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In race for AL East, Yankees make first statement

Nick Cafardo

NEW YORK — It looked as if Hanley Ramirez had given the Red Sox a major adrenaline boost Wednesday night when he homered to give Boston a one-run lead in the seventh inning at Yankee Stadium. This was shaping up as a major victory for the Red Sox, even though it's only May. It would have at least put a temporary halt to the Yankees' ridiculous streak of 16 wins in 17 games, which shockingly morphed into 17 wins in 18 games when the 3-hour 42-minute epic had ended.

It would have made the statement, "Maybe you can beat up on everybody else, but you can't beat up on us."

And then the Yankees beat up on relievers Matt Barnes and Craig Kimbrel. And then they knocked Boston out of first place.

We will not use the word devastating or any other adjective that describes this as the be-all, end-all of Red Sox-Yankees rivalry games. It was too early to go that far out on a limb.

"They're playing good baseball," Kimbrel said of the Yankees. "It seems like they're doing all the small things at the right time. They've gotten these first two. Hopefully we can come back tomorrow and get that one."

Kimbrel probably wasn't in the mood to answer how the Red Sox once had a 7½-game lead over the Yankees that had just evaporated minutes before at his hands.

"I don't really think any of us were thinking about a 7½-game lead," he said. "I think right now we're just thinking about our team and playing good ball. As long as we do that, we'll be right there with them all year. We knew it was going to be close for the entire year and it will come down to the end of the year. It's still early. You hate to lose games like this but we're not really worried about them. We're worried about us."

This one was reminiscent of the Kimbrel/Joe Kelly meltdown on Sept. 28, 2016, when Kimbrel lost his command, walking three and throwing a wild pitch and having to give way to Kelly, who surrendered a walkoff grand slam to Mark Teixeira in a 5-3 Red Sox loss on a night when the Red Sox backed into the American League East title. That was obviously a worse feeling, but this one stung pretty hard as well.

It's now getting a little bit tougher to consider it game over when Kimbrel comes into a game. Oh, it was only his second blown save in 11 opportunities this season — not a bad percentage — but Alex Cora had brought him into a one-out situation with runners on first and third in the eighth inning.

Cora didn't want to use his closer in the eighth inning, but that's the situation Barnes left him with. And when you're looking into the Yankees' bullpen at Aroldis Chapman — another great closer in the league — it became a situation where you needed to strike someone out. Kimbrel, after all, is a strikeout machine. He struck out almost 50 percent of the batters he faced last season.

The games Kimbrel blows are usually the ones that sting the most.

This is not supposed to happen. Cora had said as early as spring training that there would be games when Kimbrel would get eighth-inning duty. That time came Wednesday night. Kimbrel, though, has never recorded a five-out save in his career.

And the Yankees were able to size him up pretty quickly.

Kimbrel fell behind Brett Gardner with three fastballs out of the zone before working the count full. On the seventh pitch of the at-bat, Gardner tripled to deep center, scoring two runs to give the Yankees a 7-6 lead. Then Aaron Judge smoked one to deep center for a two-run homer. If you were conjuring up a nightmare scenario, this was it.

What a disaster.

As the Yankee Stadium crowd of 47,088 jeered the Red Sox with Chapman hitting 102 miles per hour in the ninth inning, the Red Sox had no retort. This was a game the Red Sox had fought hard to get back into, and then take the late lead. These are losses that can bring some teams to their knees.

There's nothing worse for a team's confidence than losing a game via a bad bullpen performance. In this bullpen age, it's imperative that relievers nail down the win. It almost seemed as if Barnes and Kimbrel were nervous.

It is only May and yes, there's a long way to go. The Yankees have gone on a 17-1 run. The Red Sox went on a 17-2 run last month. The Red Sox were not able to keep up the pace, and Wednesday they got passed by the red-hot Yankees on a night when Boston did everything it could to try to put a stop to these new Bronx Bombers.

Game on: Is David Price's ailment linked to video gaming?

Dan Shaughnessy

NEW YORK — Carpal tunnel syndrome.

David Price missed his start in New York on Wednesday night — the biggest game of the year thus far in this stellar Sox season — because of carpal tunnel syndrome.

And not only that. According to the Red Sox, Price is suffering from minor carpal tunnel syndrome.

Could things get any more hideous for Boston's \$217 million starter? Price is forever walking around Fenway with a target on his back because of his salary, his playoff history, his Dennis Eckersley ambush, and all the other quotes and stunts that indicate he is ill-equipped for Boston baseball. And now he misses a start in New York because of a condition that possibly was brought on by playing too many video games?

Man, it's days like this that I wish Bob Feller were still alive. Rapid Robert would have had a field day with this one.

I e-mailed Hall of Famer Jim Palmer asking for a comment and Palmer wrote back, "There are three nerves that affect the way your hand feels. I think it is that, and Karma with a capital K."

If you play at Fenway, the best way to make Sox fans like you is to play well against the Yankees. Ask Nomar Garciaparra. He had to be traded after that infamous night in New York in 2004 when he refused to play while Derek Jeter was diving into the stands in an extra-inning Yankee win. Now, just as the ancient rivalry is being renewed with gusto, Price looks like he's avoiding the Bombers. One of my clever readers suggested that Price this week came down with a case of "Bronx-itis."

Totally unfair, of course. It's just bad luck with Price and the Yankees this year. It was bad luck that Price had to bail after one inning of his first start vs. the Yankees in April. That was the night the Baby Bombers

cuffed him around for four runs in the first and then he had to leave due to tingling in his fingers. The Sox said it was a circulation issue. It was a brutally cold night.

Fast forward to last Sunday in Texas when it was 84 degrees and Price had the same symptoms when he was throwing a bullpen session. The Sox sent him back to Boston for tests. Wednesday Sox manager Alex Cora told us Price does not have a circulation issue and cited carpal tunnel syndrome. Cora said Price will rejoin the team in New York on Thursday. He has allowed 16 earned runs in 17 innings over his last three starts.

“Tomorrow is a big day for us,” said the manager. “If he can throw his bullpen and be ready to go, he could go Saturday. But we haven’t ruled anything out. We’ll sit down with him tomorrow and map out a plan. As you guys know, we need him.”

When I asked Cora if Price’s malady might be attributed to playing video games, the manager said “no,” adding, “From what I know, David Price has played video games his whole life. There’s a lot of teams playing ‘Fortnite’ [more on that later].”

Just about every person Price’s age plays video games, but none of them make \$217 million playing baseball and none of them miss a start in New York this week due to carpal tunnel syndrome.

We certainly don’t know the source of Price’s injury, but every definition of CTS cites video games as a possible cause of the syndrome. CTS occurs when one of the major nerves to the hand is squeezed or compressed as it travels through the wrist. It happens to some people who type a lot. It happens to gamers and eSport competitors.

I haven’t played a video game since the Ms. Pac-Man machine was hauled out of the Iron Horse at the Old Garden, but according to Jen McCaffrey’s May 7 report in *The Athletic*, “Fortnite” is all the rage in the Red Sox clubhouse.

According to McCaffrey, “The multiplayer game is set in a post-apocalyptic world where players are tasked with searching for survivors and resources, while gradually eliminating all your foes. The object is to be the last survivor at the end of each 100-player round.”

Swell. The story reports that Chris Sale, Craig Kimbrel, Xander Bogaerts, J. D. Martinez, and Price are among a dozen or more Fortnite fanboys.

Here’s what Price told *The Athletic*:

“Let’s say we get back at 11 p.m. from a game, we’ll play until 1 a.m., 1:30 a.m., 2 a.m., depending on what time our game is the next day. But day games or off days, we can put some time in . . . You can lose track of time whenever you’re playing it . . . I’ve got an Xbox. I’ve got my own backpack for it. I can put it in anywhere.”

So there. We have our goofy story from this epic May series in the Bronx.

The Detroit Tigers famously lost their 100-miles-per-hour rocket righty Joel Zumaya because he played too much “Guitar Hero.” The Cleveland Indians lost Trevor Bauer in a 2016 playoff game because Bauer injured his hand fooling with a drone.

And David Price missed the big Yankee series, possibly because of too much “Fortnite.”

Yuck.

Dustin Pedroia can’t return soon enough for the Red Sox

Nick Cafardo

NEW YORK — Dustin Pedroia's return to the Red Sox lineup can't come soon enough.

It might be two or three weeks away, but with Jackie Bradley Jr. struggling and the bottom third of the lineup producing hardly anything, the Sox need a jolt. And their infield defense could use Pedroia's glove.

"We'll be OK," Pedroia said from Fort Myers, Fla., where he returned after going to California for a couple of days to attend his grandmother's funeral. "I'll be ready when they need me."

We're certainly aware of Bradley's offensive plight. It has gone on since he made his major league debut in 2013. Managers put up with it because he's one of the best defensive center fielders in baseball.

My feeling on Bradley is, yes, give him a day or two off as manager Alex Cora did Wednesday night against the Yankees, but his glove is too valuable to keep him out of the lineup too long.

"He's not playing today. He didn't play [one day] last week, either," Cora said. "What I would like him to be is more athletic in the batter's box. Sometimes we get caught up in mechanics and we get to the batter's box at 7:30 and you're thinking about your load, and your hips, and your landing time, and you forget the most important thing — the baseball.

"For me he's not using his hands. When we talk about good hitters they look 'hitterish.' You have to have a rhythm going and it doesn't seem like he has any rhythm. He's not doing that. I saw some video from two years ago, when he had that long hitting streak [29 games]. There was a different stance and he looked 'hitterish.' You have to get your hands moving."

If Bradley, hitting .173 overall and .088 (3 for 34) against lefthanders, were benched for a long stretch the pitchers would revolt. The feeling is having Bradley in center field saves them extra-base hits and runs and extends their outings.

Defense has to be stressed, which is why Bradley and Pedroia are very important to that side of the game.

The Red Sox, who entered Wednesday tied with the Yankees for the best record in baseball, have been able to get by with Eduardo Nunez, though metrics show he has the worst range of any second baseman in baseball. Brock Holt's return should help in that area. Rafael Devers has struggled defensively at third base as well, while shortstop Xander Bogaerts has been steady.

As Cora points out, Pedroia's presence will help solidify the entire infield. Nunez can then be used as a utility player and perhaps give Devers a break. The 21-year-old Devers has played a team-leading 34 games but it's clear there are times when he needs a break.

Pedroia also could add depth to the lineup. Cora could slot the career .300 hitter into the No. 7 spot to give a boost to the bottom third of the order.

Every team needs reinforcements at some point. The Yankees, who entered Wednesday's game having won 16 of their past 17 games, can't wait to get slugging first baseman Greg Bird back in their lineup. Yankees manager Aaron Boone said that Bird, who injured his right ankle in spring training, is almost ready to begin a rehab assignment. Imagine the Yankees adding Bird to a lineup that already features Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton, and Gary Sanchez.

Bradley isn't the only player struggling offensively for the Red Sox. Catchers Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon are hitting .196 and .154, respectively, though Leon did slug a three-run homer on Sunday to spark a 6-1 win over the Rangers. It also doesn't appear that Cora is going to give Blake Swihart, the best offensive option behind the plate, a shot to use his bat. And because of it Swihart has struggled at the plate — hitting .160 in his limited opportunities as a backup outfielder.

Nunez does have 11 extra-base hits in 122 at-bats, but he's hitting .238 and just .114 against lefthanders.

The comparisons between the Red Sox and Yankees on the bottom three spots in the order are telling. The Yankees lead in virtually every category: batting average, .261 to .206; OBP, .312 to .270; OPS, .731 to .573; and home runs, 9 to 6.

We don't know where Pedroia might bat when he does return. The top of the order is pretty much set with Mookie Betts, Andrew Benintendi, Hanley Ramirez, J.D. Martinez, and Mitch Moreland. It's the bottom third of the order that's on life support.

Pedroia said he will return to Boston this weekend and then start playing in minor league games next week. He'll need a couple of weeks to get up to speed and hopefully inject some much-needed pop to a stagnant offense.

Red Sox top prospect Jay Groome needs Tommy John surgery

Alex Speier

Lefthander Jay Groome, the Red Sox' top prospect entering the 2018 season, will require Tommy John surgery that will keep him off the mound until 2019, the Red Sox announced Wednesday.

The procedure is scheduled to be performed Tuesday by Dr. Neal ElAttrache in Los Angeles.

News of a torn ulnar collateral ligament represents the latest blow to the 2016 first-rounder, who has thrown just 62 professional innings.

Groome, 19, endured a pair of injuries with Single A Greenville during his 2017 pro debut, suffering an intercostal muscle strain in his first start and then, after returning for 10 starts, having his season come to an end in August because of what was described by the team as a mild forearm strain.

The stop-and-start season was a struggle for the teenager, who went 3-7 with a 6.70 ERA in 11 starts for Greenville.

Back on the mound this spring after a winter in which he worked out regularly with Red Sox ace Chris Sale, Groome looked outstanding in spring training. In March games, he showed an easy low-to-mid-90s fastball, a hammer of a curveball, and an impressive changeup. But near the end of spring, he felt mild forearm soreness that was similar to the issue that ended his 2017 campaign.

According to major league sources, the Sox had an MRI done that did not show any structural damage at the time. But as Groome began throwing on flat ground in April, he continued to feel discomfort, resulting in another MRI that showed the UCL tear. With the surgery, he will miss all of this year and likely a good chunk of 2019.

Groome, who is 6 feet 6 inches, was selected 12th overall by the Sox in the 2016 draft.

His absence is magnified by issues with the organization's other top prospects, who are either not playing or struggling.

Corner infielder Michael Chavis, the organization's top position player, was suspended 80 games last month for testing positive for a banned substance. Starting pitchers Tanner Houck and Bryan Mata, generally viewed as the third- and fourth-best prospects, have had severe control issues in High A Salem. No. 5 prospect Sam Travis is sidelined with an intercostal strain.

Those setbacks have hammered the top of a farm system that already had been depleted by numerous trades and prospect graduations to the big leagues.

This really should prove to be the Red Sox' best team since 2013, and other thoughts

Chad Finn

Playing Nine Innings while suspecting Didi Gregorius stole some of countryman Xander Bogaerts's powers during the 2017 World Baseball Classic . . .

1. Well, that evaporated fast. After trailing the Red Sox by 7½ games April 20, the Yankees tied the Red Sox for the lead in the American League East Tuesday night with their 16th win in 17 games since that date. And they did so with a 3-2 win that was just the kind of annoying victory — dotted with Red Sox what-ifs and a clutch Yankees hit against a jeered Red Sox pitcher — that felt straight out of 1998.

Was it a sign of a rivalry reborn? Eh, the rivalry never goes away; it just simmers every few years or so. But this could be the year that it bubbles up and boils close to early 2000s intensity (though nothing can ever surpass the mutual loathing of October 2003).

They're both excellent teams fighting for the same prize. And they've already rumbled once. Better get used to it, because they meet 15 more times, including 10 times after Aug. 1. And probably, for the first time since 2004, beyond the end of the regular season.

2. Despite their recent return to the earth's atmosphere after their out-of-this-world 17-2 start, the 25-10 Red Sox are still on pace to win 116 games. That would tie the 2001 Seattle Mariners — which happened to be the recently sort-of-retired Ichiro's first season stateside — for the most victories in a season. Not a bad pace, even with their recent hiccups.

Barring a cruel string of catastrophic injuries — and yes, the David Price situation is ominous — this really should prove to be the Red Sox' best team since 2013. I suspect Red Sox fans probably need a reminder of that right now.

3. Of course, that optimism in a moment of frustration tells the broader story of the season, which is somehow already nearly one-quarter of the way through. (Weren't these guys just in Fort Myers?) It does not address the frustrations of the moment, with the Red Sox having lost 8 of 16 while question marks showed up everywhere (in the lineup, rotation, bullpen, and even the dugout). And it offers no solutions to quickly repair what ails the Red Sox now, other than the callow suggestion to play the way they were before they, you know, stopped playing well.

4. The macro problem is that the Yankees are on the same pace, and they've already endured and escaped a chaotic stretch of the season while the Red Sox are currently flailing around in their own. Two weeks ago, it was actually reasonable to wonder whether the Sox might run away with the division. Now, it's tempting to curse that the wild card is just a single win-or-go-home game given the slim but possible chance that they end up winning 100 games for the first time since 1946 while not winning the division.

5. The Red Sox started 17-2. The Yankees have won 18 of their last 21. You know what you get when you put those two extraordinary streaks together? A won-lost record equal to the Detroit Tigers' 35-5 start in 1984. That's nuts for a team to play .875 ball for nearly a quarter of the season.

The Tigers got a no-hitter from Jack Morris on the fourth game of the season, won their first nine, didn't lose again until their 18th game (a 19-inning loss to Cleveland), lost two in a row to drop to 19-4, then won 16 of their next 17. They finished 104-58 and beat San Diego in the World Series.

6. My frequently stated suggestion last season that Andrew Benintendi would be a complete player in the Fred Lynn mold and a superior player to Aaron Judge in the long run isn't looking especially prescient right now. After a prolonged slump last summer, Judge adjusted and has been outstanding since. Benintendi had a fine season for his age (22) last year; his top statistical comparison at that stage was Dave Winfield, who is actually the perfect visceral comp for Judge. But Benintendi's .426 career slugging

percentage needs to rise. He's basically been at the Todd Benzinger level as a major leaguer (.432 with the 1987-88 Red Sox).

7. In terms of talent and charisma, Mookie Betts is one of the most appealing Red Sox players I've ever seen. But let's admit it: He needs to do what he's doing now for at least three more years before a comparison to Mike Trout is reasonable. Playing on the West Coast really limits Trout's exposure, which is too bad. The relatively low profile has probably cost him a couple of MVP awards. If he played in New York, they'd be saying he's Mickey Mantle with two good knees.

8. I'm not quite there yet, but it's near: Maybe Jackie Bradley Jr. is nothing more than a platoon starter/fourth outfielder. He'd better get on one of his insane hot streaks soon, or he's doomed to a career of being the modern-day Gary Pettis.

9. Alex Cora's mistakes are magnified because he's learning on the job and he thinks unconventionally and analytically, which takes him out of the realm of conventional wisdom. But man, he has done some strange stuff, especially in his deployment (or non-deployment) of pinch hitters. I'm not sure how he let Tuesday's game pass without using Mitch Moreland. He's done a good job — the record is confirmation enough — and I like how he explains himself. I just hope he gets to the point where he has to explain himself a little less often.

David Price diagnosed with mild carpal tunnel syndrome

Peter Abraham

NEW YORK — David Price could make his next start as soon as Saturday in Toronto after being diagnosed with a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome in his left wrist.

Price was supposed to start against the Yankees on Wednesday night but was scratched because of numbness in his hand and sent back to Boston to be examined by a specialist, Dr. Matthew Liebman, at Newton Wellesley Hospital.

Price is scheduled to return here Thursday and play catch. If he also completes a bullpen session, the Sox would consider having Price start on Saturday. If not, lefthander Brian Johnson or righthander Hector Velazquez could pitch.

“We're hoping he can make his next start,” Cora said. “We'll see how it goes [Thursday] . . . If he can throw his bullpen and he's ready to go, I don't rule him out to pitch on Saturday.”

That the Sox did not place Price on the disabled list suggests they do not think the issue is serious.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is typically caused by repetitive wrist work that compresses the median nerve in the hand. Cincinnati Reds pitcher Bronson Arroyo was diagnosed with it in 2009 and advised to stop playing the guitar.

Cora said Price could be treated by ice, massage, or laser.

“We'll see what works for him. We need him. We need him here. We need him to compete,” Cora said.

Cora was not informed as to what caused Price to have carpal tunnel. He speculated it could be from pitching.

“I don't know,” the manager said. “The only thing that we know is this and for me this is quote-unquote good news compared to thinking about something else.”

Price is an avid video-game player, as are many of the Red Sox. Of late, “Fortnite” is their game of choice. But Cora did not believe that was the cause.

“When he comes here [Thursday] we’ll talk about it,” Cora said. “We’ll talk with [Red Sox head athletic trainer Brad Pearson] and see where we’re at. From what I know, David has been playing video games his whole life.”

Price left his April 11 start against the Yankees after one inning because of numbness in his hand. He said that night it was the result of the cold weather and a circulatory issue he has had since childhood.

The symptoms disappeared that night and apparently did not pop up again until Sunday when Price cut short a bullpen session in Texas.

Whether Price has a circulation problem and carpal tunnel isn’t certain.

