

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, February 6, 2020

*** *The Boston Globe***

Mookie Betts trade held up by medical issues with Brusdar Graterol, report says

Julian McWilliams

It's been more than 24 hours since the Red Sox agreed in principle to a blockbuster three-team trade with the Dodgers and Twins to send superstar Mookie Betts and lefthander David Price to the Los Angeles in exchange for outfielder Alex Verdugo and righthander Brusdar Graterol, who had been acquired by Los Angeles from Minnesota in exchange for pitcher Kenta Maeda. The reason for the delay apparently revolves around issues in the evaluation of Graterol's medical records.

According to a report from Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic, the Red Sox's review of the 21-year-old's medical records led the team to conclude that he is less likely than anticipated to project as a starting pitcher. With that conclusion, according to the report, the Sox may seek additional compensation in the form of an additional player and/or money from either the Twins or Dodgers.

Graterol has had a history of injuries dating to 2015. In June of that year he underwent Tommy John surgery. In May 2018, he dealt with back spasms, followed by shoulder impingement syndrome in 2019. Now, a medical issue concerning Graterol may be keeping the trade from becoming official.

"It would not stun me," one American League scout said. "He's had issues in the past."

The shoulder impingement limited the 21-year-old end Graterol to just over 70 innings combined in the minor leagues and big leagues last year. That said, when he returned from more than two months on the injured list, he showed premium velocity (over 100 m.p.h.) on his sinker.

While there are still what one major league source described as "a lot of moving parts" to the trade, another said that the sides are "continuing to work toward a deal." Rosenthal reported that officials involved in the deal remain confident that it will be completed — just not necessarily in the form of the original Tuesday night agreement.

Why do it? Why now? Answering the lingering questions following the Mookie Betts trade

Alex Speier

When you deal the face of the franchise, a superstar whose talents are matched by few, there is no such thing as a perfect deal — only degrees of imperfection. That's part of the reason why trades such as the one sending Mookie Betts — along with David Price and money to subsidize roughly half of the rest of the \$96 million the lefthander is owed — almost never happen, and more particularly, almost never happen with big-market teams.

Yes, franchises with deep pockets that are intent on contending have traded stars. But that decision usually requires unexpected circumstances, such as visions of contention getting blown up midseason (the trade of Jon Lester by the 2014 Sox, for instance) or demands for a trade (Ken Griffey Jr. with the Mariners before 2000).

A trade of a 27-year-old standout — even one who is a full year from free agency — for a franchise with enormous revenues and a desire to contend almost never happens. That rarity makes it difficult to find the right prism of context through which to view the deal of Betts and Price to the Dodgers for outfielder Alex

Verdugo and righthander Brusdar Graterol. (As of Wednesday night, the deal had not been finalized, the review of player medicals still incomplete.)

Nonetheless, there are questions about the process that shaped the deal.

WHAT WAS THE MOTIVATION?

The Red Sox have been open about their view that getting their payroll under the luxury-tax threshold (\$208 million in 2020) — after two straight years of exceeding it — represented an important goal. The team forged that stance for a variety of reasons.

It's fair to question how much a major league team can or should spend, but insofar as the Red Sox — like every other sports team — operate with a defined budget, getting under the threshold and resetting their tax rates once out every few years allows them to channel more of their spending into players than taxes/penalties.

In the past, when the Sox have reset their tax rates, they've spent heavily in the years that followed. Moreover, with the Rays, Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom was part of a team that thrived even with limited funds.

"It's real salary relief," noted an American League evaluator. "That's something Chaim really knows how to value."

Still, a number of evaluators felt it was impossible to look at the deal and to think that the Red Sox had prioritized on-field return over long-term financial flexibility.

"It's a money dump," said one National League executive. "They chose to clear more money instead of getting more talent."

Another AL evaluator said that once the Sox committed to seeking salary relief, their willingness to pursue it without half-measures made sense — but still didn't clarify whether the deal will ultimately be a good one.

"What did they achieve? I don't know. What it did was give them options. You can't judge it right now," said the evaluator. "They might do something good with those options. They might not do something good with those."

WAS DOING IT NOW THE BEST DECISION?

Did the Red Sox really need to pair Betts with Price in a combination that led to less player return? Was getting rid of Price, and clearing roughly half his remaining salary, sufficient motivation to sacrifice the inclusion of additional talent, whether in a package from the Dodgers (for Betts alone) or arguably the Padres (for Betts, but with the Sox taking Wil Myers)?

The fact that the Sox took the deal they did led to an unflattering review by some in the industry. One NL executive expressed surprise that even while committing to pay roughly half the money owed to Price, the Sox still got just a two-player package. In the eyes of that evaluator, by the time the Sox paid down Price that much, he could have been a trade chip.

Price's value was at a nadir — and was, in fact, negative — in the deal as constructed. His inclusion resulted in less talent going to Boston.

But if healthy, Price might have been able to emerge as a fascinating chip midseason — a proven veteran who now has demonstrated the ability to excel in October, and a master pitch manipulator. Yes, the remaining obligation was huge — but so were those of Zack Greinke (acquired by the Astros at the

deadline last year) and Justin Verlander (acquired by the Astros in August 2017). Both fetched valuable multi-prospect packages with their trading clubs getting considerable salary relief.

There would have been a real risk for the Sox that this deal represented their only chance to shed Price and part of his salary. But the Sox also certainly gave up any chance they had of maximizing their return for Betts (by attaching Price to him) and Price (by trading him at a time when he was a negative asset).

COULD THIS HAVE BEEN DONE EARLIER?

The Dodgers have long coveted Betts, and have long anticipated that taking on Price's contract might be a way to pry the superstar from the Red Sox. Yet according to multiple industry sources, the Red Sox didn't engage Los Angeles in meaningful talks about the outfielder at the Winter Meetings or in the weeks immediately thereafter.

That lack of contact derived in part from LA's efforts to talk to Cleveland about Francisco Lindor, but at least at the Winter Meetings the Sox seemed more focused on discussing a trade of one of their starting pitchers (most frequently Price) than a deal involving Betts. The stance was understandable, but ultimately may have proven costly if it prevented the Sox from having meaningful dialogue with teams about Betts earlier.

Did the Sox miss a chance to discuss Betts with teams when they could have involved even more suitors, before teams spent their money on free agents? And, perhaps more significantly, if the Sox had acted earlier, could they have taken advantage of their newly created financial flexibility to pursue a better-rounded team in 2020?

If the team, for instance, had traded Betts and Price in December — before or after signing Martin Perez to a one-year deal — then it could have reinvested some of the liberated money in a fifth starter, bullpen help, a righthanded outfielder, or some combination. Instead, while the Sox will end up with about \$18 million in flexibility below the \$208 million threshold, they're doing so at a time when there are few remaining options on the free agent market.

In short, getting under the threshold could help the Red Sox pursue premium talent during or after the 2020 season — but the timing of the deal gave the Sox little ability to restock for the coming campaign.

The return for Mookie Betts seems stunningly low

Christopher L. Gasper

Welcome to Salary Dumpsville. Population: Red Sox Nation.

The trade Tuesday night that ended the Mookie Betts era here doesn't look any better in the light of day. That's it?

After an offseason of agonizing, vacillating, endlessly evaluating, and negotiating, the best Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and the baseball ops politburo he oversees could do in a deal for the second-best player in baseball is young Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Minnesota Twins pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol? What happened to the influx of prospects that were going to restock the Sox' fallow farm system with potential sign-stealing draft penalties looming?

The 36-year-old Bloom's first major move with the Red Sox — pending medical clearance — is a doozy and initially a disappointment. Trading Betts to the Dodgers while attaching Hub hardball hostage David Price is going to identify Bloom like his Social Security number for the rest of his baseball career.

The Yalie had better hope the quality of what he got in return for Betts eventually overshadows the quantity. He needs this deal to be what the in-season Nomar Garciaparra swap was for former Red Sox

general manager Theo Epstein and what the last salary dump the Red Sox conducted with the Dodgers in 2012 was for Ben Cherington. Both of those deals begat World Series winners (2004 and 2013).

Here's hoping Bloom has the Ambien handy, a la Theo. There could be some sleepless nights ahead as he reshapes the Sox in the aftermath of this payroll purge.

I warned that the return for Betts, a free agent flight risk with a \$27 million salary, would be underwhelming, but it's downright depressing that this was the best the Sox could do after a tortuous offseason of will-they-or-won't-they with Mookie. In fairness to Bloom, we don't know what his marching orders were from ownership. But we can deduce them from the composition of the giveaway, err, trade.

This appears to be a straight-up salary dump dressed in trade's clothing. The real return the Red Sox desired to pull the trigger on a Betts trade wasn't talent. It was the rebalancing of their books to avoid paying the luxury tax for a third straight season.

The Sox used a five-tool franchise player in his prime as a chaser to wash down the awful taste of the Dodgers swallowing a significant portion of the three years and \$96 million remaining on Price. The Sox prioritized peeling off payroll over procuring talent to slink below the \$208 million tax threshold.

Yuck.

Still, you'd think that Bloom could have squeezed a little bit more out of his old boss in Tampa Bay, Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman, overseer of one of baseball's most fecund farm systems. Bloom's mentor might have fleeced his player procurement Padawan. He can now team Betts, the 2018 American League MVP, with 2019 National League MVP Cody Bellinger. He gave up precious little to do it.

The Dodgers will be the first team to have MVPs from the previous two seasons in the same outfield since the 1963 New York Yankees boasted Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris.

The Dodgers were never going to part with their two top prospects, infielder Gavin Lux or pitcher Dustin May, to rent Betts as they try to end a World Series drought dating back to 1988, even if Betts is baseball's answer to Kawhi Leonard. But Bloom should've been able to convince them to part with infielder Jeter Downs or one of their surfeit of pitching prospects such as Josiah Gray or Tony Gonsolin. These were all names bandied about in reports forecasting the inevitable trade.

Instead, Bloom settled for young outfielder Alex Verdugo, part of a surplus of LA outfield options, and a flame-throwing lottery ticket in the Venezuelan Graterol. One ESPN talent evaluator pegged the lefthanded-hitting Verdugo's ceiling as being another J.D. Drew. That's both comforting and distressing.

Drew was an immensely talented player who never looked fully engaged, couldn't stay healthy, and made only one All-Star team (with the Sox in 2008) during a quality career. He was the poster-child for torpor.

The 21-year-old Graterol made his major league debut last season for Minnesota pitching out of the bullpen. But he looks to be boom or bust, replete with red flags. He missed the entire 2016 season after having Tommy John surgery and sat out more than two months last season with a shoulder impingement.

And for someone with a triple-digit fastball, his strikeout numbers weren't eye-popping. Graterol struck out 61 batters in 61 minor league innings, then in 10 relief appearances for the Twins during the regular season fanned 10 batters in 9 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

He's a scratch ticket. He could be worth five bucks or \$1 million.

Maybe Verdugo turns out to be Christian Yelich, and Graterol morphs into Felix Hernandez. Bloom's old team, Tampa Bay, benefits from an uncanny knack for identifying undervalued assets. That's part of the reason the Sox hired Bloom to replace the deposed Dave Dombrowski.

Let there be no doubt, though, where the Sox' priorities reside in 2020. The real innovative thinking they desired to import from the AL East rival Rays wasn't creative team building, but creative cost-cutting.

The Sox had to deal Betts, who showed zero signs of forgoing free agency to remain here. The writing was on the left-field Wall. The Sox and Betts were acres apart on a new deal.

Mookie is a joy to watch. But he never struck one as a Sox lifer like fellow Boston MVPs Ted Williams, Yaz, and Jim Rice. He never looked fully comfortable as the franchise fulcrum like David Ortiz, who became synonymous with the city.

All the caterwauling from fans and media about not wanting to see a charismatic, dynamic MVP and four-time All-Star depart is understandable. Betts is a generational player to root for. But, removing sentimentality, there was only one pragmatic business decision.

What's frustrating is that the Sox waited so long pondering their options and got so little in return for Mookie. There's a fine line between deliberation and procrastination. This felt like the latter, waiting until a week before pitchers and catchers report to ship Betts away.

Maybe the overcrowded structure of baseball operations had something to do with that, with Bloom and the holdover Gang of Four — general manager Brian O'Halloran and assistant GMs Eddie Romero, Raquel Ferreira, and Zack Scott — wedded together in an awkward arranged marriage.

Getting five people to reach a consensus on where to go for dinner is a challenge, never mind dealing off a franchise player.

But it's Bloom who will have to wear this deal for better or worse. He's the face of the front office.

It was just more than 15 months ago that Red Sox ownership was gloating over the best team in franchise history, celebrating a World Series title on the same Dodger Stadium diamond that Betts will now call home. They had all the answers then as they danced in the glow of a 119-win tour de force.

Now, the manager that day (Alex Cora), the winning pitcher (Price), and the franchise player (Betts) are all gone. It's a stunning demolition.

Bloom is the one left to pick up the pieces and refashion the Red Sox into a winner. This wasn't a great start.

After trading Mookie Betts and David Price, where do the Red Sox go from here?

Tara Sullivan

The emotional impact of the Tuesday night trade that sent Mookie Betts (and David Price) to Los Angeles isn't fading any time soon, not when you consider how the emotional ties to the teams we love are precisely the reason we care so much, bound as we are to the players and franchises that steal our hearts. When management starts prioritizing business interests over rooting interests, we are understandably angry, undeniably disillusioned, and unabashedly sad.

That's how Red Sox Nation feels today, bidding farewell to a generational talent simply because his future price tag was going to be too high. There's no other way to slice the reality of the trade that shipped Betts off to the West Coast in exchange for two potentially decent players who together don't match Betts's skill set, and with Price thrown in so the Sox could dump more salary.

But of all the swirling emotions roiling an aggravated fan base, the one that doesn't belong is surprise. This is how baseball works in 2020, when managing finances is every bit as demanding as managing rosters, and either process can go badly enough to demand a do-over. When the Sox moved every chip to the center of

the table to win the World Series just two seasons ago, when they broke open their checkbook and stocked the roster to win the franchise's fourth championship since 2004, no one complained.

But the profligate spending in the heady aftermath all but guaranteed a day like today would arrive. With a big-money deal for Nathan Eovaldi (that heroic World Series relief appearance looks awfully expensive in hindsight), a similarly unwise one-year reward for Series MVP Steve Pearce (limited to a measly 29 healthy games in 2019), and an ill-timed extension for the mercurial Chris Sale (who couldn't even make his final World Series start, giving way to Price, and whose injuries have sidelined him for long stretches), there should be little surprise that former president of baseball ops Dave Dombrowski didn't make it through the 2019 season.

So now it's time to pay the price, and behind new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and his history of doing more with less in Tampa Bay, the Red Sox move forward. They move forward without Betts, and without Price, but with a young outfielder (Alex Verdugo) who can play right away where Betts once did and a hard-throwing pitcher (Brusdar Graterol) they hope can eventually take some of the innings Price once threw.

They move forward with a return for Betts that while light in comparison to him is more than the value of the draft pick they would have gotten had he left via free agency at season's end. They move forward unconstrained by the season-long story line of whether Betts would indeed test the market or re-up with the Sox, the same kind of story line that grew tiresome across 16 games with the Patriots and Tom Brady. Imagine how it would have felt after 162 baseball games.

They move forward with the ability to get under the luxury-tax threshold and thus get more payroll flexibility for the upcoming years, a reality that seems ridiculous when that money would be best spent on a player like Betts (or perhaps Betts himself once he's on the open market) but doesn't happen without first parting ways with Betts.

The roller coaster of sports never stops, does it? Was it really only 465 days ago that the Red Sox were atop the baseball world, standing on the same Chavez Ravine field Betts and Price will now call home, celebrating their championship win over the Dodgers? The stunning fall since then has been tough to stomach, a head-spinning plummet to the depths of embarrassment and outrage.

I can still see Alex Cora standing in front of a packed house at the 2019 Boston Baseball Writers dinner, proclaiming that if we thought the previous year had been good, "Just wait till this year."

That didn't turn out so well.

We had spring training with a tired pitching staff that barely pitched. We had a regular-season start with a veteran team that could barely win. We had bursts of hope swallowed by stretches of incompetence, promises of team meetings and defiant reversals that they weren't needed.

We had a trade deadline pass with nary a move to help a battered bullpen, a top executive fired without any public explanation from his bosses, and a limp to the season's finish line with no playoff ticket to be punched.

Then we got to the offseason, with a front office makeover geared toward a rebuild, a Houston sign-stealing scandal that ultimately ended Cora's managerial tenure, a search for his replacement that still is ongoing, and now, a trade of a homegrown talent not simply lauded for his superior skill but beloved for his personality and leadership.

That 2018 title was costly in so many ways, and it's truly a shame that Betts is collateral damage. But as much as our hearts don't want to hear it, our heads have to recognize that this is reality in sports, too. The Red Sox are moving forward, with or without Betts, and with or without you.

What you need to know about Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol, the newest Red Sox

Hayden Bird

The decision to trade Mookie Betts will come under enormous scrutiny, but Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom managed to acquire an interesting pitching prospect in the deal.

Brusdar Graterol, who was one of the top prospects in the Twins organization, has tremendous potential. He ranked 53rd on MLB.com's list of the top 100 prospects in 2019.

Here's the prospect scouting report on Graterol:

"Graterol's stuff continues to get better the more he matures and the further removed from surgery he gets. His fastball touches triple digits and will often sit in the 96-98 mph range, with an ability to maintain velocity deep into starts.

