

The Boston Red Sox Monday, August 6, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Eduardo Rodriguez throws off mound for first time since injury

Peter Abraham

One of the more significant developments for the Red Sox on Sunday happened 4½ hours before they played the Yankees.

Eduardo Rodriguez, who has been on the disabled list since badly spraining his right ankle on July 14, threw 30 pitches off the main mound at Fenway Park.

“That was impressive, honestly,” manager Alex Cora said. “That was good to see.”

With Dan Butler catching and Rafael Devers standing in but not swinging, Rodriguez threw his full assortment of pitches with Cora, pitching coach Dana LeVangie and other team officials watching closely.

“I thought he looked great,” Butler said. “He was sharp.”

Rodriguez appeared to have a long-term injury when he took an awkward tumble covering first base against the Blue Jays. But the lefthander was soon playing catch and that progressed to throwing off the mound for the first time on Sunday.

“I want to keep going; I want to keep doing it. My ankle is really good,” Rodriguez said. “It feels great, feels fine throwing off the mound. That was a test today, on a main diamond and everything. It was really good.”

Rodriguez said playing catch kept his arm strong and when he got on the mound his pitches felt normal.

“It felt great,” he said. “I asked Raffy how he saw it and he said it was good.”

After Rodriguez finished pitching, he jogged in the outfield and went through a few fielding drills.

Rodriguez said how well the Sox have played is a source of motivation.

“I just want to get back and contribute, too,” he said. “The team is playing pretty good and I want to be part of that.”

That Rodriguez pitched with only tape on his ankles and not a brace was another sign of his progress. He is no longer using a walking boot or air cast.

Rodriguez had a reputation for being ultra-cautious with injuries in past years. But he has had a different approach since spring training and was ahead of schedule returning from knee surgery.

That he was on the mound throwing only three weeks after what the Sox feared was a season-ending injury was another example.

“That was good news right there,” Cora said.

Rodriguez is 11-3 with a 3.44 earned run average in 19 starts. Given his recent progress, he should have time to return as a starter. That would be a boost to what is already a strong rotation.

“That’s what I want, to be available to them as a starter,” he said. “But if they put me in the bullpen, or wherever they put me, I’m going to go out there and pitch.”

His next step has not been scheduled, although Rodriguez did not rule out the idea of being able to return before the end of the month.

“We’ve got to see what the plan is going to be,” he said. “We’ve got to sit together.”

Typically, the Sox would want to see a pitcher build up via a simulated game and then a minor league rehabilitation assignment before returning to the majors.

That process would be quicker if Rodriguez is used a reliever.

Even when Red Sox do it wrong, they can do no wrong

Christopher L. Gasper

Even when the Red Sox do it wrong, they can do no wrong. It has been that type of season. They secured a decisive four-game sweep of the New York Yankees with a 5-4 walkoff win in 10 innings Sunday night in a game that took four hours and 39 minutes — and several twists and turns — before finding its way into the win column for the good guys.

What was shaping up as another classic Red Sox-Yankees divisional race now has the Sox separating like Secretariat, ballooning their lead to 9½ games in the American League East over a Yankees team that looked feckless and fundamentally unsound. The dejected Yanks showed their most alacrity of the series when they exited the field posthaste after Andrew Benintendi delivered a two-out, seeing-eye single to center field to plate the winning the run and push the Sox to a remarkable 79-34.

Nights like Sunday convince you that 2018 Red Sox are a team of destiny and dominance like Boston’s last World Series winner in 2013. That was also the last Sox team to enjoy a 9½-game lead in the AL East.

Great teams can win games in a multitude of ways and can find a way to win games they don’t deserve to. The Sox did both in this series. They deserved to sweep the Yankees. Paradoxically, they didn’t deserve to win Sunday’s game after manager Alex Cora made a managerial miscue and Xander Bogaerts misplayed a double-play ball into a two-run error in the seventh that erased Boston’s 1-0 lead and a brilliant start from David Price, who exorcised his Yankee demons.

The most impressive aspect of this season for the Red Sox is their consistent excellence in a sport that force-feeds failure. The Red Sox are the only team in baseball this season not to lose four in a row. They’re 7-0-2 in their last nine series.

“I’m proud of them,” said Cora. “They’re playing well. They don’t get caught up in the whole thing. They show up every day. They digest the information. They go out there and play and they win games. They win a lot of games.”

Even ones they shouldn’t.

This was a statement series for the Sox. This wasn’t the Orioles or the Blue Jays that the Red Sox walked all over like a welcome mat. It was the Yankees, a probable playoff team. Boston is 8-5 against its rival this season, outscoring New York, 81-62. Yes, the Yankees lineup looked light without injured slugger Aaron Judge. But the Sox swept without the services of ace Chris Sale, who was supposed to start the first game of the series before he went on the disabled list with shoulder inflammation. (Since the All-Star break Boston starters have posted a 1.74 ERA, best in the bigs.)

Everything went right for the Red Sox in a series that went from showdown to a beatdown. All of Dave Dombrowski's recent trade acquisitions starred. Price put his pinstripe post-traumatic stress disorder behind him. The bullpen wasn't exposed. Cora got tossed from one game in the first inning and opened himself up to second-guessing in another, and still came out a hero.

The rookie skipper sent Price back to the mound when he should have sent him to the showers with six satisfying innings of shutout baseball against a New York club that had bedeviled him.

All eyes among the 37,830 that constituted Fenway's largest crowd of the season were on Price, who entered the contest 2-6 with an 8.43 ERA in nine starts against the Yankees since he joined the Red Sox. In two starts against the Yankees this season, he was 0-2 with a 24.92 ERA, allowing 12 runs (all earned), 12 hits, and six home runs in 4½ innings.

On his 95th pitch of the evening, Price punched out Luke Voit on a 3-2 changeup with a runner on first to end the sixth and preserve a 1-0 lead. He nodded his head emphatically as he walked off the mound. It looked like Price was done with a breakthrough outing and his Bronx Bombers mental block, but Cora channeled his inner Grady Little and brought Price back for the seventh.

Price allowed the first two men to reach and was pulled for Health Hembree, who walked No. 9 hitter Shane Robinson while trying to prevent a sacrifice bunt. Bogaerts botched an apparent double-play ball off the bat of Aaron Hicks, so instead of a tie game with two outs, the Sox trailed 2-1. The Yankees added two more runs on a Giancarlo Stanton RBI single off Hembree and a Didi Gregorius sacrifice fly off Ryan Brasier.

The long and tortured history of the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry informs us that normally the Sox would have been left to wallow in what might have been. Not this year. The sublime Sox simply shrugged it off and rallied for three runs in the ninth against wild Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman, aided by third baseman Miguel Andujar's error on the ostensible game-ending grounder, allowing the tying run to score.

You know things are going well when the guy who scored the run that secured the sweep in the 10th, recent call-up Tony Renda, is basically a complete stranger. He was greeted after the game by Dombrowski, who offered a "Welcome to Boston."

This edition of the Red Sox is more talented top to bottom than the 2013 team, which was supposed to restore the Sox to respectability after a last-place finish in 2012 but exceeded all expectations. The current Red Sox were expected to be World Series contenders after back-to-back AL East titles. The 2013 team won 97 games. This team should blow right by that on its way to 100-plus wins.

But the feeling around the teams is similar. There's a confidence and camaraderie that permeates the clubhouse.

"It's fun. This is a fun team," said J.D. Martinez. "It's a very humble team, I feel like. We don't have any of those egos on this team. It seems like a close group of guys, guys who like to have fun, guys who talk crap to each other every day and keep it loose in here. It's a good time."

The Atlantic recently ran a story about trying to measure chemistry in baseball. It's one of the last aspects of the game that defies being quantified. The age-old question is whether chemistry begets winning or winning begets chemistry.

Either way, these Red Sox have lots of both.

Red Sox sweep Yankees with stirring late rally

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox have been relentless winners this season, the best team in baseball. But what they pulled off early Monday morning at Fenway Park was almost beyond belief.

Down to their final out, the Sox scored three runs in the bottom of the ninth inning to tie the game then beat the Yankees, 5-4, in the 10th inning on a three-hop single by Andrew Benintendi that found its way to the outfield.

That completed a four-game sweep, dropping an anvil on any realistic hopes the Yankees have of catching the Red Sox in the American League East.

At 79-34, the Red Sox have a 9½-game lead with 49 games to play. They have won eight of nine and a remarkable 23 of 28. No team in baseball has a larger lead in its division.

The 68-42 Yankees have lost five straight and are 18-20 since June 22.

The Yankees led 3-0 in the first inning on Thursday. The Red Sox outscored them 28-10 after that.

As Sunday night turned into Monday morning, the Sox put their rivals away.

“I honestly never thought we would lose that game,” Mookie Betts said. “Not the way we’ve been playing.”

Sandy Leon, who started the rally that tied the game in the ninth, singled with two outs off Jonathan Holder. After a wild pitch, the Yankees intentionally walked Mookie Betts.

With Tony Renda making his Red Sox debut pinch running at second base, Benintendi bounced a single up the middle into center field. The Yankees were in a shift and second baseman Gleyber Torres had no play because he was pulled over to the right side.

“Of all the hits up the middle that were taken away by the shift, that one finds a way to get through. Thank God it did,” Benintendi said.

After Renda slid across the plate head first, the party was on.

“That’s the best run I’ve ever scored in my life,” said Renda, who joined the Sox on Saturday. “What a feeling.”

Most of the crowd of 37,830, the largest of the season, stayed until the end. Many were chanting “sweep, sweep, sweep” as they left the park.

The players were celebrating, too.

“That clubhouse is pretty loud right now,” Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Down 4-1 in the ninth, the Sox tied the game against Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman with only one hit.

Leon and Betts drew one-out walks before Benintendi stuck out looking at a high slider.

Steve Pearce worked a walk to load the bases for J.D. Martinez, who swung at the first pitch he saw — a 98½-m.p.h. fastball — and lined a two-run single to center field.

“I’m just sticking to my plan,” Martinez said. “It’s top secret.”

Martinez did say the walk to Pearce did not change his approach. He was not going to let a hittable pitch go by.

“Be ready to hit,” he said. “If you go up there are and take, it’s tough.”

When Xander Bogaerts grounded to third base, the Sox appeared finished. But Miguel Andujar’s throw was low and got away from first baseman Greg Bird. Pinch runner Jackie Bradley Jr. scored from second base to tie it.

Chapman struck out Mitch Moreland to end a 39-pitch inning.

Chapman has faced the Red Sox 16 times as a member of the Yankees. He has allowed 11 earned runs on 14 hits and 15 walks over 15 1/3 innings.

“We had tough at-bats, a lot of them,” Pearce said. “We made him work.”

Matt Barnes worked a perfect top of the 10th inning and was the winner.

The first four innings, though scoreless, took one hour and 40 minutes as Red Sox starter David Price and Yankees counterpart Masahiro Tanaka were at their customary slow pace.

Betts added some much-needed life to the game with one out in the fifth inning when he homered over everything in left field, a 437-foot shot.

Tanaka struck out Benintendi but was pulled out of the game after Pearce reached on an error by Andujar.

David Robertson, pitching in the fifth inning for the first time this season, came in and struck Martinez out.

Beyond the home run, Tanaka pitched well. He scattered six hits, walked one and struck out eight.

Price had faced the Yankees twice previously this season and allowed 12 runs on 12 hits — six of them home runs — over 4 2/3 innings. That left him 2-6 with an 8.43 earned run average in nine starts against the Yankees since joining the Red Sox in 2016.

That made his performance on Sunday all the more notable as he took a 1-0 lead into the seventh inning. The lefthander, relying heavily on his changeup and cutter, was sharp.

The first inning was a test. Giancarlo Stanton rifled a single to left field before Price hit Didi Gregorius with a wayward curveball.

With two outs, Andujar singled to left field to load the bases.

Luke Voit grounded back to the mound to end the inning. It was the first of nine consecutive batters Price retired.

When Austin Romine singled to lead off the fifth, the Yankees resorted to a sacrifice bunt by Shane Robinson.

Price retired Aaron Hicks on a groundball to second and Stanton on a grounder to shortstop.

Price was at 95 pitches after striking out Andujar and Voit to end the sixth inning. That appeared to be a good spot to end his night on a positive note.

But Cora’s judgment was faulty this time as sent Price came back out for the seventh inning.

Brett Gardner singled to right field. Price remained in the game and walked Romine on a full-count cut fastball that was high.

“We trust [Price]. He was locked in; he was commanding the strike zone,” Cora said.

Heath Hembree, as he so often does, came into the game with runners on base. He had stranded 21 of 24 this season, the last 19 in a row.

So much for that. Robinson squared to bunt again but Hembree tried to pitch around the attempt and walked him to load the bases.

When Hicks grounded to shortstop, the ball got under the glove of Xander Bogaerts, rolled slowly into center and two runs scored.

Robinson went to third on the error and scored on Stanton's single to left. Facing Ryan Brasier, Torres sent a sacrifice fly to center and Hicks scored.

Price was charged with two runs on four hits with three walks and five strikeouts.

"He threw an unbelievable game," Leon said. "He used all his pitches. He competed, man. He was fighting."

The anatomy of a walkoff celebration

Patience will be key in Chris Sale's return to rotation

Peter Abraham

Chris Sale said last week he expected to miss only one start after being placed on the disabled list with what was described by the Red Sox as "mild" shoulder inflammation.

Sale is eligible to return on Wednesday. But the Sox have scheduled Drew Pomeranz, Brian Johnson and Rick Porcello for the series at Toronto that starts on Tuesday night.

Sale's injury has not worsened, according to president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. The Sox are just waiting to return him to the rotation.

Cora said Sunday he wants to reconfigure the rotation to keep Sale from having to hit when the Red Sox play in Philadelphia Aug. 14 and 15.

The plan now is for Sale to "most likely" pitch one of the four games in Baltimore, Cora said. That series starts Thursday.

"For me, that actually works," Cora said after a 5-4, 10-inning victory against the Yankees.

Sale is 11-4 with a 2.04 earned run average in 22 starts.

For Pomeranz, Tuesday's start could determine whether he will remain in the rotation. The lefthander is 1-5 with a 6.56 ERA in 10 starts — 0-2 with a 5.59 ERA since spending nearly eight weeks on the disabled list with biceps tendinitis.

Devers close

Third baseman Rafael Devers, who is on the disabled list with a strained left hamstring, went through an extensive workout before the game.

Devers played catch, did a series of base-running drills and took ground balls at third base. He then stood at the plate to track pitches while Eduardo Rodriguez threw off the mound.

The plan is for Devers to report to Single A Lowell on Monday to play 6-7 innings. The Spinners host Vermont at 6:35 p.m. at LeLacheur Park.

Devers would then join up with the Red Sox in Toronto. He is eligible to come off the disabled list on Wednesday.

Devers was injured while running the bases on July 28.

Related: Gasper: Even when Red Sox do it wrong, they can do no wrong

Welcomed day off

Swihart (right) and Kinsler (left) have hamstring strains. Alex Cora said both are recovering well and could return to the roster when eligible or shortly after.

Cora is looking forward to the day off in Toronto on Monday after what was a hectic week. The trade deadline was Tuesday; he attended a memorial service for a close friend's teenaged son in Miami on Wednesday and then came the four games against the Yankees.

"We need this off day as a team," Cora said.

Chips bag value

During his pregame press session, Cora praised what Kinsler, righthander Nathan Eovaldi and first baseman/DH Steve Pearce have contributed to the team since being acquired by trade.

Eovaldi is 2-0 through two starts and has thrown 15 scoreless innings. Pearce has hit .333 with a 1.097 OPS in 20 games. He has five home runs and 14 RBIs.

Kinsler appeared in only three games before he was injured but was 4 for 10 with a double, two RBIs and two stolen bases.

That the Sox had the trade chips to acquire three helpful players was not lost on the manager.

"The topic is always about our minor league system, how quote/unquote weak it is," Cora said. "We got Nathan, Ian and Steve and they're three pretty good players."

Sunday was a good day for the minor league system. Power-hitting third base prospect Bobby Dalbec , 23, hit two home runs and walked twice in his fourth game since being promoted to Double A Portland.

Another power hitter, 22-year-old first baseman Josh Ockimey , homered for Triple A Pawtucket. He is 3 for 11 with two home runs in three games since being promoted.

Dalbec was a fourth-round pick in 2016 and Ockimey a fifth-round pick in 2014.

Stop, thief

The Red Sox were successful in 13 stolen base attempts against the Yankees this season before Xander Bogaerts was thrown out trying to steal second by Austin Romine in the second inning. Through Saturday, the Sox led the majors with 87 steals. . . . Mookie Betts is 21 of 51 (.412) with 11 extra-base hits, 10 RBIs and 16 runs in 13 games against the Yankees this season. . . . The Sox have a major league-best 2.41 ERA since the All-Star break with their starters having a 1.74. . . . The games on Friday and Saturday lasted four hours and 48 minutes. The Sunday night/Monday morning game was 4:39, the longest of the season. . . . Patriots coach Bill Belichick and girlfriend Linda Holliday were at the game, sitting with Red Sox special assistant Tony La Russa in Dombrowski's box behind home plate. Belichick and La Russa are long-time friends.

David Price had something to prove against the Yankees

Nick Cafardo

At least he proved he could pitch well against the Yankees.

David Price didn't beat them as he left the game in the seventh when he put two men on and both scored, erasing the 1-0 lead he had after pitching six strong innings. That probably should have been it. Leave with a lead and leave on a positive note after 95 pitches. But with the bottom of the order due up in the seventh, Alex Cora wanted to see if he could get one more inning out of price.

Heath Hembree came on, Xander Bogaerts made an error, and before you knew it the 1-0 lead was a 4-1 deficit. But when Boston came back in the bottom of the ninth to tie it against Aroldis Chapman before taking a 5-4 win in the 10th, Price avoided the loss.

Price left the field in the seventh to a standing ovation, one of the few signs of love Price has felt from the Boston fans since he got here.

The pressure was on Price to prove to the fans, to his teammates, to the organization, to himself, that he can pitch well against the Yankees. He had been 2-6, with an 8.43 ERA (44 ER/47 IP) in nine starts vs. the Yankees since joining the Red Sox. He'd lost both of his previous outings against them this season, allowing 12 runs in just 4½ innings (0-2, with a 24.92 ERA).

