

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, October 6, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Chris Sale's outing gives Red Sox reason for optimism

Nick Cafardo

The health concerns were answered, though how his shoulder feels and reacts in the upcoming days will give everyone a better indication of how Chris Sale came out of Game 1. Sale exited the game after allowing a pair of singles in the sixth inning and if he had known what would transpire with a shaky bullpen that almost gave it all away, he probably would have begged to stay for more than the 93 pitches manager Alex Cora allowed.

"If he didn't take the ball out of my hands I would have kept throwing," Sale said. "There's no holding back. If they want me to throw 150, I'll throw 150. If they want me to throw tomorrow, I'll throw tomorrow. I think that's the mind-set of everyone in this clubhouse."

If the Red Sox reinforced one thing in their 5-4 win, it's that they need to be a starter-oriented team. That's different from the Yankees and many other teams around baseball who have become bullpen-oriented.

Sale wasn't the 98-100 m.p.h. Sale. But he wasn't the 92-94 m.p.h. Sale either. He was in the 95 m.p.h. range for most of his outing enough to be able to strike out eight batters, seven of them via the changeup or slider. Yes, Sale pitched somewhere in between the fire-balling Sale and David Price. He knew he had to mix things up, keep those big Yankee righthanded hitters off balance. He pulled it off nicely. But by the sixth inning his pitch count had reached 93. Even though he was hitting 95 on his four-seam fastball, you could tell fatigue was setting in when Cora came out to get him.

"I felt more like myself because I felt this was just a normal start," Sale said. "Just like, no restrictions. There's no going back out to the bullpen after my start to add pitches. I knew I was going to get my 100-plus pitches or somewhere around there. That's a very freeing feeling."

If Sale had been able to get through seven or into the seventh, you could have least eliminated Ryan Brasier or Brandon Workman, both of whom struggled.

That's why the Red Sox need to rely on their starters. Price needs to shed those postseason and Yankee blues and pitch seven or eight strong innings. Rick Porcello, who actually had to come in and get two outs in the eighth, also needs a lengthy appearance when the Sox travel to Yankee Stadium on Monday night.

Where was Nathan Eovaldi, the Game 4 starter? He's pitched so well vs. the Yankees, but he wasn't one of the pitchers who warmed up.

Sale was effective with his changeups and slider. Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton struck out a combined three times against Sale. He set a very good tone and when J.D. Martinez stroked a three-run homer in the bottom of the first, Sale wasn't going to give it back. Whatever mechanical adjustments he made on his arm extension, which he wasn't able to do in his last regular-season outing, seemed to work in Game 1.

"Part of the game is changing speeds and eye levels," Sale said of the game plan, which he said was completely set by Sandy Leon, who was like a hockey goalie with kick save after kick save with the erratic relievers. "Go up and down, hard and soft. I go by what my catcher says and that was Sandy's game plan."

The important thing is that Sale is free of shoulder tendinitis. If he is, then he can pitch Game 5, if it is necessary. Sale has wanted to shed the image of the Sox staff being unable to win the big games. He helped do that with his performance, though going deeper would be preferable given the state of Boston's middle relief.

While the Sox can't avoid the bullpen all together, they must get to the point where they can use their preferable relievers (one of them, Steven Wright, was unavailable because of a sore knee) and usually reliable Matt Barnes, who was all over the place before settling down in the seventh.

From a psychological point of view, having your No. 1 starter, who has had injury issues, doing what he did, was a major confidence booster for the Red Sox.

"You know, AC [Alex Cora] said something to me the other night that really stuck, and that was win the first pitch and then win every pitch after that. I threw every pitch tonight like he was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch I threw. You have to go out there and do what you have to do to get the win," Sale said.

Dave Dombrowski dreamed this up a long time ago. He wanted a dynamic duo of Sale and Price just like he had Justin Verlander and Max Scherzer in Detroit. In those days it meant something to have starting pitchers who can go deep in games.

Who knows if deep down Cora would have preferred Sale to go longer Friday night. Maybe afterward he regretted taking him out, but at the time he simply wanted Sale not to be overworked in his first real time back in a high-leverage situation.

There likely won't be any restrictions next time for Sale, if all checks out well. At least that's what Sale's thinking.

Oh, now we remember what a Red Sox-Yankees playoff game feels like

Chad Finn

Nine thoughts on the Red Sox' 5-4 victory over the Yankees in Game 1 of the American League Division Series . . .

1. Oh, right. It's been awhile, but now we remember: This is what it's like to play the Yankees in October. No early lead seems safe, every game seems to slow to a Buchholzian crawl when your rooting interest is ahead, and the tension is chronic. The Red Sox' 109th victory overall this season and first of the postseason was undoubtedly their most grueling of 2018, and while winning meaningful games like this is satisfying once they're complete, it's also a reminder of this: We'd better learn how to cope now, because this is how it always is with the Yankees, and it's how it is going to be until this series is over. Tension isn't a result of this series. It's a participant.

2. Had the Sox blown their early 5-0 lead, the story of this game would be the uneven performance of the bullpen. It's still a major part of the plot, and one that will probably resurface again. But in the end, there were a number of Game 1 heroes for the Red Sox. J.D. Martinez lasered a three-run home run in the first inning. Chris Sale was not at his electrifying best, but he was the next tier or two down, and that was plenty good enough. Rick Porcello, the Game 3 starter, got two huge outs in the eighth inning, and Craig Kimbrel nailed down the final four outs, though an Aaron Judge homer leading off the night only heightened the drama. I'd suggest exhaling and savoring this Red Sox win, but they're back at this Saturday night, and it all feels so familiar again.

3. When Sale departed after 5½ innings, there were two runners on, the Red Sox held a five-run lead, and they needed 11 outs from the bullpen. When Ryan Brasier was removed three batters after relieving Sale (his final act walking Miguel Andujar, who totaled 25 walks in 606 plate appearances in the regular

season), there were two other runners on, the Red Sox held a three-run lead, and they needed 10 outs from their bullpen.

4. Given how it's gone with this pen this season – they've been the chronic blemish on an otherwise lovely season —it seemed a tall task asking them to get 11 outs, especially after Brandon Workman entered and walked .186-hitting Gary Sanchez on four pitches to load the bases. But rather than continuing to dabble in arson, Workman somehow – and absolutely it was surprising – struck out Gleyber Torres on a 3-2 pitch to escape the jam.

5. Matt Barnes followed. He's been one of the Red Sox' more dependable relievers, which is kind of like being the most ethical person on "Bachelor in Paradise." He has excellent strikeout numbers (96 in 61½ innings), but walks too many (4.5 per nine innings this season) and occasionally self-destructs like he's some kind of Calvin Schiraldi disciple. He's also coming off a hip injury. Barnes was, however, a clearly better option than one mentioned in a press box announcement: "Warming up in the bullpen for the Red Sox, Joe Kelly." Warming up for what, I have no idea.

6. Late-game tension suffocates the good things that came before. Sale's performance (5½ innings, 5 hits, 2 earned run, 2 walks, 8 strikeouts) was at least encouraging from the first pitch, a four-seam fastball to Andrew McCutchen that registered 95.4 miles per hour on the radar gun. The zip on his fastball, missing in his recent starts as he tried to find his groove after shoulder inflammation abbreviated his second half to 29 innings, was back. In the first truly meaningful inning he has pitched in weeks if not months, he whiffed McCutchen on four pitches, got Aaron Judge looking at a slider, and after a walk to Aaron Hicks, struck out Giancarlo Stanton on a 3-2 count.

