

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, August 7, 2018

*** The Boston Globe**

The Red Sox' dizzying pace is matched by few teams in history; here's some context

Alex Speier

It's not quite Halley's Comet, but the stars rarely align to produce regular seasons like the one the 2018 Red Sox are experiencing, or events within it, such as the just-completed four-game sweep against the Yankees.

With more than two-thirds of the season completed, the Red Sox can't take their position atop the American League East by a whopping 9½ games for granted. (The 2011 Red Sox, who were 11 games ahead of the Rays through 113 games, and 1978 Red Sox, who were up nine games through 116 games, wave hello.) But the rarity of what the Red Sox are accomplishing likewise can't be ignored.

As the Red Sox continue to amass wins at a dizzying pace, the challenge of finding precedent becomes more challenging. Some context for both what was seen over the weekend and what has been seen thus far in 2018:

■ The Red Sox continue to steamroll their way through wins at a pace matched by few teams in history. They improved to 79-34, a .699 winning percentage that is tied for the fourth-best through 113 games since the introduction of divisions to baseball in 1969. The previous four teams to play at such a level to this point averaged 111 regular-season victories.

Year	113-game record	Reg. season record	Playoffs
1998 Yankees	84-29 (.743)	114-48	Won World Series
2001 Mariners	82-31 (.726)	116-46	Lost ALCS
2017 Dodgers	80-33 (.708)	104-58	Lost World Series
2018 Red Sox	79-34 (.699)	?	?
1969 Orioles	79-34 (.699)	109-53	Lost World Series
1995 Indians	78-35 (.690)	100-44*	Lost World Series

Best records through 113 games, in the divisional era

SOURCE: baseball-reference.com; *strike-shortened season

- If the Red Sox go 21-27 (.438) down the stretch, they'll cruise to their first 100-win season since 1946.
- If the Red Sox go 27-21 (.562) down the stretch, they'll surpass the 1912 Red Sox for the most wins in a season in franchise history (105).
- The Red Sox swept a series of four or more games against the Yankees for the seventh time in the last 100 years. While they had done so as recently as 2016, the prior such series sweep had come in 1990. The four-game sweep was the first by the Red Sox against a team that had started the series with a record that was at least 30 games over .500 since they blitzed the 1939 Yankees over five games.

Red Sox sweeps of 4+ games vs. Yankees, last 100 years

Date Games
Aug. 2-5, 2018 4
Sept. 15-18, 2016 4
June 4-7, 1990 4
Sept. 22-25, 1969 4
July 9-13, 1959 5
June 7-11, 1944 4
July 7-9, 1939 5
SOURCE: Stats Inc.

■ Entering Sunday's game, Aroldis Chapman had been entrusted with a lead of three runs 88 times in his career. He had fumbled that advantage just three times (3.4 percent) before he failed to secure the 4-1 advantage Sunday night in the Red Sox' 5-4 walkoff win. In three years with the Yankees, Chapman has been charged with just nine blown saves; three of those have come against a Red Sox team that looks unusually comfortable against him. "Statistics show any time you face a reliever, the more you face him, the odds begin to swing in a hitter's favor," observed J.D. Martinez.

■ Over the final three games of the series, the Red Sox got three straight dominant starts. Rick Porcello (nine innings, one run), Nathan Eovaldi (eight shutout innings), and David Price (six-plus innings, two runs) became the first three Red Sox starters to put together three straight starts of at least six innings and no more than two runs allowed against the Yankees since Jon Lester, Josh Beckett, and Clay Buchholz in August 2009. "I don't think anybody's thrown the ball better than us since the All-Star break," observed Price.

■ The Red Sox' 9½-game lead in the division is their largest since the final days of the 2013 championship season. The last time they had a lead of more than 9½ games was in another season that ended with a trophy, 2007.

The typical disclaimers apply: What the Red Sox accomplish in the regular season has no real bearing on what happens in October. For that matter, their steady march through the summer to this point is not a guarantee of what will happen over the remainder of the regular season.

All the same, the 2018 Red Sox continue to win in a fashion that has few precedents over the full expanse of the franchise's 118 years of existence.

Rampaging Red Sox are winning at a historically high rate

Peter Abraham

Alex Cora inherited a barren office in the Fenway clubhouse when he was named manager of the Red Sox last fall.

The previous occupant, John Farrell, had cleaned out his photographs and mementos. Only bare walls remained.

Cora looked at the wide-open space across from his desk and had an idea: display a photograph from every game the Sox won this season, something representative of that particular victory. Soon 8-by-12 color photos were sprouting like seeds in neat rows, nine across.

Now there's a problem: Cora is running out of room.

The Red Sox are 79-34 after Sunday night's stunning rally to beat the Yankees, 5-4, in 10 innings. The Sox are on a pace to win 113 games, something only three teams in major league history have done.

The Sox haven't won 100 games since 1946, and the team record of 105 has stood since 1912. Their longest losing streak of the season, three games, was back in April.

This is not normal.

The defending World Series champion Houston Astros, at 71-42, went into Monday's game eight games behind the Red Sox for the best record in baseball and home-field advantage through the postseason.

The Yankees? Forget about them. They left Boston a whopping 9½ games behind the Sox in the American League East after being swept in the four-game series.

"There's no question that they've established themselves right now as the best team in this league," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said of the Sox.

In reality, the Red Sox are competing less against the 2018 Yankees and more the 1998 Yankees, who won 114 games and then the World Series. There's a standard of excellence being chased down.

A 22-9-1 record in spring training suggested that Cora, 42, had connected with players considered underachievers in previous seasons, even as they made the playoffs.

"Alex has been our emotional leader all season," righthander Rick Porcello said. "It goes back to then."

Still, those games didn't count. When the Sox won 17 of the first 19 games of the season, expectations were reset. Even for a team with the highest payroll in the game, there was a sense of something special happening.

The elusive intangible of team chemistry came easily, the players bonding quickly with their new manager and each other. A team that trudged through the 2017 season has glided through this one.

"It's fun to come to the ballpark, I'll say that," center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. said.

Cora and a new coaching staff have also struck the right balance of using data to drive their decision-making and presenting it to the players in a form they find useful.

Since 1900, the Sox are one of 18 teams to win at least 79 of their first 113 games. Fifteen of the previous 17 went to the World Series and nine won it.

So while history favors the Sox, it guarantees nothing.

The 2001 Seattle Mariners won 116 games, then lost the American League Championship Series in five games to the Yankees.

The 1954 Cleveland Indians are considered baseball's greatest cautionary tale. They won 111 of 154 regular-season games, then were swept in the World Series by Willie Mays and the New York Giants.

"The goal is the World Series. That's always the case here," said right fielder Mookie Betts, a Most Valuable Player candidate. "What we're doing right now is special, but we know it's not everything.

"I think we have a good attitude about it. Nobody really looks ahead."

J.D. Martinez, who leads the Red Sox with 33 home runs and 93 RBIs, shook his head when asked about the idea of being 45 games over .500 with 49 games remaining.