“I know there were a lot of tests from what [Pearson] told me,” Cora said. “I didn’t get into specifics.”

Price is 2-4 with a 5.11 earned run average in seven starts.

Double-checking

The Mets batted out of order in the first inning of their game at Cincinnati. It cost them a base runner in what ended up a 2-1 loss. Manager Mickey Callaway took the blame.

For Cora and fellow rookie manager Aaron Boone of the Yankees, it was a reminder to never take anything for granted.

Cora said bench coach Ron Roenicke confirms the lineup printed out by video coordinator Billy Broadbent. Then that is compared with the lineup posted in the dugout.

“There’s a lot of checking, a lot of check points,” Cora said. “I have nightmares thinking about it. Hopefully it doesn’t happen.”

Said Boone: “It’s one of the things I’m paranoid about every single day. We have about eight layers that we go through to make sure that something like that, hopefully, doesn’t happen to us, but certainly understand how it could.”

The Sox last batted out of order on Sept. 16, 1972, although the Cleveland Indians did not call it to the attention of the umpires.

There also was an odd incident last Aug. 25, when Chris Young illegally reentered the game in the ninth inning and hit. The Orioles, leading by 13 runs at the time, either did not notice or elected not to protest.

Wright readies for return

Steven Wright allowed one run over six innings of relief for Triple A Pawtucket on Tuesday night. He will pitch one or two innings out of the bullpen in his next appearance, probably on Saturday or Sunday.

Wright is allowed to pitch in the minors over a six-day period during his 15-game suspension for violating baseball’s domestic abuse policy. The final day of the suspension is Sunday.

Because Wright is out of minor league options, the Sox will add him to the major league roster. Cora said the only decision would be how to use the knuckleballer.

The Sox would not seem to need a starter unless Price cannot pitch. Wright has 15 career relief appearances, the most recent in 2015.

Pedroia’s plan

Dustin Pedroia is back at the team facility in Fort Myers, Fla., after attending a funeral in California. He is scheduled to play five innings in an extended spring training game on Thursday. Pedroia, who is coming

back from knee surgery, is expected to join one of the minor league affiliates later this month . . . Righthander Tyler Thornburg is scheduled to pitch for Double A Portland on Thursday or Friday. He has pitched four times on a rehab assignment following shoulder surgery.

A single pitch encapsulated the depths of Jackie Bradley Jr.'s slump

Alex Speier

NEW YORK — For Jackie Bradley Jr., this is what bottom looked like.

With a runner on first and no outs in the top of the fifth inning Tuesday, Bradley received as meaty an offering as any Red Sox batter would see all night from Yankees ace Luis Severino. A straight, 99-mile-per-hour four-seamer flew right down the middle of the plate.

BaseballSavant.com, MLB's website for mining through publicly available Statcast data, identifies 14 location zones for pitches. Severino's offering to Bradley, on a 1-and-2 count, traveled through Zone 5 — the absolute heart of the plate.

There have been 4,477 four-seam fastballs that have fallen in that zone this year. Batters are conditioned to swing at such offerings, given the possibility of doing damage. This year, batters have swung at 77.5 percent of all four-seamers in Zone 5, posting a .302 average and .603 slugging percentage against those offerings.

But Bradley, who one pitch earlier had swung and missed at a four-seamer at the very top of the strike zone, watched as the pitch bisected the plate for a called strike three. Against the 1,021 four-seam fastballs that have flown through that center-cut location in two-strike counts this year, 97.1 percent inspired swings. Bradley was left to make the desolate march back to the dugout, in the company of that unfortunate 2.9 percent that declined to attack such an offering.

“When you miss your pitch at this level,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora observed prior to Tuesday's game, “they are going to bury you.”

Yet this was worse. It wasn't simply that Bradley had missed his pitch; he hadn't even offered at it.

“I'm not exactly sure what happened,” said Red Sox assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett. “I haven't talked to him about that particular pitch, but he's not off to a particularly great start. He's showed signs of coming around. But tonight it seemed like on that particular pitch, he might have gotten mentally locked up a little bit.

“When you're scuffling, sometimes you talk yourself into looking for certain things. Sometimes you have different thoughts that go through your brain. Sometimes it locks you up.”

As much as Bradley is viewed as a player who has been prone to streaks, his current struggles are arguably the most severe of his career. He did not put a ball in play in any of his four plate appearances in Tuesday's 3-2 loss, going 0 for 3 with three strikeouts and getting drummed in the side by a 103 m.p.h. Aroldis Chapman fastball in the ninth.

Since April 21, starting with an 0-for-3, three-strikeout game against Sean Manaea in the Oakland hurler's no-hitter, Bradley is now 5 for 50 with three walks, 24 strikeouts, and no extra-base hits in a stretch of 56 plate appearances. He has a line of .100/.179/.100 over the span.

The Red Sox insist that some of Bradley's struggles are attributable to bad luck, and that's undoubtedly true; five of the six hardest-hit balls by Bradley (exit velocities of 99 m.p.h. or higher) during this stretch have resulted in outs. But there also has been a jarring number of times in which Bradley hasn't made contact. His 43 percent strikeout rate since April 21 is the highest by a qualifying player in the big leagues.

“He’s working,” Cora said before the game. “Like I said last week, he keeps getting pitches that he can drive in the strike zone and he’s fouling them off. You can take it in different ways — he’s slumping or he’s very close. I’ll take it that he’s very close.

“This is a guy we trust. We’re going to keep putting him in the lineup, getting his at-bats.

“This is my first year as a manager with him. This guy, when he gets hot, he gets locked in, he can carry a team for a few weeks. We want him to be more consistent, obviously. Hopefully his slump is early in the season and he will be consistent the rest of the season.”

Is there anything to suggest that Bradley can do that? Actually, yes.

At the start of this season, in 17 games preceding the Manaea no-hitter, Bradley was doing an impressive job of attacking strikes, walking six times and striking out just seven times in 69 plate appearances (10.1 percent strikeout rate).

From mid May through late August last year — from the time that he started playing without a knee brace until he suffered a thumb injury — Bradley was one of the Sox’ best players, hitting .282/.368/.465 with 12 homers over 85 games. His strikeout rate during that time was 22 percent — close to the major league average.

Yet another slump may be even more relevant when considering Bradley’s current rut. In 2015, across a few trips from Triple A (where he spent most of the first half) through his first plate appearance (a strikeout) of an Aug. 6 game against CC Sabathia and the Yankees, Bradley went 5 for 50 with a .100/.217/.160 line and a 27 percent strikeout rate. Yet that day, he had a single against lefty reliever Justin Wilson and added walks against Sabathia and Andrew Miller.

A flood of hits soon followed. From Aug. 9 through Sept. 7, Bradley hit .446/.489/.952 with 24 extra-base hits in 25 games, a run that, in combination with outstanding defense, proved so compelling that it cemented him as the Sox’ everyday center fielder for years to come in the eyes of then-new Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

So, yes, there is precedent for Bradley to emerge from a 5-for-50 slump. The Sox look at that precedent, at the behind-the-scenes work the 28-year-old is doing, and at the broader body of work from the 2015-17 seasons (a .255/.337/.456 line with an average of 24 homers per 162 games) and insist that the current struggles will eventually give way.

“He’s working hard every day trying to stay up the middle, trying to use the whole field,” said Barkett. “A couple hits fall, the confidence starts to flow, and the game gets a little easier. He’s a talented young man and has shown in the past he can hit. We have all the confidence in the world he’s going to hit again.”

Yet even with some conviction, with each lineup card or each potential late-innings pinch-hitting opportunity, the team must ask itself: How long can we wait to see if that faith will be rewarded with production?

“I trust the guy. I trust him,” said Cora. “But we’ve got to sit down and talk, obviously.”

Brian Johnson can relate to what David Price is going through

Alex Speier

NEW YORK — When Red Sox lefthander Brian Johnson heard about the numbness that David Price experienced in his hand in a start last month against the Yankees and again during a bullpen session this week, he understood the gravity of the situation.

Johnson doesn't know the particulars of Price's condition or diagnosis. But he can relate to the unsettling feeling of numbness in the hand and what it might mean to a pitcher who depends on being able to grip a baseball and throw it in a very particular way in order to generate the power, spin, and command that lie at the heart of his craft.

Throughout the 2015 season, Johnson dealt with ulnar nerve irritation, a condition that created numbness in his hands and fingers.

"It's a very uncomfortable feeling," said Johnson. "It's hard to explain. It just kind of comes and goes. I don't know what his is like, but mine would come and go where at points in time you feel great, and there would be points in time where I would sit down and couldn't get a haircut with my hand going numb.

"I haven't had a chance to sit down and go in depth with [Price] about it, but it sucks."

The challenges of pitching with such a sensation, Johnson said, are considerable. Though he forged a 9-6 record and 2.53 ERA in Pawtucket in 2015 while managing the condition, he had to be shut down for the final two months of that season.

"You can't [pitch with it]," he said. "Just stop immediately, especially if it keeps getting worse. If it stops, you're fine, but you're going to go out there and not pitch like who you are."

While Johnson required months of rest and rehab to move beyond his ulnar nerve irritation, he couldn't say what the future might hold for Price. If Price isn't dealing with ulnar nerve irritation, then his prognosis might be very different from Johnson's.

Nonetheless, Johnson believes his teammate is taking the proper course of action by not pitching until he gets a clear handle on the situation.

"You're just going down a road you don't want to go down," said Johnson. "I think he's doing the right thing right now."

*** *The Boston Herald***

Craig Kimbrel blows save as Red Sox fall to first-place Yankees

Jason Mastrodonato

NEW YORK -- The first two games of this Red Sox-Yankees series have been tense, the scores close, the moments big and the noise overwhelming.

And it looked destined for a rubber match if Craig Kimbrel could convert a five-out save for the first time in his career. But with a chance to steal a game and give the Sox sole possession of first place in the AL East once again, Kimbrel blew it.

Called on to face the top of the order with runners at the corners in a one-run game, Kimbrel served up a triple to Brett Gardner and a home run to Aaron Judge, and the red-hot Yankees pulled off a 9-6 victory.

"I felt great tonight," Kimbrel said. "Just two pitches they put good wood on and wasn't able to hold it where it was."

And after a relentless pursuit, the Yanks are in first place with an MLB-best 26-10 record, having won 17 of their past 18.

The sinking Sox, now 8-9 since a 17-2 start, are in second place for the first time since March, when they were 1-1.

“We knew it was going to be close throughout the entire year and come down to the end of the year,” Kimbrel said. “It’s still early. You hate to lose games like this, but we’re not really worried about them. We’re worried about us.”

It’s been manager Alex Cora’s vision since December to use Kimbrel in the most high-leverage spot of the game, regardless of the inning. He made good on his word last night, when the Yanks were threatening and Matt Barnes did not look sharp.

With Barnes struggling to start the eighth, Carson Smith already used and Joe Kelly the only late-inning arm available, Cora wanted Kimbrel to face Gardner and Judge. The logic is sensible: Kimbrel is the Red Sox’ best reliever, Gardner was locked in, Judge is the Yanks’ best hitter, and the moment wasn’t going to be bigger.

“We talked about it before the game; we’re not making it up during the game,” Cora said. “We have a plan before, and today was a day we were like, ‘You know what, he’s rested enough, and we know they’ve been coming back against a lot of teams. We saw what they did against Cleveland. So, that was (Kimbrel’s) spot.”

Kimbrel just didn’t have it.

He threw seven straight 97-mph fastballs to Gardner, the last one a 3-2 heater over the middle of the plate that was sent to the warning track in left-center for a two-run triple that gave the Yankees a 7-6 lead.

“Right there, I didn’t want him to put the ball in play,” Kimbrel said. “Trying to strike him out, and wasn’t able to do it.”

Then against Judge, Kimbrel jumped ahead 1-2 when he tried to place a 97-mph heater up and on the outer edge, but Judge put a hurting on it, lining it square over the wall in center for a two-run blast.

Kimbrel hadn’t gotten five outs in a game since May 11 of last year. And he’s never recorded a five-out save. To ask for five outs might have been a lot, but Cora could have used Kelly in the ninth if Kimbrel ran out of steam. He simply needed his closer to come through in the eighth.

“I knew how we play these guys to be ready for multiple outs,” Kimbrel said. “Just wasn’t able to do it tonight.”

The Red Sox had stolen the momentum and were on their way to stealing the game until Barnes and Kimbrel squandered the chance.

One night after Giancarlo Stanton hit two home runs to power the Yanks to a 3-2 win, it was the Sox who brought the thunder to Yankee Stadium.

Mitch Moreland, Andrew Benintendi and Hanley Ramirez homered. Ramirez’ two-run monster shot to left in the seventh looked like a killer blow.

Benintendi worked a two-out walk before Ramirez got a juicy slider from Chad Green and hammered it. It was a no-doubter, and he admired it then pumped his chest after rounding third. The hit sucked the air out of Yankee Stadium, and the Sox dugout went crazy.

Rick Porcello had finally thrown a stinker, giving up five runs in five-plus innings to push his ERA to 2.79, and the Sox thought they had bailed him out.

The Yankees are just too hot.

Red Sox notebook: Jackie Bradley Jr. takes struggles to bench for a night of rest

Jason Mastrodonato

NEW YORK — Jackie Bradley Jr. was not in the Red Sox starting lineup against the Yankees last night, and manager Alex Cora would not say if he would be back in the lineup for tonight's series finale.

A break could be necessary.

Bradley went 0-for-3 with three strikeouts and three men left on base in the Sox' 3-2 loss on Tuesday. He's in the midst of a 5-for-50 stretch in which he's struck out 24 times without an extra-base hit.

Cora said he would sit down and talk with Bradley and the coaching staff about what was best going forward.

"What I would like him to be is to become athletic in the batter's box," Cora said. "Sometimes we get caught up in mechanics and what we are working on before the game and we go to the batter's box at 7:30 and you are working on, or you're thinking about your load, and your hips, and landing and time, and you forget the most important thing. It's the baseball.

"Manny Ramirez always talked about this and Manny, he worked on his craft just like J.D. Martinez. At the end of the day, everything you talk about is to see the ball. You have to see the ball. Regardless of what you do before the game, when you go to the game it is the ball against you. It seems like right now there's a lot of mechanical stuff going on with Jackie and he's not using his athletic ability to dominate the game."

Without Bradley, Mookie Betts was the starting center fielder while Andrew Benintendi stayed in left field, an alignment that keeps Martinez from having to roam the spacious left field at Yankee Stadium. Martinez was instead in right field.

The alignment also allowed the hot-hitting Mitch Moreland (.347 average) to get in the lineup at first base. Moreland hit a two-run homer in the second inning.

It would seem advantageous for the Sox to go with this alignment for a little while to get Bradley some rest, but Cora said he wasn't sure yet how long Bradley would be on the bench.

The notoriously streaky Bradley has been in a stretch like this before and come out of it.

"Honestly for me he's not using his hands," Cora said. "I saw some video from two years ago, that's when he had that long hitting streak, there was a different stance. There were more — he looked hitterish. His hands were moving. So hopefully we can get him there."

Is it better to let a slumping player stay in the lineup or continue playing?

"I'm learning now," Cora said. "Obviously this is my first time doing this. But I do feel it gets to the point that you have to take a step back before you go forward. . . . It's very important that today for him, if he wants to go to the cage and take 500 swings, go ahead. If you want to go to the video and sit down and just watch video, that'll be great. Use the day for your advantage. Don't use it just to sit down at your locker and wonder what's going on."

Tommy John for Groome

It hasn't been a great year for Red Sox prospects.

Earlier this season, the Sox' best position player prospect, Michael Chavis, was suspended 80 games for testing positive for a performance enhancing substance.

And yesterday it was announced that their best pitching prospect and best prospect overall, left-hander Jay Groome, would undergo Tommy John surgery on Tuesday.

Groome hasn't pitched all season while on the disabled list due to a flexor strain in his elbow that has cost him time since last year, when he threw only 5 1/3 innings, striking out 72 while walking 30 and posting a 5.69 ERA between Single-A Greenville and short-season Lowell.

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said there was no specific date of Groome's injury, but "his arm bothered him after resting for a while and we had him checked by our doctors."

After a second opinion by Dr. Neal ElAttrache, it was decided Groome would have Tommy John at the Kerlan-Jobe Institute in Los Angeles.

He was drafted 12th overall in 2016, Dombrowski's first draft with the Sox, and was considered a bargain pick who could've been the No. 1 overall selection if not for concerns over his makeup, which caused Vanderbilt to back away from the New Jersey high schooler.

The 19-year-old throws a mid-90s fastball with a wipeout curveball. He was ranked the No. 43 prospect in baseball ahead of 2017 and the No. 83 prospect ahead of 2018, according to Baseball America.

Wright all right in rehab

Knuckleballer Steven Wright will make one more relief appearance rehabbing with Triple-A Pawtucket before the Red Sox prepare to get him back from a 15-game suspension.

Wright threw six innings of one-run ball in relief with the PawSox on Tuesday night. He'll throw either one or two innings out of the bullpen next time out.

Cora said the Red Sox aren't sure how they'll use Wright when he returns to the team May 14. . . .

Pawtucket left-hander Jalen Beeks threw five innings of one-run ball with six strikeouts and now has 52 strikeouts in 31 1/3 innings this season.

According to the PawSox, Beeks' 14.94 strikeout-per-nine-innings ratio leads all qualifying minor leaguers.

Silverman: Gamer issue may be reason for David Price's injury

Michael Silverman

NEW YORK — Even after he took strides in turning over a new leaf and even when he's just trying to have some innocent fun with his teammates, David Price just can't stop stepping in it.

The latest weirdness to emanate from Price is that he has been diagnosed with a "mild case" of carpal tunnel syndrome, which as we all know is a repetitive stress injury.

Pitchers get hurt all the time, but rather than the run-of-the-mill strained forearm (like Price had last year) or a shoulder strain or split fingernail, this latest malady falls into a completely different category.

Not only does the timing look bad — he's missing a start against the Yankees? — but the potential cause leaves Price in a light best described a "mild case" of avoidable embarrassment.

It comes on the heels of an The Athletic article last week in which Price freely admitted that he has been spending up to three hours a day playing, sometimes with teammates, other times with random folks online, the multi-player battle royale video game "Fortnite" that has captured the attention of the Red Sox clubhouse.

Now, I suppose there could be no correlation between Price's new injury and a new video game that is eating up to one-eighth of Price's daily routine.

But until I hear or read about some other explanation for the sudden onset of carpal tunnel syndrome in a pitcher, I'll go with what's in front of our face for now.

Manager Alex Cora said, "no, no, no" if he believed that there was a link between Price's video gaming practices and this injury.

"I mean, it can happen in different ways, like I said earlier today, it's about repetition and I don't know, you throw bullpens, you throw off of flat ground, you throw games, you make adjustments with pitches, I don't know, the only thing we know is it's this and, for me, this is quote unquote good news compared to thinking about something news," said Cora.

That answer did not truly satisfy some of the media gathered at Cora's pre-game media session.

Didn't he know that video gaming has been linked to carpal tunnel syndrome and since that's the case, will he ask his players to stop gaming?

"When he comes here (today) we'll talk about it," said Cora. "We'll talk with (trainer) Brad (Pearson) and see where we're at. From what I know, David has played video games his whole life. It seems like Fortnite now is the one everybody is playing, but last year, I saw a lot of guys playing Fifa. That's a lot of playing, too. So, there's a lot of teams playing Fortnite, too. We'll talk about it (today)."

Cora looked about as uncomfortable as he has at any other point in his 36-game tenure here as Red Sox manager answering injury and gaming questions.

"From what I know, it was a lot of testing and that's all I can tell you," said Cora. "I didn't get into specifics. I'm learning a lot about this process, about the medical stuff, and from what I know, he went through a lot during these tests. This is what it came out, and if he misses a start — another start — because of this, I'm fine with it."

At this point, nobody knows exactly how treatment of Price's injury will proceed. Surgery is a worse-case option but Cora said that has been ruled out.

Presumably, the immediate cessation of "Fortnite" activities will be one scrip the medical staff will order.

Otherwise, "sometimes it's ice, sometimes it's massage, sometimes it's laser, we'll see," said Cora. "We'll see what works with him. As you guys know, we need him. We need him here."

Scorn is not justified for Price and his syndrome. This doesn't fall under his lame and regrettable outbursts last year. He's evolved in that sense, but this still represents a setback for a high-profile athlete who has not yet come close to capturing the hearts and minds of Boston sports fans.