"Throwing with plenty of sink, Graterol misses bats and gets a ton of ground-ball outs off of his fastball. When he committed to throw the harder version of his slider, in the 87-89 mph range, it trended toward plus, but he would back off of it at times. Continued separation between that and his slower curve will help, as will further refinement of his changeup."

According to the Globe's Alex Speier, Graterol projects as a potential front-of-the-rotation starter, or valuable specialist.

He made his major league debut in 2019, pitching $9\frac{2}{3}$ innings over 10 appearances, with 10 strikeouts.

Here are a few things to know about him:

- He has elite velocity

The most notable thing about Graterol is his velocity. During his time in the minor leagues, Graterol once hit 103.8 miles per hour on the radar gun.

He's also shown his overpowering stuff at the major league level:

Here's footage of him warming up in 2018 during his time in the minor leagues:

- The Twins organization and other experts think highly of him

One way to gauge a player's value is by examining what his previous team (and the reporters who cover it) have said about him. In this regard, the Red Sox have reason to be optimistic.

"There is no question that the Twins are opening themselves up to be second-guessed for years to come," wrote Aaron Gleeman, the Twins writer for The Athletic. Gleeman labeled Graterol an "awfully big chip," noting that he was set to place third out of 40 in an upcoming ranking of Twins prospects.

Aside from his ability on the field, Graterol's character was praised in a tweet from Minnesota's Double A affiliate:

- He comes with a history of injuries

Potentially the largest concern regarding Graterol will be durability. As Phil Miller of the Minnesota Star-Tribune noted, Graterol's perceived career trajectory had already been altered because of injuries.

"Graterol missed all of 2016 and half of 2017 after undergoing elbow surgery, and spent more than two months last summer on the injured list because of an impingement," wrote Miller. "The Twins brought him

to the majors in September as a reliever, and perhaps suspecting that he would have trouble remaining healthy as a starter, last month revealed their plan to leave him in the bullpen, at least for 2020.”

One additional note: Boston will have its newest pitcher on a lower salary for several years. Graterol is not arbitration-eligible until 2023 and can't become an unrestricted free agent until 2026.

The player the Red Sox are acquiring from the Dodgers to fill one of their outfield spots is 23-year-old Alex Verdugo.

Clearly, the task of replacing Betts in the lineup is immense for a player with 158 games of major league experience over three seasons. But Verdugo is undeniably talented.

Taken in the second round of the 2014 MLB draft, Verdugo made his major league debut when he was 21 in 2017. In 158 games with the Dodgers, he has a career OPS of .784. And the Arizona native has logged at least 37 games at each outfield position.

Here are a few things to know about Verdugo

- He has a lot of natural talent, including a “plus-plus arm”

A 2018 MLB.com scouting report on Verdugo labeled him “one of the best pure hitting prospects in baseball.”

In 2017, he hit .314 at the Triple A level of the Dodgers system, improving in 2018 to hit for a .329 average. In 106 games a season ago at the major league level, Verdugo hit .294 with a .342 on-base percentage.

Like Betts, Verdugo isn't a one-tool player.

“As good as he is in the batter's box,” read the 2018 scouting report, “Verdugo's best tool actually is his plus-plus arm.”

During a game against the Red Sox in 2019, Verdugo threw out Rafael Devers at home plate from left field. The throw's velocity topped out at 97 miles per hour, demonstrating how he was also once seen as a high school pitching prospect:

- This wasn't the first trade he was linked with

Given that he's been a top-100 prospect for several years, Verdugo's name has come up in trade rumors before. The involvement helped him mature as a professional.

“It kind of got in my head a little bit,” Verdugo noted in a 2019 interview. “But I feel like the last few years, I'm like, hey man it's a compliment, really. It just means that other teams see you as a good player, good enough to be in a lot of these big headliner trades.”

- His enthusiasm and energy have drawn praise

One of the aspects of replacing Betts that's especially tough to measure is intangibles, such as a player's day-to-day enthusiasm. It appears that the Dodgers were fans of the energy Verdugo regularly brought to the team.

“I love Dugie,” said pitcher Clayton Kershaw in 2019. “I love him. He's great. Ton of energy, every single day. And good energy too, super competitive. Incredible instincts on the baseball field. Can put him in any outfield spot.”

“Guys rally around him and pull for him,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said last May. “When he gets out there, the fans get into it. The players get into it. I get into it.”

This contrasts with a well-publicized incident in 2017 when Verdugo — recently called up for the first time — was late arriving for a game, and was promptly yelled at by Dodgers pitcher Rich Hill. It appears Verdugo was able to learn from his mistake.

- He’s recovering from a back injury

One thing that Red Sox fans might have to have with Verdugo in the short term is patience. He missed the final two months of the 2019 season (and playoffs) with a back injury, and is still working his way back.

In January, speaking with reporters at a holiday event in Los Angeles, Verdugo said he was being cautious, given the location of the injury.

“Any activity you do, any daily, regular [activity], your back helps you with a lot of it,” Verdugo told reporters. “You kind of do one little thing and then you realize the toll it takes on everything else.”

“So it is frustrating, but at the end of the day, all I can do is stay positive and just be blessed that I’m going in the right direction.”

“My goal is obviously going to be starting Opening Day. I want to be out there Opening Day. We’ll just go from there, see how the days and weeks start compiling and how I recover.”

- He represented Mexico at the World Baseball Classic

Verdugo is Mexican-American and played for Mexico in the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

Then just a minor league prospect with the Dodgers, Verdugo impressed. He hit .357 (5 for 14) and scored three runs in three games.

While playing in Los Angeles, Verdugo received strong support from Dodgers fans for his usage of “Volver, Volver” as a walk-up song.

“That is something I like to listen to,” Verdugo explained. “My father, growing up, every time I am in the car with him, anytime I am cleaning the house, he would be playing Vicente [Fernandez] and all these other artists. It is just something I grew up listening to. Being Mexican, we like to dance and we get emotional, so when they listen, they love to hear it.”

- He already has signed his name inside the Green Monster

During the Dodgers’ visit to Fenway Park in 2019, Verdugo was given a tour of the ballpark, including inside the Green Monster. Verdugo’s signature included an addition that might require amending.

Nate Eovaldi’s reaction to trade: ‘We have a lot of things we have to figure out’

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — David Price has been showing up at JetBlue Park for several weeks now, working out with other early arrivals to spring training on the fields behind the stadium.

His parking spot was empty Wednesday, the lefthander having been traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers along with Mookie Betts.

The trade had been rumored for days, so it was no surprise to the handful of Sox players who were at the park. But that didn’t make it any easier to accept.

“Big moves, obviously. It’s unfortunate, I guess,” righthander Nate Eovaldi said. “[Price] was a big guy for us. And of course Mookie at the top of the lineup and in right field. It’s unfortunate.

“He’s definitely one of our leaders, having him at the top of the lineup and setting the tone for us, getting everything started. He’s huge.”

Eovaldi has been traded three times in his career, and this is the third time for Price. Older players understand it’s always a possibility. The unusual aspect of this deal is that it came on the eve of spring training and tore big holes in the roster of what appeared to be a playoff contender.

Pitchers and catchers report to Red Sox camp next Tuesday, with their first official workout Wednesday.

The Sox also have not yet replaced manager Alex Cora.

“It seems like we have a lot of things we have to figure out right before the start of spring training,” Eovaldi said. “Manager-wise and now we’re trying to fill a slot in the starting rotation and right field, who that’s going to be.”

It’ll fall on Eovaldi, Chris Sale, and Eduardo Rodriguez to carry the rotation. If the depleted Sox have any hope of contention, their starters have to deliver.

“It’s hard to see the big picture right now,” Eovaldi said. “You have to stay focused on everything and think about the team that we do have and all the young guys we have coming up.

“We have a lot of guys who can contribute.”

Eovaldi answered quickly when asked if the Sox would still be competitive.

“One hundred percent,” he said. “Especially with the way Eddie [Rodriguez] picked it up last season. Plus Sale and I are going to be healthy. I think we’re going to be a great team.”

How will the trade of Mookie Betts, David Price affect the Red Sox roster?

Alex Speier

Change arrived with the force of a wrecking ball, the agreement to send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers shaking up the Red Sox franchise. Pending the medical evaluations on the five players involved in Tuesday’s three-team trade, the Red Sox will part with one of the most dynamic players in franchise history, along with a pitcher who, while increasingly injury-prone, was a rotation anchor when healthy not only in the championship run of 2018 but also through the first half of 2019.

So what now? This was a deal made not with 2020 but with a longer-term view in mind, the Sox trading a superstar who was one year from a foray into free agency for players who are talented, risky, inexpensive, and under control for several years (outfielder Alex Verdugo and righthander Brusdar Graterol).

How is the Red Sox roster positioned for 2020? In a word: Incomplete. In more words, incomplete, and with a dwindling amount of time to take full shape. Here’s a reassessment of the team in light of the deal:

■ Plenty of cash . . . but nothing left to buy?

Assuming the trade goes through, the Sox payroll will sit a bit under \$190 million — about \$18 million under the luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million. Even keeping a healthy in-season war chest of \$8 million for call-ups, in-season signings, and trades, the Sox still have money to spend.

The problem is that there isn't a wealth of impact players available in free agency. The remaining starting pitching options are players with uninspiring recent track records (Jason Vargas, Andrew Cashner) or players with injury histories (Taijuan Walker, Clay Buchholz). Likewise, there aren't many righthanded impact bats to complement the lefthanded skew of the lineup.

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

If the Red Sox are competing for a wild-card spot at the deadline, then financial flexibility could prove a critical asset in allowing them to address deficiencies. Yet it's not far-fetched to imagine that the loss of Betts and Price pulls them just far enough away from championship contention that they end up parting with more longtime contributors by July.

■ The rotation

If Chris Sale is healthy, he and Eduardo Rodriguez are formidable anchors atop the rotation. If Nate Eovaldi is healthy, he's a solid mid-rotation presence. Martin Perez proved durable if unexceptional with the Twins last year, but with some underlying numbers that suggested he pitched better than his 5.12 ERA.

But the Sox now lack a clear fifth starter. They have Hector Velazquez, Ryan Weber, and Brian Johnson as pitchers with big league experience, though all profile better as depth starters than even back-of-the-rotation candidates. Ditto lefthander Kyle Hart, who was added to the 40-man roster this winter.

Graterol, 21, has high-end starter potential, though he needs more time to develop in the minors. Righthander Tanner Houck has a chance to contribute as a big league starter, though his dominance against righties and struggles against lefties suggest a greater likelihood of relieving — at least until he takes more developmental steps in the minors.

Perhaps the Red Sox will employ an opener in the No. 5 spot. Perhaps they'll try to grab someone from the picked-over pool of free agents. But right now, they have a considerable question mark at the back of their rotation — and their absence of depth (until perhaps Graterol is ready) could be magnified if Sale or Eovaldi gets hurt again.

■ Bullpen

Despite the gaudy blown saves total of 2019 (31), the bullpen was not a primary concern for the Red Sox entering the winter. Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Darwinzon Hernandez, and Josh Taylor give them late-innings options who get tons of swings and misses. All dominated for stretches of 2019, showing enough to give the Red Sox comfort with their internal options rather than diving into a notoriously volatile bullpen market.

With Marcus Walden and Heath Hembree back, the Sox have rebuilt their bullpen depth through a number of waiver moves and minor trades. They seem more likely to continue to work around the margins of their relief corps, but the group is largely set.

■ Infield/catcher

This is unaltered by the trade, with the left side — third baseman Rafael Devers and shortstop Xander Bogaerts — representing one of the team's foremost strengths. Mitch Moreland is back at first, at least against righties, with Michael Chavis, Jose Peraza, and perhaps Rule 5 draftee Jonathan Arauz slated for multipositional duties. Christian Vazquez and Kevin Plawecki will split duties behind the plate.

■ Outfield/DH

How on earth do you replace a perennial All-Star who seemed like a given as one of the top players in the American League every year? Answer: You don't. You can't. Instead, the Sox will hope that improvement from multiple players helps offset the loss of Betts.

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

A great deal will ride on whether Andrew Benintendi can take a step forward. He has All-Star potential, with offensive skills that should at least make him an above-average everyday player, rather than the average level at which he performed for much of last year. If he can look anything like he did in the first half of 2018, it would prove a huge boost to the Red Sox.

Verdugo, meanwhile, will be expected to produce right away and build on his strong performance as a 23-year-old rookie with the Dodgers in 2019, when he looked like an above-average everyday player until his season concluded in early August because of injuries.

The lefthanded Verdugo drives the ball to left field with enough frequency that he looks likely to benefit from Fenway Park and the AL East, with a number of outs turning into doubles and homers.

We have moved beyond the point in Jackie Bradley Jr.'s career where anyone can expect him to leave behind the extreme streakiness that has yielded a roughly average everyday center fielder. That said, last year's season-opening rut — a .144 average and .421 OPS though mid-May — could be chalked up at least in part to remaking and then relearning his swing. Over the final four-plus months, he hit .252/.342/.504 with 21 homers in 109 games.

If Bradley can shorten his annual offensive trough, it would help diminish the impact of Betts's absence.

There could be plenty of days when the Red Sox feature an all-lefthanded-hitting outfield of Benintendi in left, Bradley in center, and Verdugo (a strong defender) in right. While J.D. Martinez can contribute as a corner outfielder, the Sox may want to explore the addition of a righthanded-hitting outfielder capable of playing all three spots.

Kevin Pillar and Cameron Maybin are the remaining free agents who fit that description, though other righthanded corner outfielders (Hunter Pence, Yasiel Puig) remain available.

Ultimately, the absence of Betts likely lowers the ceiling of the Sox lineup from great to very good.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Mookie Betts trade on hold, may be adjusted after medical review, per report

Steve Hewitt

More than a day after it was reportedly agreed upon, the blockbuster three-team trade between the Red Sox, Dodgers and Twins still hasn't been finalized. The hold-up apparently has to do with the medical record on right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol, who is being dealt to the Red Sox.

The Athletic reported late Wednesday night that the trade — which will send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers — may be adjusted after further review of Graterol's medicals. According to the report, the Red Sox view Graterol more as a reliever than a starter, and may ask for an additional player and/or money, either from the Dodgers or Twins to complete the trade.

The 21-year-old Graterol missed more than two months last season due to a right shoulder impingement, but returned to make his big-league debut and he made 10 appearances for the Twins, all in relief. The hard-throwing Graterol has been projected as a top-of-the-rotation starter, but the Twins viewed him as a reliever. According to The Athletic's report, the Red Sox "evidently agree that he is not suited for a 150- to 170-inning workload, at least not right away."

The review of medical records is commonly one of the final steps before a trade is made official. The Athletic's report said the teams involved in this trade remain confident it will be completed.

Alex Verdugo, the Dodgers outfielder who is the other player being dealt to the Red Sox, has been medically cleared, according to The Athletic. Verdugo missed the final two months of last season due to injuries sustained in his back and oblique.

Red Sox fans rue trade of Mookie Betts

Jessica Heslam

The shocking trade of beloved Red Sox superstar Mookie Betts has fans down in the dumps as they come to grips with a gut-wrenching move that could haunt the team for decades like the infamous trading of Babe Ruth.

"I'm heartbroken," said 20-year-old Sox fan Jake Wallinger, who came to Fenway Park in search of a soon-to-be-obsolete Betts shirt.

Wallinger, a film major who became enthralled with the team at age 8 in 2007 after they won the World Series, rarely misses a game and was at Fenway in September when Betts played what turned out to be his final Sox game.

What a game it was. The Sox and Orioles were tied at the bottom of the ninth inning when Betts made a surprise run for home plate after a single and clinched a walk-off win.

"He's the best player they've had in 80 years, since Ted Williams," Wallinger told me Wednesday at the Red Sox Team Store on Jersey Street. "He's an electric player. There's nothing to not like about Mookie. He's the perfect player."

Betts has emerged as perhaps the top player in Major League Baseball as he won the league's batting title and Most Valuable Player award in 2018 while leading the Sox to their ninth World Series title and second in five years. On Tuesday night, Betts was sent packing to the Los Angeles Dodgers along with pitcher David Price in a money-saving move by the team.

As spring training begins next week, the Sox are also without a manager because of a cheating scandal involving former skipper Alex Cora.

Despite the drama, New Hampshire grandfather Dave Clements stopped at the Fenway pro shop to pick out a new Sox cap. Clements is worried about the upcoming season. "Who wouldn't be?" he said.

Clements said his 4-year-old grandson, Ryan, was crushed to learn of his favorite player's departure. "The kid's got everything," Clements said of Betts. "The work ethic. He's fast. He's good. He's a team player. He just does it all. How are you going to replace that?"

Weston mother-of-three Wendy Fox said she too loved watching Betts play.

"What I loved about Mookie so much is that he was the guy that after the games would go out and deliver food to the homeless and he never looked for any kind of publicity," Fox said. "I'm going to miss him as a person, not just a player."

Tough move for the Sox and one that has many wondering if a new curse is brewing.

Who are Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol? Get to know newest Red Sox

Steve Hewitt

The Mookie Betts era is suddenly over in Boston, and with that, so is David Price's after the Red Sox completed a blockbuster trade Tuesday night to send both to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

So, now what?