"I don't even care about that," he said. "I never get caught up in any of that stuff. That stuff is for you guys to write.

"We've got to keep it simple, look at our next objective, our next task."

Unreasonable as it may seem, winning 110 or more games is not fantasy baseball.

The Sox have won 23 of their last 28 games despite the loss of several important players to injury. Ace lefthander Chris Sale, who missed his last start with a sore shoulder, should return over the weekend. Third baseman Rafael Devers, second baseman Ian Kinsler, and lefthander Eduardo Rodriguez also are making their way back.

“I keep saying it: I’m proud of them,” Cora said. “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.”

The Red Sox start a nine-game road trip in Toronto Tuesday night. By the time they return to Fenway Aug. 17, Cora’s office wall should have a few more splashes of color marking what has been a remarkable journey.

Here’s how the newest Red Sox contributed to the sweep of the Yankees

Andrew Mahoney

This past weekend could not have gone much better for the Red Sox, and in particular president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. In the process of sweeping the Yankees, the Sox got key contributions from Dombrowski’s mid-season trade acquisitions.

Here’s a look at how they did against the Yankees:

Steve Pearce

Acquired at the end of June from the Toronto Blue Jays, Pearce smacked four home runs in the first two games of the series, with three coming in Thursday night’s 15-7 win.

He brought the Red Sox back into the game after they fell behind, smacking a solo shot that landed in the monster seats in the second inning to get the Red Sox on the board. He then followed it up in the fourth inning with a three-run shot to Lansdowne Street that gave the Red Sox the lead for good, 6-4.

His third shot bounced off the upper portion of a Fenway Park light tower.

“I’ll remember the whole night,” Pearce said after the game. “It was exciting from start to finish. To start off down and we did what we needed to do, we battled back and just to have a big win, to have everybody involved, what a great feeling. And to do what I did tonight at the plate?”

“I’m never going to forget it.”

Nathan Eovaldi

Making his second start since being traded to the Red Sox, Eovaldi once again did not allow a run, going eight shutout innings in Saturday’s 4-1 win to increase his consecutive scoreless streak since joining the Red Sox to 15 innings. He did not allow a hit until the fourth inning and only three for the game. Only one Yankee advanced as far as second base against him.

When the Red Sox initially acquired him, there was talk of moving Eovaldi to the bullpen for the postseason, and possibly sooner when Eduardo Rodriguez, Steven Wright, and Chris Sale returned from the disabled list.

Given how he’s pitched so far, it seems likely he’ll stay in the rotation. Nick Cafardo has more on Eovaldi’s performance.

Ian Kinsler

The recently acquired second baseman played in just three games before he was placed on the disabled list with a hamstring injury. He had three hits in six at bats and drove in two runs in Thursday's win, and also made a spectacular defensive play. In the top of the seventh, he ranged behind second base to track down Gleyber Torres's ground ball, and fired to Pearce at first base to record the out and get out of the inning.

The Red Sox hope Kinsler will miss only 10 days. But they will be cautious given how important speed and agility are to his game, writes Peter Abraham.

Red Sox effectively, if not officially, clinched the division with sweep

Chad Finn

Usually the moment when a team clinches a division title is a literal one, a victory over not just the opponent on the field but math. Take last year, when the Red Sox, behind a home run from Mookie Betts (sounds familiar) and six strong innings from Drew Pomeranz (does not sound familiar) defeated the Houston Astros, 6-3, on Sept. 30 to secure their second straight AL East crown.

No combination of Red Sox losses and wins by the second-place Yankees would allow for them to be surpassed. The division belonged to them. The bottles popped in appropriate acknowledgment of the feat.

Then there are the rare seasons, the special seasons, the ones that often end up documented on a DVD, when it's over before the math can confirm. The Red Sox have won nine AL East titles since divisional play began in 1969. Never before this season have they made it so clear that they will finish at the top of their class, that they are in the midst of one of those special seasons.

It's all over but the accounting. For all intents and purposes, the Red Sox clinched their third straight AL East title Sunday night.

Trailing, 4-1, in the ninth and facing hard-throwing Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman, the Red Sox rallied for three runs — tying it on a dual hustle play by Xander Bogaerts and Jackie Bradley Jr. — then won it in the 10th on Andrew Benintendi's seeing-eye single. The victory gave them a four-game sweep of the second-place and wild-card-leading Yankees and a 9½-game lead in the division. The Red Sox are 79-34 with 49 games to go, having already surpassed their victory totals from the 2015 (78), 2014 (71), and 2012 (69) seasons.

There was a joyous celebration befitting a walkoff victory, but of course there was no champagne. That will come when the math makes it official. But make no mistake: It's over now. This division, and perhaps so much more come October, belongs to the Red Sox.

I know, they've had big leads before and collapsed. My yelping radio tells me this every day, just as it did in 2013. But this isn't 1978 — Alex Cora is pretty much the polar opposite of sensitive, stubborn Don Zimmer as a manager — and it sure as heck isn't 2011, when the Red Sox took a half-game lead in the division and a nine-game advantage in the wild card into September, only to choke on a chicken bone and miss the playoffs altogether.

They could sign Adrian Gonzalez tomorrow, name him team captain and the Official Clubhouse Lawyer of the Boston Red Sox, and they'd still run away with this thing.

This team is loaded (the Steve Pearce and Nathan Eovaldi pickups couldn't have worked better so far), unified (their young core players perform with an elan under Cora that was lacking when rigid John Farrell was in charge), and has shown no signs of wavering (their longest losing streak is three games, which has happened once, in April).

The Red Sox have had a quiet confidence all season. It's not so quiet now, and perhaps their appealing we're-better-than-you brashness in this series leads to genuine contempt should the Red Sox and Yankees

meet in the postseason for the first time since 2004. Let's hope so. But that's on the Yankees to make it happen; right now, I'm thinking a Red Sox-Athletics first-round series is more likely.

They're not unbeatable, of course. It just seems that way. There have been a couple of times this season when you had to pause and think to remember when they last lost. It seems like they've been on a 110- to 112-win pace all season, which is especially remarkable given that a Red Sox team has not won 100 games in a season since 1946.

If all realistic dreams are fulfilled this season, Sunday night's comeback was one of those outcomes that will be looked back upon as a landmark moment, savored along with Betts's 13-pitch at-bat that culminated in a grand slam against the Jays a few weeks ago and Bogaerts's walkoff homer right before the All-Star break.

Maybe these moments are foreshadowing a championship; it certainly feels like they carry that kind of meaning, though only October can tell. The Astros and Indians are formidable too, though Houston's talent may not overcome its self-inflicted lousy karma.

For now, Sunday's win and the sweep stand as the promise of something bigger. But it's also the greatest confirmation yet of the pure satisfaction Red Sox fans — at least those who stopped renewing their memberships in the Fellowship of the Miserable years ago — get to feel in real time with this team.

If you stayed up to watch until the end, you have a smile on your sleepy face today. If you went to bed, you woke up, said, "Holy cow, they won?" then caught up on what you missed while lamenting that you checked out early.

