

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, October 10, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Escape from New York: Red Sox hold off Yankees to advance to ALCS

Peter Abraham

NEW YORK — Red Sox first baseman Steve Pearce was sure he had his foot on the bag and the ball in glove. But the Yankees weren't going to just go away.

They challenged the final call of the game, making the Sox and countless fans at home on the edge of their couches wait 63 long seconds to learn whether they had won the Division Series and advanced to baseball's final four.

A video review confirmed the call and the champagne bottles popped. A 4-3 victory was in the books.

"That was weird," Pearce said. "But it was worth it."

On a night every reliever but closer Craig Kimbrel was perfect, the Sox held on to defeat their rivals in four games and advance to the American League Championship Series.

Game 1 is scheduled for Saturday at 8:09 p.m. at Fenway Park against the defending World Series champion Houston Astros.

Rick Porcello and four relievers held the Yankees to five hits. The set-up man for Kimbrel was Chris Sale, who came in for the eighth inning and retired the side in order.

"This is why I've been playing baseball all these years, for this," said Sale, who had never been on a team that won a playoff series. "It's even better than I thought it would be."

For the Red Sox, who won 108 games in the regular season, it was their first postseason series victory since the 2013 World Series. That they sent the rival Yankees home for the winter was an added bonus.

Tuesday was the second champagne celebration in 20 days in the visitors' clubhouse at Yankee Stadium for the Sox, who clinched the American League East in the Bronx on Sept. 20.

"We just wanted to win, it didn't matter against who," Andrew Benintendi said. "But the way the season went, we knew we'd have to beat these guys."

Sox pitchers had retired 11 in a row and handed Kimbrel a 4-1 lead in the ninth. He walked Aaron Judge before Didi Gregorius singled to right field.

Giancarlo Stanton struck out on four pitches, waving helplessly at a curveball. Kimbrel then walked Luke Voit on four pitches to load the bases.

Kimbrel hit Neil Walker with a pitch to force in a run. Gary Sanchez's fly ball to deep left field scored Gregorius. When Gleyber Torres grounded to third, Eduardo Nunez raced in and made a terrific throw to first.

Torres was called out on a close play as Pearce made a stretch to secure the ball.

"Great play all the way around," Sale said. "We knew he was out."

Kimbrel needed 28 pitches for the shakiest of saves.

“He wasn’t the usual Craig Kimbrel, but he got three outs, and he closed out the game,” manager Alex Cora said.

Cora, as he did in Game 3, made all the right moves. He changed the lineup again to use Nunez, Ian Kinsler, and Christian Vazquez. They accounted for three runs.

Cora played chess in the series while Yankees counterpart Aaron Boone was playing Chutes and Ladders. Cora’s style paid off.

“The last couple of years, I didn’t think we were very aggressive,” principal owner John Henry said. “We were tonight. Alex did a great job.”

In what could have been his final game for the Yankees, 38-year-old CC Sabathia allowed three runs over three innings before being lifted. All three came in the third inning.

Sabathia hit Benintendi with a pitch before Pearce singled to right field. Benintendi went to third on the single, then scored on a sacrifice fly by J.D. Martinez.

With two outs, Kinsler doubled to left field and scored on a single down the line in left by Nunez.

Kinsler and Nunez, both righthanded hitters, were in the lineup against Sabathia a day after Brock Holt and Rafael Devers started and played leading roles in a 16-1 rout of the Yankees.

“Alex has a great feel for the game and for this team,” Holt said. “It was great to see those guys do what they did.”

The lead grew to 4-0 when Vazquez sneaked a home run over the fence in right field against Zach Britton in the fourth inning. It was his first career postseason home run and Vazquez pumped his fist as he rounded first base.

Porcello came into the game with a 5.85 earned run average in four previous postseason starts. But in this game, throwing to Vazquez for the first time this season, he allowed one run over five innings and left with a 4-1 lead.

“I wasn’t surprised. Alex had the bullpen set up,” Porcello said.

Porcello needed only 40 pitches to get through the first four innings, retiring 12 of the 14 hitters he faced with unerring efficiency.

Sanchez doubled to the gap in left field with one out in the fifth. Torres followed with a slow groundball down the third base line that stayed fair all the way to the bag for a single.

Brett Gardner’s sacrifice fly scored Sanchez. Porcello then won a nine-pitch battle with Aaron Hicks, getting him on a popup to shallow right field that left Judge on deck.

Despite Porcello having thrown only 65 pitches, Cora went to Matt Barnes to start the sixth inning.

It was less about inning and more about leverage as the Yankees had their big hitters coming up. Barnes dispatched Judge, Gregorius and Stanton on 14 pitches.

Ryan Brasier was next out of the bullpen and he retired the side in order in the seventh inning.

“We have a great team. We’re very versatile. We count on everybody, and it was a great team victory,” Cora said. “The last two games, if you think about it, it was fun to watch.”

In New York, it’s never easy, and this one was no exception

Chad Finn

Nine thoughts on the Red Sox’ Division Series-clinching 4-3 victory over the Yankees . . .

1. I’ll remember this next time, whenever there is a next time. Winning a meaningful game against the Yankees is rarely easy, even when for so many innings it seems to be trending that way. Be assured, there will be plot twists and tensions your baseball mind cannot even imagine. Game 7 of the 2004 ALCS was a Red Sox rout, you say? Sure was. Cathartic too. And you were terrified when Pedro Martinez came into the game, the Yankees fans’ murmur turned to a taunt, it seemed like the cruelest trick yet might happen, and you know it. That’s the trick and the set up — it’s never easy, even when the end results suggests it kind of was — and the Red Sox’ clinching 4-3 victory in Game 4 of the American League Championship Series is just the latest example.

2. The Red Sox got five excellent innings from Rick Porcello, which was not much of a surprise. They got shutout innings from Matt Barnes, Ryan Brazier, and ace-turned-temporary-setup-man Chris Sale, which was a surprise. And closer Craig Kimbrel — one of the most statistically dominant closers in baseball history — came in for the ninth, his usual domain of dominance, and don’t you know it, he almost gave it away. He allowed two runs, the second coming on a deep fly ball by Gary Sanchez that appeared on contact to be a walk-off grand slam and a stroke of absolute devastation for the Red Sox. The final out, a beautiful bang-bang play at first base on a Gleyber Torres slow roller, had to be confirmed by replay, because of course it did.

3. Some might say the only true surprise is that the Red Sox survived and advanced to the American League Championship Series for the first time since 2013. But it was stressful, and it was further confirmation that the Red Sox, who have won 6 of their last 7 playoff games against the Yankees, are no longer jinxed, doomed, or an inferior operation. They won, somehow, and now and again it’s left to the Yankees to deal with a winter of what-ifs. You can exhale now. It all changed in ’04. It has not changed back yet.

4. The win goes to Porcello, the first of his postseason career — and remember, he was great in relief in Game 1. The save goes not to Kimbrel — good Lord, did he have Sox fans longing for ’13 Koji Uehara, ’07 Jonathan Papelbon, and ’04 Keith Foulke — but to first baseman Steve Pearce, who stretched every muscle and tendon in his body to maximum length to snag Eduardo Nunez’s throw for the final out. It was an exceptional defensive play by a player who does not have an exceptional defensive reputation. Honorable mention goes to catcher Christian Vazquez, who probably had at least two near-death experiences while keeping Kimbrel’s haywire sliders in front of him in the ninth.

5. Porcello suffocated the Yankees through the first four innings but ran into his first jam in the fifth. Gary Sanchez crushed a double (are we sure this guy hit .186 this year?), and after an 89-foot infield single by Torres, Brett Gardner brought in Sanchez for the Yankees first run. Porcello got out of it, but not before an epic nine-pitch duel with Aaron Hicks that felt as if it took about 40 pitches. Hicks hit a long foul to right that for a few seconds looked like it would make the game 4-3. But Porcello got him to pop out, in what would be his final pitch of the night.

6. I’ll admit it: I did not like pulling Porcello after five innings, during which he’d allowed just four hits and a run on 65 pitches. Given the Red Sox bullpen’s well-earned reputation for occasionally dousing gasoline on a ballgame and waving around a match in the middle innings, I thought Alex Cora should have tried to squeeze another inning out of him, though he clearly missed his spots a few times in the fifth. In baseball, the unexpected can get you out of nowhere, but in this case, the unexpected was a positive, with Barnes and Brazier getting through the sixth and seventh innings with little suspense.

7. But Cora, man. He knows stuff. He got the usual sports-radio yelping for deciding to start Ian Kinsler at second base over Game 3 cyclist Brock Holt, a choice that at the very least was defensible given that Sabathia held lefties to a .180/.339/.230 slash line this year. He also put Nunez back at third base after going with Rafael Devers in Game 3 (he had a pair of hits). Perhaps most surprisingly, he gave Vazquez a second straight start behind the plate instead of Sandy Leon, even though Vazquez hadn't caught Porcello all season.

8. So how did it work? You know how it worked: Just how Cora wanted it to when he wrote out his lineup card. Kinsler, who came maybe 15 feet away from a grand slam in the first inning, gave the Red Sox a 2-0 lead in the third on a crushed double to left just over the glove of Gardner. (Gardner is listed at 5 feet 10 inches. If that height was legitimate, he would have caught it.) Nunez doubled Kinsler in for the third Red Sox run, and made an extraordinary throw to end the game. And besides his stellar performance defensively in the ninth, Vazquez hit his first homer since June in the fourth, putting the Sox up 4-0.

9. You know who else had a great couple of days? Dave Dombrowski. Midseason acquisitions Kinsler and Pearce made important contributions Tuesday. Midseason acquisition Nathan Eovaldi was brilliant in Game 3. And the main accusation against him — that he didn't acquire bullpen help at the deadline — did not factor into the Game 4 victory, with his guy Ryan Brasier pitching like a grizzled veteran of big moments. Great victory for him. Better victory for the Red Sox. Don't know about you, but after this, my nerves will be ready for another Red Sox-Yankees series in, oh, about 14 years.

How the Red Sox bullpen navigated the final 12 outs of Game 4

Owen Pence

NEW YORK — Nerve-racking would be an understatement. Late on Tuesday evening, Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel made an entire region collectively hold its breath, thousands upon thousands of neck hairs standing on edge.

No one thought it would be easy. With 12 outs left and a trip to the ALCS on the line, the erratic Red Sox bullpen was put on trial.

It all started according to plan. With Boston leading, 4-1, following five sturdy innings from Rick Porcello, on came the Red Sox relievers. Matt Barnes worked a 1-2-3 sixth. Ryan Brasier recorded a spotless seventh. Chris Sale made a surprise appearance in the eighth, and he too did not allow a base runner.

Who could have imagined Kimbrel giving Bostonians the biggest scare?

The Yankees' deficit remained at three when Kimbrel entered to work the ninth. He walked Aaron Judge on four pitches as Yankee Stadium began to buzz. Didi Gregorius was next and looked lost early in the count before grounding a single into right.

Kimbrel briefly regained control, feeding Giancarlo Stanton a heavy diet of sliders and striking him out.

Then his control was gone again as Luke Voit walked on four pitches to load the bases. Neil Walker followed and was clipped in the foot with a stray breaking ball, trimming Boston's lead to two.

If one play will haunt New Yorkers for the duration of winter, it was a Gary Sanchez fly ball that came a few feet away from forcing a rubber match. The Yankees' catcher worked the count full, battling until Kimbrel offered him a fastball down Broadway. Sanchez unloaded and gave the ball a ride, but it settled in the glove of Andrew Benintendi on the left field warning track.

The excitement wasn't over, but New York's best chance at victory was. The lead now down to one after Sanchez's sacrifice fly, Kimbrel induced a dribbler by rookie Gleyber Torres down the third-base line. Eduardo Nunez fielded and threw, producing a bang-bang play. Upon review, it was confirmed Torres was out.

Onto Houston.

“It got a little exciting there at the end,” said Kimbrel. “The goal is to come off the field with a win and we were able to do it.”

Barely.

Porcello sat at just 65 pitches after five innings, but Cora decided to try his luck with his relievers. Perhaps Cora would have left Porcello in under different circumstances, but with the heart of the Yankee order due up and the righty already twice through New York’s order, he called upon Barnes instead.

Barnes calmly tossed seven heaters and seven curveballs to retire Judge, Gregorius, and Stanton in order.

Brasier was next — not exactly the spot he envisioned for himself when he began the season in Triple-A Pawtucket. He too was entirely composed with an antsy Yankee Stadium crowd looking for any reason to erupt.

Then came a surprise. Prior to Game 4, Cora rewinded the tape back to 2017 when he served as a bench coach for Houston. With the Astros in an identical situation to the Red Sox on Tuesday, manager A.J. Hinch summoned ace Justin Verlander out of the bullpen, thus making him unusable for a potential fifth game. Verlander got the job done and Houston advanced, but Cora disagreed with the call.

“I didn’t agree with that move,” recalled Cora. “When [A.J.] brought in Verlander, I remember Benny hits it out of the ballpark. I said, ‘Hey, how long are you going to keep him out there?’ Because I’m thinking Game 5. And A.J. goes, ‘Let him finish the inning.’ And he goes out there again, and I look at the bullpen, and there’s nobody in the bullpen. I say, ‘How long are you going to stay with him?’ He’s like, ‘The whole game.’ Okay, you’re the manager.”

So much for that explanation. Cora is now the primary decision maker and he knew Sale had handled himself well in prior relief appearances.

Torres gave Sale a scare, sending a limp changeup to the warning track in right-center, but Jackie Bradley Jr. tracked it down. Sale then retired Andrew McCutchen and fanned Aaron Hicks looking with a mean slider.

“From the fifth inning on, I was ready,” said Sale. “It was fun. I enjoyed it. [The bullpen] was my home to start my career. It was fun to get back in there.”

Kimbrel made things messy in the final frame, but Boston emerged with a 4-3 victory.

Sure, Kimbrel could have been sharper, but what’s a Yankees-Red Sox playoff game without loads of drama?

Pay tribute to Rick Porcello for an ‘outstanding’ outing in this one

Nick Cafardo

NEW YORK — The Red Sox starters, with the exception of David Price’s hideous Game 2 outing, did their jobs in this American League Division Series. Gone are the days when playoff starters would pitch seven to nine innings. If they give you five to seven innings and keep you in the game, that’s all you can ask for in 2018.

And that’s what Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, and, finally, Rick Porcello did against the Yankees by virtue of a nail-biting, 4-3 win Tuesday night at Yankee Stadium in which Craig Kimbrel sent everyone in Red Sox Nation for a manicure.

Sale, who pitched a scoreless eighth inning to help preserve a 4-1 lead, gave up two runs in 5½ innings in Game 1. Eovaldi allowed one run over seven innings in Game 3. And Porcello allowed one run in five innings in Game 4. In a perfect world manager Alex Cora would have loved an extra inning from Sale and Porcello, but because the Sox bullpen recovered from poor outings in Games 1 and 2 it was able to piece together enough good pitching to pull this out against a prolific Yankees offense.

But we should pay tribute to Porcello for the series-clinching win, his first postseason victory in 13 appearances and five starts. Porcello went from 17 losses in 2017 to 17 wins in 2018. He was pushed back to Game 4 after he contributed two outs in the eighth inning of Game 1 and sacrificed his scheduled Game 3 start so Eovaldi, the better choice, could pitch Game 3.

Porcello was one of the first players to leave the dugout after a replay of Gleyber Torres's game-ending groundout was confirmed. Porcello wanted to be one of the first to congratulate Kimbrel. In the end, his start and Kimbrel's finish enabled the Sox to move on to the ALCS to play Houston. Game 1 is Saturday night at Fenway Park.

"Rick was outstanding and the bullpen did an outstanding job," Cora said. "He wasn't the usual Craig Kimbrel, but he got three outs."

The Sox were encouraged by Sale, who regained his velocity at 95 to 97 m.p.h. in his start, while Eovaldi was throwing in the high 90s and mixing up all of his pitches. Porcello threw a very efficient game, the Yankees able to scratch out only a run in the fifth on a Brett Gardner sacrifice fly. After that, Cora felt he had a rested enough bullpen to make it work.

"One of their goals was to keep us in the ballpark, and they were able to do it," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

Porcello doesn't get enough credit for all he does and for the respect teammates have for him. If there's a pitching version of the well-prepared J.D. Martinez, that would be Porcello. He takes his craft seriously. While he doesn't have Sale's overpowering stuff and isn't the controversial figure that is Price, he is a pitcher worthy of respect and Tuesday night he went out and proved that in the clincher.

Porcello won the American League Cy Young Award in 2016. Last year was a nightmare. As hard as this guy works, he couldn't seem to solve the mystery of where his stuff had gone. It seemed everything he threw was hit. This season he couldn't beat the Blue Jays. If you could erase his four starts against the Jays, in which he went 1-2 with a 9.15 ERA, Porcello's numbers would have looked much better. He might have even reached the 20-win plateau again.

As good as he looked in relief in Game 1, Porcello did a good job Tuesday night of keeping the big Yankees hitters off-balance with a nice mixture of two-seamers, curveballs, and four-seamers. He worked at a good pace and never allowed the Yankees to get too comfortable. His velocity was at 90 to 94 m.p.h. Porcello had thrown only 65 pitches (48 for strikes) after five innings, but after struggling in the fifth inning Cora decided not to push the envelope.

After struggling for most of the season, Red Sox relievers had some success in the ALDS. Cora went with Matt Barnes in the sixth, Ryan Brasier in the seventh, and Sale in the eighth. The trio pitched three hitless innings with two strikeouts and no walks.

Kimbrel struggled through a 28-pitch inning but eventually finished it off after giving up two runs on one hit, two walks, and a hit batter.

He retired Torres on a slow roller with the winning run at second base.

Porcello, who grew up in New Jersey, wanted to beat the Yankees at Yankee Stadium, a team he grew up watching as a kid. Porcello looked to the crowd after the game to acknowledge a small group of family

members. He badly wanted to go beyond five innings, but Cora said he pretty much had the rest of the game planned out.

Moving on against Houston, we'll see if Cora gives Price, who doesn't have to worry about the Yankees anymore, a chance to right his postseason. Price was 1-0 with a 3.65 ERA in two starts this season against the Astros. He struck out 17 in 12⅓ innings.

With a rejuvenated Price added to the mix, the Red Sox could go into the ALCS in good shape with their starters.

Brock Holt takes a seat after taking spin on cycle

Peter Abraham

NEW YORK — The Red Sox revealed their lineup four hours before Game 4 of the Division Series on Tuesday night. It did not include second baseman Brock Holt, who hit for the cycle and drove in five runs in Game 3 on Monday.

“Tough league. It’s a tough league,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “It’s more about the guy on the mound.”

With the Yankees starting lefthander CC Sabathia, Cora wanted as many righthanded hitters as he could reasonably get in the lineup. So Ian Kinsler started at second base and Eduardo Nunez was at third. Kinsler went 1 for 4 with an RBI and Nunez went 2 for 4 in the Red Sox’ 4-3 victory in Game 4.

Lefthanded hitters had a .180 batting average and .629 OPS against Sabathia during the regular season. Cora wanted a lineup that could do the most damage against him.

The lineup also gave Cora the option of using Holt and Rafael Devers as pinch hitters against the Yankees bullpen.

Cora told Holt about his decision Tuesday morning. Holt expected that would be the case. He had faced Sabathia only six times in his career and was 0 for 4.

“I don’t have very many at-bats against him. He throws with his left arm; I normally don’t get in on those games,” Holt said.

Holt understands, as all players do, that decisions in the postseason won’t necessarily follow the same protocol as the regular season. Managers have to do what gives them even the slightest edge and not be concerned about egos.

“It’s different,” said Cora, who as a player was a backup much like Holt. “It’s the team concept. You have to stay ready. They know we count on all of them and we’re comfortable with whatever lineup is out there. So stay ready.”

For Holt, the cycle Monday was the first in 1,562 postseason games. He also joined Hall of Famer Bobby Doerr (1944, ’47) as the only Red Sox players to hit for the cycle twice.

Holt, John Valentin (1999), and Mo Vaughn (1998) are the only Sox players with at least three extra-base hits and five RBIs in a postseason game.

Hernandez factor

A day after three of his calls at first base were overturned on replay challenges, umpire Angel Hernandez was behind the plate and very much in the spotlight before the game.

During Cora's pregame news conference, which is run by Major League Baseball, he was asked if there were any concerns about Hernandez being behind the plate for a potential clinching game.

"No," Cora said. "There's a reason he's in this series, and he has a job to do just like all of us."

Cora joked that he had an advantage over Yankees manager Aaron Boone because he could complain to Hernandez in both English and Spanish.

"They're going to call the game the way they see it," Cora said. "They do a good job of it. It's not an easy job, especially nowadays with the stuff that we see on a nightly basis."

The fans at Yankee Stadium booed Hernandez loudly when the umpires were introduced before the game.

All this is transpiring with Hernandez having an active lawsuit against MLB claiming he was denied a promotion to crew chief and postseason assignments because of ethnicity.

Hernandez, who is from Cuba, filed his suit in July 2017 in Ohio. It was moved to New York this month when a US District Court Judge ruled in favor of MLB's petition to change the venue.

