

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, May 17, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Alex Cora stuck to his plan, and the Red Sox avoided a sweep

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox have been saying since the early days of spring training that they would cut down on workload of their starting pitchers in the first few months of the season with an eye on improved performance in September and beyond.

But well-intended goals in March are often cast aside to feed the demands of winning a series or stopping a losing streak when the games count.

Sticking with an ace is easier for a manager to explain than why he had faith in some ham-and-egger out of the bullpen.

But through what is now just over a quarter of the season, Alex Cora is showing conviction. Wednesday night's 6-4 victory against the Oakland Athletics offered more proof of that.

The Sox had dropped the first two games of the series, part of losing five of eight overall. That was a problem.

Cora also spent much of his pregame media session discussing third-string catcher Blake Swihart having demanded a trade and defending his use of Carson Smith, a reliever who hurt his shoulder throwing his glove at the bench two nights prior yet somehow blamed the manager.

Such are the duties of his job. Cora at one point burst out laughing at the incredulity of it all.

But when the game started and Chris Sale lost control of his pitch count, Cora did what he promised he would. He ended the lefthander's night after five innings and 102 pitches and relied on the bullpen. The Sox needed a win but it didn't come at the expense of leaning too heavily on Sale.

Through 10 starts, Sale has thrown 10 fewer innings and 83 fewer pitches than at the same junction last season. If that continues, benefits should be waiting.

There may be some now.

"It seems there's not extra effort to get the velocity up," Cora said. "It's very easy, the delivery is clean and the ball is coming out of his hand the way it should be."

Sale struck out nine and allowed only two hits. But one of the hits was a two-run homer by Marcus Semien in the fifth inning. He also walked four, his most in 42 games with the Sox.

Oakland hitters fouled off 24 of Sale's pitches, running up his pitch count so quickly that four relievers were needed to finish the game.

"Four walks, that's not my game. That's not who I am," Sale said. "Obviously, you want to be better than that. Any time your bullpen throws almost as many innings as you do, it's not what you're looking for."

Matt Barnes, Heath Hembree, Joe Kelly, and Craig Kimbrel did what was needed. Matt Joyce homered off Hembree and Matt Olson off Kimbrel, but Oakland had only five hits in all and struck out 13 times.

It was the 12th save for Kimbrel.

Trevor Cahill, who had an elbow impingement, came off the disabled list to make the start for Oakland. He gave up three runs on five hits over five innings.

Cahill (1-2) needed 35 pitches to get through the first inning as the Sox took a 3-0 lead.

Mookie Betts singled to left field and took second on an error by Chad Pinder. Andrew Benintendi extended his hit streak to nine games with a single to right field.

Betts scored when Hanley Ramirez grounded to shortstop. J.D. Martinez then blasted a changeup to center field with such force that it hit off the back wall, deflected off part of the stands and landed back on the field.

It was Martinez's 12th home run. He has reached base safely in 21 consecutive games, hitting .397 in that stretch. He already has 36 RBIs.

"I see myself as more of an all-around hitter, not just a slugger," Martinez said. "I'll get my numbers but to me it's a balance."

Ryan Dull started the sixth inning with Oakland trailing, 3-2. Ramirez singled and Martinez walked before Xander Bogaerts stayed on a low slider and sent it over everything in left field for his fifth home run. Bogaerts had 10 last season.

Betts was 2 for 4. But he also jammed his right foot against the wall in right trying to steal Joyce's home run in the seventh inning.

"I thought I had one more step back. Obviously I didn't," Betts said. "It got tight real quick, but it was fine after a couple of minutes."

The Sox (\$233.7 million) have the highest payroll in baseball and the Athletics (\$65.9 million) the lowest. But Oakland took four of six games in the season series.

"Those guys, get them out of here," Cora said. "The quality of the at-bats, for three days that was uncomfortable the way they foul off pitches. Even with two strikes, they're doing damage. They kept fouling off fastballs and putting good at-bats."

With the Yankees rained out in Washington, the 29-14 Sox are a half-game out of first place in the American League East.

They start a four-game series against Baltimore on Thursday with David Price facing Kevin Gausman.

Steven Wright glad to get back in the mix

Peter Abraham

Steven Wright had not pitched in the majors for nearly 13 months when he came out of the bullpen to start the sixth inning against the Oakland Athletics on Tuesday.

But it felt even longer than that for the 33-year-old righthander.

"That's the best I've felt on the mound since 2016," Wright said on Wednesday before the Sox finished their series against the Athletics. "It's been a long time."

Wright threw a three-hit shutout against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Dodger Stadium on Aug. 5 that season. He walked one and struck out nine.

Wright was used as a pinch runner two days later and injured his right shoulder diving back to second base. He pitched only twice more that season, allowing nine runs over 10 innings.

In 2017, Wright injured his left knee in spring training and pitched in five games before having surgery.

So facing 11 hitters on Tuesday felt like an accomplishment, even if it was a bit rocky. Wright allowed two hits, walked three, and struck out one. He left the game with two runners on base and both scored when Bobby Poyner allowed a double by Mark Canha.

The positive for Wright was that his knuckleball had good movement and his knee was stable.

“It was good. It was different, obviously,” manager Alex Cora said. “You go from [Eduardo Rodriguez] to a knuckleball. That’s the first time I saw it in person.

“You get feedback from the catcher right away and it looked like it wasn’t easy for Christian [Vazquez] behind the plate. So that was good. That’s interesting.”

Cora and the coaches are still discussing how best to use Wright.

“We’ll see how he bounces back, when he bounces back,” Cora said. “That’s the most important thing because that will let us know how long we can we go [with Wright]. Overall he was good.”

Wright had not pitched in relief since midway through the 2015 season. He doesn’t expect to need much time to adapt.

“I’m focused on baseball and not rehab,” he said. “I have at least a chance to pitch on a daily basis. They told me [Tuesday] when I was coming in so I had time to get ready. But that window will get narrowed down.”

Wright said he would be fine entering a game with runner on base if needed. If the Sox needed him to start, he thought 90 pitches was doable.

After two injuries, being in a position to contribute is what essentially matters, not the role

“I’ve proven I can pitch at this level,” Wright said. “I’ve been waiting to get back and be healthy. I’m ready to go.”

On the move?

Dustin Pedroia’s biggest problem these days is the weather, not his surgically repaired left knee.

Pedroia was 1 for 3 on Monday playing for Triple A Pawtucket. He was scheduled to play Tuesday but the game was rained out.

As planned, Pedroia will not play again until Friday with Pawtucket at Rochester. But with rain in the forecast, his rehab assignment could be transferred to another affiliate.

“We’ll find innings for him,” Cora said. “We have to, he needs his repetitions.”

Both Single A Salem and Low Single A Greenville are home over the weekend.

“For me, it really doesn’t matter the pitching he faces or where he [plays],” Cora said. “For me, it’s more about playing defense and doing it for seven innings back-to-back days and seeing how he reacts to it.”

The same could be true for righthander Tyler Thornburg, who is scheduled to pitch again on Friday in the minors. He could be sent to a spot with agreeable weather.

Thornburg has so far appeared in six minor league games as he returns from shoulder surgery.

Smith seeks opinion

Carson Smith will soon get a second opinion on his right shoulder from Dr. David Altchek in New York. Smith partially separated his shoulder when he threw his glove on Monday night after allowing a run in the eighth inning.

If Smith needs surgery, which the Red Sox expect to be the case, it would likely end his season.

Smith, who turns 29 in October, will be arbitration eligible following the season. That further clouds his future.

Lefthander Jay Groome had Tommy John elbow surgery on Tuesday at the Kerlan-Jobe Institute in Los Angeles. Dr. Neal ElAttrache did the procedure.

Groome, 19, is 3-9 with a 5.37 earned run average in 17 minor-league games for the Sox since he was the 12th overall pick of the 2016 draft.

The hope is for Groome to return at some point next season. Prior to the injury, he was considered the best pitching prospect in the organization.

Oakland moves

The Athletics activated righthander Trevor Cahill to make the start against Chris Sale and optioned outfielder Jake Smolinski to Triple A Nashville. Cahill (1-2) allowed three runs on five hits in five inning Wednesday night to take the loss.

Oakland plays at Toronto on Thursday night but catcher Bruce Maxwell could not accompany the team there. The San Francisco Chronicle reported that Maxwell will be placed on the restricted list for the four-game series and replaced by Josh Phegley.

Maxwell is not eligible to enter Canada as he awaits sentencing for an incident last fall when he allegedly waved a gun at a delivery person in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Maxwell's sentencing is not until June 4. Under Canadian laws, foreign visitors facing a gun charge are denied entry.

Blake Swihart's agent asks Red Sox for trade

Alex Speier

Blake Swihart confirmed on Wednesday that his agent, Brodie Scoffield of The Legacy Agency, requested that the Red Sox trade the 26-year-old to another team where he might have a greater role. That said, Swihart said that while the request reflected the catcher/utility player's desire for more playing time, he also remains focused on doing everything he can to remain prepared to help the Red Sox.

"I think [Scoffield's request] was kind of looking out for me," said Swihart. "That's his job. I just want to let everyone know, I'm still here, I'm focused on being here. I'm going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win."

Moreover, Swihart said that he could "definitely" still envision a scenario in which he remains with the Red Sox with a larger role than what he's had to this point of 2018. The 2011 first-rounder would welcome such a development.

“I love it here,” said Swihart. “Whatever happens, happens, but this is the only place I’ve ever known . . . My focus is still here. I’m still part of this team. I prepare myself every day to get ready any way I can to play.”

Toward that end, shortly before 4 o’clock, Swihart ran in full catcher’s gear across the field at Fenway, a study in near-constant motion. There were no more than a couple minutes between his work catching bullpen sessions from members of the pitching staff and the start of pregame meetings, which in turn preceded time shagging in the outfield and then time in the cage working on his swing from both sides of the plate.

“That’s who I am. I put my work in,” said Swihart. “I’m not just going to sit there and have a sad face on all the time and not put the work in. I’m not going to get any better that way.”

But while Swihart can be seen all over the field prior to games, he’s rarely been seen outside the dugout once the game starts. Swihart entered Wednesday having appeared in just 15 of the Sox’ 42 games, making a scant 32 plate appearances. His irregular playing time prompted his agent to request that the Sox trade him.

“We’ve had conversations with the team, and they’re aware of how we feel,” Scofield told NBC Sports Boston. “I don’t think we’re building any type of trade value, nor helping him progress as a ballplayer, nor is the team really being served by him in this role.”

For his part, Swihart said that he has not personally expressed a desire to be traded.

“That’s not my job to do that. I would never go to them and do that,” said Swihart. “I know I’m wanted here. I know that. I haven’t had a conversation about what the plan really is. Obviously my role is what it has been all year.”

Swihart is in his eighth pro season. He feels that the considerable promise that he showed down the stretch as the Sox’ everyday catcher in 2015 — over the final seven weeks, the Sox were 15-12 with Swihart behind the plate, a time during which he hit .319/.373/.500 — still remains.

“I feel even better [than in 2015],” said Swihart. “My catching has come a long way since then. I put in so much work. I catch bullpens every day. I try to stay ready. I feel even better behind the plate, getting back behind there, than I did at the end of that stretch.”

For the purposes of Swihart’s trade value, however, the fact that he hasn’t been behind the plate to show whether or not any of those self-perceived gains are real, represents a problem for Swihart and the rest of the league.

Conversations with multiple talent evaluators from around the league suggested that the Red Sox are indeed listening to offers on the catcher — showing a greater receptivity to trading him than they did at the end of spring training. With Dustin Pedroia likely to return within the next couple of weeks, a bench bottleneck involving Swihart, Eduardo Nunez, and Brock Holt likely looms, and given the distribution of playing time to this point, Swihart seems the likely odd man out.

Even at a time when evaluators lament the state of the catching position, the perception that the Sox may be forced to deal Swihart as a distressed asset has driven down what some teams might be willing to offer Boston. The fact that the Sox haven’t given him time behind the plate this year likewise has diminished what teams might be prepared to offer.

“People would have interest. We would have interest. But if he’s so good, why isn’t he playing? . . . I can’t stick my neck out on this kid because I haven’t seen him play,” said one National League evaluator.

“I’m not surprised they’re trying to move him. I’m going to be interested to see what the value is and if it comes close to when Pedroia is going to be activated and they’ve got to do something, I wouldn’t be surprised if they don’t get as much in return as they’re hoping.”

That evaluator, for instance, suggested that he would be surprised if Swihart could command a setup reliever at this time given the uncertainty that surrounds what he might look like as an everyday player. While Swihart made an extremely favorable impression during spring training, the halo of that performance — and the uncertain way spring performances can translate to the season — dampens what teams might give up.

There is a desperate need among several contenders for more production from their catching position. Winnow teams with poor offensive production from their catchers such as the Diamondbacks (.181/.263/.306 line by its catchers), Mets (.168/.283/.288), the Twins (.185/.264/.331), and, for that matter, the Red Sox (.174/.224/.219) all seem to have significant potential for an upgrade. Yet the Sox remain committed to Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon, the Diamondbacks seem comfortable standing pat, and multiple other contenders lack certainty about whether they could throw Swihart behind the plate in the middle of a pennant race.

Swihart seems best suited to a rebuilding team that can give him time to re-establish himself behind the plate in games. The Rangers, Athletics, and Marlins were cited by evaluators as teams that likely harbor both interest and a potential regular role — whether strictly as a catcher or as a more versatile option — for Swihart.

But for now, despite the request by his agent, Swihart said that he’s trying to tune out the noise of potential landing spots, while concentrating on doing what he can to help the Red Sox.

“I’m part of a big league baseball team,” said Swihart. “It can’t be too bad.”

It’s kind of hard to buy Carson Smith’s ‘tired’ excuse

Nick Cafardo

By Tuesday night, the primary relievers in the Red Sox bullpen had all pitched in exactly 18 of the team’s 42 games, including Carson Smith, who after slamming his glove into the dugout bench and suffering a subluxation of his right shoulder said that his arm was tired.

Smith had pitched fewer innings than any of those pitchers (Craig Kimbrel, Joe Kelly, Matt Barnes, Heath Hembree). He had thrown 14½ innings. But now, he was confessing that he was tired and that was the reason why slamming his glove into the bench led to the injury.

It’s understandable that someone who worked so hard to get back from Tommy John surgery might have to be treated with kid gloves. And looking at Smith’s game log, he basically was. There were four back-to-back appearances, but that is not unusual.

We understand that relievers sometimes get up and don’t get into the game. They get “hot” — meaning they warm up enough to get into the game — and that also can be taxing.

But Smith had rehabbed and actually had come back late last season. Then he had a full offseason to get stronger.

He also had a spring training in which the Red Sox went light with him. So when do you finally take off the leash and let him go? One would think that now is the time. But Smith surely intimated that there was some sort of overuse.

The Red Sox brass wasn’t too pleased with what they heard, nor should they be.

If Smith felt tired or overused, I guess he wasn't ready to take his place as a late-inning reliever.

This is the quote that stood out for me:

"I think fatigue played a factor. My shoulder just couldn't handle it. I think my shoulder is tired in general just from pitching. I've thrown a lot lately and I think my arm was just tired."

At his pregame press conference Wednesday, manager Alex Cora shot back, saying, "I don't agree with it. On a daily basis, we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't feel they can pitch that day, we stay away from them.

"It caught me by surprise, and if he felt that way, he should have talked to us. Actually, there was a day in New York we talked and he said he wasn't available that day and we stayed away from him."

I'll say this: I have never seen such a super-cautious manager or pitching coach (Dana LeVangie) in my 35 years around the Red Sox. It was LeVangie's idea to go easy on the pitchers in spring training and let them build up gradually. LeVangie drew a lot of praise from relievers last season for the way he prepared them as bullpen coach.

In this day and age, relievers are used more. That's just the way the game is evolving. Even though he was healthy, Smith was still the third and sometimes fourth option out of the bullpen.

He was well-protected. And that was the plan.

At the time Smith was acquired from Seattle, I quoted a Mariners official saying that Smith's delivery made him vulnerable to an injury that could require Tommy John surgery, and sure enough, Smith underwent Tommy John surgery. He recovered from that, but still had the same susceptible-to-injury delivery.