The lesson, of course, is an obvious one. No matter the circumstances, there's no sleeping on these Sox.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox show little appreciation for fine art of the bunt

Jason Mastrodonato

Until the Red Sox completed a dramatic comeback against the Yankees Sunday night, there was a strategic element of the game that failed.

Bunting is a lost art. Those who can do it well in the American League are an endangered species.

But when the Yankees' No. 9 hitter, Shane Robinson, was trying to give the Red Sox an out by bunting in the seventh inning, Heath Hembree didn't want to take it.

The strategy was to go up-and-away, manager Alex Cora said afterward, to make it an uncomfortable at-bat for Robinson, who squared from the first pitch and made his attempt to sacrifice crystal clear.

"We knew he was going to bunt," Hembree said. "I go first-pitch slider to get ahead, then ride some fastballs up in the zone, try to get a pop-up.

"He worked the count 3-2, then I walked him."

Hembree walked the .200 hitter to load the bases with nobody out, to get to the top of the Yankees order while protecting a one-run lead. It backfired badly.

Was the risk worth the reward? The modern game indicates it was not, Hembree should've thrown strikes to Robinson and let him make an effort to give the Sox a free out.

“I saw him drop the bunt first pitch, he was going first-base side,” Hembree said. “I was hoping it would be something more toward me or third-base side, so we could get to it and get a throw off to third.

“I wasn’t going to let him try to get it down, being honest. I was trying to ride a fastball up in the zone and trying to get a pop-up. Ended up walking him.”

Big mistake, of course. It cost the Red Sox as the Yankees went on to score four runs in the inning. The Sox had to complete a wild comeback in the ninth to tie it, then walked off in the 10th.

“It’s weird, everybody in here, we knew the whole time we were going to come back, it felt like,” Hembree said. “That’s an unbelievable win.”

Had they lost the game, the bunt play would’ve been front and center.

Why not take the out?

The decline of the bunt has been steady, with the number of sacrifice bunts in the AL on the decline for the fourth straight year, and on pace to have its total chopped in half in a 10-year span.

People around the game offer different reasons why, but the common theme is in the numbers. Giving up an out for the chance to advance 90 feet is usually not a good trade. The total run expectancy in the inning drops after a bunt.

Take Sunday’s game, for example.

With runners on first and second and nobody out, the average runs scored in that situation is 1.47, according to data collected from 1957-2015 and sorted by Greg Stoll in an online database.

Had the bunt been successful and advanced the runners to second and third at the cost of one out, the Yankees’ total run expectancy would’ve actually dropped from 1.47 to 1.37.

But because the Sox were clinging to a one-run lead, the strategy made a bit more sense. Once the runners reach second and third, even with one out, the Sox’ chance of keeping the Yanks from scoring at least one run would’ve dropped from 37 percent to 33 percent.

The problem is that Hembree didn’t give his team a chance. Instead, he threw three straight fastballs up and in, one getting close to Robinson’s head, and later walked the worst hitter on the team.

The Sox chances of holding the Yanks from scoring fell from 37 percent to 14 percent. New York’s run expectancy that inning went from 1.47 to 2.26.

Hembree hasn’t made too many mistakes this year. It was the first time he let an inherited runner score since April 28. In total, only five of the 26 inherited runners have scored on him, an 81 percent success rate.

Of all 85 relievers with at least 20 inherited runners, Hembree’s success rate ranks 14th.

“I could say it’s a learning curve,” he said. “As far as just mentally approaching each inning, each situation, I feel like I’ve gotten better.”

Hembree has been a big part of the Sox’ relief crew, posting a 3.55 ERA and a career-best 12.2 strikeouts-per-nine-innings. The Sox chose not to add relievers at the trade deadline, instead showing faith in their current group.

“Really gives you confidence to know this staff has confidence in us to get the job done,” Hembree said.

Perhaps next time, he’ll take the free out.

Despite Red Sox' big lead, anything can happen

Steve Buckley

Such was the Red Sox' annihilation of the Yankees this past weekend that the remainder of the regular season has been reduced to little more than a stretching exercise for October.

Right?

The Sox have wrapped up the American League East, leaving the humbled, hurtin' Yankees and their fans to collect themselves and start planning for that scary one-and-done wild card game against the Oakland A's or Seattle Mariners.

Right?

Most Valuable Player: Mookie Betts.

Cy Young Award: Chris Sale.

Manager of the Year: Alex Cora.

Executive of the Year: Dave Dombrowski.

Fans of the Year: You!!!!

Um, right?

This is what's being said by a new generation of New England yahoos who've been blinded by championship lights that haven't dimmed since the early days of the 21st century. And you know what? They're probably right. More than being merely "great," these 2018 Red Sox are hurtling toward being stamped historically great. Never mind that no Red Sox team since 1946 has won 100 games in a season. These guys are on a pace to win 113 games.

Winning has become so easy for the Red Sox that sometimes it looks like they're playing Mass Envelope of the Boston Park League. They are going to mock the 100th anniversary of what used to be called Boston's "last World Series championship" by winning their fourth title in 14 years. It's going to be glorious.

Just one small problem: The yahoos who are hitchin' up their pants and talking this smack are not unlike yahoos the world over: they're idiots. And I bet you're now expecting a long, somber lecture about what happened 40 summers ago, how the powerful, chest-poundin' Red Sox of 1978 were a whopping 14 games ahead of the Yankees on July 19, only to lose the American League East title when Bucky Dent's home run off Mike Torrez powered the Bombers to a 5-4 victory in an epic one-game playoff showdown.

The Yankees went on to win the World Series. Sox fans never saw a pitch, curled up in the fetal position as they were.

But I'm not going to go there, even if I just did. The problem with dredging up the 1978 Red Sox as some kind of cautionary tale about the evils of staging premature celebrations is that they've become a sort of cliché by now. Mention the '78 Sox, and the Bucky Dent home run, and embattled manager Don Zimmer handing the ball to untested Bobby Sprowl, and on and on and on, and you're going to lose the room.

Young fans don't care because they don't know what you're talking about. And I don't think older fans care much either, this because they, too, experienced the World Series celebrations in '04, '07, and '13. As

for 1978, they've let it go. Like Bill Buckner in Game 6 of the '86 World Series, people don't take it personally anymore.

But what is important is understanding that late-season collapses happen more often than you think. Forget about 1978. How about 1974, when the Red Sox had a seven-game lead over the Orioles and Yankees on Aug. 23 and wound up finishing in third place in the AL East, seven games behind the division-winning O's? Think about that: In just 38 games the Sox fell 14 games in the standings. It seems almost impossible.

The 1951 Brooklyn Dodgers are another cliché. They were 13 games ahead of the New York Giants on Aug. 11 and wound up losing the National League pennant on Bobby Thomson's home run, which I happen to believe is the greatest moment in the game's history. Still, though, the whole saga gets told so many times as to be a hardball bedtime story. And bedtime stories put kids to sleep.