A year after a disappointing 84-win season, the Red Sox were a week away from reporting to Fort Myers with virtually the same roster. By dealing Betts, the 2018 American League MVP who's still in his prime, and Price, a key starter, the Red Sox inarguably got worse Tuesday. A bridge year in 2020 just became almost a certain reality.

Now, the Red Sox trek on by building for the future, and they're hoping the two players they received in the trade — outfielder Alex Verdugo from the Dodgers and right-handed pitcher Brusdar Graterol from the Twins — can be significant parts of that.

In the 23-year-old Verdugo, who turns 24 in May, the Red Sox found their logical replacement for Betts, even if he needs some more time to develop. He entered 2019 as the No. 35-ranked prospect by Baseball America, and eventually assumed an everyday role for the Dodgers in the wake of A.J. Pollock's injury. Verdugo batted .294 with an .817 OPS, 12 homers, 22 doubles and 44 RBI while playing good defense in 106 games, but injuries ended his season early. He's still recovering from a back injury but is hopeful to be ready by Opening Day.

The left-handed Verdugo was considered one of the best pure hitting prospects in baseball with his ability to control the strike zone, and he showed that in his opportunities last season. He's more of a line-drive hitter, but at 6-feet, 205 pounds, he has room to become more of a power hitter.

"Verdugo is the purest hitter in the Dodgers system with a simple, balanced swing," Baseball America wrote in its scouting report of him before last season. "He generates hard line drives to all fields and is extremely patient, recording nearly as many walks (86) as strikeouts (97) over the last two years. Verdugo's average home run power is mostly to his pull side, but he can drive the ball hard the other way, too."

Verdugo may be as skilled defensively as he is at the plate, which will be critical if he finds himself playing every day in Fenway Park's right field. He played mostly center for the Dodgers last season, but he should be able to transition well if he is asked to play right on a regular basis in Boston. MLB.com's report on Verdugo prior to last season said his instincts make up for average speed, and "no one doubts his arm would play in right."

The biggest question surrounding Verdugo may be his focus and effort. In 2017, then a September call-up, he overslept and was late to the park for a game, which earned him a lashing out from veteran pitcher Rich Hill. He's also shown some bad habits in the field, according to Baseball America.

"Verdugo stays dialed in at the plate, but an indifferent attitude affects the rest of his game," Baseball America wrote last year. "He has average speed and gets good jumps in right field when he's focused, but he often isn't and lets balls drop that shouldn't. His slow motor also shows up on the bases, frustrating teammates and coaches alike."

The 21-year-old Graterol projects as a top-of-the-rotation starter with time. Injuries have slowed the righty's development, but he showed encouragement last season, going 7-0 with a 1.92 ERA combined in three levels in the minors, and was named the top pitching prospect in the Southern League. He made 10 appearances for the Twins last season, all as a reliever.

Graterol, the No. 55-ranked prospect by Baseball America before last season, already has a troubling injury record. The Twins signed the Venezuelan as a 16-year-old in 2015, but he lasted just four starts in the Dominican Summer League before tearing his UCL and undergoing Tommy John surgery. Last season, a shoulder impingement held Graterol out for more than two months.

The Tommy John surgery kept Graterol out of baseball for two years, when he put on considerable weight — he's now listed at 6-foot-1, 265 pounds. His increased muscle has helped him gain a fastball that touches 100 mph and sits consistently in the high 90s. He also possesses a plus-slider, but he'll need to continue to develop his secondary pitches, particularly his changeup, to realize his potential.

How Graterol grows from here is yet to be determined, but he has the raw talent.

"He has ability that very few people have," Twins manager Rocco Baldelli said late last season. "The pure velocity in and of itself is pretty unique. When it comes out of his hand, everybody in the ballpark notices that it looks and appears different than everybody else.

"He's a young guy and is going to have a lot of time to figure things out, but he's been good for us and it's really nice to see him go out there and have the success early on. It's real. The stuff is real and he seems like a great young man, too."

*** *The Providence Journal***

Report: Brusdar Graterol medical reports holding up Red Sox trade of Mookie Betts, David Price

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- There appears to be a specific reason why the three-team blockbuster trade involving Mookie Betts and David Price has yet to be formally announced.

Per an overnight report from The Athletic, the medical records for Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol have raised Red Sox eyebrows. Boston now views the 21-year-old as more relief pitcher than future starter, diminishing his value alongside Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo as the return headed to the Back Bay.

Graterol made his debut with Minnesota in 2019 and came out of the bullpen in each of his 10 appearances. He's already returned from Tommy John surgery in 2015 and a two-month shutdown period in the minor leagues last year due to a right shoulder impingement. Graterol's fastball-slider combination is a powerful one, but the lack of a more refined arsenal suggests he could be more in line to help the Red Sox bullpen than the rotation.

Boston also should be mindful of how Graterol's current physical conditioning could impact his future health. He was listed at 6-foot-1, 265 pounds last season, a significant gain from the reported 180 pounds he weighed when signed as an international free agent from Venezuela in August 2014. Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom could maximize an opportunity to exercise some leverage and increase the return in the deal, be it more cash toward paying down the remaining \$93 million on Price's contract or demanding additional prospect capital.

The Athletic said Boston, Minnesota and Los Angeles are still expected to complete the trade at some point in the near future. The Red Sox are sending the 27-year-old Betts, the 34-year-old Price and roughly half of Price's salary over the next three years to the Dodgers. Los Angeles starter Kenta Maeda will also move to Minnesota.

By any reasonable measure, statistical or otherwise, Boston is giving up the best player in the deal. Betts was the 2018 American League Most Valuable Player and is a four-time Gold Glove winner. Only Angels outfielder Mike Trout has been more valuable than Betts per FanGraphs wins above replacement since the start of the 2016 season.

Price could well use the warm weather and more pitcher-friendly ballpark at Dodger Stadium to rediscover his form on the mound. Elbow and wrist injuries have limited Price to just 63 starts over the last three seasons after at least 31 in six of the previous seven campaigns. Price's clinching victories over the Astros

and Dodgers in the 2018 A.L. Championship Series and World Series, respectively, went a long way toward validating the seven-year contract he signed with Boston prior to 2016.

The trade does allow the Red Sox to clear more than \$40 million from their payroll for the upcoming 2020 season, an amount that would bring Boston comfortably under the lowest threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax. Any Red Sox penalties incurred over the last two seasons would be reset, giving Boston additional flexibility going forward. Betts has stated his intent to test free agency following the 2020 season and gave the Red Sox no indication he was prepared to sign a multi-year extension before hitting the open market.

Boston executives – including principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner and president Sam Kennedy – said slipping under the CBT was a goal and not a mandate entering this offseason. The Red Sox find themselves in an undesirable financial position thanks to several contracts negotiated by former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and ultimately approved by Henry. Boston spent a combined \$430 million to acquire or retain Price and fellow starting pitchers Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox rumors: Here are 10 potential free agents the Sox could pursue before Opening Day

Chris Cotillo

Assuming it gets finalized, the trade sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers will give the Red Sox a ton of financial flexibility to upgrade the current roster before spring training. While nobody added at this late stage of the offseason will be able to produce at the levels of Betts or Price, there are still some intriguing players available in free agency who might interest Boston.

Here are 10 potential fits:

1. UTIL Brock Holt

A reunion with Holt looked all but impossible for most of the winter, but the fan favorite is still out there and he might be more valuable to the Red Sox than any other club. A frustrating foray into free agency for the 31-year-old has resulted in little more than lukewarm interest from the Blue Jays and Reds but could, at least theoretically, change quickly now that the Sox have money to spend.

Boston has way too many utility players already, but it's not hard to see Holt replacing Rule 5 pick Jonathan Arauz on the projected roster. The move would win over fans at a time in which that might be necessary for the front office.

2. OF Yasiel Puig

Puig is the best free agent still available, remaining unsigned even with top options Marcell Ozuna and Nick Castellanos signing last month. Still just 29, Puig would at least bring electrifying potential to the Sox, giving Boston a right-handed hitting option in an outfield that needs one.

Puig has a higher OPS (.845) against righties than lefties (.762) for his career, so he's not a perfect platoon fit. But he represents a talented option that will likely be available for cheap.

3. OF Kevin Pillar

Pillar, the longtime Jay, was somewhat surprisingly non-tendered by the Giants in December. The 31-year-old does hit lefties well (.823 career OPS) and provides stellar defense. A one-year deal would make some

sense, as the Sox could look to flip Pillar (and pending free agent Jackie Bradley Jr.) during the season if they're out of contention.

4. SP Taijuan Walker

Walker, who won't turn 28 until August, has been limited to just four starts over the last two years due to injury but is on the comeback trail. The former Mariner and Diamondback recently threw for scouts and is likely to sign soon. On a minor-league deal or incentive-laden guaranteed contract, he's a talented arm to consider on a flier. If healthy, Walker could theoretically replace Price in the rotation.

5. SP Jason Vargas

Vargas, who just turned 37, threw 149 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings for the Mets and Phillies last year. The Red Sox are going to need to pick up Price's innings somewhere, and it's hard to envision a bunch of rookies and openers doing so. Vargas makes the list over two other veteran starters who seem unlikely to return to Boston in Clay Buchholz and Andrew Cashner.

6. RP Brad Boxberger

Boxberger was an All-Star in 2015 but has regressed since, posting a 5.40 ERA in 29 games for the Royals last year before being released in August. He makes the list because he's a former Ray (2014-17), and Chaim Bloom knows him from there.

7. RP Fernando Rodney

Rodney will turn 43 next month, but he's been around forever and would provide a veteran relief arm in camp. The Red Sox added a handful of unproven relief options this winter, but not a proven veteran, even on a minor-league deal. Rodney pitched for the Rays in 2012 and 2013. Tony Sipp, Tommy Hunter, Luke Gregerson and others are still out there, too.

8. OF/DH Hunter Pence

Pence, almost 37, was a surprise All-Star in 2019, celebrating a career resurgence with the Rangers. He has hit lefties during his career (.830 OPS) and would likely be an instant fan favorite off the bench. The Astros and Giants have been linked to him in recent weeks.

9. SP Jeremy Hellickson

Hellickson, the 2011 American League Rookie of the Year and Price's former rotation mate in Tampa Bay, is just a year removed from posting a 3.45 ERA (and 123 ERA+) in 19 starts for the Nationals. He has the Bloom familiarity factor working for him and would serve as a depth starter.

10. SP/RP Collin McHugh

McHugh might just be the best remaining free agent pitcher and has a track record of success as both a starter and reliever. He dealt with elbow trouble in September, potentially explaining why he's unsigned. If healthy, he could help.

Slowly but surely, core of 2018 Sox dissipating

Less than 16 months after capping the winningest season in franchise history, the Red Sox have said goodbye to a ton of key contributors from their 2018 championship team.

In that span, Boston has lost its president of baseball operations (Dave Dombrowski), manager (Alex Cora), league MVP (Mookie Betts), two of its top three starters (David Price and Rick Porcello), closer (Craig Kimbrel), a key reliever (Joe Kelly), two backup catchers (Sandy Leon and Blake Swihart), three key

infielders (Brock Holt, Eduardo Nunez and Ian Kinsler) and the World Series MVP (Steve Pearce). There's still a huge bit of the 2018 core in place, but the turnover has come quickly this winter.

Assuming Holt signs elsewhere and the Betts/Price deal is finalized, the Sox have said goodbye to 12 of the 25 players on their 2018 World Series roster in addition to Dombrowski and Cora. Six players have departed this offseason.

10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. The blockbuster Mookie Betts/David Price trade will go down as one of the largest in franchise history, if finalized. There's no exaggerating the magnitude of that move.
2. By the end, the deal wasn't a surprise. It became clear about a week prior that something was going to happen with the Dodgers and that Verdugo was going to be involved.
3. Early indications are that Betts was interested in playing in southern California, but I'd bet against him signing an extension this close to free agency. He has made it this far, after all.
4. BetOnline.ag has the Red Sox' 2020 win total at 86.5, down two wins after the Price/Betts trade. Considering Boston won 84 games last year, that feels high.
5. The most important player on this year's Red Sox team might just be Andrew Benintendi. Might just be a make-or-break year for him.
6. It'll come as a mild surprise if the Sox don't seriously pursue extensions with Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez by the end of spring training. The only impediment to those talks was the competitive balance tax threshold, which no longer looks like an issue.
7. The Red Sox look like an early favorite to sign George Springer if he gets to free agency after the season. A reunion with Betts would be less likely.
8. Camp hasn't even started yet and the Yankees already have the injury bug. Lefty James Paxton will miss 3-4 months after undergoing back surgery.
9. If the trade is indeed scuttled, I may just delete the thousands of words of analysis about the trade and write "just kidding." That includes this column.
10. Theo Epstein's Hot Stove Cool Music event returns to Boston this weekend, with a roundtable event (featuring Roger Clemens) on Friday and a concert Saturday night.

Mookie Betts/David Price trade on hold? Boston Red Sox might ask for more compensation after reviewing Brusdar Graterol's medicals (report)

Chris Cotillo

The blockbuster trade sending Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers is temporarily on hold after the Red Sox were not satisfied with the medical records of pitcher Brusdar Graterol, according to Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic.

Boston agreed to acquire Graterol (from the Twins) and outfielder Alex Verdugo (from the Dodgers) in the three-team deal Tuesday night but might demand additional compensation (either in the form of a player or cash) after reviewing Graterol's medicals, according to Rosenthal. The records led the Sox to project Graterol "more as a reliever than a starter," leading Boston to rework the deal in order to secure a more valuable package for Betts and Price.

Rosenthal wrote that officials involved in the talks are still confident the deal will be completed but cautioned the final deal might come in a different form than originally reported. The original iteration of the trade had Betts, Price and cash going to Los Angeles, Verdugo and Graterol going to Boston and right-hander Kenta Maeda set to join the Twins.

More than 24 hours after reports emerged of an agreement between the three clubs, no official announcement had been made between the involved teams. According to an industry source, players involved in the trade had not been officially notified by the clubs, which is usually one of the final steps before finalization. Multiple sources expressed concern over the stall in momentum Tuesday night, with one confirming that the deal needs to “be worked through” before finalization.

Graterol, who made his major league debut in September, missed more than two months of last season due to a right shoulder impingement.

If the deal were to fall apart completely, the Red Sox would find themselves in a very awkward position with spring training beginning in a week and Betts and Price suddenly back in the fold. Considering what’s at stake, it stands to reason that all three clubs will be motivated to get the blockbuster finalized as quickly as possible.

After Mookie Betts/David Price trade, what’s next for Boston Red Sox?

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox made their first franchise-altering move under Chaim Bloom on Tuesday night, agreeing to send outfielder Mookie Price and starter David Price to the Dodgers in a blockbuster, three-team deal. The move, which significantly decreases Boston’s chances of contending in 2020, gets the Sox well below the competitive balance tax threshold by taking more than \$40 million in payroll off the books.

For Bloom, the work has just begun. He has plenty on his plate, both in the short-term and long-term, as he tries to build the next championship Red Sox team.

Here’s what lies ahead of him:

BEFORE THE SEASON

1. Receive the results of Major League Baseball’s investigation into alleged sign-stealing in 2018

The next bit of Red Sox-related news will likely come in the form of a league report. Major League Baseball has been investigating the Sox for alleged electronic sign-stealing in 2018 and is expecting to announce the results of the inquiry within the next week or two.

Though many in the organization have claimed that the investigation won’t find much, it’s still possible the Sox are punished in some way. It’s unlikely any players would be suspended, but the Sox could still lose draft picks and be fined heavily if any wrongdoing is found.

Bloom -- who was not with the Sox in 2018 -- will have to react to any potential punishments as he formulates his path forward. If any current coaches are implicated by the league, Bloom may have to rethink aspects of his managerial search.

2. Hire a manager

The Red Sox are still without a manager after parting ways with Alex Cora in the wake of Major League Baseball finding he was one of the key players in the Astros’ sign-stealing practices in 2017. The search appears to be nearing its conclusion, with four candidates (bench coach Ron Roenicke, third base coach Carlos Febles, Diamondbacks bench coach Luis Urueta and Athletics quality control coach Mark Kotsay) known to have interviewed and others believed to be in play as well.

It's unlikely Bloom would make an internal hire before receiving the results of the league's investigation, but he could bring in someone from the outside before the league's findings are announced. Either way, finding Cora's replacement -- whether an interim or long-term option -- is a major organizational priority with spring training a week away.

3. Augment the 2020 roster with the payroll flexibility afforded by the Betts/Price trade

The deal with the Dodgers will save the Red Sox something like \$42-43 million in 2020, putting their projected payroll at around \$190 million (or \$18 million under the almighty competitive balance tax threshold). That means the Sox, at least theoretically, have about \$18 million to augment their roster if they intend to contend in 2020.

That money could be distributed in a variety of ways. There are holes on the current roster, both in the rotation (the Sox only have four starters) and bullpen (though that's less of a priority). The Sox could look to add a cheap free agent or two (Brock Holt?) to add to their overall depth pool or look to acquire a piece or two via trade. If they're still well under \$208 million as the season progresses, Bloom will have flexibility to make an addition or two at the July 31 trade deadline.

4. Identify the core, and start considering extensions

With Betts out of the fold, Bloom must identify the core group of players he envisions on his roster for years to come. Four players -- Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, Eduardo Rodriguez and Chris Sale -- are a good place to start.