7. The Yankees' resilience — it's reasonable to believe they'd have won this game had it lasted another inning or two — probably spared J.A. Happ of seeing a "Happless!" headline in one New York tabloid or another Saturday morning. Happ, who went 7-0 for the Yankees after a deadline trade from the Blue Jays, entered the game with a deserved reputation as a Red Sox nuisance. He'd had a 1.99 ERA this season against the Red Sox in four starts, and a 5-1 record with a 1.98 ERA in a dozen starts since the beginning of the 2015 season. Happ lasted just two innings in Game 1, allowing four hits, a walk, and five earned runs. Some of his problems were command-related — just 24 of his 44 pitches were strikes – but there were also signs the Red Sox had finally solved him. Andrew Benintendi had two hits against Happ after managing the same number in 18 at-bats previously in his career. J.D. Martinez, 4 for 20 previously, took him deep and crushed another ball deep to right. They'll see him again in this series, and now they know they can get to him.

8. David Ortiz had a .947 OPS and 17 home runs in 85 postseason games. He batted .455 with a 1.322 OPS in 14 World Series games. He accounts for at least a half-dozen of the most memorable moments in Red Sox postseason history, delivering in the playoff situations that Ted Williams, Jim Rice, Mo Vaughn, and even Carl Yastrzemski too often could not. There would be so much more misery in Red Sox history had he not come here in 2003. I would never compare anyone in the postseason to Ortiz, because no one in the postseason – including Reggie Jackson – has been his October equal. I will, however, say this: J.D. Martinez's three-run homer in the first inning sure did seem like something David Ortiz would do.

9. Before all of the stress, it was reassuring to be reminded of success of the past. Trot Nixon, who threw out the first pitch, has long been a favorite of Red Sox fans for his Dirt Dog persona. Now 44, with more than a touch of gray in his beard and looking like no threat to steal a base, he now blends in with his people, which is kind of charming. It was especially as he was standing on Jersey Street before the game in an unbuttoned Sox jersey while accepting donations for Hurricane Florence relief efforts in his native North Carolina. Though he had the game-breaking hit in the clinching Game 4 of the 2004 World Series, I'll always remember him first for the 11th-inning home run in Game 3 of the 2003 AL Division Series win against the A's. Shane Victorino's don't-worry-'bout-a-thing grand slam in Game 6 of the 2013 ALCS is the loudest I've ever heard Fenway. Nixon's homer might be the runner up. Another moment like that would be wonderful this postseason. It might also be necessary to survive this bullpen.

Chris Sale's fastball back up to speed, and other thoughts on Game 1 win

Alex Speier

The Red Sox made a statement with their first pitch of the game and built enough of an early lead to withstand a jarring performance by their bullpen and earn a 5-4 victory in Game 1 of the American League Division Series against the Yankees Friday night at Fenway Park.

Chris Sale entered the game under a cloud of questions about his health based on the decline in velocity he experienced over the course of September. He quickly dispelled those concerns when he unleashed a 95.4-miles-per-hour four-seam fastball for an Andrew McCutchen swing-and-miss on the first pitch of the game, then, for good measure, backed it up with a 94.1-m.p.h. swing-and-miss heater on his next offering.

With two pitches, Sale ceased to be a damaged pitcher and instead looked like a potential anchor of the Red Sox' efforts to charge through October. He backed up those initial glimpses with an overpowering performance in which he showed power to his fastball but also used it judiciously, throwing more sliders (33) than four-seam fastballs (31) over the course of his outing.

Sale averaged 94.6 m.p.h. and topped out at 96.6 — vastly better velocity than he showed down the stretch. While both of the inherited runners he left behind scored, thus leading to a less-than-dominant line (5 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings, 2 runs), he nonetheless delivered an outing that helped the Red Sox rotation move beyond its awful performances of the last two postseasons.

In 2016 and 2017, Red Sox pitchers made seven starts, allowing 28 earned runs in 23 innings. No starter recorded an out in the sixth inning in either of those two brief postseasons.

Sale ended that pattern, looking overpowering through five innings (his eight strikeouts were tied for the most by a Red Sox pitcher in the playoffs in the last 10 years) and setting a tone that the Red Sox hope the rest of their starters can follow. His effort — along with a couple of key game-settling outs by starter-turned-reliever Rick Porcello in the eighth inning — allowed the Red Sox to claim a Game 1 victory.

Although the Red Sox bullpen introduced plenty of turbulence to the late innings — in a fashion that did nothing to allay the questions about the group — the victory represented a development of considerable significance. Since the introduction of the best-of-five Division Series in 1995, 34 of 47 home teams that won Game 1 (72 percent) advanced to the LCS; in the 2-2-1 format, 27 of 36 teams that won Game 1 (75 percent) won the series. That's far from a guarantee, but certainly better for the Red Sox than the alternative after a white-knuckled Game 1 win.

Other key takeaways:

The Red Sox bullpen is every bit as unsteady as anticipated — The Red Sox bullpen was shaky down the stretch, and dreadful all season against the Yankees (6.75 ERA). The first glimpse of Boston's relievers in the series did little to suggest a reversal of course.

After Sale departed with two on and one out in the sixth and the Red Sox in possession of a 5-0 lead, Ryan Brasier immediately turned a spark into a flame, and in the process made a seemingly comfortable advantage seem narrow. Luke Voit jumped on a first-pitch fastball from Brasier and shot it down the right-field line to score a run and then, after a run-scoring groundout, the righthander lost the strike zone and walked Miguel Andujar (a plate appearance that included a wild pitch).

Brandon Workman — likely the last of the 11 pitchers included on the postseason roster — followed by walking Gary Sanchez and nearly doing the same against Gleyber Torres, falling behind, 3-1, before coming back to strike him out.

Workman then returned for the seventh inning and allowed back-to-back hits before giving way to Matt Barnes. Barnes had a heart-pounding hold, settling after initial wildness (a walk and a wild pitch) to escape

the inning with a bases-loaded strikeout of Giancarlo Stanton and a pair of groundouts (one of which scored a run).

Next up? Rick Porcello, who was making his second relief appearance since 2014. Porcello retired a pair of batters, but once he yielded an infield hit, manager Alex Cora made the move to summon Craig Kimbrel for a four-out save.

The situation is one in which Kimbrel struggled at times in the regular season (he was 3 for 5 when brought into a game for a save situation in the eighth inning during the regular season, allowing four runs in six innings).

But in this instance, he escaped by getting a 99-m.p.h. fastball on the hands of Andrew McCutchen for a flyout, then withstood a solo homer by Aaron Judge in the ninth to record the save.

To review: Last pitcher on the roster pitching in a key situation? Check. Starter turned reliever? Check. Four-out save from a closer with a mixed history in such situations? Check.

The Red Sox made it work — barely — but clearly, the bullpen formula is far from settled.

J.D. Martinez's love for Fenway extends to October: J.D. Martinez was a transformative hitter for the Red Sox in the regular season, and he immediately carried that status into October. With two on and one out in the bottom of the first inning, Martinez ripped a 2-0 fastball from New York starter J.A. Happ and sent it screaming just over the Green Monster for a three-run homer, his fourth in eight career playoff games. Later, he almost drove an offering from reliever Chad Green into the right field bullpen.