So let's go with something that's not a cliché: The '93 San Francisco Giants had a 7½-game lead over the second-place Atlanta Braves in the NL West on Aug. 22. They went 20-18 the rest of the way. The Braves, thanks to Fred McGriff tearing the cover off the ball, went 28-9. The Braves won the division; the Giants, despite 103 victories, went home.

If Alex Cora is as smart a skipper as y'all think he is, he's not high-fiving his players and congratulating them on winning the AL East.

He knows anything can happen, even if the yahoos do not.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Sox sweep of Yankees bodes well for October

Bill Reynolds

Another weekend, another reminder.

Another weekend, another reminder that the Red Sox are in the midst of a dream season.

Another weekend, another reminder that we could be watching something very special.

For we are in the middle of a great pennant race, one of those classics from days of yore, back when there was nothing better in sports than the Red Sox and the Yankees, these two franchises, wrapped in both history and memory, coming down the stretch in a frantic finish.

Welcome to 2018, when baseball needs a summer like this, especially around here, when nothing incites the passions any more than the Sox and the Yankees going at each other like a warring couple in a contentious divorce, as if the seasons go on, and the players come and the players go, and yet the rivalry never fades, as if it's always had a life of its own.

This weekend was just the latest example.

The Yankees arrived in Fenway Park on Thursday night 5½ games behind Boston and they needed to make a dramatic statement, one that said that not only is this season far from over, but this division is far from over, too.

They did just the opposite. They came in here and got swept. And worst of all? They sent a very public message that maybe the Bombers are not quite as good as a lot of people might have thought.

The good news for them? Maybe the only good news?

It's only the beginning of August, still 50 or so games to be played, way too soon to send the symbolic white flag up the flag pole.

But the Red Sox sent a public statement this weekend, too, both to the Yankees and to the rest of baseball, one that says that, yes, this is a very talented team, but it's also one playing with a laser focus.

Credit Red Sox president Dave Dombrowski for putting together a very talented roster, and adding some key pieces in Steve Pearce and Nathan Eovaldi.

Credit Alex Cora for managing as though he's a conductor who knows he's got a great orchestra and that the smartest thing he can do is to stay in the background and just let them play. Smart managing comes in many forms.

So do happy endings to a season.

This season still has nearly two more months to go if it's going to be a one to truly remember, one that lives up to the promise of this wonderful baseball summer. For the Red Sox are 9½ games up in the division, in total control of the American League East, with the best record in all of baseball. This historically good team is on pace to win 113 games — eclipsing the franchise record 105 wins by the 1912 Red Sox of Smokey Joe Wood and Tris Speaker.

And if the past weekend wasn't an unofficial surrender of the division by the Yankees, it sure seemed that way. Especially after Sunday night when the Red Sox refused to go quietly into the night. A rally to tie the game in the ninth inning, then a game-winning hit in the 10th secured a sweep and pushed New York farther into the distance.

But it's only the beginning of August and the afternoon shadows of October are still two months away. The point? There's still a lot of baseball to be played. And doesn't baseball history tell us that the teams that play well in August and September usually are the teams that win in October?

The Red Sox are in control of their fate. They are sending a message, too. Which is no insignificant thing. So much of sports is played between the ears. Call it confidence. Call it resilience. Call it anything you want. The great teams and the great players learn to make it work for them.

It's what the Patriots have, and what the old-time Celtics teams had, and it's what Tom Brady has when he gets the ball in the closing minutes and you just know he's going to take the ball down the field and score, as if the game is a movie where everybody goes home happy.

This Red Sox team is still writing the script.

Stay tuned.

*** *MassLive.com***

Rafael Devers injury: Boston Red Sox slugger heads to Toronto on Tuesday morning after homering in rehab game

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers (left hamstring strain) went 1-for-4 with a solo home run and RBI groundout in a rehab game for Short Season Lowell on Monday.

He helped Lowell win 11-3 over Vermont.

Devers homered in the sixth inning. He played six innings in the field as expected.

Devers is eligible to return from the 10-day disabled list Wednesday (tomorrow). He will fly to Toronto on Tuesday morning.

The Red Sox begin a three-game series in Toronto against the Blue Jays on Tuesday.

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

Boston Red Sox should be slow and cautious with Chris Sale's return

Matt Vautour

It was hard not to admire Chris Sale at least a little as he sat in the Boston Red Sox interview room last week.

As the rest of his team was getting set to face the Philadelphia Phillies, Sale was talking about going on the disabled list with inflammation in his left shoulder.

He was mad. He takes his role as a guy who takes the ball every fifth day. Missing any start bugs him. Missing a showdown with the Yankees was all the more offensive to his ethos.

"I pride myself on pitching every fifth day. It really bothers me not being able to do that," he said and later added. "I'm a pitcher that pitches. I don't like sitting on the sideline and watching someone else do my job."

The reason people never warmed to J.D. Drew is the reason they love Sale.

He wants to win today and he'll worry about tomorrow later. He's a great pitcher, a great competitor and a great teammate. He's expected to be activated from the disabled list in time to make his start in this weekend's series at Baltimore.

The Red Sox should keep him on the disabled list for at least one more start.

If there was enough there for Sale, who had been dominant enough to be the American League Pitcher of the Month in July, to admit his shoulder wasn't right, it's worth pausing for a second. Sale isn't likely to reveal something insignificant.

With a 9.5-game lead, there's room for extra caution. The Red Sox decimated the Yankees without him. Alex Cora said Sunday that they were already manipulating his time frame to prevent him from having to bat in Philadelphia next week. It's just smart business.

Plus there's a side benefit of giving Brian Johnson and Drew Pomeranz each one more audition start for their role in the September rotation and perhaps the postseason roster.

Sale's constant gas-pedal-down approach at least contributed to him looking fatigued down the stretch last year. He wasn't the same in September and the postseason. Even without shoulder inflammation, giving Sale a mini-vacation wouldn't have been the worst idea.

If the Red Sox are going to make a deep postseason run, they need Sale to pitch like the ace he is. Extending his break might help him get there. They need him against the Yankees or the Astros in October, not the Orioles in August.

Red Sox's Dan Butler gives baseball lessons in winter for grocery money, 'always felt' he could play in majors

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Red Sox catcher Dan Butler spent the past three and a half seasons grinding in the minor leagues and waiting for a second opportunity to play in the majors.

He makes a "decent salary" in the minors but "obviously not a ton of money," he said. He gives hitting lessons and catching lessons during the offseason. He also coaches an 18-and-under club team during the winter. He loves doing it, but it also helps pay the bills.

"It's just enough to buy groceries so I don't have to actually dip into my account at all," Butler told MassLive.com. "It's not enough to live off of. It's just enough to get me through the offseason."

He has to work during the offseason.

"Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah. Otherwise I'll be paying my credit card off (from) the whole offseason during the whole season," Butler said. "So I've got to save as much money during the season so I can live off of that during the offseason (too)."