The Red Sox always knew, even when he returned, that they'd have to pick their spots with him, and they did. They picked situations where his sinker might induce a double-play grounder. That's how they used him.

There was no abuse.

Cora is right; if Smith's arm was tired, he needed to tell the staff. Keeping it to himself was simply not the right thing to do. And again, why would his arm be fatigued?

Cora didn't dismiss the possibility that a pitcher could be fatigued at this time of the year. There is a "dead-arm stage" that pitchers go through. Maybe Smith was going through that. If you were, open your mouth.

I would doubt that LeVangie or the bullpen catchers or the regular catchers or the bullpen coach would miss that.

I think it was a poor thing for Smith to say, even though that's how he felt. Maybe he was feeling some frustration, but he should have kept it to himself if so.

Smith was supposed to be huge in Boston's bullpen plans, but at least the deal is turning out lousy for both teams. The Red Sox gave up Wade Miley and Jonathan Aro, and they also acquired Roenis Elias, who hasn't been able to break out of Triple A and has had some injury issues.

They should be able to replace Smith from within, especially when Tyler Thornburg returns. They have Steven Wright they can use in long situations, and lefty Bobby Poyner will likely be used in more high-leverage situations.

Losing any reliever with Smith's stuff is never good, but there isn't a team in baseball that doesn't have to tweak its bullpen many times during the course of a season.

This injury was unfortunate and very avoidable. It sets back Smith even further, and is likely to jeopardize his Red Sox career once all of the testing is in.

If it is another long-term injury, he didn't go out with a blaze of glory, given the comments he made.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox power show turns back Oakland

Jason Mastrodonato

The power is back on at Fenway Park.

That J.D. Martinez would add a big surge of home runs to a group that badly needed them probably isn't a huge surprise.

That Xander Bogaerts already has half his home run total from 2017? Not even Bogaerts can really explain that one.

Martinez hit his 12th home run of the season and Bogaerts hit his fifth last night, as the pair of multi-run shots propelled the Red Sox to a 6-4 win over the Oakland A's.

The homers were the 58th and 59th of the season for the Red Sox. Entering the day, the only the Cleveland Indians (63) had more.

Bogaerts might not have hit his fifth if it wasn't for his manager, Alex Cora, noticing something from his first at-bat, when Bogaerts got a juicy cutter over the heart of the plate and hit a groundout to third base.

"Cora told me today after my first at-bat to get a little bit ready earlier," Bogaerts said. "That helped me. My second at-bat I hit a line drive and my third at-bat I hit a home run, so it kind of helped me. Sometimes someone seeing it from the side has a better view of what you're doing in the box."

Bogaerts is one of the clear benefactors of the team's new philosophy.

He took a huge hack on a 1-1 slider from Ryan Dull in the sixth inning and blasted it over everything in left field. It was struck so well Bogaerts knew it was gone, dropping his bat and admiring it for a few seconds before he rounded the bases.

"Yeah, I mean, I guess everyone knows," Bogaerts said. "I don't hit a lot of home runs but I think when I hit them I feel good about it leaving. And I mean it's good on a night like tonight where those few extra runs scored were important because they chip, chip, chip away and came back."

The 25-year-old shortstop is swinging at 48 percent of the pitches he sees this year, up from 42 percent last year.

"Cora also tells me a lot, sometimes I'm getting passive, getting fastballs in there and I'm taking so he's helped me with some thoughts and things he sees also," Bogaerts said. "I'm not comfortable with it yet, but hopefully I'll get there. It's 20-something games I've played. I guess you have to pick your spots."

That Bogaerts also is hitting .306 and still isn't comfortable says a lot about his ceiling.

Instead of being the slap-hitter who can hit for average, Bogaerts is turning into a power hitter.

“I do feel like he can drive the ball,” Cora said. “He can hit .330, .335 and of course, go the other way, he can do that. But if he can hit .300 and drive the ball out of the ballpark, I’ll take that one.”

Martinez’ two-run shot was a blast to center field in the first inning. Facing Trevor Cahill, who made his first start after returning from the disabled list, Martinez went ahead 2-1 in the count and got an inside changeup that was squarely hit.

In his first season with the Sox since signing a five-year, \$110 million contract in February, Martinez started the year cold but has been the hottest hitter in the majors since April 13, when he’s hitting .388 with 10 homers and 26 RBI over 30 games.

He has 57 homers since the start of last season, third-most in the majors to only Giancarlo Stanton and Aaron Judge.

Chris Sale didn’t look himself, walking four batters for the first time all year. But he allowed just one hit until the fifth inning, when he served up a two-run long ball to Marcus Semien.

It was the second and final hit Sale allowed, and it almost got caught by Mookie Betts in right. Betts backed himself up against the wall and lifted his glove, but his right foot appeared to take an awkward bend at the wall and Betts crumbled to the ground, the ball sailing just over his glove.

Betts stretched it out and stayed in the game. Afterward, Cora said Betts was fine and just got his foot caught under the wall.

Sale stayed in for just five innings and the bullpen picked him up from there, with Matt Barnes, Heath Hembree, Joe Kelly and Craig Kimbrel handling the final four innings.

Sale threw a season-high 116 pitches his last time out and was held to 102 pitches this time, just 60 for strikes. He struck out nine.

“When you have a night like tonight, obviously I didn’t fill up as many innings as I wanted to, but I was able to lean on my guys,” Sale said. “That’s kind of what this is all about. It’s what team sports is about. When one guy falters, another guy steps in and picks him up. That’s what they did for me tonight.”

Red Sox brass better control recent distractions involving Carson Smith and Blake Swihart

Michael Silverman

Dave Dombrowski and Alex Cora now have two Red Sox brushfires they need to put out.

One’s a ridiculous flare-up.

The other’s going to require a far more delicate touch to put out, and will test Dombrowski’s experience and Cora’s communication skills.

Let’s dispense with Carson Smith first.

This isn’t about his regrettable and over-emotional glove throw episode that might have ruined the rest of his season but definitely put the Red Sox bullpen in peril.

This is about his remarks on Tuesday. Before saying he took “full responsibility” for the shoulder subluxation, he felt it necessary to add that his shoulder and arm were “tired” and that he’s “thrown a lot lately.”

Really?

Including his last outing, Smith made six appearances and pitched 4 2/3 innings in nine days. His workload was a bit heavier before his injury than it was earlier in the season. Overall, he made 14 appearances and pitched 14 1/3 innings.

It's ridiculous to call that overusage. To their credit, Dombrowski and Cora dismissed the insinuation that anything other than emotional overload led to Smith's injury.

"Pitchers are often tired during the season," Dombrowski said in an email. "Managers do their best to balance rest with the needs of the club. I do not feel that there is any correlation between Carson being tired and his injury. It is apparent that his throwing of the glove caused the injury."

Cora flatly contradicted Smith.

"I don't agree with it, I don't agree with it," the manager said. "On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't think they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way he should've told it to us or he should've mentioned it. There was a day in New York or Toronto, New York I think, we talked and he said he wasn't available that day and we stayed away from him."

Smith's claims represent a nuisance at this point.

Swihart is a true predicament.

He wants a trade, and there's little doubt that someone with his talent and potential needs to be an everyday player. One major league scout said yesterday, "I'd love to have him," and envisioned Swihart as a super-utility type to play left field, first, third and catch, somebody "you can move around to keep/get bat in lineup, would be a guy to replace defensively in tight games. His bat can/should be in lineup on regular basis if he gets in better situation than Sox."

The Red Sox could trade Swihart, not because they want to make him happy but because they have a need, likely in the bullpen due to Smith's bum shoulder.

Still, the happier the Red Sox can keep Swihart, the better for everyone.

They can't ignore him or what he wants, just as they can't cave and do whatever he wants.

This is going to require finesse.

"In Blake's case, understand a player's desire to want to play more," Dombrowski said in an email. "You are always willing to listen. Think you deal with these situations on an individual basis."

Specifically with Swihart, how do you handle him?

"Just like any other player, he needs to stay ready to play daily — sure that he will do that," wrote Dombrowski.

The Red Sox have not covered themselves in glory when it comes to knowing what to do with the offensively gifted catcher. He showed well in a 2015 call-up and was even the starter in 2016 but once Christian Vazquez got healthy, the club couldn't figure out how best to deploy Swihart. A stint in left field turned disastrous in 2016, and he spent most of last season recovering from injuries.

Out of options this year, he hit very well in spring training, broke camp with the Sox and has excelled only in keeping the bench nice and toasty. He has yet to start at catcher and has only made four starts, all as the DH. He's hitting .138 with one RBI and one extra-base hit, a double, in 32 plate appearances.

There's not much mystery why his agent told NBC Sports Boston that Swihart wants to be traded.

Swihart is likable and not a problem. As he said yesterday, "I just want to let everyone know, I'm still here, I'm focused on being here. I'm going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win," but "yeah," what his agent said is what Swihart wants.

So as long as Vazquez and Sandy Leon stay healthy, Swihart stays on the bench.

And if Cora can't play him, he'll at least keep talking to him.

"We talk," Cora said. "It's the situation he's in, you know? Honestly, he's part of the big league ballclub and he understands his role. His agent, I guess you know, he expressed his feelings but he's not the only big leaguer — first of all I haven't heard it from Blake, and second, it's been an ongoing talk of players asking for trades or whatever throughout the year."

Red Sox right-hander Carson Smith lands on disabled list after throwing glove in fit of frustration
Smith's flailing goodbye will pass soon enough.

Swihart's is just getting started.

It's on the Red Sox to keep it under control.

Blake Swihart's agent asks Red Sox to trade seldom-used 25th man

Jason Mastrodonato

The strange season of Blake Swihart took another turn yesterday, when his agent, Brodie Scoffield, told NBC Sports Boston that he requested the Red Sox attempt to trade Swihart to another club.

The rarely used 25th man would surely be in the minors if he wasn't out of options. Instead, he's been called the team's "third catcher" by president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and has played about as much as a third catcher might, with just four starts in the first 42 games.

"Yes. We've had conversations with the team, and they're aware of how we feel," Scoffield told NBC Sports Boston. "Blake's in a really difficult position. We've got a switch-hitter, offensive impact player, and his bat deserves a chance to be in the lineup.

"Blake's not the type of player that's going to ask or demand a trade (on his own). He's focused on what's in front of him and happy having a positive impact on the team and the situation at hand. That being said, I don't think we're building any type of trade value, nor helping him progress as a ballplayer, nor is the team really being served by him in this role."

Swihart said he was aware that his agent was going to request a trade on his behalf and his agent spoke accurately for him.

"He's looking out for me," Swihart said. "That's his job. I just want to let everyone know, I'm still here, I'm focused on being here. I'm going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win."

Swihart has yet to start a game in the field this season. All four of his starts have been as the designated hitter.

Manager Alex Cora said that's because he asks J.D. Martinez if he'd rather play the outfield or DH and Martinez prefers the outfield.

Swihart, 26, has started 84 major league games as a catcher and thrown out 27 percent of attempted base stealers, below the 31 percent league average. His ability to frame pitches and call games behind the plate has long been in question, particularly because of his inexperience.

He split time with Ryan Hanigan for the 2015 Red Sox, who finished in last place, and has started only six games behind the plate since then.

Swihart does have some experience in left field, where he looked OK before injuring his ankle running into the wall in 2016. He said the ankle finally stopped bothering him this past winter.

A switch-hitter, Swihart has promise with the bat. Former general manager Mike Hazen previously said the Sox knew Swihart's bat would play in the major leagues, they just weren't sure at which position.

Former hitting coach Chili Davis once said he thought Swihart could be a .300 hitter, albeit without much home run power. He's hit just .269 with a .680 OPS in his major league career.

When Dustin Pedroia is ready to return in the next week or two, there will be a roster crunch. Brock Holt has options, but he's hitting .328 with eight doubles in 20 games and the Sox need a backup shortstop on the team.

If the Sox designated Swihart for assignment, they'll have 10 days to trade him or try to pass him through waivers.

Red Sox notebook: Alex Cora does not agree with Carson Smith's tired excuse

Jason Mastrodonato

Carson Smith's suggestion that his shoulder was tired from pitching a lot did not go over particularly well with Red Sox manager Alex Cora.

Smith is out indefinitely after suffering a shoulder subluxation as a result from throwing his glove in the dugout after his most recent outing on Monday. It was his fifth appearance in seven days, but he threw only 59 pitches in them.

Smith shouldered most of the blame for his injury, but also noted that he's been worked a lot, suggesting that workload was related to why he hurt himself.

"I think my shoulder's tired in general, just from pitching," he said. "I've thrown a lot lately and I think my arm was just tired."

As of yesterday, there were 159 pitchers who had thrown more than his 14 1/3 innings out of relief this season.

Cora doesn't think he overworked Smith.

"I don't agree with it," Cora said before last night's 6-4 win over Oakland. "I don't agree with it. On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't think they can pitch that day, we stay away from them.

"It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way he should've told it to us or he should've mentioned it."

Cora hadn't talked to Smith about his comments, but planned to. Each day the manager gets a list from the training staff and pitching coach Dana LeVangie that details who is available to pitch. He noted there was a day in New York when Smith said he wasn't available and Cora obliged him.

“All the relievers, we talk to them on a daily basis, ‘where you guys at?’ ” Cora said. “And we have information too, but their input is very important to our decision making and there’s been some days that he felt that he wasn’t available and there’s others that he was available.”

Without Smith last night, Cora went to Matt Barnes in the sixth, Heath Hembree in the seventh, Joe Kelly in the eighth and Craig Kimbrel in the ninth to close out the victory.

Swihart asks for trade

The strange season of Blake Swihart took another turn, when his agent, Brodie Scoffield told NBC Sports Boston that he requested the Red Sox attempt to trade Swihart to another club.

The rarely used 25th man surely would be in the minors if he wasn’t out of options. Instead, he’s been called the team’s “third catcher” by president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and has played about as much as a third catcher might, with just four starts in the team’s first 42 games.

“Yes. We’ve had conversations with the team, and they’re aware of how we feel,” Scoffield told NBC Sports Boston. “Blake’s in a really difficult position. We’ve got a switch-hitter, offensive impact player, and his bat deserves a chance to be in the lineup.

“Blake’s not the type of player that’s going to ask or demand a trade (on his own). He’s focused on what’s in front of him and happy having a positive impact on the team and the situation at hand. That being said, I don’t think we’re building any type of trade value, nor helping him progress as a ballplayer, nor is the team really being served by him in this role.”

Swihart said he was aware that his agent was going to request a trade on his behalf and his agent spoke accurately for him.

“He’s looking out for me,” Swihart said. “That’s his job. I just want to let everyone know, I’m still here, I’m focused on being here. I’m going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win.”

Swihart has yet to start a game in the field this season. All four of his starts have been as the designated hitter.

Dustin’ off the rust

Where will Dustin Pedroia bat in the order when the second baseman returns to the Sox?

Cora has an idea, but wasn’t ready to share it.

Pedroia was supposed to play his second rehab game with Triple-A Pawtucket on Tuesday but that was rained out. He’s next scheduled to play tomorrow with the PawSox.

If the weather is bad, the Sox may send Pedroia to a different minor league affiliate.

“We have to, he needs his repetitions,” Cora said. “We’ll see, we’ll see how that works out. For me it really doesn’t matter the pitching he faces or where he gets them. For me it’s more about playing defense, coming back and doing it for seven innings on back to back days and see how he reacts to it.”

Inching closer

Pitcher Austin Maddox is getting closer to a rehab assignment.

The right-hander who posted a 0.52 ERA in 17 1/3 innings in his first major league season, then cracked the playoff roster because of his success against right-handed hitters, is recovering from a shoulder issue that has kept him sidelined since spring training.

“Pedey faced him a few times in spring training so he was our best scout in terms of judging his pitches and where he was,” Cora said. “He looks good. So most likely we’re going to make a decision I think tomorrow and go from there. It’s getting close.”

Learning lesson

Tyler Thornburg had a rough outing in Pawtucket on Monday, when he served up a leadoff homer, walk and a single and recorded only one out while throwing 19 pitches.

He’ll pitch again tomorrow.

