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**** The Boston Globe***

Red Sox overpower Bartolo Colon, Rangers

Peter Abraham

ARLINGTON, Texas — Rafael Devers was 7 months old when Bartolo Colon made his major league debut with the Cleveland Indians in 1997. Yet there they were, on the same field Friday night as the Red Sox played the Texas Rangers.

Devers, 21, considered it an honor to face the 44-year-old Colon. Devers grew up in the Dominican Republic watching Colon pitch on television year after year.

“A superstar in my eyes,” Devers said.

But Devers wasn’t awed. He hit two home runs off Colon as the Red Sox took a 5-1 victory before a crowd of 31,404 at Globe Life Park.

J.D. Martinez and, of course, Mookie Betts also connected off Colon. Rick Porcello and three relievers held the Rangers to four hits and struck out 12.

The 44-year-old Colon came into the game having pitched well in three of his four starts this season. But Martinez homered leading off the second inning and that lit a fuse.

Devers was smiling after the game, his interview translated by team staffer Daveson Perez and, briefly, teammate Xander Bogaerts.

“It was important for my career, I would say, to get the chance to face somebody like [Colon],” Devers said. “I just came into the league last year and I wasn’t able to be teammates with David Ortiz. But he’s also another guy I looked up to.”

Colon struck out Devers on four pitches in the second inning, a swinging third strike coming on a two-seam fastball inside.

In the fifth inning, Colon tried to throw the same pitch on a 2 and 2 count. But the ball stayed over the plate and Devers sent it several rows deep into the second deck in right field. It was measured at 427 feet.

The second home run, in the fifth inning, was on a low changeup. Devers has six homers and 23 runs batted in.

“His talent is unreal,” Sox manager Alex Cora said. “That’s why you love the kid, his talent. On a daily basis he can do special things.”

Porcello (5-0) added to what has been a turnaround season by holding the Rangers to one run on three hits over six innings. He struck out eight without a walk to drop his earned run average to 2.14.

Nomar Mazara was the only Texas hitter to advance beyond first base against Porcello. He doubled in the second inning and homered in the fourth inning.

Porcello has given up one or fewer earned runs in four of his seven starts. He also has struck out 46 with only five walks.

A year after he was 11-17 with a 4.65 ERA, Porcello has improved all facets of his game: command, location and in particular the sequencing of his pitches.

“It not as predictable as last year,” Cora said. “Last year you could look for a fastball, pick a spot, and put a good swing on it, especially early in the count. The mix wasn’t there.”

Porcello also has clicked with Sandy Leon, who has caught all his starts. They are of the same mind with pitch selection, which allows Porcello to work at an efficient pace.

With Porcello at 96 pitches, Cora went to Joe Kelly for the seventh inning. He worked a perfect inning and now has a string of 13 $\frac{1}{3}$ scoreless innings since giving up four runs on Opening Day. Matt Barnes and Bobby Poyner finished up.

Sox pitchers retired 16 of 18 after Mazara’s home run.

Colon (1-1) allowed four runs over seven innings. The big righthander worked fast and threw strikes but erred in challenging hitters who had the right idea against him.

“He’s going to win if you keep beating it into the ground,” Betts said. “As a team we were just trying to get the ball in the air and we did.”

It was the sixth time in his long career Colon allowed four homers, the first since 2014.

Colon at one point stopped Red Sox first base coach Tom Goodwin and joked that his neck hurt watching so many balls fly out of the park.

Betts homered in the sixth inning and just missed a second one in the eighth inning off Jake Diekman when a drive was caught on the warning track.

Betts has 13 home runs on the season. He is 12 of his last 29 with 4 doubles, 7 home runs, and 12 RBIs. Five of those home runs have come in his last 11 at-bats.

“I don’t even know what to say anymore,” Cora said.

Porcello did.

“I don’t think I’ve seen a player do so many things so well,” the pitcher said. “He’s the best right fielder. He’s one of the best base-runners. He hits for average. He hits for power. He doesn’t strike out. What more could you ask for in a ballplayer?”

Colon was done after 91 pitches. Diekman started the eighth inning by walking Leon. With two outs, Hanley Ramirez lined a double to the gap in left field and Leon came all the way around.

The Sox have Eduardo Rodriguez on the mound Saturday night against lefthander Cole Hamels.

As member of 3,000-hit club, Albert Pujols still amazes Tony La Russa

Nick Cafardo

ARLINGTON, Texas — Tony La Russa texted Albert Pujols to congratulate the Angels’ slugger on his 2,999th hit Thursday, and he’ll likely speak to him soon now that Pujols got No. 3,000 on Friday night in Seattle.

Pujols and La Russa spent 11 years together in St. Louis — the first 11 years of Pujols's career — and developed a lifetime friendship. There's no player the Hall of Fame manager respects more, on and off the field.

"I know he really wanted to get the 3,000 at home," said La Russa, now a special assistant to Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, referring to the Angels' five-game road trip.

La Russa is in Texas evaluating the team while Dombrowski tours the organization's minor league system.

La Russa, 73, the third-winningest manager in major league history, called Pujols "a man of great integrity," and he is sure that if Pujols feels at some point he can't play anymore, he will walk away from his enormous contract with the Angels, which pays him \$27 million-\$30 million a season into 2021. Pujols, 38, also has a 10-year, \$10 million personal services deal after that.

The milestone reminded La Russa of when he first had Pujols as a kid in spring training.

"In his rookie spring training, when he made the team from A ball, just watching, he was incredible in spring training," said La Russa, "but you don't want to put a young player in position to be embarrassed where he leaves camp with his confidence low.

"He was a determined kid. There was a spring training game against Javier Vazquez with Montreal that I hit him fourth, and the coaches were coming at me like, 'You trying to get this guy cut?'

"I know it's unfair, but we're seriously talking about this kid coming north. The first time up, it's a 1-and-2 count and Javier throws that nasty slider and he flails at it. And we kind of look at each other. Next time up, it's two strikes. He hits one off the right-center wall.

"And throughout his career, he would go in after an at-bat, walk by someone — and I know it must have happened at least a hundred times — he'd go out and he'd say, 'Next time he does that to me, watch, I'm gonna hit it to right, and if he pitches me in, I'm gonna hit it to left.'

"The answer is he was a dedicated student of the entire game. That's part of the incredible record he's got."

La Russa said Pujols always took pride in never striking out 100 times in a season, something the great Hank Aaron never did either.

"For 100 years, striking out was a personal thing for hitters," La Russa said. "They prided themselves on being professional and productive and contributors to a team's success.

"We all grew up with a two-strike approach. It was taught better in some places than others. And now it's a game where some people feel it's better if you strike out three times and connect once in a game.

"But the truth of it is, when you see how you win games now, putting the ball in play, you have a better chance to win games, especially close games against good pitching. We always stressed it, and our teams were always in the top five in putting the ball in play.

"The point is, Albert came into that. We had a two-strike technique. He became a master at it and still uses it. What's incredibly special about this man is he's not changed from Day 1 — his commitment, whether it's running the bases or playing defense, at the plate and separating each at-bat.

"If he's leading off an inning, he's up there trying to get on base. If there's somebody on base, he's trying to do something to advance them. In scoring position, he's going to try and score them. If he misses a pitch or fouls one off and it's two strikes, he's a terrific two-strike hitter, and that's why in part he's at 3,000."

Is Pujols the best he's ever managed?

“One of those disrespectful kind of answers because of Harold Baines, Pudge [Carlton Fisk], and guys in Oakland,” said La Russa, “but I would say that he’s mentally the most relentless about separating every at-bat and literally doing whatever it takes for his team to win the game.

“He just played the game so hard and tough. Those 11 years are the best in major league history as far as average, home runs, and RBIs. I want to always respect Fisk and Baines, Rickey [Henderson] and Mark [McGwire], but Albert has done it in an era of fame and fortune where players sometimes lose an edge. Albert has never lost the edge.”

Can he play to the end of his contract?:

“I think it’ll all depend on his bottom half, because his struggles in Anaheim have come from his feet and ankles,” La Russa said. “There’s been a lot of at-bats he’s had over the last seven years where he’s been swinging with one leg. When he’s got his bottom half healthy, he can still hit.

“I talked to [Angels manager Mike] Scioscia about him, and he marvels at how he’s hurt and doing OK. I know that he’s driven. If there comes a time when he’s not productive, he’ll walk away from that contract. He’s got incredible integrity.”

For 27 years, La Russa — along with his wife and two daughters — has run the Animal Rescue Foundation in Walnut Creek, Calif., and he said Pujols always has been a supporter; La Russa likewise has been a part of Pujols’s not-for-profit, the Pujols Family Foundation.

La Russa’s foundation gives animals to military personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder to ease the condition, and his organization recently was presented with an award in Washington, D.C., where Patriots coach Bill Belichick did the introduction.

“It was a special night,” La Russa said. “And that’s the word — special — that describes Albert.”

J.D. Martinez has been a hit as a Red Sox outfielder, too

Peter Abraham

ARLINGTON, Texas — Renato Nunez hit the ball hard, sending it soaring to the gap in left field at Globe Life Park in the second inning on Thursday night.

Red Sox left fielder J.D. Martinez turned and sprinted to the warning track, catching the ball on the run before he bounced off the padded wall.

Instead of an extra-base hit, Nunez had a sacrifice fly.

Per MLB’s Statcast calculations, there was a 21 percent chance the ball would be caught. But Martinez beat those odds.

It was a catch that changed that inning but not the game as the Sox lost, 11-5, against the Texas Rangers. It also offered further proof that playing Martinez in the outfield is working out better than was expected.

Martinez has started 13 games in left field, two in right field, and 15 as the designated hitter, including on Friday night.

Defensive metrics are neutral so far. Per runs-saved calculations, Martinez is at zero. He was minus-5 with the Tigers and Diamondbacks as a right fielder last season.

Manager Alex Cora feels Martinez has benefited from how the Red Sox position their outfielders.

“It’s more than just this hitter and the pitcher. It’s [the outfielder’s] speed and range,” Cora said. “We try and get the better alignment of those guys. We’re comfortable with him in left or right; it doesn’t matter.

“He’s a good athlete. It’s just he’s a big one. If you do your research and you position these guys where you’re supposed to, they’re going to make some plays . . . There’s a lot of information that goes into what we’re trying to in the outfield and he benefits from that.”