If he is found guilty of excessive gaming, the problem clears up and he resumes playing like an ace, then this injury will go down as a freakish injury.

It won't be half as bad as when Trevor Bauer cut his pinkie playing with a drone, Carl Pavano lacerated his spleen shoveling snow, Nolan Ryan got bit by a coyote pup, Steve Sparks separated his shoulder trying to rip a phone book in half, Jeremy Affeldt required hand surgery trying to separate frozen hamburgers, Joba Chamberlain dislocated his ankle jumping on a trampoline or Vaughn Eshelman burnt his hand trying to put out a candle-lit fire in his hotel room.

This would be Joel Zumaya straining his wrist playing too much "Guitar Hero."

Weird but true.

Kind of like Price's stint with the Red Sox.

Red Sox fall to second place with another loss to Yankees

Jason Mastrodonato

This rendition of Red Sox vs. Yankees looked destined for a third game to settle the series.

The first two games have been tense, the scores close, the moments big and the noise overwhelming.

With the Red Sox five outs away from stealing one and climbing back on top the American League East perch, Craig Kimbrel blew it.

Called on to pitch with the top of the order up and runners on the corners with a one-run lead in the eighth inning, Kimbrel served up back-to-back extra-base hits to Brett Gardner and Aaron Judge to send the Yankees home with a 9-6 win.

Finally, it's the Yanks who are in first place with an MLB-best 26-10 record, having won 17 of their last 18.

The sinking Sox, just under .500 (8-9) since starting the year 17-2, are back in second place for the first time since March, when they started the year 1-1.

It's been manager Alex Cora's vision since December to use Kimbrel in the most high-leverage spot of the game, regardless if it's in the seventh, eighth or ninth inning.

J.D. Martinez gets no reward for Aroldis Chapman collision

Michael Silverman

NEW YORK – J.D. Martinez “ran into a wall” called Aroldis Chapman last night.

He lived to tell about it, but he wasn't too happy that Chapman was not called for obstruction for standing in Martinez' path as he rounded first base in an attempt to leg out a double on a ball he poked into the right field corner in the ninth inning of last night's 9-6 loss.

The two collided, and it was the object in motion, the 6-foot-3, 220-pound Martinez, who went down, not the 6-4, 212-pound Chapman.

From the dirt, Martinez looked up at first base umpire Stu Scheurwater then stood up and started to head to second base but was told to stay at first.

It was just a single.

“I was rounding first going to second, I thought I had it pretty easily, he was blocking the bag,” Martinez said. “I got up and I was like, 'That's not obstruction?' And they pretty much said you have to go and you have to make it close. I said, 'How can I make it close? I'm on the ground.' I just ran into a wall.”

For obstruction to be applied, the runner has to continue on to the base he is seeking, and the call can be applied after he is out, if he is out.

Martinez never went to second base.

“There's no way if I get up and try to make that play, I'm out by 20 feet,” Martinez said. “They said, 'If you're out by 20 feet, then you're out.' That makes no sense. I said, 'If that's the case, every pitcher in the league should do this.' Set up like a pick, almost, on any borderline doubles.”

Martinez got his single, and the play was rendered moot because Chapman struck out the next two batters to preserve the win.

The Red Sox bench never came out to protest the non-call. They seemed to understand immediately that Martinez had not gone far enough to activate the rule.

“That's a tough one,” manager Alex Cora said. “That's a tough rule. I think it happened here in the playoffs one time. There's obstruction, and if you go and you're out by a mile, and you don't feel the obstruction...didn't interfere or whatever it is in the play, they can call you out. I don't know.”

Christian Vazquez believes he fixed his throws, now working on his swing

Jason Mastrodonato

NEW YORK -- Christian Vazquez has long been considered to have a feared throwing arm, one that few baserunners dare to steal against.

But when opponents began the season a perfect 7-for-7 stealing bases off him, Vazquez knew something was wrong.

After studying video, he figured it out.

“I made some adjustments and feel better now,” he said. “Everything is better. I was so square and wanted to be more sideways, more freedom to throw.”

Vazquez has since caught three of the last five attempted base stealers.

His next challenge will be to fix his swing.

He was one of the best hitters in the big leagues from July 29 through the end of the 2017 season, when he quietly hit .346 with an .899 OPS over a span of 40 games while splitting time with Sandy Leon behind the plate.

New Red Sox manager Alex Cora made it clear early in 2018 that Vazquez would transition to being a full-time catcher, starting three or four games each time through the rotation. Leon has been Rick Porcello's catcher, but otherwise Vazquez is getting most of the starts.

The way Cora sees it, Vazquez began the year hot.

He was spraying line drives all over the field but without many hits to show for it. Then he started pressing. The results have been horrendous, with Vazquez's .196 average and .492 OPS ranking him among the worst full-time catchers in the majors.

“I do feel that Christian early in the season, he was swinging the bat well,” Cora said. “But he wasn't getting results and he started chasing hits and he got into bad habits. The last few days have been better staying inside the ball, trying to go the other way.”

Vazquez had a nice at-bat against Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman with two outs in the ninth inning of the Sox' 3-2 loss on Tuesday, when he nearly got inside of a ball on the outer half, but instead of a double to right-center it was a groundout to second.

“He was pitching me away, never comes in,” Vazquez said. “I was trying to drive the ball. Missed a little bit. Was on top of the ball.

“I’m working to stay to the middle. To just see the ball and hit it, not try to do too much. Trying to get back to last year. It’s not over.”

Despite the poor results, Cora hasn’t shied away from his No. 1 catcher.

Even late in the game on Tuesday, he never pinch-hit for Vazquez, not with Mitch Moreland and Brock Holt available.

“It feels good to have the confidence of the manager,” Vazquez said. “I want to win. That’s all that matters. I try to get my pitchers. The hitting is coming, it’s a process, but I’m concentrating on my pitching right now.”

Buckley: Alex Cora’s Red Sox honeymoon ends in the Bronx

Steve Buckley

Let the record show that Alex Cora’s honeymoon as manager of the Red Sox ended at exactly 10:40 p.m., on Tuesday, May 8, 2018, at Yankee Stadium, The Bronx, New York,

It was at that moment, and inside that gaudy salute to capitalism and conspicuous consumption, that the Red Sox dropped a 3-2 decision to the Yankees, leaving these two forever hardball rivals tied for first place in the American League East.

Now that Cora has returned from his honeymoon, we hope he brought some touristy gifts for Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner.

Say, perhaps, something along the lines of a “My Manager Just Returned From Sole Possession of First Place and All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt.”

We kid — about the T-shirt. But the honeymoon? Done. Now before continuing, let’s make sure we all understand that, in sports, a honeymoon “being over” in no way is a demand for a player to be traded, or a coach/manager to be fired. It simply means, to deploy some other Old Faithfuls from the cliché dictionary, the kid gloves are off . . . no more Mr. Nice Guy . . . time to sing for your supper . . . and so on.

Alex Cora did stuff during Tuesday’s loss to the Yankees that infuriated Red Sox fans and sent the hosts on both of Boston’s sports talk radio stations into apoplexy. To be more precise, it’s not the moves Cora made Tuesday night that have angered everybody; it’s the moves he did not make.

Watching Cora manage the Red Sox Tuesday night was not a moving experience.

In the seventh inning, with the Red Sox trailing 2-1, Eduardo Nunez on first, nobody out, Cora allowed two struggling players at the bottom of his lineup, Jackie Bradley Jr., and Christian Vazquez, to go to bat against veteran right-hander David Robertson. He could have gone to his bench, and to Mitch Moreland (.347 batting average, .653 slugging percentage, five home runs in 81 plate appearances) or Brock Holt (hitting .340 and newly returned from the disabled list after missing time with a hammy strain). Both swing from the left side. Both remained on the bench.

Bradley, who came into the game hitting .193, struck out for the third time. Vazquez, who came in at .193, flied to center.

Mookie Betts tied the game with a two-out triple. That doesn’t change the moves — non-moves — that took place earlier in the inning.

Yankees lefty Aroldis Chapman took over in the ninth. With two out, nobody on, Bradley returned to the plate and took first after being hit by a pitch.

Due up: Vazquez.

Maybe role the dice here with the lefty-hitting Moreland? Or the lefty-hitting Holt?

How about switch-hitting Blake Swihart? There are, after all, rumors he's still on the team.

Up came Vazquez, who hit a grounder to second and then ran up the line with the urgency of a trip to Cumby's for a carton of milk. Gametime.

Speaking with reporters after the game, Cora said he considered pinch-hitting a couple of times, but that he was waiting for the spot to do it. The right situation, he said, didn't come up.

Instead, Bradley and Vazquez came up.

Cora's honeymoon was fun while it lasted. The man arrived in spring training as a youngish manager with old-time values, as a guy who learned the game from the ground up — from the sandlots of Puerto Rico to the nicely-groomed fields of the University of Miami. From the minors to the bigs. He was the former Sox utility infielder who helped a young, struggling Dustin Pedroia fight off an early case of the big-league willies. He was bench coach of the Houston Astros, who knocked the shaky Red Sox out of the playoffs and went on to win the World Series.

Alex Cora was going to be everything his predecessor, John Farrell, was not. He would "communicate" with his players and be "transparent" with the media.

He became the first minority to manager the Red Sox, a team that forever sits at the bottom of the list of big-league teams to add a player of color to its roster. The news that Cora would be the next manager of the Red Sox made for a huge celebration in Puerto Rico, and we could hear the cheering back here in chilly Boston.

None of that has changed. Farrell had to go, and Cora fit the mold in an age when teams are looking for younger managers who can work the clubhouse yet play nice with those analytics whiz kids locked away in a darkened room.

What has changed is that on Tuesday night in the Bronx Alex Cora did the kind of things that inspire baseball fans to ring up their favorite talk show for three minutes of venting.

The honeymoon over, Alex Cora and Red Sox Nation are now just another bickering couple.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox Journal: 'Mild case' of carpal tunnel for Price

Bill Koch

NEW YORK — All things considered, Red Sox manager Alex Cora was somewhat relieved while discussing David Price on Wednesday afternoon.

The left-handed pitcher is expected to arrive at Yankee Stadium sometime Thursday after returning to Boston for a battery of medical tests. Red Sox staff members diagnosed the recurring numbness in his pitching hand as a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome.

"He'll play catch," Cora said. "Hopefully he throws a bullpen and then, after that, we'll make a decision."

Price experienced what he described as a sensation in his throwing hand in his April 11 start against the Yankees at Fenway Park. He was shelled over one inning, allowing four earned runs in a 10-7 loss. Price had the same feeling during a regular bullpen session on Sunday in Texas, and this time the cold temperatures thought to be the cause the first time around couldn't have been a factor.

"As soon as we found out we had to make sure he went through the tests and tried to find out what was going on," Cora said. "Now we know and we're going to attack the problem the way we feel we should attack it and get him ready to compete at the big-league level."

According to the Mayo Clinic, carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition that causes numbness, tingling and other symptoms in the hand and arm. Its usual cause is a compressed nerve on the palm side of the hand. Personal anatomy and repetitive hand motions are contributing factors.

"We'll map out the plan," Cora said. "Sometimes it's ice. Sometimes it's massage. Sometimes it's laser. We'll see what works for him."

Cora refused to rule out any course of action involving Price over the next few days. He's yet to be officially scratched from what would be a Saturday start at Toronto. Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez would be the likely candidates to take the ball should Price not be able to go.

"If we feel that he can make his next start, he'll make it," Cora said. "If not, then we'll make a decision. As you guys know we've been trying to take care of these guys from the get-go. We'll see how it goes tomorrow."

Surgery for Groome

The news wasn't as good for the top pitching prospect in the Red Sox farm system.

Boston announced prior to Wednesday's game left-hander Jay Groome will undergo Tommy John surgery in Los Angeles next week.

Groome, 19, had yet to pitch in a game this season. The No. 12 overall pick in the 2016 draft threw 55 1/3 innings across 14 starts in his first full professional year in 2017, allowing 49 hits and striking out 72.

Groome was shut down last August due to a forearm strain and opened this season on the disabled list due to a flexor strain. Dr. Neal ElAttrache, who performed reconstructive left knee surgery on Patriots quarterback Tom Brady in 2008, will operate on Groome on Tuesday at the Kerlan-Jobe Institute.

Lineup nightmare come true

Cora took note of an embarrassing situation involving fellow rookie manager Mickey Callaway on Wednesday, saying he harbors some of the same fears.

The Mets batted out of order in the first inning of a 2-1 extra-inning loss at the Reds. Asdrubal Cabrera was listed ahead of Wilmer Flores on the handwritten lineup copy provided to the umpiring crew pregame, but Flores struck out ahead of a Cabrera double instead. Cincinnati interim manager Jim Riggleman immediately alerted the umpires, and they declared New York's next batter, Jay Bruce, out to end the inning.

"There's a lot of checking, a lot of checkpoints, with that one," Cora said. "That's something that I have nightmares thinking about."

Yankees 9, Red Sox 6: New York stings Kimbrel, Boston late

Bill Koch

NEW YORK --- At the most, the Red Sox will leave the Bronx with just a share of first place in the American League East.

The Yankees assumed the lead and positioned themselves for a series sweep in their rocking home park Wednesday night, stinging their ancient rivals in the late innings to extend their blistering recent run.

Brett Gardner's third extra-base hit of the evening, a two-run triple to deep left center in the bottom of the eighth, ensured the night's final lead change. Aaron Judge's two-run homer to center padded the margin.

That both decisive blows came off Boston closer Craig Kimbrel made it all the sweeter. New York sent the sellout crowd of 47,088 home happy thanks to a 9-6 win, one that took on something of a postseason feel.

Kimbrel inherited a pair of runners from Matt Barnes with one out in the bottom of the eighth, attempting to record his first career five-out save. He didn't retire a Yankees' hitter before losing the lead, as Gardner slashed a drive to deep left center and Judge lined a missile into Monument Park beyond the wall in center. It was a 6-5 deficit that turned into a three-run cushion, and Aroldis Chapman struck out the side for New York in the ninth.

"I've got to come in and get outs," Kimbrel said. "It doesn't matter if it's the eighth or ninth inning, especially in situations like that."

The Red Sox were in position for a 15th come-from-behind win of the season thanks to Hanley Ramirez. His two-run blast to the second deck in left field put Boston ahead for the final time in the top of the seventh, his first home run since April 14. The Red Sox failed to add on after a Mitch Moreland walk and an Eduardo Nunez double to left starting the top of the eighth, exactly the momentum change the Yankees required coming to bat in the bottom half.

"You have to put the ball in play, regardless of the result," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We didn't and we paid the price there."

New York won its eighth straight game, best in the big leagues, and its 11th in a row in this park. That's the best run at home enjoyed by the Yankees since moving across the street in 2009, and making it an even dozen in Thursday's series finale will give New York a two-game lead atop the division.

"They're playing good baseball," Kimbrel said. "It seems like they're doing all the small things at the right time."

The Yankees required just four pitches from Rick Porcello to get on the board in this one. Gardner missed a home run by a couple feet, settling for a leadoff double that hit the fence in right center, and Judge grounded an RBI single up the middle to make it 1-0. It was the first of a season-high five earned runs allowed by Porcello, the roughest of his eight starts to date.

"I just wasn't locating the ball the way I wanted to," Porcello said. "I just didn't pitch well."

Boston responded in the top of the second through their hottest hitter, as Moreland followed a single by Xander Bogaerts with a two-run homer to right center. It was the fourth time in five games Moreland has gone deep, with the part-time starter's performance making the case for more time in the lineup.

New York struck back with three more in the third, two courtesy of Tuesday's hero. Giancarlo Stanton followed his two-homer game in a 3-2 win by whacking a two-run double to right, and a sacrifice fly to center by Aaron Hicks made it a 4-2 lead.

Two single runs were exchanged from there, with Andrew Benintendi driving a solo homer to right in the top of the fifth and Gary Sanchez lining a sacrifice fly to center in the bottom. That left things at 5-3 into

the sixth, and Nunez drove a sacrifice fly of his own to center to make it a one-run game. Ramirez appeared for a few brief moments to own the decisive swing, but the Yankees had other ideas.

“We’ve got to get outs,” Cora said. “We fell behind most of the hitters there, and we didn’t get the job done.”

Moreland’s hot at the plate, but Bradley’s not

Bill Koch

NEW YORK — The Red Sox offense has been potent to this point in the season despite a paltry contribution from the bottom of the order. Both things can be true.

Boston topped the big leagues in slugging percentage, OPS, doubles and extra-base hits entering Wednesday’s matchup with the Yankees, powered mostly by a blistering start from Mookie Betts and some thunder in the middle of the order provided by J.D. Martinez.

The catcher position has been a relative nonfactor at the plate, as Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon have both posted slash lines with three figures lower than an acceptable grade point average. But it’s Jackie Bradley Jr. who could be in the most jeopardy of seeing his playing time reduced, as the center fielder received the night off Wednesday against the Yankees.

This wasn’t one of the maintenance days Red Sox manager Alex Cora has featured for the bulk of his position players through the season’s opening 35 games. This was Bradley sitting against a right-handed pitcher as a way of clearing his head, mired in a 7-for-58 funk that includes just two extra-base hits.

“If he wants to go to the cage and take 500 swings, go ahead,” Cora said. “If you want to go to the video and sit down and just watch video that would be great. Use the day for your advantage.”

Whether or not Mitch Moreland should have been used at any point as a pinch hitter in Tuesday’s 3-2 loss to open the series against New York was a hot postgame topic. Cora didn’t have that option in the middle game after inserting Moreland into the starting lineup at first base. He carried with him four straight outings with multiple hits, including three homers and a pair of doubles.

“He’s putting pressure on the manager to play more, and I like that,” Cora said of Moreland after Sunday’s 6-1 win over the Rangers. “We do feel he can hit lefties and righties. When his number is called we feel very comfortable with him.”

Moreland has put an 0-for-12 start to the season behind him, going 25-for-60 with five homers and seven doubles over the last calendar month. His inclusion shifted Hanley Ramirez to designated hitter and put Martinez in the smaller right field at Yankee Stadium. Betts slid over the center and Andrew Benintendi manned left, with their speed required to cover the acres of space from right center to the left field line.

One particular stretch of Bradley’s career has Cora and the club hopeful he can turn things around. Bradley’s 29-game hitting streak in 2016 featured real damage at the plate, as he homered eight times and compiled a gaudy 1.271 OPS. Red Sox coaching staff members have studied video from that stretch with Bradley in recent days hoping to rediscover his stroke.

“There was a different stance,” Cora said. “He looked hitterish. His hands were moving. Hopefully we can get him there, get him in a good spot and after that everything can go from there.”

Leon drew the start Wednesday catching Rick Porcello, with his three-run homer on Sunday representing his lone extra-base hit of the season. Leon’s slashing .154/.214/.231 while Vazquez has been similarly ineffective at .171/.216/.200. Their deft handling of the Boston pitching staff has been enough to convince Cora not to use Blake Swihart behind the plate, but more convenient replacements for Bradley could soon find themselves on the field more often if current trends continue.

“We want them to get going,” Cora said. “It’s not a concern, but yes, we’d like them to contribute offensively. It’s important for us.”

* *MassLive.com*

Boston Red Sox bullpen has eighth-inning problems; Tyler Thornburg might help or Dave Dombrowski must make trade

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- The Red Sox bullpen has an eighth-inning issue. Perhaps Tyler Thornburg can help fix it. If not, Dave Dombrowski will need to find the answer via the trade market.

Boston relievers have allowed 20 earned runs in 36 eighth innings this season. Red Sox relievers are tied for 21st in the majors in eighth inning ERA (5.00).

Sure, 10 of the 20 runs came in two games. Still, not good enough.

Matt Barnes failed to do his job with a 6-5 lead against the bottom of the Yankees lineup here last night. Manager Alex Cora had to ask Craig Kimbrel for a five-out save and things turned ugly rather quickly.

Barnes and Kimbrel gave up four runs on three hits and one walk. The Red Sox lost 9-6 here at Yankee Stadium and the Yankees overtook Boston for sole possession of first place in the AL East.

The Red Sox had been tied for first place or in sole possession of first since March 31. Not anymore. The Yankees have won 17 of their past 18 games.

This is the second straight game a Red Sox reliever couldn't hold a lead or tie against the bottom of the Yankees lineup. Heath Hembree failed to keep the game tied 2-2 in the seventh inning Tuesday and Boston lost 3-2.

