrifying than any doddering slugger who sparked the Red Sox's first three championships this century.

It's also instructive to ponder what Betts wasn't — in Boston and beyond.

He was loved at Fenway Park, though perhaps not revered. Such is life for an athlete whose career blossomed as David Ortiz's was ending — and Big Papi would remain an outsized presence even in retirement. In another era, Betts might have owned Boston; in this one, he was another great athlete showering an embarrassment of championship riches on New England — Brady and Gronk and Papi and Mookie and Bergeron seamlessly blending one season into the next in a haze of Duck Boat celebrations.

WINNERS AND LOSERS: From Dodgers-Red Sox blockbuster trade including Mookie Betts, David Price

IT'S GO TIME: With Mookie Betts on board, it's World Series or bust for Los Angeles Dodgers

Mookie Betts won an MVP and World Series with the Red Sox.

He was known to baseball fans — but not in a manner befitting his greatness.

For all the handwringing over Mike Trout's inability to connect with fans on a national level, it is Betts' relative lack of fame that should horrify baseball executives wondering how their grip on American culture loosened.

Betts is not quite the player Trout is, but the difference between the two is a relative pittance to the casual fan. More significantly, Betts checks every box Trout does not.

He plays in a massive market for a storied franchise. He made the playoffs in three consecutive seasons and has a World Series ring, to boot.

And while Trout warms many an old heart that savors his Mickey Mantle talent in an unassuming, aw-shucks package, it is Betts, an African American star on a huge stage, who represents the diversity of America today, and the audience Major League Baseball so desperately wants to reach.

Yet Betts, perhaps moreso than even Trout, could walk unbothered through the heart of almost any American city in a manner that, say, Patrick Mahomes never could.

Certainly, it is a function of their sports and their positions — Mahomes will never play a game in which he goes 0 for 1 with three walks and hardly touches the ball — that a quarterback for a team in a state the president cannot identify enjoys a higher level of fame than an outfielder in a huge market. But drop-in fans should know Mookie Betts. Playing in front of Mary Hart and Larry King every night in L.A. will only help so much.

Finally, it is more than a little embarrassing that a team such as the Red Sox saw fit to no longer employ Betts. The best player on the best team in franchise history should not merely be considered an "asset" to be bought and sold.

The confetti had barely been swept up from Back Bay in 2018 when the hand-wringing began over how “unsustainable” the Red Sox’s success was, a pearl-clutching that only intensified when baseball ops chief Dave Dombrowski re-signed and extended pitchers Nathan Eovaldi and Chris Sale.

Dombrowski was gone a year later, likely as much a result of internal conflict as his overly aggressive dealmaking. We may never know how earnestly Dombrowski and his replacement, Chaim Bloom, tried to extend Betts, who will make \$27 million in his final year before free agency.

The Red Sox certainly got something for him. Alex Verdugo might win a batting title spraying the ball all over Fenway Park, and might have in him a .330, 30-plus home run campaign that will look fairly Betts-like.

But again: These are the Boston Red Sox. That “getting something for Betts” and “bundling him with a toxic asset” like David Price — another 2018 hero turned fungible commodity — took on far more urgency than actually retaining the superstar is depressing. The franchise is more than capable of delivering what Betts will command — somewhere between Bryce Harper’s \$330 million and Trout’s \$426 million.

Instead, there’s barely any hesitation in uprooting an MVP-caliber player in his prime and “replacing him in the aggregate,” words better suited for places like Oakland or Tampa Bay.

Certainly, there’s a chance all parties are better off. The Red Sox could make good use of their “flexibility,” even if they’re doomed to third place for the foreseeable future. Betts could get another ring in L.A., a town that should take to him warmly, and then he’ll be off to get paid very handsomely.

Perhaps the Dodgers will retain him beyond 2020. More likely, Betts will disappear to Arlington or another outpost where he will be plenty rich, if not appropriately famous.

All we know is it’s over in Boston, where Betts and the Red Sox amplifies the game’s significant beauty.

And, in ushering him out of town, how unsatisfying it can be, too.

Mookie Betts, David Price heading to Dodgers in blockbuster trade with Red Sox

Bob Nightengale

Step aside 2012, we have a new Trade of the Century involving the Boston Red Sox and Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Dodgers, Red Sox and Minnesota Twins have agreed on a three-team trade that will send outfielder Mookie Betts and starter David Price to Los Angeles, according to an official with direct knowledge of the discussions.

The official spoke to USA TODAY Sports on the condition of anonymity because the deal was not yet finalized.

Boston's return package will include outfielder Alex Verdugo from Los Angeles as well as pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol from the Twins. Minnesota will get right-handed pitcher Kenta Maeda from the Dodgers.

Already favorites to win the NL West for an eighth consecutive year, the Dodgers now have an even better shot at reaching World Series for the third time in four years and winning the club's first championship since 1988.

A SAD EXIT: For Mookie Betts, a glorious run with an unsatisfying end in Boston

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Boston won the World Series in 2018 but missed out on the postseason last year, firing GM Dave Dombrowski in September and manager Alex Cora in January for his role in the Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal.

The move clears \$59 million in 2020 salaries for Boston, with Price due \$32 million and Betts \$27 million, though the Red Sox are expected to send money to the Dodgers in the deal.

The Red Sox tried to sign Betts to a long-term deal on several occasions, but were never able to get the deal done. Now, the Dodgers are left to see whether they can keep Betts when he becomes a free agent after this season.