“I talked to him after his outing the other day and sometimes things happen for a reason and he feels that he learned a lot from that outing so that’s good,” Cora said. . . .

Knuckleballer Steven Wright’s first outing of the season on Tuesday night was a good one to Cora, who said he’ll use Wright in more than just long relief situations.

“We’ll see how he bounces back, when he bounces back, that’s the most important thing because that’s going to let us know how long can we go in a night and see when he can bounce back,” Cora said. . . .

The Sox’ top pitching prospect Jay Groome underwent successful Tommy John surgery on his left elbow Tuesday, the team announced. He’s been battling injuries on-and-off since the Sox drafted him 12th overall in 2016.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 6, Athletics 4: Martinez, Bogaerts homer as Boston avoids sweep

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- It’s difficult to be swept in a series when you almost never lose the finale.

Such was the case for the Red Sox on Wednesday night against the Athletics, a club that has been a major thorn in their side on the young season.

Boston rebounded after two frustrating nights at Fenway Park, riding home runs by J.D. Martinez and Xander Bogaerts to a 6-4 victory over Oakland.

Martinez launched a two-run shot to left center to highlight a three-run bottom of the first inning and Bogaerts crushed a three-run drive onto Lansdowne Street in the bottom of the sixth, as the Red Sox did all of their scoring in those two frames. Chris Sale and four relievers pushed Boston to 13-1 wrapping up their 14 series to date, the lone loss a 4-1 setback at the Athletics on April 22.

“First two games against them, pretty rough,” Sale said. “It’s nice to be able to end the series on a good note.”

Three of the first four Red Sox hitters reached safely and scored, with Mookie Betts and Andrew Benintendi knocking back-to-back singles and Hanley Ramirez plating a run with a grounder to short. Martinez completed the early blitz of Oakland starter Trevor Cahill by hammering a 2-1 pitch out by the flagpole, his seventh homer in 14 games to make it 3-0.

“There was a streak where he was just swinging and first pitches and getting hits and bombs,” Bogaerts said. “It’s pretty amazing.”

Matt Barnes turned in a scoreless top of the sixth against the heart of the Oakland order, and the Red Sox doubled their offensive output in the bottom of the inning. Ramirez singled, Martinez walked and Bogaerts connected on a majestic drive that sailed out of sight toward Kenmore Square. It was suddenly a 6-2 lead, and a solo homer by Matt Joyce against Heath Hembree in the seventh barely made a dent.

“I went up with a plan and kind of stuck to it,” Bogaerts said. “I know (Athletics reliever Ryan Dull) has a good fastball and a good slider, and sometimes the percentages are good to go with.”

Sale couldn’t quite harness his crackling fastball on this night, limited to five innings as his pitch count swelled to 102. The left-hander issued four walks, the most in any of his 42 starts with Boston, and the last came back to bite him in the top of the fifth. Chad Pinder drew a free pass and Marcus Semien sent a two-run blast onto Lansdowne Street to trim the Athletics’ deficit to 3-2.

“Four walks, that’s not my game,” Sale said. “That’s not who I am. Obviously you want to be better than that.”

Sale threw 60 pitches at 95 mph or harder, a noticeable jump from the 92.9 mph he averaged on his fastball through his first nine starts. There have been signs of the left-hander resuming the dominant form that carried him through his first season with Boston in 2017, as he fanned 27 against just one walk over his previous two starts. Sale completed nine inning for the first time since August 2016 in his last outing, an eventual 12-inning loss at the Blue Jays on Friday night.

“There were some tough at-bats today,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “That was enough.”

Barnes worked around a two-out single in the sixth, excelling in the sort of high-leverage role he’s carved out early in the season. Joe Kelly’s leadoff walk in the eighth did no harm, as a fielder’s choice and a 6-4-3 double play left the potential tying run in the on-deck circle. Craig Kimbrel surrendered a leadoff homer to Matt Olson in the ninth, the only hit he allowed while working for the first time since Saturday’s 5-2 victory over the Blue Jays.

After smooth start, Red Sox encounter some turbulence

Bill Koch

BOSTON — This was bound to happen at some point.

Alex Cora was due to face some real adversity in his debut as Red Sox manager, and this feels like the first week where the heat is being turned up in the clubhouse’s corner office.

Blake Swihart’s agent has requested a trade on behalf of his client. Carson Smith appears to have a difference of opinion with Cora regarding the underlying cause of his right shoulder injury. And Boston was 11-12 into Wednesday night’s series finale with the Athletics after a blistering 17-2 beginning, regressing to something approaching the norm.

Welcome to the second quarter of the 2018 season.

For all the good feeling Cora has fostered to this point on the job, this Red Sox team was always going to have some underlying issues. Some upcoming difficult roster decisions have senses heightened in the clubhouse. Obvious holes in terms of bench depth, offense at the catching position and late-inning bullpen performance haven’t been fully exposed to this point, but the potential is there for them to prove damaging in the season’s later stages.

Swihart was drafted as a shortstop in 2011, developed as a catcher in the minor leagues and was injured as a left fielder in 2016. He's now a 26-year-old in limbo, no longer young enough to be considered a prospect and not yet trusted enough to displace either Christian Vazquez or Sandy Leon behind the plate. The contract extension inked by Vazquez in the offseason runs through 2021 and holds a club option for 2022, by which point Swihart will be 30.

That left Swihart's representatives with no choice, at least in their minds. NBC Sports Boston reported early Wednesday that Boston has been asked to give Swihart a fresh start elsewhere, hoping to push through a trade. Swihart is out of minor league options and has appeared in just 15 games to this point. Swihart enjoyed a rare start Monday night as the designated hitter, his first in 11 days.

Smith said he felt shoulder fatigue before throwing his glove in the dugout Monday night, an action that caused a subluxation and potentially put his season in jeopardy. He'll seek a second opinion later this week, but any sort of damage found could require a second lengthy rehab in three years. Smith was just starting to make an impact after Tommy John surgery cost him the bulk of 2016 and 2017. He had posted seven straight scoreless appearances before the eventual game-winning homer by Oakland's Khris Davis on Monday set him off.

Cora had ready answers for both scenarios during his pregame remarks Wednesday. He said Swihart has been nothing but the model professional to date, with no reason to believe there would be any disruption in the clubhouse. He also disagreed with Smith's assertion that he might have been overworked, citing daily communication with his relievers, and said they would have a follow-up conversation in short order.

And really, on a roster being paid upwards of \$233 million this season, these are peripheral discussions. The nearly \$30 million being wasted on Pablo Sandoval and Rusney Castillo prevents Boston from making any meaningful upgrades due to luxury tax implications. Addressing the problems listed above would go further toward Cora becoming the third of the last four Red Sox managers to win the World Series in his first season with the club.

Consider the slash lines of the Boston bench to open Wednesday. Brock Holt (.328/.379/.508) feels like the lone reliable option, and Dustin Pedroia's imminent return is about to limit Holt's chances at second base. Jackie Bradley Jr. (.171/.263/.256), Sandy Leon (.170/.220/.234) and Swihart (.138/.219/.172) won't concern members of an opposing pitching staff anytime soon.

A one-run deficit Tuesday became a three-run gap in the top of the eighth inning, as knuckleballer Steven Wright and rookie Bobby Poyner surrendered a pair of costly runs in a 5-3 loss. Keeping the game at 3-2 — possible through a lights-out setup man for closer Craig Kimbrel — would have made the task seem much more possible for the Red Sox in the bottom of the ninth.

Cora's everyday lineup boasts some real star power in Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez. Few teams in baseball would find fault with Chris Sale fronting the starting rotation. But it's how Cora navigates through these small rough patches that will determine whether or not he can keep Boston on its larger course for the season, the first one of which it feels like he's enduring right now.

Broken-bat single off lefty a plus for Benintendi

Brian MacPherson

BOSTON — The bat leaned against a pile of boxes next to Andrew Benintendi's locker, just inside the Red Sox clubhouse at Fenway Park. It had snapped almost completely in half, from the knob to a point around where the handle meets the barrel.

The break occurred abruptly in Monday's third inning, in an easily overlooked moment in a Red Sox loss to Sean Manaea and the Oakland Athletics. Mookie Betts was on third base. Benintendi was at the plate. The Red Sox trailed by a run against a pitcher who had no-hit them less than a month earlier. They needed to capitalize on every opportunity they could muster.

With two strikes on Benintendi, Manaea tried to get him to chase a slider off the outside corner. Benintendi laid off. Manaea then went after Benintendi with fastballs off the inside corner. Benintendi fouled the first one off. The second one got just enough of the plate for Benintendi to get his hands inside it and get the bat to the ball — which both broke the bat and got Benintendi on base via an infield single, allowing Betts to score Boston's first run.

It was far from the game's most dramatic moment, but it was meaningful — particularly given the matchup.

“That pitcher is really tough, and he can run that two-seam fastball in on lefthanders,” Red Sox assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett said. “We had a plan to look for something over the middle of the plate and stay in the middle of the field, and he did run it in on him a little bit, but he was able to get enough on it. He's a talented young man.”

Entering play Monday, Manaea had stifled lefties to the tune of a .260 slugging percentage. He'd struck out 14 and walked just two — one of whom was Benintendi, who laid off a series of sliders to draw a walk in the ninth inning of the no-hitter.

Meanwhile, Benintendi came into Monday's game hitting all of .143 with a .229 slugging percentage against lefties. He didn't collect his first extra-base hit against a lefty until May 1. He was one of a number of Red Sox hitters who seemed unable to touch lefties, among them Rafael Devers, Eduardo Nunez, and, worst of all, erstwhile center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., who has hit under .100 with 13 strikeouts and no walks against lefties this season.

The depths to which Bradley has fallen were the reason Benintendi was in center field, flanked by the lefty-mashing (and righty-mashing) J.D. Martinez in left field.

All else being equal, the Red Sox would rather see Bradley in center field than Benintendi. Both came out of the SEC as pedigreed center fielders, but Benintendi has turned out to be a squarely average big-league center fielder while Bradley remains one of the game's greats.

It was easy to imagine Bradley hauling in the Dustin Fowler triple off the left-center field fence on Monday that Benintendi failed to catch and then let ricochet behind him. Bradley has made just that catch before — and not just once.

All else, of course, is not equal. Bradley is mired in the kind of slump that makes one wonder if the peaks really are worth the troughs. Since the All-Star break a year ago, Bradley is slugging .287 and has struck out nearly four times for every walk.

And that makes Benintendi all the more important — both in his ability to man center field and his ability not to be an automatic out when a lefty takes the mound.

What Manaea did in Monday's third inning was what lefties — and, often, righties — have done frequently to Benintendi. It's textbook, but it's still tough to counter. They're going after him hard inside and then trying to get him to chase breaking pitches away. That lefties often work inside with sinkers, pitches that dive at or under his hands, only makes his task more difficult.

To Barkett, the most impressive part of what Benintendi did against Manaea wasn't his broken-bat single — it was the two-strike slider two pitches earlier that Benintendi laid off. Not chasing that slider gave Benintendi a chance to do something with the fastball in on his hands.

“He's a disciplined young man who has an idea of what he's doing up there,” Barkett said. “It's not so much the swings, the pitches he swings at — the pitches he takes can be the difference-maker. Like Mookie, he's got that recognition. They can see things out of the hand of the pitcher sooner than most.”

* *MassLive.com*

J.D. Martinez on pace for 45 homers for 2018 Boston Red Sox, having David Ortiz-like impact

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez bashed his seventh home run in 14 games last night to power the Red Sox 6-4 over the Athletics here at Fenway Park.

He has 12 homers, putting him on pace for 45 home runs, the same number he had last year.

He has certainly hasn't disappointed one bit after signing for five years, \$110 million in February. He's without question having a David Ortiz-like impact in the middle of the Red Sox lineup.

Ortiz finished the 2016 season, his final year, with 87 extra-base hits (38 homers, 48 doubles, one triple).

Martinez is on pace for 87 extra-base hits this season (45 homers, 38 doubles, four triples).

Just compare the stats of Martinez through Boston's first 43 games and Ortiz through Boston's first 43 games in 2016.

J.D. Martinez's stats through Boston's first 43 games: .344 batting average, .395 on-base percentage, .644 slugging percentage, 1.039 OPS, 12 homers, 10 doubles, one triple, 36 RBIs, 28 runs, 14 walks, 46 strikeouts, 177 plate appearances, 41 games.

David Ortiz's stats through Boston's first 43 games in 2016: .311 batting average, .391 on-base percentage, .642 slugging percentage, 1.032 OPS, 10 homers, 17 doubles, one triple, 34 RBIs, 20 runs, 20 walks, 27 strikeouts, 169 plate appearances, 39 games.

Remarkably similar.

Martinez is crushing everything. He has the second highest average exit velocity (95.6 mph) in the majors behind only Yankees' Aaron Judge (96.1 mph), per Baseball Savant.

He has hit the second most balls (67) over 95 mph of any major leaguer.

The Red Sox waited a year to replace Ortiz but they found their man.

Martinez has the perfect personality to thrive here in Boston. He has embraced the environment and the media coverage. He never showed any change in personality when he started slow the first week and a half. He knows he's one of the game's top hitters.

Dave Dombrowski landed the best free agent on this past offseason's market.

Red Sox sign reliever Josh Smith to minor league deal; he's appeared in 67 major league games

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have added some reliever depth.

They signed right-handed reliever Josh Smith to a minor league deal, reports MassLive.com Red Sox beat reporter Chris Cotillo.

Cotillo, who officially begins at MassLive.com on May 29, reported the news via Twitter:

The 30-year-old has appeared in 67 major league games, including making nine starts. He went 2-1 with a 4.89 ERA and 1.43 WHIP in 26 outings (35 innings) for the Athletics last year.

He pitched for the Reds in 2015 and '16.

The Mariners released him April 24 after he posted a 6.10 ERA in four outings (one start) for Triple-A Tacoma.

J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts crush homers, Red Sox beat Athletics; Chris Sale strikes out 9

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez and Xander Bogaerts each homered for a combined distance of 833 feet.

They helped the Red Sox salvage the final game of their three-game series vs. the Athletics with a 6-4 win here at Fenway Park.

Boston, which improved to 29-14, lost the season series 2-4 to the A's. The Sox open a four-game series vs. the Orioles tomorrow at Fenway Park.

Chris Sale left the game after just 5 innings because of a high pitch count but he improved to 4-1 with a 2.29 ERA.

He threw 102 pitches (60 strikes). He allowed two runs on a two-run homer to Marcus Semien. He walked four, gave up two hits and struck out nine.

Martinez on pace for 45 homers

J.D. Martinez belted his 12th homer, putting him on pace for 45, the same number of home runs he hit last year.

His two-run homer in the first inning gave the Red Sox a 3-0 lead.

He hit an 85.3 mph changeup 422 feet to left-center field with a 106.4 mph exit velocity.

Bogaerts breaks out of May slump

Xander Bogaerts' three-run homer in the sixth inning put Boston ahead 6-2.

He crushed an 82 mph slider from reliever Ryan Dull 411 feet to left field. It traveled with a 105.5 mph exit velocity.

Bogaerts entered the game batting .214 with a .267 on-base percentage, .339 slugging percentage, .606 OPS, one homer, four doubles and three RBIs in 14 games during May.

Blake Swihart confirms agent asked Boston Red Sox for trade; 'I want to play. He wants me to play'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Blake Swihart confirmed the NBC Sports Boston report that his agent Brodie Scoffield has requested the Red Sox to trade him.

"I want to play. He wants me to play," Swihart told reporters here at Fenway Park. "So that's what he decided to do."

Scoffield told Swihart before he requested the trade, Swihart said.

"I think he's just looking out for me. I mean, that's his job," he said. "I just want everyone to know that I'm still here. I'm focused on being here. I'm going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win."

Swihart said it's not his job to request the trade.

"I would never go in and do that. So no, I haven't talked to them about it."

Swihart has started only four games, all at DH.

Dustin Pedroia is making progress. He began a rehab assignment at Triple-A Pawtucket on Monday. He could return within the next couple of weeks. The Red Sox will need to open a roster spot when he does return.