Butler -- who appeared in seven games for Boston in 2014 and took 19 at-bats (hit three doubles) -- finally is back in the majors. The Red Sox promoted him Friday after placing Blake Swihart (hamstring) on the 10-day disabled list.

People have suggested he retire and become a coach. But he kept playing and hoping for this second chance with Boston.

His current stint might be brief. Swihart's DL stint is expected to last only the required 10 days. But Butler certainly could be a September call-up now that he's on the 40-man roster.

"Everybody keeps talking about me coaching," Butler said. "I still enjoy playing. I've still got that competitive feeling of winning. And I enjoy playing still. Obviously I've been trying to get back here. So I got that taste in 2014. So I always felt like I want to just get back there. So that's what's really kept me going: trying to get here and getting my other opportunity in the big leagues."

He always felt he would be back in the majors someday.

"I've always had confidence," Butler said. "Obviously the longer you get away from it, the further it seems. But that's what kind of drives me at the same time. I've always felt like I could play at the big leagues, and I would be successful in the big leagues."

Butler signed with the Red Sox as an undrafted free agent out of the University of Arizona. So he never received a lucrative signing bonus.

He lives in Gilbert, Ariz., during the offseason. The 18-and-under team he coaches plays out of Queen Creek.

He said the paychecks he receives from coaching and hitting/catching lessons are "very minimal," but they're enough.

"It's one of my buddy's teams," Butler said. "He's got one of those programs that goes from (age) 12 all the way to 18. And he's also a high school baseball coach. So I just hang out with the high school baseball kids and go to their practices every Saturday morning. We've got lessons during the week and we've got games on the weekends."

He certainly enjoys himself.

"It gets me out of the house and keeps me learning, too, because those kids teach you stuff," Butler said. "It makes you relate to that stuff again. Simple adjustments that you might forget that you used to have to

make. It just refreshes your memory a little, especially mine. And it's fun. The kids are hilarious, man. I love hanging out with them. I'd hang out with them (outside) but they're 17, 18 years old. A couple of them are really funny. We have a great time in the dugout."

Butler got married in November to Felice (Lowery) Butler. Felice played softball at Roanoke College in Salem, Va. She was a catcher, too.

They met when Butler played for High-A Salem.

"Long distance dating for a long time," Butler said.

They married in Roanoke.

Butler, who turns 32 on Friday, is known for his strong defense and helping the development of the young pitchers at Pawtucket.

"I think that's the job of every catcher is to kinda mentor the pitchers or talk with them," Butler said. "It's just them asking me questions about their stuff and then I give them my opinion. And they take it for what it's worth to them. And I don't think I'm trying to teach them. I'm just another voice."

Butler is interested in being a member of a coaching staff for an affiliated minor league team when he retires.

He admires how long catching instructor Chad Epperson and pitching coach Dana LeVangie have worked for the Red Sox organization.

LeVangie, for instance, has remained with the the Red Sox since they drafted him in 1991. After retiring from playing, he worked his way from bullpen catcher to pitching coach.

"I think that's a really cool thing," he said. "It's something that's intrigued me."

Maybe Butler will follow in a similar path as LeVangie and Epperson and coach in the Red Sox system someday. He has spent his entire professional career except for the 2015 season with this organization.

"One year. I got traded over there (to Baltimore). I didn't have a choice," Butler said, laughing.

But he returned. He has re-signed with Boston as a minor league free agent each of the past three winters.

"It's a really cool connection I've made with the staff and the players," Butler said. "It's like a home away from home."

Boston Red Sox prospect Bobby Dalbec belts 451-foot HR; 2018 draft pick Jarren Duran has .414 OBP, 10 triples

Christopher Smith

Bobby Dalbec bashed two homers in his third game with Double-A Portland on Sunday. The Red Sox promoted the 23-year-old power-hitting third baseman Friday.

The right-handed hitter, who Boston selected in the fourth round of the 2016 draft out of Arizona, went 2-for-3 with two homers, including a 451-footer to center field. He also walked twice and drove in three runs. He led Portland 7-3 over Richmond.

He's 4-for-9 (.444) with two homers, four RBIs, two walks and four strikeouts since his promotion to Portland.

He crushed 26 homers, 27 doubles, two triples, drove in 85 runs and slashed .256/.372/.573/.945 in 100 games for High-A Salem.

Ockimey homers again

Josh Ockimey, who the Red Sox promoted to Triple-A Pawtucket on Thursday -- delivered his second homer in three games Sunday.

The left-handed hitting first baseman went 1-for-4 with a three-run homer in the first inning but the PawSox lost 6-3 to Rochester. He's 3-for-11 (.273) with two homers, four RBIs, one walk and four strikeouts since his promotion from Portland.

The 22-year-old, who Boston selected in the fifth round in 2014 out of Neumann & Goretti Catholic (Penn.), slashed .254/.370/.473/.842 with 15 homers, 19 doubles, two triples and 56 RBIs in 90 games at Portland.

Lakins hurls another scoreless inning

Travis Lakins, who turned 24 on June 29, tossed another scoreless inning of relief for Triple-A Pawtucket on Sunday. He has pitched 2.1 scoreless since his promotion from Portland.

The righty, who the Red Sox selected in the sixth round in 2016 out of Ohio State, has allowed just two earned runs, eight hits and eight walks while striking out 24 in 23.1 innings since the Red Sox converted him to a reliever in late May.

Duran goes 5-for-5

Jarren Duran, who the Red Sox selected in the seventh round in June out of Long Beach State, went 5-for-5 in Low-A Greenville's 9-2 win over Rome on Sunday.

Duran, a 21-year-old left-handed batter, is 10-for-17 (.588) with two doubles and three RBIs in four games since his promotion.

He posted a .348/.393/.548/.941 line with 10 triples, five doubles, two homers and 20 RBIs in 37 games for Short Season Lowell to begin his career.

Overall, he's slashing .372/.414/.564/.978 in 41 games.

Reyes hurls 5.2 scoreless innings in High-A debut

Denyi Reyes earned the win by hurling 5.2 scoreless innings in his High-A Salem debut. He allowed five hits and one walk while striking out four. Salem won 7-5 over Carolina.

The 21-year-old righty from the Dominican Republic has pinpoint control. He has walked only 14 and struck out 126 in 129.1 innings this season. He has a 1.81 ERA and 0.86 WHIP in 22 outings (19 starts). The opposition is batting .203 against him.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

9 things you may have missed as Red Sox swept the Yankees

Chris Mason

1. Sox heard what Cashman said

Before this weekend's four-game series kicked off, Yankees general manager Brian Cashman made a comment that may have been damaging.

"You wonder what their record would be if they weren't playing us," Cashman said 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."

The Yankees were 5-4 against the Red Sox when Cashman said that. They're now 5-8.

"Yeah, we saw it," Mookie Betts said.

Betts was asked if the sweep was any sweeter given the comments preceding it.

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

Like Betts, Alex Cora took the high road, but was certainly aware of what was said.

"I respect Cash," the manager said. "He said that, but he's said a lot of good 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."