When he signed with the Sox in February, Martinez said he received assurances from the organization that he would get playing time in the outfield. Cora said there was no formal agreement, but he does embrace the idea of Martinez being part of a rotation with Andrew Benintendi, Mookie Betts, and Jackie Bradley Jr.

That has allowed the Sox to get more playing time for Mitch Moreland at first base when Hanley Ramirez is the DH.

“In the situation we’re in and how deep we are and what I was trying to accomplish, for him to play the outfield, it helps me out,” Cora said. “It was never that [Martinez] was just a DH. He’s a good player; he’s a complete player we feel.”

Cora has twice given Martinez the option of playing the outfield or being the DH. Both times he has wanted to play the field. Martinez chafes at the idea that he is a below-average outfielder. Prior to this season, he had only 35 career starts as a DH.

“It’s part of the game; I’ve always been an outfielder,” he said. “I take a lot of pride in playing the outfield and trying to play it the right way.”

Through Thursday, Martinez had a 1.041 OPS as an outfielder, .843 as a DH. It is going to move up, though. Martinez, batting fourth and serving as the DH on Friday, went 1 for 4 with a solo home run in the Red Sox’ 5-1 win.

Rodriguez set to start

Eduardo Rodriguez, who is on the family medical leave list, will be activated to start against the Rangers on Saturday. Cora said the lefthander was on his way from Boston.

That could make it a brief stay for Bobby Poyner, who was recalled from Triple A Pawtucket for Friday’s game. The Sox optioned righthander Marcus Walden. He pitched 3⅓ innings and threw 53 pitches Thursday.

For Poyner, it was his second stint in the majors. The 25-year-old lefthander made the team out of spring training and appeared in six games before going on the disabled list on April 12, then being optioned 10 days later.

Poyner came out and pitched a scoreless ninth Friday, striking out two and allowing an infield single.

Rotation plans

The Sox have a day off on Monday, which would allow them to manipulate the rotation for the series against the Yankees that starts Tuesday. But Cora suggested the Sox would stay in line. That would have Drew Pomeranz, David Price, and Rick Porcello starting those games.

“We’re staying the course,” Cora said.

Price faced the Yankees on April 11 at Fenway Park. He allowed four runs in the first inning then left the game with a numb hand. Porcello pitched the next night and threw seven shutout innings against the Yankees. He allowed two hits and struck out six without a walk.

Holt getting closer

The Red Sox have a plan in place for Brock Holt, who has been on the disabled list with a left hamstring strain since April 27.

Holt is scheduled for an extensive workout before the game Saturday then would join Pawtucket on Monday for a rehabilitation assignment. The PawSox will be at Lehigh Valley.

The schedule is for Holt to play five innings Monday and nine Tuesday. Holt could be activated as soon as Wednesday in New York.

Holt hit .340 with a .920 OPS in 16 games before going on the disabled list. His return would give the Sox another option at second base. Eduardo Nunez went 0 for 4 Friday and has a .645 OPS. He also has struggled defensively.

Wright's path

Steven Wright has served seven games of his 15-game suspension for violating MLB's domestic violence policy. The Red Sox can choose six consecutive days of the remaining eight for Wright to have a minor league rehabilitation assignment. When Wright will join an affiliate has not been determined, nor has whether the knuckleballer will pitch as a starter or reliever . . . Through Thursday, Betts had an .850 slugging percentage. That was higher than the OPS of all but 22 players in the American League.

Is velocity the culprit in David Price's recent rough stretch?

Alex Speier

David Price lost his final two starts of April, allowing 10 runs (9 earned) over 13½ innings. Yet the Red Sox saw some reason for encouragement in those outings. He dominated most of his April 22 start against the A's before a questionable pitch selection (a curveball to Khris Davis) resulted in an outing-spoiling three-run homer and a 4-1 loss. Last Saturday against the Rays, despite a lack of command, Price showed his best velocity of the year, regularly sitting at 94-95 m.p.h., a sign that his arm strength was coming.

Thursday, however, represented a step back in every respect.

Price's fastball velocity in Texas was down by 1-2 m.p.h. His ability to locate pitches was lacking, evidenced by the fact that he issued a bases-loaded walk. A pitcher who typically pounds righthanded hitters on the inner part of the plate (his glove side) worked heavily to his arm side, where his cutter goes from a cringe-inducing pitch to a hittable one.

Price is now in one of the worst stretches of his career. His current three-start rut — in which he has allowed 19 runs (16 earned) in 17 innings — marks the first time in his career that he's allowed four or more runs in three straight starts.

So what's happening?

It's natural to view injury as the culprit, particularly given that Price exited his start against the Yankees April 11 when he felt numbness in his hand. While he said that the condition is something he'd encountered previously in the cold, such a sensation also can be associated with any number of medical issues for pitchers (ulnar collateral ligament nerve irritation, or a tear, and thoracic outlet syndrome come to mind). Has there been anything in his pitch data to suggest injury?

On the surface, the answer appears to be not really, at least within his starts this season. There's very little difference in the velocity of his four-seam fastball, two-seam fastball, cutter, or changeup before and after the Yankees start. His spin rates on all four pitches are likewise roughly the same, and his release points haven't altered much from the beginning of the season.

Still, despite the uptick into the 94-95 m.p.h. range in his starts against Oakland and Tampa Bay, Price has spent most of the season sitting around 92-93 m.p.h., the range where he operated Thursday against the Rangers. That difference is a big deal.

According to BaseballSavant.com, the league is hitting .238 with a .397 slugging mark against 94-95 m.p.h. pitches. Against 92-93 offerings, those marks jump to .281 with a .473 slugging percentage. Velocity is not the be-all, end-all — deception, command, and movement all weigh heavily into the effectiveness of a pitch — but at a very basic level, velocity does matter.

It's hard to pinpoint the reason for Price's diminished velocity this year. Possibilities:

- It could reflect the Red Sox' gradual spring training program for pitchers, an approach the team took in hopes of putting the staff in the best position to excel at the end of the season. Pitching coach Dana LeVangie recently cited that approach as a potential cause for the velocity drop of Chris Sale (1.7 m.p.h. on his four-seam fastball), Price, and other members of the staff.

"You've got to realize that we took a slower buildup in spring training," said LeVangie. "We didn't come out of the chute featuring the best velo. I think a month or two from now, we'll see different velocity. We'll see the benefits of [the spring approach] later on."

- It could be the normal aging process, with this season representing the continuation of a velocity decline that started in 2016. (While Price's velocity ticked back up in 2017, some in the industry speculated that he was reaching back for more in a way that played a role in his injuries.)

- It could be an injury, whether related to his 2017 time on the sidelines or whatever he experienced in his April start against the Yankees. Certainly, the coincidence of numbness in his hand and diminished command is something that has caught the attention of people in baseball's medical community.

Price has insisted that he is healthy, and perhaps he is. Even so, if his fastball velocity is down, then he has to figure out ways of compensating. Manager Alex Cora raised concerns about the fact that the velocity of Price's fastball, cutter, and changeup all blend in a way that simplifies life for opposing hitters.

Yet Price also operated with the same pitches and with a largely similar velocity range when dominating out of the bullpen last year. But when a fastball is 92 instead of 94, it gives hitters more of an opportunity to differentiate between offerings. Perhaps that explains why Cora and Price feel like he may need to do more to incorporate his curveball, a pitch he's thrown just 11 times this year (and not once Thursday).

*** *The Boston Herald***

Rafael Devers takes on starring role with two home runs as Red Sox beat Rangers

Stephen Hewitt

ARLINGTON, Texas — Rafael Devers still was a baby when Bartolo Colon made his debut in the major leagues in 1997, and grew up watching the veteran right-hander in the Dominican Republic.

You couldn't blame Devers if he got a little starstruck here last night.

"To be honest, he's something of a phenom in the D.R. and a superstar in my eyes," Devers said. "I was more happy just to face him."

But Devers did more than just face one of his childhood heroes. He made sure this was a night he wouldn't soon forget.

Devers did strike out swinging on his first at-bat against Colon, but shook it off. Against the 44-year-old ageless wonder, the 21-year-old Devers proved age was just a number as he hit two home runs off Colon to lead the Red Sox past the Rangers, 5-1, at Globe Life Park.

It certainly was a moment to remember for Devers, who stood in the corner of the visitors clubhouse afterwards beaming, and grinning ear to ear.

“It’s important for me because you grow up watching him and then you get the chance to face him so it’s pretty cool,” Devers said.

“To get the chance to face somebody like that. I just came into the league last year and I wasn’t able to be teammates with David Ortiz but he’s also the guy that I looked up to and Bartolo is another one of those guys.”

The Red Sox blasted four home runs, all solo, off Colon, including Mookie Betts’ major league-leading 13th of the season, and it was Devers’ that were maybe the most pivotal.

After Nomar Mazara had tied the game, crushing a solo shot off Rick Porcello, who was otherwise brilliant, Devers led off the fifth and certainly was not starry-eyed this time around.

The count was 2-2, but Devers found a fastball he liked and demolished it to the second deck in right field. It measured approximately 427 feet.

“He can do special things,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Yesterday he hit three or four rockets at 105 (mph) and he only got one hit and any other 21-year-old kid probably comes back the next day with his head down but he’s happy and smiling and he doesn’t know what’s going on and is happy to play baseball. Turn the page and the next day, when you’re as talented as he is it can be special.”

The four homers, which also included one from J.D. Martinez in the second inning, made it 13 long balls in five games for the Red Sox.

Betts created more separation in the sixth inning with his fifth homer in three days, and in 10 at-bats. His 398-foot solo shot to left came on an 0-2 changeup from Colon after he had fouled off four consecutive pitches.

With the homer, Betts passed Dom DiMaggio for the most home runs in Red Sox history by a leadoff hitter. Betts now has 70 from the top spot.

It’s been quite a week for Betts, whose teammates are just marveling at the success he’s had.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like it,” Porcello said. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a player like him, so definitely glad he’s on our side. . . .

“I don’t think I’ve seen a player do so many things so well. I mean, he’s the best right fielder, one of the best baserunners, he hits for average, he hits for power, he doesn’t strike out. What more could you ask for in a ballplayer?”