Sale and Bogaerts both signed extensions last year, but Rodriguez (free agent after 2021) and Devers (free agent after 2023) look like prime candidates for longterm deals. The Sox could also look to lock up Andrew Benintendi or work out an unusual pre-arbitration deal with someone like Michael Chavis or Bobby Dalbec to ensure some cost certainty. A restructured deal with J.D. Martinez (who can opt out after both 2020 and 2021) might also be on the table.

DURING THE SEASON

5. Assess young players and consider trading valuable veterans on expiring deals

The Red Sox enter 2020 with some exciting young players, including Chavis, Dalbec, Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor and the two pieces they received in the Betts/Price deal (Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol). With the roster going through a period of transition, it's clear Bloom will have ample opportunity to assess his young guys and determine how they project for the future.

As those young pieces progress, older options might be phased out. Two pending free agents (outfielder Jackie Bradley Jr. and reliever Brandon Workman) look like prime trade candidates, especially if the Sox don't contend in 2020. Martinez and Matt Barnes might draw interest as well.

6. See which players step up in the absence of Betts and Price

The Red Sox had a few young players take major steps forward last year, with Devers, Rodriguez and Christian Vazquez all putting together career years. This year, the focus will be on some others who could take similar steps.

Verdugo, Chavis and Benintendi are three of the top candidates to do so, with Benintendi finding himself close to a make-or-break season after a down year in 2019. The opportunity is there for any of the less established players on the roster to make a significant leap.

7. Be active at the trade deadline

Bloom won't sit out the trade deadline like Dave Dombrowski did in 2019, even if the Sox are in the no-man's land between buying and selling.

If the Sox are in it, Bloom will likely add pieces using the financial capital he gained by trading Betts and Price. If they're out of it, trades involving Bradley Jr., Workman, Martinez and others (Martin Perez, Mitch Moreland and Jose Peraza) are likely. If Boston is somewhere in between, Bloom could operate as a hybrid buyer/seller, looking to trade short-term assets while acquiring long-term pieces like he frequently did in Tampa Bay.

AFTER THE SEASON

8. Become an aggressive, major player in the free agent and trade markets

The Red Sox will accomplish their goal of resetting their standing in the competitive balance tax threshold, so it's likely they'll be major players in free agency. Betts is the top free agent next winter, but there are other solid options (George Springer, J.T. Realmuto, D.J. LeMahieu, Trevor Bauer, Robbie Ray and James Paxton) who will be out there.

The trade market will also likely be active, especially if the top candidates from this winter (Nolan Arenado, Kris Bryant and Francisco Lindor) are not dealt. The rental market for starting pitchers might be robust with Noah Syndergaard, Clayton Kershaw, Max Scherzer, Justin Verlander, Zack Greinke and Mike Foltyniewicz all scheduled to hit free agency after 2021.

9. Reassess the manager, especially if the hire was a short-term one

If Bloom makes a short-term hire at manager, he might reassess after the season. If someone like Roenicke or Feibles is promoted, it's more likely than not that they'll be looked at as a bridge to a long-term option that will be brought in after the year.

If the Sox do search for a manager after the 2020 season, an early favorite is Rays bench coach Matt Quatraro. Bloom is very familiar with Quatraro from their time together in Tampa.

*** *ESPN.com***

Sources: Prospect's health holds up 3-team trade involving Mookie Betts

Jeff Passan

The blockbuster three-way trade that would send star outfielder Mookie Betts and starter David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers has been held up due to questions regarding the health of one player involved in the deal, though officials with the teams remain confident it will be completed, sources familiar with the situation tell ESPN.

The deal, which would send Betts and Price to the Dodgers, outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol to the Boston Red Sox and starter Kenta Maeda to the Minnesota Twins, was not completed Wednesday after being agreed upon Tuesday night. The Red Sox, sources said, were spooked by a medical review of Graterol, the hard-throwing 21-year-old right-hander who has undergone Tommy John surgery and missed time in 2019 because of a shoulder injury.

Alternative options to complete a deal exist, according to sources. The players involved could be amended, as could the amount of money Boston is sending to Los Angeles to cover a portion of the \$96 million still owed Price. The Dodgers and Red Sox could theoretically opt for a two-team deal or involve a different third team; Graterol is currently with the Twins.

The likelihood of the trade of Betts to the Dodgers blowing up altogether, sources said, is slim, as medical-related impasses are typically worked around. Although the negative reaction in Boston to trading Betts, a homegrown franchise player, was loud and abundant, it was not a driving force behind the holdup, sources said. Boston simply wants to ensure that it receives a commensurate return for the 27-year-old right fielder,

who is entering his final season before free agency and is expected to seek a contract well in excess of \$300 million and perhaps even \$400 million.

The three-way trade is tied to another proposed deal in which the Dodgers would send outfielder Joc Pederson, starter Ross Stripling and prospect Andy Pages to the Los Angeles Angels for infielder Luis Rengifo and a prospect, according to sources. By offloading Pederson, the Dodgers would remain underneath the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold, even after taking on the hefty salaries of Betts and Price.

Boston's motivation to dip beneath the threshold was a strong part of its motivation to deal Betts, sources said. Packaging Betts and Price would allow Boston to shed more than \$40 million in payroll this season and reset future luxury-tax consequences instead of exceeding the threshold for the third consecutive season and compounding the penalties for doing so.

The holdup, first reported by The Athletic, "is a problem but one we can figure out," according to a source involved in the deal. With pitchers and catchers due to report to Red Sox and Twins camp Wednesday and Dodgers camp Feb. 14, the incentive to find a quick resolution is strong and work will continue Thursday.

The great Mookie irony: How the Red Sox are actually copying the Dodgers

Kiley McDaniel

It's easy to see a Boston Red Sox fan's point of view, that even with the club's top-tier revenue, they chose to trade their best position player in years because of money concerns. I can't convince these fans that trading Mookie Betts is a good idea, but I can tell you what they're thinking. A dozen cheap years of strong contributors -- split between outfielder Alex Verdugo and pitcher Brusdar Graterol -- is a solid return for one year of an elite player and dumping a bad contract, even if it hurts for Boston to officially commit to the opposite of the Dave Dombrowski approach to team building.

It's totally reasonable to complain that the Red Sox can afford to keep Betts if they wanted to. Every MLB team can technically afford any one player. The Red Sox appear to be aiming for something that's about more than any one player: building a model franchise from top to bottom. And trading Mookie Betts has a good chance of making that a reality more quickly, as preposterous as that may sound.

The Red Sox's new baseball chief, Chaim Bloom, comes from the Tampa Bay Rays, the model franchise for sustained contention on a micro-payroll. It will look different in Boston with the franchise's higher payroll ceiling, but the primary strategic focus is to be a perennial contender that won't have to have down years, due to a more sound approach to roster/payroll flexibility, depth and a strong farm system. Betts wouldn't sign a contract extension and his value is so high that he could be used to kick-start the new approach to roster construction.

Dodgers fans still complain about their former Rays exec (Andrew Friedman) doing the same thing, because it means not always paying retail for top players, but Friedman's consistent playoff runs are the example of how to extend the Tampa Bay model to a large-market team. The element of delayed satisfaction isn't fun for some fans to watch and it can seem like the team is being run on a spreadsheet, but like it or not both things are essential elements to a modern baseball dynasty.

The Dodgers make out great here. They got one of the best players in baseball in Betts and depth to their rotation in Price, whose contract gets paid down a bit by the Red Sox. Achieving a sustained winner in Boston meant getting underwater contracts off the books, arguably the hardest thing to do in today's game. Attaching Betts to any such deal was one way to be sure to clear that money. The Dodgers made prudent financial decisions for years to set up this chance to get an elite player at a discount price while taking on another player's bad-money deal. One day, Bloom will likely make his own push-the-chips-in move along these lines when all his ducks are in a row.

The cost to Los Angeles is a controllable, above-average every-day position player in Verdugo and a dependable arm in Kenta Maeda. They didn't have to touch their farm system, much less trade away their

top-tier young talents like Gavin Lux or Dustin May. Verdugo offers a wide base of skills, with all five tools grading above average, and providing elite contact ability with emerging ability to get to his power in games. He's essentially the new J.D. Drew and he'll be cheap for a half-dozen years. The one negative is that the 23-year-old Verdugo has a history of maturity issues, but all accounts are that these are behind him.

Maeda is a nice playoff-caliber starter for the Minnesota Twins, but one who comes at the high price of a half-dozen controllable years of Graterol. He's a monster right-handed pitcher who regularly hits 100 mph with low effort to go with a plus slider, and he has a chance to be a midrotation starter. He's still a bit of a bull in a china shop, so there's some relief risk, but that was also said about Frankie Montas, another similar prospect from a few years ago, who had a breakout half-season as a starter with the A's last year before a PED suspension.

For Boston, this opens spots on the big league team to let youngsters such as infielders Michael Chavis and Bobby Dalbec and pitchers Tanner Houck, Darwinzon Hernandez and Bryan Mata prove if they can become core contributors on the next title-caliber Red Sox club.

Why Red Sox fans are angry about the Mookie Betts trade -- and why they shouldn't be

Joon Lee

Boston Red Sox fans are angry. Very angry.

It's no surprise that there is outrage over the Mookie Betts deal. The 2018 AL MVP and now former Red Sox right fielder was one of the most beloved athletes in the city, particularly given his rise from rookie to superstar happened nightly in front of an adoring Fenway Park crowd. Now, that superstar is headed to Hollywood to play for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Boston's new chief baseball officer, Chaim Bloom, said last month he expected Betts to be on the Opening Day roster. But over the past few weeks, trade negotiations heated up. With spring training right around the corner, Boston is bringing in Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol -- young talent the team hopes will be a big part of its future -- while one of Boston's most popular players is leaving town, along with another World Series hero in starting pitcher David Price.

Here's why fans are angry at the Red Sox -- and at Betts -- and whether that anger is justified.

Why they're angry at the Red Sox

This offseason hasn't been fun for Red Sox fans. The team's two biggest free-agent signings: utility man Jose Peraza (-0.9 WAR in 2019 with Cincinnati) and starter Martin Perez (5.49 ERA over the past two seasons with Minnesota and Texas). Alex Cora, an extremely popular manager, parted ways with the organization amid the fallout of the Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal, in which he played a major role while serving as that team's bench coach in 2017. On Tuesday, Boston traded away a 27-year-old megastar a year before he hits free agency.

The team's approach to this winter has been centered on owner John Henry's stated desire to get under the luxury tax threshold and reset the penalties the Red Sox have paid in recent years. Henry later clarified his comments about the team's financial intentions -- getting under the luxury tax threshold, he said, was a "goal" and not a "mandate." The initial flame ignited by Henry's comments on the luxury tax, though, was enough to start a brush fire of speculation about Betts' future -- and raise the ire of fans. Fenway Sports Group, after all, has grown in value from \$700 million to \$6.6 billion, according to Forbes, since Henry purchased the Red Sox 18 years ago -- an 837% increase -- placing it as the third-largest sports conglomerate in the world, even ahead of the rival New York Yankees (\$6.1 billion).

Betts is one of the most talented players the Red Sox have ever developed. His 42.0 WAR through his first six seasons is seventh in MLB history, trailing only Hall of Famers -- or future Hall of Famers -- Ted Williams, Mike Trout, Albert Pujols, Jackie Robinson, Wade Boggs and Joe DiMaggio. The three names

right below Betts on the list: Mickey Mantle, Barry Bonds and Willie Mays. Teams with the financial resources of the Boston Red Sox don't typically trade away homegrown MVPs whose career starts rank among the all-time greats.

The optics of dealing Betts -- just one offseason after winning a World Series and signing starting pitchers Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi to huge contracts -- are not ideal from a public relations standpoint for Bloom, now making his first moves in his new job.

Boston had been pessimistic about signing Betts to a long-term deal for a while. Betts' intent to test free agency after the coming season made that difficult. But many fans believe the team never should have been in this position in the first place, noting that the reported 10-year, \$300 million offer the Red Sox made him is significantly below his value on the open market.

Meanwhile, the signing of Peraza didn't generate much excitement among Red Sox fans. You can blame the 25-year-old's .239/.285/.346 slash line last season for that. Boston's front office, however, remains optimistic about Peraza, pointing to his 2018 numbers of .288/.326/.416. Either way, internal optimism about a bottom-of-the-roster infielder does little to mitigate the disappointment of needing to deal Betts. The decision to trade Betts serves as a true gut punch to Boston fans, capping off an unsatisfying -- and at times ugly -- offseason.

The logic behind much of the anger is completely valid. Regardless of the end game, the result is the same: Betts developed into a homegrown MVP talent in Boston, and despite deep financial resources and rising ticket prices, the Red Sox traded him away one year from free agency. That's not a recipe for fan appreciation.

Why they're angry at Mookie Betts

To be fair, a vast majority of the anger Wednesday morning was directed at team ownership. But if you ask some corners of Red Sox fandom, Betts did not enthusiastically sign an extension with the Red Sox because some fans believe he didn't enjoy playing in Boston.

Betts is naturally introverted and wasn't dreaming of the spotlight when he became a professional athlete. Being a sports star in Boston means you're an A-list celebrity. While Betts wasn't quite as much of an off-the-field public figure as some previous Red Sox stars have been, he had on multiple occasions expressed his appreciation for the team and being a part of its culture of winning.

"It's just been a blessing to be a part of such a great franchise with all of the history and all of the guys who have come through and they still come through," Betts told ESPN in May. "You meet a lot of people. A lot of eyes are on you here, and I've learned if you don't embrace it, it may eat you up.

"You have the opportunity to win every year. Nobody is trying to take a season off. You can't ask for anything more than that. Winning every year, winning is obviously the reason why we play and we've been able to do it every year. It's definitely something I want to be a part of."

While fans tend to favor players signing extensions before they hit free agency, as Xander Bogaerts did before the 2019 season, many of those contracts end up as team-friendly deals at premium positions. If Bogaerts had entered free agency after his 2019 season, when he hit .309/.384/.555 with 33 homers and 117 RBIs, he would undoubtedly have received more lucrative contract offers than the six-year, \$120 million deal he got from the Red Sox. After all, any extra money players don't receive still ends up in the pockets of billionaire owners.

Still, you can't blame fans for wanting their favorite players to stay put -- and homegrown players are stuck with the added burden of public pressure to take a hometown discount. Many people around Boston point to the example of Tom Brady, who took less money for years to stay with the New England Patriots, giving them payroll flexibility to improve the rest of the team in becoming one of the NFL's greatest dynasties. Though Betts did enjoy playing in Boston, his priority wasn't to remain with the Red Sox for life -- it was,

and continues to be, maximizing his value in a sport without a hard salary cap. There aren't a ton of teams that can afford Betts' services, but many around the industry expect that while he might not get the reported 12 years and \$420 million he's looking for, he'll get somewhere close to it.

This might not be a situation like Jon Lester's in 2014, when Boston's contract extension offer of four years and \$70 million looked embarrassing compared to what the Chicago Cubs eventually gave the lefty -- a six-year, \$155 million deal -- but it's undeniable that Boston offered Betts below-market value -- and, though fans might not like it, he wasn't buying.

Why they shouldn't be quite so angry

With Henry approving the contracts of Eovaldi and Sale, and J.D. Martinez opting in to his contract, the Red Sox had backed themselves into a corner. When it came to an extension, Betts wasn't going to accept less than what he was worth on the open market, and Boston didn't feel comfortable making the financial commitment necessary to prevent him from hitting free agency. The decision to let team president Dave Dombrowski dish out big contracts en route to winning the 2018 World Series -- before firing him less than a calendar year later -- proved to be extremely significant.

It's hard to blame Bloom for following the desires of his bosses, and it's hard to blame Betts for not accepting less than what he feels he is worth. Betts can play for another winning franchise before hitting free agency, while Bloom can start to retool his new team. Bloom begins his front-office career by trading Betts, and it will be one of the biggest moves he'll ever be attached to.

Shedding Betts' \$27 million salary -- and much of the \$96 million still owed to Price -- from the payroll also eases the financial pressure the team had put on itself. Yes, Henry is a billionaire -- but luxury tax penalties aren't insignificant. Combining the potential payroll commitments with the luxury tax penalties and lost revenue sharing rebates, Boston could have been looking at spending close to \$100 million more over the next three seasons, in addition to facing greater draft pick and international bonus pool money penalties. Trading Betts and Price slashed approximately \$43 million off Boston's 2020 payroll, and positions the team to be able to spend heavily after the season and exceed the luxury tax threshold with significantly fewer penalties.

Subtracting the production of Betts from the lineup and the outfield and removing Price from the rotation makes Boston a significantly weaker team on Opening Day. Still, the deal made Tuesday means the Red Sox avoid the risk of keeping Betts on the roster for 2020 despite no guarantees for the future, while making the safest move long term, acquiring the strongest package of players they could for him. The additions of Verdugo and Graterol help supplement Boston's young core. Verdugo -- who will face intense scrutiny as Betts' replacement -- rose through the Dodgers' system as one of their top prospects. And, for what it's worth, Boston's projected win total only dipped a single game at Caesars Sportsbook -- from 87.5 to 86.5.

Boston traded Mookie Betts because it believes its best long-term interests included dealing one of the greatest players in franchise history, and that the team can weather the PR storm the deal has created.