Price allowed a single to Brett Gardner and a walk to Austin Romine before Cora came out to get him.

"Lefty against lefty with Gardner, but he got a hit. I know numbers said Romine is good against him there, but there are a lot of singles in there, we trust the guy," Cora said of his reasoning for bringing Price out for the seventh inning. "He was locked in commanding the strike zone and we felt it was a good matchup for us."

The final line Sunday night was six-plus innings, four hits, two runs, three walks, one hit batter, and five strikeouts. It could have been better, but this was a case of Cora trying to go too long with Price instead of letting him leave the game on a good note.

If you went by the first inning when he loaded the bases, but got out of it unharmed, you would have thought 'Here we go again!' But it wasn't that at all. Price wasn't dazzling, but he was good. He escaped a couple of jams, had some efficient innings, and made it through six innings without allowing a run.

"That was huge," Price said of getting out of the jam. "I think in the last two starts against them I'd given up three runs, so it was big to get out of that."

He showed a strong changeup and cutter, and at times was squeezed by home plate umpire Chris Conroy.

While the pressure was on Price, the Red Sox had already taken the first three games of the series and therefore won the series. The Sox had an 8½-game lead entering the night, so if Price had lost, no biggie in that regard.

Price has been pitching well of late. He got a no decision against another really good team, the Phillies, allowing one run in eight innings in a 2-1 Red Sox win in 13 innings his last time out. Price was 2-0, with a 1.71 ERA (4 ER/21 IP) over his previous three starts. Price relied primarily on his offspeed stuff during this three-game span, throwing a few more cutters but a lot more change-ups. In his last three starts, he'd thrown 37.5 percent fastballs, which is down from the 50.4 percent he'd thrown in his first 18 starts. He threw 30.1 percent cutters as opposed to 27.9 percent in his first 19 starts.

With Price locked in a 0-0 pitcher's duel with Masahiro Tanaka, the Red Sox got on the board in the fifth inning when Mookie Betts uncorked a 437-foot homer over the Green Monster on a 2-0 fastball.

It looked ominous in the first inning when Price allowed a single to Giancarlo Stanton with one out, hit Didi Gregorius with a pitch, and allowed a two-out single to Miguel Andujar to load the bases. But Price got Luke Voit to tap back to the mound, retiring the side with no damage done.

Gardner, Romine, and Shane Robinson all flied out in a much quicker second inning.

In the fourth, Price felt he was being squeezed by Conroy, whose borderline calls added to Price's pitch count when he walked Voit with two outs. He went to 3-2 on Gardner before striking him out on a cutter. As he walked off the mound, Price was visibly upset as he strolled to the dugout.

In the fifth, Price escaped another jam when Romine was stranded at third.

Price got through six really well. His night probably should have ended there. While there was no win for him, the win came in knowing the Yankees no longer own him.

Amazingly, these rookies have managed to handle adversity

Nick Cafardo

For a while, they were lumped together — Alex Cora and Aaron Boone — as rookie managers of the American League superpower Red Sox and Yankees, respectively. Now, however, there's separation. Cora keeps winning — with an 8½-game lead in the AL East before Sunday night's four-game series finale over Boone's Yankees, who have seemed to hit a wall.

It's been an amazing run for Cora the past two seasons. He was a bench coach for the Houston Astros, who won 101 regular-season games and then won the Divisional Series, the AL Championship Series, and the World Series. Heck, he got the Red Sox job, had the best spring training record (22-9) in baseball, started the regular season 17-2 and now sitting at 78-34.

Not much in the way of adversity.

"I'm prepared," Cora said about potential adversity. "I do believe we're very talented. It's not that we're looking forward to losing a few games in a row. But we know where we're at and what our goals are. Baseball is great and I love it. But, honestly, when the game is over, I get in my car and the game is over. I go [home] and change diapers."

Who knows when the A-word — adversity — will rear its ugly head. But, for now, Cora has been insulated with a magical touch concerning his strategic moves and in the clubhouse where his players follow and believe in him.

That sentiment started in the offseason when players seemed relieved they would be moving on from John Farrell, who had won a World Series and two straight divisional titles.

Of course, the modern reason for getting fired is when management accuses you of communication issues. It happened to Joe Girardi in New York and Farrell in Boston. The players were no longer inspired by the leader. There was no fun in the clubhouse. It even happened to Terry Francona in 2011 after his voice became muted by a chicken-and-beer incident and the great September collapse.

The shiny brand new Cora hasn't worn off on anyone yet. After some tight games with the Yankees, who had won five of the first nine meetings, Cora's Red Sox have come back with a vengeance, winning three straight before their "Sunday Night Baseball" matchup.

Both teams have been banged up, but the Red Sox have been able to weather the withering losses of Rafael Devers, Chris Sale, Steven Wright, Eduardo Rodriguez, Ian Kinsler and Blake Swihart. The Yankees, meanwhile, have not fielded quite as potent a lineup with the loss of their top two sluggers — Aaron Judge and Gary Sanchez. And what Pete Rose told the New York Post's Kevin Kernan last week in Cooperstown, N.Y., was true: the Yankees are a slugging lineup, but the Red Sox can hit for average and slug.

These two managers, obviously, have excellent talent and will succeed because of it. But both have displayed what Farrell and Girardi seemed to have been missing — the ability to communicate and connect with their players.

In big markets, the tune-out factor becomes evident after a while. Buck Showalter experienced it in Baltimore, and Mike Scioscia has likely felt it in Anaheim, where his contract is up and it looks like he could be moving on.

Boone was asked at his pregame press conference about the adversity of late and whether he believed in team meetings when things are bad.

"I say things in a group context all the time," Boone said. "I don't feel I need to call something if I sense that our guys weren't preparing right, or we're struggling in different situations, or I really think their focus isn't good. I think they're able to turn the page. I think they're able to have things roll off them, so I have no issue.

"I think we're prepared to go out there. I think each guy is in a good place even though we're going through a tough little stretch right now."

It's not as though Boone is against meetings. As a player, he said he was in some good ones that made a difference and he was in some that left him uninspired.

"I talked to everyone as a group right before the All-Star break," Boone admitted. "I will, at times, pop into to our daily hitters meeting for the first couple of minutes if I have something to say to our positional players. But, as far as calling a full-fledged team meeting, those have been few and far between since Opening Day."

During these tough times, Boone believes the team gets its strength from the manager.

"I hope they look at me as emotionally stable and understand that I'm going to be as consistent and the same guy everyday," said the Yankees manager. "I don't want them to ever look at me and have anxiety come for me. It's important for me to be consistent with who I am, how I treat them, how I talk to them.

"So that's philosophically very important to me."

While Cora is sitting in a position where it seems tough to figure how they could lose the division — unless they are haunted by the ghosts of 1978 or, even, 2003 — Boone is in the position where it's hard to see how the Yankees could come back from this far to upend the Red Sox.

"I understand we're in a tough spot," he said. "I also understand our guys know they're really good and capable of doing special things. We're going to have to play a lights-out brand of baseball and I don't put that past us. We just can't start getting ahead of ourselves and start chasing results.

"The guys we have, and who they are, if we stay locked in to the plan and the process and keep winning every pitch, over time if we stay true to that, we'll wrap up a lot of wins."

Boone and Cora were interchangeable at one point this season. But now Cora has left his old ESPN buddy a bit behind.

After Sunday's game there will still be six more games between the two teams, the final three at Fenway to end the season. If the Yankees win the wild card game, they'll likely face Boston in the Divisional Series. And that's where Boone could create some adversity for Cora.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox rally in ninth, walk off in 10th to sweep Yankees

Jason Mastrodonato

Not long after Andrew Benintendi stroked a ground ball up the middle for a walkoff RBI single, slammed his helmet on the ground after rounding first base and let out a scream, he was already talking about the next game tomorrow.

Turn the page. On to Toronto. The sports cliché is generic and endless.

And yet the Red Sox have stuck to it. They've played with fire and energy on the field and hardly shown any residual effects off of it.

It's one game down, another to go.

Benintendi's clutch hit completed the Red Sox' 5-4 come-from-behind 10th-inning win against the New York Yankees last night that secured a series sweep, just the seventh of the Yankees in a four-game series in 100 years.

The Red Sox now are 79-34 and 9 1/2 games up on their division rivals. And hardly showing it.

"We're just having fun," Benintendi said. "Nobody is stressing in here, really. We're just going out and we know we have a pretty good team. And when we're loose is when we play the best. That's what we're trying to do.

"Everybody knew how big this series was. We came in and did what we wanted to do. Kind of stole this one. Every win counts the same. Now we have to reshift our focus toward Toronto."

The air was taken out of Fenway Park in the seventh inning, when David Price finally bent, the bullpen broke and it looked like a missed opportunity to bury the Yankees for good.

But the Sox scored three runs off Aroldis Chapman in the ninth before Benintendi walked it off in the 10th.

"We always come to series and the goal is to win it and we swept them," manager Alex Cora said. "Now, it's great, that clubhouse is pretty loud right now. But like I've been saying all along, (today) is an off day and then we've got Toronto. We've got to turn the page and be ready for that team and same goal, go win the series."

What looked like a disappointing loss for the Red Sox, after Price pitched brilliant for six innings and faded in the seventh, slowly turned around in the ninth inning.

The Sox loaded the bases off Chapman with three walks before J.D. Martinez roped a two-out, two-run single up the middle to bring them within one. The next batter, Xander Bogaerts, hit a grounder to third base that was fielded by Miguel Andujar, but the throw was low and Greg Bird couldn't handle the scoop as pinch-runner Jackie Bradley Jr. scored all the way from second to tie it.

After Matt Barnes pitched a scoreless 10th inning, Sandy Leon roped a two-out single off Jonathan Holder. Leon scurried to second on a wild pitch and the Yankees intentionally walked Mookie Betts to get to

Benintendi, who slapped a single up the middle to bring in pinch-runner Tony Renda and end the long game.

Price came into it with a chance to answer some questions about his performances in big games, particularly against the Yankees, who knocked him around for eight runs the last time they faced him in early July.

The Yankees couldn't touch Rick Porcello (one hit) on Friday or Nathan Eovaldi (three hits) on Saturday. They had struck out 28 times in the first three games of the series.

Price didn't follow the efficient game plan from Porcello and Eovaldi, and instead made the Yankees chase pitches out of the strike zone all night. Of his 65 strikes, 19 of them were pitches out of the zone that the Yankees reached for. And six of them resulted in immediate outs.

He was huffing and puffing on the mound, taking a handful of moments to step off and suck in some air as the game crawled at a snail's pace. He was patient and careful, and the Yanks had no answers.

"Typical Red Sox-Yankee game, lasting a very long time and you know we were able to come out on top," he said.

Asked about his performance, he said, "It was good. It was better. Happy we won."

In the seventh, on 95 pitches, Price walked back to the mound and appeared out of gas. He worked Brett Gardner to a 2-2 count, but couldn't finish him and gave up a line drive single to right field. After jumping ahead 1-2 on Austin Romine, Price threw three straight uncompetitive pitches to walk him. He finished with 108 pitches, 65 for strikes.

"We trust the guy, he was locked in," Cora said.

Heath Hembree should have had an easy time when he entered to face the No. 9 hitter, Shane Robinson, a career .227 hitter who squared up to bunt. Robinson bunted the first pitch foul, then Hembree tried getting cute and threw three straight pitches up-and-in, finally walking Robinson to load the bases with nobody out.

The Red Sox had held their opponents hitless in their last 29 at-bats with the bases loaded until Aaron Hicks stepped up.

Hicks smoked a ground ball to Bogaerts, who had fielded more than 300 balls at shortstop this year without making an error with his glove (he has five errors, but all of them were throwing mistakes). Finally, Bogaerts broke. The ball scooted by him and into the outfield as two runs scored. Two more scored before the disastrous inning finally ended, and Fenway Park went almost silent.

It roared back to life in the ninth as the Red Sox won their 79th game of the season.

"At no point did we think we were going to lose," Betts said. "The whole time coming in, if we can keep it close, we can come back and make something happen. We don't ever give up. Obviously, that showed."

Red-hot starting rotation has Sox in feel-good mode entering Monday off day

Jason Mastrodonato

Well before David Price took the mound last night, the Red Sox had already felt like they accomplished enough this weekend to feel good about themselves.

They had banked a lot of positive feelings over the previous 14 games since the All-Star break.

And they've been doing it with their starting rotation, which entered the night with a 1.65 ERA since the midsummer break.

Price's results weren't going to change that.

"At the end of the day, (today) is a great off day for everybody," manager Alex Cora said. "That's the way I see it. It's been a tough week. Trading deadline, obviously what happened in Miami (when Cora's best friend's son, Ari Arteaga, died in a car crash), playing these guys (the Yankees), obviously looking forward to David pitching. But then when the game is over, hop on the plane and enjoy the off day.

"We needed it. We need this off day."

They need it to rest, not because they aren't playing well.

It's been 99 years since Red Sox starters posted a streak as good as the one they were on entering yesterday.

"I feel like we all feed off each other," newcomer Nathan Eovaldi said after his gem on Saturday.

Sox starters have allowed zero or one earned run in 10 of the 14 games since the break. And five of those outings came from depth starter Brian Johnson and the struggling Drew Pomeranz.

And the Red Sox are only getting deeper.

The dominance has come mostly from Chris Sale, but Rick Porcello showed on Friday that he's very capable of throwing a gem. And Eovaldi hasn't allowed a run in two starts since joining the Red Sox.

Sale won't pitch again until after the Sox' upcoming series with the Toronto Blue Jays, instead getting extra rest while on the disabled list with shoulder inflammation.

But it's not hard to imagine a playoff series that features Sale as the No. 1 starter and whoever is pitching best behind him. There will be options.

It's looking more likely that Pomeranz is going to end up in the bullpen, where he pitched well for the Oakland A's in 2014-15. He volunteered to pitch out of the 'pen this weekend, to which Cora said, "cool," and immediately moved him there, though Pomeranz was never used.

His velocity is still stuck in the high-80s, his command remains inconsistent and as soon as the Red Sox have a better option, Pomeranz should be tried out of relief.

And eventually Eduardo Rodriguez is coming back.

Rodriguez threw a bullpen session yesterday for the first time since suffering serious ligament damage in his right ankle, the landing ankle for a left-handed pitcher. He threw 25-30 pitches while Rafael Devers stood in to watch. Devers later told Rodriguez he looked great.

"That was impressive, honestly," Cora said.

Said Rodriguez: "My ankle is really good, feels great, feels fine throwing the ball. That was the test today, how I would land on it and everything. Feels really good."

He wasn't sure if he would return before Sept. 1, but if the rotation is still rolling by then, maybe the Sox will give Rodriguez a try out of relief instead of waiting for him to build up 80-100 pitches again.

The Sox still don't have a trusty left-hander in the bullpen. It was just five years ago that Felix Doubront moved to the 'pen to play a key role in the Sox' run to a World Series title, throwing seven strong postseason innings and allowing just one run on three hits.

"I want to be available as a starter," Rodriguez said. "But if they put me in the bullpen or wherever they put me, I'm going to go out there and pitch."

The Red Sox are starting to resemble a team similar to the 2016 Cubs, whose starting rotation hit a groove in the second half and led the majors with a 2.80 ERA after the All-Star break.

They had a 2.60 ERA in the postseason as the Cubs took home the trophy.

The Sox haven't scored much since the break, but their starting pitching can carry them.

"They've given us a chance to win on a nightly basis," Cora said. "And I do feel offensively we will score runs, it's just a matter of time. We try to put pressure on the opposition to score runs.

"But what we're doing, it seems like they're always ahead in the count, they're putting the opposition in the corner 0-1, 0-2, 1-2. And at this level, the average goes way down when you're in those counts. So they're doing an outstanding job working ahead. They've been very efficient."

Red Sox notebook: Ace Chris Sale will miss start in Toronto, likely to return in Baltimore

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox hoped Chris Sale would miss only one start during his stint on the 10-day disabled list, but it turns out it's going to be more.

Sale will not be in the Red Sox starting rotation when they visit Toronto for a three-game series against the Blue Jays this week, the team announced last night.

The Sox originally thought he might be able to start the second game of the series Wednesday, but instead Sale will stay on the DL and continue to rehab from shoulder inflammation.

He'll likely make his return next weekend when the Red Sox are in Baltimore for four games in three days.

"One of the reasons: He's OK, but he hasn't thrown a bullpen yet," manager Alex Cora said. "At the same time, you start looking at the schedule, and I don't want him pitching in Philly (after the Baltimore series). I don't want him to hit. So, we kind of maneuver the schedule and see Baltimore, most likely. That's what it's going to be."

Drew Pomeranz will start the first game of the series against the Jays tomorrow, Brian Johnson will start in Sale's spot Wednesday and Rick Porcello will get a chance to work on his career 4.87 ERA at the Rogers Centre to throw the series finale Thursday.

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Sale played catch before the Sox’ 5-4 win over the Yankees last night. He likely will throw again today and the Sox will get a better idea of when he’ll be ready. Cora spoke more about wanting to keep Sale from hitting in Philadelphia next week than the recovery of his shoulder.

“It actually works in the sense that I was thinking about that start in Philly, I really don’t want him to hit,” Cora said. “He’s dying to hit. I guess he hit a double last year in Philly, but I’ll watch on video.”

Before this year, Sale hadn’t been on the DL since 2015. He’s never missed time previously because of shoulder inflammation, though he did miss a start in 2013 with shoulder tendinitis. He had a 2.53 ERA in his first nine starts of the year, then a 3.29 ERA over his final 21 starts after the shoulder ailment.

This time around he wasn’t concerned when he originally received the diagnosis.

“I’m very optimistic that this is going to be a very short stint on the DL,” Sale said Tuesday.

Sale leads all pitchers with 5.6 WAR this season, though in the race for his first American League Cy Young Award, Trevor Bauer of the Indians is closing in behind him with 5.3 WAR and Justin Verlander of the Astros isn’t far back with 4.9 WAR.

Devers close

While the Sox won’t get Sale back for their series in Toronto, they should see the return of Rafael Devers from a hamstring injury.

Devers hasn’t played since July 28 and is eligible to come off the DL on Wednesday.

He’s scheduled to play in a minor league rehab game with Single-A Lowell tonight. If it goes well, he’ll fly to Toronto to join the team.