In the seventh, Devers jumped on another Colon changeup and blasted it to right-center for another solo homer. It was his eighth home run of the season, and second career multi-home run game.

Hanley Ramirez added more insurance in the eighth with an RBI double that scored Sandy Leon, and it was more than enough for Porcello, who provided six strong innings, allowed three hits and struck out eight to improve to 5-0.

David Price needs to throw more curveballs in next start

Stephen Hewitt

ARLINGTON, Texas — A night after he was shelled in the Red Sox' loss to the Rangers to begin this road trip, David Price sat down with pitching coach Dana LeVangie to talk about what went wrong, and how to fix it.

It seems the two are on their way for a plan of attack for the left-hander's next start on Wednesday in New York against the Yankees.

Price was crushed by the Rangers on Thursday night, giving up nine runs over 3²/₃ innings in an eventual 11-5 loss. After the game, both Price and manager Alex Cora pointed to a lack of command that doomed the lefty, and LeVangie agreed.

"That's fair to say," he said. "When you make mistakes in this league, it will cost you."

LeVangie said that over the first three innings of Price's outing, he thought he featured his best changeup of the season. But then he made some big mistakes in the fourth, where he missed location on his fastball, and he didn't get out of the inning after he issued a bases-loaded walk.

Cora said after that he didn't think there was much separation in the velocity between Price's fastballs and his secondary pitches. According to Brooks Baseball, his two-seam fastball averaged 92.83 mph, his four-seamer was 92.69 mph, his changeup was 85.31 mph and his cutter was 88.65 mph. That made it easier for hitters to time Price's pitches and jump on them.

LeVangie said that's something he talked about with Price, and similar to what Cora said, it comes down to a better pitch mix.

"Things have changed a little bit," LeVangie said. "You gotta pitch and mix a little bit more nowadays than maybe you had to in the past. It's different out of the bullpen. You can live with two pitches. But starters have to mix their pitches a little bit more. ..."

"As soon as you do that, you get them off-balance, so we'll have those conversations. We started them already, and we're looking forward to making a step next start."

That could mean a re-emergence of Price's curveball. The lefty used it just twice in his previous start against Tampa Bay, and none against Texas, and Cora suggested after Thursday's loss that they would add a little bit more to keep hitters off-balance.

Price is using his curveball on just two percent of his pitches this season, which is a career low. It's something LeVangie said is probably worth exploring.

"It's never been one of his top three pitches," LeVangie said. "It's always been his fourth pitch, but it's probably something we can add in to the equation."

Some of it also comes down to Price making timely pitches. He was one strike away from getting out of the third inning Thursday when he gave up a two-run double to Nomar Mazara. Then, in the fourth inning, he had a full count with two outs when he walked in a run.

"That's the difference," said Cora. "To put guys away, he hasn't been able to do it. . . . You've got to put it away and he knows it and he's been able to do it his whole career."

Red Sox notebook: Rick Porcello turns in another dominant performance in perfect start to 2018

Stephen Hewitt

ARLINGTON, Texas — The beginning of Rick Porcello's season has been everything he's wanted, and he's keeping his mind in the present.

Through seven starts after yet another dominant effort in the Red Sox' 5-1 win over the Rangers last night, Porcello quickly is making his disastrous 2017 campaign a distant memory. He's now 5-0 with a 2.14 ERA, and his stuff may be even better than in 2016, when he won the Cy Young Award.

But much like 2017, that's no matter to him right now. The Red Sox right-hander is on a roll, and that's all he's focused on.

"Two years ago is a long time ago now it feels like, so it's hard to compare," Porcello said. "I think we're doing some things differently than we even did two years ago. So, I haven't really thought about what I was doing then. I know what I'm doing now and I want to keep that going."

Last night's display seemed to be a microcosm of what he was focusing on in spring training as he worked on rebounding from last season. Against what he called a good fastball-hitting Rangers lineup, Porcello's cutter was working well, and he consistently kept Rangers hitters guessing with nasty off-speed stuff.

Of Porcello's eight strikeouts last night, seven came via swing and miss.

"They're seeing it out of the hand as a fastball or they're seeing something that looks like it's good to hit and then it's disappearing," Porcello said. "So that's the idea, and that was again, what we focused on going into the season was executing sinkers down and using that to throw off-speed pitches off of it."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora certainly is pleased with his righty's display in the early going this season, and so far, it seems like their plan from the outset is going by design.

"It's not as predictable as last year," Cora said. "Last year you could look for a fastball and pick the spot and put a good swing on it, especially early in the count. The mix wasn't there. It seems like he wasn't able to pitch down in the zone as well as he did the previous year and since day one I go back to our conversations at winterfest about being consistent in the strike zone and being able to mix up the pitches, and change speeds and become a pitcher. He's doing a great job for us."

Going to bat for JBJ

Jackie Bradley Jr. always has been a streaky hitter, and the Red Sox want to change that.

That's easier said than done, of course, but the Red Sox seem to be encouraged by their center fielder even as he's struggled at the plate in the early portion of the season.

Bradley has always claimed his fame on defense, but offensively he's never been consistent. Beyond a 29-game hitting streak in 2016 that was ultimately just a tease of his offensive potential, he's been less than average. He's a career .236 hitter, and this season it's been more of the same.

After going 1-for-4 last night, JBJ is batting .183 on the season with just six extra-base hits and 26 strikeouts.

It's still early, and Cora doesn't seem too concerned.

"It's a process," Cora said. "As everybody knows here, he's been a streaky player and we don't want that, we want him to be consistent, so hopefully when it clicks, when he gets it, it just stays through a season."

The results haven't been there, especially recently. Over his last 10 games, Bradley is 3-for-33, but it seems Cora thinks he's about to break out.

“This last week, he’s been getting a lot of pitches in the zone and he’s not swinging and missing, he’s fouling off, so is that a good sign? Is it getting closer?” Cora said. “I don’t know, but I do feel like he was taking good swings at home. . . .

“I know he’s trying. You can see in the swings, he’s trying to stay in the middle of the field. It’s just a matter of doing it. He will.”

J.D. helps out

The Red Sox signed J.D. Martinez primarily for his bat, but they like his glove, too.

That was evident in Thursday’s loss to the Rangers, as Martinez tracked a deep fly ball to left field and snagged it over his shoulder on a play that could have done more damage to David Price’s outing.

There weren’t any specific contract stipulations that said Martinez had to play a certain amount in the outfield, but both parties seem to be content so far. Including last night, Martinez has played either left or right field in exactly half of his 30 games, with the other half at DH.

While the trio of Bradley, Andrew Benintendi and Mookie Betts get the majority of the time in the outfield, Martinez has added valuable depth for Cora, who likes to set up his lineups based on matchups.

“He likes playing there and he helps the whole rotation,” Cora said. “One thing that we tried to accomplish with the information we get is, it’s more than just this hitter and the pitcher. Their speed and the range, we try to get the better alignment of those guys, and he’s been good. We’re comfortable with him in left and in right, it doesn’t matter.

“It helps me out, you can give the guys a breather and you can get Mitch (Moreland) in the lineup. We got Blake (Swihart) yesterday in the lineup because of a matchup. It was never like, he’s just a DH. He’s a good player, he’s a complete player we feel, and we can use him whenever we want.”

Rehab next for Holt

Brock Holt, who’s making his way back from a strained left hamstring, is scheduled to go through a workout in which he’ll take grounders, hit and run today. Cora said the plan is for him to go on a rehab assignment, likely with Triple-A Pawtucket, on Monday and play two games, one for five innings and the other for nine.

If there aren’t any setbacks, Cora said Holt could be activated on Wednesday in New York.

Poyner returns

The Sox recalled left-handed reliever Bobby Poyner, who had been on the disabled list since April 12 with a left hamstring injury. Marcus Walden was optioned back to Pawtucket.

The move came a night after Walden threw 32/3 innings of relief in the 11-5 loss to the Rangers. He allowed one unearned run on four hits, struck out four and walked none.

Poyner pitched on Tuesday against Rochester, retiring the three batters he faced on eight pitches. He finished off last night’s game by giving up one hit while striking out one in the ninth.

Before he went on the DL, Poyner made six relief appearances with the Sox. He pitched seven innings, allowing eight hits and two earned runs with eight strikeouts and one walk. . . .

Eduardo Rodriguez, who was placed on the family leave list earlier in the week, should be able to make his scheduled start today, Cora said. The manager was expecting Rodriguez to rejoin the team last night.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 5, Rangers 1: Betts, Devers make history as Boston strikes back

Bill Koch

ARLINGTON, Texas --- The young lions roared at the plate for the Red Sox on Friday night, and a steady veteran hand on the mound did most of the rest.

Mookie Betts made his latest bit of franchise history, Rafael Devers peppered the stands in right field twice and Rick Porcello continued his 2018 redemption tour.

It was Boston at its finest in a 5-1 victory over the Rangers at Globe Life Park, a crisp, stress-free effort following a stinker beginning the road trip the previous night.

Betts cracked the 70th home run of his career out of the leadoff spot, a drive to the bleachers in left to open the top of the sixth inning. Dom DiMaggio's previous mark of 69 had stood since his 1953 retirement, more than six decades before Betts made his big league debut in 2014. It was his fifth home run in 10 plate appearances, and his 13 on the season lead the American League.

"It's cool," Betts said. "I'm just trying to do what I can to help us win games. We had some guys swinging the bat today for sure."

The 21-year-old Devers hit solo homers in the fifth and seventh for the second multiple home run game of his career. Tony Conigliaro (four times) and Ted Williams (three) are the only other players in franchise history to hit multiple home runs in a game more than once before turning 22. Devers enjoyed his first two-homer game against Cleveland on August 14 last year.

"The first one was a little outside," Devers said. "The second one, they tried to come in and I got it good."

Boston continued to dominate against right-handed starting pitchers, moving to 20-5 in 2018. Bartolo Colon was on the receiving end this particular night, as the Red Sox showed little respect for the resident elder in the big leagues. Four of the five hits allowed by Colon left the yard, with Boston padding the .847 OPS it carried into the game in similar matchups.