"His agent, I guess, expressed his feelings, but he's not the only big leaguer (who has asked for a trade)," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "First of all, I haven't heard it from Blake. And second, it's been an ongoing talk of players asking for trades or whatever throughout the year. (J.T.) Realmuto, (Josh) Harrison and (David) Freese. And the last time I checked, Harrison and Freese, they are very happy with their team."

"It is what it is. But he works, man. He shows up and he knows in advance when he's going to play. I let him know the night before. And he's ready to roll."

Carson Smith has 'no comment' on Alex Cora's usage of him; 'I've said what I need to say'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Red Sox reliever Carson Smith said yesterday he feels fatigue could have played a factor in him suffering a right shoulder subluxation.

He suffered the injury while throwing his glove in frustration Monday after his outing vs. the Athletics. He gave up a homer to Khris Davis.

"I think my shoulder is tired in general," Smith said yesterday. "Just from pitching. I've thrown a lot lately. And I think my arm is just tired."

MassLive.com told Smith that Red Sox manager Alex Cora was asked on his weekly WEEI Dale & Keefe appearance today if he felt Smith was blaming him for overuse. MassLive.com asked Smith to set the record straight about what he meant.

"Honestly, I don't have any comment on that," Smith said. "I've said what I need to say. It is what it is. I'm in the position I'm in. I've got to move forward. So I have no comment on that."

About 20 minutes later, Cora spoke about Smith's comments yesterday at his pregame media availability.

"I don't agree with it," Cora said. "I don't agree with it. On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. And if they don't feel like they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way, he should have told it to us. He should have mentioned it."

Cora mentioned Smith recently told the staff he wasn't available to pitch one day and he wasn't used.

Cora hasn't talked with Smith about his comments but he plans to talk with him.

"We will," he said.

Smith has allowed six earned runs in 14 1/3 innings (3.77 ERA) this year. He pitched three times in four days before the injury and five times in seven days.

*** *The Worcester Telegram & Gazette***

Red Sox Journal: Looking for more pop from down under

Bill Ballou

BOSTON — The bottom of the order has looked like the bottom of the barrel for the Red Sox so far in 2018.

That did not make much difference in April when Boston went 17-2 to begin the season but the Sox have essentially been a .500 team since then. Lack of production from batters seven, eight and nine has been a substantial contributor to that.

In Tuesday night's 5-3 defeat, the bottom third went 1 for 12 and the only hit was a double by pinch-hitter Brock Holt. The night before, a 6-5 loss, the bottom 33.3 percent combined to go 2 for 12 including a home run by Rafael Devers.

Jackie Bradley Jr. was not in the starting lineup again Wednesday night. If his regular contributions are figured in and not Devers', things are even worse. Devers, who began the season in the middle of the order, batted eighth Wednesday night for the third straight game.

That's to get Mitch Moreland higher up in the batting order.

"When Mitch plays," Alex Cora said, "I do feel he should hit sixth in the lineup. And then I want to split Mitch and [Devers], so I hit [Eduardo] Nunez in between them."

Cora declined to blame the bottom part of the order for the Red Sox' recent spate of mediocre results.

"I think we just got to play better all around," he said. "Pitch better, play better in all aspects. We want everybody to contribute, that's obvious. Some times you go with the numbers. Some times you go with the quality of at-bats, but we need quality at-bats from everybody, that's from top to bottom.

"We've made some strides with certain guys and we haven't with others."

Aches and pains

A couple of injury updates:

Dustin Pedroia did not play the morning game in Pawtucket Wednesday and may wind up getting re-assigned to a different affiliate for the weekend as the weather forecasts are bad.

"We'll find innings for him," Cora said. "With [Pedroia] it's more about repetitions. It's not the at-bats. He can hit at any level."

Reliever Austin Maddox is getting closer to pitching in games. The Sox may make a decision on him Thursday. Maddox has been sidelined with an unspecified right shoulder ailment.

Twins are a handful

Not only did Tuesday night's game run late because of the rain — Cora had to get up early Wednesday.

“Today was a busy day from getting up at 5:30 in the morning with the twins to coming over here,” the manager said of his boys, Xander Gabriel and Islander Manuel, both less than a year old. “They were bad today. I was feeding them for lunch and I quit. I went to [my wife] and said, ‘Hey, I got to get to the ballpark.’ It’s been a tough one.”

Orioles on the rebound

The Orioles arrive at Fenway Thursday night for a four-game series that includes the make-up from last month’s rainout on Patriots Day. Two weeks ago a four-game series with Baltimore would have been considered a gift but the Orioles have been playing better lately.

Even with a 4-1 loss to the Phillies on Wednesday, Baltimore is 5-2 in its last seven games after starting the season with an 8-27 record. The Red Sox swept the three games the teams played here in April and have won six in a row versus Baltimore going back to last season.

The Orioles’ lineup has translated well at Fenway Park in recent years. They are 12-9 here since the start of the 2016 season and have out-homered the Red Sox in those games, 29-17. This series marks the beginning of an 11-game road trip for Baltimore.

The pitching match ups:

Thursday, 7:10, David Price (3-4) versus Kevin Gausman (3-2); Friday, 7:10 p.m., Drew Pomeranz (1-1) versus Alex Cobb (0-5); Saturday, 7:10 p.m., Rick Porcello (5-1) versus Dylan Bundy (2-5); and Sunday, 1:05 p.m., Eduardo Rodriguez (3-1) versus TBA.

Diamond dust

Price is doing well after his carpal tunnel incident, Cora said, and is expected to be fine for Thursday night’s start. ... Neither here nor there, but the Athletics annually have the best-looking media guide in baseball. ... Wednesday night was Devers’ 100th game in the major leagues.

*** *The Pawtucket Times***

What PawSox manager Kevin Boles looks for when a Red Sox player comes down on a rehab assignment

Brendan McGair

PAWTUCKET – When Red Sox rehabbers like Dustin Pedroia walk into the PawSox clubhouse, they do so with a set-in-stone plan already in place. Sounds like smooth sailing for manager Kevin Boles and his coaching staff, no?

“They’re going to dictate what happens, but you also have to make an in-game adjustment,” said Boles prior to Pawtucket committing four errors and leaving the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth inning of a 5-4 loss to Buffalo on Wednesday.

Delving further, Boles referenced a rehab start made by David Price nearly one year ago in Buffalo. The left-hander needed 69 pitches to get through two innings. He might have been scheduled to throw 85-90 pitches, but in some instances, you have to take a step back and use common sense.

Price didn’t take the mound for the third inning, a decision that began with a simple observation by the person who’s on the ground floor.

“Throwing him back out there and extending this, is that going to be productive or counterproductive?” Boles said. “With rehabbers, you always rather err on the side of caution. If there’s something you don’t like, you can always make a suggestion.”

That appeared to be the case on Tuesday night when the PawSox were rained out. The team waited until 7 p.m. before officially postponing the game, yet Pedroia was nowhere to be found when the clubhouse was made available to the media. A wet field and a player who’s coming back from knee surgery was a mixture that Boston clearly wanted no part of, hence it wouldn’t have come as a shocker to learn that Pedroia was told that then risk far outweighed the reward well in advance of the announced postponement.

“You’re going ask to give your opinion because you’re there with the player,” Boles said. “All you can do is paint a picture so they can ultimately make a judgment, but hopefully they trust what your eyes say.”

Whenever a Pedroia or a Price comes to Pawtucket, they immediately gain a best friend in Boles.

“The biggest thing is talking with these players and making sure you’re communicating with them,” Boles said. “You tell them before they start that, ‘Look, I’m going to be asking you a lot about you’re feeling. It’s not meant to annoy you. It’s about staying on top of where you’re at.’ After pregame workouts, you ask. During the game, you ask.”

The starting pitcher who’s making a rehab start represents the easiest player to manage because he can go through his normal pregame ritual before taking the mound. A position player can take batting practice and stay loose by hitting in the cage before hitting the field roughly 20 minutes before first pitch so he can stretch.

The trickiest group of rehabbers to manage are relievers. Generally, they’ll throw one inning and between 20-25 pitches. There is a caveat that has Boles on alert even before someone like Tyler Thornburg takes the mound.

“They don’t have all the time in the world to prepare unless they know they’re coming at the very end of the game,” Boles said.

As was the case with Thornburg on Monday night and with Craig Kimbrel when he made an appearance with the PawSox two summers ago, a rehabbing reliever’s outing can go awry in a hurry. When that happens, there’s no reason to flirt with danger. For Boles, it’s all about cutting bait like what happened when Thornburg was lifted after facing just four Buffalo hitters.

With rehabbers, the type of minor-league numbers they put up before getting activated is a secondary concern. The most important question that Boles has to answer is whether he feels they’re ready to help the parent club.

“There comes a point where you’re building them up stamina-wise and getting them used to being on their feet as long as they have to be out there. What we try to do is evaluate with our own eyes and depending on the injury, are they favoring it? It’s very simple,” Boles said. “It’s not so much performance-related. It’s about getting them healthy and hope that their timing is on by the time they’re ready to go back up.”

It was an interesting seventh inning for hard-throwing PawSox reliever Ty Buttrey on Wednesday. He struck out the side and pitched around two errors and a walk that fostered a first-and-third jam with two down. Buttrey escaped by striking out Buffalo No. 3 hitter Rowdy Tellez, who already had two hits by that point. The punchout of Tellez kept the game tied at 4-4.

“He got out of what could have been a particularly damaging inning. He has swing-and-miss capability with the stuff that he has. With him, it’s about trying to stay away from pitching in high-stress innings all the time,” Boles said.

Buttrey has been involved in more than his fair share of tight spots this season – he’s allowed baserunners to reach in eight of his 12 outings. Boles says that when trouble arises, it’s important for Buttrey to trust his mid 90s fastball and not let the game speed up unnecessarily. Of the last 43 outs that Buttrey has recorded, 25 have come via strikeout.

“When those moments happen, it’s natural that the game speeds up on you a little bit,” said Buttrey, who was added to Boston’s 40-man roster last winter. “When the runner got to second base (on Wednesday), I focused on executing my pitches instead of rushing my delivery and it paid off.”

EXTRA BASES: Sam Travis and Mike Ohlman belted solo home runs for the PawSox, but the Bisons pushed across the go-ahead in the ninth on a sacrifice fly that was aided by a throwing error from the catcher Ohlman. Pawtucket loaded the bases in the bottom of the ninth but Rusney Castillo’s two-out fly ball died just before the warning track in center field. ... The home run was the first for Travis since April 16 and obviously his first since coming off the disabled list last Saturday. The blast cleared everything in left field. ... William Cuevas overcame a three-run first inning to provide six innings of four-run ball with four strikeouts. ... Fernando Rodriguez Jr. made his return from the disabled list with a scoreless eighth inning while Ryan Brasier allowed an unearned run in the top of the ninth. ... Despite the four errors, the PawSox allowed just one unearned run. Ohlman was wild with two throws while shortstop Tzu-Wei Lin was off with a throw and also booted a ball. “We need to care of the baseball. We’re not looking for perfection, but that’s not what we’re looking for,” Boles said. ... Wednesday’s attendance was 4,678. ... The PawSox will enjoy an off day on Thursday before hitting the road for a three-game series in Rochester that begins Friday. The probable pitchers are Chandler Shepherd (2-2, 4.75) on Friday, Justin Haley on Saturday (1-4, 3.74), and Marcus Walden (0-1, 7.50) on Sunday. ... Nothing is confirmed, but all signs point to right-handed reliever Austin Maddox beginning a rehab assignment with the PawSox this weekend. Maddox (shoulder) has been on the disabled list since spring training. Last year, he appeared in 27 games for Pawtucket and 13 games for Boston.

* *RedSox.com*

Dingers, ace end Sox's two-game slide vs. A's

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- If the early power from Chris Sale (nine strikeouts in five innings) and J.D. Martinez (two-run rocket in the first) wasn't enough for the Red Sox to put away the pesky Oakland Athletics on Wednesday night, a towering three-run shot by Xander Bogaerts helped do the job.

Bogaerts, demonstrating the type of swing that was his norm in the early part of the season, belted one high and far over the Green Monster and onto Lansdowne Street in the bottom of the sixth in what wound up being the biggest hit of Wednesday's 6-4 victory over the Athletics.

"I mean, we were up 3-2, it was a tight game after [Marcus] Semien hit that home run," said Bogaerts. "Just trying to get Sale some extra runs and get into our bullpen, since we knew he had a lot of pitches and was probably coming out."

The win allowed the Red Sox to salvage the finale of a three-game series against Oakland, a team that took four of six from Boston for the season. Boston leads the Majors in wins with 29, but it trails the Yankees by a half-game in the American League East.

"Those guys, get them out of here," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said of Oakland. "The quality of the at-bats, I was just telling somebody, that was uncomfortable, the way they foul off pitches. Even with two strikes, they're doing damage. They kept fouling off fastballs, putting together good at-bats."

Due to Oakland's strong approach, Sale (4-1, 2.29 ERA) had to exit earlier than he would have liked due to his pitch count (102), and departed with a slight lead at 3-2.

"It just seemed like a lot of foul balls," said Sale. "My offspeed stuff wasn't as good as I wanted it to be, especially my breaking ball. I got into some old habits tonight. My arm felt good, I felt loose, I felt strong. Command was obviously erratic, but this is Major League Baseball. If you go out there with not your best stuff, it's going to be tough. If you give somebody something, they're going to take advantage of it. But my guys were there tonight to pick me up."

Aside from Martinez, nobody gave Sale a bigger pick-me-up than Bogaerts, who opened up some breathing room with that three-run homer to make it 6-2 and showed signs that he might be ready to get hot again.

It was homer No. 5 on the season for Bogaerts, who came into the game hitting .214 in May with a homer and three RBIs.

"He can hit," said Cora. "I do feel like he can drive the ball. But he can hit .330, .335 and, of course, go the other way. He can do that. But if he can hit .300 and drive the ball out of the ballpark, I'll take that one."

The Red Sox might have tacked on more insurance if not for a sensational catch by A's right fielder Stephen Piscotty, who snagged a foul ball by Mookie Betts and somehow hung on as he landed in the stands.

However, none of the Athletics had any shot to catch that early missile by Martinez. The slugger's two-run shot to left-center crashed against the section of wall where the Green Monster intersects with the bleachers and traveled a projected distance of 422 feet, according to Statcast™.

It was Martinez's seventh homer in the last 14 games and third in the last four. He also continued his streak of getting on base to 21 games, a career high.

"I have a cue that I'm riding right now so I'm kind of just riding that out right now and it kind of seems to be working," Martinez said.

The blast by Bogaerts wound up being a key to victory, considering the solo homers by Matt Joyce and Matt Olson that followed in the seventh and ninth, respectively.

"Yeah, I went up with a plan and kind of stuck to it," said Bogaerts. "I know he has a good fastball and a good slider. Sometimes percentages are good to go with. He's a good pitcher, he got me out enough times. I figured the guys on base, maybe look for his best pitch."

SOUND SMART

This is the seventh time in Red Sox history they've won at least 29 of their first 43 games and the first time since the World Series championship team of 2007 that Cora played for.

HE SAID IT

"Cora told me today after my first at-bat to get a little bit ready earlier. That helped me. My second at-bat, I hit a line drive and my third at-bat I hit a home run, so it kind of helped me. Sometimes someone seeing it from the side has a better view of what you're doing in the box." -- Bogaerts, on a hitting tip from his manager that helped lead to his crucial home run

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The catch that Piscotty made against Betts on that foul ball in the sixth was so exquisite that even the umpires initially couldn't believe it. Initially, it was ruled that the Piscotty didn't hang on to the ball cleanly. But the A's were so sure that he did they came running off the field for what they presumed to be the third out of the inning. They were right. After a brief review, the call was overturned and Piscotty was credited for his sweet catch.

UP NEXT

Mookie Betts could be in store for a big night when the Red Sox open a four-game series against the Orioles on Thursday night at Fenway Park. Betts is batting .444 (12-for-27) with a double, three homers and seven RBIs lifetime against Baltimore starter Kevin Gausman. The Red Sox counter with lefty David Price (3-4, 4.89 ERA). First pitch is scheduled for 7:10 p.m. ET.