Devers had been hitting .292 with an .827 OPS in his last 19 games before getting hurt. Eduardo Nunez has played third base, hitting .348 with an .853 OPS in Devers’ absence.

Blake Swihart and Ian Kinsler, also on the DL with hamstring injuries, are expected to miss just the minimum 10 days, Cora said.

Cashing in

After sweeping the four-game series with the Yankees, the Red Sox are 8-5 against their AL East rivals on the season with six games remaining.

It put new light on the comments by Yankees general manager Brian Cashman from earlier in the week, when he said, “You wonder what their record would be if they weren’t playing us. Because when we go head to head, we do some damage against them and it doesn’t seem like anybody else is capable.”

Cora said last night, “I respect Cash. He said that but he’s said other nice things about us. I read those and he basically said he wishes he was in the position we’re in and obviously they’re trying to catch us. I saw that and he likes the way we play.”

Mookie Betts said the team was aware of Cashman's comments.

"Yeah, we saw it," he said.

Does it make the win sweeter?

"Sure, I guess," he said. "We weren't paying it any attention. We know who we are. We know what we can do. We just went out and showed it."

Cora said closer Craig Kimbrel was available last night but the Red Sox never used him after he threw 32 pitches to finish a 4-1 win Saturday.

"He was, but at the same time, he threw a lot yesterday, so after everything that happened, we tried to stay away from him," Cora said. "Matt Barnes hasn't pitched in a while, so Barnes was actually going back for the next inning. Ryan Brasier did a good job. Tyler Thornburg did a good job. It worked out for us."

Barnes pitched a scoreless 10th to get the victory when the Red Sox walked it off on Andrew Benintendi's two-out single in the bottom of the inning.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 (F/10): Boston sweeps New York in stunning fashion | VIDEO

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Look no further than the bottom of the ninth inning to sum up the Red Sox this season.

Yankees' closer Aroldis Chapman was summoned to record what would be three routine outs, and Boston would fall short of just the third four-game sweep of its ancient rival since 1990.

That seemed like the logical outcome, anyway.

But this group of Red Sox seems increasingly capable of defying the expected, and Sunday night served as the latest reminder. Chapman surrendered a three-run lead, Jonathan Holder was summoned for the 10th, and you all should know by now how this one turned out.

Andrew Benintendi found a hole in the New York shift by sending a three-hopper up the middle. Pinch runner Tony Renda raced around from second base, and what was left of the season-high crowd of 37,830 unleashed a full-throated roar. Boston had pulled off a 5-4, 10-inning stunner that leaves New York gasping for breath in the American League East race.

"They all count the same," Benintendi said. "But where we were in the ninth, down three, this is up there."

The Red Sox looked finished as the flame-throwing left-hander took the mound for the first time this series, but a bout of wildness cost Chapman and the Yankees dearly. Three walks loaded the bases with two outs and J.D. Martinez lashed a two-run single to center, making it 4-3. Xander Bogaerts followed with a bouncer to third and Miguel Andujar spiked the throw to first, with the ball rolling away from Greg Bird for an error that allowed pinch runner Jackie Bradley Jr. to race all the way in from second with the tying run.

"Once the bases got loaded," Martinez said, when asked when he started to believe Boston could finish this one off. "Once we started walking and stuff like that, then you're like, 'Okay, we've got a chance here.'"

The Red Sox now own a 9½-game lead in the division, their largest in almost five years. Not since September 2013 has Boston enjoyed such a comfortable margin, a season that ended with the franchise's third World Series title since the turn of the century.

"Like I said, they play the game the right way," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "They play to the end. That was fun to watch."

Two walks and a Bogaerts error amounted to self-inflicted wounds for Boston in the seventh, as the Red Sox surrendered a 1-0 lead in sloppy fashion. It was rather jarring to watch Boston implode after exhibiting such dominance to this point, riding potent bats to a Thursday night comeback and two fantastic pitching performances by Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi on Friday and Saturday.

David Price returned for the seventh and allowed a leadoff single to right by Brett Gardner. Heath Hembree was up and warming but Cora opted to have Price continue, and Austin Romine drew a walk to put the go-ahead run aboard. Only then did Cora make his move, summoning Hembree while Price received a standing ovation.

Shane Robinson squared around to bunt on the first five pitches thrown by Hembree, three of them running high and tight. The count went full and Hembree missed high with a slider, loading the bases. Aaron Hicks then lashed a one-hopper that clanked off the glove of Bogaerts and into short center field, plating a pair to give New York a 2-1 lead.

It was just the sixth error of the season committed by the Red Sox shortstop, and it gave the Yankees their first lead since the fourth inning on Thursday. Giancarlo Stanton's single through the left side and a sacrifice fly to center by Gleyber Torres doubled New York's output, and it seemed like Boston would depart for its three-city road trip on a sour note.

"This team doesn't quit," Price said. "This lineup doesn't quit. They continue to have good at-bats throughout the night."

Rocked by the Yankees for a career-worst five home runs in an 11-1 loss on July 1, Price was a different pitcher on this night. He settled in by wriggling out of an immediate jam in the top of the first, as the Yankees loaded the bases with two outs on a single through the left side by Andujar. Price buried a cut-fastball inside to retire Luke Voit on a weak tapper back to the mound, escaping unscathed.

"I think I've given up at least three runs in the first inning against those guys every time this year," Price said. "To make pitches and get out of that inning, that was big."

"He's been throwing the ball well for a while," Cora said. "He's made some adjustments, and you can see the results."

Price retired 15 of the next 18 men he faced, buying the Red Sox time to break through against Masahiro Tanaka. The right-hander's scoreless string finally came to an end at 21 2/3 innings when Mookie Betts jumped all over a cut-fastball with one out in the fifth, launching a titanic shot toward Lansdowne Street. His 26th home run of the season traveled 437 feet and gave Boston a narrow cushion, one that went up in smoke and was eventually restored.

"Everybody knew how big this series was," Benintendi said. "We came in and did what we wanted to do. We kind of stole this one, but every win counts the same."

Red Sox-Yankees rivalry is intense once again

Nick Friar

BOSTON — Roger Clemens, Wade Boggs, Johnny Damon and Jacoby Ellsbury are some of the more notable among the multiple players who've traded in their red socks for pinstripes.

But there haven't been as many players to make the move from the Bronx to Boston, though this year's Red Sox team has three: Eduardo Nunez, Steve Pearce and Nathan Eovaldi.

Among those three, Nunez has dealt with the rivalry the most, playing in the Yankees organization from 2006 to 2013, spending parts of four seasons at the big-league level. Having come up with the old Yankees guard, he knows these games mean more than just a spot in the standings.

"When I was with the Yankees, it was a different situation because it was [with] the old school, with [Derek] Jeter, A-Rod [Alex Rodriguez], [Jorge] Posada, [Mark] Teixeira [and] Mariano [Rivera]," Nunez said. "All those guys really wanted to beat the Red Sox. So I grew up with that in mind, [that] we really want to beat the Red Sox so bad. Now it's a different situation because now it's much younger players, we're having more fun, but at the same time it's serious. The rivalry is real and we want to beat them for sure, so bad."

Nunez could not pinpoint which among the old Yankee greats wanted to beat the Red Sox most, but that's in part because they were all told from day one that beating Boston was a top priority. He even remembers being told as a Yankee minor-leaguer about the rivalry's importance.

"We grew up with that mentality," he said. "They put a chip in our mind with that mentality."

When Nunez left New York for Minnesota, the rivalry was changing. With the Red Sox winning in 2004 and again in 2007, there was a new dynamic. So, by the time Pearce joined New York in 2012 for a brief stint, things had changed, at least for those not on the diamond. But Pearce still felt the Red Sox-Yankees games were unique from the rest of the season schedule.

"We're not ignorant," Pearce said. "You know it's Red Sox-Yankees; we know what's at stake. There's a little bit more that goes into these games."

After watching Pearce's three home-run performance in Thursday's series opener, it seemed like he thought these games were like any others.

Which is how it felt for Eovaldi back in his days with New York in 2015 and 2016.

"I don't feel like it was as intense as I would say it's been in the past," he said. "Looking back, it always seemed like it was real intense. Someone didn't even necessarily need to get hit, especially with how the rules changed with the collisions at the plate and the safety slide or whatever at second base. I feel like that's taken a lot of it out of the game. Also, the umpires nowadays, even the other day when Rick [Porcello] hit [Brett] Gardner, it was an 0-2 count, there was not intention behind it. And whether [Luis] Severino had intention behind his or not, first pitch of the game, they instantly warned both sides. The umpires took control of the game and kept it safe for both sides."

But between the standings, the hit batsmen and close shaves — like Eovaldi's breaking ball up and in on Stanton in Saturday's win, which he said was not a message pitch — the rivalry has felt similar to the days of old — or at least the closest it's been to the good-old days since 2004.

"It's definitely been tense," Eovaldi said. "I think it has to a lot with certain teams. Right now, we've been playing really good baseball, they've been playing catch-up the whole time. For us to be able to do what we did the first game of the series kind of set the tone. And we've kind of been able to keep our foot on the throat, so to speak."

Red Sox Journal: Rodriguez getting closer to return

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Eduardo Rodriguez appears to be making significant strides in his bid to return from the disabled list and help the Red Sox down the stretch.

The left-hander threw off the mound at Fenway Park prior to Sunday's series finale with the Yankees. Rodriguez (right ankle) faced teammate Rafael Devers, who stood in the batter's box while the pitcher fired fastballs, cut-fastballs, sliders and changeups. Rodriguez estimated he threw 30 pitches during the afternoon session, his most significant action since suffering his injury in a July 14 start against the Blue Jays.

"My ankle is really good," Rodriguez said. "Feels great. It was fine throwing tonight. That was a test today on the main diamond and everything, and it feels really good."

"That was impressive, honestly," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "He threw a bullpen and that was good to see."

Rodriguez was in the midst of a 19-inning scoreless string when he turned the ankle covering first base on an infield grounder. He's been in and out of a walking boot while receiving treatment the last three weeks. Boston moved at the trade deadline for Nathan Eovaldi to bolster the rotation. Rodriguez would give the Red Sox another power arm to deploy as a starter or in a relief role should they continue on their expected path toward October's postseason.

"That's what I want — to be available to come back as a starter," Rodriguez said. "But if they put me in the bullpen or wherever they put me, I've got to go out there and pitch."

Despite recent results, Boston is patching things together a bit at this point. Chris Sale (left-shoulder inflammation) isn't among the three listed starters this week in Toronto, with Drew Pomeranz, Brian Johnson and Rick Porcello scheduled to take the ball on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. This will mark a second turn missed by Sale since being scratched ahead of Thursday's opening game with New York.

"He's okay, but he hasn't thrown a bullpen," Cora said following Sunday's game. "At the same time, you start looking at the schedule and I don't want him to pitch in (Philadelphia). I don't want him to hit. So we're kind of going to maneuver the schedule."

"Probably Baltimore most likely — that's where it's going to be. He'll go to the ballpark tomorrow and throw, but he didn't throw a bullpen today. He's probably one day behind. For me, it actually works."

Injury updates

Boston was scheduled to depart late Sunday night for the first leg of a three-city road trip, but the traveling party will be a bit short of full capacity.

Devers and Ian Kinsler will both stay behind to rehab their respective left-hamstring strains. Blake Swihart (right-hamstring strain) and Steven Wright (left-knee inflammation) will also be out of action at least through the series with the Blue Jays. Devers went through a full baseball workout on Sunday and could begin a brief assignment at Class-A Lowell beginning on Monday night.

"We have the turf in Toronto, which doesn't benefit them," Cora said. "We're mapping that out. Hopefully everything goes well."

Kinsler and Swihart are both expected to rejoin the Red Sox next weekend in Baltimore, with Cora hopeful their respective time on the disabled list lasts the minimum 10 days. Wright still hasn't resumed his throwing program and has been sidelined since June 23.

Lineup moves

Steve Pearce was back in the lineup as the designated hitter after cracking four home runs through the first two games of the series against the Yankees. J.D. Martinez went to right field, Mookie Betts moved to center and Jackie Bradley Jr. was given the day off with three games upcoming on the artificial surface at Rogers Centre. Pearce entered 5-for-15 with two career homers against New York starter Masahiro Tanaka.

"It's not that he's got five hits, but he's done some damage against him," Cora said. "Hopefully, a few hanging changeups and he hits it in the air again."

Pearce and Moreland nailed first-inning two-run homers on back-to-back days Friday and Saturday. Boston went on to win each game, 4-1, and improved to 53-7 this season when scoring first.

"We've been making the routine plays, and that's what you have to do when you get the lead," Cora said Saturday. "Don't give them more than 27 outs."

"We've been good as far as not walking people. It seems like we've been ahead a lot in counts. It's 0-1, 0-2 — that's a tough at-bat when you're falling behind."

* **MassLive.com**

Boston Red Sox channel inner Bill Belichick, ready to focus on Toronto after sweeping Yankees

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- In the wee hours of Monday morning after arguably their best win of the series over the Yankees, the Red Sox channeled their inner Bill Belichick and had one thing on their mind: Toronto.

Less than an hour after what is arguably their best win of the season, the Sox were already ready to turn the page. The 5-4, extra-innings comeback win to clinch a 4-game sweep over the Yankees wasn't a season-defining moment. It was just win No. 79.

The Red Sox are on a historic pace and seem all but certain to clinch their third straight A.L. East title after extending their division lead to 9 1/2 games this weekend. But their pursuit of history isn't close to being at the forefront of their minds.

"I don't even care about that," said outfielder J.D. Martinez. "I'm worried about Toronto right now, where we're going. I never get caught up in any of that stuff. That stuff is for you guys to write. We're the ones who have to keep it simple, look at our next objective and our next task, and be ready to play Toronto."

Boston enters each series with the goal of winning it, thinking of a sweep as an icing on the cake. The Sox have been good at that, winning 28 of 39 series while splitting four more.

"We always come to series with the goal to win," manager Alex Cora said. "We swept them. It's great. That clubhouse is pretty loud right now. Like I've been saying all along, tomorrow's an off day and we have to turn the page and be ready for that team."

Cora was asked repeatedly about the pressure on David Price to put up a good performance against the Yankees on Sunday night. He repeated the same refrain each time: win or loss, good performance or bad, the Red Sox had a much-needed off day Monday and would shift focus to the Blue Jays.

Not taking more than a brief moment to celebrate a potentially season-defining sweep against the Yankees and focusing on a 51-60 Blue Jays club is about as Belichickian as it gets. The coach, who was in attendance at Fenway Park on Sunday, is famous for being "on to Cincinnati." The Red Sox don't think it'll be hard to shift focus quickly in a way similar to how the Patriots do on a week-to-week basis.

"Nah, not for this group," said outfielder Mookie Betts. "We're really good at putting all that stuff behind us and focusing on the task at hand. That's Toronto."

Still, the Red Sox have a right to look back at their first 113 games and marvel at what they've accomplished. After overcoming the one demon that has seemed to haunt them so far in 2018-- their head-to-head record against the Yankees-- it was hard for Cora to not appreciate where his team is at.

"They're playing well," Cora said. "I keep saying it. I'm proud of them. They don't get caught up in the whole thing. They show up every day, digest information, go out there and play and win games. And they've been winning a lot of games."

David Price's strong start for Red Sox vs. Yankees as insignificant as his postseason record

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- David Price never feared the Yankees. He just hasn't pitched well against them as a member of the Red Sox. It's that simple.

But he did pitch 6 strong innings vs. New York here Sunday at Fenway Park. The Red Sox won 5-4 in 10 innings to cap a four-game series sweep and increase their AL East lead to 9 1/2 games.

Price exited during the seventh inning after he allowed the first two batters to reach with Boston leading 1-0. Both runners scored with Heath Hembree on the mound. And so Price allowed two runs, four hits and three walks while striking out five.

Price topped out at 94.1 mph and mixed his pitches well again like he has done his past four starts. He threw 34 changeups, 32 cutters, 26 two-seamers, 14 four-seamers and two curveballs. He induced 17 swings-and-misses, including 11 on changeups.

Price was brief with all his answers during his postgame press conference and expressed some displeasure with the questions as he walked away. Nobody asked him anything controversial. One reporter wanted to know the biggest difference between this start and previous starts vs. the Yankees.

"Umm, pitch selection and just making better pitches," said Price who entered with an 8.43 ERA (44 earned runs, 47 innings) in nine starts vs. the Yankees as a member of the Red Sox.

It's not that surprising he acted a little frustrated.

This start got hyped as something more than it actually was (and yes, he shouldn't pay attention or care what is said on the radio or written in the papers/internet). It was hyped as a potential confidence booster for the lefty if he pitched well and an indicator of whether or not he'd be able to beat the Yankees in a potential ALDS matchup.

If he pitched poorly, the two local sports radio shows probably would have focused on Price (and Tom Brady of course) all day.

But Price pitching well against the Yankees on Aug. 5 doesn't tell us anything.

One of his best starts in a Red Sox uniform came against New York. He tossed 8 scoreless innings against a Yankees lineup that included Aaron Judge and Gary Sanchez at Fenway Park on July 16, 2017.

Why don't we use that game to judge whether he fears New York and can beat the Yanks in the postseason? After all, he faced a better Yankees lineup that night. Sanchez is 6-for-12 with five homers and 12 RBIs in his career vs. Price.

The Yankees' October lineup won't include Luke Voit like Sunday's lineup did.

Price didn't need this strong start as a confidence booster.

He has pitched in the majors for 11 seasons (291 regular season games). He has made 40 starts vs. the Yankees. He wasn't stressing over this one start.

There's no reason Price can't pitch well against the Yankees in the postseason just like no reason exists why he can't pitch well during the postseason.

We focus on his 5.03 postseason ERA and how he's winless as a postseason starter. But is it fair? Is the sample size of nine starts large enough to determine whether or not he's capable of actually putting together a dominant postseason run for the 2018 Red Sox?

He has made strong starts in the postseason. He pitched 8 innings and allowed two runs vs. the Orioles in elimination Game 3 of the 2014 ALDS.

He held the Royals scoreless for the first six innings of Game 2 in the 2015 ALCS before KC scored five runs against him in the seventh inning. Did the pressure suddenly overtake him in the seventh or did he tire a bit, make a few bad pitches and get beat?

Price was Boston's best pitcher in the 2017 ALDS (6.2 scoreless innings of relief).