Porcello turned in another strong outing over six innings of work, lowering his earned-run average this season to a tidy 2.14. Nomar Mazara's two-out homer to the home bullpen in the fourth was the lone blemish, as Porcello walked one and struck out eight. He's allowed one earned run or less in four of his seven starts after doing so just seven times in 33 starts last season.

"It's about being consistent in the strike zone and being able to mix up the pitches and change speeds and become a pitcher," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "He's doing a great job for us."

Porcello navigated through just one real trouble spot, that coming in the second after Mazara lined a leadoff double to the corner in right. He was stranded 90 feet away when Isiah Kiner-Falefa hit a weak grounder to third and Ronald Guzman struck out swinging on a cut-fastball.

"That was a nice one to get out of," Porcello said. "Leadoff double on a not well-executed changeup, and then they had a couple guys coming up behind (Mazara) who had been swinging the bats well."

J.D. Martinez started the fun with a towering solo homer to left field leading off the second, a sign of things to come for the visitors. Hanley Ramirez finished it with an RBI double to the gap in left center in the eighth, chasing in Sandy Leon all the way from first. That was more than enough insurance for Joe Kelly, Matt Barnes and Bobby Poyner, who combined to retire nine of the 10 men they faced out of the bullpen.

Red Sox Journal: Betts sets example with approach to the game

Bill Koch

ARLINGTON, Texas — Lost in the shuffle of Thursday's 11-5 drubbing against the Rangers was some leadership from Mookie Betts.

The 25-year-old tops several hitting categories through the first 31 games, but his influence in the dugout and in the clubhouse could also pay future dividends.

Betts ran hard on a nubber up the first-base line in the sixth inning, almost beating out an infield single in what was a 10-3 game. One at-bat later, as he scalded an RBI double to deep left in the eighth against Texas reliever Jose Leclerc.

"You can come back and win a game by guys not giving away at-bats and putting together some good ones," Betts said. "That's just my mindset. I try not to give any away."

Opposing pitchers likely wish Betts would ease up on the gas from time to time. His 12th home run of the season in the third was his 69th out of the leadoff spot, tying Dom DiMaggio for the Red Sox franchise record. Betts had 24 extra-base hits, 85 total bases, an .850 slugging percentage and a 1.299 OPS going into Friday, all tops in the big leagues.

"Out of all the things he's done the last few days, in a game like that, he doesn't give that at-bat away," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "You could hear him in the dugout pulling for his teammates — 'Hey, don't give it away. Don't give it away.' That's cool to see."

Betts hammered three home runs on getaway day against the Royals, a 5-4 win in which he made more Red Sox history. Betts became the first Boston player with four, three home-run games and the youngest in baseball history to accomplish the feat. Consider that Betts was in his 534th game with the team while legends like Carl Yastrzemski (3,308 games), Ted Williams (2,292), Jim Rice (2,089) and David Ortiz (1,953) all appeared in at least three times as many.

"Stay positive," Betts said. "I think I just have a new mindset of turning the page and starting each day fresh. In doing that I'm having a little success, but I have a long time to go."

Cora sends message

Cora and the Boston bench got into a couple of verbal scraps with plate umpire Phil Cuzzi on Thursday night, and the Red Sox manager opted to send a message early on Friday.

Cora watched Texas starter Bartolo Colon carry a perfect game into the eighth inning on April 15 against the Astros, one aided a bit by a wide strike zone from home plate umpire Adam Hamari. It was Hamari again behind the dish for Friday night's game at Globe Life Park.

"We have to get [Colon] on the plate," Cora said. "Not only us — his strikes have to be on the plate. When he gets the one or two inches off the plate, he becomes tough."

In an era where launch angle and pitching vertically have become the new trends, it's all but inevitable to classify the 44-year-old Colon as a throwback. He works almost exclusively off the fastball, throwing it 82.3 percent of the time entering Friday. Most of those are of the two-seam variety, with Colon running the pitch back to the outside corner against right-handed hitters or slipping it through the front door against left-handed hitters.

"It's not that he makes a lot of mistakes down the middle, but he works ahead a lot," Cora said. "You've got to be ready to hit."

Holt to begin rehab

Brock Holt (left hamstring strain) is expected to begin a rehab assignment with Pawtucket on Monday. Holt remains here with the Red Sox and will join the Triple-A affiliate on the off day. The PawSox are scheduled to open a three-game series at Lehigh Valley. ... Eduardo Rodriguez (family medical leave) was expected to arrive in Texas on Friday night and will make his scheduled start on Saturday. Rodriguez was away from the team for the opener of the 10-game road trip. ... Left-handed reliever Bobby Poyner was recalled from Pawtucket on Friday, with right-handed reliever Marcus Walden sent down to Pawtucket. Walden turned in 3 2/3 innings of relief to finish up on Thursday, allowing an unearned run.

David Price gives up on his curveball in last two starts

Bill Koch

ARLINGTON, Texas — David Price adopted his current pitch mix ahead of capturing the 2012 American League Cy Young Award.

The slider Price threw in his first four seasons with Tampa Bay was replaced by a cut-fastball. The left-hander retained his fastball, changeup and curveball, dominating opposing lineups to the tune of just 7.4 hits allowed per nine innings.

One of those offerings has been noticeably absent over Price's last two starts, and he's suffered the consequences. Price didn't throw a single curveball in Thursday night's 11-5 loss to the Rangers, that on the heels of using the pitch only twice in a 12-6 defeat against Tampa Bay on Saturday.

Price and Red Sox manager Alex Cora both insist health isn't a concern for the 32-year-old at the present time. Both said they would watch video of the start the following afternoon on Friday. Both expressed confidence Price's next outing against the Yankees would be an improvement.

So what gives?

"It seems like there's no separation in his pitches right now," Cora said Thursday night. "If you're a hitter, you look for something in the range of 90-91 (mph), pick a side of the plate and go from there. He has to make adjustments, obviously."

"That could be the case," Price said. "Guys were still out front. A couple of them were still off the end of the bat. Could be a couple miles per hour here or there and that could turn into that swing and miss."

Price threw 60.6 percent fastballs in 2012, averaging 95.5 mph. His cutter checked in at 89.3 mph and the changeup came in at 84.4 mph. Price threw those three pitches 88.7 percent of the time, giving opposing hitters a spread of 11.1 mph to consider in the majority of their at-bats.

Compare that to Price's seven starts this season. He's throwing the fastball 50.6 percent of the time at 92.4 mph and the cutter a career-high 31.6 percent of the time at 88.2 mph. The changeup remains at 84.6 mph and is thrown 15.7 percent of the time.

The difference is a glaring one. Price presents a spread of just 7.8 mph on 98 percent of his pitches, throwing the curveball a career-low 2.0 percent of the time.

"The mix has to be better," Cora said Friday. "Like I said, separation is important. We're going to be working on it."

Price's average curveball this season comes in at 78.6 mph. That represents almost a 14 mph difference from the fastball, one that would be ideal to disrupt the timing of opposing hitters. But Price hasn't

necessarily found a feel for that pitch early – the last one he threw was slammed for a two-run homer to the Monster seats by Tampa Bay catcher Wilson Ramos on Saturday.

“Fastball, cutter, changeup – that was what I did really well,” Price said, referring to his first handful of starts this season. He blanked the Rays over two outings and 14 innings before lasting a single frame against New York, removed after feeling what he described as a “sensation” in his pitching hand. Price rebounded with a victory over the Angels and was strong into the eighth inning against the Athletics before Khris Davis burned him with the deciding three-run homer in a 4-1 defeat.

“That’s the difference,” Cora said. “Just to put guys away, he hasn’t been able to do it.”

“In my last two starts I have not commanded the baseball the way that I did in four out of those first five,” Price said. “That’s something that I take a lot of pride in doing, and I haven’t done that in my last couple.”

The Rays and Texas combined to pile up 12 earned runs against Price, and the nine runs (seven earned) he allowed against the Rangers on Thursday were the most he’s conceded in 58 appearances with Boston. Whether or not Price can find some additional velocity or the right blend over the season’s next five months remains to be seen, but there seems to be a missing ingredient at the moment.

*** *MassLive.com***

Rick Porcello's 2018 Boston Red Sox season better than his Cy Young campaign so far and 6 statistics tell story

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Athletics' Sean Manaea won the AL Pitcher of the Month for April. But Rick Porcello's FIP (2.07) actually was better than Manaea's (3.23).

FIP is a more advanced ERA metric independent of fielding.

Porcello continues to roll. He allowed only one run over 6 strong innings in a 5-1 Red Sox win over the Rangers here at Globe Life Park last night.

Porcello right now is easily pitching better than he ever has during his career, one year after posting a 4.65 ERA and leading the league in hits allowed (236) and homers allowed (38).

"I think it's just a mix of his pitches," manager Alex Cora said. "That changeup is a good one. The location of the fastball. Being able to establish down and then go up and in-and-out. Those two guys (Porcello and Bartolo Colon) that pitched today, that's pitching right there. If you want to become a pitcher, take a look at those two guys."

He's 5-0 with a 2.14 ERA, 0.82 WHIP and .193 batting average against in seven starts.

When he won the 2016 AL Cy Young, he went 6-1 with a 3.13 ERA and .212 batting average against in his first seven starts.

The statistics that best tell the story:

Batting average vs. his changeup: Carlos Beltran told Cora that Porcello didn't have the same changeup last year and that pitch needed to improve for him to return to his 2016 form. The opposition batted .342 against Porcello's changeup last year. They are batting .207 against his changeup this year.

Batting average vs. his sinker: Porcello's best pitch is his sinker but the opposition batted .323 against it last year. This year, opponents have batted .240 vs. his sinker.

Groundball percentage: Porcello -- who is known as a groundball pitcher -- has a 51.3 percent groundball percentage through seven starts compared to 40 percent last year and 44.1 percent during his Cy Young season.

Hard Hit Balls: Statcast has his hard-hit ball percentage at just 25.7 percent, an improvement from 35.2 percent last year and 35.4 percent in 2016.

Home runs allowed: Porcello has allowed two home runs in 46 1/3 innings. He's on pace to allow 10 homers if he starts 35 games. Porcello led the majors in home runs allowed (38) last year.

Walks: Porcello is placing the ball wherever he wants. He has pinpoint control right now. He has walked only five batters. Three walks came in one start. He's on pace for 25 walks. He walked 48 batters last year, up from 32 the year before.