It's impossible not to like the way the Red Sox played over the weekend.

2. Bogaerts is back quickly

When Xander Bogaerts was hit again in the hand last week, he thought it was *deja vu*.

You know the story by now: Bogaerts took a pitch off the hand in '17, came back too soon, and was never the same.

Like last season, Bogaerts only missed one game before getting back on the field, but he's optimistic that this time will be different.

"It feels good enough to play," Bogaerts said. "Felt all right."

There was cause for optimism in the series finale, as Bogaerts ripped a 108-MPH single. When the hand was really bothering him last season, the shortstop couldn't hit the ball that hard.

3. Sandy gets it started

With All-World flamethrower Aroldis Chapman trying to close Sunday night's game out, the Sox roared back from a 4-1 deficit to send the game to extra innings.

Was there any particular at-bat that Cora felt was the key to the rally?

"Sandy," Cora replied.

The No. 9 hitter's on-base percentage is just .273, but Leon stayed patient and worked a walk against Chapman. He was the first baserunner of the ninth, and the catcher come around to score. In the 10th, he singled and a pinch-runner would wind up scoring the sweep-clinching run.

4. A mental victory against Chapman

The last time the Red Sox were in the Bronx, Chapman needed work, so he was given the ninth even though the Yanks had an 11-run lead.

The Red Sox tagged him for a run, and despite losing by 10, built some confidence that day at Yankee Stadium.

"We were down 11-0, or whatever it was, and Sandy put (up) a good at-bat," Cora said. "I know it was an 11-0 game, but we saw the at-bats. He's still one of the best closers in the game but we feel that we can put good at-bats and that happened."

5. Bradley makes a veteran play on the bases

It'll never show up in the box score, but Jackie Bradley Jr. made a subtle baserunning play that could have been the difference in the ninth inning Sunday night.

The center fielder represented the tying run, and when Bogaerts hit a chopper to green third baseman Miguel Andújar, Bradley was heading from second to third.

Bradley made sure to jog right into Andujar's line of sight, perhaps throwing the 23-year-old off just enough, and he uncorked a one-hopper that Greg Bird couldn't handle at first. When the ball hit the dirt, Bradley turned the afterburners on to score.

It was a subtle, subtle play, but one that may have made a huge difference.

6. Porcello gets Hall-of-Fame hat tip

Rick Porcello was masterful on Friday night, becoming the first Red Sox player to one-hit the Yankees since Pedro Martinez did it in 1999.

Porcello retired the final 21 men he faced, needed only 86 pitches, and didn't walk a batter. Martinez certainly approved of his new company.

"Congratulations to my boy @RickPorcello" Martinez tweeted. "You made all of us proud on that mound last night! Keep it up!"

7. Nate's cutter has been great

Nathan Eovaldi followed Porcello's gem with eight shutout innings of his own on Saturday afternoon.

The July acquisition hit 100 MPH on the radar gun, but that fastball wasn't the key to his success.

"I would say it's the cutter," Eovaldi said. "How effective it's been, keeping the batter off my fastball. Mixing my pitches as well."

Since coming back from Tommy John, the cutter is the pitch Eovaldi has relied upon — he threw 42 on Saturday — and the proof is in the pudding. Including his time in Tampa, the only Red Sox player with a better WHIP than Eovaldi (0.889) is Chris Sale (0.872).

8. Run, Tony, Run

It was quite a Red Sox debut for Tony Renda.

In the 10th inning on Sunday, Cora rolled the dice and put Renda into the game as a pinch-runner for Leon with two outs. If the Sox didn't score, journeyman Dan Butler would have been behind the plate for the 11th.

Fortunately for the Cora, the call-up showed off his wheels on Andrew Benintendi's 10-hopper up the middle. Renda scored the game-winning run, sliding head-first across home plate.

Welcome to Boston, kid.

9. Good news for the hamstring gang

Rafael Devers, Blake Swihart and Ian Kinsler are all on the disabled list with hamstring pulls, but they shouldn't be out long.

Cora doesn't expect any of them to need more than the 10-day minimum, and Devers could return tomorrow night.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Red Sox spent a weekend dispelling a lot of myths

Tom Caron

The Boston Red Sox enjoyed a well-deserved day off Monday after stunning the New York Yankees with a four-game sweep at Fenway Park over the weekend.

The Red Sox outscored New York 28-13 over four remarkable games, and beat the Yankees in every imaginable way. They rallied from an early 4-0 deficit Thursday, won 4-1 games Saturday and Sunday – each game taking 2:33 or less to play – then scored three runs with two outs in the bottom of the ninth to tie the game Sunday night before walking off with a 10-inning victory.

The teams played 37 innings and the Yankees led at the end of five of them.

The Red Sox are 79-34, 45 games above .500 for the first time since 1946. When the series ended, their 9 1/2-game lead in the East was the largest in baseball.

The Sox were Yankee Killers this weekend. They were also Myth Busters. Here are a few “hot takes” that were exposed in the light of a Fenway house party:

1. The Red Sox can't beat good teams.

Entering the weekend, the Sox were 12-13 against AL teams that began this week with a winning record. After four straight wins there is no doubt they can play with the best. This team will still be judged on what it does in October – only then can they sweep away the lingering stench of two straight first-round losses – but this weekend's sweep reminded us that this team has a killer instinct that the 2016 and 2017 teams may have lacked.

2. The Yankees have the best bullpen in baseball.

On Thursday, Yankee relievers were asked to protect a 4-0 lead at Fenway. The Sox scored the next 14 runs and took a wild 15-7 win.

Admittedly, the bulk of the damage came against Jonathan Holder and Luis Cessa. These are not the relievers you'll see in a tight postseason game.

Aroldis Chapman is. New York's closer hadn't blown a game since May 3, but he walked three in the ninth inning Sunday while laboring through 39 pitches and giving up New York's three-run lead. Chapman can be wild and if these teams meet again in the playoffs, everyone will remember how vulnerable he can be.

3. The Yankees are the second-best team in baseball.

They aren't right now. They began the week two games behind Houston and are just 2 1/2 games ahead of Oakland in the battle to host the AL wild-card game. What's more, Seattle is just five games back. Can you imagine this Yankees team not making the playoffs?

4. The Red Sox didn't do enough at the non-waiver trade deadline.

Admittedly, Steve Pearce was acquired a month before the deadline, but he was the MVP of the series for Boston. He tied the franchise record with three home runs in Thursday's comeback and followed with a two-run shot off Luis Severino in the first inning of Friday's game. Ian Kinsler made two spectacular defensive plays Thursday and scored an important run Friday before landing on the disabled list with a hamstring injury. Nathan Eovaldi – the former Yankee – pitched eight dominant innings Saturday and has yet to give up a run in two starts (both wins) with the Red Sox.

5. Interest in baseball has dried up.

They partied like it's 2004 at Fenway over the weekend. Thursday night's game broadcast on NESN drew the biggest rating for a Sox game in six years. Sunday's attendance was a season-high 37,830 – the 28th consecutive sellout at Fenway Park. Reports of baseball's death have been greatly exaggerated.