He obviously has the potential to pitch well against the Yankees and to do it in the postseason. He's Boston's second best starter. Whether he will, who knows? Whether manager Alex Cora feels Price is the best pitcher to start Game 2 of a potential ALDS vs. New York also remains to be seen.

Cora presumably won't decide his postseason rotation (and rotation order) based on one start though.

Rick Porcello has posted a 1.25 ERA (eight earned runs, 57.2 innings), .178 opponent batting average and 0.82 WHIP in eight career starts vs. the Yankees at Fenway. But he has a 5.74 ERA in (17 earned runs, 26.2 innings) at Yankee Stadium since joining the Red Sox. So perhaps he starts Game 2 after Chris Sale in Game 1.

Eduardo Rodriguez, if his ankle is healthy, seems like an obvious choice to start one of the games in an ALDS matchup vs. the Yankees. Rodriguez has a 3.16 ERA in 11 career starts vs. the Yankees. He has posted a 3.00 ERA in seven starts at Yankee Stadium.

Nathan Eovaldi, meanwhile, has held right-handed batters to a .188/.197/.370/.567 line and he tossed 8 shutout innings vs. New York's right-handed heavy lineup Saturday.

Sunday didn't show Price and Cora that the lefty can handle the Yankees. They already knew it. But other Red Sox starters have pitched much better vs. New York and Cora might consider that information when determining his playoff rotation for the first round.

Boston Red Sox look hard to catch in American League East after memorable comeback win

Matt Vautour

If the 2018 Boston Red Sox season delivers on its considerable promise, moments from the Sunday night's game figure to feature prominently in the highlights.

Quite a few fans in the park, including Patriots coach Bill Belichick, were gone before it was over as the game lingered late. They missed out on a classic.

This is the sort of games teams in the midst of a special season win.

In the ninth against the Aroldis Chapman, the vaunted Yankee closer at the back of the vaunted Yankee bullpen, the Red Sox were a strike away from defeat and rallied to tie the game in the ninth.

On Sunday morning, most knowledgeable Boston fans didn't even realize Tony Renda was in the Red Sox organization. But by Monday morning, the call-up turned-pinch hitter was scooting home with the winning run in the 10th inning of the 5-4 victory.

The pennant race isn't actually over. The Red Sox have six more games with the Yankees and a total of 18 games with teams in playoff contention. But it sure feels over. It's not even that Boston is too good to be caught, but New York doesn't seem good enough to chase them down.

The Red Sox didn't need this win. If they lost they'd still be a healthy 7.5 games ahead in the all-important division race. This weekend would have been a huge success whether the series finished 3-1 or 4-0. Boston would have swelled their considerable lead in the division and seemed to have left New York in the distance.

The Yankees however badly needed the win to grab some momentum and to hold onto hope of a shot at the division that's been slipping away.

But the franchise that used to feed on Boston misfortune fell apart with a late lead. Up 4-1, Chapman walked three guys in the ninth before J.D. Martinez's two-run single. They still would have won a play later, but Miguel Andujar's throwing error allowed the tying run to score.

Now while the Red Sox are celebrating and recharging during an off day in Toronto, New York will carry dejected legs to face the White Sox on the road Monday.

It's a sign of just how charmed a life Alex Cora is leading. The first-year manager hasn't gotten many wrong in year one. His mixture of instinct and information has led to an awful lot of wins. But he gambled and left David Price in the game an inning too long., got burned and still earned a dramatic win.

While Belichick didn't make it to the end. J.D. Martinez seemed to channel him when asked what the sweep meant in the larger picture.

"I don't care about that," he said. "I'm just thinking about Toronto."

Boston Red Sox use internal confidence, not bulletin-board material from Brian Cashman, to sweep New York Yankees

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Brian Cashman may need to see the doctor this week. He might just be diagnosed with foot-in-mouth disease.

The Yankees general manager set the tone for the four-game series between his club and the Red Sox with some interesting comments last week, referencing New York's 5-4 record against the Red Sox to that point.

"You wonder what their record would be if they weren't playing us," Cashman told reporters last week. "Because when we go head to head, we do some damage against them and it doesn't seem like anybody else is capable."

Boston responded by sweeping the Yankees, extending its lead in the A.L. East to 9 1/2 games. An offensive explosion led by Steve Pearce on Thursday, dominating pitching performances from Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi and a thrilling comeback win Sunday propelled the Sox to a lead that looks pretty daunting for New York with just 42 games to play.

Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts admitted the team had seen Cashman's comments and answered in the affirmative when asked if they made the sweep even sweeter for Boston.

"Sure, I guess," Betts said. "But I think we weren't paying it any attention. We know what we are, we know what we can do and we went out and showed it."

The confidence in Betts' statement is symbolic of how this Red Sox team feels about itself. So is how the club, despite having a 2.1 percent win probability (per FanGraphs) after a Brock Holt strikeout to kick off the ninth inning, believed it had a solid shot at scoring three runs against Aroldis Chapman and tying what looked like a lost ballgame.

"At no point did we think we were gonna lose," Betts said. "I think the whole time coming in, keep it close and we could come back and make something happen. We don't ever give it up and obviously that showed."

After Chapman walked three of the first five batters he faced, J.D. Martinez hit a two-run double to make it a 4-3 game with two outs. That must have been the first time the Red Sox thought they had a legitimate chance to win, right?

"Nah," manager Alex Cora said. "Before that."

Cora's confidence has spread to his players, being noticed by the handful of newcomers who have joined Boston's roster in the last week. Catcher Dan Butler, a career minor-leaguer, spent the late innings in awe of the attitude of his new teammates.

"There was never a doubt in that dugout thinking we were gonna lose that game," Butler said. "It was an incredible feeling. There really is something special going on here."

The Red Sox will find out if they have something special over the next three months. At 79-34, they're on pace for history. And there's no sign of them stopping any time soon.

"I think we feel like if we do our jobs and do it the way we're supposed to do it, we should come out on top every time," Porcello said. "I think that's kind of just the general feeling. It doesn't always work out that way, but that's how we feel approaching every game."

Boston approaches every game with a confidence that comes from within, not from bulletin-board material like what Cashman said this week. These Red Sox don't need prodding from outside sources to be successful, instead motivating themselves with innate confidence against their main rivals.

"Beating them is sweet enough," Porcello said. "We don't need any other incentive."

Chris Sale injury: Boston Red Sox ace 'most likely' will start in Baltimore, hasn't experienced setback

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Chris Sale, who is on the 10-day disabled list with a mild case of shoulder inflammation, likely will start for the Red Sox in Baltimore this coming weekend.

The Red Sox begin a three-game series in Toronto on Tuesday. They play four games in Baltimore over the weekend, including a doubleheader Saturday. They then travel to Philadelphia for two games next Tuesday and Wednesday.

Sale initially was expected to pitch Wednesday in Toronto. But Brian Johnson will start instead.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Sale hasn't experienced a setback.

"He played catch today," Cora said about Sale after Boston's 5-4 10-inning victory over the Yankees here Sunday. "One of the reasons, he's OK but hasn't thrown a bullpen. At the same time, you start looking at the schedule and I don't want him to pitch in Philly. I don't want him to hit. So we're going to kind of maneuver the schedule and probably (he'll pitch in) Baltimore most likely."

Sale is expected to throw at the park Monday.

"But he didn't throw a bullpen today, so he's probably one day behind," Cora said. "So for me it actually works in a sense that I was thinking about that start in Philly and I really don't want him to hit."

Andrew Benintendi delivers walkoff RBI single, Boston Red Sox sweep four-game series against Yankees

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- The Red Sox were down 4-1 with one out and nobody on base in the ninth inning against All-Star closer Aroldis Chapman who can be wild at times (4.7 walks per nine innings).

That's when the rally started.

Boston tied it 4-4 against Chapman with three walks, a two-run single by J.D. Martinez and one Yankees error.

Andrew Benintendi then delivered a 10th-inning walkoff single to center field against reliever Jonathan Holder. Boston won 5-4 over the Yankees here at Fenway Park.

The Red Sox swept the four-game series. They increased their lead in the AL East standings to 9 1/2 games over New York.

Benintendi now has three career walkoffs, including two vs. the Yankees.

Chapman walked Sandy Leon and Mookie Betts after he struck out Brock Holt to open the ninth. He then struck out Benintendi for the second out before walking Steve Pearce to load the bases.

With two outs, Martinez belted a first-pitch 98.5 mph four-seamer for a two-run single just over second baseman Gleyber Torres' reach. That made it 4-3.

Xander Bogaerts grounded to third base but Miguel Andujar's errant throw allowed Jackie Bradley Jr. to score the tying run from second base.

Hembree can't hold lead

Heath Hembree entered Sunday with a 17.18 ERA (seven earned runs, 3.2 innings) in four outings against the Yankees this season.

But manager Alex Cora decided to use him in the highest leverage spot vs. the Yankees in the four-game series finale.

Hembree relieved David Price in the seventh after the first two New York hitters reached base with the Red Sox leading 1-0.

Hembree had stranded 21-of-24 inherited runners this season. But he couldn't strand the two he inherited here Sunday.

No. 9 hitter Shane Robinson tried to lay down a sacrifice bunt against Hembree. He fouled off two pitches. Hembree inexplicably walked Robinson after getting ahead 1-2 in the count.

Aaron Hicks then hit a 96.3 mph grounder to shortstop that Xander Bogaerts booted. The ball went into center field, two runs scored the Yankees took a 2-1 lead.

It marked Bogaerts' first fielding error this season. All five of his previous errors were throwing errors.

Giancarlo Stanton stroked an RBI single to make it 3-1. Gleyber Torres' sacrifice fly against Ryan Brasier made it 4-1.

The Red Sox bullpen failed to hold a lead or tie vs. the bottom of the Yankees batting order in all three games at Yankee Stadium May 8-10. The Red Sox have blown three saves in 13 games vs. New York.

Price pitches 6 strong innings

Price pitched well. He allowed two runs, both earned, in 6 innings. He gave up four hits and three walks while striking out five.

Betts hits 26th homer

Betts gave the Red Sox a 1-0 lead in the fifth inning with a 106.2 mph, 437-foot home run over the Green Monster.

It marked Betts' 26th home run of the season.

He connected on an 87.4 mph splitter from Masahiro Tanaka.

Tanaka had his splitter working until Betts' at-bat. He induced some ugly swing-and-misses with both his splitter and slider.

The righty lasted 4.2 innings, giving up just one run, six hits and one walk while striking out nine. Yankees manager Aaron Boone removed him at 97 pitches (59 strikes).

Stanton with hardest hit of 2018 season so far

Giancarlo Stanton's 121.1 mph single marked the hardest hit this season. It's tied for the hardest-hit ball in play. Yankees teammate Gary Sanchez ripped a 121.1 mph lineout earlier in the season.

Price retired Stanton when it mattered the most though. Stanton grounded out to end the fifth in a scoreless game with a runner at third base.

Eduardo Rodriguez injury: Boston Red Sox starter throws off mound for first time, says ankle 'feels great'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Eduardo Rodriguez threw off the main mound here at Fenway Park on Sunday. It marked his first time throwing off a mound since being placed on the 10-day disabled list July 15 with a right ankle sprain.

Rodriguez said he threw 25-30 pitches.

"My ankle is really good, feels great," Rodriguez said. "It feels fine throwing off the mound. So that was a test today."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora added, "That was impressive, honestly. He threw a bullpen and that was good to see. I don't know yet what's the next step. But to see him on the mound ... that was good news right there."

Rodriguez said his workouts include jumping. He also has participated in pitchers fielding practice drills.

He's unsure whether a return before Sept. 1 is realistic.

"I've got to see," he said. "I've got to follow the plan ... and just wait for them to tell me what to do."

Rodriguez is 11-3 with a 3.44 ERA and 1.22 WHIP in 19 starts. He hopes to return as a starter.

"That's what I want: to be available to come back as a starter," he said. "But if they put me in the bullpen or wherever they put me, I've got to go out there and pitch."

Boston Red Sox bullpen enjoying added rest created by starters' success

Matt Vautour

Heading into Sunday's series finale against the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora should have a full complement of bullpen arms available.

The success and pitch efficiency of starters Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi Friday and Saturday meant one inning for closer Craig Kimbrel, while everyone else has been a spectator.

Since Wednesday's off day between the Philadelphia and New York series Matt Barnes, Heath Hembree, Tyler Thornburg and Hector Velazquez haven't pitched at all. Only Brandon Workman has pitched more than an inning.

They were glad to get the chance to recharge for the final 49 games after Monday's off day and what they hope will be a long postseason.

"It's always good when you can get a little bit of a break like that. Our starters have been pitching so well," said Joe Kelly, who has pitched four straight scoreless outings. "We've had a lot of rest. Going into an off day it's only going to be more helpful saving as many bullets as you can going towards the end of the season."

Ryan Brasier agreed.

"It's far enough along in the season where a lot of guys welcome the days off," he said. "Obviously we love seeing our starters go deep into games, a complete game by Rick and eight by Nate. We're ready to pitch whatever happens."

Tyler Thornburg, who is coming off a mechanical adjustment that's led to his recent success, said normally he'd prefer to keep pitching, to keep those mechanics sharp. But he was willing to trade the rust risk for the added recuperation.

"I'd rather be getting in regular work as far as that's concerned, but arm wise it's going to help," said Thornburg, who has gone five straight appearances (4.2 innings) without a run. "For guys this late in the year, it's fantastic just getting this rest. For me personally, it's nice just because I had a high workload week. It's a nice little recharge before the end of the season push. Every little bit we get off right now helps in late September and October. In the long run, I'm going to get the mechanics back."

New Boston Red Sox second baseman Tony Renda went to same high school as Tom Brady, roots for Patriots

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- New Red Sox second baseman Tony Renda comes to Boston knowing he has no shot of being the most beloved Junipero Serra High School alum in the area.

Renda, who was recalled from Pawtucket to replace the injured Ian Kinsler, went to the same California high school as Patriots quarterback Tom Brady. And because of that, Renda said, a non-football fan has found himself rooting for the Patriots each fall.

"I never really got on board with the Niners or Raiders or anything like that," Renda said. "Sundays, I'd rather be golfing than sitting at home and watching football. But if the Pats are on, I will watch. And I'll root for them to win solely because of Brady."

Renda is the 11th Serra alum to reach the majors, with Barry Bonds and Jim Fregosi headlining the list. Brady and Lynn Swann are the two most notable football alums for a school that has one of the best athletic track records in the country.

"To walk the halls of that school, there's definitely a sense of pride," Renda said. "Guys like Brady and Barry, they're idols. The greatest in their sports. There's definitely a ton of pride around those halls because of them."

Renda has never met Brady, who graduated fourteen years before him. He said that he would like to, just as his wife would want to meet Brady's wife, Gisele Bundchen. He believes with certainty that his fellow Serra Padre is the greatest quarterback of all-time despite being raised with leagues of 49ers fans who may argue for Joe Montana.

Brady's impact on the school has extended far beyond his time as a student-athlete in San Mateo. Renda has noticed.

"I do know that Tom comes back to the high school every once in a while for fundraisers," Renda said. "They have a dinner that raises a ton of money for the school every year. He's been back a few times, they help out whenever they can. The football stadium is named Brady Family Field. I know they do a lot for the school and a lot for the program."

Renda, who signed a minor-league deal with the Red Sox in late April, has spent the last three months in New England, making stops in Portland, Pawtucket and now Boston. His appreciation for Brady has grown in that time, having seen the impact the quarterback has around the region.

On his recent drive up I-95 from Pawtucket to Boston, Renda took notice of how he was, in a way, once again following Brady's path.

"I drove through Foxborough and thought, 'wow, I bet Tom Brady has driven on this road before,'" Renda said "He's the greatest. He continues to get better. His work ethic, dedication... just everything you need to be great in your sport, to be the best, he has it."

Rafael Devers injury: Boston Red Sox 3B expected to go on one-game rehab assignment in Lowell on Monday

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Rafael Devers (left hamstring strain) is nearing a return from the disabled list. He's expected to appear in one rehab game for Short Season Lowell on Monday.

The Red Sox placed Devers on the 10-day DL last Sunday (July 29). He's eligible to return Wednesday when Boston plays the second game of a three-game series at Rogers Centre.

"Raffy is going to go through the whole workout today," Cora said Sunday at Fenway Park. "If everything goes well, he'll go to Lowell tomorrow, play six or seven innings. And everything goes well, he'll go to Toronto and then we'll make a decision."

Devers is slashing .245/.295/.425/.721 with 15 homers, 21 doubles and 52 RBIs in 96 games.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Quiet confidence continues to grow in Red Sox clubhouse

Chris Mason

BOSTON — Down to their last strike, the Red Sox trailed by three runs against one of the baddest closers in baseball, Aroldis Chapman.

"At no point did we think we were going to lose," Mookie Betts said.

That's the kind of season it's been for Alex Cora's Red Sox.

Sure enough, Chapman took a walk on the wild side, the Sox sent the game to extra innings, and Andrew Benintendi hit a seeing-eye single to walk off with the win.

It was an unfathomable comeback, but one that's somehow entirely believable given what's going on this season.

There's something in the dirty water.

Up 4-1, Chapman walked Sandy Leon, Betts and Steve Pearce to load the bases with two outs in the ninth, and J.D. Martinez hacked at the first pitch he saw, lacing an RBI single that scored two.

Despite Chapman's control issues, Martinez didn't hesitate to swing.

"No, I'm just sticking to my plan, which is top secret," Martinez smirked. "It's a question everybody loves to ask."

The Sox scored the game-tying run on a Miguel Andujar error, and seized all of the momentum as the game went to extras. It didn't take them long to finish the Yankees off.

In the 10th, Benintendi's chopper up the middle scored pinch-runner Tony Renda — making his Red Sox debut — and Boston walked off, 5-4.

It completed a spirit-breaking four-game sweep of the Yankees.

"Everybody knew how big this series was," Benintendi said. "We came in and did what we wanted to do. Kind of stole this one."

The Yankees were only three games back in the loss column when they arrived in Boston.

Now?

The Red Sox are 9 1/2 games up with 49 games to play. The race for the AL East is all but over.

"It's not about the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry that everyone loves to talk about," Martinez said. "It's more about sweeping the team that's on your heels."

It was a four-game sweep that saw two remarkable comebacks, and two lights out pitching performances from Boston's starters. No matter the type of game, the Red Sox have just found ways to win.