*** *WEEI.com***

Red Sox raise medical concerns regarding Brusdar Graterol, delaying trade

Rob Bradford

You didn't actually think anything involving the Red Sox' offseason was going to be easy, did you?

According to The Athletic, the three-team trade that would send Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers, Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol to the Red Sox and Kenta Maeda to the Twins has been held up due to Boston's concerns over Graterol's health.

The Red Sox reportedly have concerns regarding the 21-year-old pitcher Graterol, who has not only undergone Tommy John surgery but missed two months last season due to shoulder issues, limiting him to 70 2/3 innings in 2019. The Sox may view him more as a reliever than a starter, potentially necessitating another player and/or cash added in the deal.

Per ESPN, the likelihood of the deal blowing up is slim and a source told The Athletic that the medical issue "is a problem but one we can figure out."

Getting to know 2 players Red Sox received in trade for Mookie Betts, David Price

Ryan Hannable

On Tuesday night, the Red Sox reportedly sent Mookie Betts and David Price as well as cash to the Dodgers in a blockbuster trade, which also involved the Twins.

The Red Sox received outfielder Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and Twins pitching prospect Brusdar Graterol. Verdugo and Graterol aren't exactly household names in baseball, so what exactly are the Red Sox getting?

For starters, Verdugo isn't as unknown as Graterol. The 23-year-old has appeared in the big leagues with the Dodgers each of the last three seasons and figures to immediately slide into the Red Sox' starting lineup.

He's a left-handed hitter, who in 106 games last season hit .294/.342/.475 with 12 homers and 44 RBIs. He's a solid outfielder with room to grow at the plate. Going into last season, Verdugo was Baseball Prospectus's No. 19 ranked overall prospect.

Verdugo is arbitration eligible in 2022 and will hit free agency in 2025.

As for Graterol, he's the more intriguing player, but there's also not all that much known about him.

The 21-year-old right-hander from Venezuela is known for his hard-throwing pitching ability. He made his Major League debut late last season and set a Twins team record with a 101.9 mph pitch. In 10 big league innings, he struck out 10 batters and was added to the playoff roster.

He also threw a scoreless inning in the playoffs, striking out two Yankees during a perfect eighth inning in Twins' Game 1 loss. While he was a reliever in the big leagues, he came up through the Twins' organization as a starter.

In the minors last season, Graterol went 7-0 with a 1.92 ERA in 18 games (11 starts). In 61 innings, he struck out 61 batters.

It's unclear what role the Red Sox envision for him, but what he turns out to be will play a major role in reviewing this trade down the road.

How Jon Lester situation impacted trading of Mookie Betts

Jim Hackett

Some bad decisions leave permanent scars and like that regrettable tattoo many of us may have from our youth, the Red Sox should be riddled with regrets on this one.

Mookie Betts, arguably one of the greatest and certainly most dynamic players that the Red Sox have ever produced, is gone.

Regrets, the Red Sox should have more than a few...

Here's my timeline on why the Betts trade happened -- the process started six years ago.

Winter of 2014: The Red Sox make an embarrassingly low-ball offer to a proven Jon Lester of four years and \$70 million. He was traded out of town on July 31 of that year. To show what a farce that offer was, here's a solid comparison of the value of a top end starter at the time. Cole Hamels had just signed with the Philadelphia Phillies for 6 years / \$144 million. Was Cole Hamels worth twice as much as Jon Lester? Hard no.

Sadly, at the time there were plenty of rumors circling that Lester would take a hometown discount to stay in Boston. The Red Sox took the literal meaning of that one. Perhaps a starting offer of five years \$105 or \$110 million would've been a more reasonable anchor to set. That likely would have landed him for less than the six-year, \$155 million he eventually agreed to with the Chicago Cubs later.

Sounds like quite a bargain now, but it gets worse. After this debacle, the real madness ensued...

Fall of 2014: Panic stricken on the heels of a lost 2014 season and a failed Lester negotiation, the Red Sox sign Pablo "The Hut" Sandoval for five years and \$95 million and Hanley Ramirez for four years and \$88 million. These contracts still logjam their payroll today.

Winter of 2015: Realizing the err of their ways with the Lester "negotiations" the Red Sox wildly overpay for David Price with a commitment of seven years and \$217 million.

Winter of 2018-19: Following a World Series Championship (thank you), the Red Sox got sentimental and committed another \$68 million over four years to the sometimes dazzling yet injury prone Nathan Eovaldi. Then in March of 2019, the oft brilliant yet chronically injured Chris Sale was extended for five years and \$145 million. This contract was seemingly offered based past performance, considering the recent and obvious injury history with Sale's ailing left shoulder.

The rest is history.

Victims of their surprising World Series success in 2013, the Red Sox leadership read and reveled in their well-documented frugal team building strategy of the year prior. They read and enjoyed their press clippings and the series of events that followed bit them back. Hard.

Had they not made such a hard line and frankly market blind offer to Lester that offseason, some of these moves that have fiscally handcuffed them since, may never have happened at all. The result of their most cavalier, know-it-all attitude during the 2014 offseason, led to the fiscal recklessness of the years that followed. The result of that fiscal madness is the unfortunate and inevitable loss of Betts, a player who should have minimally played in Boston through his prime years, which are about to come right now.

In terms of the actual trade that Chaim Bloom made for Betts, it's about as good as you can hope for. Two highly regarded prospects and the unburdening of the albatross that was the remainder of the David Price contract is a win.

However, it's a win in a game that the Red Sox should never have had to play in had they handled their business better in the years leading into today.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Mookie Betts trade will one day pay off for Red Sox, even if it feels terrible now

John Tomase

When did Red Sox ownership perform its about-face on Mookie Betts and pirouette from offering him a \$300 million contract to deciding he must go?

My guess would be 3-8.

Last year's disastrous season-opening road trip stamped out the euphoria of 2018 like a flicked cigarette. If ownership had let its emotions overrule rationality when agreeing to more than \$200 million in questionable money for pitchers Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi, that brutal West Coast swing served as a bracing reality slap.

Owner John Henry admitted that his differences with former boss Dave Dombrowski started almost immediately after the World Series parade. Dombrowski envisioned a star-studded roster with the payroll to match. Henry recognized a need to reset — though in a classic example of wanting it both ways, signed off on a series of lucrative extensions that ran counter to that goal anyway.

The resulting clash led to Tuesday's still-shocking departure of Betts, a homegrown superstar entering his age-27 season with free agency looming in the fall.

The immediate, visceral reaction of most Red Sox fans is white-hot rage. They want to know how one of the game's richest teams — backed by some of its most expensive tickets — can justify crying poor at the cost of an MVP in his prime. It's an understandable sentiment, but this deal had to be made for a host of reasons that will pay off in the long run.

The first and most obvious is that the odds of Betts staying here beyond 2020 felt increasingly remote. According to NBC Sports Boston analyst Lou Merloni, the two sides remained more than \$100 million apart at this time last year, with the team offering around 10 years and \$300 million and Betts countering at 12 years and \$420 million.

Were the Red Sox on the cusp of a three-peat, then the case to let Betts play out his contract in the hopes of hitting some Anthony Rendon-style walk-year magic would be compelling. But following an 84-win season, with major questions dogging the pitching staff, the Red Sox aren't configured to challenge the Yankees, Astros, or even Rays in the American League. Trying to convince yourself otherwise is an exercise in wishful thinking.

So if Betts isn't enough to propel you to a World Series, and if he's almost gone in the fall, then the Red Sox really had only one choice — trade him before he leaves for nothing.

They determined that cutting payroll in the form of a David Price salary dump took precedence over the young talent coming back in return, and I believe that history will prove them right.

Both the Yankees and Dodgers have reset their luxury-tax penalties since 2016 by slashing payroll, and they've combined for five 100-win seasons since. That temporary fiscal discipline put each in a position to spend this offseason, the Yankees by inking right-hander Gerrit Cole to a record \$324 million contract, and the Dodgers by assuming \$75 million of Betts and Price.

The Red Sox, who have routinely boasted the game's highest payroll, will spend again, and this deal gives them the means to do it. Heck, they're now in a better position to pursue Betts next fall than if they had kept him, but even if he goes elsewhere, they could still be in play for a cheaper impact replacement like Astros All-Star George Springer.

There's nothing worse, from a team-building standpoint, than a top-heavy, bloated payroll. The Yankees dynasty officially died, for instance, under the weight of giant bills for Mark Teixeira, Derek Jeter, and Alex Rodriguez.

Similarly, locking Price, Sale, and Eovaldi into contracts totaling \$430 million is a recipe for fielding a rotation with a bunch of openers, since it precludes meaningful spending on depth.

That makes the \$48 million in savings on Price the key to this trade, as gross as that sounds. The Red Sox dropped their payroll from more than \$230 million to about \$190 million. That leaves them wiggle room to add a starter (Clay Buchholz is still out there!) or improve at the trade deadline without fear of crossing the \$208 million threshold that triggers third-time-offender penalties.

The removal of Price should also improve the team's culture and likability, though that's a story for another day. In the here and now, what matters is fixing the payroll, and this deal does it. Promising youngsters Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol should contribute in 2020, with the latter a candidate to replace Price in the rotation after being named Minnesota's No. 1 prospect.

There's also the long-term wisdom of signing Betts to a contract that would take him to age 40. We recently wrote about the worrisome history of superstars standing no taller than 5-9, most of whom broke down around 30. Were Betts to join their ranks, his contract would become an albatross.

So take heart, Red Sox fans. You loved Mookie Betts, and he was a great player here. Losing him hurts, but not half as much as losing him for nothing.

What can Red Sox' history of rebuilds tell us about Mookie Betts trade?

Darren Hartwell

Believe it or not, the Boston Red Sox have been here before.

Maybe not to this extent: It's not every day you trade away your 27-year-old superstar outfielder two seasons removed from an American League MVP campaign.

But the Red Sox' decision to deal Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a virtual salary dump -- a move that all but waves the white flag on the 2020 season and essentially signals a rebuild -- isn't totally without precedent.

The John Henry-era Red Sox, while consistently among the biggest spenders in baseball, have a history of hitting the "reset button" by declining to give new contracts to players viewed as franchise cornerstones.

That may explain why all four of Boston's World Series titles this century have come at least two years apart, and why the Sox have never made the playoffs in more than three consecutive seasons.

Tomase: Why the Betts/Price trade will work out in the long run
Want examples? We have examples. Let's start after the Red Sox' first World Series title in 86 years and continue through to the present:

2005 offseason: Pedro Martinez and Derek Lowe

The Red Sox actually got ahead of their first "rebuild" by trading star shortstop Nomar Garciaparra at the 2004 MLB trade deadline, months before their historic World Series victory.

The Sox then allowed both future Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez and postseason hero Derek Lowe to walk in free agency: Martinez signed a four-year, \$53 million contract with the New York Mets, while Lowe got four years and \$36 million from the Dodgers.

Boston got swept out of the 2005 American League Division Series and missed the playoffs in 2006. But moving on from Garciaparra, Martinez and Lowe allowed the club to take on the contracts of Josh Beckett and Mike Lowell in a 2005 trade with the Miami Marlins.

The Red Sox were back atop the MLB heap in 2007, with Beckett and Lowell (the eventual World Series MVP) playing a key role in that championship run.

2012 season: Josh Beckett, Carl Crawford and Adrian Gonzalez

Ben Cherington's August 2012 blockbuster with the Dodgers was a long time coming for the Red Sox, who had a bloated payroll and a roster of overpaid stars on bad contracts.

So, Cherington pulled the plug, trading Beckett, Crawford, Gonzalez and Nick Punto to L.A. for prospects in a move that opened up more than \$250 million in payroll.

What did Boston do with that extra money? The Sox signed seven free agents -- David Ross, Jonny Gomes, Stephen Drew, Mike Napoli, Shane Victorino, Koji Uehara and Ryan Dempster -- who under first-year manager John Farrell caught lightning in a bottle to win the 2013 World Series.

2014 season: Jon Lester

You know the story here: The Red Sox famously lowballed Lester in contract negotiations prior to the 2014 season, then dealt him to the Oakland Athletics at the 2014 MLB trade deadline rather than sign him to a long-term contract.

The next two seasons were a dark time in Boston -- last place finishes in the American League East in 2014 and 2015 -- but Dave Dombrowski's additions of Rick Porcello, David Price and Chris Sale over the next three seasons along with the development of young prospects like Betts, Xander Bogaerts and Andrew Benintendi helped the Red Sox climb back to relevance.

After early exits in the 2016 and 2017 playoffs, the Red Sox finally put it all together in 2018 with a 108-win season and another championship.

2020 offseason: Mookie Betts and David Price?

Let's face it: The Red Sox might miss the playoffs for the second consecutive season, and you may be inclined to call Boston "cheap" for trading a once-in-a-generation talent to get under the luxury tax.

That said: Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom now has the resources to check out the 2021 free-agent market or explore trades to improve the team.

As we've seen in years past, there's a good chance Bloom will do just that and get the Red Sox back into title contention.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Five Questions in the Aftermath of Mookie Betts/David Price trade

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox have yet to make their three-team deal from Tuesday night official, but here are five questions in search of answers in the wake of the trade.

1. Did they get enough in return?

Short answer: no.

Long answer: it's complicated.

The Red Sox were not dealing from a position of strength, even given what they surrendered. Mookie Betts had only a year of control remaining, was due to make \$27 million in 2020 and had given no indication that he was open to signing an extension anywhere else. That limited the Sox in their dealings.

In Alex Verdugo and Brusdar Graterol, they got two very talented young players. Verdugo has the potential to be an All-Star outfielder and he's under control for five seasons. Graterol could be a No. 2 starter and is under control for six seasons. If both reach their potential, the Red Sox will have gotten a middle-of-the-

order bat and a plus defender and an elite starter — something they've failed to develop on their own — for at least a five-year stretch.

But some context is necessary.

Let's divide the trade in half. If you look at getting Graterol for Price, the Sox paid down half of Price's remaining money to get themselves a top pitching prospect in return for a 34-year-old with significant injury concerns. That's a good deal.

But that leaves you with Betts for Verdugo, which doesn't seem like an adequate return for one of the best players in the game. Yes, five years of control versus one is a huge aspect of this.

But contrast that to, say, what the Arizona Diamondbacks got in return for one year of Paul Goldschmidt a year ago. Had the Sox received a second good prospect from a loaded Dodgers system, it might be easier to say they did close to full value here. But they didn't.

2. What are the plans for Verdugo and Graterol?

It's assumed that Verdugo will take over for Betts in right field. He has a plus arm and is considered an above-average defender, necessary traits for handling right in Fenway.

It's possible, too, that Verdugo could replace Betts as the team's leadoff hitter. Verdugo had a .342 OBP last year with the Dodgers and in his final year in the minors (2018), got on base at a .391 clip. And it's not like there are any other obvious candidates to hit leadoff on the current roster.

As for Graterol, Price's departure leaves a gaping hole in the Boston rotation, but Graterol is unlikely to fill it right away. He hasn't started in the big leagues (he made 10 relief appearances for the Twins at the end of last season). In fact, his workload has been limited. He missed all of 2016 with Tommy John surgery and has topped only 100 innings (102 in 2018) just once.

In the view of most evaluators, he needs more time to develop as a starter. The likely plan would be to start him at Triple-A, and if he's ready, add him to the major league rotation in mid-season.

3. Would the Sox have been better off moving Price in a separate deal?

Perhaps such a strategy would have yielded a better return. Some believe the inclusion of Price in the deal limited what the Sox got back even though they've reportedly agreed to take back approximately half his remaining \$96 million.

Then again, consider that Chaim Bloom spent much of the past offseason trying to move Price, with little to show for his effort.

With the Dodgers intent on making the deal for Betts, Bloom took the opportunity to package Price into the trade, unloading \$48 million or so and landing a very good pitching prospect.

4. Now that they're (considerably) under the first CBT threshold, what do the Red Sox do with the savings?

For the time being, nothing. Yes, the Sox' roster still has holes, including a big one in the starting rotation. And yes, there are still some veteran free agents available.

But do the names Andrew Cashner, Jason Vargas, Clay Buchholz or Aaron Sanchez excite you? Because they're the best in the remainders bin.

The rotation currently consists of Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez and Martin Perez. It's likely that the Sox use that fifth spot to experiment with the opener concept. That would be an ideal way to introduce, someone like Tanner Houck to the rigors of the big leagues.

5. Could the Red Sox still sign Betts when/if he hits the free-agent market?

Could they? Sure. Will they? Doubtful.

The Sox will have successfully re-set their tax rate and could go back over the CBT threshold by outbidding the field to bring Betts back to Boston.

The Red Sox tried this strategy once before with Jon Lester after trading him away at the deadline in 2014 and it didn't go well. They didn't come close to the bids from the San Francisco Giants or the Chicago Cubs.

There is precedent for trading a player a year before free agency, then re-signing him later. The Yankees did it with closer Aroldis Chapman after 2016. But those instances are rare.

As Lester himself noted, once a player experiences what life is like beyond his original organization, it becomes much easier to sign elsewhere.

And then there's the magnitude of the ask. If the Sox, on numerous occasions, couldn't come close to narrowing the gap between what they believed to be fair value and what Betts thought he was worth, why will that change in 10 months?

Scouting reports on Alex Verdugo, Brusdar Graterol

Sean McAdam

A little is known about Alex Verdugo, the outfielder the Red Sox obtained for Mookie Betts and David Price Tuesday night. Next to nothing is known about Brusdar Graterol, the pitching prospect who was the second piece, via the Minnesota Twins.