Riding 'cue,' Martinez remains red-hot at plate

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez is in a stretch where he is getting on base every game, and also rounding the bases for a home run in many of them.

The slugger continued his recent tear with a two-run rocket to center that gave his team an early three-run lead en route to a 6-4 victory over the Athletics on Wednesday night at Fenway Park.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

Martinez's 12th homer of the season came with one out in the bottom of the first, landing off the back wall in center where the Green Monster intersects with the bleachers.

A shot like that from Martinez has been par for the course of late. Martinez has reached base a career-high 21 consecutive games, slashing .397/.466/.731 over that stretch. He has homers in three of his last four games, and seven of his last 14.

"I mean, I have a cue that I'm riding right now, so I'm kind of just riding that out right now and it kind of seems to be working," Martinez said.

That's a bit of an understatement. Martinez is on fire.

"That's special," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora.

"Keep it going," said Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts. "I always tell [Eduardo Nunez] that I have to be ready. Normally I'm a guy that gets to the on-deck circle a little bit later. With J.D., I have to get there early, because he swings at the first pitch and gets a hit. I have to be there earlier and get my stuff going so I can hit. There was a streak [where] he was just swinging at the first pitch and getting hits and bombs. It's pretty amazing."

Martinez's home run was on an 2-1, 85.3-mph changeup by Athletics right-hander Trevor Cahill, leaving Martinez's bat with an exit velocity of 106.4 mph and a projected distance of 422 feet, according to Statcast™.

Clearly, Martinez is thriving at Fenway Park, even if he isn't a pull hitter.

The right-handed hitter has a line of .371/.410/.714 at home with six homers and 20 RBIs.

"I've always kind of liked it," Martinez said of Fenway. "I wish right field was a little closer, but that's part of it. Like I said at the beginning when everybody asked me about the Green Monster and what am I going to do with the wall. I'm going to do me. I'm not going to worry about that wall. That's a trap, I feel like."

Cora doesn't feel he over-used Smith out of 'pen

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora doesn't agree with the assertion from Carson Smith that the righty's shoulder subluxation that occurred when he threw his glove Monday in the dugout could have been caused by fatigue.

Smith, who underwent Tommy John surgery in May 2016, was used three times in a four-day span before the injury occurred.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

However, Cora checked with the training staff on each occasion Smith pitched to make sure he would be available, as he does with all the relievers. That same process took place on Monday, when Smith gave up a solo homer to Khris Davis and then threw his glove in frustration at the end of the inning.

"I don't agree with it," Cora said. "On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't [think] they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way, he should've told it to us or he should've mentioned it. There was a day in New York or Toronto, New York I think, when we talked and he said he wasn't available that day and we stayed away from him."

The Red Sox were counting on Smith to be a reliable member of their setup crew this season, but he is now out indefinitely following the unfortunate injury.

Smith will undergo further tests from Dr. David Altchek in New York later this week to rule out a significant injury to his labrum.

Though he is in his first year as a manager, Cora wanted to make it clear that he would never jeopardize a pitcher's health while trying to win a game.

"We ask everybody, [Craig] Kimbrel, all the relievers," Cora said. "We talk to them on a daily basis, 'Where you guys at?' And we have information, too, but their input is very important to our decision making and there's been some days that he felt that he wasn't available and there's others that he was available."

Pedroia plan

After playing his first Minor League rehab game for Triple-A Pawtucket on Monday, Dustin Pedroia's second scheduled start was rained out on Tuesday. With Wednesday's PawSox game taking place at 11 a.m. ET, the team stuck with its original plan of giving Pedroia the day off. Pawtucket doesn't play on Thursday. Weather permitting, Pedroia will travel with the team for a weekend series at Rochester and start on Friday night.

"From what I know, I think the weather is going to be miserable over the weekend. So we'll find innings for him," Cora said. "I think with Pedey, honestly, it's more about reputations than innings, not the at-bats. This is a guy who can hit at any level. Timing-wise, he has his at-bats, but repetitions on the field, going out, just like a pitcher. The up and downs, go play defense, come back, sit down, so that's what he needs. We'll find innings somewhere. Whenever he's back, he'll be ready to go."

Where will Pedroia hit in Boston's batting order when he returns?

"I have an idea, but we'll talk about it," said Cora.

Swihart staying positive despite trade request

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Seldom-used Blake Swihart is keeping a positive attitude amid a report that his agent asked the Red Sox to trade him.

"I think it was kind of looking out for me," said Swihart. "That's his job. I just want to let everyone know I'm still here, I'm focused on being here. I'm going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win."

Swihart didn't ask the Red Sox to trade him, nor will he.

"That's not my job to do that. I would never go to them and do that. No, I haven't talked to them about it," Swihart said.

Agent Brodie Scoffield did tell Swihart what his plan was before talking to the Red Sox.

"He told me beforehand that he was going to do it, so he's looking out for me," Swihart said.

At the moment, Swihart is the 25th man on the Red Sox's roster, and an insurance policy behind catchers Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon.

When Dustin Pedroia returns from the disabled list -- which will likely take place within the next couple of weeks -- the Red Sox might have to make a move with Swihart, who doesn't have Minor League options.

"He's probably been thinking about a bunch of things that can happen in the next couple of weeks," Swihart said of his agent. "I want to play. He wants me to play. That's what he decided to do."

Prior to Wednesday's game against the Athletics -- for which Swihart was not in the lineup -- manager Alex Cora praised the switch-hitter for his attitude.

"Showing up every day, working hard like always," Cora said. "Communication with me has been outstanding. I have no complaints."

Swihart has started just four of the first 43 games of the season, all at designated hitter. This, despite the fact he got playing time during Spring Training at catcher, first base, second base, third base and left field.

"I think about it everyday, 'How are we going to do this?'" Cora said. "I've said it from the get-go, that it was honestly the toughest part of the job early -- how are we going to do this? It's tough to do it. Whenever it comes down to him playing the outfield or DH'ing, I honestly run it through J.D. [Martinez] first.

"I say, 'What would you rather do? Do you want to DH or do you want to play left?' You guys know the answer. It's nothing against Blake, but J.D., he likes to play the outfield. Whenever we have the chance and we have options, we will check with him and if he wants to play the outfield then Blake will DH."

Cora feels his relationship with Swihart has been honest and healthy.

"We talk," said Cora. "He's ready to play. He knows that when he doesn't play, we might need him late in games, so he goes in and takes his hacks and he's engaged in the game. We talk about the game. It's the situation he's in, you know?"

"Honestly, he's part of the big league ballclub and he understands his role. His agent, I guess you know, he expressed his feelings, but he's not the only big leaguer [to want a trade] -- and first of all, I haven't heard it from Blake, and second, it's been an ongoing talk of players asking for trades or whatever throughout the year. [J.T] Realmuto and [Josh] Harrison and [David] Freese, and the last time I checked, Harrison and Freese are very happy with their team.

"So it is what it is, you know? But he works, man. He shows up and he knows in advance when he's going to play. I let him know the night before and he's ready to roll."

*** *ESPN.com***

Real or not? J.D. Martinez giving Red Sox power bat they needed

David Schoenfield

J.D. Martinez waited and waited and waited. The Boston Red Sox waited and waited and waited. Finally, in what always felt like a preordained outcome, the two sides agreed to a contract in late February. Even if this marriage is still in its honeymoon stage, it looks like one that will have many happy moments: Martinez is on fire, proving his 2017 monster season was no accident.

Martinez blasted a two-run homer in the first inning in Boston's 6-4 win over the A's and is hitting .344/.395/.644 with 12 home runs and 36 RBIs in 41 games. The Red Sox needed a power hitter and they have one:

That's seven home runs in 14 games for Martinez, and he has reached base in 21 consecutive games. His numbers over the past two seasons: 160 G, .314/.381/.677, 57 HR, 140 RBIs.

The Red Sox are second in the majors in runs per game behind only the Yankees, and after ranking last in the AL in home runs in 2017, they're tied for second this year with 59, behind Cleveland's 64. With Mookie Betts even hotter than Martinez, Xander Bogaerts back from his DL stint and raking (he also homered Wednesday) and Mitch Moreland slugging over .600, it's a scary lineup with the potential to get better. Rafael Devers hasn't done much yet (.245/.286/.423), the catchers have been a big zero and Eduardo Nunez hasn't contributed filling in for Dustin Pedroia, who has started his rehab stint in the minors.

Is Martinez worth \$110 million? So far, so good.

Justin Verlander is pitching better than peak Justin Verlander: In a series played with a playoff-like intensity, Verlander went the distance in a 2-0 victory over the Angels, his first shutout with the Astros and the eighth of his career. It seems weird that he has only eight career shutouts -- heck, Fernando Valenzuela threw eight his rookie season in 1981 -- but it's a reminder that these days nobody throws complete games. So appreciate them when do they happen.

Verlander cruised through seven innings with 83 pitches. The Angels got runners on second and third with one out -- Kole Calhoun's double to center bounced over the wall, otherwise Ian Kinsler probably would have scored -- but Verlander struck out Luis Valbuena looking on a 97 mph heater that caught the inside corner. The call elicited some complaints from Valbuena and Mike Scioscia (I'm pretty sure no manager complains more about called strikes than Scioscia), but it was a strike. Verlander then got Mike Trout on a dribbler back to the mound, and Verlander pumped his fist in excitement.

It was his game to finish off. Love it. The Angels did get a hit and walk with two outs in the ninth, but Zack Cozart popped up to first -- a 97 mph fastball on Verlander's 118th pitch.

His season stats: 5-2 in 10 starts, 1.05 ERA, 84 strikeouts in 68.2 innings, .148 batting average allowed. How are Daz Cameron, Franklin Perez and Jake Rogers doing in the minors?

Braves get robbed, beat Cubs anyway: Cubs center fielder Albert Almora Jr. stole a home run from Tyler Flowers with this great catch:

The ball had a 95 percent hit expectancy. Alas, baseball.

The score was tied 1-1 when the Braves scored three runs in the eighth off the usually tough Carl Edwards Jr., who has given up seven runs in his past three appearances. The top of the lineup did the damage. Ozzie Albies tripled with one out, Ronald Acuna Jr. singled him in and Freddie Freeman's single (plus three walks, one intentional) would lead to two more runs and a 4-1 Atlanta win. Note:

I saw another guy beat a shift in an earlier game that helped break things open as well. The Rangers and Mariners were tied 0-0 in the eighth when Isiah Kiner-Falefa led off with a base hit. Rougned Odor then reached on a drag bunt to the second baseman, who was playing back in a deep shift. That led to the go-ahead run (and the Rangers broke it open with four more runs in the ninth). Would love to see more of this. Beat the shift enough and they'll stop shifting on you.

Quote of the year: Speaking of the Rangers, that game was 0-0 because Bartolo Colon tossed a gem with 7 $\frac{2}{3}$ scoreless innings. He did that taking a 102 mph line drive off his stomach early in the game. His comment afterward: "I have a big belly, so I can take it."

We know strikeouts are at an all-time high and aren't likely to go down anytime soon. But 41 K's for one walk? Come on, now.

OK, that's funny, and this is amazing: In 16 career starts at Safeco Field, Colon is 14-1 with a 1.98 ERA. As somebody on Twitter pointed out, Colon is so old he actually pitched against the Mariners at Safeco in a playoff game.

With Colon throwing so well (2.82 ERA) and the Rangers not going anywhere, they might want to consider trading him sooner rather than later, given he didn't pitch well in 2017. He won't return more than a lottery ticket kind of prospect, but you have to think teams in need of rotation help might be interested in Colon.

There's no crying in baseball: What's with all the whining of late? Sticking with the Rangers, Joey Gallo made one of the stranger comments of the season when he said he doesn't want to play third base. "I don't want it. I don't like it," he said before Wednesday's game. "I hate it, no joke. I hate third base. ... I've played other positions, realized how bad third base can be on my body."

OK, that sounds bad. I'm not exactly sure why third base would be harder on his body than left field or first base. And he did say he'd have no problem playing there if asked (he has been playing left of late and hasn't played third this season). I guess he's being honest, but, man, maybe you want to get your average higher than .200 before you start trying to dictate where you should play.

Meanwhile, Miguel Cabrera complained that he's "done playing hurt." Cabrera is out because of a hamstring issue and was eligible to come off the disabled list Monday, but he has had lingering soreness in his back and hips. He doesn't want to go through what he did last year, when he played through some injuries and hit .249.

"Nobody appreciates you when you play hurt," he said, "so I'm going to take my time and play when I'm good. I played hurt a lot of years here in Detroit. They don't appreciate it."

I'd suggest there are about 30 million reasons how the Tigers actually show their appreciation, and I get that Cabrera didn't like the numbers he put up last season, but I guess the question is: What is good health? Should the face of the franchise be expected to suck it up and play even if he's not 100 percent? Cabrera also is 35; it's possible he'll never really be 100 percent at his age. By the way, this is just the third year of Cabrera's eight-year deal that runs through 2023 -- when he'll make \$32 million at age 40.

Finally ... The Marlins beat the Dodgers again, 6-5. The Marlins are 16-26. The Dodgers are 16-26. You can't predict baseball, my friends.

*** *WEEI.com***

Red Sox 6, Athletics 4: Why Chris Sale hasn't been as dominant this year

Ryan Hannable

Make no mistake about it, Chris Sale is off to a very good start this year.

The left-hander won his fourth game of the year on Wednesday, a 6-4 win over the Athletics, and has a 2.29 ERA, but he just isn't the same pitcher as he was at this point last season.

Wednesday was Sale's 10th start of the season and he's only gone at least seven innings three times. Last year through 10 starts he went at least seven innings in all but one.

There's the big difference.

It's about not having the same precise control and command. The walk totals are pretty similar to what they were this time last year — 14 walks through 10 starts last year compared to 15 walks through 10 starts this year -- but, it's been inconsistent.

His start against the A's was the perfect example, as he went just five innings and allowed two runs on two hits, while walking four and striking out nine. The four walks were the first time he's done that as a member of the Red Sox. Sale had good stuff, he just wasn't as sharp as he could be.

"I'll be honest, I felt this was probably my best fastball I've had all year in terms of the way it was coming out and the velocity behind it," Sale said. "Just wasn't able to pick up on my secondary stuff. I wasn't able to corral it all in. Just command-wise was a little bit off. It happens. You're not going to be able to go out there and pinpoint every time. I'd like to be better than I was tonight, that's for sure."

For the year, it seems like Sale has gotten into a lot more deep counts than last year, and also opposing hitters have extended at-bats with a number of foul balls. Failing to put hitters away is another reason why he's not going as deep into games, and thus not as dominant.

Through 10 games last year he had 101 strikeouts, this year he has 87 strikeouts. He also had eight double-digit strikeout games at this point last season, but only has three this year.

"Yeah, it just seemed like a lot of foul balls," Sale said. "My off-speed stuff wasn't as good as I wanted it to be, especially my breaking ball. I got into some old habits tonight. My arm felt good, I felt loose, I felt strong. Command was obviously erratic, but this is major league baseball. If you go out there with not your best stuff, it's going to be tough. If you give somebody something, they're going to take advantage of it. But my guys were there tonight to pick me up."

Wednesday he made only one real mistake, allowing a two-run home run to Marcus Semien in the fifth, which made it a 3-2 game at the time. It shouldn't have come as much of a surprise, as of the seven homers he's allowed this year five have been in the third time through the order.

Some might say Sale's not going as deep into games as an effort to preserve him for later in the season, but he's still throwing over 100 pitches in almost all of his outings. While it may play some factor, the bigger factor is just a matter of not being as sharp. With 100 pitches last year he could get into the seventh inning and beyond.

While Sale has had a solid year to this point, there's no question he could be even better and it all starts with putting hitters away, thus going deeper in games.

J.D. Martinez has reached base in 21 straight games, which is a career high. He homered in the first inning, his 12th of the season.

Despite agent seeking trade on his behalf, Blake Swihart remains committed to Red Sox

Ryan Hannable

It's clear Blake Swihart is frustrated, but he also made it clear it won't affect how he approaches each day with the Red Sox.

On Tuesday night, his agent expressed to NBC Sports Boston his client wants a trade. Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Swihart didn't deny anything his agent said, but did say he remains focused on his time with the Red Sox.