"This is a fun team. It's a very humble team, I feel like," Martinez said. "We don't have any of those egos on this team. We have a close group of guys, guys who like to have fun. We talk crap to each other every day, keep it loose in here. It's a good time."

Humble, perhaps, but certainly confident, too.

At 79-34 — 45 games above .500 — they have every reason to be.

"It's just the season. I think the staff believes in us. We believe in us," Bets said. "Go out and play. I mean, we don't have to have a whole lot of people believing in us other than us. And I think we root for each other, and we know we can do it. It doesn't matter what the deficit is."

Betts may need to find a new line. If Cora ran for mayor of Boston tomorrow, he'd probably wind up with 105 percent of the vote.

The more miracles the Red Sox pull off, the more believers they're getting.

David Price finally delivers against the Yankees

Chris Mason

BOSTON — No, it wasn't a playoff game.

But last night was as close to one as David Price can get until October; the \$217 million man squared off with the Yankees on ESPN's Sunday Night Baseball.

Since joining the Red Sox, Price had pitched well against the Yankees a grand total of once.

It was the nightcap of a double header in 2017, and the Yankees had already taken the afternoon contest. Think, split-squad spring training game.

Beyond that?

He'd never given up fewer than three earned runs, and more often than not, the total was well more.

It felt like whenever the Red Sox and Yankees squared off, King Kong would leave his perch on the Empire State Building for a couple innings to catch the game on Price's back. The monkey had grown that large.

In a Red Sox uniform, Price owned an 8.43 ERA against New York, and was blown up in both of his starts this season.

In the first inning, it looked like Price was going to pen another chapter in the same book.

Yankees behemoth Giancarlo Stanton rifled a 121.1 MPH single — tying the hardest hit ball by any player in baseball this season — and with the next pitch, Price hit Didi Gregorius with a curveball.

Three batters in, it looked like the lefty was already coming unraveled. After a generous strike-three call sent Gleyber Torres down looking, Price gave up a single to Miguel Adujar to load the bases.

Fenway Park grew restless, and rightfully so.

But that's when Price began spinning a different story. With another game on the verge of spiraling early, Price got Luke Voit to bounce a ball right back to the pitcher's mound. He didn't panic, got the out at first, and escaped unscathed.

"It was big," Price said. "I've given up at least three runs against those guys in the first inning every time this year. And to make pitches and get out of that inning, that was big."

Voit was the first of nine Yankees Price would retire in a row.

The lefty wouldn't be tested again until the fifth, when Austin Romine reached on a ball that didn't leave the infield, and then No. 9 hitter Shane Robinson squared to sacrifice bunt.

Consider that for a moment.

Price was so locked in last night that the New York Yankees opted to sacrifice bunt against him.

Sure, Aaron Judge and Gary Sanchez were out, but that's still a serious departure from the norm. Robinson laid it down, and Romine advanced on another groundout. Then another crucial at-bat for Price came.

After crushing the ball an hour earlier, Stanton returned to the plate for a third time with the go-ahead run 90 feet away.

Price was up to the challenge: Stanton grounded out meekly and the lefty escaped again.

Mookie Betts finally got the Red Sox on the board with a solo shot, and Price responded with a shutdown sixth, punctuating it with back-to-back strikeouts. Both came on the changeup, his nastiest pitch of the night.

At 95 pitches, Alex Cora trotted Price back out for the seventh.

That was an ill-advised decision. Price gave up a single to Brett Gardner, walked Romine, and was given the hook two batters too late.

Price left with a 1-0 lead, and walked off the field to a standing ovation. The pitcher that's often seemed at odds with the city of Boston looked up into the crowd, and took a moment to soak it in.

The embattled pitcher knew he'd needed to work for that ovation.

"He did an outstanding job," Cora said.

From there, Price's teammates left him hanging a bit. Robinson tried to sacrifice bunt again and Heath Hembree walked him — the bullpen remains a concern, but that's a story for another day — and then Xander Bogaerts made an error at short.

When both inherited runners scored, Price's shutout was gone and he was on the hook for two runs. He wound up with a no-decision, but that doesn't tell the story of how sharp he was.

David Price finally pitched well against the Yankees, and everybody that watched the nationally-televised broadcast saw it.

'Impressive' bullpen session marks first major step for Eduardo Rodriguez

Chris Mason

BOSTON — The Red Sox have opened a commanding lead AL East, and there's more help on the way.

Eduardo Rodriguez got back on the mound yesterday, throwing a 30-pitch bullpen session. The 25-year-old lefty was 11-3 with a 3.44 ERA when he took a spill covering first base last month, rolling his ankle severely and damaging ligaments in the process.

Three weeks later, he took the first major step towards a return.

"My ankle is really good, feels great, feels fine throwing the ball," Rodriguez said before last night's game. "That was the test today, how I would land on it and everything. Feels really good."

Rodriguez won't return for a few more weeks, but September 1 could be a reasonable target date. He threw all five of his pitches as he began strengthening his arm. Rafael Devers stood in the batter's box while Alex Cora and a slew of others looked on.

"Eduardo, that was impressive, honestly," Cora said. "I don't know yet what's the next step but to see him on the mound, like I told you guys that Sunday (he fell), that didn't look too promising. That was good... good news right there."

It will take some time to build him back up as a starter, but it will be interesting to see where Rodriguez will be utilized come October. When the Red Sox are healthy, they've got Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, and Nathan Eovaldi as legitimate candidates to start playoff games, too.

Either way, the goal is for Rodriguez to return to the rotation before then.

"That's what I want to be available as a starter," Rodriguez said. "But if they put me in the bullpen or wherever they put me I'm going to go out there and pitch."

Rodriguez didn't like being relegated to the bench with the Yankees in town. He's thrived in rivalry games against them, to the tune of a 3.16 ERA.

"It's pretty hard to sit next to (teammates), watching everybody pitching and playing," Rodriguez said. "It's hard to play against the Yankees and you don't have a chance to play. Hope it happens next time. We'll see."

The Red Sox return to New York in mid-September. With Rodriguez in tow, they'll be even better off.

Chris Sale 'likely' to start in Baltimore this weekend

Chris Mason

BOSTON — The Red Sox had hoped Chris Sale would be back on the mound Wednesday against the Blue Jays.

That isn't going to happen, but the news could be worse.

According to Alex Cora, Sale didn't suffer a serious setback with his shoulder inflammation, and the manager expects him to start in Baltimore next weekend.

"He's OK, but he hasn't thrown a bullpen (session)," Cora said. "At the same time, you start looking at the schedule, and I don't want him pitching (next week) in Philly. I don't want him to hit. So, we kind of maneuver the schedule and see Baltimore, most likely."

"He's actually going to the ballpark tomorrow and throw, but he didn't throw a bullpen today," Cora said. "So, he's probably one day behind. For me, it actually works in the sense that I was thinking about that start in Philly, I really don't want him to hit."

For what it's worth, when Sale landed on the disabled list last week, he wasn't sweating the soreness in his shoulder.

"I'm not too worried about this," Sale said. "I know that we're the Boston Red Sox and all this other stuff, but I'm not too worried about it. I'm very optimistic that this is going to be a very short stint on the DL. But, you know, with it being the DL people get kind of antsy. But I'm not worried about it at all."

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

When you add it up, all the pitching injuries doesn't make sense

Bill Ballou

There are many things in life that are counter-intuitive, which is Dr. Phil jargon for saying they make no sense.

Exhibit A: The top of Mount Everest should be the warmest place in the world because it is the closest to the sun, but it is actually the coldest. And so it is with baseball injuries.

There is better training, better equipment, better treatment and better diagnostics today than ever before, but there are more injuries, and especially with pitchers.

Exhibit A: Chris Sale goes on the disabled list with a sore shoulder even though the Red Sox have reduced his standard workload in order to keep him fresh for the fall.

One of the things this reporter has done in his years covering the Red Sox, which began in 1987, is keep track of the team's disabled list. Here are the numbers from that:

- In the 1970s, Boston totaled 516 games missed due to pitching injuries.
- In the 1980s, that was up to 1,200.
- In the 1990s, it ballooned to 3,687.
- From 2000 to 2009 it was 3,480.
- From 2010 to now it is 4,733.

Something's out of whack here. Look at track and field, or swimming records. They change incrementally, in hundredths of a second, or millimeters. The human body evolves over centuries, not seasons. Pitchers should not be nine times more injury-prone in 2018 than they were in 1978.

They are not, of course. There are lots of factors involved in why the disabled list has exploded. One is salaries — teams are going to be more careful with a pitcher worth \$32,000,000 than they were with one worth \$32,000. Another is the way the DL is used now. Until 1990, teams were restricted to how many players they could have on the disabled list at one time.

In the years before that, teams could have only three players on the DL at any one time. That meant there were many hurting pitchers on major-league mounds. Today's DL is almost limitless, including the 60-day DL. The Red Sox have 11 men on the disabled list right now, although not all are pitchers.

Another factor is Tommy John surgery. Until that operation was invented, pitchers with shredded elbow ligaments either retired or were released. There was minimal DL time. Now pitchers recovering from the surgery spend a minimum of a full season on the disabled list.

So there are lots of reasons, but no definitive answer to one nagging question:

Does all of this technology, training and prevention reduce the number of arm injuries for pitchers?

There is no proof that it does. Look at Sale. How about Nathan Eovaldi, who at age 28 already has had two Tommy John surgeries. Sox prospect Anderson Espinosa, who they traded to San Diego for Drew Pomeranz, had Tommy John at age 19.

For a long time, pitching with pain was considered to be part of the job description. Tall Sox lefty Pete Schourek once said that he never threw a pitch in the major leagues that did not hurt, and the year his arm hurt the most he won the most games he ever had.

That was 1995 when he won 18 games for the Reds, working 190 1/3 innings. It is worth noting that the year after, Schourek was 4-5 with a 6.01 ERA.

Today's pitchers pitch less than ever before, have better conditioning programs than ever before, have better medical treatment than ever before, and get hurt more than ever before. Or maybe not.

It makes no sense, but it sure is cold at the top of Mount Everest.

Here and there

– I'm on umpire Adam Hamari's side in how he handled the Red Sox-Yankees potential beanball battle on Friday night. Rick Porcello, who did not walk anybody in nine innings and is known for his great control, somehow managed to hit Brett Gardner accidentally, and is second in the league in hit batsmen overall. Luis Severino's retaliation — a pitch up and in on Mookie Betts — was too high, for sure. But when Red Sox manager Alex Cora charged out to argue the warning — an automatic ejection — Hamari actually gave him a chance to retreat before throwing him out. And the game was pretty uneventful after that, which was the goal.

– Thank goodness Dave Dombrowski did not fall prey to the “bolster the bullpen” litany that resounds through baseball at the trade deadline. Remember Eric Gagne? Addison Reed? Dombrowski's two pickups — Steve Pearce and Ian Kinsler — have him in line for Executive of the Year consideration. One more thing — Dombrowski's winning percentage running the Sox is .605, way ahead the second-place GM. That would be Theo Epstein at .575. Of course, those two World Series titles Epstein has must play into the best-GM equation, as well.

– Could Alex Cobb, the Orioles' workhorse, lose 20 games this season? He has 14 losses already and nine, maybe 10 starts left. The majors' last 20-game loser was Mike Maroth, who was 9-21 for the Tigers in 2003.

– That 2-hour, 15-minute game on Friday night was the shortest involving the Red Sox and Yankees since May 6, 1994, when it took 2:13 for New York to win at Yankee Stadium, 3-1. The Sox have not played a regulation game in under two hours in this century. Their most recent in under 120 minutes was on April 22, 1999, when the Tigers won, 1-0, in Detroit, with Mark Portugal hurling for Boston.

– After slow start due to dreadful weather, attendance has picked up a bit at Fenway Park, although it can be hard to tell since almost every game in June through August is a sellout or close. ... The Pawtucket Red Sox are on the road all week, returning to McCoy Stadium on Aug. 13. That could be the start of a momentous week in the franchise's long history as the team is likely to announce it will relocate to Worcester for 2021. We've heard that there is a team of technology experts from WPI who are working on making the new ballpark the most modern in the minors, if not all of baseball. ... While Porcello has given up 16 home runs this season, 12 have come with the bases empty. ... So, it's not Aaron Judge, Aaron Hicks or Giancarlo Stanton who has hit the most home runs off Boston pitching this year — and hasn't Hicks been a real Sox killer during his career? It is Justin Smoak of Toronto with five.

*** RedSox.com**

Benintendi's 1B in 10th gives Sox walk-off sweep

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- At the four-hour-and-39-minute mark of a zany Sunday night/Monday morning comeback, Andrew Benintendi's three-hop single to cap a 5-4 walk-off win in 10 innings was just about the perfect way for the Red Sox to complete a four-game sweep that couldn't help but crush the Yankees.

"I'd take a 19-hopper up the middle for a game-winning hit," said slugger J.D. Martinez. "That's baseball, man."

Pinch-runner Tony Renda, who just minutes earlier came off the bench to make his debut for Boston in his first Major League game since 2016, dove home to end it at 12:49 a.m. ET.

"Pretty surreal," Renda said. "It's unbelievable. I knew where the defense was playing, I had a feeling they weren't standing where Benny hit that ball, and as soon as you hear the crowd just go nuts, it's unbelievable. You just go numb and run as hard as you can. Jackie [Bradley Jr.] was telling me, 'Down, down, down' and that's that. It's unbelievable."

As you can guess, the Red Sox didn't seem tired.

Not after a game in which they rallied from 4-1 down with two outs in the bottom of the ninth against Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman to tie it.

Not after a dagger of a sweep that put them 45 games above .500 (79-34) and 9 1/2 games up in the American League East against their rivals, whom they won't see again until Sept. 18 in New York.

"They play the game the right way, they play until the end. That was fun to watch," said manager Alex Cora. "We always come to a series and the goal is to win it, and we swept them. Now, it's great, that clubhouse is pretty loud right now, but like I've been saying all along, tomorrow is an off-day and then we've got Toronto. We've got to turn the page and be ready for that team and the same goal -- go win the series."

According to Statcast™, Benintendi had a hit probability of just 13 percent on his 93.5-mph hopper against Jonathan Holder, who had a tough weekend in Boston.

"He started me off with two fastballs," said Benintendi. "The third one was in for a strike. The last one was a changeup up and away, and I got on top of it and just kind of rolled it over. And of all the hits up the middle that were taken away by the shift, that one finds a way to get through, and thank God it did."

The Yankees had a three-run lead and looked primed to salvage the finale of the four-game series until Chapman struggled mightily in the ninth. The lefty walked the bases loaded, then had to face the dangerous Martinez, who hammered a two-run single to center to make it a one-run game.

"Chapman's a guy who can throw four balls to the backstop, then dot four balls right on the corner. He's one of those guys," said Martinez, who has an MLB-leading 93 RBIs. "Yeah, once the bases got loaded, once he started with the walks, then you're like, 'There's a chance here.'"

It was a cashed-in chance that couldn't have happened without some help from the Yankees.

After the big hit by Martinez, Xander Bogaerts hit a grounder down the line at third, and Miguel Andujar could have ended the game with a good throw to first. Instead he bounced it, and first baseman Greg Bird couldn't hang on to it. Bradley came roaring around from second to tie it.

"It's a tough way, obviously, to end a tough weekend, but we can't let this define what's been a great season for us," said Yankees manager Aaron Boone.

Left-hander David Price turned in a solid performance for Boston, and reversed his recent trend of rough outings against the Yankees. He walked off the mound in the top of the seventh with two on and nobody out to a loud ovation from the Fenway faithful.

"It was big," said Price. "You know I think I've given up at least three runs against those guys in the first inning every time this year. And to make pitches and get out of that first inning, that was big."

As soon as Price left, things went awry against reliever Heath Hembree, who has been the go-to guy for the Red Sox this season with inherited runners.

The Yankees had No. 9 hitter Shane Robinson up, and even though Robinson tried to make an out three times by attempting a sacrifice bunt, Hembree still couldn't get him out. Instead he issued a seven-pitch walk that proved to be predictably damaging. Aaron Hicks then smacked a grounder to short that looked like it might have been a double-play ball, but Bogaerts booted it for an error, and two runs scored to give the Yankees a 2-1 lead.

In July, Hembree inherited 12 runners over 11 appearances and stranded all of them. This was the first time since April 28 he allowed an inherited runner to score.

In six-plus innings, Price gave up four hits and two runs while walking three and striking out five.

"This team doesn't quit," Price said. "This lineup doesn't quit. They continue to have good at-bats throughout the night. That was a very good one."

Masahiro Tanaka matched zeros with Price for the first four innings. Mookie Betts broke the deadlock in the bottom of the fifth by hammering a solo shot over the Green Monster and onto Lansdowne Street.

According to Statcast™, Betts' 26th homer of the season had an exit velocity of 106.2 mph with a projected distance of 437 feet.

For a while it seemed as though Betts' long ball would be enough. But there were plenty of twists and turns left and right until the sweet end on Benintendi's soft and well-placed contact.

"Everybody knew how big this series was," Benintendi said. "We came in and did what we wanted to do. Kind of stole this one. Every win counts the same, but now again we have to reshift our focus toward Toronto."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Leon the rally starter: Though catcher Sandy Leon is mainly known for his defense, he came up with a couple of big at-bats in this one, starting the tying rally in the ninth and the winning one in the 10th. After Chapman struck out Brock Holt for the first out of the ninth, Leon took a 101-mph fastball for the first strike, then let four straight pitches go by for a walk. In the 10th, with two outs and nobody on, he flared a 64.2-mph bloop into short left for a two-out single against Holder. That brought the dangerous Betts to the plate and, after a wild pitch moved Leon to second, Boone intentionally walked Betts to set up Benintendi's game-winner.

"We put together a lot of at-bats, good ones, from the seventh inning on, against their bullpen," said Cora.

SOUND SMART

The last time the Red Sox had a bigger lead in the division than the one they currently have was when Cora was playing for the team instead of managing it. In July 2007, Boston had a lead of 11 1/2 games at one point.