We turned to a veteran talent evaluator for his assessment of both:

ALEX VERDUGO: "Sound athlete with big tools, top to bottom...Can manage at-bats with ability to show plate discipline. ... Low strikeout rate ... above league average developing power that translates into 45-double, 30-homer potential. ... Uses entire field. The Wall at Fenway can be his best friend if he can stay disciplined. ... Plus-plus bat contact with plus power developing. ... Strong arm and average speed and instincts will probably translate into playing a corner outfield spot, but could fill CF as well. ... Biggest issue is mental maturity development, taking responsibility for policy, daily commitment. ... Is the passion 100 percent or 75 percent?. ... If he achieves his talent, he's a No. 3-5 hitter. ... Patience will be needed with his maturing "upstairs" but I like this gamble as he now has a legitimate opportunity to flourish."

BRUSDAR GRATEROL: "Thick, strong agile power body. ... Big arm strength, with a 97-101 mph fastball with good sink action. ... Throws from three-quarter delivery. ... Doesn't have the swing-and-miss rate, which is a tick below average. ... Hard slider, which hitters chase because of late life, thrown 88-92 mph. ... Uses changeup mostly against left-handed hitters. ... How well he develops changeup will be a key to his success as a starter. ... Loses concentration at times. ... Needs to get ahead of hitters more and contain walks and mistakes in and out of strike zone. ... No reason to put him in the bullpen yet, since he has a No. 2-3 starter ceiling with the floor being a power set-up arm...Finish on the fastball tends to bore, fade rather than the riding effect he flirts with....Needs a half-year of development at Triple A."

*** *The Athletic***

Red Sox roster projection, post-Mookie Betts edition

Jen McCaffrey

A blockbuster deal Tuesday night that shipped Mookie Betts and David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers has left the Red Sox with serious roster questions to address in the days leading up to the start of spring training.

There may be more moves on the horizon now that the Red Sox payroll sits around \$190 million, well below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold they'd been eyeing as a goal.

But for now, here's a look at where the projected 26-player roster stands.

Lineup (9)

1. Andrew Benintendi, LF

Benintendi had a forgettable 2019 season and will look to regain his 2018 form, when he hit .290 with an .830 OPS. Hitting coach Tim Hyers said he visited Benintendi twice this winter, working through some swing adjustments. He said a bad start last year compounded things for the left fielder. Hyers noted Benintendi's focus on regaining his college swing while adding back some fitness he'd lost last season. The Red Sox attempted to hit Benintendi in the leadoff spot last year, but he struggled in the role. Perhaps they'll give it another shot after a winter of work on his swing.

2. Xander Bogaerts, SS

Without Betts to move the lineup, Bogaerts' role takes on even greater importance. If he can re-create his success from last season — when Bogaerts hit .309 with a career-high .939 OPS — the Red Sox offense should be OK. They'll need him to maintain that level of production.

3. J.D. Martinez, DH

Martinez is yet another slugger who'll have more pressure to drive in the runs with Betts gone. Martinez's 2019 season wasn't as strong as 2018, but he still managed a .304 average and .939 OPS. Martinez said at the team's winter weekend that he opted into his 2020 contract with the Red Sox, when he's owed \$23.75 million, because he knew he'd be playing for a competitive team. This team will still be competitive — but arguably less so without Betts and Price.

4. Rafael Devers, 3B

Alongside Bogaerts, the 23-year-old Devers helped carry the Red Sox offense for much of last season with a breakout year in which he hit .311 with a .916 OPS. As with Bogaerts and Martinez, maintaining that offense will be key in a tough AL East. Devers made progress defensively at third base last year, and that should remain a focus for improvement this year.

5. Alex Verdugo, RF

The newcomer to Boston who came over in the Betts trade turns 24 in May. He is a strong defender with a powerful arm and should be able to handle the quirks of right field at Fenway. Verdugo hit .294 with an .817 OPS, 22 doubles and 12 homers over 106 games in his first full season in the majors last year. Verdugo split most of his at-bats between second, sixth and seventh in the Dodgers lineup. It wouldn't be surprising if the Red Sox opt to start him lower in the lineup to alleviate some of the pressure he'll face as Betts' "replacement."

6. Michael Chavis, 1B

Chavis is likely to find time at first and second base and maybe even some in the outfield. The recent resigning of Mitch Moreland will only give Chavis not only a teacher at first base but also a platoon partner. Moreland will likely bat against right-handers, with Chavis potentially playing first against lefties. Chavis

had a solid rookie campaign, but he faded in the second half and will need to focus on reducing his number of strikeouts.

7. Christian Vazquez, C

Vazquez already took the majority of the reps behind the plate last year alongside Sandy León. Now that León is gone, this is Vazquez's staff. He'll have the task of getting backup Kevin Plawekci up to speed. Vazquez had a nice offensive start to 2019 but faded in the second half. Nevertheless, his .276 average and .798 OPS were career highs.

8. Jose Peraza, 2B

The Red Sox signed Peraza in December to a one-year, \$3 million deal with the hope of shoring up second base. Chavis is expected to see some time at the spot, but Peraza's addition will add versatility. The 25-year-old had a down 2019 (.239/.631 OPS) after a strong 2018 (.288/.742 OPS).

9. Jackie Bradley Jr., CF

Bradley's streakiness at the plate is expected, so predicting anything beyond that would be futile. However, his tremendous defense rarely disappoints. The Betts-Bradley duo made few missteps in the outfield, and Bradley shouldn't have too much of an adjustment figuring out how to thrive next to Verdugo's defensive skill set.

Rotation (5)

1. Chris Sale

More than any pitcher on the roster, Sale needs to prove himself and show why the Red Sox signed him to a \$145 million extension. Injury-shortened seasons have become a frustrating cycle for Sale each of the last two years, especially given what he can provide when he is healthy. Without another veteran anchor in the rotation now that Price and Rick Porcello are gone, the Red Sox will need more from Sale if they're going to be competitive.

2. Nathan Eovaldi

The Red Sox have hardly seen what Eovaldi can do in their rotation after a half-season in 2018 following the trade from Tampa and an injury-shortened 2019. Like Sale, Eovaldi needs to remain healthy enough to fortify a rotation that's lost two big pieces this winter. The 30-year-old has never pitched more than 200 innings. This year would be a good time to start.

3. Eduardo Rodriguez

Rodriguez relied heavily on the leadership and guidance of Price and Porcello as part of his development, so it will be interesting to see what their departures mean for him. The 2019 season was a breakout campaign for Rodriguez, who reached 200 innings, 200 strikeouts and 19 wins. Rodriguez needs to step up and help anchor the staff.

4. Martín Pérez

Pérez signed with the Red Sox in December and is expected to be a part of the rotation. The lefty posted a pedestrian 5.12 ERA over 32 games (29 starts), with a 3.6 BB/9 and 7.3 K/9 last season, but the Red Sox think tweaks to his delivery and his pitch mix, particularly his cutter, will help.

Spot No. 5: TBA

This spot is up for grabs. Newcomer Brusdar Graterol, acquired from Minnesota in the three-team trade with the Dodgers, is an option but probably not to begin the year. (The Sox also flagged something in his

medical review, which as The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal reported, has held up the deal from becoming official.) While he's been groomed as a starter in the Twins system, he debuted last year in 10 games out of the bullpen, allowing five runs in 9 2/3 innings while striking out 10 and walking two. He probably needs more development in the minors. Tanner Houck, meanwhile, made solid strides this winter in the Arizona Fall League and with Team USA. The 23-year-old spent most of 2019 in Double-A Portland and might benefit from starting the season in Pawtucket, but it's possible he tries to make a case for himself in spring training. In 33 games (17 starts) last year, he posted a 4.01 ERA, 3.8 BB/9 and 8.9 K/9. The Red Sox have turned to Brian Johnson in the past for spot starts and could view him as an opener option. Lefty Kyle Hart, who joined the 40-man roster this winter, is also an option for opener innings after a strong 2019.

Bullpen (8)

Matt Barnes

Barnes tied a career high with 70 appearances last year, and the overuse, especially early on, started to show as the season went on. Barnes finished with a 3.78 ERA but a career-high 15.4 K/9. Perhaps a few other reliable arms in the bullpen this season will alleviate some of the overuse.

Brandon Workman

Workman's 1.88 ERA ranked sixth among relievers with at least 50 innings pitched, and his .123 opponents' batting average was the lowest in baseball last season. He tallied 16 saves for the Red Sox. While it's uncertain if he'll retain the closer role, the Sox need another season from him like the one he offered last year.

Darwinzon Hernandez

Hernandez had an impressive rookie campaign, with a 16.9 K/9 in 30 1/3 innings over 29 appearances. The 7.7 BB/9 and overall command are issues Hernandez needs to work on to find a long-term role. The Red Sox plan to keep Hernandez in the bullpen entering 2020, and it's possible he could take over the closer's role.

Marcus Walden

In a season that saw a lot of bullpen turnover, Walden was an unsung hero, putting up 78 innings over 70 appearances while posting a 3.81 ERA and an 8.8 K/9. He stabilized the bullpen and will be looked to again for stability there, whether in a more conventional late-innings role or earlier if the Red Sox opt to turn to the opener system.

Josh Taylor

Another unexpected contributor in 2019, Taylor made 52 appearances and posted a 3.04 ERA and an impressive 11.8 K/9. As he continues to gain experience, the Sox will likely look to him for some key innings.

Heath Hembree

Hembree struggled in 2019 and spent time in Triple-A Pawtucket to work on mechanics. In 45 appearances with Boston, he posted a 3.86 ERA and 10.4 K/9, but walks and lack of command plagued him for much of the first half. He'll have a lot to prove in spring training, and his spot isn't guaranteed.

Josh Osich

Osich signed with the Red Sox in December after making 57 appearances with the White Sox, posting a 4.66 ERA and 8.1 K/9. The Red Sox signed several relievers to one-year deals this winter, and Osich will join that crew competing this spring for a spot.

Austin Brice

The Red Sox acquired the 27-year-old from the Marlins this winter in exchange for minor-leaguer Angeudis Santos. Brice posted a career-high 36 appearances in the majors last year and a career-best 3.43 ERA and 9.3 K/9. He could be an intriguing option for a bullpen that needs reliable arms.

Bench (4)

Mitch Moreland, 1B

Back on a one-year, \$3 million deal, Moreland has a veteran presence that will be welcomed in a clubhouse reeling from turnover. The 34-year-old will likely come off the bench against right-handers while helping Chavis — and perhaps even Bobby Dalbec later in the season — develop at first base. Moreland isn't an everyday player anymore, but he could be a valuable bench player.

Kevin Plawecki, C

Plawecki will need time to learn the staff, albeit one that's in flux, but he will likely see most of his time behind the plate when Vazquez needs a day off. Plawecki doesn't offer much offensively.

Jonathan Arauz, INF

Selected in the Rule 5 draft, Arauz needs to remain on the 26-man roster the entire season or be lost to waivers. If Arauz proves versatile and puts up a strong showing in spring training, he could win a spot on the Sox bench. He plays short, second and third and hit .249 with a .707 OPS in 115 games for Houston's Double-A and Triple-A teams last year. Should the Red Sox opt to re-sign Brock Holt in the wake of trading Betts and Price, he'd get this spot over Arauz.

Tzu-Wei Lin, utility

The Red Sox don't have a backup outfielder outside of Martinez, and given the designated hitter's back issues, limiting his outfield reps would be wise. Lin has limited experience in the outfield and the Red Sox do have Marcus Wilson on the 40-man roster, but he's yet to appear above Double-A. This is another area where the Red Sox might pursue a trade or free agent to plug a hole.

Red Sox fans are angry after Mookie Betts trade, and they should be

Steve Buckley

We are three weeks removed from that festive Fenway Park news conference at which the Red Sox announced they had promoted Alex Cora to ex-manager.

It sure sounded like that, didn't it? Owners John Henry and Tom Werner and CEO Sam Kennedy practically hammerlocked one another in a competition to see which suit could say the nicest things about Cora, to the point that it was easy to forget he'd been fired. (Or, in Red Sox-speak, he's not the manager anymore because of a "mutual parting of the ways.")

But wait: Is Cora out because of his involvement in the Houston Astros' 2017 cheating scandal? Is he out because of what Major League Baseball's version of Scotland Yard (not to be confused with Camden Yards) has developed in its investigation of possible cheating by the Cora-led Red Sox in 2018?

The Red Sox want you to withhold judgment about that until all the facts are known.

Fine, then. We'll withhold judgment. But while the Red Sox went to great lengths to stage a news conference designed to impress upon their fans the need to withhold judgment about Cora, they would be wise to avoid playing the withhold-judgment game vis-à-vis their decision to trade Mookie Betts to the Dodgers.

Earth to Red Sox: Your fans are decidedly not reserving judgment on the jettisoning of Mookie Betts. While some Sox fans are playing the home version of “You Be The General Manager!” and concluding it’s the right time to trade the right fielder, most Red Sox fans, as in about 99.5 percent of them, don’t like the deal.

OK, so I’m just throwing that out there, that 99.5 percent. (Although 99.5 is the projected win total for the 2020 Dodgers at one internet site I visited.) But allow me to pose a question: As you were going about your business on Wednesday, how many people did you come across who are OK with the Betts deal?

My sense is that at this moment Red Sox fans are the angriest they have been at any time during the Henry-Werner Era. Before continuing, I’ll ladle out the obligatory acknowledgment that this ownership has produced four World Series championships and has somehow managed to do massive renovations of Fenway Park in such a way that you can still envision what it was like when Ted Williams was digging in against Bob Feller.

But they’ve botched things but good since the Red Sox won the World Series in 2018, and the customers are not happy. And let’s be grown-ups about this: It’s not the one year of not making the playoffs that has everyone so upset. Fans can handle that. The Red Sox have had eight seasons without making the playoffs since this ownership got the keys to Fenway in 2002, including the Dark Ages of 2010-12.

Yes, it may seem hard to believe in this century of decadence by the four big-league teams — a combined 12 championships by the Patriots (six), Red Sox (four), Celtics and Bruins (one apiece) — but the Sox actually have had a stretch of three straight seasons without a trip to the postseason. And some of today’s high school kids are old enough to remember it.

That three-year stretch includes two of the worst moments Red Sox fans have had to endure this century:

2011 — The Sox coughed up a seemingly certain postseason berth by going 7-20 in September, after which popular manager Terry Francona was fired. GM Theo Epstein then cashed out and moved to Chicago to run the Cubs. After that came the “chicken and beer” reports that painted the 2011 Red Sox as a team whose players simply didn’t give a damn.

2012 — Bobby Valentine was hired to manage the Red Sox. His tenure was a disaster, of course, but I’ll say it until I die: Goofy and out of place though Valentine may have been, the team he managed was awful.

Red Sox fans were also plenty angry when 2007 and 2013 World Series hero Jon Lester received a slap-in-the-face low-ball offer from the Red Sox leading into the 2014 season (four years, \$70 million), and then, when he turned it down, was traded to the Oakland A’s as part of a July 31 housecleaning. Incredibly, Lester, who turned 36 last month, might still be with the Red Sox — and David Price most likely never would have been signed — had the Sox made him a respectable offer.

So, yes, the Red Sox have been plenty bad this century and their fans have had plenty to be mad about.

But this?

MLB is undergoing an investigation into the possibility the Red Sox cheated their way to a championship in 2018.

Pitchers and catchers report next week and still there is no manager.

Mookie Betts, one of the finest all-around players ever produced by the Red Sox, and still just 27, has been traded as a part of a salary dump.

Yes, this is the angriest Red Sox fans have been this century.

By far.

And they have a right to be.

You may recall the Red Sox holding a postmortem news conference at the end of last season, during which CEO Sam Kennedy said he anticipated a “modest increase” in ticket prices for 2020. I mentioned it at the end of a column, along with my observation that “The mere staging of a big-league ballgame is hugely expensive, so let them have their modest increase.”

OK, I was pretty wrong about that. (I was also wrong in 1994 when I stated that newly acquired catcher Dave Valle had a swing just made for Fenway and that he would hit a ton of homers there. He hit .158 in his 30-game career with the Red Sox. He hit just one home run. It was in Kansas City.)

Anyway, the Red Sox are in the withholding-judgment business, right? Until you get some answers from the Red Sox, and a look at that MLB report on 2018, Sox fans might consider withholding their credit cards.

27 thoughts while digesting the still-shocking idea that Red Sox would trade Mookie Betts

Chad Jennings

While we wait for the medical exams to make the trade official, here are 27 thoughts on the monumental Red Sox trade just days before pitchers and catchers report to spring training.

1. There’s analytical logic, and there’s sports logic, and those two don’t always see eye to eye. It’s possible to understand why the Red Sox traded Mookie Betts, and still not like it. It’s possible even to agree with the rationale behind it, and still disagree with actually making the trade.

2. Justification for this deal starts with Betts’ refusal to sign a contract extension unless it would match his perceived open-market value. That’s not a pointed finger of blame, it’s just an explanation. Baseball’s pay structure offers the greatest financial rewards to those who reach free agency at their peak. Many players prefer the security and stability of a long-term extension before they get there. Betts believed in himself enough to hold out.