Just too many eighth-inning walks. Boston has issued 17, ninth most in the majors.

Thornburg, who is returning from surgery to treat thoracic outlet syndrome, has allowed just one unearned run in 3 2/3 innings over four rehab outings between Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket. The Red Sox still want him to enter in the middle of an inning with runners on base as well as pitch back-to-back days before they activate him from the DL.

But he has hit 97 mph and shown "phenomenal" secondary pitches.

Hector Velazquez should get a chance in more high-leverage spots. He doesn't throw hard but has excellent control and keeps getting outs. The righty averaged 2.1 walks per nine innings at Triple-A Pawtucket last year. He averaged 1.1 walks per nine innings during his 22 starts in the Mexican League in 2016.

Hector Velazquez, Boston Red Sox righty from Mexico, throws bullpen session at Yankee Stadium (Ma... Can Barnes be trusted in these type of high-pressure games on the road?

In away games since the beginning of last year, Barnes has a 4.81 ERA (21 runs, 39 1/3 innings). He has walked 27.

He posted a 5.28 ERA on the road last year while holding the opposition to a .215 batting average. It's all about the walks.

He has a better road ERA (3.12) this year. But he has allowed seven walks in 8 2/3 innings.

Carson Smith (3.86 ERA, 1.54 WHIP) hasn't been as sharp as expected either. He recorded two important outs here yesterday but he has had an issue with walks as well. He has issued six in 11 2/3 innings this season.

It feels like Joe Kelly and Kimbrel are the only two relievers who can be trusted with one-run leads in the eighth inning or later in these types of playoff-like atmospheres on the road.

Barnes fell behind both the Nos. 7 and 8 hitters, Neil Walker and Miguel Andujar, 2-0 in the count. Walker doubled on a 2-2 pitch, a 96.2 mph four-seamer.

Andujar grounded out to second base, advancing Walker to third with one out.

Barnes fell behind No. 9 hitter Gleyber Torres 3-0 before walking him on five pitches.

"He came back and he was 2-2 with (Walker)," Cora said. "After four breakballs, he throws a fastball and he's all over him. So give credit to Walker. And then the kid did a good job of getting the guy over. And Torres showed some poise in that situation. He saw a 3-0 breaking ball. He took it. Saw a 3-1 breaking ball and he took it like a veteran. So give him credit."

The Red Sox wanted Torres to get himself out before bringing in Kimbrel to face leadoff man Brett Gardner. It didn't work though.

Torres walked, then Gardner belted a go-ahead, two-run triple against Kimbrel.

"I fell behind all three hitters which obviously isn't ideal in that situation," Barnes said. "Made some good pitches to get back in the count with Walker. The fastball, maybe was not as up as I would have liked to. Kind of stayed in the zone a little longer. He put a good swing on it."

"Torres, we were trying to go kill pitches from the start. We weren't trying to give him anything to hit. So in that situation, the pitches to him were kind of designed to (be) executed in that fashion. But yeah, got to execute the one to Walker a little bit better."

Craig Kimbrel, Red Sox bullpen blow lead as Yankees come back for win, overtake Boston for first in AL East

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- The Red Sox squandered a perfect chance to add to their 6-5 lead in the top of the eighth inning. They then paid in the bottom of the eighth.

Matt Barnes allowed a leadoff double and walk while retiring just one batter before manager Alex Cora asked Craig Kimbrel for a five-out save.

Kimbrel wasn't his typical dominant self. Brett Gardner ripped a go-ahead two-run triple against the Red Sox closer.

Aaron Judge then crushed a 429-foot homer with a 117 mph exit velocity to straightaway center field. The Yankees won 9-6 and took over sole possession of first place in the AL East.

The Red Sox had been tied for first place or in sole possession of first since March 31. But the Yankees have won 17 of their past 18 games.

Mitch Moreland walked and Eduardo Nunez doubled to put two runners in scoring position for the Red Sox with no outs in the top of the eighth.

But Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez struck out swinging. Andrew Benintendi then grounded out after an intentional walk to Mookie Betts.

Hanley's homer gives Boston lead in seventh

Hanley Ramirez hadn't homered in his previous 19 games.

But the Red Sox DH ended his power drought with two outs in the seventh inning. He crushed a 113 mph home run 431 feet into the second deck in left field to give Boston a 6-5 lead.

Porcello gives up season-high 5 runs

Rick Porcello entered with a 2.14 ERA and didn't allow more than three runs in any of his first seven starts.

But he gave up a season-high five runs in 5 1/3 innings. He allowed eight hits and a rare three walks while striking out three. He had allowed only five walks in his first seven starts (46 1/3 innings).

The key inning for Porcello was the fifth. He loaded the bases with no outs but escaped after allowing just one run.

Aaron Judge singled and advanced to second on an error. Porcello then walked Didi Gregorius and hit Giancarlo Stanton with a pitch.

Gary Sanchez's sacrifice fly plated Judge to make it 5-3 New York. Porcello escaped any further damage when he got Aaron Hicks to ground into a force out and Neil Walker to line out.

Tanaka with almost an identical line to Porcello's

Tanaka pitched 5 1/3 innings, allowing four runs, all earned, eight hits (two homers) and two walks while striking out three.

Red Sox bash 3 homers

Andrew Benintendi and Mitch Moreland also homered in addition to Ramirez.

Moreland bashed a 90.9 mph sinker from Masahiro Tanaka for a two-run homer to right-center to make it 2-1 Red Sox in the second inning.

Moreland hit it 407 feet with a 103.6 mph exit velocity and 28 launch angle.

After belting 20 homers last year, Andrew Benintendi stroked only one in the Red Sox's first 35 games of 2018.

But he bashed his second during the fifth inning to cut the deficit to 4-3.

His 99.5 mph blast to right-center field traveled 391 feet and with a 29 launch angle.

Boston Red Sox still deciding Steven Wright's role for when they reinstate him from suspension

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- Steven Wright pitched 6 strong innings for Triple-A Pawtucket at Leigh Valley yesterday. He allowed one run, eight hits and no walks while striking out one.

Wright is serving a 15-game suspension for a domestic violence policy violation. He has five games remaining, including today's game.

He has no minor league options remaining and so the Red Sox must activate him Monday vs. the Athletics (May 14).

He'll make one more appearance for Triple-A Pawtucket out of the bullpen. The Red Sox still are unsure how they will use him when he returns.

"Either one or two innings and then when he comes out, we'll make a decision on what we're going to do," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Cora said the Red Sox do plan to place him on the 25-man roster. "As of now, yes," Cora said.

Jason Groome, Boston Red Sox top prospect, to undergo Tommy John surgery May 15

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- Red Sox top overall prospect Jason Groome will undergo Tommy John surgery next Tuesday (May 15) in Los Angeles, Calif.

Dr. Neal El Attrache will perform the procedure at the Kerlan-Jobe Institute.

The Red Sox drafted the 19-year-old 12th overall in 2016.

He began this season on the disabled list with a mild flexor strain and hasn't pitched at all since spring training (see video above of him during spring training).

A forearm strain ended his 2017 season in late August.

The 6-foot-6, 220-pounder went 3-9 with a 5.69 ERA and 1.43 WHIP in 14 starts during 2017 for Short Season Lowell (3 starts) and Low-A Greenville (11 starts). But he did strike out 72 batters in 55 1/3 innings (11.7 strikeouts per nine innings).

He worked out with Chris Sale during the offseason.

David Price's carpal tunnel caused by Fortnite? Red Sox's Alex Cora will talk with Price but indicated it's pitching-related

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- Red Sox starter David Price has been diagnosed with a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome. He underwent tests in Boston yesterday.

He'll rejoin the Red Sox here tomorrow. He'll play catch and then "hopefully throw a bullpen," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

The Red Sox then will decide whether Price is able to make his next start. Boston will need a starter for Saturday.

"We're hoping he makes his next start," Cora said.

Price frequently plays the popular video game Fortnite. Could that have caused his carpal tunnel?

Cora initially indicated the injury is pitching related.

Red Sox have 'Fortnite' fever, use 'Take the L' dance

Red Sox have 'Fortnite' fever, use 'Take the L' dance

The Boston Red Sox are adapting the 'Take the L' dance from the hit game 'Fortnite' as their newest celebration.

"It can happen in different ways," Cora said. "It's about repetition. You throw bullpens, you throw flat ground, you throw games, you make adjustments with pitches. I don't know. The only thing we know is this (the diagnosis)."

Cora was asked if he has any concerns it was caused by video games or typing. Cora replied, "No, no, no."

Cora later answered a follow-up specifically about Price frequently playing Fortnite and whether he'll ask the lefty to ease up on the video game.

"When he comes here tomorrow we'll talk about it," Cora said. "We'll talk with (head athletic trainer) Brad (Pearson) and see where we're at. For what I know, David has played video games his whole life. It seems like Fortnite now is the one everybody's playing. But last year, I saw a lot of guys playing FIFA. And that's a lot of playing, too. There's a lot of teams playing Fortnite, too. I don't know. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Cora was asked if Price underwent tests on his entire arm, including his elbow.

"For what I know, it was a lot of testing," Cora said. "That's all I can tell you. I didn't get into specifics. I'm learning a lot about his process, about the medical stuff. For what I know, he went through a lot during this test."

David Price injury: Boston Red Sox lefty has mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora said today during his weekly appearance on the WEEI Dale & Keefe show that Red Sox starter David Price has a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Cora said Price will throw a bullpen session tomorrow. The manager is hopeful Price won't miss another start but a decision will be made following the bullpen.

Price returned to Boston for tests yesterday on his left hand. Cora also announced yesterday Price was scratched from today's start.

The southpaw experienced numbness in his hand while throwing a bullpen session Sunday. The staff immediately shut him down.

Price also experienced the same numbness when he was removed after just one inning April 11 against the Yankees at Fenway Park. He surrendered four runs in that start.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Craig Kimbrel's usage marks a silver lining in Red Sox loss

Chris Mason

NEW YORK — The Red Sox let a late lead slip away, lost their second straight to the Yankees, and fell out of first place in the AL East.

It was a bad, bad night for the Sox, but it wasn't without a silver lining.

Alex Cora's usage of Craig Kimbrel signified the two are on the same page, and that's cause for optimism moving forward.

Kimbrel was brought up as an old school closer — the ninth inning is his — while Cora is of a newer mindset that a closer can be used whenever a game's leverage is the highest.

In tonight's loss, Cora targeted a specific hitter as the spot in the Yankees lineup where Kimbrel would be needed, whether it came in the eighth or ninth.

"We identified it was (Brett) Gardner when he comes in," Cora said. "That's the guy we want for Craig."

Though Matt Barnes started the eighth, when the lead-off man reached and ensured Gardner would bat later in the inning, Kimbrel got up in the Red Sox bullpen and began loosening.

Barnes only recorded one out with the bottom third of the Yankees lineup, so Kimbrel came into a game with runners on the corners clinging to a 6-5 lead and the top of the order coming up.

This was a progressive usage of the All-World closer; although it was the eighth, the leverage was never going to be higher. Cora and Kimbrel discussed the possibility before the game.

"I knew how we play these guys to be ready for multiple outs," Kimbrel said. "Just wasn't able to do it."

Ultimately, Kimbrel gave up a two-run triple to Gardner, and later, a two-run homer to Aaron Judge. But he's an All Star talent and certainly the best reliever in the Red Sox 'pen.

"It obviously sucks to have a lead (and lose). You have to tip your cap to them, they beat our best bullet," J.D. Martinez said.

Cora fired that bullet in the eighth instead of leaving it in the barrel. That's significant.

Five Red Sox Takes: Bullpen blows another one in the Bronx

Chris Mason

NEW YORK — It wasn't quite *deja vu*, but it was pretty darn close.

For the second night in a row, the Yankees to escaped with a late-inning win, 9-6, after the Red Sox bullpen fell apart.

With the loss, the Sox have fallen out of first place in the AL East for the first time in over a month.

Here are five takes from the Bronx:

1. Bullpen blows it again

Tuesday night, Alex Cora asked Heath Hembree to get the bottom third of the Yankees lineup. He couldn't get the job done and the Red Sox lost because one of those runners scored.

Last night, Alex Cora asked Matt Barnes to get the bottom third of the Yankees lineup. He couldn't get the job done and the Red Sox lost because two of those runners scored. With a 6-5 lead in the bottom of the eighth, Barnes fell behind all three batters he faced 2-0, allowing two of them to reach.

With runners on the corners, Alex Cora summoned Craig Kimbrel for a potential five-out save. Kimbrel gave up a go-ahead triple to Brett Gardner, then a two-run bomb to Aaron Judge that was a dagger.

2. Cora uses Kimbrel at the right time

Though it ultimately blew up in his face, it was the right move to bring Kimbrel in with runners on and the top of the Yankees order coming up in the eighth.

The leverage was never going to be higher than it was in that moment. The outcome of that inning would more than likely be the outcome of the game.

It didn't work out, but at least Cora went down with his best reliever. Better to lose that way than with Kimbrel watching from the bullpen.

3. Hanley absolutely hammers one

Trailing 5-4 in the seventh, the Red Sox needed a lift. Hanley Ramirez delivered it.

Ramirez crushed a two-run shot into the second deck, his first home run since April 14. The designated hitter knew it was gone immediately, and teammates on the top step of the dugout did, too.

The homer left Ramirez's bat at 113 mph, the second hardest any ball has been hit by the Red Sox this season.

4. Rough night for Rick

After a 5-0 start, Rick Porcello had his first rocky outing of the season last night in the Bronx.

Porcello was tagged for five runs in 5 1/3 innings. It was the only time this season he'd given up more than three.

A major culprit was that Porcello's fastball command. He struggled to locate the pitch and walked three batters. Porcello didn't issue a single free pass in four of his first seven starts.

5. Moreland makes it count

Cora put Mitch Moreland in the starting lineup, and he sure looked like an everyday player.

Moreland hit a two-run shot in the second inning, and made a nifty diving play at first base. With him in the game, the Red Sox lineup felt significantly deeper than it had been with Jackie Bradley Jr.

Red Sox No. 1 pitching prospect Jay Groome to undergo Tommy John surgery

Chris Mason

NEW YORK — The best pitching prospect in the Red Sox farm system, Jay Groome, will have to undergo Tommy John surgery.

The 19-year-old lefty was taken 12th overall in the 2016 MLB draft, and the only reason he fell that far was a reported demand for a \$4 million signing bonus. Groome and the Sox settled on \$3.65 million.

His surgery will come on the heels of No. 1 hitting prospect Michael Chavis getting slapped with an 80-game suspension for taking a performance-enhancing drug.

The Sox system was already thin to begin 2018. Somehow, it's significantly thinner.

Mason: Red Sox and Yankees rivalry still missing real villains

Chris Mason

NEW YORK — The talent is there. The records are, too.

But the Red Sox and Yankees need some villains — real villains — if they want to escalate their storied rivalry to its apex.

"But they brawled in Boston," you may argue. Sure, but consider the centerpieces of that melee.

Tyler Austin, who made his first Opening Day roster this year at 26, slid recklessly into Brock Holt, and later charged the mound after being hit intentionally.

This isn't Alex Rodriguez.

Austin was just a kid that finally got his shot trying to make an impact on the bases — and a kid who's already beaten cancer, no less. Austin was diagnosed with testicular cancer as a teenager, had surgery to remove the tumor, and beat the wretched disease.

That's no villain.

On the other side, Joe Kelly drilled Austin. The hard-throwing reliever was trying to stick up for Holt. That's just being a good teammate.

Kelly received some hearty boos in his first appearance at New York after the fight, but it was nothing stadium shattering.

"Actually, I thought it was going to be worse," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Kelly dismissed the taunts from fans as, "Nothing I hadn't heard before."

Austin and Kelly are solid role players for their teams, but for the rivalry to truly be reignited, the villains need to be the superstars.

Consider the rosters when things were white-hot in 2003 and 2004. Yankees fans despised Pedro Martinez, Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz. The feeling was mutual between Boston and Rodriguez, Roger Clemens and Jason Giambi. When Jason Varitek fought Rodriguez, that hatred was real.

It was the same way back in 1976 when Lou Pinella barreled over Pudge Fisk at the plate. (If you haven't seen the video, YouTube it.) The late '70's were another example of the rivalry at its nastiest best.

Decades later, Bill Lee was still carrying a Graig Nettles baseball card in his wallet.

Why?

"The Spaceman" will offer a reminder that he keeps his wallet in his back pocket, and then he'll tell you that he hopes the Yankees third baseman likes the view.

It doesn't necessarily need to be a fight that creates a villain. It can be bat flips, trash talk or even fastballs inside.

Yankees megastar Giancarlo Stanton took Drew Pomeranz deep twice on Tuesday night. There was no bat flip or slow trot around the bases.

Luis Severino was on the hill for the Yankees. Though the hard-throwing Dominican is a pupil of Pedro Martinez, nobody on the Red Sox was buzzed.

Heck, before the game Kelly played catch on the outfield grass right behind the Yankees taking infield. It sure didn't sound like a word of smack talk was spoken.

But perhaps nobody illustrates the current state of the rivalry better than Aaron Judge and Mookie Betts. They're tremendous players, but both remain affable guys; neither player inspires any real disdain from opponents.

They're the guys that opposing fans boo because they're the best player on the team, not for anything else they've done.

Just go back Kelly and Austin's fight.

Betts jogged in slowly from right field, and the mammoth Judge shifted the entire scrum across the diamond, but played peacemaker in the middle of it.

If Judge had taken a swing, he would have been villainized in Boston for the rest of his career.

But that's not where this rivalry is at. Not yet, anyway.

Chris Mason is a Red Sox beat writer for CNHI Sports Boston. Email him at cmason@northofboston.com, and follow him on Twitter at [@ByChrisMason](https://twitter.com/ByChrisMason)

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Carpal Tunnel for Price

The Red Sox may have dodged a bullet with David Price.

The lefty was sent back to Boston for testing after feeling more numbness in his pitching hand, but his condition was diagnosed as a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Alex Cora called it good news, and after being scratched at Yankee Stadium last night, Price may not miss another start.

"He'll play catch (today) and hopefully he throws a bullpen and after that we'll make a decision," Cora said. "If we feel that he can make his next start, he'll make it. If not, we'll make a decision. As you guys know, we've been trying to take care of these guys from the get go so we'll see how it goes."

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Tough times on the farm

The best pitching prospect in the Red Sox farm system, Jay Groome, will have to undergo Tommy John surgery.

The 19-year-old left-hander was taken 12th overall in the 2016 MLB draft, and the only reason he fell that far was a reported demand for a \$4 million signing bonus. Groome and the Sox settled on \$3.65 million.

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David Price diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome

Chris Mason

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****Redsox.com***

Kimbrel can't protect one-run lead in eighth

Ian Browne

NEW YORK -- The five-out save is something Craig Kimbrel had never accomplished in his career, and no one had even asked him to do it since May 28, 2016, when a six-out save opportunity fell apart for him in Toronto.

But Red Sox manager Alex Cora thought that Wednesday night at Yankee Stadium was the right time to lean on his elite closer for the toughest of save chances -- with runners at the corners and one out and clinging to a one-run lead with the top of New York's batting order looming.

It didn't work. The hottest team in baseball got hotter by surging back against Kimbrel and handing the Red Sox an agonizing 9-6 defeat.

Brett Gardner smashed a two-run triple and Aaron Judge followed by testing the maximum decibel level at Yankee Stadium with a two-run homer to center. A once-promising night went bad very fast for the Red Sox.

"I think any time we're playing these guys, be ready for multiple [innings]," said Kimbrel. "I wasn't able to do it tonight. I felt great tonight. Just two pitches that they put good wood on and I wasn't able to hold it where it was."

For the Yankees, it was the continuation of a torrid streak that includes eight wins in a row (all against teams that started the game tied or in sole possession of first place) and 17 wins in the last 18 games, something the storied franchise hadn't done since 1953. The Red Sox started this season by taking 17 of 19, so they can relate to the run their rivals are on.

"They're playing good ball," said Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez. "Both of these games have been close, they've come down to the wire. We've got to keep our heads up and battle and come back tomorrow."

As for the decision to bring on Kimbrel when he did, Cora had eyed the matchup with Gardner all along. He was just hoping it would have been a cleaner handoff.

Matt Barnes opened the bottom of the eighth by giving up a double to Neil Walker. After a groundout pushed Walker to third, Barnes walked Gleyber Torres.