Wait and see

Mitch Moreland, who strained his right hamstring in Game 2, would not have been in the lineup against Sabathia, even if healthy. But Cora acknowledged he would likely not have started against a righthander, either.

"Day by day. He feels better, still available," the manager said. "But not ready to go out there and play nine . . . We have to be really careful with him."

Moreland has so far been limited to hitting off a tee since the injury.

The Sox believe Moreland will recover. But in case there's a setback, utility player Tzu-Wei Lin rejoined the team to be available. Lin had been working out at the team complex in Fort Myers, Fla.

Big ratings

TBS reported that Game 3 peaked at 6.4 million viewers, with an average of 4.4. Boston was top local market, generating an 18.9 rating. It was the highest for any Sox game on any network since 2013 . . . The Yankees, seeking good karma, had Bucky Dent throw out the first pitch. It was Dent who homered to beat the Sox in the fabled 1978 playoff game between the teams. The Yankees trotted out Dent for first-pitch duty in Game 7 of the 2004 American League Championship Series. The Red Sox won that game, 10-3.

It's safe to say that there is a new world order in this ancient rivalry

Dan Shaughnessy

NEW YORK — One week ago, Yankee Stadium fans were chanting, "We Want Boston!" while the Yanks were beating the Oakland A's in the one-game wild-card playoff.

They got Boston.

With both barrels.

And full fury.

The relentless Sox beat the Yankees, 4-3, on Tuesday, winning their American League Division Series, 3-1. The Sox advance to the ALCS. They'll have ace Chris Sale on the mound Saturday at Fenway for Game 1 against the world champion Houston Astros.

After finishing first in three straight seasons, the 108-win Red Sox won the franchise's first playoff series since that championship season of 2013.

The final moments of the ALDS were frightening and downright weird. It was Clinchus Interruptus. The game ended on a ground out to third, but the Sox couldn't celebrate until the play was reviewed back in New York. So the Sox stood around the infield, waited for the review, then tossed their gloves in the air. It was like pushing your out-of-gas car across the finish line to win the Indianapolis 500.

Boston led, 4-1 when the bottom of the ninth started. Craig Kimbrel, a Hall-of-Fame-bound closer came on to slam the door. Perfect, right? A clean inning. A three-run lead. All the momentum in the world.

And then it almost all unraveled. Walk. Single. Strikeout. Walk. Hit by pitch to force in a run. A high fly by Gary Sanchez that might have been out of Fenway but was a mere sad fly at Yankee Stadium that cut the lead to 4-3.

With the tying and winning runs aboard, rookie Gleyber Torres hit a weak chopper to third. Eduardo Nunez charged, pocketed the ball, and fired to first, barely beating Torres.

But it was not perfectly clear. As the Sox started to celebrate, the Yankees challenged the call. While this was going on, Nunez appeared to hurt himself while starting the celebration. A trainer came out to look at Nunez while the umps gathered to look at the play. Finally, the out signal was given and the Sox resumed their celebration. Weird.

It was like the end of the 2016 season when the Sox clinched the American League East while the Yankees were batting in the bottom of the ninth. The Sox clinched only because the Orioles beat the Blue Jays. After learning they had clinched, Kimbrel loaded the bases and Joe Kelly surrendered a walkoff grand slam to Mark Teixeira. So we saw both teams celebrating simultaneously at the end of the game. In the Sox clubhouse, manager John Farrell had to prod his players to pop the bubbly.

Tuesday was similarly awkward.

But who cares? The Sox are moving on in the quest of their fourth World Series championship of this century. They played Sinatra's "New York, New York" while dousing one another with champagne in the visitors' clubhouse.

There was an air of desperation on 161st Street in the moments before Game 4. Teetering on the brink of elimination after their own 100-win season, the Yankees rolled out Bucky Dent for the ceremonial first pitch.

Ha-ha. These guys never stop. It's not enough that they've got Aaron Bleepin' Boone in the dugout? They've got to summon Bucky Bleepin' Dent for a first pitch? Why not introduce the great grandson of Harry Frazee?

The stunt didn't work in 2004 when Dent was called in to stop the bleeding before Game 7 at the old Yankee Stadium. That was the same night that the Yanks assigned Sox ownership to the Babe Ruth suite. There was no Bucky/Bambino magic. The Sox scored six in the first two innings, won 10-3, and danced on the Yankee lawn, celebrating the greatest comeback in baseball history.

And now Boston has done it to New York again.

Coming into this series, the Yanks liked their chances at home. They had won seven consecutive playoff games at the new Yankee Stadium, including four elimination games in 2017. But the raging Red Sox pummeled the Yankees, 20-4, over 18 innings in the House of Steinbrenner.

Related: Instant Analysis: Red Sox starters dominated, while Yankees starters wilted

Sweet. For all their success over the last three seasons, the Sox had been unable to win a playoff series, and there were doubts about their chances in this first-round matchup after they were beaten by the Yankees, 6-2, in Game 2 at Fenway on Saturday night. Boston's bullpen was a mess, David Price was rendered useless, and Yankee slugger Aaron Judge was taunting the Sox with Sinatra's "New York, New York."

It was then that rookie manager Alex Cora shifted into genius mode — making all the right moves as the Sox mowed down the Bronx Bombers on their own sacred sod. Dick Williams steered the Impossible Dream Red Sox to a World Series in 1967 and Tito Francona won two crowns in his eight seasons at Fenway, but it would be hard to find a Sox skipper with a hotter hand than Cora's over the last 48 hours.

He went to four bench guys in Game 3 and they all produced (Brock Holt hit for the cycle). He predicted Nathan Eovaldi would throw seven innings and give up one run in Game 3 (Eovaldi threw seven innings and gave up one run.) He let Christian Vazquez catch Rick Porcello for the first time all season in Game 4 and Vazquez hit a homer while Porcello picked up his first career playoff win. In the eighth inning of Game 4, Cora went off the grid and summoned ace lefty Chris Sale for his first relief appearance since last year's playoffs. Sale retired the side in order on 13 pitches.

"A lot of people gave up on us after losing Game 2," said Cora. "We showed up last night and tonight had our plan mapped out. At the end, he wasn't the usual Craig Kimbrel, but he got three outs."

It's safe to say that there is a new world order in this ancient rivalry. After sucking exhaust for eight decades — an 86-year stretch in which the Yankees won 26 World Series to Boston's zero — the Sox have become kings of the American League in this century, winning three World Series to New York's one.

The tide turned in 2004 when Francona's Red Sox shocked the world and beat the Yankees after trailing three games to none. Tuesday marked the fourth time the Sox have sipped champagne here since '04.

Finally, the Sox are the Yankees' daddies.

Feels good, doesn't it?

Red Sox starters dominated, while Yankees starters wilted

Alex Speier

NEW YORK — The ghosts of Yankee Stadium have long since been vanquished, the notion of curses of one rival against another now seeming like history as ancient as the Salem witch trials.

For the third time in the last three seasons and the fourth in the last 15, the Red Sox enjoyed the champagne-soaked taste of victory in New York's home park. On Tuesday night, Boston's 4-3 victory in Game 4 of the American League Division Series sent the team past the Yankees to the American League Championship Series for the first time since 2013 and the 11th time in franchise history.

As much as the modern postseason revolves around bullpen excellence, the Red Sox leaned heavily on their starters to set the tone and shut down the Yankees. Rick Porcello joined Game 1 winner Chris Sale and Game 3 dominator Nathan Eovaldi in stifling a quick-strike New York offense and positioning the Sox for a win.

Though he struck out just one batter on Tuesday, Porcello painted the edges of the strike zone with a five-pitch mix (four- and two-seam fastballs, slider, curveball, and changeup) over five innings, limiting the Yankees to one run while throwing an impressive 48 of 65 pitches (74 percent) for strikes. This was a reasonable facsimile of the Porcello who carved lineups en route to a Cy Young Award in 2016, but the one who, until Tuesday night, had never been seen in a playoff start.

In the series, Porcello, Eovaldi, and Sale combined to walk just two batters while allowing no homers in 17½ innings, posting a combined 2.08 ERA in the process. Their ability to command pitches and limit both

homers and free passes prevented the Yankees from their familiar offensive fireworks. In particular, the work of Porcello and Eovaldi in the final two games of the series — with the Sox very intentionally setting up back-to-back starts from righties in the Bronx — yielded the rarest of pitching feats, two straight games in which New York didn't homer. Monday and Tuesday marked just the second time all year — and the first since early-April, when the season was less than two weeks old — that the Yankees failed to hit homers in their home park in back-to-back games.

Championship-caliber execution took the Red Sox three wins and one series closer to a title. Now, they return to Fenway to rest for three days before trying to avenge last year's ALDS loss to the Astros.

Other takeaways from a night when the Red Sox may borrow Aaron Judge's playlist to start spreading some news:

- Alex Cora had a really good series: One day after Alex Cora struck gold with his decisions to start Eovaldi and Brock Holt, he again hit a mother lode by sitting Holt and Rafael Devers in favor of Ian Kinsler (RBI double) and Eduardo Nunez (RBI single), and by pairing catcher Christian Vazquez (solo homer, strong game-calling) with Porcello for the first time this year. Finally, for the coup de grace, Cora navigated a perfect night from his bullpen, with Matt Barnes (6th), Ryan Brasier (7th), and Chris Sale (8th) all recording perfect innings in front of closer Craig Kimbrel.

- Kimbrel comes with questions: Kimbrel nearly self-immolated in the ninth. Entrusted with a three-run lead, he walked a pair of batters, gave up a single, hit a batter, then gave up a massive sac fly to Gary Sanchez that fell just in front of the fence, narrowly averting a walkoff. He earned the save, but the wobbly performance will only reinforce questions about the Red Sox' ability to navigate the late innings.

- The Yankees rotation never gave the bullpen a chance: The Yankees joined the 2017 and 1999 Red Sox as the only teams in Division Series history to have three starts of three innings or fewer. CC Sabathia allowed three runs on five hits in three innings. New York, which accomplished its mission of getting under the luxury tax threshold this season in order to reset their penalty rates, now seems likely to move aggressively for rotation reinforcements this winter.

- The Red Sox must have been watching 2015 Royals highlights: In the final two games of the series, the Red Sox scored 20 runs, with all but three of them coming on sustained rallies rather than the quick-strike of homers. On Tuesday, the Sox leaned on a sac fly by J.D. Martinez, a two-out RBI double by Kinsler, and a two-out single by Nunez that chased Kinsler home for a three-run third that put the Yankees on their heels. Vazquez then spread the game out in the fourth with a pop-up that snuck over the fence, but as was the case in Monday's 16-run Red Sox explosion, most of the damage was done through key hits with runners on base.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox beat Yankees, advance to ALCS

Jason Mastrodonato

NEW YORK -- There was no debating the better team all year, and there was no debating the better team in this series.

The 108-win Red Sox entered the postseason with more questions than the SATs while the wild card Yankees looked like a team nobody wanted to face in October.

And yet it was the Sox who looked like juggernauts by the time the American League Division Series was finished last night at Yankee Stadium.

Rick Porcello earned his first win in a playoff start, Christian Vazquez hit his first home run since June 26 and Chris Sale pitched the eighth inning in a bizarre Game 4 victory, 4-3, that secured the Red Sox' first playoff series win since 2013.

Next up: the world champion Houston Astros in the seven-game American League Championship Series that will begin Saturday night at Fenway Park.

"Coming in here, Yankee Stadium, a lot of guys doubted us," shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. "A lot of guys doubted us. I had the off day, and I turned on the TV, everything is, 'Yankees winning in four. Yankees in four.' I'm like, 'What is going on?' No one is picking the Red Sox, but all of us in here picked ourselves, and it was fun. ... How can we have 108 wins and they'll be like the Yankees are going to win in four? I don't understand."

Red Sox owner John Henry also felt the Red Sox were written off coming into Yankee Stadium on Monday.

"It felt like the media thought when it was 1-1 that we were down 0-2," he said. "That's what I was reading. That was the feeling. But I think the media from the first day of spring training was pretty negative, even though we won the division two years in a row. Just needed to be a little more aggressive in our approach because these guys are so talented, they just needed somebody to say, 'Go get 'em.'"

"And they went and got them this year, all year long."

The Sox out-classed the Yankees with better performances in every phase during these four games, but they'll go into the ALCS with a particular confidence in their starting rotation, which allowed just seven runs in 19 innings (3.32 ERA). Yankees starters pitched just 13 innings and gave up an astounding 15 runs.

It's hard to argue there's a more important development after the Red Sox starting rotation had a 10.96 ERA in seven postseason games combined in 2016 and '17.

"We got used to pitching in the playoffs," pitching coach Dana LeVangie said. "Chris Sale's first time, his first start was in Houston last year. He settled his nerves a little bit. Rick Porcello is growing up. He's comfortable where he's at. He's trusting himself. Nathan Eovaldi, first time, but Nathan is the same guy regardless of what day it is, it doesn't matter. Same guy all the time."

Porcello carried the torch for five innings of one-run ball against the Yankees last night after Sale threw 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings (two runs) in Game 1 and Nathan Eovaldi threw the gem of the series with seven innings (one run) in Game 3.

A pending free agent, Eovaldi "made himself a lot of money," LeVangie said. But he also might have earned a promotion to start Game 2 against the Astros at Fenway Park on Sunday in place of David Price, whose teams are now 0-10 in his 10 career postseason starts.

"I don't know about that, but Nathan is just, his calming influence allows him to have success in these big games," LeVangie said.

The Red Sox bullpen threw 17 innings and allowed seven runs.

The Yankees bullpen was the class of the league, with four proven closers ready to come out at any time. They had a 3.38 ERA in the regular season. And the Red Sox plated 12 runs off them in 17 innings this series.

Alex Cora managed circles around Aaron Boone, whose head might not stop spinning until spring training. It's possible Cora didn't make a single mistake this series. And if he did, it'll be overshadowed by his bullpen maneuvering in Game 1, lineup decisions in Games 3 (Brock Holt) and 4 (Ian Kinsler, Eduardo Nunez and Vazquez) and bullpen usage last night.

Kinsler hit a line drive to score the second run, and Nunez singled to drive in the third in the third inning. Vazquez hit a home run off Zach Britton in the fourth.

In the series, the Red Sox hit just as many homers (four) as the Yankees, who set an MLB record for home runs this season but didn't hit any in their two games at Yankee Stadium, where Eovaldi and Porcello out-dueled Luis Severino and CC Sabathia without contest in back-to-back games.

"It's nice to get past the first round, for sure, absolutely," Porcello said. "I think we've been a good enough ballclub to do so the last three years, but this year we finally broke through."

Cora got five good innings out of Porcello, who also pitched the eighth inning in Game 1.

Then it was an inning each from Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Sale, who became the second starting pitcher to handle the eighth inning this series.

There was sizable risk in that move, given that if it didn't work, either the Red Sox would have to bring back Sale on one day of rest to pitch Game 5 on Thursday, or turn to Price, who was one of just two Red Sox pitchers who had a bad series (Eduardo Rodriguez being the other).

"First thing I told Cora when I came in the clubhouse, I was ready for multiple innings, beginning, middle or end of the game," Sale said. "Didn't matter, I wanted to get in there."

And if it didn't work out, Sale pitched and the Sox still lost Game 4? The plan was to turn to Sale again in Game 5.

"If we didn't use Barnes and Brasier leading up to the eighth, then potentially we avoid Chris," LeVangie said. "There's never an automatic win, but that's the way we felt. We need to win this game. If we use Chris Sale, knowing he potentially starts on Thursday, we have to win this."

Sale came out throwing in the mid-90s. Gleyber Torres took him to the warning track on a changeup for the first out, Andrew McCutchen grounded out on a fastball and then Sale struck out Aaron Hicks on a nasty slider to finish the eighth on just 13 pitches.

"We've been talking about it for a couple days," LeVangie said. "He didn't throw a side leading up this game because of potentially pitching in this."

Craig Kimbrel got the ninth, and as usual, he made it interesting, giving up one single, two walks and one hit-by-pitch before finally clinching the series with the tying run on second base.

The Yankees might have the younger team with most of their superstars under their control for years to come, while the Red Sox have a narrow window to win it all. But it's the Sox who win the 2018 season and keep their World Series dreams alive.

The Yankees are going home.

"This is such a great rivalry," Henry said. "They're going to have a great team again next year. I look forward to another 19 games next year and hopefully we'll see them in the playoffs again."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora real MVP of Division Series win vs. Yankees

Michael Silverman

NEW YORK – There is no MVP award for the Division Series.

But Alex Cora won it anyway.

In overseeing the Red Sox' first successful attempt to win a postseason series since 2013, the rookie manager made the biggest, boldest and best moves. He pulled all the right strings and led his talented roster to a convincing four-game victory in the once hostile but now docile Yankee Stadium. They will face the dangerous Houston Astros in the American League Championship Series, but let's give the clubbies time to wash the beer and champagne out of the uniforms before diving too deeply into that matchup.

Still, given the way Cora navigated the Red Sox to three wins in four tries against a potent Yankees team, you'd have to give them a fighting chance against the Astros. Cora's success makes all the sense in the world to Sox principal owner John Henry, but a year ago, when he interviewed the managerial candidate in a hotel in Manhattan, he had some concerns.

"My only criticism after we interviewed him, I went back to Dave (Dombrowski) and I said, 'Dave, he's a little confident. In fact, he's overconfident,'" Henry after last night's 4-3 victory in Game 4. "But he was born to be a manager, he's a natural leader. I've never seen anybody do a better job of handling a clubhouse, from Day 1 throughout 162 games. I think he knew he was ready for this job."

Last night's game featured Cora at his readiest and at his very best.

Nothing stood more for Cora's aggressive style than his decision to turn to putative Game 5 starter Chris Sale for the eighth inning with the Red Sox holding a 4-1 lead.

Before the game, Cora was outspoken about a "very slim" chance he would use Sale, yet there was the lanky lefty trotting in from the bullpen to start the eighth, and three batters later, he was trotting into the dugout for high fives.

"He's been talking about it for three days already," Cora said. "In the seventh, we got together, (pitching coach) Dana (LeVangie), (bench coach) Ron (Roenicke) and myself. We already talked to the training staff about if he was OK to come in. He was in the bullpen, but it was kind of like his day. Everybody was on board. I even shouted to the dugout, 'Hey, we're all in. He's coming in.' He did an outstanding job, passed the baton to Craig, and we closed the deal."

The lineup that Cora put together in Game 4?

Well, it didn't have Brock Holt, which is a statement in itself.

All Holt did the night before was complete the first postseason cycle in Major League Baseball history, yet Cora went back to Ian Kinsler, who of course drove in the second run of the game.

"None. He didn't even play. No, I'm kidding," Holt said about how much credit Cora should take. "He deserves all the credit man. From Day 1 in spring training, he's been our guy. He's led us to this point. From the beginning, he told us how good we can be, and we obviously knew that, but we believed him. From Day 1 in spring training, he's communicated with us, he's believed in us, he's let us go out and play the game and be ourselves."

Starter Rick Porcello was lights out, and his pitch count was only 65 after five innings when Cora figured his time was up. The big right-handed boppers, Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton, were coming up, and Cora didn't like the odds of them batting for the third time against Porcello. He turned to his primary setup man, Matt Barnes, who was Sale-like: three up, three down. Judge and Stanton both grounded out.

"We're very fortunate to have a guy in (Cora) who is not very far removed from playing the game, which definitely helps," Barnes said. "You have a guy who won the World Series last year, so he knows what it takes to win a World Series, but what he did in the postseason from pushing the right buttons, it seemed like every button he pushed was the right one."

What about having Porcello on the mound in the first place?

He was supposed to be the Game 3 starter, but given Cora went to Porcello in Game 1 for two outs, he figured Nathan Eovaldi could do the job.

His instincts, based on sound logic and Eovaldi's track record against the Yankees, paid off as Eovaldi completely suppressed the Yankees in Game 3.

That Game 3 victory featured a different lineup.

Cora didn't like the lack of offense and the poor approach from the lineup in Game 2 especially, so he inserted three new starters: Holt, Rafael Devers at third base and Christian Vazquez as catcher. All three contributed in every way in that lopsided 16-1 victory.

There were plenty of other difference-makers this year. J.D. Martinez, replacing David Ortiz as the thunderbolt and lightning in the Red Sox lineup with his 43 homers and 130 RBI, was the biggest.

Mookie Betts? Yep, he played a huge role, too.

Sale, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Andrew Benintendi – lots and lots of contributors across the Red Sox clubhouse.

But the guy who ran the show, Cora, was new guy at the very top as the team reached 108 regular-season wins.

And when the stakes were the highest, when the team needed to show the regular season was no fluke, Cora came through and led the Sox past their first true test.

Cora deflected all credit back to his players.

“Very proud, very proud – it took 26 guys to win this series,” Cora said. “Steven (Wright) gets hurt at 4:00 before Game 1. We have to go to (Heath) Hembree, and he did an outstanding job throughout the series. Like I said, yesterday was Brock, Devers, and Christian. Today we have to match up with CC (Sabathia), and Ian comes up with a bit hit, (Eduardo) Nunez did an outstanding job offensively and defensively, Christian did a good job too.

“Like I've been saying all along, we're a complete team, and we count on everybody to win games. The last two games, if you think about it, it was fun to watch.”