That Martinez made an immediate impact in a home game should come as little surprise. His 26 homers during the regular season at Fenway were the eighth-most of all time by a Red Sox and the most since Mo Vaughn had 27 in 1996.

The Red Sox will bring a multi-dimensional offensive attack to the series: In the first inning, Andrew Benintendi stayed on a J.A. Happ slider and drilled it to left for a single. The Red Sox immediately got to work poking a source of Yankees weakness, with Benintendi taking off for second on the first pitch and arriving safely into second, ahead of the throw of catcher Gary Sanchez.

Benintendi's steal built on a regular season in which the Red Sox were an astounding 17 of 18 in stolen bases against the New York, a 94 percent success rate that was the highest of any single team against any other single team this year (minimum 15 attempts). Benintendi later served further notice that the Red Sox would apply forms of pressure when he bunted for a single in the third inning as part of a two-run rally.

While the Red Sox' offense was spearheaded by the three-run homer by Martinez in the first inning (which, it should be noted, followed Benintendi's steal and a Steve Pearce walk), Benintendi's diverse skillset offered an indication of the variety of ways in which the Red Sox offense can apply pressure to an opposing pitching staff. Whereas the Yankees were 10 games under .500 this season when hitting zero or one homer, the Red Sox were six over .500 when going deep once or not at all.

Even in victory, it's hard to get fired up by this combustible bullpen

Dan Shaughnessy

Outlined against the late Fenway sky, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse rode again Friday night. In dramatic lore they are known as Death, Destruction, Pestilence, and Famine, but those are only aliases. Their real names are Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, and Joe Kelly.

And the Red Sox are going to try to win 10 more playoff games with this motley crew hired by Dave Dombrowski?

Apologies to Grantland Rice for stealing his great lead, but desperate times call for big-time hyperbole.

The Red Sox hung on to beat the Yankees, 5-4, in Game 1 of the AL Division Series, but the overall takeaway was not good. It's hard to fathom the 108-win Sox getting this done 10 more times in October. The Yankees left 10 runners on base and went 1 for 7 with runners in scoring position.

Dombrowski is a renowned architect of baseball teams, but his fatal flaw always has been bullpen assembly. Dombro's poor relief corps cost him the 2013 AL Championship Series when his superior Detroit Tigers succumbed to a Boston team because Joaquin Benoit surrendered a grand slam to David Ortiz in the eighth inning of pivotal Game 2. It turned the whole series around.

A Raging Bullpen seemed the only weakness of these 108-win Sox, but Dombro did nothing at the deadline to get help, insisting he was happy with his cluster of torch carriers.

So what happened in the first game of the 2018 postseason? The Sox burst to a 5-0 lead, got 5½ good innings from Chris Sale, then hung on for dear life while messrs. Brasier, Workman, Barnes, Rick Porcello, and Craig Kimbrel (Kelly only warmed up, thankfully) came in to finish.

Yes, Rick Porcello. In relief.

Talk about making it up on the fly. In Game 1 of the playoffs, Alex Cora needed his Game 3 starter. What happened to the grand plan of using Nathan Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez, and Steven Wright (it was learned after the game that Wright has a sore knee and went for an MRI)?

"We knew where we were going," said Cora. "We had an idea Rick was going to be in the bullpen. It didn't work out with Ryan. We had to go to Workman and he did a [good] job getting [Gleyber] Torres out. We went to Barnes earlier than expected and that's why we had to go to Rick . . . One thing I learned last year — to win a World Series it's gonna take 24-25 guys. To get 27 outs at this stage is very difficult and sometimes you have to go to plan C or plan D."

"It's postseason baseball, you've got to be prepared for anything," said Sale.

The Sox' bullpen problems were well-documented this year. They blew 10 saves after July 31, second most in baseball. They also walked a million guys. Boston's pen ranked 22nd in baseball in walks per nine innings. So why would it be a surprise that Brasier, Workman, and Barnes all walked guys last night? And how desperate does it look to have Porcello called in when you've told us that your pen is just fine?

The playoffs are all about bullpens. Remember Kansas City in 2015? Cleveland in 2016? Those teams got to the World Series on the strength of their bullpens. The 2018 Red Sox have a really good team but it's hard to imagine staggering through 10 more wins like Friday night's.

The early part of Game 1 looked like a Red Sox season highlight reel. In the first three innings we saw a laser three-run homer off the bat of J.D. Martinez, a Gold Glove catch by Mookie Betts, a string of shutout innings from Sale, and the Delaware area code (3-0-2) stamped on the left field wall. After falling behind in six consecutive playoff games over the last two years, the Sox finally had an early lead. It was all the stuff that made the CoraMen great in 2018.

Sale's first pitch was a 95.4-mile-per-hour heater (equal to his fastest pitch of the night), which produced a swing and miss from Andrew McCutchen. That's what Sox fans were looking for. The lean lefty wound up striking out the side in the inning while the Yankees made him throw 24 pitches. He lasted 5½ innings, giving up two runs on five hits and two walks. He threw 93 pitches and handed over a 5-0 lead to Boston's combustible relief corps.

Brasier was first out of the pen and he allowed both inherited runners to score before handing the ball to Workman. Workman walked Gary Sanchez to load the bases . . . then fanned Torres on a 3-and-2 pitch to

preserve the lead. Barnes got out of the seventh after issuing a walk to load the bases, and Porcello came to the rescue in the eighth.

Finally, there was Kimbrel. He got the last out of the eighth, then gave up a leadoff homer to Aaron Judge to start the ninth and make it 5-4. Kimbrel is easily the Sox top reliever but he allowed a career-high seven homers this year and had an unusually high walk ratio. His teams are 0-5 in playoff series.

Sale answered some of the questions in Game 1, but his endurance is still an issue. Will 5 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings be enough in a potential Game 5?

One game down and two, three, maybe four to go.

David Price (gulp) tonight.

Hope we all survive the drama.

It didn't go according to plan, but the Red Sox held on to beat Yankees

Peter Abraham

Red Sox manager Alex Cora spoke confidently about his plans to use the bullpen before Friday night's playoff opener against the Yankees. He had worked with pitching coach Dana LeVangie to determine which relief pitchers would be most effective against particular segments of the lineup.

"We're pretty structured," Cora said. "I think people know where we're going."

It all sounded plausible. But once Fenway Park filled up and the Yankees charged back after falling behind, the script was shredded.

But the Sox survived, beating their rivals, 5-4, in Game 1 of the Division Series. Game 2 will be Saturday at 8:15 p.m., with David Price facing Masahiro Tanaka.

Take a deep breath; this is just getting started.

The Sox needed five relievers to get the final 11 outs, Cora getting so desperate that he used scheduled Game 3 starter Rick Porcello in the eighth inning.

In all, the bullpen allowed two runs on five hits, three walks, and two wild pitches. New England will soon be out of fingernails if every playoff game is like this.

"It's about getting 27 outs, having the lead," said Cora, who barely passed the postseason litmus test of bullpen management. "And we did it."

Whether Cora can wring 10 more victories out of what is clearly a bullpen short on reliable arms remains to be seen.

Steven Wright, who was viewed an important piece, was unavailable because of a sore right knee and was taken for an MRI. His status for the rest of the series is uncertain.