He hit .295 with 29 home runs, 80 RBI and led the majors with 135 runs scored in 2019.

Price signed a seven-year, \$217 million contract with the Red Sox after the 2015 season and is still due \$96 million over the next three years. The 2012 Cy Young winner had a 4.28 ERA in 22 starts last season.

Meanwhile, the Twins strengthen their staff with Maeda, who has a 3.87 ERA in four seasons. The 32-year-old bounced between the rotation and bullpen with the Dodgers, but he should compete for a rotation slot immediately in Minnesota.

Graterol, going from Minnesota to Boston, was one of the Twins' top pitching prospects, reaching the majors in 2019. The Twins planned to use the flamethrower as a reliever this season, but the 21-year-old is expected to be a starter in the long term.

In a separate trade, the Dodgers have agreed to send outfielder Joc Pederson – deemed surplus with Betts aboard – to the neighboring Los Angeles Angels for infielder Luis Rengifo.

*** *Associated Press***

AP sources: Red Sox agree to trade Betts, Price to Dodgers

BOSTON (AP) — Banking on Mookie Betts to be the missing piece in their World Series pursuit, the Los Angeles Dodgers finally pulled off a blockbuster deal with the cost-cutting Red Sox.

Boston agreed to trade the 2018 AL MVP to the Dodgers on Tuesday night, according to two people with knowledge of the deal, packaging Betts with left-hander David Price in a salary dump designed to save the Red Sox tens of millions of dollars and help them dip below baseball's luxury tax threshold.

The Dodgers, eager for a World Series title after losing in the 2017 and '18 Fall Classics, are sending outfielder Alex Verdugo back to the Red Sox. The deal also involves the Minnesota Twins, who are getting right-hander Kenta Maeda from the Dodgers and sending pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol to Boston. Los Angeles will also get cash from Boston to offset some of the \$123 million owed to Betts and Price, but the exact amount was not yet known.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the trade, pending the exchange of medical information, had not been announced.

Betts, who will earn \$27 million this season, has spurned nine-figure offers from the Red Sox for a long-term deal and expressed eagerness to test the free agent market. Boston decided to move him now — a

century after selling Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees — rather than let the four-time All-Star walk after the 2020 season.

One of baseball's best all-around talents, the popular Betts should fit nicely into a Dodgers lineup that also includes reigning NL MVP Cody Bellinger. Los Angeles has won seven straight NL West titles but hasn't celebrated a World Series championship since 1988. They fell in 2018 against Betts and the Red Sox, a year after being defeated by the Houston Astros in seven games.

Price is due \$96 million over the final three years of a \$217 million, seven-year deal he signed before the 2016 season. The 2012 AL Cy Young Award winner missed time last year with a wrist issue and went 7-5 with a 4.28 ERA in 22 starts.

The Dodgers finally pulled off the kind of splashy offseason deal that has eluded them in recent years. They lost out on two primary offseason pursuits when pitcher Gerrit Cole signed with the New York Yankees for \$324 million over nine years and third baseman Anthony Rendon signed a \$245 million, seven-year contract with the rival Angels.

Until now, the Dodgers' top addition this winter was reliever Blake Treinen.

Adding Betts' bat to a lineup that includes Bellinger, Justin Turner, Max Muncy and Corey Seager makes the Dodgers even more fearsome. Their offense led the National League with 886 runs and 279 home runs last year.

Verdugo, a left-handed hitter, batted .294 with 44 RBIs and 12 home runs in 106 games before a back injury in August ended his season early. His outfield defense is average, but at 23 he has time to improve.

Betts' departure deepens the disappointment in Boston, where the New England Patriots sat out the Super Bowl for the first time in four years and face the prospect of quarterback Tom Brady leaving as a free agent. The Red Sox are now without the best player, the top executive and the manager who led them to a franchise-record 108 wins and the World Series championship a year ago.

The deal makes sense only in the complicated economics of baseball's collective bargaining tax, which penalizes a team for spending over a preset limit — \$208 million for 2020. What's more, a ballclub that surpasses the threshold in three straight years pays a top rate of 95%; on the other hand, if a team goes under the limit for a season, the penalty for their next violation resets to the lowest rate of 20%.

This deal is expected to get Boston below that threshold.

Owner John Henry said in September, after the team missed the playoffs for the first time since 2015, that the Red Sox “need to be under the CBT.” Team president Sam Kennedy later walked back the comments and said that was “a goal but not a mandate.” After he was hired, Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom said: “The goal remains to be competitive always. 2020 is important. So are 2021, 2022 and beyond.”

Undoubtedly, the focus is now on the future.

The Red Sox remain without a manager three weeks after firing Alex Cora for his role in the Houston Astros 2017 sign-stealing scandal; Major League Baseball has not announced the results of its investigation into whether Cora implemented a similar scheme when he took over in Boston in '18. Pitchers and catchers are due to report to spring training in one week.

The new manager will need to sort out a lineup that is missing a player who batted leadoff and won four straight Gold Gloves in the outfield, as well as Price, a five-time All-Star.

Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez was among the first to react to reports of the deal on social media, sending out only a sad-face emoji.

Graterol is a hard-throwing righty who ranked 83rd on MLB.com's most recent list of the top 100 prospects in baseball. He made his major league debut last season with the Twins and posted a 4.66 ERA in 10 relief appearances. A starter in the minors, he faces questions about his durability but could get a chance to pitch in Boston's rotation. If not, he's thrown as hard as 102 mph and could be an effective late-inning reliever.