Red Sox put Brock Holt back on bench for ALDS Game 4 vs. Yankees

Jason Mastrodonato

NEW YORK — Alex Cora jokes that he has a three-home-run rule.

No matter the matchup, if you hit three home runs, you play the next day.

Hitting for the cycle doesn't count.

One night after becoming the first player in MLB history to hit for the cycle in the playoffs, Brock Holt was on the bench against Yankees left-hander CC Sabathia in Game 4 of the American League Division Series on Tuesday night.

Ian Kinsler (3-for-9 this postseason) was starting at second base in place of Holt (4-for-6).

"It wasn't that hard, this decision," Cora said. "I know he's swinging the bat well and I know what he did yesterday, but this is a different game and we feel this is the best lineup that we have to go against him. And they understand that."

"For the people outside this room it looks like, 'this guy's nuts.' Like, 'what's he doing?' But for the people in here it's just like, 'yeah, there's a reason we're doing this and that's what matters.' I get it. I understand why people might be asking why he's not playing Brock or Rafael Devers, but at the same time, that guy Sabathia, he's pretty tough on lefties and we have to maximize our lineup."

Sabathia has held left-handed hitters to a .180 average and .679 OPS this season while righties hit .264 with a .732 OPS.

But Cora has gone against the platoon advantages before. Why not this time?

"It's more about the guy on the mound," Cora said. "He's been great against lefties. The way we see it is like, we get him early with the righties or we have to grind with the righties through five innings. Obviously, they're going to be all-in with the righties later on in the game. The way (Aaron Boone) has been managing, seems like (lefties) Zach Britton and Aroldis Chapman are his late guys. Might get a righty in between there and we'll go to our options. But we had to take our best shots with the righties in the lineup."

Dating back to Sept. 11, Holt is 21-for-47 (.447) with four doubles, one triple and five home runs in 15 games including the postseason. Of all players with at least 40 at-bats since then, Holt's average is by far the highest. In comparison, likely National League MVP Christian Yelich is hitting .397 in 68 at-bats over that span.

Perhaps the Red Sox believe Holt's success has been more matchup related.

"No, I mean, he's in a hot streak," Cora said. "He didn't play for 10 days and he still put good at-bats yesterday. In this case, that guy is very tough against lefties. He is."

Holt took the news well.

"I called him this morning and he's like, 'I know,'" Cora said. "He knew it. Ian was the one, I texted him yesterday and he's like, 'are you sure?' I was like, 'yeah, 100 percent.' He was joking. They knew before the game we were going this route. They're ready."

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David Price was again available in the bullpen for Game 4.

"He's in the equation," Cora said. "They got a different lineup tonight. Andrew McCutchen and Miguel Andujar off the bench. We have to see where we match up. It's a different lineup and I do feel they will use everybody if we start matching up with them, so we look for the matchups and go from there."

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Christian Vazquez got the start, his second straight start over Sandy Leon.

Vazquez hadn't caught Rick Porcello since the 2017 postseason.

"Christian, the last month has been great," Cora said. "Really, really good behind the plate with pitches, blocking balls, throwing people out, sticking with the game plan defensively. I feel like he gave us enough (on Monday) putting the ball in play, with the hit and run, the competitive at-bats. We feel comfortable with him."

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Mitch Moreland was again on the bench with hamstring soreness, though Cora said he was available off the bench. Tzu-Wei Lin is now working out with the team in case Moreland needs to be replaced on the roster.

Nathan Eovaldi, who threw 97 pitches in seven strong innings on Monday, is unlikely to pitch again this series, though Cora wouldn't rule it out. He's had Tommy John surgery twice and the Sox want to be careful with him.

MLB announced the times for the A.L. Champion Series between the Sox or Yankees and the Houston Astros on TBS. Game 1 will be on Saturday at 8:09 p.m. ET and Game 2 will be Sunday at 7:09 p.m. ET. The Patriots play the Chiefs on Sunday Night Football at 8:20 p.m. ET.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 4, Yankees 3: Boston hangs on to eliminate New York, capture ALDS

Bill Koch

NEW YORK --- There was nothing muted about this Red Sox celebration.

Clinching a third straight American League East crown at Yankee Stadium in September was one thing. Several Boston players and staff members have followed the satisfaction of that achievement by experiencing immediate playoff disappointment, with the Red Sox eliminated in the A.L. Division Series in 2016 and 2017.

Capturing just one game combined against Cleveland and Houston convinced Boston to fire manager John Farrell, sign free agent slugger J.D. Martinez and enter this season with a fresh approach. Alex Cora guided the Red Sox beautifully over the first six months as a rookie skipper, so why stop now?

Boston's first victory in a postseason series since 2013 came over its most hated rival, one clinched by a nerve-racking 4-3 triumph against New York in the Bronx on Tuesday night. The Red Sox held the Yankees without a home run over two nights, outscored them by 16 runs and finished off the best-of-five matchup, 3-1.

"Like I've been saying all along, we're a complete team," Cora said. "We count on everybody to win games. The last two games, if you think about it, it was fun to watch."

Craig Kimbrel threatened to cough up a three-run lead in the bottom of the ninth inning, nearly scuttling the good work of four pitchers who came before him. New York came within a whisker of mustering a rally for the ages and forcing a Game 5 on Saturday night at Fenway Park, one the Red Sox couldn't possibly have faced with any measure of confidence. Gleyber Torres was called out on a soft grounder to third base, with a final failed replay challenge by the Yankees ending their season.

"The whole inning was drama – might as well throw that wrinkle in there, too," said Red Sox first baseman Steve Pearce, whose stretch on the backhand enabled him to glove the throw from Eduardo Nunez. "It was awesome once it was confirmed. It was awesome to be able to celebrate with the teammates."

Aaron Judge drew a four-pitch walk, Didi Gregorius singled through the right side and Luke Voit drew another four-pitch walk with one out. Neil Walker was hit by a pitch to force in Judge and put the potential tying run in scoring position. Gary Sanchez sent a towering sacrifice fly to the warning track in left, making it a one-run game, but Torres was out by a half-step at first on a chopper to third to end the series.

"It was a little nervous," Mookie Betts said. "We had the best closer in the world out there. He found a way to get it done."

Champagne sprayed and adult beverages flowed yet again in the visiting clubhouse, this time with the stakes raised to October levels. Rick Porcello and a host of relievers – including Game 1 starter Chris Sale – combined on a five-hitter despite recording just four strikeouts. Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Sale and

Kimbrel ultimately refused to buckle under the brightest of spotlights, a much maligned bullpen putting up just enough zeroes when it mattered most.

“We put it all on the line,” Sale said. “This is what we live for. We go for the win. That was the first thing I said to (Cora) when I came through the door – ‘I want the ball.’”

It’s the fifth ALCS appearance for Boston in the last 15 years and the ninth in the last 32. Boston is 4-4 in those matchups, winning each of their last three World Series appearances. Those same Astros will provide the opposition in Saturday’s Game 1 in Boston, with Houston finishing off a three-game sweep of the Indians.

The Yankees came into Monday winners of seven straight postseason games in this ballpark, threatening to transform it into a modern version of the old fortress that stood across East 161st Street until a decade ago. The Red Sox snapped that streak thanks to a 16-1 shellacking in Game 3 and finished the job the following night, stifling New York from the opening stages.

Porcello retired nine of the first 10 men he faced, allowing just a two-out single to right by Walker in the second. The right-hander required only 28 pitches to that point, changing speeds and keeping the New York hitters off balance. It was shades of Aug. 3 when Porcello fired an 86-pitch one-hitter at Fenway Park, a 4-1 Red Sox victory.

But the Yankees weren’t about to go quietly in front of an electric sellout crowd of 49,641 fans, stranding Gregorius at third base in the fourth and threatening again in the fifth. Sanchez’s ground-rule double to left center and an infield single to third by Torres gave New York runners at the corners for Brett Gardner, who sliced a sacrifice fly to left to make it 4-1.

That turned the lineup over to leadoff man Aaron Hicks, and the center fielder was Porcello’s final batter of the night. Hicks fought Porcello for nine pitches, even lining what would have been a two-run homer just outside the foul pole in right. Porcello escaped on a towering pop to Ian Kinsler in short right field, the last of his 65 pitches before turning it over to the Boston bullpen.

“It’s nice,” Porcello said of his first career postseason victory in 13 appearances. “It’s definitely one of the better feelings I’ve had as a ballplayer.”

C.C. Sabathia was long gone by that point, lasting just three innings and coming one batter short of facing each man in the Red Sox lineup twice. Boston forced the veteran left-hander to grind through 59 pitches, and a pair of Cora’s lineup changes from the previous night’s Game 3 paid dividends. Kinsler and Nunez visited left field with an RBI double and RBI single, respectively, to give the Red Sox a 3-0 lead in the third.

“No one cares who the hero is,” Kinsler said. “We’re here to win the game regardless of who’s in the lineup or who gets it done. That’s just the bottom line with this club.”

The ballpark’s short porch in right field came back to bite the home team in the fourth. Christian Vazquez greeted New York setup man Zach Britton with a lazy fly that kept carrying in the warm night air. The ball settled into the first row of the boxes just 338 feet away, an unlikely solo home run that gave Boston a four-run cushion and ultimately served as the decider.

Red Sox Journal: Cora sticks with the master plan

Bill Koch

NEW YORK — Hitting for the first postseason cycle in Major League Baseball history wasn’t enough to earn Brock Holt a start the following night.

Ian Kinsler was back in the Red Sox lineup at second base for Game 4 of the American League Division Series on Tuesday. Holt's tour de force in a 16-1 thrashing of the Yankees in Game 3 didn't move Sox manager Alex Cora off the plan he carried with him into the best-of-5 meeting with the Yankees.

Cora decided to deploy his right-handed bats against left-handed New York starter CC Sabathia, with Eduardo Nunez also returning at third base rather than Rafael Devers. Sabathia's career splits — .229/.292/.347 against left-handed hitters, .256/.315/.399 against right-handed hitters — were even sharper this season. Batters posted an OPS 103 points higher — .732 to .629 — from the right side.

"Tough league," Cora quipped. "It's a tough league. It's more about the guy on the mound — he's been great against lefties."

Holt hit in 11 straight games to close the regular season and started a seven-run fourth inning against the Yankees on Monday with a single to center. He bashed a two-run triple to the corner in right to cap the damage, as Boston took any suspense out of the evening rather early. Entering Tuesday's game, Kinsler was 2-for-8 in the series with a team-high five strikeouts, and he was a bit surprised when Cora told him there would be no last-minute changes.

"For the people outside this room, it looks like this guy is nuts," Cora said, referring to himself. "What's he doing? For the people in here, there's a reason we're doing this. That's what matters."

"I get it. I understand why people might be asking why he's not playing Brock or Raffy, but at the same time that guy Sabathia is pretty tough on lefties. We have to maximize our lineup."

Christian Vazquez was also a bit of a surprise starter behind the plate, catching Rick Porcello for the first time since the Red Sox were eliminated by Houston in last year's ALDS. Porcello's career earned-run average is only a tick lower throwing to Sandy Leon — 4.14, compared to 4.15 with Vazquez. Leon remains mired in a dreadful 5-for-84 funk over the last two months while Vazquez singled twice in Game 3.

"Christian, the last month, he's been really, really good behind the plate calling pitches, blocking balls, throwing people out and sticking with the game plan," Cora said. "Offensively, I felt like he gave us enough yesterday."

Counting on Pearce

Steve Pearce was always a likely Game 4 starter at first base thanks to his strong numbers against left-handed pitchers in general and Sabathia specifically. Pearce is 12-for-38 with three doubles and three home runs against Sabathia, and the fact that Mitch Moreland (right hamstring) is still ailing played little to no part in Cora's decision.

"He feels better today," Cora said of Moreland. "Still available. Not ready to go out there and play nine (innings). He wasn't playing anyway today, but we'll use him if needed against a righty."

Pearce would also be a likely Game 5 starter if the Yankees bring back J.A. Happ for a second outing of the series. Moreland (5-for-23, double, two home runs) would likely be in consideration along with Pearce (5-for-18, two home runs) should New York decide to move up Masahiro Tanaka in place of Happ.

Saving Sale

Cora said David Price would be available out of the bullpen in Game 4, but it would be less likely to see the other Red Sox left-handed starter.

Chris Sale lobbied Cora over the first two days in New York to pitch in relief should Boston have a chance to close out the series. He's the scheduled Game 5 starter, if necessary, on Thursday, but Sale's mindset was that the Red Sox should sell out for the kill if they have even the slightest chance.

"It's something that has to be too perfect," Cora said. "I lived it last year."

Cora was the Astros' bench coach when manager A.J. Hinch went to Justin Verlander in relief of Charlie Morton in Game 4 of last year's ALDS. There was a man on in the fifth inning when Verlander served up a two-run homer to Andrew Benintendi, the first batter the right-handed starter faced in the game. Houston eventually rallied late for a 5-4 victory to secure the series win, but a deciding Game 5 could have been a dicey proposition.

"A.J. made a decision to bring in Verlander, and I didn't agree because it was a one-run game (Houston had a 2-1 lead)," Cora said. "That happened and we almost didn't have him for a potential Game 5."

"We'll talk. The chances are very slim."

Brock Holt's performance was a surprise right from the start

Bill Koch

NEW YORK — Brock Holt was 1-for-15 with six strikeouts in his career against Luis Severino entering Monday night's game.

Based on the numbers alone, the Red Sox utilityman had only mild expectations of being included in Boston's lineup for the pivotal Game 3 of its American League Division Series matchup with the Yankees.

That's why a certain text message late Sunday night from Red Sox manager Alex Cora surprised Holt. He would indeed be among the starting nine at second base the following evening at Yankee Stadium, replacing Ian Kinsler. What followed was the first postseason cycle in Major League Baseball history, one punctuated by a two-run homer in the top of the ninth inning in a 16-1 Boston blowout.

"I don't have very good numbers against Severino," Holt said. "I sent (Cora) a text and I said, 'Are you sure?'"

"He's been swinging the bat well for a while now," Cora said. "We felt the matchup was good for him tonight although he was 0-for-whatever coming into the game tonight against Severino."

You can't blame Holt for being a bit suspicious. Kinsler was 2-for-8 but had struck out a team-high five times combined in Games 1 and 2. Holt had yet to be deployed as the pinch-hitting weapon he was billed to be, and wasn't selected to start against right-handed Masahiro Tanaka in Saturday's 6-2 loss.

"In the position I'm in, you try to stay ready," Holt said. "Whenever your name's called, you try to do what you can to help the team."

Holt's leadoff single to center in the fourth inning made it 12 straight games with a hit, as he ended the regular season on an 11-game streak. He added his second hit of the seven-run inning on a two-run triple to the corner in right and added a ground-rule double to right center in the eighth.

That left Holt looking only for a home run to complete the cycle, and New York offered something of a gift in the ninth. Backup catcher Austin Romine was sent to the mound in a 14-1 game — the second position player to ever pitch in a playoff contest — and issued a two-out walk to Kinsler. Up stepped Holt with only one thing on his mind, and he hooked a two-run shot down the line to the boxes in right.

"You get a little antsy when a position player is on the mound," Holt said. "I told everyone, 'Get me up. I need a home run for the cycle.' I was going to try to hit a home run, but I figured I'd ground out to first."

Holt's press conference alongside starting pitcher Nathan Eovaldi and left fielder Andrew Benintendi was being broadcast live in the Boston clubhouse. That last line drew a chuckle from several Red Sox players fresh out of the shower, each of whom were likely still a bit surprised by what they had just witnessed. That Cora made four lineup changes from Game 2 was no surprise, and Holt finishing among those who helped drive Boston to victory also wasn't entirely unexpected.

"We're deep," said first baseman Steve Pearce, who sent an RBI single through the left side and eventually came around to score in the fourth. "We have a lot of athletic guys who can play a lot of positions. We're never surprised if there's somebody playing a different position that day."

"We show up every day," Cora said. "That's the thing about this team. It's boring, and people kind of don't like it, but we show up, we prepare, we play and we turn the page. We've been doing it the whole season."

* **MassLive.com**

Chris Sale, Boston Red Sox starters post 3.32 ERA in ALDS after ugly 10.96 ERA past two postseasons

Christopher Smith

NEW YORK -- Strong starting pitching is the reason the Red Sox advanced to the ALCS. Poor starting pitching is the reason the Yankees' 2018 season ended in the ALDS.

It's that simple.

The Red Sox won 4-3 over New York here at Yankee Stadium on Tuesday to win the best-of-five ALDS 3-1.

"When our starters can go deep into games and keep it close, our offense is good enough to score runs," Brock Holt said. "So if that's the case, we feel like we can win pretty much any game."

Red Sox starting pitchers posted a 3.32 ERA (19 innings, seven earned runs) vs. the Yankees in this series. Chris Sale also hurled the eighth inning Tuesday and Rick Porcello recorded two outs in the eighth inning of Game 1. And so Red Sox starters posted a 3.05 ERA, including the two relief appearances in the series.

New York starting pitchers, meanwhile, recorded a 10.38 ERA (13 innings, 15 earned runs) vs. Red Sox hitters in the four games.

Boston failed to advance beyond the ALDS the past two years because of poor starting pitching. Boston starters combined for a 10.96 ERA (23 innings, 28 earned runs) the past two postseasons.

"Pitching always seems to get it done in October," Red Sox president Sam Kennedy said. "Rick Porcello, he was fired up to go tonight and he stepped up huge."

Red Sox in 2018 ALDS:

Sale: 5.1 IP, 2 ER.
Price: 1.2 IP, 3 ER.
Eovaldi: 7 IP, 1 ER.
Porcello 5 IP, 1 ER.

Yankees in 2018 ALDS:

Happ: 2 IP, 5 ER.

Tanaka 5 IP, 1 ER.
Severino: 3 IP, 6 ER.
Sabathia 3 IP, 3 ER.

"Getting those guys out (of the game), even though their bullpen is one of the best in baseball, if you can put up early runs and put yourself in the lead by multiple runs than you feel more comfortable going later into the game," Holt said.

Holt said Sale gave the Red Sox what they needed in Game 1. He called Eovaldi "pretty unhittable" in Game 3.

David Price is the lone Red Sox starting pitching who struggled.

"Obviously David didn't have the outing he wanted in Game 2, but we've got faith in him," Holt said.

Thanks to Eovaldi and Porcello, Price will receive another chance to prove himself in the postseason during 2018. Price likely will start Game 2 on Sunday.

The lefty earned a win at Houston's Minute Maid Park on June 2. He tossed 6 innings and he allowed three runs, all earned, five hits and one walk while striking out seven. Alex Bregman crushed a two-run home run against him.

He received a no-decision at Fenway Park against the Astros on Sept. 7, allowing two runs, both earned, two hits and two walks while striking out 10.

Boston Red Sox no longer have anything to fear at Yankee Stadium after ALDS win

Matt Vautour

The ghosts are dead.

Maybe they're still at the old Yankee Stadium, or left when George Steinbrenner died. Maybe they're living in a nice Florida retirement community with so many other old New Yorkers.

Either way there's nothing for the Boston Red Sox to fear at E 161st Street in the Bronx anymore.

They've been gone for a while actually, but Boston fans lived in fear for so long that it took a while to realize the venue, they're sacrilegiously calling Yankee Stadium, is just another ballpark.

Aaron Boone's home run off Tim Wakefield in Game 7 of the 2003 ALCS was the last gasp of whatever cosmic forces once stymied Boston in New York.

Since that day, the once snake-bitten Red Sox have been the better franchise. They've won three World Series compared to just one in New York.

Boston embarrassed the Yankees in 2004 when they became the first team to fall behind three games to none and come back to win that ALCS and then the World Series.

This year the Red Sox clinched the American League East crown for the second straight season in the Bronx and now won a playoff series there without even having to get to Game 5.

When it matters head to head, Boston has done more celebrating in the Big Apple than the Bronx Bombers have. High school kids don't even remember what it was like to worry about the Yankees or curses.

The Yankees tried desperately to restore dominance in the rivalry. They hauled in Bucky F. Dent to throw out the first pitch. The hope was that the mere sight of the Boston's 1978 villain might rattle the Red Sox or that whatever pixie dust allowed Dent, a guy with 40 home runs in 12 seasons to hit his legendary shot over the Green Monster, might rub off on the current squad.

It didn't happen.

Tuesday's game was scripted perfectly for things to go awry at so many points and so many still-worried New Englanders waited for disaster.

The shaky Boston bullpen could have faltered when Rick Porcello came out. Instead Matt Barnes looks like he's back on track and Ryan Brasier was outstanding again.

Pitching Chris Sale in relief could have been a colossal gaffe. He could have blown up in an unfamiliar role and lost the game faster than you could say "Grady Little." That could have rendered him unable or ineffective for Game 5 leaving David Price to start. That horror script writes itself. But Sale was outstanding.

The ninth inning was littered with landmines. Craig Kimbrel gave up two walks and a hit to load the bases with one out and then hit Neil Walker to force in a run.