3. Betts reportedly asked for 12 years, \$420 million. If that’s correct, it’s an insane amount of money – and maybe the Red Sox should have given it to him. Huge contracts like that are almost always a terrible idea, and they’re rarely justified in the end, but when it’s a homegrown player like Mookie Betts, the calculation might have to go beyond what he’s “worth” as a ballplayer.

4. There’s a lot of historical and analytical logic in a team refusing to sign a player for something like \$400 million. But fans sure do like cheering for a team that’s willing to go that far. That’s where so much of the frustration with this trade will come. If the Red Sox weren’t willing to go above and beyond the open-market rate for their best homegrown player since – I mean, if he’d stayed, maybe since Carl Yastrzemski – who will they go to that far to sign? Maybe no one. It’s probably smart, but it also kind of stinks.

5. Signing Betts to an absurd contract would have been a signal to the fan base – the jersey buyers and NESN watchers and season ticket holders – that the Red Sox don’t mess around when it comes to the best of the best. Especially when it’s one of their own, drafted and developed and now fully ascended to the upper echelon of the game’s elite. It would be nice to think a team like the Red Sox will never lose a player like that, no matter the cost. Probably not logical to think that way, but anyone who’s bought a jersey can understand that feeling.

6. And so, what a way for Chaim Bloom to start. Even if Bloom was ordered from on high to get payroll below \$208 million, he was still the chief baseball officer in charge of making that happen. And even if he was ordered specifically to trade Betts, he was the guy responsible for maximizing the return.

7. Bloom might be young and new, but he's no dummy, and he's been around the game for a long time. He had to know trading Mookie Betts – the Mookie Betts – would be shocking and unpopular even if he got Lamar Jackson to play for the Patriots as part of the return package. He had to really believe in this to actually make it happen.

8. Also, a move like this doesn't happen because of one man. Betts wasn't traded because Bloom camped out in his hotel room with his calculator and his spreadsheets, running the numbers down to the decimal point, until he proved Betts had to go. It takes more than one person to trade a guy like Mookie Betts.

9. Ultimately, there can be little doubt this was an ownership-driven move. John Henry and Tom Werner made clear months ago that they wanted to cut payroll. In fact, they suggested that cutting payroll this offseason had been discussed for a while. The fact Dave Dombrowski saddled them with so many big contracts heading into this winter seemed like a key reason Dombrowski was fired. Even if you label cutting payroll a goal, not a mandate – a stated goal from ownership carries a lot of weight.

10. Put it another way: If ownership insisted on keeping Betts, Betts would be here for one last year. Maybe more. And if ownership still wanted to cut payroll with Betts onboard, Bloom would have had to find another way to dump salary or explain why this wasn't the right time to do it.

11. Can we please, though, stop calling Red Sox ownership cheap? Say that they were misguided in green-lighting some of last year's contracts. Say they should have pushed harder for a Betts extension before it got to this point. Say it's a bad look to raise ticket prices while slashing payroll. Say they never should have let it come to this. But cheap? From the Fenway Park renovations to the community outreach to the huge investments in payroll, international free agents, and that 2011 draft class that brought Betts in the first place – most fan bases wish they had owners so thrifty. Not saying fans shouldn't be upset with ownership but come up with a different word for it. "Cheap" misses the mark.

12. (I do wonder, though, if we might see a different way of doing business for the next few years, a model that tries to learn something from the Rays and Athletics, but supplemented with a real big-league budget, just not one that blows most of the league out of the water. I'm just curious to see if it happens.)

13. Even with a new head of baseball operations, and even after ownership talked about cutting payroll, and even knowing Betts was hell-bent on free agency, I still didn't think the Red Sox would trade their best player this winter. It was a distinct possibility, for sure, but the trade deadline always seemed like a better time to make such a deal.

14. Waiting until July would have let the Red Sox figure out whether they could be competitive this year – Is Chris Sale back to his old self? Is Bobby Dalbec good for 30-plus homers? Is Andrew Benintendi finally an All-Star? – and if not, they could trade Betts to a contending team prepared to overpay and go all-in. That seemed like the best of both worlds. That's obviously not the path they chose.

15. Waiting for the trade deadline was also a bit of a pie-in-the-sky idea. Betts had to stay healthy. He couldn't have a down year. More than one contender had to be a position to trade for him. Those contenders had to have the prospect stock to make a deal. Those contenders also needed a willingness to trade those prospects for a two-month rental. Are we certain any team would have made a deadline deal giving up a package better than a current top 100 prospect, plus a young big leaguer who was top 100 last year? Maybe not.

16. Even if a team would have made that trade at the deadline, what are the chances that team also would have taken on roughly half of David Price's remaining contract?

17. Removing the uncertainty of Price is important. He was clearly being paid well above his market value – almost twice what Dallas Keuchel got this winter – but his contract had a chance to get even worse. He's making significantly more per year than Dustin Pedroia will make this season, or than Pablo Sandoval made the two years before that. The Red Sox treated part of his salary as a sunk cost and passed the remaining uncertainty onto the Dodgers.

18. Within that uncertainty, of course, is the possibility that Price could be pretty good. Maybe not a Cy Young winner again, but when healthy, he's remained a pretty solid and sometimes awfully good starter these past four years. If he stays on the field throwing more than 100 innings a season, the Red Sox will miss him. In fact, they might miss him a lot.

19. Without Price, that fifth starter spot is now a glaring hole on the Red Sox roster, and the remaining free-agent market doesn't exactly offer a good fit to round out the staff. Clay Buchholz, anyone? Jeremy Hellickson? Aaron Sanchez? Take a flyer on Taijuan Walker's health? I suppose it wouldn't be a surprise to see the Red Sox sign one of those guys as a cheap option, or maybe even trade for some team's excess starter if they can find one.

20. One possibility I've heard is that a young internal candidate could get a real opportunity in spring training or at some point this summer. Tanner Houck or Kyle Hart or even Bryan Mata could be a part of the short-term plan. In recent years, it's seemed most of the upper-level pitching depth has been treated as just-in-case alternatives. The Red Sox might now be gearing up to let some of those guys sink or swim. Maybe they won't all end up in the bullpen at the first sign of trouble.

21. On a related note, the Red Sox believe they've done a better job of scouting and developing starting pitchers lately. They might have to prove it pretty soon. They've already seen some positive results in guys they drafted and traded. Now we might see some of the guys they drafted and kept.

22. One random thought from the what-might-have-been folder: If J.D. Martinez had opted out of his contract, would Betts still be with the Red Sox for 2020? Or would losing Martinez have spurred a more complete rebuild?

23. At the very least, it seems safe to say, if Martinez had opted out, he would not have been replaced. The Red Sox would have pocketed the savings from his opt-out, moved at least one other relatively large contract, and gotten below the luxury tax threshold for 2020. But maybe they would have looked at the big picture – Martinez is gone, Betts won't re-sign, Price is overpaid, the pitching staff is a crapshoot, the Yankees have reloaded – and decided to burn the whole thing to the ground so they could shoot for contention sometime around 2022. Who knows?

24. The outfielder coming from the Dodgers, Alex Verdugo, is a nice player. He's not Betts, of course, but he was worth roughly 3 WAR in a little more than a half-season last year. Not a huge sample size, but not a tiny one either. It's enough to suggest he's big-league regular. Maybe not a star, but a guy who definitely can play.

25. I am a little bit surprised the Red Sox didn't end up with a young catcher in this deal. The fact both the Dodgers and Padres were involved in Betts trade talk, and each has a good but probably not untouchable catcher in its system, seemed to line up nicely for the Red Sox to address a glaring weakness in their system. Guess not.

26. The package of Verdugo and hard-throwing Brusdar Graterol vaguely reminds me of the top two guys the Diamondbacks got for Paul Goldschmidt last winter. In Arizona's case, it was a good and young everyday catcher (Carson Kelly), plus a once touted young starter who'd never quite put it together in the majors (Luke Weaver). It's not a perfect comparison, but it seems to be somewhere in the same ballpark – two good, young, major-league-ready players for one expensive superstar. Add in getting rid of the Price uncertainty, and there's obvious logic to making this trade.

27. But it's Mookie Betts. And watching that guy play defies logic.

Three-team Mookie Betts trade held up, may be adjusted over medical review

Ken Rosenthal

Officials involved in the three-team Mookie Betts blockbuster remain confident the deal will be completed, but perhaps not in its original reported form.

The Red Sox, after viewing the medical records of Twins right-hander Brusdar Graterol, projected him more as a reliever than as a starter, according to sources involved with the discussions. As a result of that valuation, the Sox might ask for an additional player and/or money to bridge the gap, though it is unclear whether the player would come from the Twins or Dodgers, sources said.

The review of players' medical records is one of the last steps in completing a trade, and four teams reached two separate deals involving a reported 10 players on Tuesday night. None of the players had been formally notified as of midnight Wednesday, because the deal was not yet official.

Any trade involving a cash exchange of more than \$1 million also requires the approval of the commissioner's office, and the Red Sox reportedly will send the Dodgers about half of the remaining \$96 million on left-hander David Price's contract as a condition of the agreement.

Graterol is one of two players the Red Sox are set to obtain for Price and outfielder Mookie Betts. Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo, the other player ticketed for Boston, has been cleared medically, sources said, even though he did not play after Aug. 4 last season due to a back/oblique/core issue.

Discussions continued late Wednesday night, with one official saying the deals included "a lot of moving parts." In addition to acquiring Graterol for right-hander Kenta Maeda and then sending him to the Red Sox, the Dodgers are in agreement on a deal that would send outfielder Joc Pederson, right-hander Ross Stripling and outfield prospect Andy Pages to the Angels for infielder Luis Rengifo and a prospect, according to sources and published reports.

Graterol, 21, was out from May 25 to Aug. 7 last season with a right shoulder impingement, but recovered to make his major-league debut in September and crack the Twins' Division Series roster. His fastball tops out at 101 mph, but the Twins viewed him as a future reliever, and the Red Sox evidently agree that he is not suited for a 150- to 170-inning workload, at least not right away.

A revised interpretation of risk is not unusual after a trade agreement is reached and a club sees a player's medical records for the first time. Teams consider starters more valuable than relievers, which is why the Red Sox might seek additional compensation.

The Sox have drawn heavy criticism in Boston over their return for Betts and Price, but they are looking at additional benefits. By clearing Betts' \$27 million salary for 2020 and approximately half of Price's remaining \$96 million over the next three seasons, the Sox would fall under the luxury-tax threshold and re-set their penalty rate to the minimum.

The Yankees and Dodgers followed a similar strategy in recent years, creating the payroll flexibility for bigger moves this offseason. For the Yankees, it was signing Gerrit Cole to the Yankees to a nine-year, \$324 million free-agent deal. For the Dodgers, it will be the acquisitions of Betts and Price.

They are just not there yet.

Early trade grades for the Dodgers, Red Sox and Twins in the Mookie Betts deal

Jim Bowden

The trade:

Dodgers get RF Mookie Betts, LHP David Price and cash
Red Sox get OF Alex Verdugo and RHP Brusdar Graterol
Twins get RHP Kenta Maeda

Los Angeles Dodgers

Grade: A

The Dodgers made one of the most lopsided trades for a superstar player in baseball history. They gave up only two players from their major-league roster and zero prospects from their farm system to land one of the top five position players in the game in Mookie Betts along with veteran starter David Price, and also got the Red Sox to pay a significant chunk of Price's salary.

Betts, 27, was the American League Most Valuable player in 2018, when he led the Red Sox to a World Championship. He is a four-time All-Star, four-time Gold Glove Award winner and three-time Silver Slugger Award winner. He's finished in the top eight in MVP voting in four consecutive years.

Betts can beat you in every possible way, with his glove, arm, range, hit tool, power, base running, intelligence — and for that matter, on the golf course and at the bowling alley. He does excellent charity work in the community. He will look good sharing a billboard with new teammate Cody Bellinger wherever the Dodgers want to put one. He's a special talent, the kind that doesn't come around often.

Mookie was a 6.8 WAR player last year and is a 42.0 WAR player for his career. He's had at least 24 homers, 100 runs, 80 RBI and 16 stolen bases in each of the last four seasons. He's led the AL in batting average, slugging percentage and runs scored in his career. His career OPS+ is 134. His hard-hit rate is in the 88th percentile and his xBA in the 98th percentile. His average exit velocity is 91 mph and his barrel percentage over 10 percent.

Price, 34, is a five-time All-Star, won the Cy Young award back in 2012 and finished runner up in Cy Young voting twice. Price doesn't have the same stuff he used to, but his fastball is still 91-94 mph and he cuts it more than ever before; throws his change-up more than ever (almost 26 percent of the time); and throws his curveball less (a career-low 2.9 percent of the time last year). He's nursed some nagging injuries the last few seasons, but the Dodgers are great at workload management. Price will definitely benefit from changing leagues for the first time in his career and getting to pitch half of his games at Dodger Stadium.

The Dodgers were able to hold on to their best two prospects, Gavin Lux and Dustin May, as expected — but to also avoid giving up infielder Jeter Downs or catcher Keibert Ruiz was amazing. They did give up outfielder Alex Verdugo as the centerpiece; he looks like he's going to be a .300 hitter with 20 homer power, and should be a solid player for years to come. Maeda was solid for the Dodgers as a middle-of-the-rotation starter and reliever.

Boston Red Sox

Grade: B-

The Red Sox knew they were not going to be able to sign Betts to a contract extension, and realized that if they didn't trade him, all they would get is a draft pick. They made the trade that they viewed as the best that was offered. Unfortunately, it's not even close to value, even for a rental.

The Sox got under the luxury tax threshold and created financial flexibility, which was a goal. And they did get a solid outfielder in Verdugo, who should be able to develop into a hitter capable of slashing .300/.365/.475 with 20 home runs and 15 stolen bases. After the Dodgers balked on dealing them May, the Red Sox and Dodgers tried to find a third team that would deliver a top pitching prospect to Boston, and that's when the Twins came in. It's somewhat surprising that they were willing to give up Brusdar Graterol for a mid-rotation starter in Maeda. Graterol is a typical Chaim Bloom sort of pitching prospect — a high-end dominating reliever type. He has a 102 mph fastball that acts like a bowling ball at the bottom of the strike zone; a nasty late-breaking slider that he can put hitters away with; and a curveball that right now is for show only. His changeup needs a lot of work, as it's too hard and lacks deception. He made his major league debut last year, and in 9.2 innings of work he punched out 10 and walked only 2. He profiles either as a back-end closer or potentially a top-of-the-rotation starter.

The disappointing aspect for the Red Sox is that they weren't able to get any other prospects thrown in. I thought they'd at least get a significant third prospect like infielder Downs or catcher Ruiz. However, taking quality over quantity was probably the best play here.

Minnesota Twins

Grade: C

I think the Twins made a bad trade — but, because their intent is to take advantage of their window to get back to the World Series for the first time since 1991, I'm ultimately OK with it. There are times that GMs can't be concerned about "winning a trade" long-term, and instead need to focus on winning a championship. The Twins traded their best pitching prospect, Graterol, for a veteran starter in Maeda. They traded a high-upside arm for a sure thing, realizing their World Series window is definitely the next few years.

Remember, the Cubs "lost" the Gleyber Torres trade with the Yankees when they dealt him for Aroldis Chapman. But they didn't care. They won a championship. The Nationals "lost" their trade with the White Sox when they sent over top-of-the-rotation starter Lucas Giolito in a package deal for outfielder Adam Eaton. Who cares? They just won a championship. That's the type of deal this is for the Twins. Short-term win, long-term loss, and it won't matter if they get to play into late October.

Maeda, 31, has made at least 20 starts in each of the last four seasons with a career ERA of 3.87 and WAR of 5.4. Last year he was 10-8 with a 4.04 ERA, 1.074 WHIP and 1.8 WAR. However, his home-road splits were a bit alarming last season, as he went 8-3 with a 3.13 ERA at Dodger Stadium and 2-5 with a 5.12 ERA on the road. Maeda has a 91-93 mph fastball a hard 83 mph slider, a deceptive change-up and mixes in a curveball, albeit not as much as he used to. Opponents hit .280 against his four-seamer, .222 against his two-seamer, .158 against the slider, .294 vs. the curveball and .183 against the change-up.

One of the key aspects from the Twins' perspective is that they will control Maeda through 2023 at an affordable \$3.125 million per year, plus incentives. A starting pitcher with four years of control at a reasonable price is what makes this trade so attractive to the small- to middle-market Twins.

However, Graterol was their best pitching prospect, and he was ready to dominate out of the bullpen this year. His overpowering fastball and late-breaking slider make him a two-pitch lights-out reliever ready to help them right now. And he still could develop into an impact closer or top-of-the-rotation starter.

Bottom line is I don't like the actual trade long-term for the Twins, but it's easy to see why they made it. They needed another starter, and they have a legitimate chance of doing damage in October.

Untangling the three-team trade that's sending Mookie Betts to L.A.

Keith Law

Tuesday night finally brought us the Mookie Betts trade that has seemed inevitable since last summer. The only surprise was that the trade involved a third team, the Twins, who inserted themselves into the deal between the Red Sox and Dodgers to get another starter, while Boston focused primarily on moving money.