"I think it was kind of looking out for me," Swihart said of his agent. "That's his job. I just want to let everyone know, I'm still here, I'm focused on being here. I'm going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win."

Swihart has played in just 15 games this season and is batting just .138. Even with Sandy Leon and Christian Vazquez struggling at the plate, Swihart started any games at catcher. In fact, all of his starts have come as the DH.

Manager Alex Cora said Swihart hasn't said anything to him or the team, and Swihart said that wouldn't be his place.

"That's not my job to do that," he said. "I would never go to them and do that. No, I haven't talked to them about it."

A move could be coming in the next week or so when Dustin Pedroia returns to the club, as it seems either he or Brock Holt would need to be taken off the 25-man roster. It's worth noting Holt has options, while Swihart does not.

Blake Swihart seeking trade is news to Alex Cora

Ryan Hannable

The Red Sox' 25th-man, Blake Swihart, has played in just 15 games so far this season and according to his agent, he wants a trade.

"Yes. We've had conversations with the team, and they're aware of how we feel," his agent Brody Scoffield told NBC Sports Boston Tuesday night. "Blake's in a really difficult position. We've got a switch-hitter, offensive impact player, and his bat deserves a chance to be in the lineup."

"Blake's not the type of player that's going to ask or demand a trade [on his own]. He's focused on what's in front of him and happy having a positive impact on the team and the situation at hand. That being said, I don't think we're building any type of trade value, nor helping him progress as a ballplayer, nor is the team really being served by him in this role."

According to manager Alex Cora, Swihart hasn't expressed it with him.

"His agent, I guess you know, he expressed his feelings but he's not the only big leaguer -- first of all I haven't heard it from Blake, and second, it's been an ongoing talk of players asking for trades or whatever throughout the year," Cora said. "[J.T.] Realmuto and [Josh] Harrison and [David] Freese, and the last time I checked, Harrison and Freese are very happy with their team. So it is what it is, you know? But he works, man. He shows up and he knows in advance when he's going to play. I let him know the night before and he's ready to roll."

The Red Sox manager admitted it's been tough trying to find a spot for Swihart in the lineup and he hasn't been able to play the outfield because of J.D. Martinez's preference.

"I think about it everyday, how are we going to do this? I've said it from the get-go, that was honestly the toughest part of the job early — how are we going to do this? It's tough to do it," Cora said. "Whenever it comes down to him playing the outfield or DH'ing, I honestly run it through J.D. first. I say, 'What would you rather do? Do you want to DH or do you want to play left?' You guys know the answer. It's nothing

against Blake, but J.D., he likes to play the outfield. Whenever we have the chance and we have options, we will check with him and if he wants to play the outfield then Blake will DH.”

Once Dustin Pedroia returns to the roster, which is likely in a week or so, the Red Sox will have to make a move with him (he doesn’t have options), or Brock Holt (who does have options).

Alex Cora doesn’t agree with Carson Smith saying over usage contributed to shoulder injury

Ryan Hannable

When speaking about his shoulder injury which happened as a result of throwing his glove in the dugout following his outing Monday, Carson Smith seemed to indicate over usage may have contributed to it.

On Wednesday, Alex Cora was asked about the comment and disagreed.

“I don’t agree with it,” he said. “I don’t agree with it. On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don’t they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way he should’ve told it to us or he should’ve mentioned it. There was a day in New York or Toronto, New York I think, we talked and he said he wasn’t available that day and we stayed away from him.”

Including Monday, Smith pitched five times in a seven-day span, but had the same number of appearances (18) as most of the other relievers.

Cora said he will address Smith's comments with him at some point.

The right-hander was diagnosed with right shoulder subluxation, but it’s feared it’s more serious than that and potentially a season-ender.

While no new information was shared by Cora, WEEL.com’s Rob Bradford reports Smith is slated to go for second opinion in person with Dr. [David] Altchek in New York. His rotator cuff is OK, but they are seeking to get clarification on his labrum.

With Smith out of the mix, it will be up to the rest of the bullpen to step up.

“As far as [Matt] Barnes, [Joe] Kelly, Heath [Hembree], it’s business as usual,” Cora said. “We’ve been mixing and matching the whole season so that’s not going to change. Carson was turning the corner. We felt throwing the ball a lot better the last 10 days, the action of his pitches were great. The only — it wasn’t a mistake — just a pitch down in the zone that Davis hit out of the ballpark. He was great, but the other guys they can do the job. It’s not like he was pitching high leverage, late in the games, high leverage situations, we were working his way after his struggles early in the season.

“But somebody has to step up. It takes more than 25 guys I’ve been saying to win it and we’ve got capable guys of getting outs late in the game.”

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

What we learned from the disagreement between Alex Cora and Carson Smith

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — In a public back and forth between Carson Smith and Alex Cora the last two days, Smith acted as pitchers often do: quiet until it's too late. More than anything else, it's unfortunate.

Cora, meanwhile, positively answered one of the questions that existed when he took the Red Sox’ job: can he establish authority, or will he always be buddy-buddy?

Smith's belief that fatigue contributed to his shoulder subluxation has drawn attention because it suggested misuse by Cora and the Red Sox. After a moment when the pitcher made a very poor choice to slam down his glove in anger, Smith indicated he was predisposed to being hurt. That sounded like he was trying to assign blame elsewhere.

Factually, having just pitched in an outing, Smith was predisposed to being hurt. Any level of fatigue inherently makes an arm more vulnerable. Smith is not wrong on a technical level. His appearance Monday was his sixth in nine days and his third in four days, as well. Fatigue easily could have contributed to the situation.

But the real question is this: was that fatigue unexpected, or somehow against Smith's verbalized wishes, and therefore a mistake on Cora and the staff's part? There's no evidence of that. And if Smith did not speak up about what he may have felt was overuse, then no one is at fault aside from him.

"I don't agree with it. I don't agree with it," Cora said when asked about Smith's usage comments. "On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and [ask] how they feel. And if they don't feel they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. So it caught me by surprise, and if he felt that way, he should have told it to us, he should have mentioned it. Actually there was a day, in New York, or Toronto — ah New York. We talked and he said he wasn't available that day and we stayed away from him."

Here's what needs to be remembered: pitchers are often dishonest when it comes to their physical state. They rarely want to take themselves out of use. They want to be good teammates and contribute as much as possible and generally appear tough. Inside every bullpen, there's always a pitcher who feels underused, and always a pitcher who feels overused. But a lot goes unsaid.

When MassLive.com approached Smith Wednesday about whether he had been overused, Smith didn't back away, saying "I've said what I needed to say."

Smith, then, at a time of high emotion, seemed to be vocalizing a real feeling of his, but one he had not previously shared. He was trying to be a good teammate, and it bit him in the rear end.

"Let's be honest," pitching coach Dana LeVangie said Wednesday afternoon. "A lot of our bullpen guys have been under water for a little bit. So, yeah I mean they've pitched a lot of innings. You know, I don't want to say this loosely, but that's what they do out there, and we're hopefully trying to get him back on track. I mean, again, unfortunately a lot of guys will end up taking the ball when they're not feeling their best, and to a man I can probably say most of those guys, most of our guys do it."

"I don't take anything that he said as a negative. But there's also days where he pitched two in a row and we said, 'Smitty, you're down today.' Like you're an emergency only [option]. We do that with most of the guys. We just knew he had a day off before [Monday]."

Bottom line: Smith should have said something. His use may have been a problem for him, but no one can read his mind.

Meanwhile, the way Cora handled Smith's response is a glimpse into how the manager handles discord: head-on, with a preference for exerting authority rather than catering to a player's feelings.

The first words Cora said when asked about Smith's usage — "I don't agree with it" — were pointed and direct. He repeated them, too.

Said another way: I, the manager, think you, the player, are wrong.

Then, when Cora was asked if he had talked to Smith about it yet: "Nah."

One word, no explanation. Implication: he's the boss. No explanation needed, apparently.

Cora was asked if he plans to speak to Smith, and Cora said he did. At the same time, Cora also made clear that there were other things he prioritized first rather than an upset reliever who hurt himself.

“We will [talk],” Cora said. “I guess, today, honestly, today was a busy day from getting up at 5:30 in the morning to coming all the way here. I mean, yeah. [My young twins] were bad today. Yeah. Oh God. I mean, I was feeding them for lunch. And I quit. Like dude, I went to [my girlfriend] Angelica, like, ‘Hey, I gotta get to the ballpark.’ It’s been a tough one today. But yeah we’ll talk. We’ll talk, yeah.”

Life does happen, even for a baseball manager. Smith and Cora both approached everything with what seemed like honesty. And if you look closely, there’s nothing really amiss. Smith probably feels an immense amount of guilt. It’s a terrible situation for him. He appeared on the brink of tears speaking to reporters on Tuesday.

If he really thinks Cora is the reason he is hurt right now, Smith is misguided, and he’ll see that at some point. Cora, meanwhile, showed that his approach to conflict management will not always be appeasement or aversion.

*** *NESN.com***

Red Sox Notes: Chris Sale Praises Teammates After Five-Inning Outing

Lauren Campbell

Chris Sale may not have given the Boston Red Sox nine innings, but the lefty did give the team nine strikeouts Wednesday night.

Sale didn’t have his best stuff on the mound Wednesday, as he struggled with his command and relieved too much on his fastball. But he had help from J.D. Martinez and Xander Bogaerts, who each homered in the 6-4 victory over the Oakland Athletics at Fenway Park.

Wednesday’s victory was a full-team effort as the bullpen picked up the game in the sixth inning after Sale threw at least 20 pitches in three of his five innings of work. He exited having thrown 102 pitches while giving up two runs in those five frames.

The ace had high praise for his team after the game, saying they had his back tonight.

“My guys picked me up tonight (and) allowed me to kind of have a misstep,” Sale said after the game, as seen on NESN’s postgame coverage. “Four walks is not my game, it’s not who I am. But when you have a night like tonight, I was able to lean on my guys.”

Sale said although it wasn’t his best outing, he felt strong on the mound and thought his fastball was the best it’s been all year, but his secondary pitches were lacking.

“(My) off-speed stuff wasn’t as good as I wanted it to be, especially my breaking ball,” Sale said. “Command-wise (I) was a little bit off. I’d like to better than tonight, that’s for sure.”

Here are some other notes from Thursday’s Red Sox-Athletics game:

— With the victory, Boston sits just a half game back of the New York Yankees for the top spot in the American League East. The 29 wins for the Sox, however, leads Major League Baseball.

— Mookie Betts looked as if he tweaked his leg during Matt Joyce’s home run in the seventh, but he stayed in the game and manager Alex Cora said the star outfielder is OK.

— With nine K's Wednesday night, Sale now has 87 strikeouts on the season.

— Rafael Devers became the 15th player in Red Sox history to appear in 100 games before turning 22. He joins some pretty elite company, including Dwight Evans, Carl Yastrzemski, Ted Williams Babe Ruth and current teammate Bogaerts.

— Craig Kimbrel has allowed four home runs through 17 1/3 innings.

— The Red Sox are 17-3 on the season when they score the first run.

Red Sox Wrap: Boston Avoids Being Swept With 6-4 Victory Over Athletics

Lauren Campbell

The Boston Red Sox refuse to be swept this season.

Boston has struggled with Oakland Athletics this season, as they entered the game with a 1-4 record against the American League West club after dropping the first two games of the current three-game series.

But with five strong innings from Chris Sale and home runs from J.D. Martinez and Xander Bogaerts, the Red Sox were able to secure a 6-4 win in the rubber match.

With the win, the Red Sox climb to 29-14, while the A's fall to 21-22.

Here's how it all went down:

GAME IN A WORD

Refreshing.

It was a full-team effort Wednesday, as the Red Sox executed in every aspect of the game to conquer an A's team that had given them fits all season.

ON THE BUMP

— Sale lasted only five innings on the night, but he made them count, fanning nine batters in the process.

Sale didn't have his best command Wednesday, but he only surrendered one hit through the first four innings — an infield single by Marcus Semien to lead off the game. The second hit he gave up came four innings later and was a little louder, as Semien cranked a two-run home run in the fifth to cut Boston's lead to 3-2.

The lefty finished the fifth before manager Alex Cora went to the bullpen due to Sale having thrown 102 pitches on the night.

— Matt Barnes took the mound in relief of Sale in the sixth and pitched a scoreless frame that included two strikeouts.

— Heath Hembree came in for the seventh and didn't have quite the luck Barnes did. The right-handed reliever surrendered a solo shot to Matt Joyce that just made it into the Boston bullpen to cut the Red Sox's lead to three.

— Joe Kelly recorded a scoreless eighth inning.

— Craig Kimbrel came in for the ninth and gave up a home run to Matt Olson to begin the inning, but he retired the next three batters in order.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— The Red Sox plated three runs in the first, two of them coming as a result of Martinez's 12th home run of the season.

Mookie Betts led the inning off with a double and Andrew Benintendi ripped a single to right. Hanley Ramirez grounded into a fielder's choice to push Betts across the plate for the 1-0 lead.

That's when Martinez smashed his two-run homer into the stands in center field.

— Oakland appeared to be on the comeback trail, but the Sox put them to bed in the sixth when Bogaerts hammered a three-run home run over the Green Monster to make it 6-2.

Boston threatened to do more damage in the frame, putting two on with two out and Betts at the dish. The right fielder hit the ball down the right field line, but A's outfielder Stephen Piscotty made a highlight-reel catch that landed him in the first row of the stands.

— Mitch Moreland and Rafael Devers both went hitless on the night.

UP NEXT

Boston will welcome the Baltimore Orioles to Fenway Park on Thursday for a four-game set. David Price will take the hill and he's set to oppose Kevin Gausman. First pitch is slated for 7:10 p.m. ET.

*** *The Boston Sports Journal***

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 6, A's 4 – Power at the plate and on the mound

Sean McAdam

HEADLINES

A's make Sale work — and only for five innings: The A's can be relentless at the plate, fouling off pitches by the bucketful and extending at-bats. Just ask Chris Sale. He needed 102 pitches just to get through five innings, even though he gave up just two hits while striking out nine. (Full disclosure: he also walked a season-high four, one that came at the end of a 12-pitch wrestling match with Khris Davis.). "It seemed like a lot of foul balls," said Sale. "My off-speed wasn't as good as I wanted it to be, especially my breaking ball. But I felt good, felt loose, felt strong. Command was obviously erratic, but this is major league baseball — you go out there without your best stuff and it's going to be tough." As much as Sale had trouble with his secondary pitches, his fastball was perhaps the best he's had this season. He routinely sat at 95-96 mph and had no trouble gearing up to 97 mph.

Bogaerts back in the power game: Last season, Bogaerts — hampered by a hand injury in the second half and too passive at the plate for much of the season — saw a big dip in his power numbers, recording just 10 homers in 148 games. This year, after just 27 games played (he missed time with a broken bone in his foot), Bogaerts already has five homers in 27 games. His three-run homer in the sixth was the biggest hit of the night and evidence that he's a different hitter than he was a year ago.

"I feel good," said Bogaerts. "It's a new year. I've made some adjustments." Chief among them is a readiness to swing earlier in the count at pitches in the strike zone. That, too, remains a work in progress. "Not yet," said a smiling Bogaerts whether was now comfortable with his new approach. "Not yet. But hopefully, I'll get there." You wouldn't know it from the numbers: Bogaerts is slashing .306/.339/.550.

Homers off Kimbrel raising a flag? Craig Kimbrel inherited a three-run lead and posted his 12th save of the season, but allowed a solo homer to Matt Olson that narrowed the Red Sox lead from three to two. He's allowed just 10 hits all season, but four of them have been homers. That's obviously a troubling stat for a closer, where the margin for error is, by definition, not great. By contrast, last season Kimbrel allowed only seven homers all season. Perhaps we're finally seeing the result of Kimbrel essentially missing all of spring training, due to his daughter's heart condition and surgery. He threw plenty on the side to maintain arm strength, but it's not the same as pitching in game conditions and it could be that his command has yet to be fine-tuned. "One thing's for sure — we feel the fastball is coming back," said Alex Cora. "We can see the velocity is up and that's a good sign."