Out of the dugout came Cora to bring on his closer, who hadn't pitched since notching his 300th career save four days earlier.

"With Gardner coming up and then those guys coming in, we talked about it before the game," Cora said. "We're not making it up during the game. We have a plan before, and today was a day we were like, 'You know what? He's rested enough, and we know they've been coming back against a lot of teams.' We saw what they did against Cleveland. So, that was his spot."

"It [would] probably be better with only a man at first and two outs, of course, but he's one of the best closers in the game, if not the best, and we gave him the ball and he did his best."

It seems nearly impossible to get the best of the Yankees these days.

For the first time since March 30, the Red Sox are in second place in the American League East. Backed by their surge, the Yankees have taken a one-game lead on their rivals heading into Thursday night's rubber match.

Hanley Ramirez staked Boston to a 6-5 lead with a towering two-run homer to left in the seventh.

Boston had a chance to extend the edge in the eighth with runners on second and third and nobody out, but the Sox couldn't score. Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez both struck out. Yankees manager Aaron Boone issued an intentional walk of Mookie Betts. Andrew Benintendi, who homered earlier in the game -- his sixth in 15 career games at Yankee Stadium -- grounded out.

That squandered opportunity wound up being costly.

"Huge," said Cora. "Second and third, infield in, you have to put the ball in play regardless of results, and we didn't. I think we paid the price there."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Barnes struggles: The whole night could have ended differently if Barnes had been able to create a sturdy bridge to Kimbrel. Instead, the righty fell behind 2-0 to Walker, who smashed a leadoff double to put the big rally in motion.

"I fell behind all three hitters, which obviously isn't ideal in that situation," Barnes said. "Made some good pitches to get back in the count with Walker. The fastball up was maybe not as up as I would have liked it to be. That is not what you want to do. My job when I go out there is to keep him out of the game until the ninth. In doing so, it means you've done your job. That is not what we're looking for."

SOUND SMART

After their sizzling start to the season, the Red Sox are just 8-9 in their last 17 games, which has coincided with the stellar run the Yankees are on. This was Boston's 12th loss in 16 games at Yankee Stadium dating back to July 17, 2016.

HE SAID IT

"I don't really think anyone was thinking about a 7 1/2-game lead. Right now, we're just thinking about our team and playing good ball. As long as we do that we'll be right there with them all year. We knew it was going to be close throughout the entire year and come down to the end of the year. It's still early. You hate to lose games like this, but we're not really worried about them; we're worried about us." -- Kimbrel

UP NEXT

The Red Sox go against a familiar foe in the finale of this three-game series in Yankees left-hander CC Sabathia in an MLB Network Showcase game at 7:05 p.m. ET. While the Red Sox sometimes got the best of Sabathia earlier in his career, that has not been the case recently. In the last five matchups dating back to Sept. 29, 2016, Sabathia is 5-0 with a 1.08 ERA. Boston counters with lefty Eduardo Rodriguez, who has been inconsistent (3-0, 5.29 ERA) since coming back from the disabled list.

Cora: 'Good news' on Price, just carpal tunnel

Ian Browne

NEW YORK -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora revealed Wednesday that the numbness lefty David Price experienced on Sunday in Texas was due to a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome and not anything related to his elbow or shoulder.

In addition, the manager expressed hope that Price can make his next start.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

The Red Sox should know for sure by Thursday, when Price rejoins the team in New York and attempts to play catch and throw a bullpen session.

"Obviously when you start talking about hand and tingling effects in the finger, you start thinking the worst," said Cora. "If we feel that he can make his next start, he'll make it. If not, we'll make a decision. As you guys know, we've been trying to take care of these guys from the get-go, so we'll see how it goes tomorrow."

If all goes well, Price could pitch as early as Saturday in Toronto, when the Red Sox have an opening in their rotation. Conversely, Cora also didn't rule out Price going to the 10-day disabled list if he isn't comfortable while throwing on Thursday.

"Tomorrow is a big day for us. We'll see how he feels and we move on," said Cora.

Price was supposed to start Wednesday's game at Yankee Stadium, but the Red Sox announced on Tuesday that he had been scratched due to numbness in the fingers on his pitching hand, something he also dealt with during an abbreviated start against the Yankees on April 11.

However, it is unclear if the two instances are related. When Price started on April 11, the temperature at Fenway Park was in the 30s and the issue seemed to be weather-related. Price experienced no symptoms the next day.

The most recent instance occurred on an 80-degree day in Texas, when Price attempted to throw a side session. There was enough lingering discomfort the next day that the Red Sox sent him back to Boston for a full battery of tests, which revealed the Carpel tunnel syndrome.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is due to a compression of the median nerve as it travels through the wrist, and the main symptoms are pain, numbness and tingling.

The ailment has often been associated to those who are on the computer a lot, and Cora noted how it can also impact a pitcher.

"I mean, it can happen in different ways," said Cora. "It's about repetition and I don't know, you throw bullpen [sessions], you throw off of flat ground, you throw games, you make adjustments with pitches. The only thing we know is it's this and, for me, this is quote-unquote good news compared to thinking about something else."

While Price has made no secret of his passion for playing video games with his teammates, Cora isn't ready to say that is related to his Carpel tunnel problem.

"When he comes here tomorrow, we'll talk about it," said Cora. "We'll talk with [trainer] Brad [Pearson] and see where we're at. From what I know, David has played video games his whole life. It seems like Fortnite now is the one everybody is playing, but last year, I saw a lot of guys playing FIFA. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Cora said the team's training staff will work with Price to get rid of the symptoms.

"We'll map out the plan," Cora said. "Sometimes it's ice. Sometimes it's massage. Sometimes it's laser. We'll see. We'll see what works with him. As you guys know, we need him. We need him here. We need him to compete. He's a big part of what we're trying to accomplish, and we need him healthy. That's the most important thing."

Price started the season 1-0 with a 0.00 ERA in his first two outings. Beginning with the start at Fenway Park when he first experienced the numbness in his fingers, Price is 1-4 with an 8.22 ERA in his past five starts.

Groome to undergo Tommy John surgery

Ian Browne

NEW YORK -- Top Red Sox pitching prospect Jay Groome won't pitch at all in 2018. Instead, the talented 19-year-old will undergo Tommy John surgery on his left elbow next Tuesday in Los Angeles.

The procedure will be performed by Dr. Neal El Attrache at the Kerlan-Jobe Institute.

The 6-foot-6 lefty was Boston's first-round pick in the 2016 Draft, taken No. 12 overall. He's currently ranked the organization's No. 2 prospect by MLB Pipeline (but their No. 1 pitching prospect), as well as the No. 85 overall prospect in baseball.

Due to injuries, Groome has made just 17 starts since being drafted, going 3-9 with a 5.69 ERA.

The New Jersey native spent the offseason working out with Red Sox lefty ace Chris Sale in Fort Myers, Fla.

Sale is a big believer in Groome and has expressed the hope numerous times they will one day pitch in the same rotation.

"It's been fun," said Sale earlier this year. "He's done a really good job. It's fun to see. He's young and this is his first go at it. I'm just trying to get him prepared and show him, 'Hey, this is what it takes to get through a big league season.' He's got all the tools you can possibly ask for. That guy is an animal. Just trying to give him some ins and outs and try to get him here sooner rather than later."

The general timetable for pitchers coming back from Tommy John surgery is 12-18 months.

Groome is seen as having frontline starter potential. In his time in the Minors, Groome's fastball has been sitting in the low 90s, although he hit 97 mph as an amateur. His best pitch, though, is his power curveball, which was the consensus best breaking ball of anyone in his Draft class.

Many pitchers make a full recovery from Tommy John surgery and some even throw harder when they return.

Cora sees flaws in Bradley's mechanics

Ian Browne

NEW YORK -- Mired in one of the worst slumps of his career, Red Sox center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. didn't start for the second time in the past three games on Wednesday at Yankee Stadium.

After watching Bradley strike out three times on Tuesday to slip to 1-for-14 on the road trip, Red Sox manager Alex Cora decided another day off would be best.

Bradley, who is 5-for-50 since April 21, was available off the bench.

With Bradley out, Cora was able to get Mitch Moreland's bat in the lineup at first base while moving Hanley Ramirez to designated hitter and J.D. Martinez to right field.

"It's just a matter of for me of what I see," said Cora. "What I would like [Bradley] to be is to become athletic in the batter's box. Sometimes we get caught up in mechanics and what we are working on before the game, and we go to the batter's box at 7:30 and you're thinking about your load and your hips and landing time, and you forget the most important thing."

Though Cora wasn't with the Red Sox in 2016, he knows all about Bradley's All-Star season, which included a 29-game hitting streak.

"Honestly, for me, he's not using his hands," said Cora. "When we talk about good hitters, they look hitterish. They start, you've got rhythm going. It seems like he doesn't have any rhythm. To get pitches in the strike zone at this level, 97, 98, you've got to get your hands going, and he's not doing that, I feel. Probably that's why he's missing them.

"I saw some video from two years ago, that's when he had that long hitting streak. There was a different stance. There were more -- he looked more hitterish. His hands were moving. So hopefully we can get him there, get him in a good spot and then after that everything can go from there."

The move to insert Moreland in the lineup paid off, as he crushed a two-run homer in the second inning.

Cora, a rookie manager, admits he is going through a learning curve of when it's best to sit a slumping player and when it might be better to show confidence by keeping the player in the lineup.

"I'm learning now," Cora said. "Obviously this is my first time doing this, but I do feel it gets to the point that you have to take a step back before you go forward. I'm not saying this is the time.

"It's very important that today for him, if he wants to go to the cage and take 500 swings, go ahead. If you want to go to the video and sit down and just watch video, that'll be great. Use the day for your advantage. Don't use it just to sit down at your locker and wonder what's going on. Take it to your advantage."

Wright's role TBD

The Red Sox aren't sure yet if Steven Wright will be in the rotation or bullpen when he's eligible to come off the suspended list on Monday. Some of that could depend on David Price's availability going forward.

The knuckleballer started for Triple-A Pawtucket on Tuesday, giving up one run over six innings.

"His next one will be coming out of the bullpen, either one or two innings. Then when he comes out we'll make a decision what we're going to do," said Cora.

Honorary bat girl from Marblehead

In recognition of Mother's Day, MLB announced the honorary batgirls for all 30 teams on Wednesday. The Red Sox selected Lindsay Northrop of Marblehead, Mass.

With the Sox on the road in Toronto on Sunday, the club will recognize her at a future home game.

For the first time since the Honorary Bat Girl program's start in 2009, clubs had the opportunity to hand-select their respective honorees, each of whom have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to battling breast cancer.

Northrop is a two-time survivor of breast cancer. She is married with two sons (ages 11 and 9) and the proud owner of two dogs.

***ESPNBoston.com**

Brett Gardner delivers key blow as Yankees beat Red Sox again

Cole Harvey

NEW YORK -- Brett Gardner, welcome back.

Hours after New York Yankees manager Aaron Boone stood up for his struggling 34-year-old leadoff man, saying he wasn't entertaining the possibility of moving Gardner down in the batting order, the veteran went out and had his best game of the season Wednesday night.

In sparking a 9-6 win over the rival Boston Red Sox that gave the Yankees sole possession of first place in the AL East, Gardner was New York's extra-base hero.

Although his doubles in the first and third innings led to a couple of early runs, it was his triple in the eighth that keyed yet another Yankees comeback by bringing home the tying and go-ahead runs.

"Before the game we talked about, we feel like he's been a little bit unlucky," Boone said, referencing the .198 batting average Gardner brought into play. "[Wednesday], he was really able to get in some good counts and put some aggressive swings in the strike zone and drive some balls. That last one [the triple], obviously, he really stepped on that one the other way."

The opposite-field drive that landed deep into the left-center gap, just in front of the 399-foot sign, brought home Neil Walker and Gleyber Torres. Walker began the eighth inning with a leadoff double to left, continuing to come through with timely, clutch at-bats.

Walker said it's "happenstance" that he continues to find himself at the plate in key situations. On Tuesday, Walker's pinch-hit double in the seventh led to the go-ahead run in a 3-2 Yankees win. A ninth-inning double by Walker on Sunday helped set up Torres' walk-off homer in that comeback. Four days earlier, his ninth-inning leadoff walk kicked off another rally that ended in a Yankees win.

"You love seeing him come up there in those situations, whether it's a lot of the key walks he's worked, or lately a couple of extra-base hits," Boone said.

Added Walker: "[The mindset] is go up there, try to have a good at-bat and find a way to get on base."

Following Walker's eighth-inning double Wednesday, third baseman Miguel Andujar immediately moved him over to third, chopping a ball to the right side of the infield. One batter later, the rookie Torres drew a five-pitch walk. That led Red Sox manager Alex Cora to bring in closer Craig Kimbrel to face Gardner.

Keep the Yankees in the yard

Although Gardner had been struggling to get hits much of the season, he was putting together the types of swings and at-bats that gave the Yankees hope. Boone said before the game that various data from the team's analytics department showed the outfielder was making adequate contact and was demonstrating a careful eye.

He just hadn't really been able to buy any hits, causing some to wonder whether the Yankees should tweak their lineup. Boone adamantly said he still considered Gardner his leadoff hitter.

"Any time you look up at the board and you're hitting .200, but maybe you see some numbers that suggest maybe you should be hitting a little better or otherwise," Gardner said. "Up there at the plate, I haven't felt completely lost. I've been feeling good physically. I've been seeing the ball well. And my work's been pretty good in the cage and batting practice. The results just haven't been there in the games."

"So when that's the case, you just have to keep working, try not to overthink it and keep things simple."

Wednesday marked the first time this season that Gardner had multiple extra-base hits in a game. It was his fifth career game with three extra-base hits, and his first since last May.

In the eighth, when Gardner was racing around second and headed for third with no plan to stop, Torres picked up the pace of his own sprint around third, realizing there was no going back. One night after getting thrown out at home by several steps, Torres was being pushed by the speedy leadoff man.

Torres scored, giving the Yankees the lead for good.

One batter later, Gardner touched the plate too, after Aaron Judge gave the Yankees a little insurance with a monstrous 429-foot two-run homer to center field that sent the Bronx faithful into a frenzy. The energy within Yankee Stadium was reminiscent of the sights and sounds from postseason classics of the past.

The come-from-behind win was the Yankees' fifth this season when trailing in the eighth inning.

"You can feel the electricity in that building in that inning, and for guys to completely go up there and control the moment," Boone said. "I just love the way our guys compete in the toughest of moments, when there's a lot on the line, when it's loud and when there's excitement. They really lock in and their concentration is extra focused."

****WEEI.com***

Craig Kimbrel owns up to not getting job done in 8th inning vs. Yankees

Ryan Hannable

NEW YORK -- Craig Kimbrel still isn't totally used to coming into games in the eighth inning, but he didn't use that as an excuse Wednesday against the Yankees.

The Red Sox closer entered the game in the eighth inning with runners on the corners, one out, a 6-5 lead and the top of the Yankees order coming to the plate. Kimbrel was greeted with a two-RBI triple off the bat of Brett Gardner and then the next batter, Aaron Judge, crushed a mammoth home run to dead-center, which gave the Yankees a 9-6 lead and ultimately a 9-6 win.

Judge's home run had an exit velocity of 117 MPH, according to Statcast. It's the hardest hit ball Kimbrel has allowed in the Statcast era (since 2015).

Afterwards, Kimbrel was asked if coming into the game in the eighth had any impact on his performance?

"Not at all," he said. "I've got to come in and get outs. It doesn't matter if it's the eighth or ninth inning, especially in situations like that. Like I said, I just didn't do it."

Added Kimbrel: "I think any time we're playing these guys, be ready for multiple outs. I wasn't able to do it tonight."

Manager Alex Cora said he spoke with Kimbrel before the game about potentially coming in prior to the ninth if the opportunity presented itself, so he was prepared.

"We talked about it before the game, this is nothing that -- you know, we're not making it up during the game," Cora said. "We have a plan before, and today was a day we were like, you know what, he's rested enough, and we know they've been coming back against a lot of teams. We saw what they did against

Cleveland. So, that was his spot. It was probably better with only a man at first and two outs, of course, but he's one of the best closers in the game, if not the best, and we gave him the ball and he did his best."

While no one will come out and say it, getting Kimbrel adjusted to coming in prior to the ninth will take time, but the important thing is they have now begun to do it.

Yankees 9, Red Sox 6: Right move by Alex Cora does not pay off

Ryan Hannable

NEW YORK -- Alex Cora knew the move would decide the game and he went for it, but ultimately the aggressive approach didn't pay off.

The Red Sox led 6-5 in the bottom of the eighth inning and right-hander Matt Barnes put runners on the corners with one out and the Yankees had the top of their lineup coming up. For the first time since the middle of May last season, the Red Sox called on Craig Kimbrel to get a five-out save, but it didn't work out.

Kimbrel allowed a two-RBI triple to lead-off hitter Brett Gardner to give the Yankees a 7-6 lead and then the next batter Aaron Judge crushed a monster homer to dead-center, giving the Yankees some extra breathing room and a 9-6 win.

"With Gardner, fall behind 3-0, got back in the count, tried to go in on him, it leaked back over the plate and he put a good swing on it for a triple," Kimbrel said. "With the home run to center field, we were trying to elevate there, just didn't get it high enough. He got good wood to it and hit it out to center."

Judge's home run had an exit velocity of 117 MPH, according to Statcast. It's the hardest hit ball Kimbrel has allowed in the Statcast era (since 2015).

(Click here for a complete game recap.)

It was the Yankees' second straight win over the Red Sox and they now are by themselves at the top of the American League East. The Red Sox had been in at least a share of first place since April 1. New York has now won eight straight games.

The Red Sox had trailed much of the game until Hanley Ramirez hit a two-run homer in the seventh inning that gave them a 6-5 lead at the time. It was his first homer since April 14 and spanned 82 at-bats. They seemed on their way to another come-from-behind win, but then came the fireworks in the eighth. It is worth noting the Red Sox squandered a big chance in the top of the eighth, as they had second and third with no outs and didn't score a run.

For all the action the game had, the talk will be bringing in Kimbrel in the eighth inning with one out, but it was undoubtedly the right move. That half inning was going to determine the outcome of the game.

This was exactly what Cora was talking about throughout spring training in talking with his closer about bringing him into the game in instances other than a clean ninth. With the Yankees' top of the order stepping to the plate with the tying run on third and go-ahead run at first, going to Kimbrel, the team's best reliever was absolutely the right move and should be encouraging for the remainder of the season.

"We talked about it before the game, this is nothing that – you know, we're not making it up during the game," Cora said. "We have a plan before, and today was a day we were like, you know what, he's rested enough, and we know they've been coming back against a lot of teams. We saw what they did against Cleveland. So, that was his spot. It was probably better with only a man at first and two outs, of course, but he's one of the best closers in the game, if not the best, and we gave him the ball and he did his best."

So, while the Red Sox lost the game, it seems clear that Kimbrel and the Red Sox are more than willing to use the closer when the game presents itself and not strictly a clean top of the ninth.

This is encouraging.

The Red Sox do not have a pinch-hit hit this season. They are 0-for-14.

Red Sox top pitching prospect Jay Groome to undergo Tommy John surgery

Ryan Hannable

NEW YORK -- The Red Sox' farm system took another hit on Wednesday.

The team announced top pitching prospect Jay Groome will undergo Tommy John surgery on his left elbow next week. The procedure will be performed by Dr. Neal El Attrache at the Kerlan-Jobe Institute in Los Angeles.

This comes after top positional prospect Michael Chavis was suspended 80 games by Major League Baseball for testing positive for a performance-enhancing drug in early April.

Groome's 2017 season was ended with a flexor strain in his elbow in August and he hasn't pitched at all this season because of the same injury. The 19-year-old appeared to be healthy during spring training, but began the year on the Single-A Greenville disabled list and now finds himself out for not only the rest of this season, but potentially most of next season.

He was the Red Sox' No. 12 overall pick in the 2016 MLB draft.

The minor league system wasn't very strong to begin with, so now it's top pitching prospects are Tanner Houck (High-A Salem), Jalen Beeks (Triple-A Pawtucket) and 19-year-old Bryan Mata (High-A Salem).

Red Sox injury updates: What's the latest with Dustin Pedroia, Tyler Thornburg?

Ryan Hannable

NEW YORK -- Prior to Wednesday's game against the Yankees, Red Sox manager Alex Cora offered updates on a few of the team's injured players.