HE SAID IT

"I feel like it's the same story every night. We're a team that doesn't give up, and we find a way to stress out those relievers and really put a lot of pressure on them and lock it in. I think that's why this team is really good. We just don't give away any at-bats, it feels like." -- Martinez

UP NEXT

The Red Sox will spend Monday's off-day in Toronto before opening a three-game series against the Blue Jays on Tuesday night. Lefty Drew Pomeranz, who is still trying to establish some kind of groove to cement his spot in the rotation, will get the start. Last time out was a small step forward for Pomeranz, as he held the Phillies to four hits and two runs over five innings in a 3-1 loss. In four career starts at Rogers Centre, Pomeranz is 2-1 with a 4.05 ERA. The Blue Jays counter with righty Marcus Stroman (4-8, 5.63 ERA). First pitch is scheduled for 7:07 p.m. ET.

E-Rod 'impressive' in bullpen session

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Pitching from the main diamond at Fenway Park for the first time since he severely sprained his right ankle on July 9, Eduardo Rodriguez was "impressive" in a bullpen session on Sunday afternoon, according to manager Alex Cora.

"Eduardo, that was impressive, honestly," said Cora. "He threw a bullpen and that was good to see. I don't know yet what's the next step, but to see him on the mound, like I told you guys that [day when he had the injury], that didn't look too promising. That was good news right there."

Rodriguez was as enthused as his manager.

"It was really good to throw off a mound," said Rodriguez. "Feels good mechanically, my shoulder and everything. I threw 25, 30 pitches or something like that."

As far as a potential return date, the Red Sox will let that play out. Typically, it takes a pitcher at least as long to build back up as the time missed. So in Rodriguez's case, since he has been out for three weeks, he could be back by late August or early September.

"I don't know," Rodriguez said. "I have to see, and follow the plan we have, sit together and just wait for them to tell me what it's going to be."

Before the injury, Rodriguez was in the middle of one of the best stretches of his career. For the season, he is 11-3 with a 3.44 ERA in 19 starts.

Following Sunday's side session, Rodriguez is confident that momentum will carry over once he returns.

"I threw all my pitches today," he said. "I've been keeping my shoulder in shape, throwing everything. I just wanted to get on the mound and throw everything, and it feels great."

No Sale in Toronto

When ace Chris Sale was placed on the disabled list last week with inflammation in his left shoulder, the initial plan was that he would miss just one start and return on Wednesday for the second game of the upcoming series in Toronto. But the Red Sox announced before Sunday's 5-4 win over the Yankees that Brian Johnson will again fill in for Sale during the next turn through the rotation.

Cora said the latest goal is for Sale to return next weekend in Baltimore, when the Sox play a four-game series, including a doubleheader on Saturday.

"He played catch today," Cora said. "He's OK, but he hasn't thrown a bullpen [session]. At the same time, you start looking at the schedule, and I don't want him pitching in Philly. I don't want him to hit. So, we kind of maneuver the schedule and see Baltimore as most likely."

Injury updates

Third baseman Rafael Devers is still set to return from his left hamstring injury on the first day he is eligible, which is Wednesday in Toronto.

Cora is hoping that Devers can play one Minor League game at Class A Lowell on Monday before flying to Toronto on Tuesday.

Second baseman Ian Kinsler and catcher Blake Swihart, both of whom are also sidelined with hamstring strains, are expected to return when they are first eligible on Aug. 14, when the Red Sox open a series in Philadelphia.

* **WEEL.com**

Don't forget David Price: Left-hander takes another step towards reinvention with outstanding effort vs. Yankees

John Tomase

David Price's moment of truth arrived early.

Five batters into Sunday's series finale vs. the Yankees, Price found himself with the bases loaded. Just over a month earlier, on the same ESPN Sunday Night Baseball stage, Price had delivered the worst start of his career in a blowout loss that sent him searching for answers.

Price allowed five home runs and eight runs, leaving the Red Sox effectively tied for first in the American League East. Price spoke softly in the Yankee Stadium visiting clubhouse that night.

"I've faced the Yankees many times," He said. "It's time for me to kind of go back to the drawing board."

Over the last month, Price has remade his approach. Once reliant on an upper-90s fastball, he has spent the last few weeks honing his cutter and changeup, with impressive results.

So when the Yankees loaded the bases with two outs in the first on Sunday night, Price faced an immediate crossroads: either escape damage or say here we go again.

Price chose Option A, carried a shutout into the seventh, and Red Sox fans suddenly have to be feeling even better about their already tremendous chances to advance deep into October.

"It was big," Price said. "You know, I think I've given up at least three runs against those guys in the first inning every time this year. And to make pitches and get out of that inning, that was big."

We should take this moment to note that the Red Sox blew a 1-0 lead in the seventh, thus denying Price the victory. We should further note that they then overcame a 4-1 deficit in the ninth to steal a 5-4 victory that may render Price a footnote, but it's an important footnote.

The no-decision did little to dim the positivity surrounding Price. He needed to prove the Yankees didn't have his number, and he did it by taking a shutout into the seventh. He left the mound to a standing ovation after a Brett Gardner single and Austin Romine walk, serenaded by the strains of Frankie Vallie's "Can't Take My Eyes off You" and its rousing chorus of, "I love you baby."

It was quite a turnaround for a pitcher who has spent much of the last year in the eye of the storm. Relying largely on a mid-80s changeup that he kept away from New York's potent right-handed bats, Price controlled the game until coming back out for the seventh.

It's hardly Price's fault that reliever Heath Hembree couldn't throw a strike, or that Xander Bogaerts booted a tailor-made double play ball that could've allowed the Red Sox to escape the seventh with a 1-1 tie.

Price went six-plus innings, allowing four hits and two runs. He walked three and struck out five while throwing a season-high 108 pitches.

"I don't think anybody's thrown the ball better than us since the All-Star break," Price said.

Price entered the game just 2-6 with an 8.42 ERA in nine career starts vs. the Yankees with the Red Sox. so this was a notable improvement.

Red Sox injury updates: E-Rod throws bullpen, Devers headed to Lowell

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox got some encouraging news regarding Eduardo Rodriguez Sunday afternoon, with the lefty starter heading back to a mound for the first time since injuring his right ankle.

Under the watchful eye of Red Sox pitching coaches Dana LeVangie and Brian Bannister, Rodriguez executed a bullpen session on the Fenway Park mound. It was a huge step in the right direction for the pitcher, who is still on the 10-day disabled list after hurting his ankle in the sixth inning of his start against the Blue Jays July 14.

"I want to keep doing it, you know what I mean? My ankle is really good, feels great, feels fine throwing the ball," said Rodriguez, who had Rafael Devers stand in the batter's box tracking each of the 25 pitches. "That was the test today, how I would land on it and everything. Feels really good."

"Eduardo, that was impressive, honestly," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "He threw a bullpen and that was good to see. I don't know yet what's the next step but to see him on the mound, like I told you guys that Sunday, that didn't look too promising. That was good, those are good news right there."

- Devers, who is on the disabled list with a hamstring injury, also executed a workout on the Fenway Park field prior to Sunday night's game.

The third baseman had no issues while fielding ground balls and running the bases, leading the news that he will play for the Single-A Lowell Spinners at LeLacheur Park Monday night.

Chris Sale skipping another start due to shoulder

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox are playing it safe with Chris Sale.

The Sox ace will not pitch Wednesday in Toronto as the team originally planned, giving Sale more time to heal his sore left shoulder.

For a second straight time through the rotation, Brian Johnson will take Sale's spot.

Drew Pomeranz is slated to start the series opener against the Blue Jays, with Rick Porcello slotted in for Thursday's tilt at Rogers Centre.

*** NESN.com**

Red Sox Wrap: Boston Completes Four-Game Sweep Of Yankees With Walk-Off, 5-4 Win

Lauren Campbell

Get your brooms out.

It looked as if the New York Yankees were going to squeak out a win Sunday night, but a ninth-inning, two-out rally paved the way for the Boston Red Sox to complete a four-game sweep over their American League East rival.

The Sox trailed by three runs with two outs in the ninth inning but came back to tie the game and send it to extras, where Andrew Benintendi played hero with a walk-off single to lift the home team to a 5-4 win at Fenway Park.

David Price, who has had his fair share of troubles against the Yanks since joining the Sox, seemed to figure out the New York lineup Sunday night. He pitched a strong outing, allowing two runs (both inherited) over six innings on four hits and three walks while striking out five.

With the win, the Red Sox improved to 79-34 and extended their AL East lead to 9 1/2 games, while the Yankees fell to 68-42.

Here's how it all went down:

GAME IN A WORD

Sweep.

Boston completed its four-game sweep, but it didn't come easy, as extra innings were needed to decide the thrilling win.

ON THE BUMP

— Price was brilliant on the hill, pitching into the seventh inning before Sox manager Alex Cora made the call to the bullpen.

The southpaw mowed down five Yankees batters and pitched his way out of jams in the first and fifth innings. He came out for the seventh and put the first two batters he faced on after Brett Gardner singled and Austin Romine walked.

— Heath Hembree relieved Price and loaded the bases with a walk to Shane Robinson. Xander Bogaerts' error on Aaron Hicks' ground ball brought in two runs, then Giancarlo Stanton singled to plate Robinson for a 3-1 New York lead.

After Hembree struck Didi Gregorius out, Cora made his second pitching change of the inning.

— Ryan Brasier got the final two outs of the inning, but not without giving up a sacrifice fly to Gleyber Torres for the Yankees' fourth run of the game. Brasier allowed one hit and recorded a strikeout in the eighth.

— Tyler Thornburg pitched a scoreless ninth.

— Matt Barnes pitched a 1-2-3 10th with a strikeout.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— The Red Sox threatened to do damage in the third inning after Mookie Betts and Andrew Benintendi each singled with one out, but Steve Pearce and J.D. Martinez both struck out to end the threat.

— Boston would strike first in the fifth, however, when Betts sent a towering solo home run over the Green Monster for a 1-0 lead.

— The Red Sox made it interesting in the ninth after Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman gave up consecutive walks to bring the tying run to the plate in Benintendi, but he struck out looking for the second out of the frame.

— Pearce then drew a walk, bringing Martinez to the plate with two outs. He roped a double to center to drive in two runs and make it a one-run game.

— The Sox weren't done, as Bogaerts hit what should have been the game-ending groundout to third. But the shortstop reached on a Miguel Andujar throwing error, and pinch-runner Jackie Bradley Jr. scored Boston's fourth run from third base to tie the game.

— Sandy Leon singled to start the 10th and later took second on a wild pitch, putting him in scoring position. Betts was intentionally walked before Benintendi made his plate appearance count with the game on the line and drove in pinch-runner Tony Renda to complete the comeback.

— Benintendi led the way for Boston with three hits, while Eduardo Nunez and Betts each had two.

TWEET OF THE GAME

Damage done.

UP NEXT

Boston will enjoy an off day Monday before taking on the Toronto Blue Jays on Tuesday in the first of a three-game set. Drew Pomeranz will take the hill for the Red Sox opposite Marcus Stroman. First pitch from Rogers Centre is set for 7:07 p.m. ET.

*** *BostonSportsJournal.com***

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 (10) – Sox tie it in the 9th, walk it off in 10th

Sean McAdam

HEADLINES

Price redeems himself: All eyes were on David Price Sunday night. After all, the last time Price faced the Yankees — also on a Sunday night ESPN game — he was shelled for eight runs in 3.1 innings. In two starts against the Yankees this season, in fact, he had allowed 12 runs in just 4.1 innings. But Price pitched extremely well, shutting out New York through six innings, during which he allowed just three hits. A key was the first inning, when he pitched himself out of a bases-loaded jam. “That was big,” acknowledged Price. “I think I’ve given up at least three runs (in the first) to those guys every time this year and to make pitches and get out of that inning, that was big.” The outing marked his fourth straight quality start. The only blemish was the decision to send him back out for the seventh after he had thrown 95 pitches

Benintendi gets even against shifts: As a lefty hitter, Andrew Benintendi sees more than his share of infield shifts over the course of the season. But in the 10th inning of a tie game, with the potential game-winning run at second base, Benintendi found a way to make the shifts work for him while facing Yankee reliever Jonathan Holder, who threw him a fastball up-and-away. “I kind of got on top of it and just kind of rolled it over,” said Benintendi. “Of all the hits up the middle that have been taken away by the shift, that one finds a way to get through. That initial hop in front of the plate, it kind of hit hard. Once I saw the second hop, I knew I was going to beat it out. It was just a matter of it getting into center field. Thank God it did.” The

game-winning single was the third hit of the night for Benintendi. He ranks sixth in the majors with 40 multi-hit games. He also has hit safely in his last 12 games against the Yankees.

Sale's return delayed, but not because of a setback: Initially, the Red Sox had hoped Chris Sale would return to the rotation Wednesday in the middle game of the Toronto series. But now, the Sox will hold him out of that series altogether and, according to Alex Cora, "probably" pitch him in Baltimore next weekend when the Sox play four games in three days. The reason? According to Cora, if Sale pitched Wednesday in Toronto, his next start would have come Aug. 14 in Philadelphia, and in the National League setting, without the use of the DH, Sale would have to hit. The Sox want to avoid that at all costs. The plan now is for Sale to throw a bullpen in Toronto on Tuesday, then pitch either Friday or Saturday in Baltimore against the Orioles, while being held out of the two-game interleague series in Philadelphia.

SECOND GUESS

As it turned out, it didn't cost the Red Sox the game, but the decision by Cora to send David Price back out for the seventh was a suspect one. Price had thrown 95 pitches, and had finally registered a good outing against the Yankees after being knocked around hard in his first two starts against him. Cora's reasoning was sound: Price was still throwing well, and the Yanks had the bottom third of their order due, with a lefty (Brett Gardner) set to lead off the inning. But the better move would have been to allow Price to feel good about his night having held a strong New York lineup scoreless for six innings.

TWO UP

J.D. Martinez: Martinez had had something of a rough night through his first four plate appearances (three swinging strikeouts and a hit batsman). But with the game on the line in the bottom of the ninth and the bases loaded, Martinez swung at the first pitch from closer Aroldis Chapman and singled to center, scoring two runs to bring the Sox to within a run.

Mookie Betts: Betts began the series by reaching base six times against the Yankees; he ended it by reaching base four more times Sunday. His homer in the fifth represented the only run of the night for either team until the sixth. He later walked in the ninth and scored a run and was then intentionally walked in the 10th, setting the stage for Benintendi's game-winner.

TWO DOWN

Heath Hembree: Hembree has been the Red Sox' most effective reliever when it comes to coming into jams in the middle of innings, having stranded the last 19 baserunners he inherited. But Sunday, he walked the No. 9 hitter, Shane Robinson, who was trying to bunt, then later uncorked a wild pitch and allowed a run-scoring single.

Xander Bogaerts: Bogaerts has been incredibly sure-handed this season, having not made an error on a batter ball through his first 90 starts at the position (he had committed five throwing errors). In the four-run New York seventh, he booted what looked to be a double-play ball, paving the way for the Yankees' big comeback.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"We kind of stole this one."

— Benintendi

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The win was the fifth walk-off victory of the season for the Red Sox

The Sox are now 7-3 in extra innings.

The Sox now own the biggest lead — 9.5 games — of any first-place team in either league.

Boston has outscored New York 81-62 this season.

The series sweep was the Sox' 11th this season, most in the majors.

The Sox improved to 20-4 in getaway games.

After playing two (relatively) short games in the previous two days, the Sox played their longest (4:39) of the season.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox have a scheduled day off Monday. On Tuesday, they play the first game of a three-city, nine-game road trip in Toronto. LHP Drew Pomeranz (1-5, 6.56) vs. RHP Marcus Stroman (4-8, 5.63)

Signature win to sweep Yankees suggests a special season for Red Sox

Sean McAdam

Down to their last strike in the ninth, the Red Sox would have to be satisfied with taking three out of four from the Yankees and, despite the disappointment of having allowed a one-run lead in the seventh turn into a three-run deficit, it was going to be, still, a pretty good weekend for the home team.

They had bludgeoned the Yankees into submission in the opener, then artfully pitched themselves past the visitors in the next two games. The goal, as Alex Cora noted pre-game, is to win series, and they had already accomplished that.

The series finale? Sure, it would have been nice to get one more, to demoralize the Yankees further, and drop them 9.5 games out of first.

Then, the seventh inning happened, when everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. Heath Hembree, who had stranded his previous 19 inherited baserunners, allowed two to score, then two more of his own, too. Xander Bogaerts, who hadn't committed a fielding error all season, made a big one, leading to two runs crossing the plate.

These things happen. But even with a loss, the Sox had picked up two games in the standings for their troubles and hey, you can't win them all.

Apparently, however, you can. Or least this one, anyway. With three runs in the ninth, the Red Sox earned themselves a tie. And with one more in the 10th — with the winning run scored by someone who wasn't even on the organization's 40-man roster 48 hours earlier and hadn't played in the big leagues for two seasons — the sweep was complete with a 5-4 thriller.

The Red Sox were not satisfied. So going into the ninth against closer Aroldis Chapman, they did not see the Yankees' three-run lead as some imposing mountain that could not be climbed. No, they saw it as an opportunity.

J.D. Martinez, who hammered the first pitch he saw with the bases loaded for a two-run single, sagely noted that Chapman's triple-digit fastball isn't the awe-inspiring weapon it once was. Not long ago, he was the lone pitcher who could hit 100 mph with his fastball. Now, it may not be commonplace, but it's hardly rare, either. Heck, Red Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi was touching the century mark on the radar gun in the eighth inning Saturday.

Now, Chapman is just another hard-thrower, stripped of his previous invincibility. Imposing? Hardly.

Impossible task at hand for the Red Sox? Try again.

"At no point," said Mookie Betts, whose solo homer in the fifth represented the only run of the game until the seventh, "did we think we were going to lose."

And why should they? They are now a smidgen under .700 (.699) for the season. They've won eight of nine, 23 of 28 and 49 of 68. They're 18-3 in the last 21 home games, and they're one of five teams in Expansion Era to win as many as 79 of their first 113 games.

They're not cocky. They're just accustomed to getting the result they want.

The narrative that they had built their gaudy record on the backs of lousy teams and folded at the sight of good ones never registered inside the Red Sox clubhouse.

Perhaps that explains why they were almost nonchalant in the aftermath of their most exciting, improbable, and yes, significant win of the season.

Not even the bulletin board comment by Yankee GM Brian Cashman ("You wonder what their record would be if they weren't playing us. Because when we go head-to-head, we do some damage against them.") riled them. Betts confirmed that the Red Sox were aware of the remarks, but weren't using it as motivation.