6. The Red Sox wrapped up the division over the weekend.

It's a commanding lead and there's no sign they will give it up. Just don't forget the lessons of 1978. The Yankees swept a four-game series at Fenway in September, outscoring Boston 42-9 in the Boston Massacre. The Sox blew a 10-game July lead and when the Yankees won the next two games of a series Sept. 15-16, the race was proclaimed over.

Then Boston won 12 of 14 to force a one-game playoff.

We offer this as a reminder that these final 49 games matter. Even if only six of them are against the Yankees.

*** *WEEI.com***

Former Red Sox Marrero DFA'd by Diamondbacks

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox starting third baseman in Game 2 of last season's American League Division Series might be looking for another new home.

Deven Marrero, who the Red Sox traded to Arizona at the end of spring training, has been designated for assignment by the Diamondbacks.

The 27-year-old infielder hasn't played since June 27 due to an oblique injury but did little offensively prior to his disabled list stint. In 85 plate appearances this season Marrero hit .167 with a .429 OPS. For his major league career, the smooth-fielding righty hitter has a .197 batting average and .533 OPS.

The highlight of Marrero's Red Sox career -- which began with him being selected in the first-round of the 2012 draft -- was getting the chance to start in the ALDS against Houston, with then-manager John Farrell pointing to his success against lefties that season (.291 batting average, .944 OPS) when going up against Astros lefty Dallas Keuchel.

Is Eovaldi setting himself up for a big payday?

Rob Bradford

Remember Rich Hill?

It took the lefty four starts at the end of the 2015 season (just four) to resurrect his career at the age of 35 years old and send him on a path that ultimately earned Hill four years of contracts worth \$54 million. That's how powerful a good run of games can be for any starting pitcher.

It's what Nathan Eovaldi might be on the verge of finding out.

The newest Red Sox starter will be eligible for free agency at the end of this season, potentially heading into a market flush with starting pitching options. But here's the thing: There aren't going to be many candidates among those free agent hurlers who are better positioned than Eovaldi.

"It's not about how you start a season, it's how you finish," Eovaldi said on the Bradfo Sho podcast. "If you can finish on a strong note, I feel like that means a lot." (To listen to the entire podcast, [click here](#).)

He is just 28 years old and currently carries a 3.38 ERA over his 12 starts this season. Sure, Eovaldi has undergone two Tommy John surgeries (the first coming in high school), but because of his sporadic usage - as was the case with Hill - the righty doesn't carry a whole lot of wear and tear. (It should also be noted Eovaldi and Hill share the same agents, Sam and Seth Levinson of ACES.)

Eovaldi is set to join Arizona's Patrick Corbin as the only starter in this year's free agent market who will enter 2019 under 30 years old. (That's assuming San Francisco picks up Madison Bumgarner's option.)

If the Red Sox starter is able to bottle the image he has offered Alex Cora's club so far -- a high 90's fastball with his newly-discovered wipeout cutter -- the here and the now will once again win out for Eovaldi over what had been a roller coaster career.

"I don't like to think about the future," he added. "Baseball is hard enough trying to focus on one start at a time. I try and take it day by day. When the season is over I'll have time to reflect on that. As long as I can put in the work now everything should be good when that times come."

Rafael Devers looks ready to return to Red Sox after homering in rehab game

Connor Donahue

LOWELL -- Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers completed what is expected to be a one-game rehab assignment by suiting up for the Lowell Spinners Monday night.

Devers batted third and played third base for the Spinners in an 11-3 victory. He went 1-for-4 with a home run and two RBI's before he was pulled in the seventh inning. He made an error in the one fielding opportunity he got at third.

"I feel great. It feels great to be here. I felt like I gave my 100 percent out there," Devers said through translator Denisse Torres. "[That last at-bat] I was looking for more pitches, taking my time. I felt great about my last at-bat, I got comfortable."

Devers was placed on the 10-day DL with a hamstring injury on July 29. It's been an up-and-down season for Devers, as the 21-year-old is batting .245 with 15 home runs for the Sox this season.

This is Devers' second DL stint this season, he had just returned from another 10-day stint for shoulder inflammation. The third baseman acknowledged that injuries come with the territory of playing baseball almost every day.

"It's part of the game, it's something that happens," Devers said. "I try my best to prevent it but it's part of the game. I'm just excited to be back."

The 21-year-old was with the Red Sox the night before his rehab assignment, watching his club rally back against the Yankees late into the night, completing a four-game sweep.

“It’s kind of tough [to miss those games] because it’s against the Yankees and it’s exciting to play against them,” Devers said. “But I had to heal, take my time, and I’m looking forward to coming back.”

Red Sox executive Tony La Russa was in attendance to watch Devers and said the Sox are keeping an eye on the third baseman, but feel he is about ready to go.

“We’re mostly watching the way [Devers] is moving, he’s being careful coming into first base,” La Russa explained. “But he’s getting his work in, so as long as he’s healthy everything else will fall into place.”

Devers will be eligible to come off the DL on Wednesday ahead of a nine-game road trip with stops in Toronto, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

“He’ll probably play be able to play this weekend, I understand,” La Russa said. “[The coaches and trainers] have been watching him. Our guys have said he’s been ready for a while. I think he’s ready, but it’s nice to see him in action.”

Sunday night matchup between Red Sox, Yankees draws highest numbers in years

Connor Donahue

There’s no question the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry has heated up this year.

From the offseason’s big-name acquisitions, to the Joe Kelly/Tyler Austin brawl, to the AL East division race – the Sox and Yanks have made the best rivalry in baseball fun again.

It all seemed to culminate Sunday night as the Red Sox were going for a four-game sweep and a 9.5-game lead in the division. The game ended with a three-run come-from-behind rally in the bottom of the ninth and a walk-off single in the tenth.

According to ESPN’s communications director Ben Cafardo, last night’s Sunday Night Baseball game smashed records. The contest drew a 2.2 metered market rating, making it the highest-rated Sunday Night Baseball telecast in four years.

The game garnered a 10.8 rating in the Boston market, the best rating for a Major League Baseball game on ESPN in seven years.

Mookie Betts, Red Sox knew of Brian Cashman’s comments before weekend series

Connor Donahue

Heading into a four-game series in Boston, Yankees GM Brian Cashman seemed confident in his team’s chances against the team with the best record in baseball.

“You wonder what their record would be if they weren’t playing us,” Cashman said. “Because when we go head to head, we do some damage against them and it doesn’t seem like anybody else is capable.”

“Doing damage” soon became a rallying cry across Red Sox Twitter during the weekend’s four-game sweep that saw the Red Sox build a 9.5-game lead in the AL East.

Sox outfielder Mookie Betts acknowledged that the team had seen the comments and responded with a yes when asked if the comments made the sweep even better.

"Sure, I guess," Betts told reporters after Sunday's win. "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."