The Dodgers will get Mookie Betts for a year, plus three years of David Price and his uncertain health outlook, without requiring me to change my ranking of their top prospects at all. Betts is one of the top five position players in baseball; in the last five seasons, only Mike Trout has produced more WAR, and Betts is about 30 percent ahead of the next player in both Baseball Reference's and FanGraphs' calculations. He does everything you could ask a position player to do: He hits for average, gets on base, rarely strikes out, hits for power (averaging 29 homers over the last four years), fields his position exceptionally, adds value on the bases (a career SB rate of 83 percent), and plays just about every day. The Dodgers didn't necessarily need Mookie Betts, not after winning their division by 21 games last year and losing nothing from their lineup, but of course they're better off with him by several wins.

Price is far more of a wild card, coming off wrist surgery and his second season in the last three where he didn't throw enough innings to qualify for the ERA title. Price's last great season was 2015, and his last 200-inning season was 2016. It's tempting to say that his BABIP spike last year, to more than 40 points

above his career average, was a fluke, but his stuff was also down across the board, with the worst fastball velocity of his career, and he hasn't demonstrated he can pitch that effectively with reduced velocity yet. The Dodgers will get three years to see if Price can get past the wrist issue and then see if either his stuff bounces back or he learns to pitch with less stuff. Right now, he'd be one of the five starters in their Opening Day rotation unless we assume Dustin May gets a spot and Alex Wood is healthy and effective enough to take another, but that could be short-lived if Price isn't effective early — in which case they might do better to see if he can pitch as a long reliever to work through this transition to pitching with less stuff.

The Red Sox's main return in this deal is salary relief, not the long-term starting pitching help their system needs right now. They moved \$59 million in 2020 salaries, and \$32 million each of the next two years, less the cash they're sending to the Dodgers in the deal. Whether the Red Sox — one of the sport's revenue juggernauts — should be prioritizing salary relief over adding pitching to return this team to contention in the short term while they still have a good offensive core in place is a matter of opinion. Mine is that this is unseemly.

Boston will get two players back who'll help the team in 2020, at least. Alex Verdugo was quite productive in a partial season for the Dodgers, hitting for average with some power while playing plus defense in left field. He has more than enough arm to slide over to right field, and I could see some four-win seasons here with his defense, average and the potential for 60+ extra-base hits. He's not Mookie Betts, but he's a regular.

Right-hander Brusdar Graterol debuted in the bullpen last year for the Twins, and I think it's more likely that that's where he ends up in the long term. Working in relief, Graterol averaged 99 mph on his fastball, and his tight slider averaged 88.3 mph, with both pitches showing plus, the slider in particular missing bats. He missed the first half of the year with a shoulder impingement, which may have contributed to the decision to move him to the pen, but with a high-effort delivery, below-average command and the lack of an average changeup to get lefties out, that was his most likely destination anyway. He could be a very high-end reliever if he's left in that role.

The problem for the Sox is that their long-term pitching weakness remains unaddressed. They have a few arms in the system, but probably don't have anyone who'll pitch at the top of a rotation, and right now they have exactly one clearly above-average major-league starter in Eduardo Rodríguez, who is a free agent after 2021. This team isn't contending any time in the near future, or even the medium future, without more pitching and the Betts trade hasn't addressed that (unless Graterol defies expectations and becomes a starter). They could take the money they saved and invest it in pitching, although that wouldn't happen until at least next winter, and that doesn't do anything to make the 2020 Red Sox more competitive. It feels like a lost opportunity to use Betts, who was still valuable in trade even as a one-year rental, to try to address a long-term organizational need.

The Twins will trade Graterol and pick up Maeda, adding to their stable of back-end starters who might be league-average. Maeda was even better in relief last year, but he's one of the five best starters on the Twins' roster right now. His slider is an out pitch, one of the most effective sliders in baseball last year per FanGraphs' pitch values (6th among pitchers with at least 150 IP), and his split-change is borderline plus as well. If they're judicious with his innings, he could be one of their three best starters this year and definitely does a bit more to push them back to the playoffs than Graterol would out of the pen. They'll get four years of Maeda, who is under contract through 2023, for six years of control of Graterol — although if Graterol's role change is permanent, I'm not sure that six years of any reliever is that valuable given the volatility of reliever health and performance.

The Dodgers swung a second, related deal on Tuesday to get themselves back under the salary cap ... er, the luxury tax, which is a de facto salary cap for most clubs right now, enough so that the union needs to push back hard on this issue in the upcoming CBA negotiations. The Dodgers made a crosstown trade with the Angels and will send outfielder Joc Pederson to Orange County for infielder Luis Rengifo to get under the cap and move a player for whom they no longer had at-bats. Pederson has turned into a solid platoon outfielder, playing above-average defense in either outfield corner, hitting 36 homers last year with a .339

OBP thanks to a walk rate that has hovered between 9 and 10 percent the last two years. He's a platoon bat rather than a regular because he doesn't hit left-handed pitching at all, although the Angels could just play Michael Hermosillo against lefties and probably get above-average production in total from the tandem. Pederson's a free agent after the year, while Rengifo, now on his fourth organization, is just entering his second year in the majors. He's a great utility player who can handle short, second and the outfield corners on a part-time basis, and he's played a little third in the minors. He's an above-average defender at short and should be plus at second base in time, with plus speed — I have no idea why he stopped stealing bases last year, but he stole 41 in the minors in 2018 — and a good eye at the plate, with plate discipline last year in line with major-league averages, even though he was a 22-year-old rookie. At worst, the Dodgers have a great utility player for several years, but I think he will eventually be someone's regular at second base, and if that's not the Dodgers, it makes him more valuable in trade.

I'm sure Padres fans are disappointed that their team didn't land Betts, but if the primary motivation for Boston was to save money rather than add young talent, San Diego probably didn't stand a chance. The Padres still have plenty of prospects to swing another deal, now or at midseason, although their playoff odds for 2020 just took a hit. Their best path to contention this year is through the wild card, and they may be just as likely to get there through progress from their young core rather than trading a bunch of prospects for another veteran star — and the Dodgers will likely lose Betts to free agency after the season while lacking payroll flexibility as long as the current luxury tax system is in place. It's not much of a silver lining for Padres fans but it's all I've got for you right now.

*** *The New York Times***

Mookie Betts Deal Offers Painful Reminders of Boston's Past

Benjamin Hoffman

“Baseball is a business, and you've got to be ready for anything.”

It would be easy to imagine those words being spoken by Mookie Betts in the wake of the controversial trade this week that sent one of the game's brightest young stars from the Boston Red Sox to the Los Angeles Dodgers. But they were actually uttered more than 100 years ago, by outfielder Tris Speaker, according to “Spoke,” a biography of Speaker.

The baseball world has rushed to compare the Betts deal — which also sent pitcher David Price to Los Angeles for prospects and payroll relief — to the infamous sale of Babe Ruth to the Yankees on Dec. 26, 1919. But there is an argument to be made that the closer precedent is Boston's sale of Speaker, a future Hall of Famer, to the Cleveland Indians in 1916.

Comparing the relative talent and importance of players across eras can be difficult, but consider this: Just 27 position players have had a season valued at 10 or more wins above replacement, according to Baseball Reference's formulation, and only four — Speaker, Eddie Collins, Jimmie Foxx and Betts — were traded away by the club they recorded the feat for while still in their 20s. At the heart of each deal were financial concerns for the selling team.

While Ruth will forever be the player most associated with a fire sale, he began his career as a starting pitcher and his best days as a hitter came with the Yankees, making him an awkward comparison to Betts. Speaker, however, has some eerie parallels.

Like Betts, the 28-year-old Speaker was an outfielder squarely in his physical prime, had recently won both a Most Valuable Player Award and a World Series title, and was viewed by many as the heart and soul of one of the most talented teams in the American League.

At the time of the trade, The New York Tribune's Grantland Rice poked fun at Speaker for saying he had been “sold like a slave,” but the columnist also castigated the Red Sox for not understanding the

significance of Speaker, comparing his talent and leadership to that of Detroit's Ty Cobb and Philadelphia's Collins.

"A great ballplayer on a club, such as Cobb, Speaker or Collins, is a moral force as well as a physical one," Rice wrote. "Which is to say, such a star operates in the capacity of a psychological uplift. He lends encouragement by his acts, to the rest of the cast."

Though separated by more than a century, both deals came about because of concerns about the Red Sox' finances. The Betts deal helps Boston avoid luxury tax penalties, rids it of Price's bloated contract (worth \$96 million over the next three years) and allows the team to avoid the issue of re-signing Betts when he becomes a free agent. Speaker had become a concern for Boston because his salary swelled to \$17,500 as a result of a bidding war with the Federal League. When that competing league dissolved, Speaker was unwilling to return to the \$9,000 salary he made in 1913.

Rather than engage in an extended fight with their star player, the Red Sox sold him to Cleveland for \$55,000 and two young players.

Speaker continued to dominate for Cleveland, and in 1920 he helped lead the Indians to the team's first championship. And while Boston won the World Series two more times without Speaker (in 1916 and 1918), by 1922 the team had jettisoned three more future Hall of Famers — Ruth, Harry Hooper and Herb Pennock — and the Red Sox finished no better than fourth from 1919 to 1935, with nine last-place finishes.

In 1936, Boston attempted to flip the script on the Speaker and Ruth deals by taking advantage of the financial struggles of Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics. For \$150,000 and a minor leaguer, Boston purchased the rights to Foxx, whose only peer as a slugger was Ruth.

Foxx remained a terrific all-around player in Boston, despite research suggesting he was playing with a severe head injury during his time with the team, and he provided a strong early on-field role model for Ted Williams. But the outrageously expensive acquisition — Lou Gehrig was baseball's highest paid player in 1935 at \$31,000, roughly one-fifth of Foxx's purchase price — did not result in a single pennant.

Still, much like the Red Sox this week, Mack took a great deal of flak for selling off Foxx and several other stars in the 1930s. But unlike the current Boston club, listed by Forbes in 2019 as the third-most valuable M.L.B. club at \$3.2 billion, Mack at least had a unique excuse for his fire sales: It was frequently said in the 1930s that Pennsylvania's blue laws kept the team from playing lucrative Sunday games, thus limiting Mack's ability to invest in the team.

For his part, Mack felt that the Foxx deal, which was the final straw in the collapse of a dynasty from earlier in the decade, had not affected his team all that much.

"I was the object of a lot of criticism for selling so many star players," Mack said in 1936. "But the public didn't seem to realize that you don't have to have stars to finish last. If we finished last with Foxx and all those other fellows, what was the point of having them?"

Boston was not in danger of a last-place finish with Betts, and probably won't be without him, either. But for Red Sox fans, who have watched their favorite club follow an 86-year championship drought with a stretch in which they won four World Series titles in 15 years, the sudden focus on financial flexibility over on-field play has to feel somewhat like the reopening of Pandora's box.

The Betts deal, and the effect it could have on everyone involved, offers a reminder that while the Ruth trade is Boston's most famous fire-sale transaction, the jettisoning of Speaker got things started. Red Sox fans in 2020 will have to hope that Boston's other young stars, like Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers, do not follow Betts out the door, as Ruth, Hooper and Pennock did after Speaker.

With Mookie Betts Trade, Red Sox Stick to an Unpopular Plan

David Waldstein

After 12 championship parades over the last two decades, Boston is suddenly reeling. Days after a Super Bowl was somehow staged without the New England Patriots playing in it, and with quarterback Tom Brady, the face of their franchise, in limbo, the city received news that was widely anticipated — yet still felt like a kick in the pants.

The Red Sox agreed to trade Mookie Betts, one of the best players in the team's 120-year history, to the Los Angeles Dodgers late on Tuesday in a move that reeked of an old-fashioned, midmarket salary dump.

The move came amid a radical and rapid transition for the Red Sox, who enter 2020 in disarray despite being less than 16 months removed from a World Series title. Gone are Betts, their top position player, and David Price, arguably their best pitcher. They fired Dave Dombrowski, their general manager, in September, less than a year after he helped deliver a championship. Craziest and perhaps most concerning of all, the Red Sox still do not have a manager just days before the start of spring training, with Alex Cora having been let go over his role in the Astros' sign-stealing scandal.

By any measure, the proverbial white flag has been raised atop Fenway Park — at least for a year or so.

Now the Red Sox must convince disgruntled fans that their club will be back to prominence soon enough after engaging in the kind of creative destruction that other teams — including the Yankees in 2016 — have used to reconfigure their teams for years to come.

The deal, according to multiple reports, will send Betts and Price to the Dodgers in a three-team trade. Los Angeles will send outfielder Alex Verdugo, 23, to Boston and will also ship the veteran pitcher Kenta Maeda, 31, to the Minnesota Twins. Minnesota will give the hard-throwing, 21-year-old Venezuelan pitcher Brusdar Graterol to Boston. The Red Sox will also pay about half of the salary remaining on Price's contract.

For those Bostonians old enough to remember, the trade evoked memories of letting Carlton Fisk walk away in free agency after the 1980 season; of refusing to pay Roger Clemens and Mo Vaughn in the 1990s; and of trading Nomar Garciaparra in 2004. Not re-signing Clemens proved to be a mistake. There was never any regret in letting Vaughn go, and a straight line can be drawn to Boston winning its first World Series in 86 years from the decision to trade Garciaparra three months earlier.

But all of those players were at least 30 when they departed. Betts will not turn 28 until October. At that point, he will presumably be competing in the playoffs for the Dodgers, who now have a fearsome lineup highlighted by Betts, the 2018 American League Most Valuable Player, and Cody Bellinger, the 2019 National League M.V.P.

Plus, the Dodgers will have Price, a good, veteran left-handed pitcher who helped lead the Sox to the 2018 World Series championship. But Price, 34, was never a good fit in Boston and is owed \$96 million over the next three years.

For the Dodgers, whose recent postseason failures included losing in the World Series in 2017 (to the Houston Astros) and 2018 (to Boston) and in an N.L. division series in 2019, the moves reaffirmed their ambition to finally win their first title since 1988 — payroll tax be damned. They simply leveraged Boston's desire to move the players before the season.

Betts with the World Series trophy after the Red Sox's win in 2018. Credit...Ezra Shaw/Getty Images
The preamble to the deal is that Boston had determined it would not sign Betts to an extension before he became eligible for free agency after this season. As one of the richest teams in baseball, the Red Sox certainly have the financial wherewithal to sign Betts. They just elected not to, instead striving to get under the \$208 million payroll threshold for M.L.B.'s punitive luxury tax.

News media reports said the Red Sox offered Betts a 10-year deal worth close to \$300 million, and Betts countered by asking for 12 years and \$420 million. The gulf between those two figures, \$120 million, is the same amount that the Red Sox are paying their superb shortstop, Xander Bogaerts, over the next six years.

Fans in Boston are mocking their team, calling it Tampa Bay North and the Boston Rays — references to the Tampa Bay Rays, a small-market team that has been making trades of this kind for years because it would be expensive to keep high-profile players.

The reason Bostonians picked that specific small-market team to inflame their sarcasm — and not the Pirates or Royals, for example — is Chaim Bloom, the Red Sox's new general manager. The moment he was hired away from Tampa Bay last fall, it was a signal that the team wanted to do things more strategically than it had under Dombrowski, who powered the Red Sox to the 2018 title by depleting Boston's farm system to acquire high-priced veteran talent.

Betts' departure is the cost of those decisions, and Bloom must now navigate the fallout. In Tampa, Bloom was part of the front office that traded away stars like Evan Longoria, Chris Archer, Wil Myers and Price, all with mixed results. But he helped make the Rays into a surprising and pesky competitor the last few years, despite their meager payroll.

Still, many Boston fans do not want to hear about financial considerations, and they have already begun criticizing the ownership team of John Henry and Tom Werner for their pivot to penny-pinching. It is a drastic change in public perception, considering that the Henry-Werner tenure brought about the end of the Red Sox's World Series title drought — the first of four Boston titles this century, more than any other team.

The third of those came in 2013, one year after Boston traded Josh Beckett, Adrian Gonzalez and Carl Crawford — three grumbling, overpriced players — to the Dodgers.

Few in Boston were sorry to see that trio go. But fans adored Betts, a homegrown player on a Hall of Fame trajectory, who seemed to embrace playing and living in Boston.

Fans are angry about it. The prospect of waiting a whole year or two before the next parade is not sitting well in Boston.

*** *The New York Post***

Mookie Betts trade hits speed bump over medical review

Ted Holmlund

The blockbuster three-team trade that sent Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers on Tuesday has hit a snag, according to The Athletic.

The deal was held up on Wednesday because of questions regarding the health of at least one player, though officials involved in the deal remain confident it will be completed, according to ESPN.

The deal would send superstar right fielder Betts, pitcher David Price and cash to the Los Angeles Dodgers as part of a three-way deal that also includes the Minnesota Twins. Boston acquired Dodgers' 23-year-old outfielder Alex Verdugo, who hit .294/.342/.475 in 106 games last season, and Brusdar Graterol from the Twins.

Minnesota 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.

According to the ESPN report, the Red Sox were alarmed by a medical review of Graterol, who has undergone Tommy John surgery and missed time in 2019 with a shoulder injury. The 21-year-old right-hander was among the Twins' top prospects, and is known for a fastball that can reach triple digits, according to MLB.com.

Nevertheless, the chance this speed bump could derail the trade is highly unlikely because other options exist to complete the deal, sources told ESPN. The players could be changed or the Red Sox could alter the amount of money amount they send Los Angeles to cover a portion of the \$96 million Price is still owed.

Another possible option, according to the report, is the Dodgers and Red Sox could work out a two-team deal or include a new third team if the Graterol injury proves to be a non-starter for Boston.