TURNING POINT

Things got a little tight after Sale allowed the two-run homer in the fifth, but in the sixth, the Sox restored order with a three-run shot from Xander Bogaerts, giving the Sox a four-run lead.

TWO UP

J.D. Martinez: So what else is new? Another homer — his third in the last four games and seventh in his last 14 — put the Sox up 3-0 in the first inning. He also walked, scored two runs and enjoyed his 12th multi-RBI game this season.

Matt Barnes: Taking over for Sale in the sixth, he came on and threw strikes — lots of them — and picked up two strikeouts in a scoreless inning.

ONE DOWN

Mitch Moreland: A rare off night for a guy who has been otherwise red-hot. Moreland struck out three times and was hitless in four plate appearances. It happens.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"Four walks, that's not my game. That's not who I am. Obviously, you want to be better than that." — Sale, who issued a season-high four walks.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Red Sox scored three runs in the first inning, marking the fourth time they've done that this year.

Since April 7, the Red Sox have hit 55 homers, the second-highest team total in that span.

Martinez homered for the seventh time in his last 14 games.

Sale became the second Red Sox pitcher since 1991 to allow three runs or fewer in each of his first 10 starts.

Sale has 36 strikeouts in his last three starts, covering 21 innings.

Bogaerts is hitting .349 at Fenway this season.

Andrew Benintendi extended his hitting streak to nine games.

UP NEXT

Now that the A's have left town, the Red Sox begin a four-game series with the Orioles, starting with Thursday's game, a makeup from the rainout on Patriots Day. LHP David Price (3-4, 4.89) vs. RHP Kevin Gausman (3-2, 3.18) is the first pitching matchup.

McAdam: Swihart, Sox backed into corner, and other clubs not inclined to help out

Sean McAdam

There may be few gestures in baseball that move the needle less than a disgruntled agent asking a team to trade his under-utilized client/player, so the fact that Brodie Scoffield told NBCSportsBoston he's requested the Red Sox move Blake Swihart couldn't be, in practical terms, less significant.

First, executives like, in this case, Dave Dombrowski, aren't in the business of placating everyone unhappy about roles or playing time — they're in the business of winning games. To put the former ahead of the latter is to risk failure.

Second, the last thing someone like Dombrowski wants is to be told what to do by an agent. Acquiescing to such a demand makes an executive look weak, and sends the wrong message to the rest of the clubhouse: Don't like things? Have your agent demand a trade. It worked for Swihart!

Finally, there's the matter of priorities. Dombrowski, in meeting with the media to discuss the Carson Smith fiasco Tuesday, went out of his way to identify Swihart as "the 25th player on the roster." In other words, Dombrowski has other things on his plate beyond mollifying the team's least-used player.

However, there does seem to be a reckoning on the horizon for the Red Sox and Swihart, one that could take place as soon as Dustin Pedroia is ready to be activated. To clear room on the roster, the Sox could maintain control over Swihart by sending Brock Holt to Pawtucket, since Holt has options and Swihart does not.

Then again, since Holt is playing more than Swihart with more than twice as many at-bats (despite spending several weeks on the DL with a hamstring strain), that would suggest the Sox regard Holt as a more essential roster piece

Either way, the Red Sox are known to have at least recognized the roster squeeze they have on their hands, and, according to a baseball source, through some of their scouts and evaluators in the field, have made it known Swihart could be had for the right price.

And that's where things get tricky.

"They have zero bargaining power," said an evaluator from a team which has had some internal discussions about Swihart. "I mean, what can they ask for? You read and hear about what they say about it him and they're acting like he's the next coming of Johnny Bench. Well, if that's the case, how come he's stuck behind Brock Holt (as a utility piece)? And if he's such a great catcher, how come he's not even catching once a week? Is Sandy Leon that good that Swihart can't get playing time?"

"They know the player better than anyone and by their actions, they're telling me that he's not good enough to play on their team. It's a weird situation — they supposedly think so highly of him, and yet, he's not playing."

Therein lies the Red Sox dilemma. If they do deal him, they'd like to market Swihart as a catcher — a position traditionally thin across the game — to maximize his value. But Swihart had caught a grand total of 65 innings at the big league level since the start of 2016, and his catching skills are largely unknown.

"If (my club) put me on him, I couldn't even evaluate him (behind the plate)," said a scout with a National League team, "because he never plays."

On paper, Swihart has other skills. He's versatile enough to play first and left field, and could handle third base if needed. He switch-hits, which adds to his appeal, and he's athletic with far-better-than-average speed for a catcher. But again, Swihart has just 32 plate appearances and a grand total of 23 innings played at positions other than catcher.

It's one thing to be thought of as versatile; it's another altogether to demonstrate it.

The timing isn't optimal, either. Traditionally, trade talk doesn't begin to percolate until after the annual amateur draft, which is still nearly three weeks away. And with Pedroia's activation drawing closer by the day, there's a sense of urgency for the Red Sox — if not other teams.

"They're on the clock and they have to do something," said a baseball source. "It's the worst possible time to try to move this kid. They should have done it in spring training, when he had played well and teams had a chance to watch him."

Finally, there's the fact that Swihart is out of options, which further reduces their leverage. Other clubs understand the Sox have to take what they can, since, were he to be designated for assignment, he could be claimed on waivers with no player cost to the claiming team.

Said the evaluator: "I would be shocked if they got (an organization's) Top 5 or even Top 10 prospect for him. Or a major league bullpen piece — which I would presume they'd be after — better than what they have now. I don't see a winning team or a team in the playoff hunt giving up someone from their big league roster who could pitch the seventh or eighth for the Red Sox. Maybe a team that's rebuilding, like the Reds or the White Sox might have some interest and would be willing to play the long game. But again, what would they be willing to give up?"

Final: Red Sox 6, A's 4 — Pitching and multi-run homers

Sean McAdam

Chris Sale and two multi-run homers proved to be a winning formula for the Red Sox, who overpowered the Oakland A's 6-4 and in the process, avoided being swept in a series for the first time this season.

J.D. Martinez drove a pitch from A's starter Trevor Cahill to center in the first with Andrew Benintendi on base. Xander Bogaerts later connected off reliever Ryan Dull with two on board in the sixth.

Sale improved to 4-1 with five innings of work, allowing two runs on two hits. He struck out nine, but also walked a season-high four.

Four Red Sox relievers each took an inning each the rest of the way, with Craig Kimbrel netting his 12th save despite yielding a solo homer to Matt Olson.

WHO: Red Sox vs. Oakland A's

WHERE: Fenway Park

WHEN: 7:10 p.m.

WHAT'S UP: The A's seem to have the Red Sox' number this season, beating them four times in five games, including the first two games of this series. The Sox returned from a long road trip with a winning record and having won three of the final games on the trip, but have started this homestand with two straight defeats, thanks to Oakland. At least the Sox have Chris Sale going as they attempt to avoid a sleep, but it would help if the Sox' offense got re-ignited, too.

STARTING PITCHERS: LHP Chris Sale (3-1, 2.17) vs. RHP Trevor Cahill (1-1, 2.25).

TV/RADIO: NESN/WEEI 93.7 FM

LINEUPS

IN-GAME OBSERVATIONS

9:23 It would seem that the power has been turned back on for Xander Bogaerts. That was his fifth homer of the season in just 27 games. Last season, with a hand injury that affected him for the second half of the season, he hit 10 in 148 games played.

8:42 Sale left a four-seamer up in the zone for Marcus Semien, who hit it over everything in left to cut the Red Sox' lead to one run. Strange night for Sale: he's got nine strikeouts and had allowed only one hit

before the homer in the fifth. But he's also walked four — including the No. 8 hitter twice. Also, not surprisingly, he's thrown 102 pitches through five.

8:01 That's just the second time in 10 attempts that Mookie Betts has been cut down stealing — and it took a pitch-out by the A's to make it happen.

7:52 Chris Sale would seem to be on one of those “strikeout runs” of his. After fanning 12 in Texas and tying a career high with 15 in his last start in Toronto, he has five through the first two innings. Over last 18 innings: 29 strikeouts. Sale getting his slider in proper working order is a major factor.

7:37 Four of the last five homers hit by J.D. Martinez have been to the opposite field, where Martinez is known to have great power. But tonight's shot was a towering shot to dead center, hitting just below — and slightly to the left — of the flag pole. That's seven homers in his last 14 games.

RED SOX

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

A's

Semien SS
Canha CF
Lowrie 2B
Davis DH
Chapman 3B
Olson 1B
Piscotty RF
Pinder LF
Lucroy C

NEWS AND NOTES

Carson Smith suggestion Tuesday that his shoulder subluxation — the result of him throwing his glove in frustration in the dugout Monday night — might have been the result of “fatigue” brought on from overuse. Smith said: “I think fatigue played a factor with my shoulder and my shoulder just couldn't handle it...I've thrown a lot lately and I think my arm was just tired.” Alex Cora disputed that assertion Wednesday. “I don't agree with it,” said Cora. “On a daily basis, we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't feel they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise; if he felt that way, he should have told us. Their input is very important to our decision-making. There have been some days that he felt he wasn't available and there were others when he was available.” Smith had made 18 appearance covering 14.1 innings. That workload ranked him behind Joe Kelly (19.1 innings), Matt Barnes (17.2 innings) and Heath Hembree (19.1 innings) among those pitchers who had been used in high-leverage situations. Smith plans to see Dr. David Atlchek in New York for a second opinion Thursday. Dustin Pedroia, who is in the middle of a rehab assignment, was off Wednesday at Pawtucket played an 11 a.m. game and the team is off Thursday. When they resume play Friday, bad weather is forecast, so the Sox could send Pedroia to another minor league affiliate to continue to get innings and games in. “He needs repetitions,” said Cora. “For me, it really doesn't matter the (level of) pitching he faces. It's more about playing defense and coming back and doing it for seven innings, playing back-to-back days, that matters.”

RHP Austin Maddox (shoulder) could be sent on a rehab assignment later in the week.

*** *The Athletic***

McCaffrey: Honeymoon may be over for Alex Cora, but Red Sox manager fighting through it

Jen McCaffrey

The honeymoon is over for Alex Cora.

After a remarkable 17-2 start, the Red Sox have run into a 12-12 stretch that has left them in second place in the AL East. But it's not just the inevitable leveling off that's made the last few weeks so different.

Controversies have arrived, as they always seem to in Boston.

Last week's drama entailed David Price being diagnosed with a mild form of carpal tunnel syndrome after missing a start in a key series in New York. Cora even had to go to bat for Price and say that he didn't think the starter's fondness for the video game Fortnite was to blame. The lefty pitched well in Toronto's dome over the weekend, but his situation remains disconcerting.

This week, reliever Carson Smith landed on the disabled list with a potential season-ending injury after throwing his glove in anger in the dugout and dislocating his shoulder.

Cora has been putting out fires for Price and Smith as issues about playing time for Blake Swihart, Jackie Bradley Jr., Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon smolder in the background.

The rookie manager has taken it all in stride so far, but as the distractions and problems mount, the first-year manager's mettle will surely be tested.

Smith added insult to injury, quite literally, on Tuesday after telling reporters he thought overuse might have contributed to his shoulder injury.

"I throw my glove every day playing catch," Smith said. "It's part of my warmup routine, going through my throwing motion, I throw my glove. Actually usually hold on to it, sometimes I accidentally release it. I think it was a freak accident. I think fatigue played a factor and my shoulder just couldn't handle it."

Smith had Tommy John surgery in May 2016 and missed most of last season before returning in September with eight appearances allowing one run. This spring, he was finally suppose to be healthy. In 18 appearances, he'd posted a 3.77 ERA.

"I think my shoulder's tired in general," Smith said. "Just from pitching. I've thrown a lot lately and I think my arm was just tired."

Cora wasn't thrilled with Smith's assertion that he'd been mismanaged or overworked.

"I don't agree with it," Cora said. "On a daily basis we talk to pitchers and how they feel. If they don't think they can pitch that day, we stay away from them. It caught me by surprise. If he felt that way he should've told it to us or he should've mentioned it. There was a day in New York or Toronto, New York I think, we talked and he said he wasn't available that day and we stayed away from him."

Smith is still undergoing tests to determine how severely his shoulder is injured. Either way the optics of the injury are not good.

“All the relievers, we talk to them on a daily basis, ‘Where you guys at?’” Cora said. “And we have information too, but their input is very important to our decision making and there’s been some days that he felt that he wasn’t available and there’s others that he was available.”

Meanwhile, on Wednesday the agent for Blake Swihart, Brodie Scoffield, told NBC Sports Boston that his client should be traded because of lack of playing time.

Swihart told reporters before Wednesday’s game that he was aware of his agent’s request, but that he’s still committed to the Red Sox.

“I just want to let everyone know, I’m still here, I’m focused on being here,” he said. “I’m going to work my tail off to keep doing what I can do to help this team win.”

The Swihart situation has been a challenge for the 26-year-old as much as it has been for Cora.

“I’ve said it from the get-go, that was honestly the toughest part of the job early — how are we going to do this? It’s tough to do it,” Cora said of finding time for Swihart. “Whenever it comes down to him playing the outfield or DH’ing, I honestly run it through J.D. first. I say, ‘What would you rather do? Do you want to DH or do you want to play left?’ You guys know the answer. It’s nothing against Blake, but J.D., he likes to play the outfield. Whenever we have the chance and we have options, we will check with him and if he wants to play the outfield then Blake will DH.”

Cora has justified playing Leon and Vazquez, despite the fact each is hitting under .200 with an OPS below .500, because of the starters’ comfort with the catchers.

He’s finding less of a reason to justify putting Bradley in the lineup, though. The outfielder has only appeared in three of the last nine games while hitting .171 with a .519 OPS.

“Work in progress,” Cora said after Bradley’s most recent game in Toronto over the weekend. “We need him to make contact, let’s be honest.”

For Cora, the shine of those first few weeks has faded. He knew it wasn’t always going to be as easy as when the wins were piling up, and he could do no wrong. He even said as much in the third week of the season when the Yankees were in town.

“I know there’s going to be good days, bad days and horrible days,” he said at the time. “I know that. Hopefully more good days than horrible ones.”

Right now he’s feeling his way through the latter and figuring it out as he goes.

Jennings: Why Red Sox GM Dave Dombrowski isn’t going to add a bullpen arm

Chad Jennings

One by one, baseballs were tossed out of the stands and into the waiting palm of an in-the-moment star. Joe Kelly leaned casually against the short wall outside the Red Sox dugout on Wednesday, making small talk, cracking a few jokes, and signing whatever came his way.

There were more than a dozen baseballs, at least one glove, and two Joe Kelly Fight Club t-shirts.

After all the autographs were signed and more than a few photographs taken, Kelly retreated down the stairs, through the clubhouse door, and back into relative obscurity.

“I think he’s one of the better guys in Major League bullpens late in the game at this point,” Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said. “I don’t know why people don’t look at him as

that. If you look at his numbers, they're strong. If you look at his stuff, it's strong. We look at him as a premium (reliever)."

And that, Dombrowski said, is one of the reasons he disagrees that the Red Sox desperately need bullpen help this season, even after Carson Smith's self-inflicted injury Monday night. At the very least, he said, such an argument is premature.

In a conversation with *The Athletic*, Dombrowski left open the possibility of adding a reliever at the trade deadline but insisted his current batch of relievers is better than people think.

"Maybe other people don't (rate them as highly)," Dombrowski said. "We like Joe Kelly. We like Matt Barnes. If they don't like them, that's up to them. But we like those guys. And we think Tyler Thornburg (will be back soon)."

The Red Sox rank fourth in the American League in bullpen WHIP, ERA and opponents' batting average. They're third in strikeouts and opponents' OPS. The only American League team that's been significantly better out of the pen is the Astros.

Some of that success is due to Craig Kimbrel, who's once again among the most effective and dominant closers in the game. But Kelly has been nearly as good.

It doesn't readily show up in the numbers because of his Opening Day debacle – four earned runs in one-third of an inning – but since then, Kelly has pitched 19 innings and allowed just one run. He's struck out 21, walked four, and opponents have hit just .154 against him. Lefties in particular have been hopeless with two hits in 33 at-bats against Kelly this season.