The Yankees had it worse, leaving 10 runners on base and getting one hit in seven at-bats with runners in scoring position.

"It's tough games. You're going to give up runs," said Craig Kimbrel, who allowed a home run by Aaron Judge in the ninth inning then finished the game for his first postseason save with the Sox. "We got into some big spots and we were able to get out of [them]. Those big innings, or big spots we got out of were the reason we won the game."

Their stars showed up, too. J.D. Martinez belted a three-run homer in the first inning and Chris Sale took a three-hit shutout into the sixth inning.

“I’ll take this one,” Sale said. “It’s postseason baseball. You have to be prepared for anything. We obviously have a lot of faith and trust in our guys. This is baseball, though. Anything can be thrown at you.”

Sale struck out eight, five with his slider and two on changeups as he mixed his pitches effectively against a team that knows him well.

Sale was charged with two runs, both scoring after he left the game.

“This was obviously my first postseason start here at Fenway. That’s something I’ll never forget,” Sale said. “That was incredible.”

Yankees starter J.A. Happ faced the Sox four times in the regular season and allowed five earned runs over 22 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. It was for just this game that the Yankees acquired him from the Toronto Blue Jays in July.

When the Yankees needed him most, Happ allowed five runs and couldn’t get out of the third inning.

Andrew Benintendi singled with one out in the first inning and stole second. It was the 18th stolen base in 19 attempts by the Sox against the Yankees this season.

Happ then pitched carefully to Steve Pearce, walking him on four pitches. Pearce hit third because he came in 11 of 32 with six home runs in his career against Happ.

After walking Pearce, Happ fell behind Martinez 2 and 0. His next pitch was inside but Martinez pulled it to left field, the ball landing in the front row of the Monster seats. The reaction of the sellout crowd shook Fenway Park.

“When I hit it, obviously I was a little bit more pumped up than every other home run I hit during the season,” Martinez said.

Mookie Betts doubled to lead off the third inning and took third on a bunt single by Benintendi, the first of his career.

That was enough for Yankees manager Aaron Boone, who took Happ out after only 44 pitches.

Cora stayed with Pearce against righthander Chad Green and was rewarded with an RBI single.

Benintendi moved to third when Martinez flied out deep to right and scored on a sacrifice fly to right by Xander Bogaerts.

Sale held the 5-0 lead through the fourth and fifth innings and to that point had thrown 83 pitches. He returned for the sixth inning and allowed two hits.

Ryan Brasier allowed both inherited runners to score in his postseason debut. He left a mess for Brandon Workman, who walked Gary Sanchez to load the bases. But Workman struck out Gleyber Torres to leave the bases loaded.

Workman stayed in for the seventh. Andrew McCutchen and Judge singled, and the next contestant was Matt Barnes. He walked Gardner to load the bases with nobody out.

Giancarlo Stanton struck out swinging at a curveball. McCutchen scored when Luke Voit grounded to third base, too slowly for a double play. Barnes then retired Didi Gregorius on a grounder to second.

Porcello, who threw a bullpen session before the game in preparation for his start, started the eighth inning. He got two outs before Torres singled.

Kimbrel finished the inning. After Judge homered leading off the ninth, Kimbrel struck out Gardner, Stanton, and Voit to end a game that lasted 3 hours and 41 minutes.

Stanton was 1 for 5 and stuck out four times.

“We’ve got a little bit of momentum and hopefully we can get Game 2 tomorrow,” Kimbrel said.

David Price not hiding from his postseason failures

Tara Sullivan

The door at the back of the Fenway Park interview room has just creaked open, and the narrow crack of daylight is just enough room for David Price’s 6-foot-5-inch frame to duck underneath and step inside. Within minutes of folding himself behind a microphone, Price’s eternally sleepy eyes are round and alert, pricked in the corners by the creases of the smile on his face. He is the picture of a man done contorting himself about the mistakes of his pitching past.

For all the understandable focus on his failures in the postseason and his meltdowns against the Yankees — two dismal storylines about to intersect in a most dramatic fashion when Price takes the mound for Game 2 of this epic Boston-New York American League Division Series on Saturday night — the veteran pitcher would much prefer the focus be elsewhere. Not because he’s trying to hide from his past, but because he’d rather focus on helping his team write a happy future.

“If I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I’ll take that,” Price said when asked Friday if a first victory in 10 career postseason starts would endear him to Red Sox Nation forever. “That’s what I’m here for. I don’t want this to be about me and not winning. I want to go out there tomorrow and throw the ball well, and help the Red Sox win. Whether we’re up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is, I want the Red Sox to win tomorrow.

“That’s what I worry about.”

If only it were that easy. But reality for the Red Sox more likely demands that Price pitch well against the Yankees if this record-setting regular season reaches the World Series dream it needs for true validation. If he crumbles again in Saturday’s start, could the Sox recover enough to emerge in this five-game series? Sure. But where will be Price be then?

Make no mistake. He needs to pitch well Saturday. For himself. For his team. For the fans. For the rest of the baseball world. How else to move past an 0-8 all-time mark in nine playoff starts? A 2-7 record and 7.71 ERA as a member of the Red Sox against the Yankees? An 0-3 mark in four starts with a 10.34 ERA this year alone against the Yanks?

Of course first-year manager Alex Cora swore his allegiance to Price on Friday, pointing to the July nadir of a five-home run debacle in the Bronx as a turning point, when Price made the adjustments that led to him going 7-1 with a 2.41 ERA over his final 12 starts.

“He’s ready. He’s ready for the challenge,” Cora insisted. “This guy, I mean he’s been one of the best pitchers in the big leagues for a long, long time. We get caught up in the numbers and the playoffs and all that. I still remember he pitched Game 163 in Texas and he threw a complete game. I still remember a game a few years ago in Kansas City in the fifth or sixth inning and he was rolling, they hit a pop-up and the ball dropped and after that there were a few seeing-eye singles and he lost the game.

“For him it’s about health. He’s healthy. He prepares. You see the same guy on the mound, but a different game plan going into games. And I do feel that he’s ready for this one.

“We feel he’s in a good place mentally and physically. We have to wait and see.”

Yes we do. There is no escaping it. Price knows it. You know it. He knows that you know it. You know that he knows that you know it. His first three questions Friday were about it, and how he might go about fixing it. After a minor variation of the same answer to the first two — “Just focus on every pitch,” he said, “Just another game, don’t treat it any differently than any other game I’ve been a part of this year or in my career,” he added — the third brought out an interesting admission. Asked if that approach meant he’d done differently in the past, Price said “No.”

“I just don’t have an answer for you guys,” he said. “I’ve been asked that quite a while now. I can’t really put my finger on it. That was my generic answer.”

Well nothing about this series feels generic, even if a large swath of the baseball nation shakes its collective head with a sighing, “those guys again?” These teams did indeed dominate the MLB headlines this season, the Red Sox with their 108 wins and the Yankees with their 100, the Red Sox with their one-game advantage in 19 regular-season meetings and the Yankees with their new major league record for total home runs. But the teams haven’t actually met in the playoffs since the unforgettable Aaron-bleeping-Boone ALCS in 2003 and its Schilling-bloody-sock encore in 2004, setting quite the dramatic backdrop for this series to live up to.