Rafael Devers, Boston Red Sox slugger: Bartolo Colon 'doesn't let anything get to him. That's how I want to be'

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Bartolo Colon made his major league debut April 4, 1997, when Rafael Devers, who homered against him twice last night here at Globe Life Park, was only 5 months old.

"As someone who loves baseball as much as I do, I definitely watched all the games on TV growing up and he's one of the big stars I would watch growing up," Devers said about Colon through translator Daveson Perez.

The Red Sox won 5-1 over the Rangers.

Colon will turn 45 on May 24. About 24 years separate these two Dominican Republic natives.

But the two have something very much in common: both play with a smile.

"He (Colon) enjoys it. He's got that personality that you don't let anything get to you," Devers said. "That's how I want to be. I want to play this game, have fun. It's the only thing we know how to do. So that's why it's important to have that attitude."

Colon certainly enjoys himself. Red Sox first base coach Tom Goodwin spent three years (2014-16) in New York with the hurler.

"You see him flipping the ball up in the air. Flip his glove up in the air while he's out there pitching," Goodwin said.

Goodwin added, "He did it all with a smile on his face."

Devers seems to have a smile on his face more often than not. You see him enjoy himself in the clubhouse. You see him enjoying himself when he strokes a big hit.

"On a daily basis, he can do special things," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "Yesterday he hit like three or four rockets over 105 (mph) and he only got one hit. Any other 21-year-old kid probably comes back the next day with their head down. He's happy, smiling. He doesn't even know what's going on. He's happy to play baseball. And it should be that way every day. Turn the page. And next day, when you're as talented as him, it can be a special night. He had one."

Cora's right about Devers crushing three balls for outs Thursday. He had outs with exit velocities of 102.5 mph, 104.5 mph and 110.5 mph.

Devers' first homer vs. Colon left with a 111.6 exit velocity and 23 launch angle, per Baseball Savant. His second traveled with a 104.4 exit velocity and 19 launch angle.

Devers said he was more excited to face Colon than to hit the homers just because of how much of an idol Colon is back in the Dominican.

"It was important for my career I would say to get the chance to face somebody like that," Devers said. "I just came into the league last year and I wasn't able to be teammates with David Ortiz but he was another guy who I looked up to. And Bartolo is another one of those guys. So that's why it was important to me."

Rafael Devers bashes 2 of Boston Red Sox's 4 homers in win over Rangers; Rick Porcello K's 8

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Rafael Devers stroked three hits and delivered two of the Red Sox's four solo homers against 44-year-old Bartolo Colon. Meanwhile, Rick Porcello delivered another gem on the mound.

Porcello pitched 6 innings, giving up just one run, three hits (one solo homer) and one walk while striking out eight to help lead the Red Sox 5-1 over the Rangers at Globe Life Park.

Devers gave Boston a 2-1 lead with a 427-foot solo homer to right field in the fifth inning, right after the Rangers tied the game 1-1 in the bottom of the fourth.

It left with a 111.6 exit velocity and 23 launch angle, per Baseball Savant.

Mookie Betts delivered his fifth homer in three games and his 13th this season to make it 3-1 in the sixth inning.

Devers' second homer (and sixth of the season) came in the seventh to put Boston ahead 4-1. He belted an 81.3 mph changeup 415 feet with a 104.4 exit velocity and 19 launch angle.

Porcello improved to 5-0 with a 2.14 ERA.

J.D. Martinez's homer sneaks out

J.D. Martinez hit an 82.1 mph changeup from Colon for a solo homer to left field in the second inning, giving Boston a 1-0 lead.

It left with a 101.4 mph exit velocity and traveled 370 feet but it had only a 26 percent hit probability, per Baseball Savant.

The Rangers tied it 1-1 in the fourth inning on Nomar Mazara's 412 foot homer. He hit an 87.5 mph slider from Porcello.

Mookie Betts sets another record

Mookie Betts passed Dom DiMaggio for the Red Sox franchise record for home runs by a leadoff hitter (70).

He bashed an 86 mph two-seamer from Colon 398 feet to left-center field. He has 13 home runs in 28 games this season.

Colon hurls 7 innings

Bartolo Colon pitched 7 innings, allowing four runs, five hits (four solo homers) and no walks while striking out four.

Mookie Betts homers again, setting Boston Red Sox record for most home runs by a leadoff hitter

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Red Sox slugger Mookie Betts has homered again, his fifth long ball in three days.

He passed Dom DiMaggio for the Red Sox franchise record for home runs by a leadoff hitter (70).

The right fielder bashed an 86 mph two-seamer from Texas Rangers starter Bartolo Colon 398 feet to left-center field. He has 13 home runs in 28 games this season.

He gave the Red Sox a 3-1 lead in the sixth inning here at Globe Life Park.

Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez also have hit solo homers for the Red Sox today.

David Price's velocity: Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora not concerned with fastball velocity but should he be?

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- David Price's decrease in fastball velocity was a popular topic during 2016 when the lefty posted a 6.75 ERA in his first seven starts.

Price's average fastball velocity dipped from 94.2 mph in 2015 to 92.9 mph in 2016, per Fangraphs.com.

His average velocity increased to 94.3 mph in 16 outings (11 starts) in 2017 but it has dropped to 92.4 mph through seven starts this year.

Manager Alex Cora isn't concerned.

"The stuff and you see the radar gun, it was there," Cora said last night.

Cora was asked again today about Price's velocity, specifically his four-seam fastball. He actually threw his two-seamer harder yesterday. It should be the other way around.

His two-seamer averaged 92.2 mph, per Baseball Savant while his four-seam fastball averaged 92.1 mph.

"He didn't use too many of those yesterday, huh?" Cora said about the four-seamer.

He threw 17 four-seamers compared to 25 two-seamers.

"I think the mix has to be better," Cora said. "Like I said, separation is important. And we're going to be working on it. But I still feel there's certain at-bats throughout the game that change games."

Pitch mix yesterday, per Baseball Savant:

Two-seam fastball: 25 pitches, 92.2 mph average velocity.

Cutter: 18 pitches: 88 mph average velocity.

Four-seam fastball: 17 pitches, 92.1 mph average velocity.

Changeup: 23 pitches, 84.7 mph average velocity.

"You go back to certain counts that change the game. The 0-2 to (Nomar) Mazara," Cora said.

Maraza hit a two-run double on a 93.3 mph two-seamer.

"It's kind of like the 0-2 to Wilson (Ramos). He hasn't been able to put guys away in big spots," Cora said.

"Wilson hit the 0-2 breaking ball out of the ballpark," Cora said. "Yesterday, Mazara 0-2, he hit a changeup foul. I think he fouled off the next one and he gets a pitch up and away. He stays on it and it's a double. That's the difference: to put guys away. He hasn't been able to do it."

Brock Holt rehab: Boston Red Sox infielder to report to Pawtucket on Monday, could return Wednesday

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Brock Holt (hamstring) will work out out here at Globe Life Park with the Red Sox on Saturday and Sunday, then he'll begin a rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket on Monday.

Holt likely will play both Monday and Tuesday for Pawtucket at Leigh Valley before the Red Sox activate him Wednesday vs. the Yankees at Yankee Stadium.

He's scheduled to play five innings Monday and nine innings Tuesday.

The infielder went 16-for-34 (.471 batting average) with six doubles, one homer and six RBIs in nine games before being placed on the DL.

He could take some starts away at second base from Eduardo Nunez who has struggled defensively.

Blake Swihart understands Boston Red Sox could trade him soon; 'A lot of moving parts in next couple weeks'

Christopher Smith

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Blake Swihart's focus is 100 percent with the Boston Red Sox right now.

"This is my team here," he said at Globe Life Park today, one day after catching for the first time in a game this season. "Anything I can do to help this team win right now is what I want to do. "

But he also realizes he could be on another team within the next month. Dustin Pedroia is making progress in Fort Myers as he returns from knee surgery. Pedroia's goal is to return to the Red Sox this month.

Swihart has started only three games, all at DH. He started yesterday and then moved to catcher for the ninth inning.

"There's a lot of moving parts that are going to happen here in the next couple weeks," Swihart told MassLive.com. "And it's not my job to make those trades or to do all that. My job is to go out there and play. And whatever happens, happens. Right now I'm part of this team so that's where my focus is.

"I know that something's got to happen," he added. "I don't know what that move could be. But I know something's got to happen."

He obviously understands he could be the one traded. Red Sox manager Alex Cora reiterated Wednesday he has no plans to go with Swihart over either Christian Vazquez or Sandy Leon.

"It's always been a possibility," Swihart said about a trade.

Swihart said he has been involved in trade rumors since Day One when he signed.

"I've just gotta go out there and keep my head up and keep doing what I'm doing and whatever happens in the next month or two is going to happen," he said.

He hasn't inquired to any front office members or Cora about whether he could be traded. He has had no conversations about trades with them.

"I haven't had any conversations like that," Swihart said. "The conversations I've had with like Cora, (assistant hitting coach) Andy (Barkett) or (hitting coach) Tim (Hyers), it's about the situation I'm in right now and how they went through it. I feel like I'm doing a good job of staying prepared."

He loves it here in Boston here but he also doesn't want to keep sitting.

"I mean, I don't want to sit the bench. I want to play. So it is what it is," Swihart said. "It's my situation right now and I've just got to live with it and make sure I'm prepared."

"I think that's every player," Swihart added. "That's every big league player. That's every player in Triple A, Double A. You want to play every day. And I feel like I can."

Swihart said he has maintained "a good relationship" with Cora.

"When I am playing, he lets me know the know the day before just so I can prepare and everything," he said. "I just go in there every day as try to get better: do something to get better."

He catches a bullpen and works on drills typically every other day. He's confidence in his catching ability.

"Yesterday when I went in that last inning, I felt pretty good," Swihart said. "Looking at video, talking with everybody."

He spoke with Jason Varitek, catching coordinator Chad Epperson and bullpen catcher Mike Brenly.

"They said I looked really good and I was where I wanted to be," Swihart said. "So I felt good."

****Redsox.com***

Porcello keeps rollin', improves to 5-0 in 2018

Ian Browne

ARLINGTON -- It had been theorized quite often by some that Rick Porcello would never again duplicate the magical season he had two years ago, one that ended with the right-hander winning the American League Cy Young Award.