In the old days, Gary Sheffield, Paul O'Neill or Jorge Posada would have followed with a walk-off home run that would have earned them entry with Dent and Boone in the unprintable middle name club. But Gary Sanchez settled for a sacrifice fly. Eduardo Nunez's hustling scoop, Steve Pearce's lunging stretch catch at first and the delayed gratification of replay sealed another big Red Sox win in the Bronx.

Maybe it's the Curse of Alex Rodriguez or the Hex of Jacoby Ellsbury's contract. But since 2003, Camden Yards (2011) and Tropicana Field (2008) have been the site of tougher defeats than anything the Red Sox suffered in the Bronx.

So give the ghosts their spot in Monument Park. Retire their numbers with all the others. They're not affecting games anymore. Boston owns this rivalry now.

Boston Red Sox players' confidence in Alex Cora crucial to ALDS win vs. Yankees

Chris Cotillo

NEW YORK -- In his first attempt at it, Alex Cora did what John Farrell could not in each of the last two seasons with the Red Sox: get a talented player past the ALDS.

Cora has been so impactful in his first season with the Red Sox because of his players' confidence in him. That showed throughout the ALDS, as no one questioned Cora's decisions to use starters as relievers, shift around lineups on a game-by-game basis and consistently put the Red Sox in the best position to succeed.

"He pulled the right moves," said shortstop Xander Bogaerts. "He did. I know we had some tough stuff going on with the lineup. Third game, he came and with the lineup, he looks like a genius."

The list of decisions that made Cora look like a genius is a long one, but a few stand out. Being without likely setup man Steven Wright led Cora to employ Rick Porcello and Chris Sale as his eighth-inning guys in Games 1 and 4, and both were hugely successful. Turning a Game 2 lineup with an ineffective Eduardo Nunez and Ian Kinsler into the first postseason cycle in major-league history from Brock Holt and meaningful contributions from Rafael Devers were notable. But the decision to take a step back after Game 3, look at Game 4 as a completely different entity and go back to a righty-heavy lineup against lefty CC Sabathia might have been the most impressive.

"He's very aware of what's going on around him," Kinsler said of Cora. "He's very aware of his players and he knows his players very well. He knows the right buttons to push. He's very aware as the game is going on. He knows what the other team is trying to do. He makes adjustments on the fly. He's got great feel and he's in the right spot."

Kinsler and others said the team's 100 percent confidence in Cora has made the season a special one. Porcello, a veteran who has played for three other managers in his career, said the team's trust in Cora was something that came about instantly in spring training.

"He's extremely intelligent," Porcello said. "He watches the game. He doesn't just manage off stat sheets or whatever numbers he's got in his back pocket. He uses every possible resource to help us win games. Everybody in this clubhouse realizes that. As weird as it is to say, it makes you want it that much more. It makes you want to play for that guy that much more."

Cora managed circles around fellow first-year manager Aaron Boone in the ALDS and will have to go up against his mentor, Astros manager A.J. Hinch, in the next round. As he deals with trying to beat his former team for a spot in the World Series, Cora won't have to worry about his players ever wondering if what he's doing is right for the team.

"I think we just have so much faith in Cora," Mookie Betts said. "He knows what he's doing. He hasn't steered us wrong yet so there's no point questioning his moves."

Boston Red Sox silence doubters, prove mettle with ALDS win over New York Yankees

Chris Cotillo

NEW YORK -- David Price choked again. The Red Sox bats had gone silent.

Alex Cora got so desperate with his bullpen that he had to use Rick Porcello in Game 1. Every inning a reliever pitched was a 20-minute heart attack.

New York was going to be louder. The Yankees were better built for October. The best the Red Sox might do is split in the Bronx and force a Game 5 at Fenway.

Remember those thoughts from two days ago? They're gone now. The Red Sox dismantled the Yankees in Game 3, escaped with a win in Game 4 and are headed to the ALCS against the Astros.

It's an accomplishment that came as no surprise to the Red Sox themselves, even if some fans and talking heads thought Yankee Stadium would serve as the burying ground of a 108-win club.

"Coming in here, Yankee Stadium, a lot of guys doubted us," said shortstop Xander Bogaerts. "I had the off day and turned on the TV and everything you hear is, 'Yankees gonna win it in four, Yankees in four'. I'm like, 'what is going on?' Nobody picked the Red Sox but all of us in here picked ourselves."

Boston's belief in itself is real, but nobody could've expected what happened over the last two days. There's no way Brock Holt was going to be come the first player in baseball history to hit for the cycle in the postseason. There was about the same chance of Christian Vazquez hitting a series-winning home run as Alex Cora doing it himself. And Chris Sale, who was coddled in September as much as any pitcher in recent memory, was sure as hell not going to be the setup man for Craig Kimbrel just two days before a potential start in a win-or-go-home Game 5.

It seemed impossible to think the stars would align for a Sox team that people are beginning to realize is pretty damn good. Even in a league that's as polarized as ever, setting the record for the most wins for a franchise with an 118-year history.

"How can we have 108 wins and they're saying the Yankees are gonna win in four?" Bogaerts asked. "I don't understand."

Bogaerts' teammate Ian Kinsler offered one explanation to answer Bogaerts' question.

"When you come to New York, that's the way it's gonna be," Kinsler said. "It's the Yankees. If they lose it's their fault. If they win, it's all them. It has nothing to do with us. That's the way it works in New York."

The Red Sox don't have to worry about how it works in New York anymore, at least for this year. And with one major test under their belts, they've built up enough good will to not have to worry about much of anything other than themselves and how to beat the Houston Astros.

"Anybody outside of the clubhouse can say whatever they want," Sale said. "We know who we are and we know what we can do. It comes with the business. It's the nature of the beast."

"We put up 16 yesterday and clinched it today. Keep coming with it."

Rick Porcello, C.C. Sabathia snipe over ALDS umpire after Boston Red Sox eliminate New York Yankees

Matt Vautour

The American League Division Series was over, but the sniping wasn't.

New York Yankee pitcher C.C. Sabathia lashed out at home plate umpire Angel Hernandez in his postgame/postseason comments and Red Sox pitcher Rick Porcello snapped back.

Hernandez's struggles in Game 3 were well-documented. Four of his calls at first base were challenged and three overturned. But while he had some disagreements over balls and strikes in Boston's 4-3 series-clinching win, it wasn't part of the narrative until Sabathia, the losing pitcher chimed in:

"He's absolutely terrible. He was terrible behind the plate today," said Sabathia, who gave up three runs in three innings. He was terrible at first base. It's amazing how he's getting jobs umpiring in these playoff games."

Porcello, who allowed one run in five innings to earn the win, fired back.

Throw the ball over the plate C.C. I thought Angel Hernandez called a good game. You gotta out the ball over the white part of the plate and then you get the strikes called."

The Athletic's Tim Healey and the New York Times' James Wagner reported the exchange.

Boston Red Sox hold on in 9th inning, advance to ALCS with 4-3 win over New York Yankees

Chris Cotillo

NEW YORK -- For the second time in three weeks, the Red Sox have a big reason to celebrate at Yankee Stadium.

And breathe a major sigh of relief.

The Red Sox eliminated the Yankees with a 4-3 win in Game 4 on Tuesday night, taking the ALDS in four games and advancing to the American League Championship Series against the Astros.

It didn't come without drama, however, as Craig Kimbrel's loss of command in the ninth inning almost sent the series back to Boston for Game 5.

With the Red Sox entering the ninth leading 4-1, Kimbrel walked Aaron Judge and allowed a single to Didi Gregorius before striking out Giancarlo Stanton for the first out of the inning. Kimbrel then walked Luke Voit and hit Neil Walker with a pitch to force in a run that cut the lead to two.

Gary Sanchez worked the count to 3-2 before hitting a 346-foot sacrifice fly off Kimbrel to make it 4-3. Kimbrel then got Gleyber Torres to ground out to Eduardo Nunez to end the game on a play that was confirmed via replay review.

The win clinched Boston's first trip back to the ALCS in five years and sixth ALCS appearance since 2000. The Sox won both games at Yankee Stadium during the series, outscoring New York, 20-4.

Sox starter Rick Porcello went five efficient innings, allowing just one run on four hits. The win was Porcello's first ever in the postseason, coming in his 12th career appearance (and fourth start), four days after recorded two outs in the eighth inning of Game 1.

Boston attacked Yankees starter CC Sabathia early, getting two hits off him in the first inning before breaking through in the third for three runs. J.D. Martinez plated the first run of the game on a sacrifice fly before Eduardo Nunez drove in Steve Pearce on an RBI double and Ian Kinsler followed with a single to make it 3-0.

Christian Vazquez, who caught Porcello for the first time all season Tuesday, hit his first career postseason home run off Zach Britton to make it 4-1 in the fourth. New York countered with a run on a Brett Gardner sacrifice fly an inning later.

Matt Barnes relieved Porcello with a 1-2-3 sixth before giving way to Ryan Brasier, who posted a 1-2-3 inning of his own. After Dellin Betances struck out Andrew Benintendi with the bases loaded to end the eighth, the Sox turned to Chris Sale for his second relief appearance since 2012.

Sale retired all three batters he faced, getting Gleyber Torres to fly out to center field and Andrew McCutchen to ground out to third before striking out Aaron Hicks to end the inning. Sale threw 13 pitches, with his fastball maxing out at 96.4 mph.

The Sox will have three days off between their matchup with the Astros, with Game 1 scheduled for Saturday night at 8:09 p.m. ET. Boston has home-field advantage and will host Games 1 and 2 at Fenway Park this weekend.

Cora's lineup changes pay off... again

Sox manager Alex Cora surprised some by starting Ian Kinsler and Eduardo Nunez over Brock Holt and Rafael Devers in Game 3, though Sabathia's success against left-handed hitters led Cora to going with a righty-heavy lineup in Game 4. Kinsler and Nunez both had big offensive days, with Kinsler hitting an RBI double in the third and Nunez going 2-for-4 with an RBI.

Even more puzzling was Cora's decision to start Christian Vazquez behind the plate, considering Vazquez had not caught Porcello at all during the regular season. Vazquez answered the call by hitting his first home run since June, a solo shot to right in the fourth inning to give the Sox a 4-0 lead.

Houston up next for Sox

If the Red Sox do represent the American League in the World Series, nobody will claim they did it in a cheap way. The Sox will face their second consecutive 100-win team, the Astros, in the ALCS starting Saturday.

Among the storylines heading into the series are Houston's ALDS defeat of the Red Sox last season and Alex Cora facing his old team after winning a World Series ring as their bench coach.

Series recap:

Game 1: Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 (Boston leads, 1-0)

Game 2: Yankees 6, Red Sox 2 (Series tied, 1-1)

Game 3: Red Sox 16, Yankees 1 (Boston leads, 2-1)

Game 4: Red Sox 4, Yankees 3 (Boston wins, 3-1)

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox top rival Yanks, to host Astros in ALCS

Ian Browne

NEW YORK -- How would this 108-win machine the Red Sox built fare in the playoffs?

Judging by the joyous pile-up that took place at Yankee Stadium -- the ultimate enemy territory -- they are off to a flying start.

This balanced Boston squad, led by rookie manager Alex Cora, avoided the American League Division Series elimination that ruined the 2016 and '17 seasons. The Sox fended off a dangerous Yankees team (100 wins during the regular season) in a harrowingly stressful bottom of the ninth inning and held on for a 4-3 victory in Game 4 of the ALDS on Tuesday night.

"Like I've been saying all along, we're a complete team, and we count on everybody to win games," said Cora. "The last two games, if you think about it, it was fun to watch."

The next stop will be the AL Championship Series, which will feature a matchup with the defending World Series champion Astros, the team Cora served as bench coach for last year while taking out Boston in the ALDS. Game 1 is Saturday night at Fenway Park. It is the first time Boston has advanced this far since the World Series championship season of 2013.

"Well, it feels absolutely tremendous, because it's a situation where we all know that we won the division, we won 108 games but we haven't been able to advance the last couple of years," said Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. "Taking this next step like this is a great step. We're not finished. We don't want to be finished, but you've got to take this first step, and we haven't done it in a while."

Backed by a strong starting effort by Rick Porcello, a collaborative bullpen effort -- which included Chris Sale -- and timely hitting early, the Sox took a second straight road game from the Yankees to avoid a winner-take-all Game 5.

"It's nice to get past the first round, for sure, absolutely," said Porcello, who earned the win, his first in five career postseason starts. "I think we've been a good enough ballclub to do so the last three years, and this year we finally broke through."

There was all kinds of drama in the bottom of the ninth inning when an uncharacteristically shaky Craig Kimbrel came on with a 4-1 lead and gave the Yankees life. The closer walked Aaron Judge and gave up a single to Didi Gregorius, putting runners at first and second with nobody out for the ever-dangerous Giancarlo Stanton. Kimbrel struck out Stanton, but he walked Luke Voit and hit Neil Walker to force in a run. Gary Sanchez hit a towering fly ball to deep left that had many at Yankee Stadium anticipating a walk-off grand slam, but the ball died at the warning track and fell into the glove of Andrew Benintendi.

"Well, it got a little exciting there at the end," said Kimbrel. "We've got [a three-run lead] there, and the goal is to come off the field with a win, and we were able to do it. Got a big strikeout of Stanton, and the 3-2 [pitch] to Sanchez was pretty nerve-wracking, but it got us to the second out, and we were able to get through it."

The series ended on a slow roller to third by Gleyber Torres, on which Eduardo Nunez made a bang-bang play to get the out at first. The Yankees challenged the call, briefly delaying Boston's celebration, but the out was confirmed and the Red Sox survived and advanced.

"It was exciting," said Porcello. "That's 2018 baseball; you have to wait for the replay. It didn't take away from our celebration. We felt pretty damn good about it."

Porcello came up big early, holding the Bombers to just a run on four hits while throwing 65 pitches over five innings. The veteran sinkerballer also got two big outs in relief in Game 1, when the bullpen appeared to be on the verge of breaking.

"With our bullpen and everything that was going on in the game, you don't think [about pitch count]," Porcello said. "You think of how many outs we need to win, and that's it."

This time, Cora went right to his highest-leverage setup man, Matt Barnes, who cut through the dangerous 2-3-4 (Judge, Gregorius and Stanton) portion of the lineup for a shutdown sixth. Ryan Brasier stifled New York in the seventh.

Prior to the game, Cora characterized the chances of Sale pitching in Game 4 as "very slim." Perhaps the manager was just talking about Sale's frame.

The ace stifled the Yankees in a 13-pitch eighth inning, ending it by freezing Aaron Hicks for strike three on a wicked slider. Sale had been lobbying to get some bullpen outs ever since the Red Sox arrived in New York during Sunday's off-day.

"He's been talking about it for three days already," said Cora. "In the seventh, we got together, [pitching coach] Dana [LeVangie], [bench coach] Ron [Roenicke] and myself. We already talked to the training staff about if he was OK to come in. He was in the bullpen, but it was kind of like his day. Everybody was on board. I even shouted to the dugout, 'Hey, we're all in. He's coming in.'"

Sale relished the moment.

"It was the first thing I said to AC when I came in the clubhouse today. I told him I wanted the ball at some point," Sale said. "I told him and I walked away, and he started laughing. I don't know if that was a good or a bad thing, but I feel like it worked out."

For the second night in a row, the Red Sox broke out first, this time against CC Sabathia. It started with some good fortune, when Sabathia hit Benintendi on the first pitch of the third inning. Steve Pearce followed with a single up the middle, and Benintendi raced to third. J.D. Martinez got the first run of the game home on a sac fly to deep center. With two outs, Ian Kinsler hit a scorching liner over the head of left fielder Brett Gardner for an RBI double. And Nunez made it 3-0 Red Sox when he laced a first-pitch cutter into left for an RBI single, his first hit of the series.

Sabathia came out after three, and Yankees manager Aaron Boone went to lefty Zach Britton. Christian Vazquez greeted him with what looked like a harmless flyout to right, but it barely carried into the stands for a solo homer, marking the end of a 69 at-bat long ball drought for the catcher that dated back to June 26.

The Red Sox didn't score after the fourth, and they got away with it -- barely.

After outlasting their rivals in the regular season to win the AL East, the Sox did so again when it counted most in October.

"The team we just beat in this series is a phenomenal team. From start to finish, they were a great team. They really were," said Barnes. "And none of these games are easy. We're going to have many more years of fighting this division with them. Beating a team like that, it's tough. And when you can come out on top, it kind of shows what kind of team we have from start to finish from the ownership down to the coaching staff to the players. We take great pride in that, and we're very excited to move forward."

Moving forward was the sweetest two-word phrase the Red Sox could possibly say after their misfortunes the last two Octobers.

"I thought our approach in the playoffs was lacking a little bit. We just didn't have the best approach last year," said Red Sox owner John Henry.

As for what is next?

"It should be quite a series," said Henry. "I think we're ready."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Porcello pops up Hicks: The only major stress Porcello faced was in the bottom of the fifth. After a sacrifice fly by Gardner made it 4-1, the Yankees had Torres on first with two outs. Hicks worked Porcello for a tough nine-pitch at-bat, but the Yankees' leadoff man ultimately popped up to Kinsler at second to end the threat.

"We had a three-run lead, short porch in right, dangerous left-handed hitter," said Porcello. "To me, that was one of the biggest at-bats of the game, and I was able to bear down and get him out."

SOUND SMART

Scoring first was again vital for the Red Sox in Game 4. In the 2018 postseason, teams that score first are 14-2, with the Indians taking both losses. The Sox were 74-15 (.831 winning percentage) when they scored first in the regular season.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

While Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. get most of the accolades in the outfield when it comes to defense, Benintendi is a pretty solid defender in his own right. To open the bottom of the third, Benintendi raced to the gap in left-center and made a fine catch to take extra bases away from Torres. According to Statcast™, Torres had a hit probability of 57 percent on the drive.

HE SAID IT

"Extremely [nerve-wracking], I guess is the best way to say it. In a game like this, your stomach is churning the whole game. And it was churning really fast at the end of the game. It was one of those things, you're just hoping to get that next out, and we were in a position where it happened. Craig buckled down, and he got the job done." -- Dombrowski

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Red Sox experienced delayed gratification on the final play of the game. Nunez made a tremendous play on the slow roller by Torres, but his throw to first forced Pearce to lunge for it at first base. Give Pearce credit for hanging on to the ball and keeping his foot on the bag. Torres was just late getting to the base, but the Yankees challenged. Once the call was confirmed, the Red Sox piled on top of each other in celebration of their accomplishment.

UP NEXT

Fenway Park will be rocking on Saturday night when the Astros come in for Game 1 of the ALCS. It should be a tremendous pitching matchup between likely starters Sale and Justin Verlander. It will be a

rematch of Game 1 of the ALDS last year, when Verlander and the Astros routed Sale and the Red Sox. First pitch is slated for 8:09 p.m. ET.

Sale rewards Cora's 'all in' call with 1-2-3 8th

Anthony DiComo

NEW YORK -- For three days, Chris Sale pestered his manager, anticipating the opportunity that was to come. Sale, who started the Red Sox's American League Division Series Game 1 win over the Yankees, told manager Alex Cora he wanted to pitch in relief in Game 4. He cajoled. He made himself a nuisance.

When Sale arrived at Yankee Stadium on Tuesday, he played his final card. Approaching Cora, Sale reiterated that he wanted the ball at some point, then turned and walked away without waiting for a response.

Cora laughed.

"I don't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing," Sale said afterward. "But I feel like it worked out."

Throwing a perfect eighth inning in Boston's 4-3, series-clinching victory over the Yankees, Sale built a bridge between Boston's middle relievers and closer Craig Kimbrel, securing three outs in a game the Red Sox won with the potential tying run at second base. Rather than start a decisive Game 5 at Fenway Park, Sale helped ensure the series wouldn't go that far.

"He did an outstanding job, passed the baton to Craig and we closed the deal," Cora said.

Coy before the game, Cora said he would only use Sale in a "perfect" situation, content to lean on Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and his other trusted relievers. Boston's Game 1 starter, Sale threw 93 pitches Friday at Fenway Park, after shoulder inflammation limited him to 17 innings over the final two months of the regular season.

In truth, Cora spent his pregame hours planning for this, consulting Boston's training staff about Sale's availability. Everything checked out. So as Brasier sliced through his three allotted batters in the seventh, Cora huddled with pitching coach Dana LeVangie and bench coach Ron Roenicke to make the final decision. Caught up in the moment, Cora called down the dugout: "Hey, we're all in! He's coming in."

"He's Chris Sale," Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts said. "In a game like this, you've got to bring out your big dog."

Boston's big dog went 11-4 with a 2.04 ERA over the season's first four months, before shoulder trouble shortened his season. Anticipating Sale's importance in October, the Red Sox bubble wrapped him as they cruised to the AL East title, waiting until ALDS Game 1 to unleash their ace in full.

Four days later, Sale jogged out of the bullpen and set to work. Entering a game in the eighth inning or later for the first time since 2012, Sale needed just 13 pitches to dispatch the Yankees in order. Gleyber Torres flew out to the warning track. Pinch-hitter Andrew McCutchen grounded out to third. Aaron Hicks struck out looking on a slider that dove toward the bottom edge of the zone. In the process, Sale reduced the Yankees' Fangraphs win expectancy from 9 percent to 3.5 percent.

"That's pretty much game over," infielder Brock Holt said.