Price, who hasn’t started a postseason game since losing Boston’s ALDS Game 2 two years ago against Cleveland, would benefit more than anyone from a similarly heroic postseason performance.

“It’s been 300-something games, however long it’s been, it has been a while,” he said. “I look forward to getting back to that point, going out there and starting a baseball game and giving us a chance to win.”

That’s the thing about professional sports. You never know when opportunities come, and you never know if you’ll get them again. The chances to make a permanent imprint on a city’s collective psyche are fleeting, and for Price’s most memorable moments to end up being an injury from playing the video game Fortnite or an insult to the venerable player-turned-broadcaster Dennis Eckersley would be a shame for someone of his ability.

Saturday night is his next best chance with the eraser.

“That’s a guy I trust,” Cora said.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Crazy eighth: Rick Porcello comes to rescue of battered Red Sox bullpen

Jason Mastrodonato

The heads began to turn when Rick Porcello started warming up in the seventh inning last night.

Porcello, the team’s third starter, was going to be the new eighth-inning guy?

Crazy as it looked, it was exactly the kind of move Alex Cora had to try.

One by one, his regular relievers had trotted out of the bullpen in their regular roles. One by one, they coughed up hits, walks and wild pitches.

It was Porcello who finally stalled the momentum of the New York Yankees and paved the way for Craig Kimbrel to finish the Red Sox' 5-4 win in Game 1 of the American League Division Series last night.

"One thing I learned last year, to win a World Series is going to take 25, 27 guys to do it, regardless of their roles," Cora said. "In a perfect world the starter goes six. You have the seventh-inning guy, eighth-inning and ninth-inning and you move on. To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult. And sometimes you have to go to Plan B or Plan C."

Using Porcello in the eighth was Plan "C and a half probably," Cora said.

That's enough of Plans A and B, already. Time for Plan C and a half as the first option.

Cora tried doing it the normal way last night. It was easily predictable and almost totally disastrous.

After 5 1/3 strong innings from Chris Sale, Cora turned to Ryan Brasier, who threw high-90 mph heaters and a sharp slider but couldn't locate. Brasier let both of Sale's runners score and the Sox' 5-0 lead was down to 5-2 in a hurry.

Brandon Workman, who spent most of the season in Triple-A Pawtucket, was next. Though he threw probably the best pitch of the night in the sixth, striking out Gleyber Torres on a nasty curve to end the inning, he created more trouble in the seventh when he allowed a pair of leadoff singles.

Workman turned it over to Matt Barnes, and a few minutes later the bases were loaded. Another run scored before the inning was over and the lead was down to two.

Plans A and B had failed.

And that's when Cora turned to Porcello, who was supposed to start Game 3. He didn't know he was going to the bullpen until Cora asked him in pregame batting practice.

"He said he was going to try not to use me but to be ready to go," Porcello said. "I said OK. He called down in the eighth, said I was in the game. I was definitely a little surprised but excited for that opportunity."

The 29-year-old Porcello hasn't ever come on in relief for the Red Sox in the regular season. The only time he's done it in a Red Sox uniform was in Game 1 of the ALDS last year, when he threw a scoreless eighth inning in a blowout loss to the Astros.

"What am I going to say, no?" Porcello said. "It's cliché, but whatever it takes. They needed me to cover the eighth and get the ball to Craig. That was my job."

Porcello was supposed to start Game 3 on Monday. Most pitchers throw a side session in between starts, and yesterday was Porcello's day to do that.

Just throw in the game instead. Pretty simple.

Except Porcello already threw his side session before the game.

"I threw 20-25 pitches," he said.

And he threw again in the eighth inning, when he looked sharp from pitch one and pitched so well in 2/3 of an inning that when Cora came out to get him after he allowed a weak infield hit to Torres, the Fenway crowd started to boo.

"I had a lot of adrenaline going," Porcello said. "My legs were shaking a little bit. I saw 94 mph, I don't think I hit that before the All-Star break."

He was the first and only Red Sox reliever to retire the leadoff man last night.

“I was really looking forward to that opportunity and I’m happy that I got it,” Porcello said. “Anytime you ask me to pick up a ball, I’ll do it.”

Porcello still said he might pitch Game 3. Or pitch out of the bullpen again.

“I’ll do whatever we need,” he said. “Until my arm falls off.”

If it was Porcello in Game 1, maybe it will be starter-turned-reliever Eduardo Rodriguez. Or the Yankee killer, Nathan Eovaldi.

It’s simply not going to work the normal way with this bullpen. Cora tried it. He got his his regular relievers in regular roles. The results were ugly.

Time to get crazy. Crazy just might work.

Red Sox escaped, but bullpen needs to be better

Michael Silverman

The Red Sox won a playoff game Friday night – 5-4 over the Yankees – but in the most predictable outcome ever, a brutally shaky bullpen wiped clean the meager balance they had in the bank.

Performances like last night's won't fly the rest of October – not deep into October at least.

Before the gruel was dished out, everything was lollipops and frosting.

Chris Sale was dealing, J.D. Martinez was slugging, Mookie Betts was dazzling and the Red Sox held a 5-0 lead more than halfway through the game.

The Red Sox were in 108-win mode and the storyline could not have looked any brighter, not with Sale touching 96 mph and sitting in the mid-90's over his 5-1/3 innings, with a serviceable slider and good enough change-up that resulted in eight strikeouts and just five hits.

And while first-time playoff manager Alex Cora did not pull a Grady Little and leave his starter in too long, he also had to witness the distressing scene of turning to a bullpen that combined to allow four runs from the sixth inning on.

In terms of energy and excitement at the ballpark, the effort was sublime from the Yankees' and their fans' perspective, sucking most of the joy and delirium out of Fenway and leaving fans at home twitching on their sofas.

Sale left two batters behind, and first reliever Ryan Brasier brought them home with a single and a forceout.

Brandon Workman came in, allowed a walk, before he delivered an impressive third-strike curveball to No. 9 hitter Gleyber Torres.

Score: 5-2.

The seventh inning began with Workman putting his first two runners on. A wild pitch from Matt Barnes moved them 90 feet closer to home. An RBI groundout narrowed the lead to 5-3.

It figured that a starter, Rick Porcello, was the best of the bunch in his emergency appearance, retiring the first two batters he faced. He allowed a single, however, and Cora heard boos when he came out to replace him with Craig Kimbrel.

The closer got the out, but he allowed a home run to Aaron Judge leading off the ninth and the shroud descended.

Kimbrel did deliver, striking out the next three batters to preserve the win.

This is a dangerous Yankees lineup.

If the Red Sox lineup and starters continue to build and protect huge leads night in and day out, then the Red Sox are all set.

But we all understand that's not in the cards.

Coming in, the Red Sox bullpen was the ugly duckling among peacocks on this team. It was no secret, and it was in plain sight from the middle of the season till the end. The front office would not and could not pull the trigger on a trade for a fresh arm, relying on the likes of Brasier, Barnes, Workman and Kimbrel.

In their first exposure to playoff baseball, the most effective reliever was a starter, Porcello.

Kimbrel did wind up with the save, but the Red Sox cannot depend on the Porcello-Kimbrel combo the rest of the way.

Great start to series: Chris Sale solid as Red Sox edge Yankees in Game 1

Stephen Hewitt

As Chris Sale prepared for his first postseason start at Fenway Park, something stuck out in his conversations with Alex Cora this week.