Since Opening Day, no American League reliever with more than 10 appearances has a lower ERA or lower opponents' OPS, and only two – Kimbrel and Royals closer Kelvin Herrera – have allowed fewer base runners per nine innings.

In Kelly, the Red Sox might already have one of the best setup men in baseball, but he happens to be more famous for impersonating a bumbling reporter in spring training and for plunking Yankees first baseman Tyler Austin with a fastball last month than for his on-field performance.

Even with Kelly and Kimbrel, though, the potential impact of another premium reliever becomes hard to ignore when, in the past three series, the bullpen has blown two winnable games at Yankee Stadium, coughed up an extra-inning, walk-off loss in Toronto, and sent Smith to the disabled list in the middle of back-to-back home losses to the middling Athletics.

"Every time you give up a run in your bullpen, people make the statement about how (your team needs relief help)," Dombrowski said. "The reality is, overall, our bullpen has been very good."

And the bullpen was very good last year as well. The 2017 Red Sox ranked fourth in the majors in bullpen ERA. The relievers had the third-most strikeouts, the third-fewest walks, and the fifth-best WHIP. According to *MLB Trade Rumors*, 46 relief pitchers signed Major League contracts this winter — not counting the likes of Tyler Clippard and John Axford, who settled for minor league deals but wound up in key major league roles – but not one of them landed in Boston.

The Red Sox spent their money on hitters (J.D. Martinez, Eduardo Nunez and Mitch Moreland) and they'd already used much of their prospect capital on pitching (most notably to acquire Chris Sale the year before) so Dombrowski let a market flush with relievers go untouched.

"We lost one guy, really, in Addison Reed, who did a very nice job for us for a couple of months," Dombrowski said. "We thought that Kelly and Barnes could continue to take steps forward, and we already had Carson Smith and Thornburg coming back. You can only have so many arms in the bullpen."

Kelly and Barnes have pitched well – Barnes ranks sixth among American League relievers in opponents' batting average; though his walks are high – and Smith was looking like a difference maker before he slammed his glove and dislocated his shoulder on Monday night.

Now, the team is waiting for Thornburg, whom Dombrowski acquired in a high-profile trade last winter, only to lose him months later because of thoracic outlet syndrome. Thornburg still hasn't thrown a big league pitch for the Red Sox, but he was excellent for the Brewers in 2016, and his rehab outings have been encouraging the past month.

Disappointing results the past two times out led the Red Sox to give him a few days off – they believed fatigue was the culprit – but Thornburg is scheduled to pitch again on Friday, and he could return by the end of the month. Hector Velazquez could also return from the disabled list relatively soon, and he was pitching well as a multi-inning reliever before his lower-back injury.

Kimbrel. Kelly. Barnes. Thornburg. Velazquez. That's five of seven spots in the bullpen, with out-of-options Brian Johnson and Heath Hembree also in the mix along with spring training surprise Bobby Poyner and, eventually, Austin Maddox, who's currently rehabbing his way back from a shoulder injury but pitched well enough to make the playoff roster last season.

Dombrowski cited that depth as a reason he's not concerned in the wake of the Smith injury. He compared the bullpen situation to the rotation, which some argued he needed to supplement this winter despite having no fewer than eight potential big league starters already on the roster.

"Same thing," Dombrowski said. "Unless you spend the big money to get a setup guy, and we felt comfortable with the guys (in house)."

Dombrowski did grant this much: "You can have injuries and all of a sudden you don't have depth or your depth is tested. I just don't know where you put all the guys (otherwise)."

Of course, that depth could change. Dombrowski acknowledged as much. If Thornburg suffers a setback or doesn't pitch as well as expected; if Kelly or Barnes get hurt or lose effectiveness; if the less proven options don't pan out – it's entirely possible the Red Sox will be back in the market for a relief pitcher come the trade deadline.

Dombrowski has been running the Red Sox' baseball operations for two full seasons, and each year he's traded for at least one reliever at the deadline. He got Brad Ziegler and Fernando Abad in 2016, and he got Reed in 2017. Ziegler and Reed pitched particularly well, and neither cost an especially high-end prospect.

"Traditionally, that's an area you can address (mid-season)," Dombrowski said. "We'll see at that particular time, but I'm not saying what we are or are not going to do."

He also would not elaborate on his bullpen construction philosophy. It seems telling that since coming to the Red Sox in August 2015, Dombrowski has made major trades for relievers, he's converted starters into relievers, he's promoted relief arms straight from Double-A, and he's been patient through lengthy reliever rehab programs, but he has yet to sign a single big-money free agent for the bullpen.

He has not ignored the bullpen – far from it – but he has not spent on free agent relievers the way so many others have in recent years.

"You pick and choose where you put your dollars," Dombrowski said. "A couple of years ago, people (in the media) were saying how unwise it was to spend big money on bullpen people. That was a trend a couple of years ago. And then this year, a lot of people spent it there. ... One winter it's a smart decision. The other winter, it's not."

The current thinking — with plenty of recent justification — seems to be that the Red Sox need help in the bullpen. But Dombrowski's official line is that he believes there's enough bullpen depth — and enough talent for bullpen impact — to stand pat.

"You never have enough depth, and you wish you had more all the time," Dombrowski said. "But that is the reality of the situation is you can only have so many guys."

And these are the Red Sox' guys until further notice.

* *The San Francisco Chronicle*

No sweep in Boston for A's, but Stephen Piscotty makes great catch

Susan Slusser

BOSTON — As well as the A's have played against the Red Sox this season, it's still tough to go into Fenway Park and pull off a sweep, especially with Chris Sale on the mound for the home team.

Oakland couldn't overcome Sale, nor a pair of three-run innings by the Red Sox, falling 6-4 on Wednesday. But the A's took the series two games to one and already had the season series sewn up, winning four of the six games.

"I don't know what they thought about us before," A's shortstop Marcus Semien said, "but I'm sure they respect us now."

For the second night in a row, Stephen Piscotty provided Oakland's top highlight. On Tuesday, Piscotty delivered an emotional moment, homering in his first at-bat following his mother's funeral Monday and holding his hand over his heart, then tapping his chest and looking skyward as he scored.

On Wednesday, Piscotty turned in an extraordinary catch in the sixth inning, racing toward the stands along the right-field wall, hauling in a foul ball just as he reached the seats and then falling headfirst into the crowd, flipping upside down.

"I felt like I had a good jump on it, I could get there, it was just a matter of figuring out that wall," Piscotty said. "I haven't played here much. I kind of got lucky, honestly, sort of threw my glove up there and was able to not get hurt and make the catch."

Piscotty emerged holding up the ball — a couple of fans even helped him up and told him, "Good catch." But the call was initially ruled no catch. After a replay review, the inning ended, the phenomenal effort officially in the books.

"That was amazing," manager Bob Melvin said. "I saw him go in the stands; I wasn't sure if it was in his glove or not. Great play, as good as you'll see."

Trevor Cahill, just off a 10-day stay on the disabled list with an elbow impingement, wasn't sharp at the start, allowing back-to-back singles, a run-scoring grounder and then a two-run homer by J.D. Martinez in the first. Cahill said his sights were a little off on his changeup — it was low, so he adjusted up, and left one too far up to Martinez.

Cahill threw 35 pitches in the inning, a lot for a player coming back from an injury, but he settled in well from there, allowing two hits over the next four innings. Cahill retired nine in a row before leaving after the fifth.

"We started mixing in more sinkers and sliders," Cahill said, adding that catcher Jonathan Lucroy did "a good job, that's what he does, of getting me through the game when I didn't have my best stuff."

Ryan Dull took over and had a sixth inning much like Cahill's first, giving up an infield single, a walk and a three-run homer by Xander Bogaerts.

Oakland's runs also came on homers, but the A's didn't have as much success filling the bases beforehand. Semien hit a two-run shot off Sale in the fifth — his second off Sale in 12 career at-bats — Matt Joyce hit a pinch-hit solo homer off Heath Hembree in the seventh and Matt Olson a solo homer off Craig Kimbrel in the ninth.

Sale (4-1) has allowed no more than three runs in each of his 10 starts this season — and Cahill has allowed no more than three earned runs in any of his five starts.

With Cahill coming off the DL, outfielder Jake Smolinski was sent down to Triple-A Nashville, but Melvin said Smolinski was “realistic” about the decision.

“Jake wants to play,” Melvin said. “He knew it was coming, and he wants to go get some at-bats and work his way back here, like he has many times.”

Smolinski was batting .118 with no homers and two RBIs in 16 games, and with Mark Canha's ability to play center field, Smolinski's playing time shrunk. He appeared in three games in May.

With Smolinski going to Nashville to play every day, the A's released outfielder Slade Heathcott this week. Heathcott was batting .266 at Nashville.

*** *The Oakland Tribune***

A's unable to complete sweep in loss to Red Sox

Martin Gallegos

BOSTON — The A's managed to chase Red Sox ace Chris Sale out of the game earlier than usual, but Boston's bullpen was a riddle the A's could not solve.

After Sale departed the game after just five innings with 102 pitches, the A's combined for just three hits against Red Sox relievers as they fell 6-4 in Wednesday's series finale.

Returning from the disabled list for his first start since May 5, Cahill had a nightmarish first inning that saw him throw 35 pitches as he allowed three runs, including a two-run homer to J.D. Martinez. Combined with it being his first outing after dealing with a right elbow impingement, it looked like it would be a short night for the right-hander. But he recovered nicely.

Cahill completed five innings, allowing just two hits after the first, ending up allowing three runs on five hits with a walk and one strikeout to leave with the A's still in the game only down 3-2.

“It was a little bit more of a struggle. My stuff wasn't as sharp,” Cahill said. “The first inning was rough. I threw a little bit more sliders than I threw last outing. After a first inning like that, I was just trying to keep the team in the game. The offense did a good job against Sale.”

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Although Cahill found a way to settle down a tough Red Sox lineup for a while, Ryan Dull seemed to wake up the beast in the sixth.

Allowing the first two runners of the inning to reach, Dull surrendered a three-run bomb to Xander Bogaerts that traveled over the green monster to give the Red Sox a commanding four-run lead.

All of the A's (21-22) runs came on homers, with Marcus Semien crushing a two-run shot off Sale in the fifth, and Matt Joyce and Matt Olson adding solo homers in the seventh and ninth. Olson's homer in the ninth of Craig Kimbrel cut Boston's lead to 6-4, but the closer recovered the record the final three outs for the save, helping the Red Sox avoid a sweep.

Even in defeat, the A's battled to the end as they finished the season series 4-2 against Boston. The two teams might be on different levels when it comes to playoff aspirations right now, but having played the Red Sox as close as they did this year, the A's feel they'll be held in a higher regard by the powerhouse club going forward.

"I don't know what they thought about us before, but I'm sure they respect us now," Semien said. "We just need to carry that over, no matter who we play. This is one of the best teams in the league, so just continue to do what he did."

The A's may have lost, but Stephen Piscotty made one of the best catches you'll see this season.

With the Red Sox (29-14) already having scored three runs in the sixth and threatening for more, Piscotty raced after fly ball by Mookie Betts in foul territory near the right field wall and made a terrific catch as he flipped over the wall and into the seats. He stood up and held the ball in the air while he was still in the stands to show he had caught it.

The play was actually ruled a foul ball at first, but with Piscotty confident that he caught the ball, the A's decided to challenge the call. It took less than a minute for the umpires to see Piscotty had made the catch before disappearing into the crowd."

"I felt like I had a good jump on it and I could get there, it was just a matter of figuring out that wall," Piscotty said. "Kind of got lucky, honestly. I just threw my glove up there trying not to get hurt and made the catch."

A'S WITHOUT MAXWELL IN TORONTO

Bruce Maxwell's legal issues will not allow him to travel with the A's to Canada.

Still yet to be sentenced for an incident last October in which he was arrested for allegedly pulling a gun on a food delivery driver, Maxwell is barred from traveling to Canada under the country's immigration guidelines.

Maxwell will be placed on MLB's restricted list, which can be used for players who are unavailable to play due to personal or legal issues, during the team's four game series against the Blue Jays. Josh Phegley will be called up from Triple-A Nashville to join the A's in Toronto and take Maxwell's place on the roster during the series.

*** *Associated Press***

Red Sox avoid sweep with 6-4 win over A's

BOSTON -- Xander Bogaerts loves watching from the on-deck circle and learning what J.D. Martinez does at the plate.

Bogaerts' start this season has been quite impressive, too.

The Red Sox shortstop hit a three-run homer, Martinez added a two-run shot and Boston avoided its first series sweep this season with a 6-4 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday night.

"It's pretty impressive what he does when you're behind looking at him," Bogaerts said. "Normally I'm a guy who gets to the on-deck circle a little bit later. I've got to get there early if he swings at the first pitch and gets a hit. He hits some bombs on the first pitch."

Signed as free agent to a \$110-million, five-year contract during spring training, Martinez is hitting mainly in the cleanup spot and has a .344 average with 12 homers and 36 RBI. Bogaerts, who spent some time on the disabled list with an injured left ankle, is batting .306 with five homers and 21 RBI.

Chris Sale (4-1) gave up just two runs and two hits in five innings, striking out nine and walking four -- his most bases on balls since also allowing four on August 31, 2016.

"Four walks, that's not my game," Sale said. "That's not who I am. Obviously, you want to be better than that. Anytime your bullpen throws almost as many innings as you do, that's not what you're looking for."

Craig Kimbrel, the fourth reliever, got the final three outs for his 12th save.

The win also prevented Boston from matching its season-high losing streak of three games.

Marcus Semien hit a two-run homer, and Matt Joyce and Matt Olson each hit a solo shot for the Athletics, who won the first two games and finished the season series by winning four of six.

Trevor Cahill (1-2) gave up three runs to the first four batters he faced, but held the Red Sox scoreless the rest his five innings.

"Had a rough first inning, but recovered well enough to give us five and keep us in the game against a guy that typically you're not going to score a whole lot off of," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said.

Coming off a career high-tying 15-strikeout performance over nine innings in his previous start, Sale struggled with his command on a chilly, misty evening and was lifted after 102 pitches.

Martinez's homer into the center-field seats highlighted a three-run first. Hanley Ramirez had a run-scoring grounder before Martinez's drive into the first section of the bleachers to the right of the Green Monster.

"I wouldn't say I wasn't sharp, but, yeah, the first was rough, but after that you just kind of mix it around," Cahill said.

Bogaerts' homer completely left Fenway Park over the Monster and made it 6-2 in the sixth.

Semien's drive also left Fenway over the Monster.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Athletics: Cahill (right shoulder impingement) was reinstated from the 10-day DL before the game and outfielder Jake Smolinski was optioned to Triple-A Nashville. "When you don't play for an extended period of time, get some at-bats, you don't feel comfortable," Melvin said.

Red Sox: Second baseman Dustin Pedroia (recovering from offseason left knee surgery) is expected to resume his rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday. With the PawSox rained out Tuesday and a morning game Wednesday, Pedroia was in Boston. Manager Alex Cora said they'd find somewhere for him to play if expected rain comes this weekend. "He needs his repetitions," Cora said. "We'll find innings."

ROAD WOES

Cahill hasn't picked up a win on the road -- start or relief -- since a victory at Colorado on August 20, 2016, a span of 24 games.

WHAT A CATCH

A's right fielder Stephen Piscotty made a running catch before tumbling headfirst over a short wall down the line. The play was overturned after replay review.

"I felt like I had a good jump on it, I could get there, it was just a matter of figuring out that wall," he said. "I haven't played here much. I kind of got lucky, honestly, sort of threw my glove up there and was able to not get hurt and make the catch."

QUICK START

Boston third baseman Rafael Devers played in his 100th major league game before his 22nd birthday, only one of three Red Sox players to do that in the last 50 years. The others are: Bogaerts and former right fielder Dwight Evans.

UP NEXT

Athletics: RHP Andrew Triggs (3-1, 5.31 ERA) is slated to start the opener of a four-game series on Thursday in Toronto.

Red Sox: LHP David Price (3-4, 4.89) is line to pitch Thursday's opener of a four-game series against Baltimore. The game is a makeup from the Patriots' Day rainout.