Boston still had to survive a Yankees rally against Kimbrel in the ninth, but by that point, all of Cora's most difficult decisions -- and there were several -- were in the books. The Sox's lone series loss occurred in Game 2, when they mustered merely two runs at Fenway Park. Given a chance to tweak the lineup following that game, Cora made wholesale changes, replacing his catcher and three-quarters of his infield.

The new players combined to go 9-for-22 with seven runs and eight RBIs in Game 3, including Holt, who hit for the first cycle in postseason history.

When Holt returned to the bench in Game 4, that move worked, too; his replacement, Ian Kinsler, hit an RBI double during Boston's three-run, third-inning rally. Cora's decision to flip starters Nathan Eovaldi and Rick Porcello also bore fruit when they combined to allow two runs in 12 innings in Games 3 and 4, putting the Sox on the verge of a clinch.

To complete it, the Sox needed a dozen outs from a bullpen that posted a 4.28 ERA after the All-Star break -- 19th in the Majors, worst of any playoff team over that stretch. Cora turned first to Barnes and then to Brasier, each recording three quick outs. Then he called for Sale.

"I had a lot of confidence that he was going to get the job done," Sox outfielder Jackie Bradley Jr. said.

Nothing, of course, is automatic. It was just last year that Sale made his postseason debut at age 28, going 0-2 with an 8.38 ERA in two ALDS outings. In the first of them, he allowed seven runs. In the second, he came on in relief and allowed two runs over 4 2/3 innings.

Sale called that experience "as bad as it can possibly get," but also the type of thing that prepared him for Tuesday -- the type of thing he will take with him into ALCS Game 1, which he is scheduled to start Saturday night against the Astros at Fenway Park.

"You learn more from your mistakes sometimes than you do your successes," Sale said. "You try to flip the script and be better from it."

What Sale envisioned was something like this. Thronged by reporters and cameras in the Sox's postgame clubhouse, Sale wore a backwards cap with ski goggles pushed up onto it. He looked over the crowd to a spot near the wall, where one of his teammates was spraying him with champagne. Then Sale excused himself.

"I think," he said, "it's time to celebrate a little more."

*** *WEEI.com***

The story behind Chris Sale pitching in Game 4

Rob Bradford

NEW YORK -- For some, it was a shock.

Chris Sale pitching out of the bullpen was not normal, even by standards set by the weird world of the postseason.

"I had no idea," said Sale's father, Allen. "I was sitting in the stands and I started getting texts that Chris was out in the bullpen. I was nervous, but I'm always nervous."

"I had no idea," Red Sox starting pitcher Rick Porcello echoed. "The only thing you understand is if you've been the postseason before and you're in a position to clinch a series it's all hands on deck. He stepped up and took the ball. That's what that guy is all about."

And then there were others who had a pretty good idea before, even before Sale trotted out to the bullpen in the fifth inning.

"I knew before," said reliever Matt Barnes, explaining he had asked the lefty about the plan before the game. "Anytime you can have Chris Sale taking the ball in the eighth inning. I got jitters from it. I was like,

'This is sick!' I don't know who it was to but I was like, 'This is sick!' Anytime you see Chris Sale on the mound you feel pretty comfortable."

Other than the Red Sox punching their ticket to the American League Championship Series with a 4-3 win over the Yankees, the three outs Sale got in the eighth inning served as the signature moment. This was a pitcher who hadn't entered a game in the eighth inning or later since May 8, 2012, and here was serving as Craig Kimbrel's set-up man.

So, how did it all come about? That's a story within itself.

It was Sale who initiated the conversation Sunday, telling Alex Cora he wanted a chance. So the bullpen he would normally have thrown Monday was put on hold, leaving a window open for such the Game 4 appearance the lefty was clamoring for. But nothing was still close to certain.

"We basically said if Chris Sale's going in the game, this is a must-win game. We're all in," said Red Sox pitching coach Dana LeVangie. "We can't send him in there with a one-run game, because things can happen. We knew going in that he probably wasn't going to pitch unless we had a three- or four-run lead, because the chances of winning with the score like that are much greater, obviously. We talked about it beforehand, but the final decision didn't come down until two outs in the seventh."

That's right, two outs in the seventh inning.

While Sale had taken up residence in the bullpen during the fifth inning, the doubts still lingered among Cora, LeVangie and bench coach Ron Roenicke. Barnes had taken care of the sixth inning, and Ryan Brasier was locking down the seventh inning. But it was leaving the Red Sox an inning short leading into Craig Kimbrel.

"We talk about those one-inning guys go out there, Barnesy gets the three outs, do you want to send him back out? No, I don't want to send him back out, because those guys get through one inning, three outs here in Yankee Stadium, that's a huge hurdle," LeVangie said. "I felt the same way with Brasier. Let's move on to the next guy. I wanted to go with Chris. We all talked about it, myself, Ron, and Alex. We were debating it."

But the debate wasn't exactly settling itself with plenty of time to spare.

It was either bring Sale in or pitch Kimbrel for six outs.

"Craig getting six outs, the closer getting six outs, that's tough," the pitching coach explained. "I was all in for (Sale), because I know if there were any issues, the training staff would say no, you can't do this, so they're a part of this too. We all wanted to do it together, but it didn't get made until two outs in the seventh."

"He was prepared to do this and we needed to have the right situation," said Roenicke. "And I think it was."

Once Sale hit the mound the plan was for one inning. There were no firm pitch limits, with the understanding that he usually threw was could be classified as an aggressive 20-pitch-or-so bullpen between starts anyway. So out of the bullpen, he ran.

"Everybody was on board," said Cora, who told the media before the game the "chances were very slim" that Sale would see the mound in Game 4. "I even shouted to the dugout, 'Hey, we're all in. He's coming in.'"

With Christian Vazquez serving as his catcher ("I made sure I talked to Sandy (Leon), talked to Vazquy about it, make sure we're cleaning up everything. We tried to go about it the right way. It worked out," LeVangie noted regarding not utilizing Sale's usual batterymate) the lefty expertly mixed his 13 pitches. There were four changeups, five sliders and four fastballs, which maxed out at just under 96 mph.

Gleyber Torres flew out to deep center field. Andrew McCutchen grounded out to third. And Aaron Hicks was frozen on a called third strike.

One uncomfortable ninth inning later and Sale was back on schedule, looking forward to pitching Game 1 of the ALCS at Fenway Park Saturday.

"It was fun," Sale said. "I enjoyed it. Obviously, I threw out of the bullpen last year but that was my home to start my career. That was fun to get back in there and get a shot of adrenaline. Its what you want."

It's also what the Red Sox needed.

John Henry criticizes media negativity after Red Sox eliminate Yankees

John Tomase

John Henry heard the dismissals of his team after the Red Sox split the first two games of the American League Division Series, and he didn't like the negativity, not one bit.

Then again, he didn't consider anything new, either.

"I don't know. It felt like the media thought when it was 1-1 that we were down 0-2," Henry told reporters in Yankee Stadium after the Red Sox won the series in four games with a 4-3 victory. "That's what I was reading. That was the feeling. But I think the media from the first day of spring training was pretty negative even though we won the division two years in a row. Just needed to be a little more aggressive in our approach because these guys are so talented, they just needed somebody to say go get 'em. And they went and got them this year all year long."

Henry credited manager Alex Cora with guiding the Red Sox to the ALCS and a date with the defending-champion Astros.

"He's been bold since Day 1, since the first day of spring training, even before spring training," Henry said. "He had ideas of what he wanted to do, what he wanted to change in the organization and he just did a tremendous job, he and Dave (Dombrowski) and his staff, and Dave's staff. Look at the late-season acquisitions that Dave brought in. You have to give those guys in baseball operations, our coaching staff, our trainers, most of all give these players (credit)."

Eventually maybe the media will even come around, too.

Craig Kimbrel nearly cost Red Sox game with wild ninth inning vs. Yankees

John Tomase

Amidst the euphoria of New York, New York, and Chris Sale saving the day, and champagne popping in the Red Sox clubhouse was this downer -- what the hell happened to Craig Kimbrel?

The All-Star closer, who periodically battled command issues throughout the season, nearly let Tuesday's ALDS-clinching 4-3 victory over the Yankees slip away.

He loaded the bases in the ninth with a 4-1 lead and allowed two runs to score before retiring Gleyber Torres on a bang-bang play at first that survived a replay review.

"Well, it got a little exciting there at the end," Kimbrel admitted. "We got three runs there and the goal is to come off the field with a win and we were able to do it."

The Red Sox could've done with a little less excitement. Kimbrel opened the ninth with a four-pitch walk to Aaron Judge, who had already homered off Kimbrel in the ninth inning of Game 1, before allowing a two-strike single to Didi Gregorius.

Slugger Giancarlo Stanton, awful all series, swung at a pair of curveballs nowhere near the plate to give Kimbrel a little breathing room, but he walked Luke Voit and hit Neil Walker with a pitch to force in a run.

"He wasn't the usual Craig Kimbrel," conceded manager Alex Cora, "but he got three outs, and he closed out the game."

Except he nearly didn't. With a full count on slugging catcher Gary Sanchez, Kimbrel left a 98 mph fastball over the heart of the plate and Sanchez barely got under it, sending it to deep left field for a sacrifice fly.

"One pitch at a time," Kimbrel said. "Got a big strikeout of Stanton and the 3-2 to Sanchez was pretty nerve-wracking but it got to the second out and we were able to get through it."

The game ended on Torres' slow roller to third, where a charging Eduardo Nunez fielded and made a strong throw to nip the hustling rookie by half a step. The Yankees challenged, but it wasn't that close.

"We were pretty confident he was out," Kimbrel said. "Once we saw it on the board, it was a little sigh of relief and we could come in here and celebrate."

Red Sox eliminate Yankees to move on to ALCS vs. defending champion Astros

John Tomase

The Yankees won 100 games and in almost any other year would've coasted to homefield advantage throughout the playoffs. But not this year.

This year belongs to the Red Sox.

Boston didn't win 108 games to lose in the Division Series, and it definitely didn't win 108 and the American League East to lose to the Yankees.

On Tuesday night, the Red Sox took care of business with their second straight win in New York, claiming the series in four games and setting up a meeting in the American League Championship Series with the Astros, who are flying high and ready to defend their World Series title after sweeping the Indians.

There will be lots of time to discuss Houston between now and Saturday's Game 1, however. First the Red Sox needed to eliminate the Yankees, and they dispatched their longtime rivals with a 4-3 victory that seemed in control until closer Craig Kimbrel couldn't find the plate in the ninth.

The Red Sox were just a little better than the Yankees all year, a trend that continued in this series. The Red Sox won the division by eight games and the season series 10-9. They absorbed every blow the Yankees landed all year, including New York's 6-2 victory in Game 2 that sent the series back to the Bronx with a chance for the Yankees to clinch at home.

Instead, they watched the Red Sox celebrate after a 16-1 beatdown in Game 3 followed by a strong outing from Rick Porcello and enough offense to withstand a wild ninth from Kimbrel, who made things dicey in the ninth by loading the bases and allowing a pair of runs before retiring Gleyber Torres on a bang-bang grounder to third that was upheld on replay to end it.

The victory fit the selfless profile of so many that came before it. Manager Alex Cora opened himself to criticism by benching Game 3 hero Brock Holt, who had just hit for the first postseason cycle in history. But Holt's replacement, veteran Ian Kinsler, responded with an RBI double and run scored during the three-run third that won the game.

The Red Sox also received an unlikely homer from catcher Christian Vazquez, who snuck one out the other way to right field. The unheralded Steve Pearce, acquired in July to provide right-handed thump, delivered two hits and a run. Third baseman Eduardo Nunez recorded a pair of hits and an RBI himself.

Even the maligned Red Sox bullpen did its part, with Matt Barnes mowing down the heart of the order in the sixth before Ryan Brasier, Chris Sale and Kimbrel handled the final nine outs.

That's right, Chris Sale. The ace and potential Game 5 starter instead entered in relief and delivered a 1-2-3 frame.

Porcello put them in the position to win with five innings of one-run ball. He allowed four hits and kept the Yankees in the biggest parts of the park.

The challenge ahead is considerably more perilous, however. The Astros are the most complete team in baseball and their offense is once again rolling. The defending champs just swept the Indians and are itching for some national exposure, as star third baseman Alex Bregman made clear after beating the Indians in Game 3, wondering if Tiger Woods would be asked to tee off before noon or Floyd Mayweather to fight on an undercard.

Game times have already been released, and Red Sox-Astros will air in primetime on Saturday and Sunday from Boston.

The Yankees have been vanquished, and now it's on to the Astros.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Chris Sale to Red Sox doubters: 'Keep comin' with it'

Evan Drellich

NEW YORK — Chris Sale does not mind if you doubt, have doubted, or intend to doubt the 2018 Red Sox.

After 13 pitches in a perfect eighth-inning appearance on Tuesday night in the decisive game of the ALDS, Sale was asked about the level of respect the Sox received leading into and during the series. The Sox finished off the Yanks with two consecutive wins in New York, the last one a 4-3 victory on Tuesday.

“We’re here now. Doesn’t matter. Anybody outside of this clubhouse can say whatever they want,” Sale said during the champagne celebration. “We know who we are and we know what we can do. Comes with the business, You know? It's the nature of the beast. It is what it is.

“Anyone can say whatever they want, but we know who we are, we know what we can do and put up 16 [runs] yesterday and clinched it today, so. Keep comin’ with it.”

Sale was the scheduled Game 5 starter, and now can rest up for Game 1 against the Astros instead. With a three-run lead, manager Alex Cora wasn’t afraid to use Sale, even with the possibility he’d have to start two days later if something went wrong and the Yankees came back to win Game 4. Sale entered with the Sox ahead 4-1.

“He's been talking about it for three days already,” Cora said. “In the seventh, we got together, Dana [LeVangie], Ron [Roenicke], and myself. We already talked to the training staff about if he was okay to come in. He was in the bullpen, but it was kind of like his day. Everybody was on board. I even shouted to the dugout, ‘Hey, we’re all in. He's coming in.’ ”

Rick Porcello, the winning pitcher who threw five innings of one-run ball, said he knew from Sale's first pitch to Gleyber Torres that he was on point.

"Awesome. He's a gamer," Porcello said. "Everything that's been through this year, and he's pitching the eighth inning. Can't say enough about him. It's not just the talent that makes Chris Sale, it's everything. It's everything he's got inside."

Red Sox bullpen passes big first test, with some turbulence

Evan Drellich

NEW YORK — It wasn't pretty, but the Red Sox bullpen twice held on against the most home-run happy team to grace the regular season in major league history. The Sox 'pen bent in Games 1 and 4 of the American League Division Series, but never did break, a big home run to Gary Sanchez that put Game 2 out of reach aside.

Sale to Red Sox doubters: 'Keep comin' with it'

The expected weakness of the Sox, who are four wins from the World Series, indeed looked vulnerable. But the relief corps also came through well enough to send the Red Sox past a fellow 100-win team in the Yankees.

"We were able to slip guys in," Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Tuesday night. "I think our bullpen did a fine job during the postseason. Craig [Kimbrel] struggled today. It doesn't happen too often, but when you get to that point with your closer, that's who you're trying to get to and you look at it today and most of the series, they did a really fine job."

Those who pitched in relief for the Red Sox in the DS allowed seven runs in 17 innings (a 3.71 ERA) with 17 strikeouts and 11 walks. There were 11 hits given up, two of them home runs, and opponents hit .183 against them.

"We figured we would use some starters at times, you can do that with some of the time," Dombrowski said. "And also we had to do even do a little bit more adjustments, because we felt that we would have Steven Wright, but he was a loss for us. But our guys were able to juggle that and Alex [Cora] did a good job handling the 'pen to get us ready to use the guys and [Heath] Hembree stepped in and pitched well for us."

The Yankees, who had many bigger names in their 'pen, had a 4.91 ERA in relief in the series — but most of that was concentrated in a disastrous Game 3. Of the 12 earned runs Yankees relievers were charged in the series, 10 were in Game 3 (and that includes Austin Romine's performance.)

Craig Kimbrel was on the verge of a meltdown in the ninth inning Tuesday night, when two runs scored to cut the 4-1 lead he began the frame with to 4-3. A huge strikeout of Giancarlo Stanton — whom the Red Sox did not allow to homer in the series — in the inning helped Kimbrel escape trouble, and the game ended on a great play from Eduardo Nunez at third base, plus a stretch from Steve Pearce at first base.

"Nerve-racking," Rick Porcello said of the ninth. "I was on the railing and I had to step back and sit on the bench, 'cause I couldn't watch. Just 'cause you know I'm so nervous. But Craig did a hell of a job. ... It was awesome."

Porcello said he had never been that nervous in a game before.

"I'm not going out there trying to do that," Kimbrel said. "I'm trying to have a 1-2-3 inning but it doesn't always work out like that. At the end of the day we got the win and we're looking forward to Houston."

Kimbrel was one of two regular Sox relievers — not a converted starter — to allow an earned run in the series, with three in 2 1/3 innings. Brandon Workman allowed one.

In an encouraging sign, the other usual late-inning relievers from the regular season, like Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Heath Hembree and Joe Kelly, combined for 9 2/3 innings with no earned runs and just two hits allowed. They walked six and fanned eight.

Henry praises Sox, criticizes media

The only game the Sox allowed inherited runners to score was in Game 1, when three of seven came home. Four inherited runners were stranded in Game 2, the only other game Sox relievers had inherited runners.

The Yanks, meanwhile, allowed seven inherited runners to score, five of them in that Game 3 slopfest.

John Henry praises Red Sox top to bottom, criticizes media

Evan Drellich

NEW YORK — Red Sox principal owner John Henry had not seen his team clinch a postseason series in New York in 14 years. He has now seen two champagne celebrations at Yankee Stadium in roughly two weeks, one for the division and one for the right to play for the American League pennant, both at the Yankees' expense. But he didn't take the opportunity during Tuesday's champagne celebration to poke the Yanks any further.

"It's a tremendous series, I mean this is the best series perhaps in sports, certainly in baseball," Henry said. "So it's a great way to start."

"This is just such a great rivalry. They're going to have a great team again next year, so I look forward to another 19 games next year and hopefully you know we'll see 'em in the playoffs again."

Henry praised manager Alex Cora as "bold since Day One," and even before, dating to the winter. He praised Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and the staff for both men. Repeatedly, he noted the late-season acquisitions Dombrowski made, and credited the players above all.

He also noted what everyone else felt.

"It was too close for comfort," Dombrowski said of Game 4's ninth inning. "That was a heck of a play on that last throw. ... [Steve] Pearce made some great plays."

On the impending match-up with the Astros, Henry said he couldn't think of anything more fun, and that it would be a great seven-game series.

"These are arguably the three strongest teams in baseball and were all year and it's going to be an exciting series, I can't wait," Henry said.

Henry, who has plenty of media experience with Fenway Sports Group's ownership of NESN and his purchase of the Boston Globe, also took a jab at some of the coverage of his team.

"It felt like the media thought at 1-1 that we were down 0-2," Henry said when asked about the Red Sox being potentially underestimated. "That's what I was reading, that that was the feeling. I think media, first day of spring training, was pretty negative, even though we won the division two years in a row. We just needed to be a little more aggressive in our approach, because these guys are so talented. [The players needed] somebody to say go get 'em, and they want and they went and got 'em this year, all year long."

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Make no mistake, Alex Cora is the difference for these Red Sox

Greg A. Bedard

Ok, so it didn't go exactly to plan. Did anyone really think a Red Sox-Yankees postseason series would wrap up nice and tidy bow?

Of course not.

But in the nerve-wracking end, the Boston Red Sox vanquished the New York Yankees and are moving onto their first American League Championship Series since 2013, when they delivered a most unexpected world title.

And after disappointing losses in the ALDS the previous two years, make no mistake: Alex Cora is the reason why the Red Sox advanced to face the Astros following a 4-3 win over the Yankees on Tuesday night.

Sure, it certainly helped to have J.D. Martinez in the middle of the lineup and as an example to his teammates of the hard work and preparation needed to be one of the best in the game. Absolutely, Martinez was a huge factor in the 108 wins and in the 3-1 series win over New York. Martinez led Sox starters in average (.357) and RBI (six).

But when it came to pushing this group over and beyond the finish line, from the franchise record in victories to ending a two-year drought of being one-and-one in the postseason, it was Cora who was the engine.

The two nights in New York (and most of this series) were basically a Picasso of postseason managing. From deciding to bring Rick Porcello out of the bullpen to rescue Game 1, to pushing up Nathan Eovaldi to be the Game 3 starter and having Porcello go again in Game 4, Cora pushed every right button.

After watching super subs Brock Holt, Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez help power the Red Sox to 16-1 victory lap on Monday night, Cora stayed with his gut and sat Holt and Devers back down in favor of Ian Kinsler and Eduardo Nunez. Even keeping Vazquez in the lineup was out of the ordinary — he hadn't caught Porcello in any of his starts this season.

Just like Monday night, Cora's moves worked perfectly. Kinsler and Nunez both drove in runs in the three-run third inning. And Vazquez homered in the fourth to give the Red Sox an insurance run at 4-0 that became a lifeline by the time the final out was recorded.