It had nothing to do with the shoulder issues that had caused some concern leading into October, and nothing about the velocity of his fastball. The message from his manager was rather simple.

"It was, win the first pitch and then win every pitch after that," Sale said. "I threw every pitch tonight like he was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch I threw. You have to go up there and do what you have to do to get a win."

The Red Sox ace certainly took that to heart. The lefty's first pitch was a 96 mph fastball on which Andrew McCutchen swung and missed. It was a sign that Sale was back.

If that wasn't clear, Sale struck out McCutchen, then punched out Aaron Judge. By then, there was no doubt Sale not only was just fine physically, but ready for this moment.

It wasn't totally smooth, but a year after a bad October start in Houston put the Red Sox behind, this was what Sale needed. The lefty's return to form was what the Red Sox were looking for, and though the bullpen made for some very nervous moments, it was just enough as they took Game 1 of the AL Division Series with a 5-4 victory over the Yankees at an electric Fenway Park.

Sale earned his first career postseason win and became the first Red Sox starter to get a playoff win since John Lackey won Game 6 of the 2013 World Series.

"He did an outstanding job for us," Cora said. "Gave us a chance to win the game."

Any questions concerning Sale mostly erased. After sitting in the lower 90s in his last start of the regular season, Sale's fastball consistently hovered as high as 96 mph, and it averaged 94.6 mph.

His off-speed stuff was as filthy as usual, too. Of his eight strikeouts, five came via the slider, and two were courtesy of his changeup. He finished with 12 swinging strikes -- five sliders, four changeups -- as he consistently kept Yankees hitters guessing.

"My game plan has been the same since the day I got here," Sale said. "And that's relying on either Sandy (Leon) or (Christian Vazquez) behind the plate. They have done a really good job of getting me through games. And Sandy tonight was exceptional behind the plate.

Sale pitched 5 1/3 innings -- just short of Cora's goal of going six -- and gave up five hits in 93 pitches of work.

"If he didn't take the ball out of my hand, I would have kept throwing," Sale said. "I said it, I think this is my third time saying it, there's no holding back. They want me to throw 150, I'm throwing 150. If they ask me to throw tomorrow, I'll throw tomorrow. I think that's the mindset for every person in this clubhouse."

Some run support helped, too, and it was appropriate that J.D. Martinez provided it almost immediately. After Sale's strong first, Martinez smacked a three-run line drive over the Green Monster to give the Red Sox a 3-0 lead.

The Red Sox used that spark to take a 5-0 lead in the third, and chased Yankees starter J.A. Happ -- who had success against them during the regular season -- after just two innings.

"Obviously it was important to get that lead right away," Martinez said. "And I think it kind of took a little pressure off everyone. Any time you go into the playoff game everyone's adrenaline is high and tensions are going, stuff like that. I think giving Chris that lead, being able to let him settle in and go out there and pitch, I think definitely just helped relax everybody."

It didn't exactly relax the bullpen, which again flirted with disaster. It took five relievers -- including a starter -- to get the job done, but they made the pitches when absolutely needed.

Ryan Brasier relieved Sale in what became a shaky sixth, and allowed both runners he inherited to score. Then came Brandon Workman, who issued a four-pitch walk to Gary Sanchez that loaded the bases. But the righty dug in, and after pitching the count full to Gleyber Torres, his knuckle curve got him swinging to end the inning.

Workman was shaky in the seventh, as he gave up back-to-back singles to McCutchen and Judge, which forced Cora to go to Matt Barnes earlier than he wanted. But Barnes immediately threw a wild pitch, and then walked Brett Gardner to load the bases with no outs.

Barnes didn't allow the Yankees to do damage, though. He struck out Giancarlo Stanton, before forcing Luke Voit and Didi Gregorius into groundouts. The Yankees only got one run.

Cora made a bold decision by inserting Rick Porcello -- who was scheduled to start Monday's Game 3 in New York -- to start the eighth, and it paid off. He got two outs before Cora turned to Craig Kimbrel for the four-out save. After giving up a leadoff homer to Judge in the ninth, Kimbrel struck out the side to preserve Game 1.

"It's about getting 27 outs," Cora said. "Having the lead. And we did it."

These Red Sox are just having fun, like their manager Alex Cora

Justin Pelletier

No one will mistake Eduardo Rodriguez for Tom Brady.

Nearly four hours before the first pitch of the Red Sox' Division Series opener against the Yankees yesterday, the starter-turned-reliever casually tossed a football back and forth with teammates. The ball wobbled worse than a Weeble out of the lefty's hand, and the group of players had a laugh over it.

The night before, Bill Belichick — rough, tough, gruff Bill Belichick — broke from his stoic postgame football routine after the Patriots' 38-24 win over Indianapolis to wish the Red Sox well this weekend.

“With that, I'd just like to wish the Red Sox well in their playoff series,” Belichick said, cracking a seldom-seen smile to cap his postgame presser. “We're pulling for them.”

E-Rod probably could use a few pointers from Belichick and Brady on how to grip and throw a football, but he and the Sox were certainly appreciative of his interest.

“Was he intense? That's awesome. That's cool,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said before Game 1. “To play sports and follow sports in this city at this time is unreal. The Patriots and the Bruins and Celtics and us. What we've been doing the last few years, it's fun.”

Fun. Like players warming up by throwing a football. Or playing hot potato.

Just down the line from Rodriguez and company, near first base, three Red Sox infielders led by a jovial Steve Pearce slapped a ball around with their hands. They weren't allowed to catch the ball, and they couldn't let it hit the ground. They laughed while trying to force each other to mess up.

That they were about to play in just the fourth postseason series ever between the Red Sox and Yankees didn't seem to cross their minds.

Loose. That was the mood du jour at Fenway Park in the afternoon. It's something the players appear to have gleaned from their manager, who reinforced that notion before the game.

“I've been saying all along, it's just a game,” Cora said. “It's just a game.”

He was referring to being with his family after breaking down film, but all season he's been of the same mindset, and he has imparted that attitude on the clubhouse.

It's infectious, in the best possible way.

That's one reason why, win or lose, the Red Sox will still believe they can come right back to the park today and do it all over again with a positive result. It's a big reason why the team muddled through a losing streak of three games just four times this season.

And a four-game losing streak? Didn't happen, not once.

Minimizing losing streaks is something the Sox have in common with the Patriots, who have lost back-to-back games just 12 times in the Belichick-Brady era.

No one has ever accused the Patriots of being a “fun” organization, but they clearly enjoy winning. Brady smiles more often than not, even in tough situations.

And Belichick? Well, at least he smiled when he talked about the Red Sox.

And as long as that mood permeates this team, they'll have a chance to keep playing.

Now, about those football-throwing lessons for Rodriguez.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora experiences something familiar from a whole new angle

Alex Cora

Thursday night was different than the rest.

Alex Cora has been to the playoffs before, but as his Red Sox prepared to begin the Divisional Series against the Yankees, it was enough to keep the first-year manager looking for more.

“For some reason I kept looking at video and video and video,” said Cora, who seemingly has pressed all the right buttons on the way to the 108 regular-season wins. “We played them 19 times, you know? They played the A’s. It was the same team we faced over the weekend.”

Cora wouldn’t say if he was nervous going into his first playoff game as a big league manager last night, but there’s no question he understands the brighter spotlight placed upon him now.