How about this, though? Maybe Porcello has an even better season in him.

The righty continued his magnificent start in 2018 by dominating the Rangers and leading the Red Sox to a 5-1 victory Friday night at Globe Life Park.

"Two years ago is a long time ago now, it feels like, so it's hard to compare," Porcello said. "I think we're doing some things differently than we even did two years ago. So I haven't really thought about what I was doing then. I know what I'm doing now, and I want to keep that going."

In six innings, Porcello (5-0, 2.14 ERA) looked surgical, allowing three hits and a run while walking one and striking out eight.

"Changeups in, changeups away, breaking balls ... the usual," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "That was cool."

Offensively, the Red Sox were powerful, smashing four solo homers against ageless Rangers righty Bartolo Colon, two of them coming from Rafael Devers.

Boston's 21-year-old third baseman was five months old when Colon made his Major League debut in 1997.

"Yeah, to be honest, he was something of a phenom in the [Dominican Republic] and a superstar in my eyes," said Devers. "I was more happy just to face him. The home run was good, but I got more enjoyment just facing him, just because he's recognized pretty highly in the DR."

Mookie Betts continued his power surge by belting No. 13 to extend his Major League lead. J.D. Martinez also went deep to put the Red Sox on the board to open the second. Three of the four homers against Colon led off the inning.

As for Porcello, he had more than enough support the way he was pitching. Rangers slugger Nomar Mazara had the only significant hit, a solo homer in the fourth.

"He's got pretty good stuff. A cutter, a slider, a two-seam and a slow curveball, so when he's able to move those pitches like that, it's pretty tough to hit a homer against him," said Mazara, who went deep for the fourth straight game.

The way both pitchers commanded the strike zone made for a quick game, which took only two hours and 36 minutes to play.

"Colon was working quick and the game was flowing well, so it's definitely a little bit easier to get into a rhythm when the innings are turning over like that," said Porcello.

With the well-rounded win, the Red Sox have the best record in baseball at 23-9.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Mookie makes more history: It has been a history-making week for Betts, who passed Ted Williams on Wednesday to claim the club record for three-homer games in a career with four. When Betts belted his homer off Colon in the sixth, it marked the 70th homer in his career while batting first in Boston's batting order, passing Dom DiMaggio for the team record. It was the third straight game Betts has homered.

"I don't think I've seen a player do so many things so well. I mean, he's the best right fielder, one of the best baserunners," said Porcello. "He hits for average, he hits for power, he doesn't strike out. What more could you ask for in a ballplayer?"

SOUND SMART

The homer tear Betts has been on is semi-ridiculous. He has seven homers in his last eight games and 11 in his last 14. In Boston's 17 road games, Betts has gone deep nine times.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Though Andrew Benintendi has yet to get hot at the plate, he continues to play tremendous defense in left field. In the sixth, he raced in to make a tremendous diving catch of a ball off the bat of Jurickson Profar.

HE SAID IT

"I know!" -- Devers, when reminded by a reporter he was just a baby when Colon made his Major League debut

UP NEXT

Lefty Eduardo Rodriguez (3-0, 4.78 ERA) returns from the family medical leave list to start Saturday night's game against the Rangers. Rodriguez turned in three consecutive strong starts before a mishap his last time out, giving up five hits, five runs and three walks in four innings against the Royals. First pitch is scheduled for 8:05 p.m. ET, and veteran lefty Cole Hamels is set to start for Texas.

Devers upstages Betts' 13th HR with two shots

Ian Browne

ARLINGTON -- It isn't often these days that a Red Sox player upstages the ridiculously hot Mookie Betts in the home run department.

But that's what happened Friday night at Globe Life Park, when the 21-year-old Rafael Devers hit a pair of solo lasers against an opposing pitcher and fellow countryman more than twice his age in Bartolo Colon to highlight a 5-1 victory over the Rangers.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

Betts also went deep because, well, of course he did. The right fielder's solo shot in the sixth was his Major League-leading 13th of the season, fifth in the last three games, seventh in the last eight games and 11th in the last 14 games.

J.D. Martinez was the first to clear the fence Friday, albeit barely, giving the Red Sox four homers in the game, all against Colon, and all solo shots.

You can be sure, though, that nobody enjoyed his trots around the bases more than Devers, who was five months old when Colon threw his first Major League pitch back in 1997.

Told by a reporter he was a baby when Colon started his career, an awe-struck Devers gleamed, "I know!"

In truth, it meant quite a bit for the powerful third baseman to face the 44-year-old Colon for the first time.

"Yeah, of course. As someone who loves baseball as much as I do, I definitely watched all of the games on TV growing up, and he's one of the big stars that I would watch growing up," Devers said. "To be honest, he was something of a phenom in the [Dominican Republic] and a superstar in my eyes. I was happy just to face him."

Colon, meanwhile, probably doesn't mind that he won't face Devers again until July at the earliest.

The first homer by Devers came in the top of the fifth, and it was a screamer, leaving his bat at 111.6 mph and traveling a projected distance of 427 feet, according to Statcast™.

"His talent is unreal," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "He gets a changeup down in the zone -- the one he missed in the previous at-bat -- and he hits a laser to right-center, and that's why you love the kid."

Devers did it again in the seventh, this time with a 104.4-mph rocket that traveled 415 feet for his sixth homer of the season.

"It's great," said Betts. "He's been swinging the bat really well. Unfortunately, they've been kind of going at people, but they can't catch them when they go over the fence."

Betts should know, given that he is the ultimate fence-clearer this season.

"I don't even know what to say anymore," Cora said. "[Betts] goes out there with a plan and executes it. He's in a good spot right now, and it's fun to watch. I've played with some great hitters, great players. See him doing it and enjoying it and not afraid to show a smile, that's what it's all about."

"When you feel that confident, why not? I think the fans love that to see him smiling and enjoy the game."

The same can be said of Devers, who seldom seems to go more than a few minutes without a smile.

Maybe Devers gets some of that care-free attitude from watching the affable Colon.

"Yeah, he enjoys it," Devers said of Colon. "It's something that he's got that personality that you don't let anything get to you, and that's how I want to be. I want to play this game, have fun. It's the only thing we know how to do, so that's why it's important to have that attitude."

Holt slated to return next week; Poyner recalled

Ian Browne

ARLINGTON -- The Red Sox should get a key bench player back in the middle of their series against the division-rival Yankees next week, as Brock Holt could be activated from the disabled list on Wednesday.

The plan for Holt, who is recovering from a left hamstring injury sustained on April 26, is that he will go through a rigorous workout prior to Saturday's game in Texas.

If that goes well, Holt will play a two-game Minor League rehab assignment for Triple-A Pawtucket on the road in Lehigh Valley on Monday and Tuesday.

The plan is for Holt to play five innings the first game and nine the second game.

"Yeah, if there's no setbacks, probably [activated] Wednesday," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora.

Before the injury, Holt was swinging the bat as well as he had at any point since his All-Star season of 2015, going on a 13-for-26 tear that raised his overall average to .340.

When Holt comes back, the Red Sox will have the luxury of resting second baseman Eduardo Nunez and shortstop Xander Bogaerts more often.

E-Rod a go; Poyner called up

The Red Sox made a roster move prior to Friday's game, recalling lefty Bobby Poyner from Triple-A Pawtucket and optioning Marcus Walden back to Triple-A.

Walden wouldn't have been available to pitch in Friday's game after logging 3 2/3 innings in Boston's 11-5 loss Thursday.

Poyner, who pitched well for Boston earlier this season, might be on the roster for only a day.

The Red Sox will activate Eduardo Rodriguez from the family medical leave list in time for his start against the Rangers on Saturday night, and Poyner is one of the candidates to be sent down.

Martinez making most of glove opportunities

While J.D. Martinez was expected to be the primary DH for the Red Sox, he has played nearly half of his time in the outfield, starting there in 15 of the team's first 32 games.

Martinez made a 5-star catch -- a running grab against the wall with his glove fully outstretched -- in Thursday's loss.

"He's a good outfielder. He's a big one," said Cora. "If you do your research and position those guys where you're supposed to, they're going to make some plays. There's a lot of information that goes into what we're trying to do in the outfield, and he benefits from it. He's making plays."

****WEEI.com***

Rick Porcello has never seen anything like Mookie Betts

Rob Bradford

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Rick Porcello had quite a night in the Red Sox' 5-1 win Friday night.

The starter allowed just one run in six innings, improving to 5-0 on the season.

But after the game, Porcello's face seemingly didn't truly light up until the subject of Mookie Betts came up.

"Mookie, it's been incredible," the pitcher said. "I don't think I've ever seen anything like it. I don't think I've ever seen a player like him, so definitely glad he's on our side."

For Porcello, that's saying something.

This is a guy who played with a guy who won the Triple Crown, Miguel Cabrera, while claiming back-to-back American League MVP awards, as well as David Ortiz. But the pitcher has good reason for separating Betts from the pack.

With his major league-best 13th homer this season, the Red Sox' outfielder has now gone deep in 11 of his last 14 games, and seven of his last eight. Betts has the majors' highest batting average (.365) and OPS (1.298), all while continuing to serve as one of the best defenders in the game.

"I don't think I've seen a player do so many things so well," Porcello said. "I mean, he's the best right fielder, one of the best baserunners, he hits for average, he hits for power, he doesn't strike out. What more could you ask for in a ballplayer?"

As for Porcello, he might not be the Red Sox' MVP thanks to Betts, but he could be classified a strong No. 2. Using a variety of pitches -- throwing his changeup as many times as his four-seam fastball -- the righty dropped his ERA to 2.14 while continuing to build on a dominant strikeout-to-walk ratio. After his eight punch-outs, he has now struck out 46 while issuing just five free passes.

"It's not as predictable as last year," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora of Porcello. "Last year you could look for a fastball and pick the spot and put a good swing on it, especially early in the count. The mix wasn't there. It seems like he wasn't able to pitch down in the zone as well as he did the previous year and since Day 1 I go back to our conversations at Winterfest about being consistent in the strike zone and being able to mix up the pitches, and change speeds and become a pitcher and he's doing a great job for us."