"We weren't paying it attention," shrugged Betts. "We know who we are, what we can do, and we just went out and showed it."

Someone asked Betts where that confidence sprang from. Was it the first three wins against the Yankees? Was it the backing of Fenway's biggest crowd of the season as the comeback unfolded?

No, Betts responded. It's been everything that has happened to date, from the best record in the Grapefruit League, to the 17-2 spring out of the starting gate, to the wins that keep getting deposited, like a kid saving for something big at the end of the year.

"It's just the season," summarized Betts. "We go out and play. I mean, we don't have to have a whole lot of people believing in us, other than us. We root for each other and we know we can do it. It doesn't matter what the deficit is."

Down four runs in the second inning Thursday. Down three runs with a strike to go Sunday.

It's just the season.

Haven't you been watching?

Final: Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 (10) – Sox rally for 3 in 9th vs. Chapman for 4-game sweep

Sean McAdam

Down to the final out in the ninth, the Red Sox rallied for three runs to force extra innings, then won it in the 10th when Andrew Benintendi drove a single up the middle, to score pinch-runner Tony Renda for a thrilling 5-4 comeback win and a sweep of the Yankees.

The Sox had led 1-0 after six thanks to six shutout innings by David Price. But the Yankees scored four times in the seventh — two off on a Xander Bogaerts error — to take what seemed a commanding lead.

However, the Sox took advantage of wildness on the part of Aroldis Chapman to score three in the ninth — two coming from an RBI single from J.D. Martinez and the tying run on a throwing error by Miguel Andujar — then beat Jonathan Holder in the 10th to push the Yankees 9.5 games back.

IN-GAME OBSERVATIONS:

12:32 What an inning. Aroldis Chapman walks the bases loaded, then serves up a two-run single to J.D. Martinez, and on a throwing error by Miguel Andujar, pinch-runner Jackie Bradley Jr. scores all the way from second base. Tied, headed for extras.

10:55 Hembree walks Shane Robinson, who was trying to give up an out. loading the bases.

10:47 Alex Cora has left himself open to some second-guessing with his decision to let Price go back out to start the 7th after 95 pitches. Price allowed a sharp single to RF and a walk, and now leaves a first-and-second jam for Heath Hembree.

10:24 Presumably, this will be Price's last inning as he's nearing 90 pitches. The final three innings will be a huge test for the Sox bullpen.

9:23 Tanaka has had his way with the Nos. 3 and 4 hitters in the Red Sox lineup – Pearce and J.D. Martinez. Four plate appearances, four strikeouts and some funky swings at pitches out of the strike zone.

8:45 Yankees catch a break in that inning as what should have been ball four to Eduardo Nunez is instead called a strike by home plate umpire Chris Conroy. On that same pitch, Xander Bogaerts was thrown out trying to steal. On the next pitch, Nunez beat out an infield hit. Who knows how the tenor of that inning was changed?

8:30 Steve Pearce is in the lineup tonight because of his history (5-for-15, two homers) with Masahiro Tanaka, but Tanaka tied Pearce up with a splitter down-and-in on that swinging strike.

8:21 David Price gets out of a bases-loaded jam by getting rookie Luke Voit on a weak tapper back to the mound. He threw 20 pitches in the first and wasn't exactly sharp, but escapes without any damage.

WHO: Red Sox vs. New York Yankees

WHEN: 8:05 p.m.

WHERE: Fenway Park

WHAT'S UP: The Sox have won the first three game of this series, and done so in convincing fashion. Their 8.5 game lead is their largest of the season, and they could go a long way to securing the division title with a win tonight in the series finale. A win would put the Sox up by eight in the loss column with less than two months to go – a formidable lead, indeed. The Yankees, meanwhile, are reeling, having lost four straight and are under .500 since the teams last met on July 1.

STARTING PITCHERS: LHP David Price (11-6, 3.97) vs. RHP Masahiro Tanaka (9-2, 3.84).

TV/RADIO: ESPN/WEEI 93.7 FM

LINEUPS

RED SOX

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

YANKEES

Hicks CF
Stanton DH

Gregorius SS
Torres 2B
Andujar 3B
Voit 1B
Gardner LF
Romine C
Robinson RF

NEWS AND NOTES

Chris Sale's return to the rotation has been delayed for at least a bit. The Red Sox had been hopeful that when they placed Sale on the DL last week with left shoulder inflammation that he would only miss one start, with the idea that he would pitch Wednesday, the middle game of their series in Toronto. But earlier Sunday evening, the Sox sent out their starters for the series, Sale was noticeably absent. The Sox have Drew Pomeranz planned for Tuesday, followed by Brian Johnson Wednesday and Rick Porcello Thursday. There was no further update on Sale's condition, but check back post-game for updated information.

Eduardo Rodriguez threw a bullpen Sunday afternoon, throwing somewhere between 25-30 pitches, with Rafael Devers standing in at the plate and tracking the pitches. "I felt really good," said Rodriguez. "My ankle is really good. Felt fine throwing on the mound today. I threw all of my pitches — changeup, slider and everything." Rodriguez followed his session with some light jogging and PFP (pitcher's fielding practice) and will wait to see what the training staff has lined up next for him. "I have to follow the plan," he said. Alex Cora termed the bullpen "impressive. That was good to see. I don't know what's next, but to see him on the mound (was encouraging)."

Devers was scheduled to take batting practice and a workout as he comes back from a hamstring strain. The tentative plan was to have him go to Lowell Monday, where he would play six or so innings, then join the Red Sox in Toronto Tuesday. He's eligible to come off the DL Wednesday.

Rodriguez will remain in Boston with three others on the DL – Ian Kinsler, Blake Swihart and Steven Wright.

*** *The Athletic***

David Price finally keeps the Yankees at bay

Jen McCaffrey

It hardly registered by the time Andrew Benintendi hit a walk-off single in the bottom of the 10th inning at 12:50 a.m. – nearly five hours into the game – but David Price finally pitched well enough to beat the Yankees.

The lefty's performance was long forgotten as the Red Sox rallied to win in dramatic fashion once again, but the fact Price dominated for six innings against New York represented a win of the intangible kind for Boston.

In early April, Price pitched one inning against New York before exiting the game with hand numbness. In early May, he missed his start at Yankee Stadium with mild carpal tunnel syndrome. On Sunday Night Baseball on July 1, he was rocked for eight runs in 3 1/3 innings.

Entering Sunday, in nine career starts against New York as a member of the Red Sox, Price owned an 8.43 ERA. He'd held the Yankees to fewer than three runs in just one of those starts.

The Yankees have been an enigma for Price. But Sunday night was different.

When Price left the mound in the sixth inning after striking out Luke Voit, he was in line for the win. The Red Sox were up 1-0 thanks to a Mookie Betts homer. Price had allowed just three hits and two walks over six scoreless innings to that point.

But manager Alex Cora sent the pitcher back out for the seventh inning at 95 pitches to face lefty hitter Brett Gardner. Gardner singled to right. Cora kept Price in for Austin Romine, a righty catcher who was 6-for-16 against Price entering the day.

“I know the numbers said (Romine’s) good against him, but there’s a lot of singles there, and it was a pop-up and a ground ball to third (tonight),” Cora explained. “We trust the guy, he was locked in. He was commanding the strike zone, pitching out of the strike zone, so we felt it was a good matchup for us.”

Romine walked, putting two on with no outs and prompting Cora to pull Price, turning instead to Heath Hembree, who had stranded all 12 inherited runners he’d acquired in the month of July. But this time, Hembree issued a walk to Shane Robinson after Robinson squared multiple times for a sacrifice bunt. With the bases loaded, Xander Bogaerts booted a potential double play ball, allowing two runs to score. A single added another run.

Price’s final line — two runs on four hits over six-plus innings — didn’t quite match the ease with which he pitched against New York.

“He’s been throwing the ball well for a while,” Cora said. “He’s made some adjustments and you can see the results.”

“I know he feels physically he’s in a great place,” Cora added. “Mechanics-wise and where he’s at as a pitcher right now he’s been feeling well.”

Price didn’t have much to say after the start.

“It was good. It was better. Happy we won,” he said.

After that July 1 start in New York, Price said he needed to change his approach against the Yankees, and he did. On Sunday, he increased his usage of changeups, two-seamers and cutters and decreased his reliance on the four-seam fastball.

Getting out of a bases loaded situation in the first seemed to propel Price through his next five innings.

“It was big,” he said. “You know I think I’ve given up at least three runs against those guys in the first inning every time this year. And to make pitches and get out of that inning, that was big.”

The strong outing represented a trend for Price; he had pitched well in his previous start against the National League East-leading Phillies on Monday, allowing one run over eight innings.

The Red Sox are on pace for 113 wins and lead the AL East by 9 1/2 games, but they’ll need Price in big games if they want a deep postseason run. After some bumps in the road, he’s starting to show he can be counted on.

Red Sox’ belief they’re ‘never out of a game’ leads to wild sweep of Yankees

Chad Jennings

All of this after-the-fact bravado would be hard to believe if weren’t playing out before our very eyes. The Red Sox were down three runs in the bottom of the ninth on Sunday. There were two outs, Aroldis Chapman was throwing 100 mph fastballs, and the game was over, by all reasonable standards.

Except, to a man, the Red Sox claim to have believed otherwise.

“At no point did we think we were going to lose,” Mookie Betts said.

At no point? Maybe Betts meant that the Red Sox started to believe after J.D. Martinez singled in a couple of runs to pull within one.

“No, before that,” manager Alex Cora said.

Before that? Maybe Cora meant all the way back in the sixth inning, when the Red Sox still held their early 1-0 lead. But, no, Cora said he thought back to a lopsided game on July 1 when the Red Sox scored a meaningless run by working a few tough at-bats against the five-time All Star closer. That gave him confidence that the team wasn’t ready to quit.

“Obviously, it’s hard to say you’re confident right off the bat just because of who (Chapman) is,” Martinez said. “But I think that once we noticed that he didn’t have command, that he was a little bit all over the plate, I think confidence grew.”

And it just keeps growing. Sunday’s improbable 5-4 win over the Yankees was just the latest high-profile evidence for a clubhouse already overflowing with self-confidence. A four-game sweep against the Yankees was the Red Sox’ best series of the season, and it ended with perhaps their most electric win of the year.

Oh, and by the way, they’ve already won 79 times. The Red Sox are 45 games above .500 for the first time since 1946. They’ve never before won this many games this fast in a season. And by stomping their division rivals the past four days – with two wild comebacks, and two brilliant pitching performances – the Red Sox now have a 9 1/2-game lead in the division, which is the largest in baseball this season.

Mind you, the team they’re leading has the third-most wins in baseball.

“They don’t get caught up in the whole thing,” Cora said. “They show up every day, they digest the information, they go out there and play, and they win games. They’ve been winning a lot of games.”

But to win Sunday’s game was remarkable.

Cora’s a big believer in advanced analytics, so here’s a number to consider: After blowing a 1-0 lead in the seventh, the Red Sox’ chances of winning Sunday’s game fell as low as 2.1 percent in the ninth inning, according to Fangraphs.com.

On the bench was Tony Renda, the Red Sox’ most recent and least likely addition, who’d been released by Arizona in spring training, signed with the Red Sox in April, and was only called up after Ian Kinsler landed on the disabled list on Friday. Renda would eventually pinch run and score the game-winner on Andrew Benintendi’s walk-off single in the 10th, but when the comeback started in the ninth, Renda was just the new guy taking stock of his new team.

“Anybody that plays baseball has been around teams that are out,” he said. “They’re done. Down 3 in the ninth, you get that vibe. You get that sense. You don’t get that here. We didn’t have that for a second in that dugout. You couldn’t see it on the field. I mean, these guys have no quit in them, so they’re never out of a game” — he caught himself — “we’re never out of a game. Even if it is the ninth down three against Chapman, it’s manageable. With this squad, it’s manageable. I mean, seriously. I’m sure it’s hard to believe from the outside looking in, but when you’re a part of it, you’re never out of it.”

Three walks loaded the bases. Martinez singled to pull within one. Pinch runner Jackie Bradley Jr. made a heads-up dash for home on a throwing error to tie the game. And Benintendi won it an inning later with his single up the middle to drive home Renda,

“We’re just having fun,” Benintendi said. “Nobody is stressing in here, really. We’re just going out, and we know we have a pretty good team. And when we’re loose is when we play the best.”

Loose? Down three in the ninth? When the whole world knows how 97.9 percent of these games will end?

“We don’t have to have a whole lot of people believing in us other than us,” Betts said. “And I think we root for each other, and we know we can do it. It doesn’t matter what the deficit is. ... If we can keep it close, we can come back and make something happen. We don’t ever give up.”

Not ever?

“We know who we are,” Betts said. “We know what we can do. We just went out and showed it.”

*** *The New York Times***

Red Sox Complete Sweep of Yankees With a Devastating Flourish

Billy Witz

BOSTON — As the Yankees trudged off the field in the wee hours of Monday morning, several of them took one last peek across what had become a bandbox of horrors, catching a sight of the Boston Red Sox mobbing Andrew Benintendi near first base.

It was his hit, a ground ball up the middle through a hole in the shifted defense, that delivered the final devastating blow to the Yankees in a weekend full of them. It brought home pinch-runner Tony Renda, whose headlong slide across the plate sealed a 5-4, 10th-inning comeback win that served as an exclamation point on a four-game sweep of the Yankees.

Instead of leaving the field with a modicum of momentum, and perhaps a sense that they were pulling out of an ill-timed funk, the Yankees dropped to nine and one-half games behind the Red Sox in the American League East. But they weren’t ready to admit that they had kissed their hopes of a division title goodbye.

“A tough way, obviously, to end a tough weekend,” Yankees Manager Aaron Boone said. “But we can’t let this define what’s been a great season for us.”

It may not define the season — that reckoning will come later in the playoffs, provided the Yankees get there — but this series, and this game, will be where regrets took hold.

In a game the Red Sox were seemingly intent on giving away, Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman blew a 4-1 lead in the ninth inning, with a big assist from third baseman Miguel Andujar.

Chapman walked three batters and gave up a two-out, two-run single to J.D. Martinez before Andujar, who had also committed a fielding error in the fifth, backhanded Xander Bogaerts’s grounder and bounced a throw that first baseman Greg Bird could not scoop. The throwing error allowed Jackie Bradley Jr. to race home from second for the tying run.

“What I can tell you is we’re going to keep battling, we’re going to keep playing ball,” Chapman said through an interpreter. “There’s no looking back. We lost these four games, but we have to keep playing.”

The series was reminiscent of one from September 2016, when the Yankees arrived here four games behind the first-place Red Sox. But in the opener Dellin Betances gave up a walk-off home run to Hanley Ramirez and the Yankees blew three- and four-run leads in two other losses, crushing their playoff hopes.

In this series, the Red Sox simply stamped themselves as the better team. They crushed the Yankees in the opener, 15-7, and then rode the ruthlessly efficient pitching of Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi to two

crisp victories. By comparison, Sunday night was an interminable slog at four hours and 39 minutes — nearly the length of Friday's and Saturday's games combined.

Making the loss doubly painful was the fact that the Red Sox had handed the Yankees a leg up. David Price, unsteady against the Yankees since his arrival in Boston in 2016, carried a 1-0 lead into the seventh after Mookie Betts hit a solo homer off Masahiro Tanaka in the fifth.

But the Yankees, who had not led Boston since the third inning on Thursday night, scored four times in the seventh inning, aided by Manager Alex Cora's tardy hook of Price, reliever Heath Hembree's inability to throw strikes to a bunting batter and Bogaerts booting a double-play ball at short.

It was the first chance in the series that the Yankees' vaunted relief corps would receive a late lead. The newly acquired Zach Britton navigated the seventh and Betances worked through the eighth before the game was turned over to Chapman.

After he struck out Brock Holt, Chapman walked Sandy Leon and Betts. He struck out Benintendi, but walked Steve Pearce to load the bases. After Chapman got a visit from pitching coach Larry Rothschild, Martinez lined a single just over the head of second baseman Gleyber Torres to score Leon and Betts.

Bogaerts followed with his grounder down the line, and when Andujar's throw bounced away from Bird, Bradley — who had run for Pearce — raced home.

The recent late-game foibles of Chapman — who had to be bailed out by the since-traded Chasen Shreve in his first appearance after the All-Star break — and the increasingly shaky defense of Andujar are not the only cracks the Yankees have shown.

Though Tanaka allowed only one run, he was lifted with two outs in the fifth, meaning that in the last turn through the rotation, nobody lasted through six innings.

And Aaron Judge, who said he was still experiencing pain in his fractured wrist, and Sanchez, who is recovering from a second groin injury, will not be returning for at least two weeks.

Still, Boone remained adamant that this series and this game would not be defining moments.

“We're too good,” he said. “This is a test we're going through right now, there's no question. We're experiencing some adversity with being dinged up a little bit roster-wise, but we'll also come out on the other side a lot tougher for this. This is a weekend we'll look back and hopefully say that it's the one that brought us together and allowed us to really grow.”

Perhaps, but the Yankees not only have to get their own ship straight, they will need considerable help from the Red Sox, who thus far have shown no signs of cooperating.

So, when Jonathan Holder — who was on the mound amid Thursday's collapse as well — surrendered a bouncing single up the middle to Benintendi in the 10th inning that escaped the lunging grasp of Torres at second, there was no chance of stopping Renda from scoring.

Still, when center fielder Aaron Hicks collected the ball and fired it home, it was as if he was performing his fiduciary duty, just in case — the same way the Yankees will pursue the Red Sox the rest of this season.

*** *The New York Daily News***

After devastating sweep by Red Sox, it's time for Yankees to face the inevitability of a Wild-Card game

Kristie Ackert

That was not a nightmare.

Andrew Benintendi's hopping ground ball up the middle and the Red Sox capping a four-run rally that started in the ninth with a 5-4 win in the bottom of the 10th were all too real.

That capped a worst-case scenario for the Yankees, who were swept by the Red Sox this weekend, sending them into a season-worst five-game spiral and an unimaginable 9.5 games back in the division.

Watching a three-run lead disappear in the ninth inning and the Red Sox pulling out of reach is not how Aaron Boone expects this team to be defined.