The skipper eventually turned off the video and went to bed, and by yesterday morning, everything was back to normal. He was up by 7:30 a.m. playing with his kids, and everything seemed routine, even though there’s nothing exactly routine about what he was about to face last night at Fenway Park.

“I’ve been saying all along, it’s just a game,” Cora said. “It’s just a game. You come here and you work. But at the same time when it’s over or before you get here to the ballpark, you have to take care of your family. That’s what I did.”

It may be just a game, but everybody will be watching. Even Bill Belichick made sure to note after his Patriots beat the Colts on Thursday night that he’ll be watching and pulling for the Red Sox.

“Was he intense? That’s awesome. That’s cool,” Cora said. “I mean, like I’ve been saying all along, to play sports and follow sports in this city at this time is unreal. The Patriots and the Bruins and Celtics and us. What we’ve been doing the last few years, it’s fun.

“I’m humbled because he’s paying attention. . . . He knows what’s going on, which is cool. I have the utmost respect for him. He’s one of the best, if not the greatest. And for him to pay attention is cool. I know the guys like that.”

Everybody will be paying attention, and Cora embraces it. As he prepared for his first playoff game as manager, he drew on the many lessons from his past.

Cora, who was a bench coach with the Astros last year when they won the World Series, said he talked a lot with Astros manager A.J. Hinch in recent days. One lesson he noted he learned under Hinch is that there’s going to be a point where everyone on the 25-man roster will be needed.

That experience under Hinch will be utilized.

“With A.J., he’s great at saying a lot and then giving you a lot of information after the games, which is great,” Cora said. “He’s awesome. He’s great with the media. He’s great with the players. . . . Just being around him last year, not only him, that organization, really prepared me for this.”

And then there’s Indians manager Terry Francona. Cora knows Tito from four seasons he played for the Red Sox under Francona. One thing Cora learned from Francona was his demeanor in big moments.

“I always said that Tito, the way he handled this, he’s the best,” Cora said. “I mean, the way he says a lot and doesn’t say anything, it’s amazing. That always — I mean, he’s unreal. I used to listen to him last year, even this year, I’m like, ‘He ain’t saying anything.’ Whatever. But he’s great.

“I was watching the game earlier. Whatever is going on, how calm he is in the dugout is very important. He did that with us in '07. For whatever they talk about '04, but in '07 we were down 3-1 against Cleveland playing over there. He didn't change.”

Cora had trouble comparing the two managers, one of which he will be playing against in the ALCS if the Red Sox advance.

“But those two guys, they are different, very different. One is sharp, you know, and the other one is . . . Tito,” Cora joked. “And in their way they are great. I learned from them.”

David Price confident tonight is the night to win as a postseason starter

Michael Silverman

If your name is David Price and at first you don't succeed, you try, try, try, try, try, try, try, try, try again.

And if tonight is actually the night when Price hits on lucky No. 10 after eight prior losses, one no-decision and a 5.74 ERA as a postseason starter, far be it from any of us amateur and professional baseball fans to have a clue as to how he flipped the script on his long and undistinguished career in this critical department.

It remains an unsolved mystery, one with almost sinister undertones in these parts considering Price's overall demeanor before this season and his inability to do his job in his first stab in his first year in 2016.

Price was excellent as a reliever last October — zero runs allowed over 6²/₃ innings and two appearances — but John Henry and Co. did not bring Price to town for seven seasons and \$217 million to run in from the bullpen. They brought him here to throw first pitches and win in every month, including October. And while Price did have one strong start as a playoff starter — eight innings, two runs in the Division Series for the Tigers in 2014 — he still lost the game.

Over the last few Octobers, the return of the swallows to Capistrano has nothing on the frequency of the questions to Price about why he hasn't succeeded as a postseason starter.

It's a useless line of questioning to ask Price to go all Sherlock Holmes on himself. But like bunting, it's part of the postseason pageantry.

At least Price has a sense of humor about it.

“I just don't have an answer for you guys,” he said, almost sheepishly with a sincere grin to boot. “I've been asked that quite awhile now. I can't really put my finger on it.”

He added, “That was my generic answer.”

Generically speaking, what distinguishes Price from the average underachieving postseason starter has been he was too often touchy and testy, starting toward the end of Year 1 and continuing into Year 2. This year, healthy at last, he also vowed over the winter that he looked forward to “being that faucet and not being a drain” this year.

Price lived up to that, and he pitched very well since the All-Star break — 6-1, 2.25 ERA, .200 opponents batting average and 0.97 WHIP over 11 starts.

This being Price and this being the Yankees, there is, of course, a hiccup. The Yanks hammered Price this season, pounding him for nine home runs, a 1.162 OPS and .309 batting average in four starts and 15²/₃ innings.

As much as Price hopes tonight is the night, he would like to point out that there are larger considerations than the David Price narrative.

“Yeah, but if I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I’ll take that,” said Price. “That’s what I’m here for. I don’t want this to be about me and me not winning. I want to go out there (tonight) and throw the ball well and help the Red Sox win. Whether we’re up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is, I want the Red Sox to win (tonight). That’s what I worry about.”

If there’s anything Price has learned over his 731/3 postseason innings (5.04 ERA), it’s that slowing down games to a crawl in October is essential.

“Just focus on every pitch, take it pitch by pitch,” he said. “Don’t worry about the last one, don’t think about the next one. Just focus on that pitch.”

If Price does not plan to focus on his last pitch, good or bad, he certainly has no intent to pull the shutters of his mind on his history.

“Just another game,” said Price. “Don’t treat it differently than any other game I’ve been a part of this year or in my career. That’s what I need to do (tonight). That’s what I look forward to doing.”

Of course, Price stated similar sentiments in 2016 before his first postseason start with the Red Sox.

“I want to help this team win, that’s the bottom line, that’s the mindset I want to take out there on the fifth day,” said Price before Game 2 against the Indians that year. “Tomorrow I want to go out there and win. I want to be dominant. I want to have that really good postseason game, and I know that I’m capable of doing that and I’m excited to pitch tomorrow.”

He’s excited for tonight again.

“Yeah, it’s been 300-something games, however long it’s been, it has been a while (since the last postseason start),” he said. “I look forward to getting back to that point, going out there and starting a baseball game and giving us a chance to win.”

Just a chance to win. That’s all Price wants.

One more chance.

Red Sox notebook: J.D. Martinez has deep impact in opening win

Jason Mastrodonato

Only one of the high-profile, high-priced designated hitters had a good game last night.

J.D. Martinez’ first playoff game in a Red Sox uniform was one to remember, as he slammed a three-run homer on a pitch from J.A. Happ in his very first at-bat in the first inning to lead the Red Sox to an eventual 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1 of the American League Division Series.

Martinez told manager Alex Cora before the game that he would be looking for a low pitch from Happ to slam his first career homer off the tough lefty. He got one, a 94 mph heater low and inside. Martinez roped it on a line over the Green Monster.

“It’s a different feeling,” Martinez said. “Everything you did before in the season doesn’t matter anymore. This is the playoffs. From here on out everything starts at zero. Look at scoreboard, all your numbers are zero, zero, zero. So you know what’s at stake. You know what the situation is. You’re playing the Yankees. This is the playoffs. You have to go. And now is the time to get it going.”