Then, there was the bullpen. Despite having only thrown 65 pitches and with a 4-1 lead, Cora told Porcello he was done after five.

Enter Matt Barnes in the sixth ... three up, three down.

It was Ryan Brasier's turn in the seventh, and the man with a spring training non-roster invitee number (70) sat down his three batters in order.

Up in his box, Dave Dombrowski had the same question many of us had.

"We said, 'Who was going to pitch the eighth?'" the general manager said.

Out walked Chris Sale, in an enormous gamble. If the inning got messy, Cora was putting his Game 5 starter at risk. ... Thirteen pitches, eight strikes, three-straight outs. Bingo.

They had the bridge to closer Craig Kimbrel. OK, so the bridge was a little shaky and you thought the Sox were going to go headfirst into the ravine at any point, but they survived.

Just another day with Alex Cora in his first season as a manager — in Boston or anywhere. It's still unbelievable that Cora is a rookie skipper. One look in the Yankees dugout during this series reinforced how the Red Sox struck gold with their manager.

"We're very fortunate to have a guy in A.C. who is not very far removed from playing the game, which definitely helps," said Barnes. "You have a guy who won the World Series last year, so he knows what it takes to win a World Series.

"But what he did in the postseason from pushing the right buttons, it seemed like every button he pushed was the right one. I was just talking about it from putting in Brock Holt last night, who hasn't played in a week, and the guy hits for the cycle. He puts in Vazquez and he's got a couple knocks and an RBI. Devers played the bat well with a couple knocks last night. And then he puts Kinsler and Nuny in again tonight, and you got RBIs out of those guys. It seemed like every button he's pushing is the right one."

You don't win all those games and sweep the Yankees in their building in the postseason just by pushing the right buttons. No, with Cora it has been something different. Something almost unspoken. From the opening days of spring training — even before that when he reached out and made a personal contact with all the players — he's known the pulse of this crew as if it were hooked up to an EKG machine.

Cora has known exactly the right buttons to push and when. From making the call for Hanley Ramirez to be shipped out instead of losing Blake Swihart. For sticking with his main catchers, Vazquez and Sandy Leon, when they couldn't hit a lick. He never wavered when the calls came from Bradley to be sent to the bench. Cora made the right call to sit Devers in the latter stages of the season and to give Nunez a shot at third. There was also the shot he took at Luis Severino for throwing at Mookie Betts in the four-game sweep at Fenway that basically ended the AL East race.

Cora also hasn't been shy about making sure his players are accountable publicly and privately. The latest lesson came after Eduardo Rodriguez failed to hustle covering first in the Game 2 loss at Fenway. Cora sent his message to Rodriguez, and then reinforced it by throwing him in the ninth inning of the Game 3 beatdown.

And then, finally, there was the decision to bring Sale into the game Tuesday night. As the lanky left-hander jogged in from the bullpen, Cora turned to his bench and said, "Hey, we're all in. He's coming in."

The message to this players: I believe in you guys. We finish this now. There's no tomorrow.

And, as they have so many times during this season, the players responded to their skipper's call.

"I think he's got a great feel for the game," Barnes said. "He understands the game. He does a great job of managing and communicating with everybody on what's going on, and I think it showed in this series, and it will be awesome moving forward."

After two years of postseason disappointments, the Red Sox broke through in Cora's first season as manager. That's not a coincidence.

Bullpen plan works like a charm — until the ninth

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK — After all that, after all the angst, it wasn't the eighth inning — or the seventh or sixth, for that matter — that the Red Sox had to worry about.

It was ... the ninth.

Getting the last three outs was the last thing the Red Sox had been worrying about.

For much of the season, the team's middle-to-late inning relief incited plenty of worries. And when the team didn't upgrade its bullpen at the non-waiver trade deadline, it seemed like relief pitching would ultimately represent their fatal flaw.

But with a ticket to the ALCS up for grabs, the Red Sox navigated their way through the sixth, seventh and eighth without incident, if with a slightly altered game plan.

Leading 4-1 after five, Alex Cora turned first to Matt Barnes, who got the Yankees in order, retiring the team's formidable trio of Aaron Judge, Didi Gregorius and Giancarlo Stanton. Next came Ryan Brasier, who took care of the next three hitters in succession.

Then came the curveball. Hours before the game, asked about the notion of Chris Sale pitching out of the bullpen on what would be his normal "throw" day, Cora coyly all but dismissed the suggestion, noting that while Sale had done his fair share of lobbying, he could envision it happening.

"It has to be something that's too perfect," said Cora of scenario, concluding that the likelihood was "very slim, very slim."

Then, slim showed up in the eighth inning – all 6-foot-6 of him, trotting out of the visitors' bullpen.

"It was the first thing I said to A.C. when I came into the clubhouse today," said Sale. "I told him I wanted the ball at some point. I just told him and walked away and he started laughing. I didn't know if that was a good or bad thing, but it worked out."

Indeed, Sale toyed with the Yankees, getting a flyout, an infield grounder and a called strikeout.

Cora had done his homework. He got permission from the training staff to use Sale three days after his last start and two days prior to possibly his next one.

Then, it was time to start spreading the news.

"I even shouted to the dugout: 'Hey, we're all in; he's coming in!' " recounted Cora afterward.

Nine up, nine down from the sixth through the eighth, with the outs recorded by, respectively, the eighth-inning guy, the journeyman castoff who wasn't part of the organization when spring training began, and of course, their ace starting pitcher.

Just like they drew it up.

Then, inexplicably, came the hard part: the ninth.

Closer Craig Kimbrel has been dependable all season, having saved 42 games while blowing only five. The worst was over. They had set down nine in a row in the minefield that stretched from the sixth through eighth. Now it was time to hand the ball to Kimbrel, get three outs before the Yankees got three runs, and move on to the next round.

But it wasn't that easy. Kimbrel walked Judge, then yielded a seeing-eye single to right by Gregorius. After a strikeout of Stanton, another walk filled the bases and Kimbrel plunked Neil Walker to force in a run. A sacrifice fly by Gary Sanchez scored another.

The tying run stood on second. The potential winning run on first. The Stadium rocked from the noise, and if you looked closely, you could almost see the field tilt in the Yankees' favor, so strong was their sudden momentum.

But Kimbrel, who had bent, wouldn't completely break. He got rookie Gleyber Torres to hit a slow roller. Eduardo Nunez charged and fired. Steve Pearce caught, then stretched.

The call at first was out, but replay was needed.

The Red Sox milled around the infield awkwardly, wanting to begin their celebration while the replay crew watched the play at first.

For a change, justice delayed was not justice denied.

“Kimbrel didn’t have it,” conceded shortstop Xander Bogaerts, “but that’s why he’s one of the best closers. He found a way to finish the job.”

Asked how he escaped, Kimbrel, nearly bored by the question in the chaos of the celebration, “Make one pitch at a time.”

For a new generation of Red Sox, Yankee Stadium no longer haunting

Sean McAdam

NEW YORK — Once, it was their own personal house of horrors, where leads disappeared, championship dreams went to die and the Red Sox seemed incapable of victory — especially when they needed one most.

Yankee Stadium was the franchise’s seventh circle of hell. Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here.

The 2003 ALCS was the low point, a refresher course no one in New England needs or wants. There are gruesome slasher movies with more uplifting endings.

But beginning in 2004, it began to turn. When the Red Sox came storming back from being down three games to none, the ugly past was exorcized for good.

Which doesn’t mean it’s an easy ballpark in which to win, especially when the home team has the firepower in the lineup and a seemingly endless supply of hard-throwers on retainer in the bullpen. Tuesday night was a stark reminder of that.

The Sox survived, alright, but with zero margin for error. What looked like a comfortable three-run cushion heading into the bottom of the ninth became a perilous slog through the final three outs. How narrow a win was their 4-3, ALDS clinching triumph? It ended with the potential tying run on second, the potential winning run on first and uncertainty over whether the 27th out had been recorded. Let’s go to the videotape.

Special assistant Tony La Russa, who has seen his share of these, sat in an office off the main clubhouse, with a satisfied smile on his face, perhaps unable to still process the harrowing ninth.

“It’s never easy,” he said in a voice borne of experience, “but that one was hard.”

Hard, yes. Impossible, no. That was pre-2004.

That doesn’t mean the big wins get handed to you here. You have to earn them, and the Red Sox did — with clutch hitting (they hit .400 with runners in scoring position), pressurized baserunning, stout starting pitching, and just enough outs from their bullpen.

And it doesn’t mean the Yankees won’t try to drag the Red Sox into the past. They had Bucky Dent, whose moment in the sun happened 40 years ago this month, throw out the first pitch Tuesday night, to incite the crowd and maybe spook the Sox.

It didn’t work. The Red Sox aren’t shackled by their past anymore. That’s over.

“We definitely had a monkey on our back (here) for a lot of decades,” said principal owner John Henry.

The new generation of Red Sox players barely know about the dark past. And why should they? As Dennis Eckersley famously exclaimed: “That’s history, pal!” And ancient history at that.

Think of it: in two of the last three years, the Red Sox have clinched the American League East title here. Two years ago, it was hugely awkward as the Red Sox celebrated only after backing in, having lost the game with the Yankees on a walk-off grand slam.

This September, there was nothing to apologize for: they won it on their own, led the division every day from July 2 on, and won on merit, by eliminating the Yankees from the division race themselves.

And finally, there was Tuesday night, when the Red Sox capped the Division Series by winning two in a row on the Yankees’ home turf. Some Red Sox were incredulous that many people expected them to fold after Sunday’s loss.

“How can we have 108 wins and they’re like, ‘Yankees gonna win in four?’” said Xander Bogaerts. “I don’t understand.”

Maybe old storylines die hard. Maybe some regard 2004 as an outlier.

But these Red Sox players aren’t interested in how things used to be. They came in, put it to the Yankees over two nights and emerged with a ticket to the ALCS.

“Every time you win, it just adds to the history of your own organization,” said Jason Varitek, who experienced life from sides here in 2003 and 2004. “And once you break (the futility streak), you’re good because it doesn’t loom over you anymore. But for these guys, they don’t think a lot about that. It didn’t matter if (we won it) here or (back home). They don’t really care.”

Many of the stars of the 2018 Red Sox were in grade school when the Sox were last taunted about their inability to win here.

They don’t wear that shame. Instead, they bathed themselves in champagne and celebrated madly. To them, it could have happened in Cleveland or Oakland or anywhere.

As Varitek, standing back and soaking in the scene, observed: “It just happened to be here.”

It could have been anywhere. But it wasn’t. It was Yankee Stadium, a scene that would have been unthinkable 15 years ago.

When the Sox took care of business in St. Louis in 2004, Theo Epstein stood in a jubilant clubhouse and shouted to anyone who would listen: “Now, 1918 is just another year in which we won the World Series.”

And now, Yankee Stadium is just another ballpark where they clinched the American League Division Series.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 4, Yankees 3 – Red Sox manage to escape the Bronx, move on to ALCS

Sean McAdam

Ninth-inning madness: It’s never easy in Yankee Stadium and this one was no exception. Leading 4-1 in the ninth, closer Craig Kimbrel struggled mightily, with two walks, a hit batsman, a sacrifice fly and a single as two runs scored. It came down to the Yankees having the tying run at second, and the Sox, via a charging play from Eduardo Nunez, just barely nipping Gleyber Torres on a slow roller to third. Even that required a replay challenge, with the call finally upheld. The Sox stood in suspended animation, poised to celebrate, but not quite ready to erupt until the out was made official. “It was nerve-wracking,” said Steve

Pearce of the whole ninth inning. “That crowd starts to get into it and you can see the whole momentum starting to shift. We’re glad we ended it when it did. The whole inning was pure drama — might as well throw that (replay challenge) wrinkle in, too. Once it was confirmed, it was awesome to celebrate with teammates. You can’t draw it up any better than that.”

Sale got the 8th: Before the game, Cora told reporters that it would require the “perfect situation” for him to give in to Chris Sale’s lobbying to contribute out of the bullpen. Perfection arrived in the eighth. After the Sox got scoreless innings from Matt Barnes (sixth) and Ryan Brasier (seventh), the Sox needed a bridge to Kimbrel. Enter, Sale. “He’s been talking about it for three days,” said Cora. “In the seventh, we got together — Dana (LeVangie), Ron (Roenicke, bench coach) and myself. We already talked to the training staff. He was in the bullpen, but it was kind of like his day (to throw).” Sale came in and got a flyout, a groundout and a called strikeout, putting away the Yankees 1-2-3.

Porcello gets them started: Like rotation-mates David Price and Chris Sale (until Game 1, that is), Rick Porcello had never won a postseason start when this series began. But that changed with his performance Tuesday night, as he gave the Sox five strong innings, allowing a single run on just four hits. Porcello had thrown just 65 pitches through five, but got the hook as Alex Cora navigated the final 12 outs with his bullpen. “I wasn’t surprised,” said Porcello. “I think we all know now how the postseason works. We’ve got a phenomenal bullpen. I wasn’t really thinking about that; I was thinking about how many more outs we needed.” Only once — in the fifth, with a one-out double by Gary Sanchez and an infield single by Gleyber Torres — did Porcello have two Yankees on base in the same inning, but he got out of that jam by getting Aaron Hicks on a pop-up to second. “Rick pitched his ass off,” said an appreciative Sale.

TURNING POINT

It didn’t come back to haunt them, but it nearly did — in the eighth inning, the Red Sox had first-and-third with one out, and eventually, loaded the bases with two down. They couldn’t get an insurance run home that inning, which nearly cost them when the Yankees scored two in the ninth and had the potential tying run on second and the potential winning run on first.

TWO UP

Christian Vazquez: Given the start behind the plate for the second straight night, his solo homer in the fourth proved to be the difference.

Steve Pearce: He had two hits and executed a perfect stretch in the ninth inning to grab the throw from Nunez, making sure to keep his foot on the bag, for the final out of the game.

ONE DOWN

Craig Kimbrel: Yes, he got the final out to preserve the win and earned the save. But he was far from sharp, with two runs allowed, two walks issued, a hit batsman and a single allowed in his one inning.

QUOTE OF NOTE

“I even shouted in the dugout, ‘Hey, we’re all in! He’s coming in.’”
— Cora, on the decision to go to Chris Sale for the eighth inning.”

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Sox outscored the Yankees 27-14 in the series.

The Sox have won seven of their last eight postseason games against the Yankees.

Rick Porcello earned his first postseason win.

With RISP, Red Sox hitters hit .400 (14-for-35) for the ALDS.

Xander Bogaerts hit safely in every game of the series.

After allowing four homers in the first two games, the Red Sox didn’t allow a homer in the last two games.

Red Sox starters had a 3.32 ERA in the series.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox are off until Saturday when they host Game 1 of the ALCS against Houston at 8:09 p.m.. Presumably, it will be LHP Chris Sale vs. RHP Justin Verlander

*** *The Athletic***

‘You have to bring out your big dogs’: Why the Red Sox turned Chris Sale into a reliever vs. Yankees

Jen McCaffrey

NEW YORK – Ian Kinsler was at the plate against Yankees reliever Dellin Betances up 4-1 in the top of the eighth inning on Tuesday night, but all eyes were on the visitors bullpen in left-center field at Yankee Stadium.

A familiar, wiry figure stood up, started loosening and began throwing pitches. It was Chris Sale and he'd been begging for this situation.

Hours earlier, Red Sox manager Alex Cora said it would have to be a perfect scenario for him to call on Sale in relief in Game 4 of the American League Division Series.

That situation presented itself in the bottom of the eighth. After five innings from starter Rick Porcello, Cora used relievers Matt Barnes in the sixth and Ryan Brasier in the seventh to hold the Yankees to one run. Extending Craig Kimbrel for the final six outs seemed risky.

So Cora, pitching coach Dana LeVangie and bench coach Ron Roenicke huddled in one corner of the dugout to make sure they were on the same page about Sale.

Their ace starter would be on the mound for Game 5 and had been on the disabled list twice over the last two months with shoulder inflammation. The last time Sale had pitched in relief was exactly one year ago in the ALDS against the Houston Astros in Game 4. He'd fired 4 2/3 innings, allowing two runs.

On Tuesday night he played bullpen hero once again. Here's how the decision to pitch Sale in the eighth unfolded:

Cora: "He's been talking about it for three days already. In the seventh, we got together, Dana, Ron, and myself. We already talked to the training staff about if he was OK to come in. He was in the bullpen, but it was kind of like his day (to pitch on the side). Everybody was on board. I even shouted to the dugout, 'Hey, we're all in. He's coming in.'"

Sale: "First thing I told AC when I came in the clubhouse — I was ready for multiple innings, beginning, middle or end of the game. Didn't matter. I wanted to get in there."

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski: "We had talked that the potential existed. So, we're sitting up there after the sixth and the seventh, we thought he was going to pitch the eighth. And we saw him throwing, so it wasn't a complete surprise by any means, because we had talked about if we were in a spot where we could close off the series, he would use him for an inning."

LeVangie: "It was about the trust factor that we were comfortable with him coming into the game knowing there potentially could be a Game 5. For me, I was very comfortable with the move, knowing who he is, what he did last year for us, and the training staff was in on it as well so. For me it was an easy decision."

Roenicke: "He had talked to Alex a couple days ago about it and we thought about it and so he didn't throw his bullpen when he normally would, which would have been (Monday) or (Tuesday). And I ran up here to talk to (athletic trainer) Brad (Pearson) and he felt good about him throwing in the bullpen and he was ready for it."

With Boston up 4-1 lead in the eighth and the threat of a Yankees comeback looming, Sale was going to be limited to one inning of work.

Sale: "I told him I was ready to go, it didn't matter when he wanted me. Whenever. Obviously we had to see how the game played out a little bit but from the fifth inning on I was ready."

Roenicke: "This was like a bullpen (session). His bullpens are not a calm bullpen. He is full-go in his bullpens so I don't think this would have been a setback."

LeVangie: "We were going one inning, and then him starting Thursday. We would have been respectful of him pitching tonight but no, we worked the pitch count to see where he was, how stressful the innings were, all the above."

Just after Andrew Benintendi struck out with the bases loaded in the top of the eighth, Sale fired his last pitch in the bullpen walked down the stairs and out the door in left-center, jogging toward the mound.

LeVangie: "We almost felt like this needs to be an automatic win if we're going to use Chris Sale in this situation. We're all in for the win here."

Brock Holt: "Hell yeah. I saw him warming up but obviously I didn't know he was going to be in the bullpen but I saw him warming up and figured he was going to come in the eighth. (You) see him come in you feel pretty good about it."

Mookie Betts: "In a game like this, you have to bring out your big dogs and he's one of them."

Nathan Eovaldi: "I knew he was going to be available, but I didn't know in that circumstance or situation that he'd be coming in, but once I saw him rolling up there in the pen I was excited."

Sale first got Gleyber Torres to fly out to deep right-center field, forcing Jackie Bradley Jr. onto the warning track.

Then pinch-hitter Andrew McCutchen grounded out third.

Leadoff hitter Aaron Hicks was next.

Sale got him looking on a slider, swinging on a changeup, then came back to the slider to freeze Hicks in the box.

Sale: "It was fun. I enjoyed it. Obviously I threw out of the bullpen last year but that was my home to start my career. That was fun to get back in there."

Betts: "Coming into the game, we wanted to win this Game 4 because anything can happen in Game 5. Got to use him in a spot like that."

Sale needed just 13 pitches to get through the three batters. Nine of the 13 pitches he threw were off-speed pitches, changeups or sliders. He topped out at 96 mph with his fastball.

It was such an easy inning, questions about whether he'd return for the ninth inning arose.

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy: "I was texting back and forth with my dad and I said, 'Chris Sale or Craig Kimbrel?' and he goes, 'Whatever Alex says.'"

Cora had already decided Sale was done and turned to Kimbrel for the ninth. The closer made things interesting, allowing two runs, but escaped the jam (albeit after a 60-second delay on the final play when the throw to first was challenged).

Sale: "It doesn't get much better than this. This is what we've all wanted our entire lives so to get it is special, but we're not done yet."

Anatomy of a celebration: Inside the Red Sox 'champagne party' at Yankee Stadium

Chad Jennings

NEW YORK – It was 11:43 when the first unison cheer erupted from the Red Sox clubhouse and filtered into the concrete walkway beneath Yankee Stadium on Tuesday night. The door opened, the team's ownership group walked in, and the cheer went up again, another random mix of shouts and hollers, just like in the movies.

Speaking of which, Billy Crystal was just walking by in his Yankees gear, making his way to the exit.

It had been nine minutes since the final play of the American League Division Series, and eight minutes since it had been officially ruled an out. The Red Sox had advanced to the AL Championship Series for the first time in five years, and the champagne was flowing. Assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister posted a video to Twitter from inside the room. The Red Sox were listening to "New York, New York."

"The last two games, if you think about it," manager Alex Cora said. "It was fun to watch."

Those last two games had come in the Bronx. At Yankee Stadium. "As intimidating as any place in sports," team president Sam Kennedy said.

Those games came immediately after Yankees slugger Aaron Judge trolled the Red Sox by blasting "New York, New York" on his way out of Fenway Park after Game 2. At that point, the series was tied. The Yankees were heading home. They seemed to have the momentum.