Before the series started, the Yankees owned a 5-4 lead in the season series and had outscored the Sox 53-49. Now, the Sox own an 8-5 lead and have outscored the Yanks 77-66.

Betts and the Red Sox exude a certain confidence that even when it's 4-1 with two outs in the bottom of the ninth against flamethrower Aroldis Chapman, there's always a feeling the game isn't over.

"At no point did we think we were going to 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."

*** *BostonSportsJournal.com***

Ghosts of '78 don't apply to this year's Red Sox

Sean McAdam

In a memorable scene from the movie "Marathon Man", Laurence Olivier famously asks Dustin Hoffman: "Is it safe?"

Now that the Red Sox' four-game series with the rival Yankees has concluded, that's what many Red Sox fans are asking about the team's position atop the American League East.

By virtue of Sunday's stirring comeback, which completed a four-game sweep, the Sox lead grew to 9.5 games, eight in the loss column. The Red Sox have 49 games remaining; the Yankees, by virtue of some rainouts earlier in the season, have 52 remaining.

Six head-to-head games remain between the teams in the final two weeks of the season — a three-game set at Yankee Stadium Sept. 18-20 and a three-game series at Fenway to finish the season — so there's time, in theory, for the Yankees to make up some ground and ensure that those final two series are meaningful.

But after the four-game sweep this past weekend, the math gets fuzzier for the Yankees.

If the Red Sox merely play a game over .500 for the remainder of the schedule — and, outside of a 26-game stretch from April 21 to May 18, the Red Sox have played well above the break-even mark for the vast majority of the season — they'll go 25-24 and finish with a record of 104-58.

Such a record would require the Yankees to go 37-15 in their final 52 games, a winning percentage of .712 that would far surpass the rate at which the Yankees have won so far in compiling MLB's third-best record. They would have to accomplish that without the services of top slugger Aaron Judge (likely sidelined until September) and catcher Gary Sanchez (return timetable unknown) and with a rotation that is currently underperforming.

Meanwhile, if the Red Sox merely go 29-20 the rest of the way — for a winning percentage of .592, or about 100 points lower than their current winning percentage of .699 — the Yankees would have to play at a rate of .788 (41-11) for the remainder of the season to overtake them.

To be sure, the Red Sox have some challenges in the final eight weeks. Even before the six games left with the Yankees in final two weeks, the Red Sox still must host Houston for three games and play two series (seven games) with Cleveland, two more with Philadelphia and three in Atlanta, meaning 15 games remain against teams either currently in first or no more than a game and half out of first.

But the Sox can also fatten up with seven more games against the lowly Baltimore Orioles, six against the Toronto Blue Jays, four with the Chicago White Sox, three with the New York Mets and two with the Miami Marlins.

Even the Tampa Bay Rays, who have been more competitive than anticipated and own a .500 record, have been little challenge for the Red Sox this season, with the Sox having won nine of the first 13 meetings. Six games remain between the clubs.

Much of the anxiety for Red Sox fans has its roots in the 1978 pennant race, which the Sox led by 14 games in July and nine games as late as August 13, only to fall apart in the final month, resulting in a one-game playoff game, won by the Yankees.

For some, the very memory of that collapse results in cold sweats and nightmares, and not even the Red Sox triumph in 2004 — to say nothing of two World Series wins since — can erase that paranoia.

But, really, a 40-year-old fold has little relevance today. The Red Sox have survived their own injuries. Two of their three best starters currently reside on the disabled list, along with half of the starting infield, and they haven't been slowed.

To the contrary, thanks to consistently excellent starting pitching, the Red Sox are getting stronger — not weaker — in the second half. They've gone 11-4 since the All-Star break.

There's a long way to go before the Red Sox can begin wondering about their magic number to clinch a playoff spot or the division title.

But to the question asked at the beginning — Is it safe? — the math, if not the history, suggests: Yes.

*** *The Athletic***

By the numbers: Just how hot are the Red Sox?

Jen McCaffrey

It took a late rally and a walk-off single in extra innings in a game that lasted nearly five hours, but the Red Sox pulled off a defining four-game sweep of the Yankees in the wee hours of Monday morning.

In the process, they turned a 5-1/2 game lead in the AL East into a 9-1/2 game edge.

Boston posted the quartet of victories despite a slew of injuries to key players, including ace Chris Sale. In the end, none of that mattered.

The Red Sox outplayed Yankees in nearly ever facet for four days and now, with the oddity of two teams in the same division on pace for 100 wins, have put themselves in a good position to secure the top spot in the AL East avoid the play-in wild-card game.

Here's a deeper look at some of the key numbers from the weekend and where the Red Sox stand with just less than two months left in the regular season:

4 — Walk-off, extra-inning wins for the Red Sox in their past 13 home games. It's happened once in each of their past four series at Fenway. Xander Bogaerts hit a walk-off grand slam in the 10th against Toronto on July 14. Mookie Betts hit a walk-off home run in the 10th on July 27 against Minnesota. Blake Swihart hit a walk-off double in the 13th on July 30 against Philadelphia. Then Andrew Benintendi hit the walk-off single against the Yankees in the 10th on Sunday night.

45 — Games the Sox are over .500, a season high and the most for the franchise since 1946, the last time the Sox won 100 games.

79 — Victories for the Sox this season, the most ever for the franchise through 113 games. Since 1961, the Red Sox are the fifth team with as many as 79 wins in their first 113 games, joining the 1969 Orioles, 1998 Yankees, 2001 Mariners, and 2017 Dodgers.

1.74 — ERA of the Sox starting rotation since the All-Star break, which leads the majors. In the four games against New York, three of the four starters allowed two or fewer runs.

1.300 — Mookie Betts' OPS for the four-game series against the Yankees. Betts went 7-for-16 (.438) with two doubles, a homer and five runs scored.

1,188 — The combined distance of Steve Pearce's three home runs Thursday night. Pearce led off the third inning with a solo homer, hit a go-ahead, three-run shot in the fourth, and a two-run homer in the sixth. He was only the third Red Sox player to hit three homers in a game against the Yankees joining Kevin Millar (July 23, 2004) and Mo Vaughn (May 30, 1997). He added another Friday night.

0 — Runs allowed by Nathan Eovaldi in two starts since joining the Red Sox. The last starter to begin a Red Sox career with a scoreless streak that long was Billy Rohr in 1967 (16 innings).

19 — Years since a Red Sox pitcher threw a complete game, one-hitter against the Yankees (Pedro Martinez, Sept. 10, 1999). Rick Porcello matched that with his gem in Boston's 4-1 win on Friday.

672 — Days since Tony Renda appeared in a major-league game before he scored the winning run for the Red Sox on Sunday night. Renda, an infielder called up when Ian Kinsler was disabled, entered the game in the 10th inning to run for Sandy Leon and scored on Benintendi's walk-off single. He signed a minor-league deal with the Red Sox in April. He'd previously been a part of the Yankees system but was traded in 2015 to Cincinnati by New York as part of their deal for Aroldis Chapman.