Red Sox 5, Rangers 1: Rafael Devers thrilled to hit two homers off childhood hero Bartolo Colon

John Tomase

On the day Bartolo Colon made his big league debut in 1997, Rafael Devers wasn't quite six months old. When Colon made his first All-Star team, Devers had just learned to walk. When Colon won the AL Cy Young Award in 2005, Devers was not yet 10.

And so it went that the oldest player in the leagues faced one of the youngest on Friday in Texas. And with two swings, youth prevailed.

Devers grew up in the Dominican Republic admiring Colon, and before the game labeled him a "superstar." So it was undoubtedly a thrill to admire the two homers he blasted into the Texas night during a 5-1 victory.

"Yeah, it was important for me – it was important for my career, I would say, to get the chance to face somebody like that," Devers said. "I just came into the league last year and I wasn't able to be teammates with David Ortiz but he's also the guy that I looked up to and Bartolo is another one of those guys, so that's why it was important."

Colon once threw 98 mph, but those days are long gone and hard to find. The 285-pounder -- and that's probably selling him short -- entered Friday's matchup in the midst of an outstanding season. The 44-year-old was 1-0 with a 2.87 ERA and a league-low three walks in 31 1/3 innings.

He beguiled the Red Sox with a series of tantalizing 88 mph two-seam fastballs and changeups, but he made four mistakes, and all of them left the park. In addition to the two solo shots by Devers, J.D. Martinez hit one out, and so did the rampaging Mookie Betts, who briefly surrendered sole possession of the MLB home run lead when Washington's Bryce Harper hit his second of the night, only for Betts to reclaim it with homer No. 13.

The Red Sox have come to expect such performances from Betts, who's off to one of the hottest starts in team history. What we're still unsure of is the impact Devers will make.

He ranks second on the club with 35 strikeouts, one behind Martinez. His OPS had dropped nearly 150 points over the last two weeks, but he ripped two doubles on May 1 and added the two homers on Friday to push his average back up to .276 and his OPS to .814. He now has six homers.

A Red Sox lineup with Devers providing power becomes a lot deeper. For all the talk of the struggles of the 7-8-9 hitters, Devers has provided production out of the six-hole. In 15 games there, he's hitting .350 with five home runs and 16 RBIs. His overall numbers have suffered thanks largely to the .205 average he produced in 10 games batting fifth.

Devers and Co. weren't the only standouts. Starter Rick Porcello was once again dominant en route to a perfect 5-0 start. He allowed three hits and a run in six innings, striking out eight. The lone blemish on his night was a solo homer by the red-hot Nomar Mazara. It was only the second homer Porcello has surrendered all year after allowing a league-worst 38 in 2017.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Not enough baserunners for Red Sox homers? Not a problem

Sean McAdam

ARLINGTON, Texas — This season it's been an all-or-nothing proposition for the Red Sox when it comes to home runs. The bases have either been loaded (six times, best in MLB) or empty.

And not much in between.

Of the 42 homers the Red Sox have hit this season — a figure that has them in the top third in the American League — 26 have come with nobody on.

Sounds like a lot, right? Only slightly so.

Heading into Friday's action, 59 percent of all major league homers have come with the bases empty. For the Red Sox, that figure is up only a bit at 62 percent.

Part of the Red Sox total is due to the work of Mookie Betts, who leads the Majors with 13 homers. Because Betts hits at the top of the order – and because the bottom two spots in the Red Sox lineup have underperformed greatly – he’s frequently coming to the plate with no one on, so when he does his damage, he’s frequently driving in only himself.

His last five – the one Friday night, the one Thursday in the road trip opener, and the three he hit Wednesday afternoon at Fenway – have all come with no one on, and for the season, 11 have been hit with the bases empty. That helps explain his rather modest RBI total of 26.

Betts may be at the extreme end of this phenomenon because he’s hitting leadoff. But the solo homer is far from uncommon in 2018. As has been the case for the past few years, hitters are often going up to the plate with the intention of swinging as hard as they can.

Gone is the notion of small ball, certainly, or even trying to put together an extended rally. Baseball has become like the Wild West, where every game is a shootout and it’s every man for himself.

Pitchers, we know, are throwing harder, with the average velocity for all pitchers at just over 92, and at 95 mph for relievers. Hitters aren’t guaranteed to make contact with the extra gas, so most have decided to adopt the old joke as their personal hitting philosophy: Swing hard in case you hit it.

More hitters are adopting a slight uppercut – hence, the infatuation with launch angle – to hit the ball in the air. The preponderance of infield shifts has made it harder to hit the ball on the ground and reach base safely, so the idea is to get some loft into the swing.

If it carries well enough, it will go out; and if no contact is made, oh well. There’s no longer any shame in striking out, as the numbers attest.

That Betts has hit so many balls out with no one to knock in has led some to suggest that Betts should be dropped down in the order so that he may have more chances to knock in runs. If Betts were to hit, say, third, he could conceivably have some teammates with high on-base percentages, and some of those solo homers would become two-run or three-run shots.

But that theory has several flaws. First, there’s no guarantee that Betts would be seeing as many hittable pitchers if he were coming up with men on base all the time.

And by hitting him first, the Red Sox achieve the goal of providing themselves with the “instant offense” that Cora craves, the chance to get out to a lead in the first inning. Further, because he’s leading off, Betts may average an extra plate appearance per game, which represents one more chance to hit the ball out of the ballpark – with runners on or not.

For a team that finished dead last in homers last season, necessitating the addition of J.D. Martinez, complaining that there are now not enough baserunners when the Sox hit the ball out of the ballpark is akin to, pardon the shift of sports, moving the goalposts.

The power switch has been turned on again for the Red Sox. They needn’t worry that the homers aren’t doing enough damage when the evidence suggests otherwise.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 5, Rangers 1 – Porcello and power tough to beat

Sean McAdam

ARLINGTON, Texas — All you need to know, in quickie form, about the Red Sox’ 5-1 win over the Texas Rangers, complete with BSJ analysis and insight.

HEADLINES

Porcello tosses another gem: You have to search hard to find fault with the outing turned in by Rick Porcello, who went six innings, struck out eight, walked just one and allowed only a run on three hits. The one blemish: a solo homer hit by Nomar Mazara. Other than that, Porcello worked quickly, threw plenty of strikes and got the Rangers to swing and miss a lot. "I felt good," he said. "The cutter was working well, which is a big pitch against their lefties. They have a lot of good fastball-hitting lefties in their lineup, so we tried to mix it up." Porcello also got into a nice groove with a lot of quick innings, piggy-backing on the quick pace set by the Rangers' starter, Bartolo Colon. "It's definitely a little easier to get into a good rhythm when the innings are turning over like that," he said.

Solo homers rule the day: The Red Sox belted four homers off Colon, all with the bases empty. J.D. Martinez hit the first, Mookie Betts hit the third and Rafael Devers hit the other two. Alex Cora noted that the third baseman had been hitting into some tough luck of late, with hard-hit balls hit right at fielders. But, he added, Devers wasn't discouraged. He also noted that Colon struck Devers out on a two-seamer in his first at-bat, and then set him up for another in the fifth. This time, however, Devers was ready and hit it out to right. And after Colon got him to swing through a changeup in the second plate appearance, Devers hit the next one he saw out in the seventh inning. "His talent is unreal," said Cora with admiration. And, it's worth noting, he's less than half the age of Colon.

Kelly continues streak: On Opening Day, Joe Kelly was part of a disastrous eighth inning in which the Sox bullpen blew a 4-0. But since then, Kelly has been almost perfect, stringing together 12 consecutive scoreless outings, stretching over 13.1 innings, during which hitters are just 6-for-45 against him. The Rangers went down in order against Kelly, who handled the seventh inning with ease.

TURNING POINT

The Red Sox were clinging to a 2-1 lead after five and Colon was keeping them off-balance and getting a lot of groundouts. But then came the daily Mookie Betts homer to give the Sox a two-run cushion and the Sox were off-and-running.

TWO UP

Matt Barnes: Barnes had an impressive eighth in which he didn't fall behind hitters and overpowered them with his fastball, recording two strikeouts in a 1-2-3 effort. If Barnes can continue to throw strikes, he could really dominate, since opponents have collected just six hits against him in 13.1 innings.

Mookie Betts: What would a game be without at least one homer from Betts? He hit his 13th in the sixth inning, giving him five in the last three games.

ONE DOWN

Andrew Benintendi: The second-year outfielder continues to run hot-and-cold. It seems it's either a multi-hit night or an 0-for. On Friday night, he was hitless in four at-bats, taking a called third strikes, rolling over on two groundouts to the right side, and popping up to first.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"I don't think I've ever seen a player like him. I don't think I've seen a player do so many things so well. I mean, he's the best right fielder, one of the best baserunners, hits for average, he hits for power, he doesn't strike out. What more can you ask for in a ballplayer?"

— Rick Porcello on teammate Mookie Betts.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The homer by Betts was his 70th from the leadoff spot, passing Dom DiMaggio to set a club record. Devers joined Betts as the only other Red Sox players with a multi-homer game this season.

Betts has nine homers in 16 road games this season.
Martinez is hitting .500 (12-for-24) during a six-game hitting streak.
Porcello has a string of six straight quality starts.
The last righthanded Red Sox hitter to homer in three straight games was Mike Napoli in May 2015.
Neither team managed a hit with runners in scoring position.
UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Rangers meet for the third game of the series, with two lefties going — Eduardo Rodriguez (3-0, 4.78) facing Cole Hamels (1-4, 4.08).

Final: Red Sox 5, Rangers 1 – Solo power

Sean McAdam

ARLINGTON, Texas – The Red Sox rode four solo homers and the strong pitching of Rick Porcello to a convincing 5-1 victory over the Texas Rangers Friday night.

The Sox got bases-empty shots from Mookie Betts (his fifth in three games), J.D. Martinez and two from Rafael Devers. They later added an insurance run on a double from Hanley Ramirez. Bartolo Colon allowed all four homers — and just one other hit — in taking the loss.

Porcello pitched six innings and allowed just three hits and walk to improve to 5-0. Three relievers — Joe Kelly, Matt Barnes, and Bobby Poyner — combined to contribute three scoreless relief innings with just one baserunner allowed.