But the Red Sox won two in a row in this place, and they turned that clubhouse into their personal party room for the second time in less than a month. They'd also clinched the division in New York, so they knew the drill.

Clubhouse attendants and grounds crew had begun hanging the protective plastic with two outs in the bottom of the eighth when Chris Sale was on the mound and the Red Sox had a three-run lead. The staff was still hanging plastic and putting it on the floor when Craig Kimbrel entered and put the first two runners on base in the bottom of the ninth.

"I'm taping it down, and I look up," Yankees visiting clubhouse manager Lou Cucuzza Jr. said. "'Holy shit, first and second, nobody out!'"

Kimbrel would walk another batter to load the bases. Yankee Stadium blasted Motley Crue's '80s anthem "Kickstart My Heart," as if anyone's heart needed the encouragement.

By that point, most of the Yankee Stadium grounds crew was sitting in the Red Sox clubhouse ready to rip the plastic from the walls if the Yankees came back to win. Cucuzza had the champagne and beer in rolling bins, ready to shove it all into a laundry room where the players would never see it.

A hit batter brought in a run. Gary Sanchez's sacrifice fly brought in another to make it 4-3.

"Goddamn, Sanchez got a hold of it, too," Cucuzza said.

And, so, it was a one-run game by the time Gleyber Torres came to the plate. That's when Kimbrel, Eduardo Nunez, Xander Bogaerts and Christian Vazquez gathered behind the mound to discuss switching up the signs. They didn't want to give anything away. It was a 1-2 curveball that Torres hit for a slow roller to third base. Nunez charged, scooped and fired to first. The play was close, and Steve Pearce nearly came off the bag, but it was an out.

Nunez hurt his ankle on the play – he said he'll be fine – but he began high-fiving even as he crouched on one knee being checked by trainers while the umpires reviewed the play.

“We knew,” Nunez said. “We know they make the replay for just trying (to not let the game be over), but we know we had him.”

When the out was official, Nunez began hopping up and down on one leg. He tugged on Kimbrel's beard. Bogaerts hopped on one leg, too, just to joke around with his teammate. A small group of fans along the third-base line chanted, “Let's go, Red Sox!” and it was onto the clubhouse.

It was 11:50 by the time media was allowed inside, and within seconds, bullpen catcher Mike Brenly was dumping a beer down Sale's shirt. Dustin Pedroia might as well have been wearing a Halloween costume with his hoodie pulled tight around a pair of giant goggles. A group of relievers – Matt Barnes, Brandon Workman, Heath Hembree, Ryan Brasier and Brian Johnson – pulled pitching coach Dana LeVangie into a tight circle for a bullpen toast of Budweiser and Bud Light. Drew Pomeranz joined the group with a bottle of champagne.

It was about that time that Sandy Leon came walking across the floor, which was covered in plastic and filled with puddles of suds, and saw injured knuckleballer Steven Wright standing near the back of the room.

“Watch your knee,” Leon said. It was definitely slippery.

But slipping and sliding was the least of anyone's problems. Nathan Eovaldi was on the loose. He's the quiet one, the calm one, the one who dominated Game 3 and reacted afterward as if he'd just completed a trip to Home Depot, but in this setting, Eovaldi was up to no good as he went creeping around the clubhouse with a fresh bottle of champagne.

“I'm on the prowl,” he said. “I feel like if you stay on the move, nobody can get you, either.”

He sprayed Mitch Moreland out of nowhere. Went for another bottle of champagne, found Brock Holt doing a television interview, and got him, too.

“I was starting to dry off,” Holt said.

Interviews were easy targets. At one point, Martinez asked all of the Spanish-language media to gather around so he could get his interviews done at once. Tzu-Wei Lin, who wasn't even on the active roster, did an interview with Taiwanese media in the corner. At 11:58, The Athletic's own Jen McCaffrey was doing a one-on-one with LeVangie when bullpen coach Craig Bjornson showed up and dumped champagne on her head

“Leave my man alone!” Bjornson yelled. “Three questions! It's a champagne party, that's it!”

Jen laughed, other coaches went looking for towels, and Bjornson handed LeVangie a beer. LeVangie offered it to Jen.

“You want the beer to get him back?” he asked.

Four minutes later, on the other side of the room, Vazquez geared up for a similar attack. He sprayed a group of reporters who were interviewing Mookie Betts. NESN's sideline reporter Guerin Austin was already drenched but wearing rainboots.

It was midnight when players began retreating behind the plastic to check their phones and gather their things. Blake Swihart went back there. Bogaerts did, too. He hugged media relations assistant Daveson Perez from the other side of the curtain so that the two were wrapped in plastic.

On the party side of the curtains, members of scouting and analytics departments stood in the corner, each wearing a black division series championship t-shirts but mostly staying out of the fray. That was, until advanced scouting assistant J.T. Watkins hit the whole group with a champagne sneak attack. Head of advance scouting Steve Langone followed with the same thing. By 12:08, there was a clubbie digging through the bins, trying to sort the empties from the full bottles.

Pedroia emerged again, now wearing a yellow towel, but still with his hat on backwards and goggles covering his face. He needed Moreland to find his shower shoes.

At 12:14, the plastic started to come down while Jay-Z blared on the speakers. Moreland was drinking a Sam Adams, and Andrew Benintendi was FaceTiming with his girlfriend. Holt jumped into frame with Benintendi and the two went nuts.

By 12:18, the plastic was off the walls, and the clubhouse crew was starting to peel the top layer of plastic off the floor. Matt Barnes was being interviewed in the hallway. John Henry, Tom Werner and Kennedy took a group photo. David Price got dressed in the corner, having already showered.

At 12:22, the third and final layer of plastic was rolled off the floor and dumped into a black garbage bin. Dave Dombrowski leaned against a wall in the hallway. His gray hair seemed perfectly dry, but his blue and red St. Croix socks – he'd ditched his shoes – were soaked. He was answering questions about the decision to pitch Sale (they'd discussed pregame that he would be available for an inning), the status of Moreland (the team's not sure whether his hamstring injury will keep him out of the ALCS) and the upcoming series against the Astros.

"We not happy yet," Dombrowski said. "We have to get eight more wins."

Of course, as Dombrowski said that, Eazy-E had begun playing on the clubhouse sound system, reciting one of his most famous lines: "Don't quote me boy, 'cause I ain't said shit."

The final piece of plastic came down at 12:26. Pedroia was now wearing a suit. Rick Porcello was still soaked, drinking a Miller Lite. Benintendi was about to hit the showers. Eovaldi was nowhere to be found. No doubt, still on the prowl.

"By now I'm entirely consumed with it, and only marginally able to do anything else": Bill James can't stop dreaming about baseball

Rustin Dodd

LAWRENCE, Kan. — It is an afternoon in September, and Bill James is talking about Kansas. He was raised here, amidst the rolling wheat fields and plains. He grew famous here, the bearded catalyst of a revolution. He stayed here, too, living in the same Victorian house on the same leafy street in the same historic neighborhood.

James can talk for hours about his state's history, about the bloody skirmishes that marked its inception, about the small towns that dot the horizon, about the college basketball team that offers identity. But on this sunny afternoon inside Free State Brewery, the father of modern baseball sabermetrics has something more specific in mind.

He's been working on a book project with his wife, Susan. It is called "Floating Kansas," and it details the state's beginnings in the 19th century. In 1850, James says, the Kansas territory was equivalent to parts of modern-day Italy in 600 B.C. It was mostly empty, a wild frontier populated by Native tribes, many of whom arrived via forced relocation by the United States government.

The living conditions were brutal — harsh winters, smallpox and a smoldering border conflict. Yet by 1920, the state had more or less modernized. James is interested in those six decades, how a town like Lawrence went from undeveloped to the home of a thriving university, a bustling community and the founder of basketball.

"How did that happen?" James says, taking a sip from his coffee. "A lot of talented and ambitious people moved here. A lot of people that moved here were pioneers.

"Pioneers are people that want to change the world."

It has been 15 years since "Moneyball" hit bookstores, upending the natural order of baseball's elite and introducing James to a wider audience. Authored by writer Michael Lewis, the book told the story of the 2002 Oakland A's and general manager Billy Beane, a transformational insurgent in a suit and tie. In 286 enthralling pages, it told of market inefficiencies and culture wars and ideas that would change an industry. In short: It mainstreamed the world Bill James created.

Major League Baseball would never be the same, forever influenced by a statistical revolution and an insatiable demand for information. For proof, all one has to do is look at the 2018 postseason. The Oakland A's were back, guided by Beane and his army of lieutenants. So are the Boston Red Sox, the organization that hired James in 2002 while Lewis was finishing "Moneyball".

In Chicago, the Cubs were guided by Theo Epstein, who worked with James in Boston and read him as a fourth grader in Brookline, Mass. In Milwaukee, the ascending Brewers are led by general manager David Stearns, 33, a Harvard graduate so young he read James and the generation of writers he inspired.

"If you were interested in baseball and this side of baseball," Stearns says, "he and his writings were often what you turned to."

The defending world champion Houston Astros are guided by Jeff Luhnow, a former engineer and management consultant who jumped into the industry during the Moneyball revolution of 2003, reading James after accepting a job with the Cardinals. And then there are the Los Angeles Dodgers, whose general manager Farhan Zaidi, an MIT graduate with a doctorate in economics, has perhaps the most romantic Jamesian baptism of all.

When Zaidi was a boy, his father took an engineering job in Manila, moving his large family from Canada to the Philippines. Zaidi, a sports fan, found a copy of James' Baseball Abstract in a U.S. Military Base bookstore.

"Probably the only place in the Philippines where it was available in 1985," Zaidi told me.

Zaidi was 9 years old and mesmerized by the numbers, the analysis and the storytelling. Eighteen years later, he read "Moneyball" and sent his resume to the A's.

"For people of my age and my ilk, he comes with a certain mystique," Zaidi said. "He was a great writer and storyteller and he had these ideas."

It has been 15 years since "Moneyball," and James still has ideas. He is sitting inside his Lawrence home on a morning in early February, and his mind drifts to baseball. Two months earlier, he challenged the conventional application of the statistic Win Above Replacement, writing a rebuttal on his website. Two days earlier, he took to Twitter to question the practical necessity of the Major League Baseball Players Association. Both arguments rankled members of baseball's intelligentsia. James shrugged his shoulders.

“Obviously I think about this differently than almost anybody else does,” he says, “So maybe I’m wrong.”

James is 69 years old now, his trademark beard still grey and shaggy. He lumbers about his home like a curious grandfather, his 6-foot-4 frame waddling in deliberate, downtempo fashion. He spends his days researching popular crime cases and reading Roman history. Yet he can never escape baseball for long.

The world he made is larger than he ever imagined, his influence felt in every corner of baseball. The game is run by quants half his age, men with Ivy League degrees and economics backgrounds and computer modeling systems that James never dreamed of. Yet he is still here, sitting in his tiny home office, poring over numbers, finishing another research project for the Red Sox, his mind forever obsessed with the next question.

“The more you know about the game, the more enjoyable — the more fun it becomes,” James says. “And this cycle has been running in me for 50 years, so that by now I’m entirely consumed with it, and only marginally able to do anything else.

“And I’m up in my dirty little office upstairs, just obsessively studying this and that. Not because I have to ... I just can’t stop doing it.”

“I dream about baseball every night,” Bill James says, one day earlier this year. He doesn’t know if people will believe this. It sounds apocryphal, a charming anecdote. James is not trying to be charming. He lays down. He dreams about the game. He wakes up.

“It’s true,” he says.

James thought about his dreams recently because his mind had shifted to true crime, one of his other muses. Last year he published “The Man From The Train”, a book he co-authored with his daughter, Rachel McCarthy James. It was his second true crime book in six years, and it claimed to solve a century-old serial killer mystery. The project required painstaking research of contemporary accounts and records, the kind of tedious minutiae for which James is known. He did not set out to find the alleged killer, he says, only to research his crimes. But then one thing led to another, and his daughter turned out to be an impressive sleuth. He found comfort in the search.

James has held an interest in crime for decades, dating back to his childhood in tiny Mayetta, Kan. He scanned the daily newspaper for stories about crime. He memorized the lives of the country’s most infamous men. When an elementary school teacher assigned some newspaper reading — and a presentation in front of the class — James forgot about the assignment and gave a long soliloquy about the case of Caryl Chessman, a California man who was executed in 1969 after being convicted of robbery, kidnapping and rape. “I just rambled on about it until the teacher told me to sit down and shut up,” James says.

James is likely more curious about true crime than you are about anything. He applies his rigorous analytical approach. He reads about the justice system a century ago. And yet, it still doesn’t compare to his devotion to baseball. He grew up listening to games on the radio as a little boy in Kansas. He watched Charlie Finley’s Kansas City A’s and the Royals of the 1970s. He stills dreams about the game every night.

“I never dreamed about murders,” he says.

Baseball is still his profession, too, even if that’s easy to forget. More than 15 years after the Red Sox made an industry splash by hiring a lifelong outsider, James remains on the payroll. He’s always been naturally quiet about his role and his work, but he concedes that his role has contracted and expanded with each new front office. He lauds the professionalism of Red Sox president Dave Dombrowski, who took over in 2015, but as with other regime changes, it took a year or two to find his lane.

Sometimes James will embark on a research project and realize there's a competitive advantage in sending it to Boston. Sometimes it's less organic. When I met him for lunch last month, he had a Red Sox project looming.

James has three World Series rings and plenty of old war stories; unlike Epstein or Terry Francona, James has been a constant for the greatest era in Red Sox history. Yet for most of the run, he's remained here in Lawrence. He did move his family to Boston for two years in the mid-2000s while his wife, Susan, earned a graduate degree from Boston University. He went to Fenway Park every day, he says. He loved living in Boston. He still loves the city and people. But after a few years, he was ready to return to Lawrence, the small college town 45 minutes from Kansas City, a community of artists and academics and townies.

"If you're trying to make a living as a writer," James says, "New York City is a trap."

One morning in late September, James gave a talk to a community group at a library in downtown Lawrence. The morning commute took just a few minutes, a small jaunt across an old historic neighborhood called Old West Lawrence. The audience, a collection of retirees and civic-minded septuagenarians, came for a discussion about baseball.

James does this often, of course. He's a regular on the panel circuit, from the Sloan Sports Analytics Conference at MIT to other sabermetric events. Yet when he gives a small talk in Lawrence, it inevitably turns into a recitation of his own personal history. It turns out people love hearing Bill James talk about becoming Bill James.

So, on this Friday morning, James begins to explain the origins of the Baseball Abstract, which he self-published for the first time in 1977. He tells the audience about those early days, how he was only searching for a readership of a couple thousand people across the country. He was looking for the kind of person who wanted to read his quirky and inventive analysis, the kind of person who might think errors are stupid opinions or RBIs were misleading; the kind of person who was interested in the same things he was.

It was the late 1970s and James was working as a watchman at the Stokely Van Camp pork and beans factory. This is a crucial detail in the James mythos. Raised in Jackson County, 25 miles north of Topeka, he came from a long line of Scotch-Irish ancestors, some of whom arrived in Kansas in the 1840s or 1850s. The Jameses likely came from Kentucky, and they set up a trading post called James Crossing. The family stayed in the area for generations.

James grew up in Mayetta and studied economics and literature at the University of Kansas. By the time he finished a stint in the U.S. Army, he was working at the Stokely plant, enough idle time to conceive an idea. If he could just find two thousand people to read his baseball writing, he could publish the book himself and make a \$10 profit on each copy. He viewed a \$20,000 salary as roughly similar to that of a school teacher. He could live off that.

"For two or three years," James says, "people told me: 'I really enjoy what you're doing. But you're never going to make a living doing it because there aren't enough of us that like this stuff.'"

"You wouldn't believe how many people told me that. So many people told me that that I knew it couldn't possibly be true."

James was right, of course, and the annual Baseball Abstract became a best seller, an early guide for the sort of sports fan who would turn fantasy sports into big business and FanGraphs into an internet touchstone. They were men like Luhnow, who has turned the Astros into the model sabermetric organization, and Zaidi, the Dodgers general manager who freelances as a shark in his own fantasy sports leagues.

Luhnow, 51, never actually read James or the Baseball Abstract until he accepted a job with the Cardinals in 2003. Yet he found himself intrigued by the concept of Win Shares, a James statistical conception. "That

helped shape my thinking as I started to work in the industry,” he told me. Zaidi, 41, says the experience was more intimate, more long-lasting. Once he found the Abstract, he was hooked.

“I went back to the bookstore every year to get the book,” he says. “So I have a pretty good run of them from the mid-80s. That was, for me, the foundation of getting passionate about baseball analytics. It made me start asking questions like: ‘How do you evaluate players?’”

Back in Lawrence, his morning talk concluded, James puts it in simpler terms: The audience for intelligent and hardcore baseball thought was not only bigger than his critics believed, it was also bigger than his supporters believed.

“It was a lot larger than I thought it was,” James says.

If James has spent much of his career as baseball’s hermit philosopher, pecking away in his office in Lawrence, he has lately found another way to engage the world: Twitter.

A user on the platform since 2009, James has only recently found his voice. Equal parts contrarian and humorous, it is also big-hearted and earnest and occasionally off-the-rails. In true Jamesian fashion, he will engage on any subject, from politics (he offered a recent poll question on the Kavanaugh hearings) to baseball on television (he loved ESPN’s recent Statcast broadcast). In most cases, though, his tweets are another extension of his curiosity (has anyone read a good book on the Kansas City mob?) or some bit of humor that seems even funnier coming from one of the most influential men in baseball.

“My goal in life is to get an app that makes my phone into a T Shirt cannon,” he tweeted last winter.

James is online a decent portion of his day (he also uses Twitter to promote baseball posts on his subscription website). But he doesn’t consume a lot of other baseball writing or sabermetric discussion. If there is something he doesn’t understand, he will seek out information. But he’d much rather read up on Roman history or opera or check another book off his reading list. He’s currently reading Flaubert’s “Madame Bovary” for the first time.

“There’s a danger in being too focused,” James says. “I’m interested in a lot of different things. Would I be better at my job if I read sabermetric articles instead of Roman history? I don’t think I would be, to be frank.”

At 69, James says Facebook is a riddle he cannot solve. Instagram seems useless. And he worries about how social media and “rapid communication allows the rapid construction of narrative.”

“Reason is a slow process,” he says. “Emotion is fast.”

There is one medium, though, one pastime where James succumbs like the rest of us. Sometimes Twitter is just that good.

“Twitter fights,” James says. “That happens to me. I’ll sit down in the morning and get into some Twitter argument. and the next thing I know, the whole morning is gone.”

For decades, James existed to his readers only as an author and thinker, the distance fostering a certain mystique. On Twitter, he is unvarnished, unfiltered and limited to 280 characters at a time. For longtime readers, the contrast can engender some whiplash. So one day earlier this year, I asked James if he was glad that social media did not exist when he first started writing the Baseball Abstract. I assume that he will say yes — that he will say he needed the solitude and unplugged culture of the late 1970s to get his career off the ground. I assume he’s glad he did not have the immediate feedback as a young writer. I will be wrong.

“I love it,” he says. “It’s what I always wanted from the time I started writing about baseball in the ’70s. I always wanted to be able to communicate quickly, and with a lot of people, and sure, some small percentages of them are jerks and all of that.

“But what I always wanted was to be able to discuss ideas with a large number of people.”

Sometimes the ideas seem small, like the true value of A’s third baseman Matt Chapman’s defense. Sometimes he takes a Jamesian swing, like a critique of a labor union (the Major League Baseball players association) that lobbies for rich men to make more money.

“Everybody fighting to get HIS full share of the wealth will eventually lead to the collapse of the economic enterprise,” James tweeted. “... not in a year, not in ten years, but it will happen in time.”

When James is not weighing in on subjects of great societal import, he spends time thinking about more serious topics, such as college basketball. James, like many Kansans, has been a diehard KU basketball fan for decades. He grew up listening to Wilt Chamberlain on the radio. He still owns season tickets to Allen Fieldhouse. For a time, he was so invested in the program that he would spend hours breaking down film of Steve Woodberry, a talented guard from Wichita who played at KU in the early 1990s.

Woodberry, in James’ mind, is one of the most underrated players in program history, a guard whose game requires closer inspection and rigorous analysis, some of which is not provided in the traditional box score. He tells one story, that former KU coach Roy Williams had three photos in his office: Dean Smith, Michael Jordan and Steve Woodberry. He tells another that includes a genuine obsession with one possession from Woodberry’s career. Yes, one.

James watched it frame by frame, rewinding so he could track each movement, attempting to log a long sequence from the perspective of one player. Woodberry kept making instinctive moves and offering subtle moments of brilliance, saving the possession five or six times.

“It was the most astonishing thing I’ve ever seen,” he says.

James’ face lights up. This happens ever so often. The professorial guise melts away. The philosopher is still a fan. I ask James if he ever considered analyzing basketball at a more serious level. Maybe he could write a book or dive into a particular KU season. Maybe he’d see something nobody else could.

“I’d love to do that,” he says. “And I get frustrated that I don’t have the skills to do it.”

Bill James keeps saying he wants to slow down. He wants to work less and he wants to relax. If not full retirement, then maybe a slower pace, a focus on something else.