-- Reliever Tyler Thornburg has made four minor league rehab appearances following offseason surgery to relieve thoracic outlet syndrome. The right-hander has allowed two hits, struck out six and walked three in 3 2/3 innings. Cora indicated he's progressing, but still has a few more outings before a return to the big league club is possible.

"His rehab process, obviously he's not pitching every day," he said. "He hasn't gone back to back. We haven't used him yet with traffic on the bases. The feedback is good. The fastball is there. Breaking ball is getting better. Slowly but surely he's getting where we want him to be. When he passes all those hurdles, we'll make a decision."

-- Dustin Pedroia is still progressing in extended spring training, but there's no timetable on when he might be ready for a minor league rehab assignment.

"As of now, not yet," Cora said. "He's playing tomorrow, five innings, three at-bats, then we go from there."

-- Steven Wright's next appearance with Triple-A Pawtucket will come out of the bullpen for one or two innings. From there, the Red Sox will decide what to do with him next, although it appears he will be on the Red Sox' roster as he's out of options. It's just a matter of what his role will be.

Wright has five games remaining on his 15-game suspension.

In other news, Cora is hopeful Wednesday's day off will be good for Jackie Bradley Jr., who is 0 for his last 8 and 1 for his last 14.

"Obviously this is my first time doing this, but I do feel it gets to the point that you have to take a step back before you go forward," Cora said. "I'm not saying this is the time, because he didn't play last week and he played I don't know, four or five in a row, but he'll be -- it's very important that today for him, if he wants to go to the cage and take 500 swings, go ahead. If you want to go to the video and sit down and just watch video, that'll be great.

"Use the day for your advantage. Don't use it just to sit down at your locker and wonder what's going on. Take it to your advantage. We might need him late in the game. Hopefully he comes in to play defense late in the games and if it's a tie game late and he has to hit, he'll hit and get a big hit. But I think it's an important day for him just to sit back and see what's going on and work on it."

Is David Price's carpal tunnel related to playing Fortnite?

Ryan Hannable

NEW YORK -- It seems like a silly thing to wonder, but the question had to be asked.

David Price was scheduled to pitch Wednesday night in New York, but he was scratched and went back to Boston on Monday to get testing done on his fingers after feeling some discomfort following throwing a bullpen in Texas on Sunday. On Wednesday, it was announced Price has a mild case of carpal tunnel.

One of the most popular things in the Red Sox' clubhouse this year besides baseball has been playing the video game Fortnite, which was detailed in a recent feature by The Athletic's Jen McCaffrey.

Price is one of the most involved players, so during Alex Cora's pregame press conference, the manager was asked if Price will be told to stop playing the game?

"When he comes here tomorrow, we'll talk about it," Cora said. "We'll talk with Brad [Pearson, trainer] and see where we're at. From what I know, David has played video games his whole life. It seems like Fortnite now is the one everybody is playing, but last year, I saw a lot of guys playing FIFA. That's a lot of playing, too. So, there's a lot of teams playing Fortnite, too.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Earlier in the press conference, Cora said he didn't believe Price's condition has anything to do with the video game.

"It can happen in different ways," he said. "Like I said earlier today, it is about repetition and I don't know, you throw bullpens, you throw off of flat ground, you throw games, you make adjustments with pitches. I don't know, the only thing we know is it's this and, for me, this is quote unquote good news compared to thinking about something [else]."

Price will return to the team Thursday and throw. If he ends up by throwing a bullpen and all goes well, he could potentially start Saturday in Toronto.

Bradford: Mookie Betts is getting more expensive by the day

Rob Bradford

NEW YORK -- It would seem to be an important exercise to check in on Mookie Betts' contract situation every once in a while. When you're dealing with one of the perceived best players in baseball (who seems to only be getting better), with a potentially franchise-defining financial commitment awaiting him in just a few years, such conversations are pertinent.

So before Tuesday night's series opener against the Yankees, we did exactly that -- asking Betts to confirm that he hadn't come off his strategy of not talking contract extension during the season.

"Everything is exactly the same," he told WEEI.com, referencing his stance on not negotiating in-season. "Nothing going on."

It's not surprising, but it also certainly doesn't make the Red Sox side of things feel all that comfy and cozy while trying to decipher the team's financial future.

In years past, the Red Sox have been really effective in finding in-season, long-term extensions for their foundation players. Both deals involving Josh Beckett and Dustin Pedroia were locked up smack-dab in the middle of the season, with Jason Bay also agreeing to a July deal before the team's medical staff negated it. Then you have players like Jonathan Papelbon, who was always intent on betting on himself all the way to free agency.

This one is different.

Betts will be eligible for free agency after the 2020 season, having already set an arbitration record with his \$10.5 million payday for 2018.

Two years ago, Betts' extension possibilities were being linked to players like Christian Yelich, who agreed to a seven-year deal with the Marlins worth at least \$51 million. Now we've morphed into comparisons with the Mike Trout contract. The Angels bought out all of Trout's arbitration years via a six-year, \$144 million deal, eliminating the outfielder's previous opportunity to hit the free agent market after the 2017 season.

Now? Think Jose Altuve's new deal ... and then some.

The Astros second baseman agreed to a seven-year, \$163.5 million, with a \$20 million signing bonus. Why should we care when talking about Betts? Beside the obvious money commitment, there are some elements in Houston's deal that should be viewed as trends.

From the team perspective, the Red Sox would be looking to do a deal with Betts that finishes his final season no older than his 35-year-old season. It's no coincidence that the deals for Altuve, Eric Hosmer and J.D. Martinez run through their age 34 seasons.

And while there is some sense of player security when it comes to Altuve's deal, let's make no mistake about it: He got paid. Folks can talk about the uncertainty of the free agent market after last offseason, but when it comes to players like Betts, that shouldn't be a concern. His camp knows that. It's why we're still sitting here with no extension in sight. And because of this reality, such deals are no longer viewed as the payroll-savers they once were.

"I think a couple of things have changed. One, the scale of these deals — the pre-arb and first-year arb deals — there were some that are still in that mid-tier range," said Rangers president Jon Daniels. "Ten years ago if there was an injury or you made a mistake in your evaluation or the player took a step back for whatever reason, the deal was small enough that it didn't really kill you. Now these deals are \$40 [million], \$50 [million], \$60 [million]-plus, especially guys wh have two years. Those are real dollars. I think it's reached a point, at least in our estimation, that there is a little more risk involved."

With Betts, it would seem to be a risk worth taking. That doesn't mean it wouldn't be appreciably more uncomfortable than previous Red Sox contract extensions.

By the time the Red Sox would have to face Betts' free agency, they will have had to already defined which players they were ready to go all-in with. Craig Kimbrel. Chris Sale. Martinez. Xander Bogaerts. Rick Porcello. Potentially David Price. All are big-ticket items they are going to have to replace or commit big dollars to.

And the longer the Betts saga goes on, the more difficult it becomes to pay proven anchors for those roster spots without blowing through the most uneasy luxury tax thresholds.

"For a variety of reasons, you don't want to sign a bad deal because it handcuffs you and it's sort of a Scarlett Letter, and I think the agents look at it the same way," Daniels said. "It's just a matter of finding that sweet spot that makes sense for both sides."

For Betts and the Red Sox, that window may be slowly closing with each passing day.

****NBC Sports Boston***

Alex Cora's best game as Red Sox manager was a painful loss

Evan Drellich

NEW YORK — On the night the Red Sox fell out of first place for the first time since March, on the night the Yankees stormed back and dealt the Sox a 9-6 loss in front of a hostile and sold-out crowd, Alex Cora managed his best game yet.

Before the Yankees teed off on the Sox bullpen, Cora turned to his bench in the seventh inning, earlier than most of his pinch-hit moves. Catcher Sandy Leon was pulled for Brock Holt. Holt didn't reach, but that's beside the point. A night after Cora oddly made no pinch-hit moves, Cora and Holt gave the Sox a better chance to start the inning with a runner.

That's the whole idea: position the Sox as best possible. Calling on Craig Kimbrel in the eighth inning achieved that goal as well. On a nightly basis, the manager's job is predicated on process over result. Over a 162-game season, results will follow more often than not.

The closer became the flashpoint. Cora tabbed his best reliever when it mattered most: with runners on the corners, a 6-5 lead, and the top of the order coming up in the eighth inning after Matt Barnes got into trouble. But Kimbrel left his fastball over the plate and got hammered. Brett Gardner put the Yanks ahead by two with a triple, and Aaron Judge followed with a screaming line drive to center for a two-run homer, a quintessential frozen rope that went 117 mph off the bat.

The worst mistake the Red Sox — or their fans — could make after Wednesday is to believe the result invalidates the process. That Kimbrel, one of the greatest relievers anywhere, should not be asked to pitch in the eighth inning in the future because he didn't get the job done this time.

The Yankees are a scorching hot team. They have the best power-hitting team in the game.

The best-laid plans can fall apart. But the Sox' plan was right.

Kimbrel isn't comfortable in the eighth inning, you say?

How is it that every other reliever in the bullpen can pitch in various innings, anywhere from the fifth through the eighth to extras, and still be expected to succeed, but not the quote-unquote closer? Do you really think Kimbrel looks up and sees the No. 8 on the scoreboard rather than the No. 9 and morphs into a pumpkin?

If you think highly of Kimbrel's ability, you understand he's good because he has a 96-97 mph fastball and a wicked curve. If he can handle the pressure of the vaunted save situation in the ninth inning, don't you think he can handle the pressure of a different inning with the game on the line?

"Not at all," Kimbrel said when asked if he has to adjust to the eighth. "I've got to come in and get outs. It doesn't matter if it's the eighth or ninth inning, especially in situations like that. Like I said, I just didn't do it."

Kimbrel probably wouldn't admit discomfort, even if he felt some. But logic backs this one up: there's a guy in the batter's box. The job for the pitcher is to get him out. Every other reliever does that job in different innings. Kimbrel is better than every other reliever the Sox have.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, the inning is something that actually affects Kimbrel. How great an effect could it be? To the point that someone else in the Sox 'pen is better equipped than him, or is even close?

Kimbrel is not standing on the mound, staring at the scoreboard, sobbing. He was ready for the eighth inning. He was notified ahead of time whom he would be brought in for, Brett Gardner, and he was not rushed. (He doesn't take long to get warm anyway.) Cora was hoping that there would be no more than one runner on base, and two outs when Gardner came up.

Kimbrel isn't comfortable with traffic, you say?

There is indeed little room for error with runners on base. Kimbrel is a strikeout pitcher. He always seeks strikeouts and probably does even moreso when there are runners on. Hitters are not as likely to expand as they are in the ninth inning.

"Especially with a runner on third, there's definitely a smaller margin of error," Kimbrel said Wednesday. "Right there, I didn't want [Gardner] to put the ball in play. Trying to strike him out, and wasn't able to do it."

Perhaps this is an area Kimbrel can grow, not trying too hard to fan people. But he's always been that way.

Again: he is the best option the Sox have with runners on. Or in any situation. His fastball does not drop to 88 mph or even 93 mph because someone is dancing off third base. He is not so mentally weak that he sees a runner on third base and cowers and forgets how to pitch.

If there's a little adaptation to be had to pitching with runners on base, so be it. Ask the team's greatest reliever to adapt a bit. Ask him to prove his excellence in a way that goes beyond that stockpile of 300 traditional saves. He's not bouncing his curveball after 40 feet because there's, oh heavens, traffic.

You're OK with a lesser pitcher coming in with runners on base, but not the best one you have?

Kimbrel is too good to be locked behind tradition's door. He doesn't need to be coddled with clean innings. Cora knows that — the competitor in Kimbrel must know it as well — and neither the pitcher nor manager should forget it because of Wednesday's result.

Alex Cora's lineup plans may be changing for Mitch Moreland

Evan Drellich

NEW YORK — Alex Cora has noted the pre-planned nature of his lineups. His Red Sox players typically know at least a couple days in advance when they're scheduled to play.

It seems, in the case of the struggling Jackie Bradley Jr., that Cora may be taking a different tack, a reactive approach. It was only a matter of time before Cora would need to do with some player or another.

Bradley was out of the lineup on Wednesday, with Mitch Moreland playing first base and J.D. Martinez sliding into the outfield.

“We’ll see,” Cora said when asked if Bradley would play Thursday. “We’ll see how it goes tomorrow.”

Moreland homered in his first trip up Wednesday against the Yankees, adding an exclamation point to the puzzling choice not to use Moreland off the bench on Tuesday in place of Bradley or Christian Vazquez. Bradley’s hitting .173 with a .264 on-base percentage.

“He’s not using his hands,” Cora said Wednesday. “When we talk about good hitters, they look hitter-ish. They start, you’ve got rhythm going. It seems like he doesn’t have any rhythm. To get pitches in the strike zone at this level, 97 [mph], 98, you’ve got to get your hands going and he’s not doing that.

“It seems like he’s on time. But he’s not, it seems like it. ... I saw some video from two years ago, that’s when he had that long hitting streak, there was a different stance. There were more — he looked hitterish. His hands were moving. So, hopefully we can get him there, get him in a good spot and then after that everything can go from there.”

Sometimes, when a player is struggling, it is said that that the only way to improve is to play through the struggles. Sometimes, players are said to need breaks. How does Cora know what’s best in the case of Bradley, or anyone else who may go through a lengthy slump?

“I’m learning now. Obviously, this is my first time doing this,” Cora said. “But I do feel it gets to the point that you have to take a step back before you go forward. I’m not saying this is the time... it’s very important that today for him, if he wants to go to the cage and take 500 swings, go ahead. If you want to go to the video and sit down and just watch video, that’ll be great. Use the day for your advantage. Don’t use it just to sit down at your locker and wonder what’s going on.”

Moreland, meanwhile, made a couple great plays in the field Wednesday. But he’s developed into an all-around threat, rather than the defense-minded first baseman he was once known to be.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

McAdam: Red Sox lacking eighth-inning solution

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK — For now at least, mixing the Red Sox bullpen with the Yankee lineup is a dangerous cocktail, and should come with a warning label: Could cause combustion.

The Yankees, in the midst of a hellacious run (17-1), have made late-inning comebacks something of a specialty. Wednesday night’s 9-6, eighth-inning rally marked the seventh time in the last 13 games the Yankees won a game in which they were trailing or tied in the seventh inning. More pointedly, they’ve gone ahead to stay in their final at-bat in five of the last eight games.

Correspondingly, the Red Sox have somehow managed to compile baseball’s second-best record — Wednesday’s loss knocked them off their first-place perch — without much of a bridge serving as safe passageway to closer Craig Kimbrel.

The closest thing they have to such a thing is Joe Kelly, and with 22 pitches thrown Tuesday, it seemed apparent that he’d be available for duty on Wednesday night, too. Instead, Alex Cora tabbed Matt Barnes with disastrous results.

Charged with protecting a one-run lead in the eighth, Barnes proceeded to fall behind each of the three hitters he faced — 2-and-0 to two, and 3-0 to a third. Is it any wonder that two of them reached?

“It obviously wasn’t ideal in that situation,” an understated Barnes said of his predicament.

Mind you, this wasn’t the meat of the vaunted New York batting order; it was the bottom third, featuring a slumping veteran (Neil Walker) stuck below the Mendoza line (.198) to begin the night, and two rookies (Michael Andujar and Gleyber Torres). In a perfect world, Barnes would have retired them in order and given Kimbrel a clean slate for the far more imposing hitters at the top of the lineup in the bottom of the ninth.

“That’s not what you want to do,” confessed Barnes. “My job when I go out there is to keep him out of the game until the ninth. In doing so, it means you’ve done your job. That’s not what we’re looking for.”

Kimbrel, summoned in the eighth for the second time in the last 10 days, fared no better. For the second time in as many multi-inning save opportunities this season, Kimbrel gave up an extra-base hit to the first hitter he faced. On Wednesday night, that was Brett Gardner, who smoked a booming triple over the head of Mookie Betts in center, wiping out the one-run Red Sox lead and giving the Yankees the edge.

Kimbrel, who last pitched Saturday night in Arlington when he posted his 300th career save, was plenty rested and had been told by Cora before the game that an eighth-inning assignment may be in the offing.

He was rested and ready, but didn’t execute.

It’s known Kimbrel was initially uneasy about coming into games before the ninth. But to his credit, Kimbrel didn’t hide behind any excuses for failing to do the job. Asked if he was still making the adjustment from clean innings in the ninth to entering with inherited runners in the eighth, Kimbrel couldn’t respond quicker or more emphatically.

“Not at all,” he said. “I mean, I’ve got to come in and get outs. It doesn’t matter if it’s the eighth or ninth inning, especially in situations like that. Like I said, I just didn’t do it.”

There’s this sobering stat: despite a career that has seen him become the quickest (in terms of age and save opportunities) and most dependable (in terms of successfully converting saves), Kimbrel has yet to have a five-out save, despite pitching in five such opportunities.

Perhaps that’s an impossibly small sample size on which to make a judgment. Or maybe that sample is trying to tell us something. Closers are notoriously creatures of habit and any circumstance that upsets their routine can be problematic.

While Kimbrel’s willingness to accept both his assignment and responsibility when he fails, is equally admirable, clearly something is lacking in the Red Sox’ bullpen: a trustworthy and experienced set-up man.

Kelly might grow into the role, but Tuesday night, he had difficulty staying in the strike zone as the Yankee Stadium crowd roasted him for his involvement in the bench-clearing brawl at Fenway last month. Carson Smith has, tantalizingly, shown more in recent appearances (seven strikeouts over his last four innings, covering five appearances), but needs to keep proving that he’s fully returned to 2016-levels.

Barnes appears miscast for such a spot too — often susceptible to hanging curveballs in big spots — and is perhaps better utilized in the seventh. Tyler Thornburg, full of promise but still in recovery from thoracic outlet surgery, remains at Pawtucket where he still must enter a game with runners on and demonstrate he can pitch on consecutive days.

For now, it would seem there’s a sizeable hole in the Boston bullpen. In time, it could be filled internally, or addressed via the trade market mid-season.

But right now, it's responsible for the one-game gap that exists between the Sox and Yankees in the A.L. East standings.

BSJ Game Report: Yankees 9, Red Sox 6 – Streaking New York overtakes Sox for first

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK – All you need to know, in quickie form, from the Red Sox' 9-6 loss to the Yankees, complete with BSJ insight and analysis.

BOX SCORE

HEADLINES

Bullpen falls apart: In what may well have been the worst eighth inning the Red Sox have suffered through since the debacle on Opening Day, Matt Barnes and Craig Kimbrel combined to allow four runs, turning what had been a one-run Red Sox lead into a three-run deficit. Barnes faced the hitters and retired only one and Kimbrel allowed a two-run triple and a two-run homer to the first two hitters he faced. It marked the third time this season the Red Sox lost a game in which they were leading after seven innings. "We didn't get the job done," said a glum Alex Cora. "Up to that point, the bullpen was great." Indeed, Brian Johnson and Carson Smith faced six hitters combined and retired five. But the eighth inning is a different animal and the Red Sox relievers couldn't hold on.

Porcello not sharp: It didn't help matters that starter Rick Porcello (5-0, 2.14 coming in) had his worst start of the season, during which he gave up more runs than he did in his first four starts of the season combined. "I wasn't good," said Porcello flatly. "I fell behind guys, a couple (three, actually) walks...I just wasn't locating the ball the way I wanted to. I just didn't pitch well." He set season highs in both hits and runs allowed and tied a season high in walks. In at-bat after at-bat, Porcello got two strikes on hitters but seemed incapable of finishing them off. "Not making the right pitch," Porcello said when asked about the problem. "The one that looks like a strike and goes out of the zone, and (I threw) too many pitches that were expanding way out that weren't competitive enough to get hitters to swing at them."

Moreland makes the most of his time: First baseman Mitch Moreland has been fighting for playing time as part of Cora's rotation, and per usual, took advantage of his opportunity. He hit a two-run homer in the second to put the Red Sox ahead after falling behind 1-0, and later in the game, hit a groundout to the right side, which succeeded in moving Xander Bogaerts (leadoff double) over to third, from where he scored on a sacrifice fly from Eduardo Nunez. Moreland has homered in four of his last five games.

TURNING POINT

Ahead 6-5 in the top of the eighth, the Red Sox had runners at second and third and no out, and yet couldn't add on. Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez both struck out, and after an intentional walk to Mookie Betts, Andrew Benintendi grounded to second. "Huge, huge," said Alex Cora, shaking his head in dismay. "You have to put the ball in play, regardless of the results. We didn't and we paid the price there."