“We will not, we are too good,” the Yankees manager told reporters at Fenway early Monday morning. “This is a test we are going through no question. We have some adversity being dinged up roster-wise, but we’ll come out a lot tougher. This is a weekend hopefully we’ll look back on that brought us together and grow as a club. We’ll move on.”

And as the Yankees head to Chicago, they move into a whole new reality.

Their chances of catching the Red Sox, to win the division and avoid the Wild Card are slim to none. They are now just 2.5 games ahead of the A’s for the first wild card spot and five ahead of the Mariners for the second.

“It’s a big (hole), but we can’t worry about that right now,” Boone said of being so far behind the Red Sox. “We have to right our ship, take care of our business. We got Chicago tomorrow, that’s starting another important series for us. We need to start playing well, a more consistent brand of baseball.”

This weekend capped a shaky stretch where the Yankees are just 18-20 over their last 38 games with question marks all over the field.

Starting Monday, they need to begin finding some answers.

They have the second fewest innings pitched by their starters since the All-Star break, behind the Rays — who purposely don’t use a starter on some days. Miguel Andujar’s two errors on Sunday night and Gleyber Torres’ mindless plays over the last week bring up concerns about the young Yankees’ focus and defense. The lineup was silent for most of the weekend without Aaron Judge and Gary Sanchez and it needs to find a way to score while they mend.

Sunday night also had to raise concerns about the bullpen, which has allowed at least a run in 12 of the last 15 games. Aroldis Chapman walked three, and then J.D. Martinez’s single scored two runs before Andujar’s error on Xander Bogaerts’ grounder to third — his second error of the night — allowed the Red Sox to score the tying run.

So right now, the Yankees leave Boston needing to change their focus.

Instead of expending all their energy on chasing the Red Sox, the Yankees need to put their house in order and prepare themselves for a fight in the Wild Card game.

They have time to get themselves ready.

The Yankees and Red Sox do not meet again until September 18. Through the rest of August, the Bombers will only face one team with an above-.500 record, the Rays at the Stadium from the 14th to the 16th. Down the stretch, the Yankees have 33 games against teams with a sub-.500 record, while the Red Sox have 22.

Before you bemoan the myth that the Yankees cannot beat losing teams, their actual record is 36-19 against teams below .500. They have struggled against the Orioles, going 6-6 and do have seven games remaining against them.

So they need to take advantage of this stretch by beating the teams they should beat and lining themselves up for October.

They can give their starters extra rest and maybe that will help get Luis Severino back on target and it would certainly keep CC Sabathia healthier and sharper down the stretch.

Most importantly, however, they can start by being cautious with the returns of Judge, who said Sunday he still had pain in the bone in his right wrist that he fractured, and Sanchez, who is on the disabled list with a groin injury for the second time. There is no rush now; it's most important to make sure they are ready for September and October.

After this weekend, the Yankees have to adjust to a whole new reality and prepare for what now looks inevitable: a playoff run that has to go through a Wild Card game and Boston.

*** *The New York Post***

Sweep of Yankees leaves rolling Red Sox with one last question

Ken Davidoff

BOSTON — Attention, Yankees fans:

It's not always about you.

The Yankees will declare themselves in the coming four weeks, with the schedule gods handing them more cupcakes than a Magnolia Bakery. These Red Sox, however, should no longer be viewed through the prism of the 2018 American League East race, or even their aspirations for a fourth title in 15 years.

This group is making a run at history.

A mind-blowing, come-from-behind, 10-inning, 5-4 victory over the Yankees early Monday morning at Fenway Park, featuring a game-tying, three-run ninth against Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman and then Andrew Benintendi's walk-off single against Jonathan Holder, gave the Red Sox a commanding four-game sweep of their rivals. Call it the Back Bay Retribution, a long-awaited payback for the 1978 Boston Massacre in which the Yankees won four straight here to expedite their comeback from a 14-game deficit.

The Red Sox now own a 79-34 record, putting them on a pace to finish 113-49, which would be the fourth-most regular-season wins in baseball's modern era. They lead the Yankees by 9 1/2 games in a divisional competition that appears all but settled.

For the rivalry, the most compelling question that remains is, how high can the Red Sox fly?

"I never get caught up in any of that," said Red Sox designated hitter J.D. Martinez, who delivered a huge, two-run single in the ninth. "That stuff is for you guys to write. We're the ones that we've got to keep it simple, look at our next objective, our next task, get ready to play Toronto [on Tuesday]."

Rest assured, we'll be writing it, the Red Sox's best record ever through 113 games. It's too spectacular to ignore.

All the more so after this one. Down three with Chapman in the game, they carried many motivations to mail in three more outs, take great satisfaction in their series victory and enjoy Monday's off day.

Instead, with Chapman making his first appearance since Tuesday, Sandy Leon and Mookie Betts drew consecutive one-out walks, and series stud Steve Pearce earned a two-out free pass to load the bases and bring on Martinez.

“Chapman’s a guy that, he can throw four balls to the backstop and then he can dot four balls right on the corner,” Martinez said. That explains why he swung at the first pitch and ripped it into center field for a two-run single, drawing the home team within 4-3.

The game should’ve ended when Xander Bogaerts tapped a bouncer to Yankees rookie third baseman Miguel Andujar, who sure looked nervous as he bounced a throw to first base that Greg Bird couldn’t quite secure, allowing pinch-runner Jackie Bradley Jr. to score the tying run. So the Yankees can’t just tip their cap to the Bosox. Nevertheless, the home team kept grinding, with Benintendi’s bouncer up the middle somehow evading Gleyber Torres and Didi Gregorius to score pinch-runner Tony Renda.

“Of all the hits up the middle that were taken away by the shift, that one finds a way to get through,” Benintendi said. “Thank God it did.”

“They’re playing well. I keep saying, I’m proud of them,” said rookie Boston manager Alex Cora, who noted that he surpassed former Marlins skipper Edwin Rodriguez (78-85) as the winningest Puerto Rican manager. “They don’t get caught up in the whole thing. They show up every day, they digest information, they go out there and play and they win games.”

It’s still an uphill battle for the Red Sox to wind up among the crème de la crème. Consider that just last year, the Dodgers reached a peak of 91-36 — so these Red Sox would have to go 12-2 in their next 14 games to match that — and they wound up a relatively human 104-58.

These teams won’t face off again until Sept. 18, at which point the division may very well be clinched. The drama likely will concern Boston’s run at immortality and the Yankees’ battle for playoff qualification.

Almost certainly, it’ll be about everything besides the rivalry. A weekend like this carries that sort of impact, none of it good for the Yankees.

Making sense of why Red Sox’s offense has risen past Yankees’

Ken Davidoff

BOSTON — What changed?

What catapulted the Red Sox over the Yankees in offensive production this season after the Yankees mashed better last year?

Sure, the Red Sox acquired J.D. Martinez, who has been spectacular. The Yankees, however, picked up Giancarlo Stanton, who has climbed back from a rough start to give his new team a clear upgrade over last year’s primary designated hitter, Matt Holliday.

No, the clear differential so far has been a department that has occasionally plagued the Yankees since they opened their new ballpark and heavily prioritized going deep:

Hitting with runners in scoring position.

“Usually those things kind of line up. Teams that are good in those spots tend to have a lot of good hitters, and vice versa,” Aaron Boone said Sunday, before the Yankees and Red Sox concluded their weekend series at Fenway Park. “But I think over the course of the year, whether you have a great year doing it, whether you have a down year, whatever it is, there’s usually going to be some kind of ebb and flow off of what you are.”

Entering Sunday night's action, the Yankees carried a .777 OPS with runners in scoring position, fifth in the American League. The Red Sox led the junior circuit, and stood far ahead of the Yankees, at .876. In overall OPS, they sat next to each other and much closer, the Sox topping the league at .795 and the Yankees owning second place at .787.

The Yankees' overall OPS had ticked upward from last year's .785, whereas the Sox had dramatically improved from their .736 mark in 2017. Concurrently, the Yankees had an OPS of .804 last year in clutch situations, ramping up slightly, and Boston ramped up considerably to .801 ... still falling far short of the league's elite.

What to make of all this? There appears to be an element of randomness to this skill. After all, Joe Girardi and John Farrell lost their managing gigs from the Yankees and Red Sox, respectively, in part because the rivals agreed that they wanted a younger voice more in touch with the players. Yet both clubs actually stepped it up in these clutch situations under their now-deposed skippers; the Red Sox have maintained that knack under Alex Cora, whereas the Yankees have not with Boone.

"I feel like we had a stretch where we were really good. We've had our stretches where we've been down a little bit, too," Boone said. "That's part of it. Especially a team like us that's built on getting on base and slug, we've had our downtimes as well."

Since the Yankees pummeled David Price and the Red Sox 11-1 on July 1, the Yankees tallied a .784 OPS in the next 28 games, as per FanGraphs. So they actually had raised their overall number in this area. In the same period, the Red Sox had an OPS of .935. Just like many aspects of this unusual season, the Yankees haven't faltered as much as the Red Sox have thrived.

"We put the ball in play, which is very important. We give ourselves a chance," Cora said. "I don't know numbers-wise if that's true, but it feels that way."

"... You look at teams that don't strike out often, there's a lot of them chasing a playoff spot. We're one of them. The Astros are one of them. The Mariners. The Pirates. You put them in play, you give yourself a chance."

The Red Sox had struck out the sixth-fewest times, 859 entering Sunday's game. The Yankees, with 972 whiffs, ranked eighth-highest.

"I think some guys do have a little bit more of a knack, but I do think it bears out who you are as a hitter," Boone said.

Will that wisdom create a market correction by which the Red Sox regress and the Yankees improve in this critical department? If the Yankees are going to play a "pretty lights-out brand of baseball" in order to make the AL East competition a legitimate race again, it can start with this area for both them and their rival.

*** USA Today**

Aroldis Chapman blows save in meltdown, Red Sox walk off to complete sweep of Yankees

Jace Evans

The New York Yankees entered Sunday night trailing the Boston Red Sox by 8½ games in the AL East after dropping the first three games of the series with their rivals in convincing fashion.

It looked like the Yankees were going to salvage at least a game in the series, getting four runs in the seventh and having turned the ball over in the ninth to star closer Aroldis Chapman to seal the win.

Instead, Chapman melted down in stunning fashion and the Red Sox secured the walk-off victory in the 10th inning to complete the four-game sweep.

"We lost these four games, we've got to put it away, move forward and keep playing, keep at it," Chapman said through an interpreter.

The trouble for Chapman began when he walked Sandy Leon with one out in the ninth. He followed that up by walking Mookie Betts.

After recovering briefly by striking out Andrew Benintendi, he walked Steve Pearce to load the bases with two outs. A J.D. Martinez single knocked two runners home, but the Yankees still had a 4-3 lead.

Then, Xander Bogaerts reached first safely thanks to a throwing error charged to third baseman Miguel Andujar.

Tie game.

"Just a bad throw there...I wanted to get rid of it quickly," Andujar said through an interpreter.

"(I've) got to learn from this, got to put it away and look forward."

Chapman, making his first appearance in five days, chalked his game up to "Just a bad outing."

Benintendi found a gap in the 10th to drive pinch-runner Tony Renda — subbed in for Leon following his single and a wild pitch that moved Leon to second — home for the winner.

"Any 10 hopper that goes through for a hit feels pretty good," Benintendi said with a smile.

"Everybody knew how big the series was. We came in and did what we wanted to do. We kind of stole this one."

The victory extended the Red Sox's lead in the East, and sent the Yankees to a season-high fifth straight loss.

"Tough weekend, but we can't let this define what has been a great season for us," said Yankees manager Aaron Boone. "This a test we're going through right now, there's no question we're experiencing some adversity.

"We'll also come out on the other side a lot tougher for this. This is a weekend we could look back on and hopefully be able to say this was one that brought us together and allowed us to really grow even more as a club."

*** *The Newark Star Ledger***

Sweep! Stunned Yankees take 10-inning, walk-off loss from Red Sox | Rapid reaction

Brendan Kutty

BOSTON -- Sweep, Caroline.

The Yankees miserable Boston trip ended in the most unthinkable brutal way -- a blown-lead ... extra-innings ... walk-off 5-4 loss to the Red Sox early Monday morning.

Jonathan Holder reprised his role as Yankees goat, giving up the deciding run when Andrew Benintendi singled to center, scoring pinch runner and ex-Yankees farmhand Tony Renda from second base.

Holder's first collapse came when he blew a four-run Yankees lead, retiring none of the seven batters he faced, in Thursday's loss.

The defeat meant a four-game sweep at the hands of their bitter rivals in a series that -- they hoped -- would show they could stand with the American League East leaders.

Instead, it was clear: They're worlds apart.

What it means

The loss continued the Yankees' horrid stretch, extending their losing streak to five -- their longest drought of the season.

The Yankees are 9 1/2 games back of Boston in the division.

They will face the Red Sox six more times this season -- a three-game set at home before finishing the season with another three games at Fenway.

The win came after the Yankees lost three straight to the Red Sox, each game seeming to display just how much better the Red Sox are.

The initial meltdown

Closer Aroldis Chapman melted down, dumping the Yankees into extra innings.

Given a three-run lead, Chapman completely fell apart, his control nonexistent. He walked the bases loaded and, with two outs, star J.D. Martinez made him pay. Martinez ripped a single up the middle to bring in two runs and cut the Yankees' lead to 4-3.

It got so much worse.

Immediately after, Miguel Andujar committed his second error of the night, short-hopping first baseman Greg Bird after backhanding a groundball. Xander Bogaerts was safe. The game was tied. Chapman struck out Mitch Moreland to stop the bleeding.

It was Chapman's second dumpster fire performance in five appearances since the All-Star break.

*** *Associated Press***

Red Sox stun Yankees 5-4 in 10 for 4-game sweep

BOSTON -- Andrew Benintendi's hit bounced a handful of times before finding its way into center field for the winning run and a big four-game sweep over the rival Yankees.

The Red Sox now find themselves in firm control of the AL East.

Benintendi's RBI single with two outs in the 10th capped Boston's rally from three runs down in the ninth against New York closer Aroldis Chapman, and the Red Sox completed a four-game sweep with a 5-4 victory Sunday night.

"Any 10 hopper that goes through for a hit feels pretty good," the usually quiet Benintendi said, breaking into a grin. "Everybody knew how big the series was. We came in and did what we wanted to do. We kind of stole this one."

Boston opened a 9 1/2-game lead atop the division over the Yankees, who lost their season-high fifth straight.

"It feels like another great win, obviously it was against our rivals," Boston's J.D. Martinez said.

Mookie Betts hit his 26th homer for Boston (79-34), which has won eight of nine games and owns the majors' best record.

The Yankees hadn't been swept in a four-game series by the Red Sox when they entered a series 30 or more games over .500 since Hall of Famer Ted Williams' rookie season in 1939, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

"A tough way to obviously end a tough weekend, but we can't let this define what's been a great season," manager Aaron Boone said.

Sandy Leon looped a two-out single off Jonathan Holder (1-3) in the 10th and advanced on a wild pitch. Tony Renda pinch-ran before Benintendi's single up the middle to the right of the second-base bag into center field.

Matt Barnes (4-3) worked a perfect inning in the top of the 10th.

For the Yankees, it was a stunning reversal of the Boston Massacre in 1978 when the Yankees came to town and swept the Red Sox en route to erasing a large lead and capturing the AL East.

"We lost these four games here, but what I can tell you is that we're gonna keep battling. We're gonna keep playing ball," Chapman said through a translator. "There's no looking back."

It snapped his streak of converting 22 straight opportunities since his last blown save on May 4.

With New York leading 4-1 in the ninth, Chapman loaded the bases on walks before Martinez's two-out, two-run single pulled Boston within one. Third baseman Miguel Andujar then bounced a throw to first on Xander Bogaerts' grounder, with pinch-runner Jackie Bradley Jr. racing home with the tying run.

Red Sox starter David Price took a shutout into the seventh, giving up two runs and four hits with five strikeouts and three walks.

Playing on a beautiful mid-summer night with a sellout crowd amped from the opening pitch, Price and Masahiro Tanaka were locked in a scoreless duel before Betts hit a hanging cutter completely out of Fenway Park over the Green Monster in the fifth.

Price, tagged for 12 runs over 4 1/3 innings in his other two starts against the Yankees this season, left to a rousing ovation with two on and nobody out in the seventh.

Heath Hembree walked Shane Robinson before Bogaerts booted what looked like a sure double-play grounder, allowing two runs. Stanton followed with an RBI single and Gleyber Torres had a sacrifice fly.

Tanaka gave up one run and six hits, striking out nine and walking one in 4 2/3 innings.

NOT FOR SALE

Red Sox ace Chris Sale, on the 10-day disabled list with mild left shoulder inflammation, will miss his second straight start.

Manager Alex Cora had been saying the hope was for him to start Wednesday in Toronto. However, when the team listed its probable starters for the next series, it was RHP Rick Porcello.

A-ROD SPEAKS

Working the ESPN Sunday Night Baseball telecast for his first time in Fenway, color analyst and former Yankee Alex Rodriguez discussed his fight with former Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek in 2004 during the broadcast, saying the current Yankees need a spark.

"The fans here, they took that as a pivotal moment on winning a championship," he said. "And I'm not saying the Yankees need to start a fight by any means, but I'd love to see more fight, more action, more Paul O'Neill attitude and sometimes you want a guy in the room to stand up and not necessarily throw a chair, but get in somebody's face and show some emotion, some passion."

Boston rallied from a 0-3 series deficit in the 2004 ALCS en route to winning its first World Series since 1918.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Yankees: OF Aaron Judge (fractured right wrist) played catch, but still hasn't swung a bat. Boone said: "They hope it's a pain-free situation. There is a chip in there, a broken wrist, you've got to get it right." ... Boone also said he hopes C Gary Sanchez (strained right groin) will be running at full speed by the end of the week and LHP J.A. Happ (hand, foot and mouth disease) could start Thursday.

Red Sox: LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (sprained right ankle) threw a bullpen that Cora called "impressive." ... 3B Rafael Devers (strained left hamstring) is slated to play for Single-A Lowell in a rehab assignment Monday.

UP NEXT

Yankees: RHP Lance Lynn (7-8, 4.89 ERA) is in line to make his first start for the Yankees on Monday against the White Sox. He was acquired from Minnesota on July 30.

Red Sox: LHP Drew Pomeranz (1-5, 6.56) is slated to start the opener of a nine-game road trip Tuesday in Toronto.