“I’m not good at enjoying life,” he says.

James can’t slow down, of course. He can’t stop working or thinking about baseball. He still loves the pursuit.

“I have things I just have to know,” James says. “I have to make my best effort to figure them out. It’s not a choice. It’s not a goal. It’s just — I have to do it.”

Most of his career has been like this. It doesn’t feel like an organized progression, he says. It feels more haphazard. At first, the attention came in waves: a magazine profile here; a best-selling book there. “Moneyball,” he says, was a big wave.

The one guiding principle was the stuff he did not know, the ideas that came to him in rare moments. They still come — all the time.

“Several times every day,” James says. “Some research idea comes to me. I wish I had time to research them all. But I don’t. I only get to a tiny percentage of them. They come all the time.”

The Jameses are empty nesters now. His daughter and two sons, Reuben and Isaac, are grown. That leaves time for more research and more ideas and more emails to his children at the end of the day. Usually, James just wants to check in and offer a rundown of the day or week. You know, dad stuff.

“Very often it turns out I just did my baseball research,” he says.

The world James created is all around us now, to the point that sometimes you don’t even notice, from the front office of the Red Sox to Minute Maid Park in Houston to the general manager’s office in Los Angeles. The analytics revolution changed the men in charge, and it changed the game itself, leading to “Openers” and spin rates and “optimization” and lineups designed to hit the ball in the air.

Back in Lawrence, James just wants to keep working. He’s finishing up lunch at an upstairs table at Free State, and the sun is coming in through a skylight, and he has a project to dive in to. He’s talking about Kansas again, the research for his new book, and he mentions the Pony Express, the famous short-lived mail service that began operating in 1859.

The route started in Missouri and ran through parts of Kansas, riders carrying mail out west to Sacramento. Today the enterprise is remembered romantically, lauded as a brilliant idea. James sees it a little differently.

It was a clever idea, he says. It was also an ancient one. The Romans did the same thing. And they stole it from an earlier civilization. And the cycle goes on.

“A lot of what we do in analytics,” James says, “is actually point out things so obvious that it becomes inconceivable that people did not always understand this.”

*** *The New York Post***

Red Sox foe mocks CC Sabathia’s umpire anger

Mike Puma

CC Sabathia had a rough night and then took out his frustration on embattled umpire Angel Hernandez.

“He shouldn’t be anywhere near a playoff game,” Sabathia said after the Yankees’ season-ending 4-3 loss to the Red Sox in Game 4 of the ALDS. “He’s bad. I don’t understand why he is doing these games.

“He’s always bad. He’s a bad umpire.”

Hernandez was the plate umpire, a night after he blew three calls at first base that were overturned by replay. Sabathia wouldn’t offer any specifics on his beef with Hernandez on Tuesday, but the two chatted after the first inning as the left-hander departed the mound. Sabathia covered his mouth with his glove as he spoke to Hernandez.

Sabathia wouldn’t blame his night — three earned runs allowed over three innings — on Hernandez, but that didn’t stop Red Sox pitcher Rick Porcello from firing a shot toward the Yankees clubhouse.

“Throw the ball over the plate, CC,” Porcello said. “I thought Angel Hernandez called a good game. You have got to throw the ball over the white part of the plate and then you get the strikes called.”

The 38-year-old Sabathia, a Yankees warhorse since 2009, is headed to free agency and has said he would like to continue pitching next year. But the Yankees could easily head in a different direction with a rotation that could use an offseason boost.

“This is a young team that has a lot of talent that is going to win a World Series,” Sabathia said. “And I want to be here to be a part of it.”

Yankees had no magic formula to change this outcome

Mike Vaccaro

For a tantalizing instant, time stood still at Yankee Stadium. The bases were loaded in the bottom of the ninth and the fans — those of the 49,641 who remained, anyway, those who hadn't abandoned the cause — were dizzy with delight.

There are times as a sports fan when you don't just wish for the impossible, you can see it. You can feel it. You can anticipate it. This was one of those times. A 4-1 Red Sox lead had already melted to 4-2. Craig Kimbrel, the Red Sox's closer, looked like he was ready to burst into tears. He'd walked a pair and hit another and allowed a soft single.

Now he had to throw fastball to Gary Sanchez, full count, sacks juiced, the season standing out there on those loaded bases.

And Sanchez squared it up.

In July or August, when the ball carries more generously in The Bronx, maybe that travels 5 or 6 feet farther. At Fenway Park, at the least, the ball hits high off The Wall for a game-tying double, probably finds its way into the Monster Seats. But this was October. This was Yankee Stadium. The ball died in Andrew Benintendi's glove.

The season perished five minutes later.

"You're always chasing Utopia, you know," Aaron Boone said.

The Yankees' manager had a scratchy voice and a sullen disposition, because he wasn't ready to lock the stadium doors for the winter. He wasn't ready to say goodbye to a baseball team that soared so high, so long this season, that won 102 games in total, that was every bit as good as any team in baseball.

Just not as good as the one they'd just played.

"These guys staying the moment, play the right way, run the bases well," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said, saluting this Boston club that has made his rookie year as a manager a wire-to-wire dream ride so far. "We're a complete team. We rely on everyone to win games."

The Yankees, in the end, didn't have near enough guys they could count on, not in the teeth of the fight, and that issue is now officially one that Giancarlo Stanton, more than any of the others, must wear. He finished the series at a sickly .222 with zero extra-base hits and a diminished presence that was shocking to behold.

In the ninth inning, the Yankees and the crowd had already gotten in Kimbrel's head, a four-pitch walk to Aaron Judge and a scratch single to Didi Gregorius putting two on with no outs for Stanton. It was a moment screaming for a leading man, and Stanton is surely paid the part.

"I have to put the ball in play there," Stanton would say later. "I have to get a pitch over the plate and keep the line moving."

He didn't put the ball in play. He waved weakly at three breaking pitches, never came close to any of them, and in the process he tossed Kimbrel a life preserver that he would wind up clinging to for dear life. The Yankees still had their chances after Stanton, sure, and for half a heartbeat it looked like Sanchez might pick him up.

Didn't happen. So much didn't happen for Stanton this year, a season that began with such promise with two bombs on Opening Day in Toronto and ended in a productive rush to reach 100 RBIs on the dot, but one that included too many times when he simply didn't look equal to the dueling burdens of his extraordinary talent and his enormous contract.

"I'm going to use this as fuel for next year," he said. "I think we all are."

But it will always be Stanton who will have the target on his back. He'll never be a home-grown fair-haired child, the way his fellow behemoth Judge is. He seems neither inclined nor hard-wired to embrace the bigger-than-life existence a slugger in New York demands; Judge plays that part as easily as he flicks BP meatballs into the second deck.

And even he felt compelled to address the 800-pound elephant that will follow him around for a while when he said, "I'm just as disappointed as the guys who went farther last year and came up short." In the same way Alex Rodriguez's biggest hurdle was that he joined a freighter that had already won four titles without him, Stanton, for now, plays the part of an interloper who couldn't even get the Yankees as far as Houston again.

"The one thing I'm proud of," Boone said, "is that we always compete."

They did hold on to every ounce of season they could, straight to the end. They did win an awful lot of baseball games this year. Just not enough of them. The Yankees are the ones who make their own rules of engagement. The Yankees are the ones who pay their stars to deliver on October's grandest stage. It will be a long winter for all of them.

Yankees' rally falls short in season-ending loss to rival Red Sox

George A. King III

Less than an hour after the Red Sox ended the Yankees' season in Game 4 of the ALDS Tuesday night, the only sound in the home clubhouse was packaging tape being dragged across the top of cardboard boxes that housed players' belongings waiting to be shipped all over the world.

That was the first step into the offseason that came within a few feet of being placed on hold by a Gary Sanchez ninth-inning, game-winning grand slam that would have pushed the series to a deciding Game 5.

Nevertheless, Sanchez's drive settled in the glove of left fielder Andrew Benintendi for a sacrifice fly, and instead of celebrating at home plate and being nine innings away from the ALCS, the Yankees were down to their last out and trailing by a run.

A 4-3 loss witnessed by a sold-out Yankee Stadium crowd of 49,641 ended when Gleyber Torres hit a ground ball to third baseman Eduardo Nunez, whose throw to first baseman Steve Pearce beat Torres by a cleat. The Yankees' challenge temporarily halted a Red Sox celebration that rebooted when Torres was officially ruled out.

So, instead of shipping suitcases to Boston for Game 5 that would have been played Thursday at Fenway Park, the Yankees watched the Red Sox celebrate in The Bronx for the second time in less than a month. The Red Sox clinched a third straight AL East in the Stadium on Sept. 20.

"We didn't play our best baseball and got beat," Brett Gardner said.

Asked how he would categorize his second full big-league season, Aaron Judge asked to table the discussion.

“I need some time to get a better answer for that,” said Judge, who started the ninth-inning rally by drawing a walk off Craig Kimbrel. “It was a grind the whole way. We came up short of our goal. It’s time to get ready for next year.”

After getting destroyed, 16-1, in Game 3 when the Red Sox ripped into Luis Severino and Lance Lynn, and Aaron Boone was heavily criticized for not removing a struggling Severino earlier and for turning to Lynn, CC Sabathia gave up three runs and five hits in three innings. Zach Britton was victimized by the short right-field fence when Christian Vazquez, Boston’s No. 9 hitter with three homers in the regular season, dropped an opposite-field fly ball in to the seats for a 4-0 lead in the fourth.

Gardner’s sacrifice fly in the fifth off Rick Porcello cut the deficit to 4-1, but Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier, members of the beleaguered Red Sox bullpen, worked a perfect sixth and seventh, respectively. Red Sox manager Alex Cora wisely turned to ace Chris Sale and he hurled a scoreless eighth.

That got the game to Kimbrel. The crowd anticipated something to celebrate, and had Giancarlo Stanton not whiffed and Sanchez’s fly ball carried a bit further, the best-of-five series would be tied and headed for Boston.

Stanton looked bad on a 1-2 breaking ball out of the strike zone and ended his first taste of the postseason with a .222 (4-for-18) average, no homers, no RBIs and a woeful .444 OPS.

“He threw some hits out there, a little up and down, got on base a little bit,” Boone said of Stanton’s ALDS. “Obviously he had some chances where he could have made a big difference with a big hit or whatever and it just didn’t happen in this series.”

And not just for Stanton. The Yankees scored four runs in the final two games that were played in The Bronx, where they are used to punishing pitchers. They hit four homers in four games and hit .214 as a team.

In the end, Boone talked about his team’s heart and will to compete while down the hall tape closed boxes and a season that included 100 wins and an AL wild-card game win but felt empty.

“Gary’s at-bat is a great example of that,” Boone said of his club’s competitive nature. “If you fall behind that guy 0-2 and battle and battle and just missing winning the game, it was a great at-bat. Proud of the way they competed. Just really sucks we came up short.”

*** *The USA Today***

Red Sox punish Yankees at home to advance to ALCS: 'We'll get the last laugh'

Bob Nightengale

NEW YORK -- The Boston Red Sox, who spent nearly a century cursed by their hated rivals -- the rich and powerful New York Yankees -- have turned Yankee Stadium into their personal nightclub.

The Red Sox, for the second time in 19 days, danced and partied on the Yankee Stadium infield, sprayed champagne and beer over one another in the visiting clubhouse, and partied Tuesday night like the ball was dropping on New Year’s Eve in Times Square.

The Red Sox, after clinching the American League East Division title in New York just three weeks ago, returned for the after-hours party, winning the AL Division Series with a 4-3 victory over the Yankees, taking the best-of-five series 3-1.

And just what music did they play during their celebration?

You guessed it, Frank Sinatra's version of "New York, New York," trolling Yankee All-Star right fielder Aaron Judge, who played the song on his stereo while walking out of Fenway Park over the weekend after the Yankees' Game 2 victory.

"Well, they know it happened," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "They talked about it. I don't know if they took it personal."

Well, no matter their music selection, the Red Sox got their sweetest form of revenge by simply beating the Yankees. The Yankees, after falling one game short of the World Series a year ago, will be staying home for the long winter. The Red Sox will travel home to open the AL Championship Series on Saturday night at Fenway Park against the defending World Series champion Houston Astros.

"They were the team we had to beat," MVP favorite Mookie Betts said. "They were in our way where we wanted to go. Now, they're out of our way."

The Red Sox, considered the underdogs in this series because their rotation had never won a postseason game and their bullpen had the second-worst ERA in the AL in September, instead showed everyone why they won a franchise-record 108 games during the season, thoroughly dominating the Yankees.

The Red Sox, after splitting the first two games in Boston, punished the Yankees in these two games at Yankee Stadium, humiliating them in Game 3, 16-1, and then burying them Tuesday, surviving a harrowing ninth inning that included a game-ending replay review.

The Red Sox not only outscored the Yankees 20-4 at Yankee Stadium, but after Gary Sanchez's three-run homer in the seventh inning of Game 2 at Fenway Park, the Yankees hit .149 with only three extra-base hits. The Yankees, who set the major-league record with 267 home runs this season, didn't hit a single homer at Yankee Stadium. It was the first time they went homerless in back-to-back games at Yankee Stadium since April 7-8 against the Baltimore Orioles.

The Yankees' offense was so abysmal that it hit just .154 with one extra-base hit with runners in scoring position, compared to .400 with five extra-base hits for the Red Sox. The Yankees scored their only four runs at home on two sacrifice flies, a fielder's choice and a hit-by-pitch.

"Definitely frustrating," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "Credit to them for being able to hold us down and shut us down. You don't move on when you can't get enough big hits in a series, and they just outplayed us a little bit."

So, go ahead, you still want to question the Red Sox? You want to doubt that they can come up big on the biggest stage? You want to ridicule their pitching staff that produced a 3.32 ERA from their starters in the Division Series, with Rick Porcello winning his first career postseason game while ace Chris Sale pitched a 1-2-3 eighth inning?

"Anybody outside the clubhouse can say what they want," Sale said, "but we know who we are. Just keep doubting us. Keep talking. We'll get the last laugh."

The Red Sox manhandled the Yankees, turning what was supposed to be an exhilarating, epic series between the greatest rivals in all of sports into a rather dull affair, with no brawls, arguments, or even so much as a lead change.

The only real excitement came in the ninth when All-Star closer Craig Kimbrel entered the game with a 4-1 lead, with the last 14 Yankees retired, only to lose command of the strike zone. After two walks, a hit by pitch and a single, the Yankees cut the lead to 4-2 with the bases loaded. He retired Gary Sanchez on a deep fly ball to left for a sacrifice fly, and then got the final out on a slow roller to third baseman Eduardo Nunez, whose throw barely got Gleyber Torres at first.

The Red Sox started to celebrate, but the play was so close, Boone immediately signaled for a replay review. The Red Sox stopped, looked up at the video board, saw that Torres was out by a half-step, and slowly started to celebrate again. Still, they waited to erupt on the field until crew chief Mike Winters signaled out.

"I was praying," Red Sox GM David Dombrowski told USA TODAY Sports. "I said, 'Please. Please be as I thought it was. Please.' "

Out!

"Whew," Dombrowski said.

And the party was on.

"It's 2018 baseball," said Porcello, who grew up just 40 miles from Yankee Stadium. "You have to wait for replay before you know you really won."

Said Betts: "All I know is that was weird. Really weird. I mean, I saw he was out, but you never know."

It was worth the wait, with the Red Sox celebrating at Yankee Stadium as if the joint belongs to them, making this celebration so much sweeter since it caused so much pain to the sellout crowd of 49,641.

The Red Sox, who were swept out of the first round the past two seasons and winning just one postseason game since 2013, are back.

"This is what I've been waiting for my entire life," said Sale, who begged manager Alex Cora to let him pitch in this game. "We want the trophy, and the really cool ring you get, too.

"Last year left a bad taste in my mouth. It sucked. I didn't want to feel like that again."

That feeling is gone now. The Red Sox, the only AL East team to ever eliminate the Yankees, pulled off an encore from their dramatic comeback in 2004, the last time they faced one another in the postseason.

They beat the Yankees, forcing their fans to witness the carnage.

"It was everything we thought it'd be, and more," said Brock Holt, who hit for the cycle in Game 3. "We're going to savor this, but we're not stopping now."

*** *Associated Press***

Red Sox win two straight in Bronx to win ALDS

NEW YORK — Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees couldn't wait to get back home.

Now, that's exactly where they're staying.

CC Sabathia became the latest pitcher to put New York in an early hole as rookie manager Aaron Boone again stuck with his starter too long, and the Yankees fell just short of extending their season Tuesday night with a 4-3 loss to the rival Boston Red Sox in Game 4 of their AL Division Series.

"That's the one team that you don't want to lose to," outfielder Brett Gardner said. "We hate losing to them and we love beating them. Obviously, they just had our number this year."

New York mounted a last-ditch rally against wild closer Craig Kimbrel, scoring twice in the ninth inning . But the Yankees' comeback stalled when Gary Sanchez's bases-loaded sacrifice fly was caught on the left-field warning track , and rookie Gleyber Torres grounded out with two on to end it — sort of.

The play at first base was close, so both teams and a sellout crowd held their breath during a dramatic replay review before the out call was upheld following a 63-second delay. Kimbrel and the Red Sox — suspended in mid-celebration for a minute — resumed bouncing around in excitement.

"We played a really hard season, we managed to win 100 games and then we get to this point and we just can't finish off a series against the Red Sox. It's tough," reliever David Robertson said.

Asked about his long fly, Sanchez said through a translator: "I wasn't sure about it. I hit it well, but I got under it."

After beating Oakland in the AL wild-card game, it was a humbling playoff exit for a power-packed Yankees team that added reigning NL MVP Giancarlo Stanton last offseason and hit a major league-record 267 home runs.

With the stakes at their highest, however, the Yankees never left the yard in two home games versus Boston. They were outscored 20-4 as the AL East champs took the best-of-five series 3-1 and advanced to the ALCS against defending World Series champion Houston.

"I didn't expect to come here and lose two in a row. I expected to come back here and win two in a row," Gardner said.

Last year, it was the Yankees who reached the AL Championship Series before their surprising run ended with a Game 7 loss to the Astros.

This time, a 2018 season that began with sky-high expectations — now over in bitter disappointment.

While the Red Sox got strong starts from Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Rick Porcello during the series, Yankees starters were charged with 15 runs over 13 innings in four games. Masahiro Tanaka was the only one to get an out in the fourth.

"They just had a lot of stuff going right. We're very equal teams," Sabathia insisted. "The ball just bounced their way."

Adding to the humiliation, the Red Sox got to revel in a second champagne celebration at Yankee Stadium in less than three weeks.

Boston also clinched its third consecutive division crown on enemy ground Sept. 20.

"They got momentum on their side and never really slowed down," Robertson said.

So while the Red Sox roll on seeking their fourth World Series title in 15 years, the Yankees own but one pennant and championship during that span (2009).

On deck, a long winter of wondering how they've fallen behind in a rivalry they dominated for nearly a century.

All that changed in 2004, when Mariano Rivera was finally unable to close out the pesky Red Sox and they rallied for an unprecedented comeback from a 3-0 deficit to win the ALCS. Boston took Games 6 and 7 at Yankee Stadium on the way to its first World Series championship in 86 years.

This was the first playoff meeting between the clubs since then, and the Red Sox once again made themselves right at home in the Bronx. After splitting two games at Fenway Park, they quieted the Yankees'

boisterous crowd — and their dangerous bats. New York hadn't gone consecutive games at Yankee Stadium without a home run since April.

"Definitely frustrating," Boone said. "I think one of their goals in this series was to keep us in the ballpark, and then coming here where we're so good at that, they were able to do it. Credit to them for being able to hold us down and shut us down, but in the end, you don't move on usually when you can't get enough big hits in a series, and they just outplayed us a little bit."

Before the last two games, New York was 7-0 at home over the past two postseasons.

Confident players were excited about returning to the Big Apple, and Judge even walked past Boston's clubhouse inside Fenway Park early Sunday morning with Frank Sinatra's rendition of "New York, New York" blaring from a boom box.

"It's a good song. And Aaron, he's one of our resident deejays, so he's got a pretty extensive playlist," Boone said later that day at Yankee Stadium, a smirk filling his face. "We like to hear that song sometimes when we win a big game."

That was the last time they did.

Boston's 16-1 blowout Monday marked the most lopsided defeat for a home team in postseason history, and shortstop Didi Gregorius called it "an embarrassing day."

Boone acknowledged some regret in allowing ace Luis Severino to start the fourth inning down 3-0. Severino was removed with the bases loaded and nobody out, but relievers Lance Lynn and Chad Green quickly let the game get out of hand.

The next night, after 1978 Boston nemesis Bucky Dent threw out the first pitch, Boone stayed with Sabathia even when the 38-year-old lefty, pitching on 11 days' rest, ran into trouble in the third. By the time the inning was over, the Red Sox had a 3-0 lead they never relinquished.

"I was fine with the way CC was throwing the ball," Boone said. "I think it was a sound decision."

Zach Britton gave up an opposite-field homer to No. 9 batter Christian Vazquez in the fourth, and New York never fully recovered.

"They've got a great team over there. They won 108 games," Judge said. "They're one of the most potent offenses in the game and it was a battle back and forth."