TWO UP

Hanley Ramirez: It had been 19 games since Ramirez had homered, covering 82 at-bats, when he came to the plate in the seventh inning. Facing reliever Chad Green, Ramirez hit a rocket into the second deck of seats in left, good for a two-run homer that put the Red Sox ahead for the first time all night.

Brian Johnson: Not every member of the bullpen failed the Sox on Wednesday night. Johnson took over for starter Rick Porcello in the sixth, retired the first two hitters he faced while stranding a baserunner, then retired the dangerous Didi Gregorius in the seventh before being lifted.

ONE DOWN

Matt Barnes: The hope was that Barnes could put down the Yankees in order in the bottom of the eighth, with the bottom third of the lineup due. Instead, Barnes fell behind all three hitters, allowed two to reach and left a mess that closer Craig Kimbrel couldn't clean up.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"Not at all. I mean, I've gotta come in and get outs. It doesn't matter if it's the eighth or ninth inning, especially in situations like that."

— Craig Kimbrel, on whether he still needs to adjust to coming in for the eighth.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

After starting the season 17-2, the Red Sox are now 8-9.

The Sox are 4-12 in Yankee Stadium since July 17, 2016.

In his last five games, Moreland is hitting .524 with four homers and eight RBI.

Since the start of 2016, Ramirez has more RBI against the Yankees than any other player.

Xander Bogaerts posted his fifth three-hit game of the season.

Andrew Benintendi has six homers in 15 career games at Yankee Stadium.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox will try to avoid a sweep at the hands of the Yankees in the series finale Thursday, sending LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (3-0, 5.29) vs. LHP CC Sabathia (2-0, 1.39) at 7:05 p.m.

Red Sox top pitching prospect Jason Groome set to undergo Tommy John surgery

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK – Jason Groome, the Red Sox top-ranked pitching prospect and first-round pick from the 2016 draft, is set to undergo Tommy John surgery either later this week or early next week according to a baseball source, further setting back a career that has been limited by a series of injuries.

Groome saw his 2017 season shortened by a flexor strain in his elbow last August, began this regular season on the disabled list with the same issue. He also spent time on the DL last year with an intercostal strain.

The lefty, who was taken 12th overall in the 2016 draft, has struggled to get his professional career on track because of a number of physical setbacks. He appeared fully recovered in spring training, averaging two strikeouts per inning against minor league hitters.

"It's just awesome to feel healthy again," Groome told the Boston Globe at the time, "just going out there and knowing I'm going to be able to pitch again in five days."

But that optimism didn't last for long. By the time the season began, Groome was again experiencing discomfort in the forearm and elbow area and was placed on the DL. A month later, he still hasn't thrown an inning for Single A Greenville, where he was scheduled to begin the season.

He's set to have the procedure done by Dr. Neal ElAttrache in Los Angeles. Typical recovery time for pitchers runs anywhere from 15 to 18 months. With shorter minor league seasons, it's unlikely Groome pitches competitively much before 2020.

Groome was a somewhat controversial figure at the time of the 2016 draft and he dropped to No. 12, where the Sox were sitting. There were concerns about his makeup and signability issues. The Sox gave him a \$3.65 million signing bonus, the largest the club had ever given to a drafted player.

The Sox have been touting Groome and fellow righty Tanner Houck, the organization's No. 1 pick last June, as the potential foundation of future rotations, hopeful that the two can develop and give the Red Sox some homegrown starters going forward. The team has notoriously struggled to develop starting pitchers, with Clay Buchholz the last starter developed by the organization to record a season with double-figures in wins.

Final: Yankees 9, Red Sox 6 – Bullpen implosion

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK — Poised to even the series with six outs to go, the Red Sox bullpen staged an epic collapse in the eighth inning, turning what had been a one-run lead into a three-run deficit, resulting in a 9-6 loss to the New York Yankees. The loss knocked the Red Sox out of first place in the East for the first time since March 30.

The Sox had taken the lead with a dramatic two-run homer from Hanley Ramirez, his first home run in almost a month, in the seventh inning.

But in the eighth, Matt Barnes fell behind the first three hitters of the eighth 2-and-0, leaving a first-and-third, one-out mess for closer Craig Kimbrel to clean up. Instead, Kimbrel yielded booming two-run triple to Brett Gardner, followed by a two-run blast to center by Aaron Judge, giving the Yankees some breathing room.

Boston also got homers from Andrew Benintendi and Mitch Moreland, to help cover up for a poor start from Rick Porcello (five runs in 5.1 innings pitched).

The Yankees have won a stunning 17-1 in their last 18 games.

WHO: Red Sox vs. New York Yankees

WHEN: 7:05 p.m.

WHERE: Yankee Stadium

WHAT'S UP: This is the middle game of a three-game set in the Bronx. The Yanks won the opener 3-2 in a well-pitched, well-played game, to forge a tie for first place in the A.L. East. New York has set a blistering pace, with 16 wins in its last 17 games. The Red Sox, meanwhile, are 8-5 in their last 13 and have lost some ground in the division race.

STARTING PITCHERS: RHP Rick Porcello (5-0, 2.14) vs RHP Masahiro Tanaka (4-2, 4.39)

TV/RADIO: NESN/WEEI 93.7 FM

LINEUPSIN-GAME OBSERVATIONS

10:21 With the game on the line, Barnes has fallen behind 2-and-0 to each of the first three hitters he's faced here in the eighth.

10:08 Poor situational hitting by the Red Sox, who had runners on second-and-third and no out and yet failed to get an insurance run in.

9:48 Huge spot here for Carson Smith, with Giancarlo Stanton and Gary Sanchez due. Two tough, powerful righthanded-hitters in a one-run game.

9:34 Hard to think of a more inviting pitch for Hanley – a hung slider right over the middle of the that Ramirez lined into the left field seats. It's his first homer in 82 at-bats, dating back to April 14.

9:22 That's it for Porcello, who is lifted with one out in the sixth. Easily his worst start of the season, and yet, not so bad that the Sox don't have a chance here, trailing by a run in the sixth.

8:57 Porcello has gone to two strikes on a ton of hitters, but hasn't been able to put them away. That's driven up his pitch count and allowed the Yankees to put a lot of balls in play. Porcello doesn't strike out a lot of hitters ordinarily, but he's got just two through the first five innings.

8:32 The Sox made Masahiro Tanaka work in the first few innings, running his pitch count up, with 64 pitches in his first three innings. But Tanaka caught a break in the fourth when he set down the Sox on just seven pitches.

8:18 Rick Porcello didn't make a bad pitch there — fastball up and on the outer half — but Giancarlo Stanton can cover a lot of the plate with that wingspan and he reached out and drove a liner to right, scoring two.

RED SOX

Betts CF
Benintendi LF
Ramirez DH
Martinez RF
Bogaerts SS
Moreland 1B
Nunez 2B
Devers 3B
Leon C

YANKEES

Gardner LF
Judge RF
Gregorius SS
Stanton DH
Sanchez C
Hicks CF
Walker 1B
Andujar 3B
Torres 2b

NEWS AND NOTES

The Red Sox have one decision to make on Steven Wright, but it seems as though they've already made another. Wright, currently serving a 15-game suspension stemming from an arrest for domestic assault last December, will be eligible to pitch early next week and Alex Cora said the team expects to add him to its major league roster. Wright is out of options and to outright him to Triple A, the team would risk exposing him to waivers. Still undetermined: whether Wright will be used as a starter or reliever. He pitched for Pawtucket Tuesday night and is set to come out of the bullpen for one or two innings in the next few days. After first-year manager Mickey Callaway of the New York Mets was responsible for his team batting out of order in the first inning in Cincinnati Wednesday afternoon, Cora was asked what sort of safeguards are taken to prevent such a mistake. "Billy (Broadbent, video coordinator) types it out and Ron (Roenicke, bench coach) checks it out first. He compares it to ours and he checks it out with the one we have in the dugout. That's something I have nightmares thinking about. Hopefully, it doesn't happen.

Jackie Bradley Jr. (1-for-14 on the road trip, 3-for-33 overall) sat Wednesday night, with the Sox inserting J.D. Martinez into right and shifting Mookie Betts to center. "What I'd like to see," explained Cora, "is for him to become athletic again in the batter's box. Sometimes we get caught up in mechanics and we're

working before the game and we go to the batter's box (at gametime) and you're thinking about your load, and your hips and landing on time and you forget the most important thing is the baseball. You have to see the ball – regardless of what you do before the game. Right now, it seems there's a lot of mechanical stuff and he's not using his athletic ability to dominate the game."

David Price diagnosed with 'mild' carpal tunnel syndrome

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK — David Price is suffering from a "mild case" of carpal tunnel syndrome, according to manager Alex Cora.

In his weekly paid appearance on WEEI, Cora revealed the news, which came after Price left the team Tuesday morning in New York and returned to Boston for a battery of tests.

"Actually, there's actually good news," Cora said. "Obviously, when you start talking about hands and tingling effects in the fingers, you start thinking the worst. But, he has a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome. We're going to treat it the way we feel ... he's going to be good again. He's coming back tomorrow, actually. He's going to throw. Hopefully, he throws a bullpen and after that, we'll make a decision if he makes his next start of something else.

"Actually, for everything that is going on and obviously the last 24 hours, for me, it's kind of like, 'Woof, thank God it's nothing else than just that.'"

Price plans to rejoin the Red Sox here Thursday and throw a bullpen. If he does so without incident, it's possible he could make a start for the Sox this weekend.

"If we feel he can make his next start, he'll make it," said Cora. "If not, we'll make a decision. As you guys know, we've been trying to take care of these guys from the get-go. We'll see (Thursday) – if he can throw his bullpen and he's ready to go, I don't rule him out pitching Saturday (in Toronto)."

Left unanswered is how Price suffered the injury.

"It can happen in different ways," Cora said. "It's about repetition. You throw bullpens, you throw (on) flat ground, you throw games, you make adjustment with pitches. The only thing we know is this (exists) and for me, this is quote-unquote good news."

A number of Red Sox players — and the pitchers in particular — are fond of video games, particularly with the rising popularity of "Fortnite," an interactive video game that has caught on in the Red Sox clubhouse. Price is known to play video games, but Cora said he didn't think the two were related.

"We'll sit down with him (Thursday)," Cora said. "We'll map out the plan. Sometimes it's ice, sometimes it's massage, sometimes it's laser. We'll see what works for him. We need him here, we need him to compete. He's a big part of what we're trying to accomplish. And we need him healthy — that's the most important thing.

"From what I know, David has played video games his whole life. It seems like 'Fortnite' now is the one everybody's playing. But last year, I saw a lot of guys playing 'FIFA' (a soccer video game). There's a lot of teams playing 'Fortnite,' too. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

BSJ analysis

Price was scratched from his scheduled start Wednesday night at Yankee Stadium, with Rick Porcello moved up in the rotation to take his place. Eduardo Rodriguez, who was originally set to open the series Friday in Toronto, will pitch the series finale Thursday.

The Sox could move up Chris Sale to take a turn Friday on his fifth day, thanks to their off-day earlier this week. That would leave them needing a starter for Saturday against the Blue Jays, with Price a possibility.

Other internal options include Brian Johnson or Hector Velazquez.

Price's issue with his left hand was first revealed last month when he left a start against the Yankees after one inning, complaining that he had a numbing sensation in his hand because of the cold weather. He said he had previously experienced it two years ago in Detroit, but had circulation problems in his extremities as a young boy.

Cora was uncertain whether any circulation issues were detected in the course of the tests he underwent.

"From what I know, it was a lot of testing," Cora said. "I didn't get into specifics (with the training staff). I'm learning a lot about this process, the medical stuff. From what I know, he went through a lot. This is what came out."

McAdam: How a lousy Opening Day helped Joe Kelly transform from thrower to pitcher

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK — As Alex Cora reviewed his new roster shortly after being hired to manage the Red Sox last November, one bullpen name stuck out.

"Coming into the situation, there were a few guys who I figured, 'Well, if this guy or this guy takes a step forward,' we'll be pretty good," said Cora recently. "And Joe Kelly was one of those guys."

Cora's wish appeared to be little more than wishful thinking when, on Opening Day, Kelly was mostly responsible for a 4-0 lead vanishing in the eighth inning, resulting in a cruel 6-4 defeat.

But since then, Kelly has been a far different pitcher — both in terms of his success and his approach. Kelly carried a string of 13 scoreless consecutive appearances into the Red Sox-Yankee series that began here Tuesday night. He allowed an inherited run to score in the seventh inning of the Red Sox' 3-2 loss to the Yanks, but he's still personally unscored upon over 15 innings, having just seven hits and two walks.

Tellingly, he's also fanned 15 hitters in that stretch. A reliever averaging a tick more than a strikeout an inning in this day and age isn't anything out of the ordinary, of course. In fact, it's highly common.

But not for Kelly, at least in the past. That was, in fact, one of the mysteries surrounding Kelly was why someone armed with elite velocity — he regularly hits 100 mph with his fastball — got so few swings and misses, and, by extension, so few strikeouts. Last year, he averaged just 8.1 strikeouts per nine innings, and as recently as 2015, that figure was 7.0 per nine innings.

Too often, Kelly's fastball was straight as a clothesline, and without much variety in his repertoire, relatively easy for hitters to time.

"It's not just throwing fastball after fastball after fastball," said Cora. "He's not a comfortable at-bat anymore."

The coaching staff and Baseball Operations department spent the spring impressing upon Kelly the need to vary his pitch mix and not rely solely on the high-octane fastball. The result: his most effective stretch since being converted permanently to the bullpen back in 2016. And the turnaround has its roots in the disastrous Opening Day appearance.

"In that first outing in Tampa, he just threw too many fastballs," said assistant pitching coach and vice-president of pitching development Brian Bannister. "I think the pattern of that game was just too obvious to the hitters. But since then, he's made really good adjustments. I think one thing he's done very well is, he's

tried to get more extension on the fastball to try to help it be a little more deceptive. He felt like he was short-arming it a little bit.

“He’s also incorporated the changeup. I think it’s been a big pitch for him. It’s generated his most swing-and-misses. And the slider has been superior to the curveball (as his breaking pitch). The curveball has a much higher batting average-against. So, I think you’ve seen him try to make his fastball better and then go to the two secondary pitches that are working better for him and just go with his strengths and not try to throw all fastballs.”

If the most obvious gains have been made in the last six weeks, Bannister notes Kelly’s transformation on the mound had its genesis a number of years ago.

“If you look back to his arm action in the Cardinals’ minor league system,” said Bannister, who frequently studies deliveries to detect flaws and spot mechanical issues, “it looks like nothing like the Joe Kelly of today. He’s gone from a long arm action, primarily throwing sinkers, to a short arm action primarily throwing power four-seamers. And then just realizing when you look at the results that, despite throwing nearly 100 mph, he gets way more swing-and-miss with his other pitches. So it’s about staying balanced.”

The improved control — going from 4.2 walks per nine innings last year to just 2.5 this year — would seem to be a function of improved mechanics, and not simply a better pitch mix. But it is, insists Bannister.

“I think traditionally, anybody that throws 100 mph also struggles with the timing of the release point,” said Bannister. “The arm’s just moving so fast, you’re going to see higher walk rates on those guys. But I think now, he almost has a starter’s pitch mix, with three quality pitches and he can mix in the curveball at times for a fourth, which is pretty rare for a reliever. Just staying balanced with his mix helps him avoid falling into patterns and giving the hitter a better view of the strike zone against that kind of velocity.”

“When he throws too many fastballs in a row, I think hitters start to see it a lot better. So just by avoiding that, I think you see his command and control play up, because hitters just don’t get a good look at his fastball.”

In a sense, as Bannister notes, the gift of elite velocity can sometimes be a curse. Scouts and pitching coaches fall in love with high radar gun readings and instill in those pitchers a belief that they have to live and die by their fastballs. Over time, they learn to recognize the advantages of utilizing other pitches, to give hitters a different look and eye level.

Finally, at 29, Kelly has figured things out.

“I’m a big believer that you put athleticism first and pitch quality second, and the results will follow,” said Bannister. “Joe is as athletic as any pitcher in the league and his pitch quality is as high as any pitcher in the league. If you combine those two, then all of a sudden, results start to follow.”

“The stumbling block for Joe was always (relying on) velocity. But there’s such a good pitcher in there, and he has so many quality pitches that if you just keep showing hitters quality pitches and don’t get into patterns, all of a sudden, the really high-level performance starts to kick in and I think that’s what you’ve seen.”

****The Athletic***

Jennings: Yankees foiled Red Sox’ grand plan for Craig Kimbrel

Chad Jennings

NEW YORK – By late afternoon, the Red Sox had decided to use Craig Kimbrel a little earlier than usual. By mid-game, they'd targeted Brett Gardner as the specific matchup they wanted. By the eighth inning, it was time.

One-run lead, one out, runners at the corners: Alex Cora walked to the mound and signaled for his very best. Kimbrel had never in his career recorded a five-out save.

He still hasn't.

"I have to come in and get outs," Kimbrel said. "It doesn't matter if it's the eighth or ninth inning, especially in situations like that. I just didn't do it."

Kimbrel's second blown save led to the Yankees' 17th win in 18 games. They finally moved ahead of the Red Sox for sole possession of first place with a 9-6 win at Yankee Stadium on Wednesday.

It might have gone the other way.

Hanley Ramirez hit a go-ahead two-run homer in the seventh, and the Red Sox had the Yankees on the ropes, but two of the past four Yankees wins had been walk-offs, and Cora knew that.

He told Kimbrel before the game to be ready for more than three outs.

"We talked about it before the game," Cora said. "You know, we're not making it up during the game. We have a plan before, and today was a day we were like, you know what, he's rested enough, and we know they've been coming back against a lot of teams. We saw what they did against Cleveland. So, that was his spot."

Kimbrel hadn't pitched since Saturday. Cora had insisted before the season began that he would be more aggressive in using Kimbrel before the ninth inning, but those plans were put on hold when Kimbrel spent much of spring training attending to his sick baby girl. He'd entered the eighth inning of a game only once this season, and that was for one out in a tie game.

This was runners at the corners, one out, and the top of the order coming up. Gardner already had a pair of doubles.

"He saw the ball well all night," Cora said. "That's why we identified it was Gardner when (Kimbrel) comes in. That's the guy we want for Craig."

Kimbrel's first three pitches, though, were balls. He brought the count back full against Gardner, then threw a fastball right down the middle of the plate, and Gardner drove it to center field for a go-ahead triple.

"Tried to go in on him," Kimbrel said. "It leaked back over the plate."

Up next was Aaron Judge. Another two-strike fastball over the middle of the plate, and Judge crushed it to dead center field for a two-run homer. It was the eighth time this season a baseball was hit at least 117 mph off the bat. Judge has done it twice.

"We were trying to elevate there," Kimbrel said. "Just didn't get it high enough."

Kimbrel's had 11 four-out saves in his career, including three of them just last year. He's also pitched a full two innings multiple times, just not with a save to show for it. But he'd never done what he tried to do last night.

Is there an adjustment to be made pitching in the eighth?

“Not at all,” Kimbrel said.

Truth be told, there were problems before Kimbrel.

The Red Sox hit three home runs in the game, but they blew an opportunity to tack on in the eighth. Runners at second and third with no outs, Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez each failed to put the ball in play.

Called on to face the bottom third of the order to start the eighth inning, Matt Barnes allowed a double and a walk around a runner-advancing ground out. That’s why Kimbrel had to face Gardner in the eighth, not the ninth. Walking rookie Gleyber Torres is the reason Kimbrel had to get two outs in the inning, not just one.

“It was probably better with only a man at (third) and two outs, of course,” Cora said. “But he’s one of the best closers in the game, if not the best, and we gave him the ball and he did his best.”

It was the kind of situation Cora envisioned way back in December when, at his first Winter Meetings as manager, he broached the topic of Kimbrel as a multi-inning weapon.

“I think there’s going to be certain situations that you’re going to see him probably earlier than what people expect,” Cora said. “So, if he has a song (for) the ninth inning, we’ll get it in the queue up there, and they will play the music in the eighth.”

The only music on Wednesday was Gardner’s walk-up song. Kimbrel came in exactly as the Red Sox planned. He just didn’t get the outs they expected.

“It was Gardner,” Cora said. “Best case scenario, I was thinking only one runner, two outs, come in, get him out, you know. We told him, get ready for that guy and he was ready.”