WHO: Red Sox vs. Texas Rangers

WHEN: 8:05 p.m.

WHERE: Globe Life Park

WHAT'S UP: The Red Sox have had a poor stretch, going 3-4 over the last seven games against three teams with losing records. They were throttled in the opener of their four-game series with the Texas Rangers Thursday night, clubbed 11-5. The only positive from the night? The torrid Mookie Betts, who had a homer (his fourth in two games), an RBI double and a sacrifice fly four RBI and seven in the last two games. The Rangers, still in last in the A.L. West, have been more respectable of late, going 4-3 in their last seven. They'll send AARP member Bartolo Colon to the mound Friday night.

STARTING PITCHERS: RHP Rick Porcello (4-0, 2.33) vs. Bartolo Colon (1-0, 2.87)

TV/RADIO: NESN/WEEI 93.7 FM

IN-GAME OBSERVATIONS

9:56 Dominant performance for Porcello, who allowed a run on three hits while striking out eight and walking one. His ERA is down to 2.14 for the season and four times has allowed one or no runs.

9:43 Solo homers are the thing tonight, apparently. Actually, they've been the thing all season for the Red Sox. They've hit 42 homers this season and 26 have come with the bases empty.

8:55 Rick Porcello has done a nice job with the Rangers' lineup, allowing just two hits through the order the first time. He's used his two-seamer to get four outs and has struck out three.

8:35 Nelson Mazara is wearing the Red Sox out. A double and homer in the series opener Thursday, and he's opened the second with a line double to right. Three extra-base hits in six at-bats in the series.

8:22 Seventh homer of the year J.D. Martinez, continues to blister the ball. Pitch was a slider down in the zone, and in something of an aberration for Martinez, he hooked it out to left, pulling the ball.

LINEUPS

RED SOX

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

RANGERS

Deshields
Choo
Profar SS
Mazara RF
Gallo LF
Kiner-Falefa 3B
Guzman 1B
Chirinos C
Robinson 2B

NEWS AND NOTES

After rain interrupted plans for Brock Holt to hit on the field, take grounders and run the bases Friday, his workout will take place Saturday instead, with the goal to get him to go out on a two-game rehab assignment for Pawtucket beginning Monday before being activated in time for Wednesday.

Eduardo Rodriguez, who had been placed on the family medical leave list Wednesday, was expected to rejoin the club late Friday night and make his scheduled start.

Jackie Bradley Jr. was in the lineup, despite being in a 2-for-26 skid at the plate, dropping his average to .180. "This last week, he's been getting a lot of pitches in the zone and he's not swinging and missing them — he's fouling them off," said Alex Cora. "Is that a good sign? Is he getting closer? I don't know. But I do feel that he was taking good swings at home. He's working on a few things. Would we like him to hit the ball in the air (more)? Yeah, but it's a process. As you guys know, he's been a streaky player and we don't want that. Hopefully, when it clicks, when he gets it, it just stays through the season."

****The Athletic***

McCaffrey: Joe Kelly has morphed into lefty specialist for Red Sox

Jen McCaffrey

ARLINGTON, Texas – Mookie Betts hit yet another home run, Rafael Devers added two of his own, and Rick Porcello dominated again from the mound on Friday night against the Rangers.

Boston beat Texas, 5-1, in a clean win with solid hitting, pitching and defense.

Tucked away at the bottom of the scoresheet will be one solid inning from reliever Joe Kelly, which on its own might not look like much.

But a quick glance at the numbers tells a different story.

Not only has Kelly had a strong overall season with a 2.63 ERA in 13 appearances, but he's also posted some startlingly drastic reverse splits.

In 23 at-bats against left-handed hitters this season, Kelly has allowed just two hits for an .087 average. Right-handed hitters have batted .208 against him in 24 at-bats.

On Friday, he continued that trend.

Porcello had tossed six impressive innings, allowing one run on three hits and a walk while striking out eight. He was in such a rhythm, that despite 96 pitches, it was a surprise to see him out of the game in the seventh.

But with two lefties coming up, manager Alex Cora turned to Kelly. The first batter Kelly faced was Nomar Mazara, who had two of the three hits Porcello allowed (a homer and a double). Kelly got the lefty to fly out on a four-seamer after starting him off with a curveball, changeup and slider.

Joey Gallo, another lefty, stepped to the plate and Kelly started him off with two sliders, which Gallo took for balls. Kelly went back to the fastball twice to even the count, threw a curveball for a ball, then struck Gallo out swinging with a changeup.

He finished off the inning by getting righty Isiah Kiner-Falefa to line out to right.

The .087 average against lefties is an eye-popping stat, but considering Kelly has never had reverse splits like that before in his career, it begs the question, what has changed this season?

"If you can mix effectively — as a really successful reliever you have two pitches you can dominate, he has four that are really good swing-and-miss potential," pitching coach Dana LeVangie said. "Just getting them back and trusting and using them. Last year was a little different because he was dealing with some things so he wasn't able to manipulate the ball as well and relied more on his fastball. So we're seeing a guy transitioning like he's a starter coming out of the bullpen. It's really good."

In 2017, lefties actually hit better off Kelly (with a .222 average) than righties (.191). In 2016 when the Red Sox moved him to the bullpen, lefties hit .269 against him and righties .283.

Kelly and LeVangie credit the diversity of his pitch mix with his early success.

According to Baseball Savant, last year Kelly threw his sinker 60.4 percent of the time while tossing his curveball 18.1 percent of the time, slider 15.7 percent and changeup 2.9 percent.

This season, the numbers are drastically different. He's using his sinker roughly 35 percent of the time while throwing his four-seamer, which he hardly threw last year, on 26.2 percent of his pitches. As for the off-speed stuff, he's thrown the curveball less than last year (11.7 percent), but increased the usage of his changeup (7.8 percent) and slider (19.9 percent).

"He has three off speed weapons that as a one-inning reliever it's hard to time up pitches and he hits 100 when it comes in. He's got incredible stuff," LeVangie said. "He has an edge because he has so many weapons to go to and they can't sit on anything."

Kelly entered spring training with the goal of refining his off-speed repertoire. In the past, he'd rely too heavily on the fastball, which he can throw upwards of 100 mph, but those who could catch up to it, knew it was coming.

"I have the confidence to get both sides of the plate out so it just happens to be working that way throwing good against [lefties] and mixing pitches in hitters' counts," Kelly said. "[I'm] not dropping to the get-me-over heater like I did before."

Now, there's no telling which of his five pitches he'll throw and it's making him one of the more effective relievers in the game, especially against left-handed hitters, early this season.

****Associated Press***

Porcello 8 Ks, Betts 13th homer in Red Sox 5-1 win at Texas

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Rick Porcello went on to win 22 games and the AL Cy Young Award the last time he started a season 5-0 -- like he now has again this year.

"Two years ago was a long time ago now it feels like, so it's hard to compare," Porcello said. "We're doing some things differently than even we did two years ago, so I haven't really thought about what I was doing then. I know what I'm doing now, and want to keep that going."

Porcello struck out eight in six innings and allowed only three hits while matching the AL lead with his fifth win, and the Red Sox hit four solo homers off 44-year-old right-hander Bartolo Colon in a 5-1 victory Friday night at Texas.

Rafael Devers, at 21 less than half Colon's age, homered twice. Mookie Betts' MLB-best 13th homer was his fifth in three games, and J.D. Martinez also went deep for the Red Sox.

"It's cool. I'm just trying to do what I can to win games," Betts said. "We had some guys swinging the bat today for sure. It's fun."

At 23-9, the Red Sox have the best record in the majors.

After winning his first four starts this season, Porcello (5-0) was coming off consecutive no-decisions in which he went at least seven innings both times. The right-hander has won seven consecutive decisions going back to last season.

"Mixing up pitches, location up and down, changeups in, changeups away, cutters, breaking balls, the usual," manager Alex Cora said.

Nomar Mazara homered in his fourth consecutive game for Texas, a career-best streak for the 23-year-old slugger who has seven homers this season. That was the lone run, and one of only three hits off Porcello. Mazara also had a double.

Colon struck out four without a walk in seven innings with the only runs coming on the four homers. He threw 91 pitches, with only 22 balls while facing 26 batters.

"It's always going to happen to me because all the players, every team, they know I throw strikes and they want to be aggressive," Colon said through an interpreter. "I always have to give credit to the hitters because they know that I'm aggressive."

The portly right-hander, who turns 45 on May 24, has 241 career wins, two short of matching Juan Marichal for the most by a pitcher born in the Dominican Republic.

"No three-ball counts. Very efficient with his pitches," manager Jeff Banister said. "Thought he had a good mix tonight, good movement on the fastball. ... Obviously, the four solo shots that we gave up did the damage."

Martinez led off the second with a towering flyball that ricocheted off the top of the 14-foot wall in left and into the seats. Devers broke a 1-1 tie leading off the fifth, and homered again in the seventh.

Betts put Boston up 3-1 with his leadoff shot in the sixth. He has gone deep in each of the first two games at Texas after his three-homer game Wednesday at Fenway Park against Kansas City. It is the first time he has homered in three consecutive games.

"Mookie, it's been incredible," Porcello said. "Definitely glad he's on our side."

THREE FOR RICK

The Red Sox have won 26 consecutive games when scoring at least three runs for Porcello, a streak that dates back to 2016. In his last 37 starts receiving that much run support, Porcello is 31-0; the Red Sox are 36-1.

SHORT HOPS

Rangers leadoff hitter Delino DeShields had two hits, extending his hitting streak to a career-best eight games. It's the longest by a Texas player this season. ... Right-handed starters are 1-14 with 7.49 ERA in 25 starts against Boston this season.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: INF Brock Holt (left hamstring) will remain with the team through the weekend before a short rehab stint. He has been on the disabled list since April 27.

Rangers: 2B Rougned Odor, out since April 10 because of a left hamstring, is set to start a rehab assignment Saturday at Double-A Frisco. He will be the DH in his first game for the RoughRiders.

UP NEXT

A fresh start for Rangers lefty Cole Hamels (1-4), who had four losses by the end of April for the first time in his career. The Red Sox counter in the third game of the four-game series with lefty Eduardo Rodriguez (3-0), who is expected to return from the family medical leave list without missing a start.