“Especially with a runner on third, there’s a smaller margin of error,” Kimbrel said. “Right there, I didn’t even want him to put the ball in play. I threw it to him, trying to strike him out. Wasn’t able to do it.”

Jennings: As injury concerns linger, David Price can’t escape the drama

Chad Jennings

NEW YORK – In the same Yankee Stadium clubhouse where 11 months ago he erupted because of a reporter’s Twitter feed, David Price will now face questions about whether a video game has put him at risk of returning to the disabled list.

His tone might reveal more than his words.

Extensive medical tests on Tuesday revealed a mild case of carpal tunnel syndrome in Price’s left wrist. That was the official diagnosis from the Red Sox explaining the finger numbness Price experienced on multiple occasions this season.

It’s still unclear whether he’ll start on Saturday or require a DL stint.

Why a video game as a potential culprit?

Because carpal tunnel syndrome can be caused by repetitive wrist activities, and Price is among a large group of Red Sox players – pitchers mostly – who have become obsessed with a game called Fortnite.

Columnists from Boston’s two biggest newspapers indirectly referenced the game when asking manager Alex Cora about the diagnosis on Wednesday, and the game’s impact was specifically cited in a question from that notorious rabble rouser The Associated Press.

Think it won't come up again when Price returns to the team on Thursday and presumably meets with the media for the first time in three days?

"From what I know, David has played video games his whole life," Cora said. "It seems like Fortnite now is the one everybody is playing, but last year, I saw a lot of guys playing (the soccer game) FIFA. That's a lot of playing, too. So, there's a lot of (other) teams playing Fortnite, too. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

It's always something, isn't it?

Price waged a one-man war against the media last season, giving the cold shoulder while rehabbing an early-season elbow injury, blowing up at NBC Sports' Evan Drellich after a game in the Bronx, and calling out Hall of Fame pitcher and Red Sox broadcaster Dennis Eckersley on a team flight to Toronto.

He came into this season promising something different, a fresh start of sorts.

"I could've handled it better last year, absolutely," he said at the start of spring training. "But I didn't, and I've moved on. I look forward to getting back this year and getting off on the right foot."

Price added this caveat: "But you're not going to come over and overload me with negativity. It's not going to happen. That's not going to happen."

So far, Price has been true to his word. The atmosphere in the Red Sox clubhouse has been noticeably different, and Price has been among the most approachable players in the room. He's laughed more, scowled less.

Price has spoken multiple times about the finger numbness, which he said has plagued him off and on throughout his life. He's also talked about off-the-field team outings, which last year he might have considered private, but which he's been open to discussing publicly this year. And he's talked about Fortnite.

"Let's say we get back at 11 p.m. from a game, we'll play until 1 a.m., 1:30 a.m., 2 a.m. depending on what time our game is the next day," Price previously told *The Athletic*. "But day games or off days, we can put some time in.

"We have to make sure, 'All right we've got to eat. Let's take 30 minutes, eat some lunch, and see you back in 30.' But you can lose track of time whenever you're playing it."

By opening up about the game, Price has exposed himself to speculation about whether a hobby has become a mental distraction and a physical detriment. That speculation is either totally fair (it's been a bizarre series of setbacks that led to this point, often with little other explanation aside from a vague history of finger numbness) or it's laughably narrow-minded (given all the professional athletes who also play a lot of video games, it's hard to label Price as negligent for joining the fun).

But such is life under the microscope. Especially in professional sports. Particularly in Boston. And specifically for Price, who last year made himself a target for increased scrutiny.

"I mean, (carpal tunnel syndrome) can happen in different ways," Cora said. "Like I said earlier today, it's about repetition and, I don't know, you throw bullpens, you throw off of flat ground, you throw games, you make adjustments with pitches. I don't know. The only thing we know is it's this and, for me, this is — quote unquote — good news compared to thinking about something else."

****The New York Times***

Brett Gardner Finally Joins the Party as the Yankees Surge Into First Place

Billy Witz

When Brett Gardner was an ears-open, mouth-shut rookie a decade ago, he remembered a night at the old Yankee Stadium when he stood in the locker next to Alex Rodriguez after he had endured a miserable night.

Watching Rodriguez handle that postgame inquisition stuck with him.

“I remember him saying that’s one good thing about baseball: we get a chance to come back here and redeem ourselves tomorrow,” Gardner said. “I never forgot that. I try to take things one day at a time and learn from what happened from yesterday and today and apply that to tomorrow, and try to keep getting better.”

That ethos has long been ingrained in Gardner, the plucky 34-year-old left fielder who, as the Yankees’ longest tenured player, is somewhat of an anachronism on a team built around emerging young sluggers.

Still, the concept of perpetual redemption was something he has leaned on recently, as his imprint has been largely absent from the current do-no-wrong Yankees, with his season average sinking below the Mendoza line.

Then came Wednesday, when Gardner validated his spot as the leadoff hitter — and the faith placed in him by Manager Aaron Boone — with three extra-base hits, including a two-run, go-ahead triple off Boston closer Craig Kimbrel in the eighth inning to lift the Yankees to a 9-6 victory over the Red Sox before another rapturous crowd at Yankee Stadium.

It was the Yankees’ eighth consecutive win — their 17th in 18 games — and it lifted them into sole possession of first place in the American League East for the first time since they began the season by winning their first two games.

The winning rally came after Hanley Ramirez, who has ably replaced David Ortiz as a Yankee tormentor, blasted a two-run homer off Chad Green to put the Red Sox ahead, 6-5, in the seventh inning.

Gleyber Torres scored from first on a triple by Gardner in the eighth inning on Wednesday, putting the Yankees ahead to stay. Credit Adam Hunger/USA Today Sports, via Reuters
But in the bottom of the eighth, Neil Walker, the igniter of every late Yankees rally in the last week, doubled to left field on a 2-2 fastball after seeing four consecutive curveballs from reliever Matt Barnes.

Walker advanced to third on a groundout by Miguel Andujar, and after Gleyber Torres walked, Red Sox Manager Alex Cora summoned his closer, Kimbrel.

The right-hander with the red beard fell behind Gardner, 3-0, before getting to a full count. After Gardner fouled off another fastball, he drove the seventh one of the at-bat deep to the left-center gap. Center fielder Mookie Betts, playing shallow to have a chance to throw out Walker, gave chase but could not run it down.

It bounced once, then careened off the wall. Betts got the ball quickly to shortstop Xander Bogaerts, whose throw was on target. But Torres — who pledged not to slide headfirst after tearing his elbow ligaments last year with a slide at the plate — artfully slid around catcher Christian Vazquez’s tag, touching home with his hand.

“I’m trying to drive a ball gap to gap somewhere in the outfield — a sac fly, worst-case scenario,” Gardner said. “That’s what I’m trying to do, but it doesn’t always work out that way when you’re facing somebody like that.”

Aaron Judge then followed with a home run to center field to give the Yankees some breathing room.

During their streak, they have beaten the closer from all of last year's American League playoff teams — Fernando Rodney of Minnesota, Ken Giles of Houston, Cody Allen of Cleveland and now Kimbrel.

And, it seems, there is a different hero each night — some old and some new.

“With some of the veteran guys here, Giancarlo, Gardner, you don't see any panic ever, no matter what the situation is — and I think that rubs off on the young guys,” Walker said. “They see that and they know you don't have to go up to the plate and try to get hits. They just have to go up and put good at-bats on and try to hit mistakes. Those are learning moments for them.”

Gardner may have delivered the crowning blow, but he also helped get the Yankees started, something he has rarely done this season.

Aaron Judge, center, was congratulated by Masahiro Tanaka and Torres after making a diving catch in the fifth inning. Judge also homered in the eighth inning. Credit Kathy Willens/Associated Press
He entered the game hitting .198 with one home run after hitting a career-high 21 last season. But Gardner doubled and scored in each of his first two at-bats Wednesday off Rick Porcello, who carried a no-hitter into the seventh inning against the Yankees last month. Gardner was deprived of another extra-base hit when Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland made a diving stop of his smash down the line in the fourth inning.

The three hits were the most Gardner has recorded in a game this season.

His emergence validated the faith that Boone placed in him before the game, when he said he had no intention of moving Gardner out of the leadoff spot except perhaps against tough left-handed pitchers. Boone said that Gardner was still getting on base, with 20 walks, tied for second on the team behind Judge and that the team's internal data — including exit velocity — showed that better luck was likely ahead.

“Any time you're look up at the board and you're hitting .200, maybe you see some numbers that suggest you should be hitting a little better or otherwise, it's kind of a good feeling,” Gardner said. “Up there at the plate, I haven't felt completely lost. I've felt good physically. I've been seeing the ball well.”

Boone also placed a great deal of trust in Masahiro Tanaka, allowing him to pitch into the sixth inning on a night when he looked vulnerable from the start.

It took Tanaka 21 pitches just to navigate a 1-2-3 first inning, and Moreland clubbed a two-run homer in the second. Andrew Benintendi hit a solo homer off Tanaka in the fifth.

In all, Tanaka allowed a season-high eight hits, walked two and was charged with four runs. He was spared more damage thanks to his defense, which turned two double plays behind him, and Judge, whose diving catch in right robbed J.D. Martinez of a hit — and left a large divot.

Still, Tanaka managed to hand a lead to the Yankees' bullpen in the sixth, but it was gone only an inning later, when Ramirez hit a 1-1 slider into the second deck in left field.

The Red Sox appeared poised to put some distance between themselves and the Yankees in the eighth, but Chasen Shreve and Jonathan Holder worked out of a second-and-third, none-out jam to keep the Yankees within range.

These days, though, who knows how far that range extends?

“There's nights when we get beat and there's nights when we can't seem to figure somebody out,” Gardner said. “But I think we all have a lot of confidence in each other that we're going to get the job done. It doesn't matter if we're down one run or four or five runs we feel like we're within striking distance.”

****The New York Daily News***

Yankees rally for four runs in eighth inning, beat Red Sox, 9-6, for eighth straight win

Christian Red

With the sold-out crowd of 47,088 screaming "Let's go Yankees!" and the Bombers trailing by one run, Brett Gardner socked a Craig Kimbrel 97-mph fastball into center field, a two-run triple that pushed the Yankees ahead of Boston by a run.

Aaron Judge then blasted his ninth home run of the season, a two-run shot, leading to bedlam in the Bronx before Yankee closer Aroldis Chapman finished off Boston in the wild 9-6 win Wednesday night.

It was the Yankees' eighth straight victory — the longest such active streak in the majors — and it gave the Yankees sole possession of first place in the American League East. They were seven and a half games behind Boston April 20.

"They expect to be really good. They expect to be a great team," Yankee manager Aaron Boone said of his club.

Before the game, Boone said he would keep Gardner in the leadoff spot even though Gardner was batting .198 entering the game. Gardner went 3-for-5 with two doubles, a triple, two RBI and three runs scored.

A night after he slugged two home runs, Giancarlo Stanton continued his hot hitting, roping a two-run double to right off Boston starter Rick Porcello in the bottom of the third. Judge whacked an RBI single in the first inning, and also flashed the leather in the fifth, making a diving, backhanded catch of a J.D. Martinez sinking line drive.

Mitch Moreland clocked a 2-0 sinking fastball off Yankee starter Masahiro Tanaka into the Yankee bullpen in right-center for a two-run homer in the second inning. Andrew Benintendi also blasted a solo shot off Tanaka in the fifth. Hanley Ramirez hit his fourth homer off reliever Chad Green.

Gardner doubled on the third pitch of the game and scored the team's first run on Judge's RBI single to center, sliding headfirst across home ahead of the relay throw.

PLAY OF THE GAME

Aaron Judge's diving, backhanded catch of a J.D. Martinez sinking line drive in the fifth to end the inning. The 280-pound right fielder charged in and went full extension to make the grab.

TURNING POINT

Brett Gardner's two-run triple in the bottom of the eighth, which put the Yankees back in the lead for good.

STAR OF THE GAME

Gardner. The outfielder entered Wednesday's game batting .198, but doubled twice, tripled, scored three runs and had two RBI.

STAT OF THE DAY

8. The Yankees' current winning streak is at 8 games and is the longest active winning stretch in the majors.

UNsung HERO

Jonathan Holder. The Yankee right-handed reliever coaxed Andrew Benintendi to ground out with the bases loaded in the top of the eighth.

M.I.A.

Chad Green. The normally lights-out reliever had a rough 1.2 innings of work, giving up two runs on two hits (including the Ramirez blast).

UP NEXT

7:05 pm at Yankee Stadium; LHP CC Sabathia (2-0, 1.39) vs. LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (3-0, 5.29)

****The New York Post***

Yankees storm into first place after stunning Red Sox

George King III

The latest version of Yankee Stadium isn't built to shake like its predecessor across the street. The upper-deck seats don't hang over the field which housed the noise better.

Yet, when the occasion calls for it like it did Wednesday night in the eighth inning against the hated Red Sox, the House That George Built doesn't take a backseat to any venue in sports.

From the moment Neil Walker slashed an opposite-field double to start the pivotal inning to Gleyber Torres' one-out walk, to Brett Gardner's two-run triple off Craig Kimbrel to Aaron Judge's homer to center field against the Red Sox closer, the building was more alive than during possibly any other regular-season game since it opened almost a decade ago.

"It got my attention. I looked around a little bit in the eighth inning and it's May and it was bedlam," manager Aaron Boone said after the Yankees scored four runs in that eighth to erase a Red Sox lead and beat their blood rivals, 9-6, in front of 47,088 jazzed customers. "It was fun to be a part of that and fun to watch those guys slow things down when the place is going nuts."

The victory was the 26-10 Yankees' eighth straight and 17th in the last 18 games, the first time the Yankees have taken 17-of-18 since June 1953. It also pushed the Yankees into first place, a game ahead of the Red Sox.

Trailing 6-5, entering the home eighth after Chad Green watched Hanley Ramirez reach the upper deck in left field with a two-run homer in the seventh on a 1-1 pitch, the Yankees started their latest comeback effort with Walker's opposite-field double to left off Matt Barnes. Miguel Andujar moved him to third with a grounder to the right side and Torres worked a walk.

Gardner, who started the game in a 7-for-56 (.125) slide, doubled in the first and third innings but saved his biggest bolt for the eighth when he hit a 3-2 pitch from Kimbrel well over center fielder Mookie Betts' head to score two runs and put the Yankees ahead. Judge added his ninth homer immediately after for a three-run bulge.

Aroldis Chapman used 100 mph heat to record the final three outs for his ninth save in 10 chances.

"It was down and away but still too much of the plate for a hitter like that," Green said of the pitch to Ramirez.

Chasen Shreve left Jonathan Holder two runners to work on in the eighth and Holder stranded them.

"It seems like the past two or three weeks, the pitching staff falters or the hitters don't get a hit and somebody is picking it up," Green said. "It's been amazing."

On April 20 the Yankees were 9-9 and 7 ½ games behind the first-place Red Sox who had won 17 of their first 19 games. When the blood rivals meet Thursday night in the finale of this three-game series, the Red Sox will be looking up at the Yankees.

“We have been playing good baseball. We have pitched well and come up with the big hits. We have to keep playing well,” Gardner said. “No matter if we are down four or five runs we are in striking distance.”

Gardner had a taste of the former Stadium in 2008 which was the final year of the structure and ended without a playoff spot. He has played and won a World Series in the latest edition and experienced the Yankees winning all six postseason games played in The Bronx last year.

“Our fans have been great and tonight it was no exception. They were fired up,” Gardner said. “Every game against Boston is very important.”

And brings out a sound rarely heard outside of last October.

****Associated Press***

Gardner beats Kimbrel, Yanks rally to beat Red Sox again

NEW YORK -- When it comes to Brett Gardner, first-year Yankees manager Aaron Boone believes in metrics and makeup.

Even as Gardner's batting average dipped under .200, Boone was optimistic. For starters, Gardner's exit velocities and other advanced stats indicated a breakout was coming. Plus, the speedy leadoff man was still getting on base.

It wasn't just the numbers, though.

"He's just a broad-shouldered, tough player," Boone said. "He just has a way of competing in the biggest spots."

Gardner capped a slump-busting performance with a go-ahead, two-run triple off Craig Kimbrel in the eighth inning, Aaron Judge followed with a homer and New York rallied to beat the Boston Red Sox 9-6 Wednesday night for its 17th victory in 18 games.

Kimbrel entered with two on and one out to face Gardner seeking the first five-out save of his career. Gardner drilled a full-count pitch into left-center, well over the head of center fielder Mookie Betts, who was playing shallow. Neil Walker scored easily from third and rookie Gleyber Torres raced from first and slid past a lunging tag attempted by catcher Christian Vazquez.

"There's just a toughness that he plays the game with," Boone said of Gardner. "Tonight, I was happy to see him break through."

Judge followed with a line drive to center measured at 117 mph off the bat, his ninth homer of the season. He had three hits, three RBI and a diving catch in right field as New York won its eighth straight overall and 11th in a row at home.

New York (26-10) broke a tie with Boston for first place in the AL East and has sole possession of the best record in the majors for the first time since July 27, 2012. The Yankees are on a 35-8 tear in the Bronx since Sept. 2, including the postseason, and at 16-5 have the best home record in the majors this year.

Fans at a sold-out Yankee Stadium went wild in the eighth. Judge compared it to the postseason atmosphere last October, and the party spilled over onto River Avenue so loudly it could still be heard back inside the stadium 15 minutes after the game.

"It's May, and it was bedlam," Boone said. "It was fun to be a part of that."

Aroldis Chapman pitched the ninth for his ninth save. J.D. Martinez got a hit off Chapman and ran into the closer trying to round first base. Martinez argued for interference, but the umpires held him at first on a grounder hit inside the bag. Chapman struck out Mitch Moreland to end it.

The 34-year-old Gardner doubled and scored twice earlier in the game after hitting .147 without an extra-base hit over his previous 19 games. Boone predicted before the game that a breakout was imminent, citing internal metrics and an appreciation for Gardner's steady approach.

"The longer you're around and the older you get, the more you realize that you can't get too excited about maybe one or two good games and you can't get too down about one or two bad weeks," Gardner said. "You just have to keep working."

The Yankees had walk-off wins in three of their previous five home games. This rally came an inning earlier.

Kimbrel replaced Matt Barnes (0-1) after a double by Walker and a one-out walk to Torres. It was the second blown save in four appearances for Kimbrel, who recently became the fastest reliever to 300 career saves.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora said the team had planned to be aggressive with Kimbrel because he hadn't pitched since Saturday.

"Today was the day we were like, 'You know what? He's rested enough and we know they've been coming back against a lot of teams,'" Cora said.

Hanley Ramirez put Boston ahead 6-5 with a two-run homer in the seventh. Ramirez turned on a hanging slider from reliever Chad Green and crushed it deep into the second deck in left field for his fourth homer.

Giancarlo Stanton drove in two with a go-ahead double off Rick Porcello in the third inning a day after hitting a pair of solo homers in a 3-2 Yankees victory. It was the first time Stanton had RBI in consecutive games this season, and he improved to 10 for 19 with seven RBI against Boston during his first season in pinstripes.

Moreland and Andrew Benintendi homered as Boston chased Masahiro Tanaka after 5 1/3 innings. Tanaka allowed four runs.

Yankees reliever Jonathan Holder (1-1) cleaned up a mess left by Chasen Shreve in the eighth, getting Benintendi to ground out with the bases loaded.

Porcello allowed five runs in 5 1/3 innings -- his first time giving up three or more runs this season.

TUNED IN

Tuesday's 3-2 win by the Yankees in the series opener was the highest-rated game on the YES Network since Derek Jeter's home finale in 2014, drawing more than 600,000 total viewers. It was the first time Boston and New York met with the majors' two best records since 2002, per the Elias Sports Bureau.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LHP David Price was diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome after twice experiencing numbness in his pitching hand this season. Cora called it "good news compared to anything else." Price will throw at Yankee Stadium on Thursday before being re-evaluated.

Yankees: 1B Greg Bird is set to begin a rehab assignment Thursday with Class A Tampa as he works back from ankle surgery on March 27. He had been playing in extended spring training.

UP NEXT

Left-handers CC Sabathia and Eduardo Rodriguez face each other in the series finale. The 37-year-old Sabathia has allowed just one earned run in four starts since returning to the Yankees from a brief DL stint. Rodriguez struck out 10 last time out against Texas, but he's also allowed five earned runs in each of his past two outings.