“When I hit it, obviously I was a little bit more pumped up than every other home run I hit during the season. But that's just because of the stage, really.”

Martinez' homer gave the Red Sox their first lead in a playoff game since Game 1 of the ALDS in 2016. They had fallen behind in their previous six straight postseason games.

Playing with a lead was a revelation to members of this team that had grown so accustomed to playing from behind on this stage.

“Last year in Houston same thing -- whenever they scored first, you could feel a little edge going to the team that scored,” shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. “Tonight was fun, it was loud -- the end of the game especially.”

While Martinez shined as the Red Sox' DH, Giancarlo Stanton fizzled as the Yankees DH.

Stanton was 1-for-5 with four strikeouts and five men left on base. With the bases loaded and nobody out in the seventh, Matt Barnes struck him out on a curve.

“Was able to settle down on Stanton and make some big pitches when I had to,” Barnes said.

He's not Wright

Knuckleballer Steven Wright was looking like a potential X-factor in this series, but now it appears he may not pitch at all.

Wright's knee was bothering him last night and he complained about it during the game. The Red Sox sent him for an MRI mid-game and he was not available. NBC Sports Boston reported Wright would likely be removed from the ALDS roster.

“We'll know more about it tomorrow,” Cora said.

Heath Hembree and Bobby Poyner were narrowly left off the final ALDS roster in favor of Joe Kelly and Brandon Workman. But if the Sox need length, they could also add Brian Johnson or Hector Velazquez in Wright's spot.

A lot on his plate

Sandy Leon might have been the low-key MVP of the game for the Red Sox last night.

There were only two official wild pitches (and no passed balls) by Red Sox relievers, but there could have been at least a half-dozen if not for Leon's ability to block the ball, especially with runners on base.

“He's really good at blocking pitches,” Cora said. “And actually I don't know how he does it, but he blocks it and he keeps the ball in his hand. There was one today that it was a breaking ball by Barnes that almost bounced in the grass. I'll tell you right now he was able to block it. That's what he brings.”

Rick Porcello, who recorded two outs in the eighth inning, once called Leon the best catcher he's had.

“I don't know how many arms we had come into the ballgame, but for him to command the game the way he did, command the plate the way he did, it's hard to calculate the statistics and his value behind the plate,” Porcello said last night. “We all have a ton of confidence throwing to him. He's really the one who has kept this pitching staff together the entire year.”

They'll role with it

Brock Holt, Rafael Devers and Blake Swihart weren't in the starting lineup last night, but all three are expected to play a big role this series.

Cora didn't want to start too many left-handed hitters against lefty Happ, who was allowing just a .171 average and two homers to lefties this year. Devers should be in the lineup on today for Game 2 against Masahiro Tanaka.

"The at-bats from Raffy lately, those are good to see," Cora said. "And he's not out of the equation. This guy is going to be an important part of what we're trying to accomplish."

Cora talked to Holt to let him know that even though he might not be starting any games this series, his hot bat (.415, four homers in last 14 games) will be called upon.

"I told him to be ready the whole game, just be ready to hit," Cora said. "The way he's swinging the bat...he's doing an outstanding job coming off the bench. He's putting good at bats. We know we can start him at any spot, second, third the outfield. Most likely the outfield is going to stay the same throughout (the series), but I do feel that there is going to be spots with men in scoring position that we can use him and he doesn't have to face a lefty."

Swihart is less of a third catcher and "more of a utility guy," Cora said.

Yankees set rotation

The Yankees announced they will start Luis Severino in Game 3 and lefty CC Sabathia in Game 4, manager Aaron Boone said.

Prior to Ian Kinsler starting last night's game, Dustin Pedroia had started at second base for the Red Sox last 51 postseason games from 2007-17. The last player other than Pedroia to start at second for the Sox was Tony Graffanino in Game 3 of the 2005 ALDS...

The Sox have won 12 of the 18 postseason series in which they won Game 1, including 8 of 9 since the start of 2004.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 5, Yankees 4: Sale starts strong, Boston holds on

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- An ineffective left-handed starting pitcher departed the Fenway Park mound in the third inning Friday night.

All five men he allowed to reach safely came around to score. His bullpen was tasked with recording 21 outs in Game 1 of the American League Division Series, an onerous task against one of baseball's most fearsome offenses.

This would have been the disaster scenario for a Red Sox fan, and Chris Sale would have been the pitcher in question. Instead, it was J.A. Happ and the Yankees giving ground to open the latest postseason grudge match between the two ancient rivals.

J.D. Martinez's first playoff swing with Boston resulted in a three-run homer, instant offensive support for a suddenly rejuvenated Sale. The Red Sox ace labored his way through the season's final two months while battling shoulder inflammation but now, in hindsight, seemed to be saving himself for the most important games of 2018.

Sale's 5 1/3 strong innings set the tone and the Boston bullpen white-knuckled its way through the final 11 outs, as New York refused to go quietly. The Yankees put the tying run on base in both the sixth and seventh innings, announced Game 3 starter Rick Porcello retired two batters in the eighth and Craig Kimbrel was summoned for a four-out save.

The end result was still the one the Red Sox were after. Boston held on long enough for a 5-4 victory, the third time in as many tries the franchise has captured the first game of an ALDS at home. The other instances came in 2007 against the Angels and 2013 against the Rays, and the Red Sox finished each season celebrating a World Series title.

"In a perfect world the starter goes six," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "You have the seventh inning guy, eighth inning, ninth inning and then you move on. To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult. And sometimes you have to go to Plan B or Plan C."

Boston's relievers will need to shape up for a similar finish to take place this October. Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes all walked a tightrope while attempting to protect a 5-0 lead, as New York sent a combined 14 men to the plate in back-to-back innings. The Yankees chipped their way to within a run but ultimately finished 1-for-7 with men in scoring position and left 10 on base.

"I don't know if it was needing work or just settling in out there," said Workman, who struck out Gleyber Torres to leave the bases loaded in the sixth. "We'll be back ready to go tomorrow and I feel like all of us will be a little bit sharper."

Luke Voit's single to right and a fielder's choice grounder by Didi Gregorius plated a pair of inherited runs against Brasier in the sixth. Voit escaped another potential double play in the seventh on a grounder to third, cutting into the deficit again, but Gregorius bounced harmlessly to second against Barnes to end the threat. Aaron Judge's leadoff solo homer against Kimbrel in the ninth left New York just short.

Sale struck out the side in the top of the first inning and fanned eight men in all. The dipping fastball velocity he displayed in his final tuneup against the Orioles was replaced by something approaching his traditional heat, as Sale touched 96.6 mph in the opening frame. The season-high sellout crowd of 39,059 fans roared with approval as Sale departed after 93 pitches and in line for his first postseason victory.

"That was awesome," Sale said. "That was my first postseason start here at Fenway. It was incredible."

Happ was unbeaten in his 11 starts with New York and had won seven of them since being acquired from Toronto prior to the trade deadline in July. He picked the worst time to suffer his first defeat, removed after facing just 11 batters and throwing 44 pitches. Andrew Benintendi singled through the left side, Steve Pearce drew a walk and Martinez uncoiled on a 2-and-0 fastball, sending a liner over the Green Monster to give the Red Sox a 3-0 lead after just four batters.

"Obviously it was important to get that lead right away," Martinez said. "It took some pressure off everyone. It definitely helped relax everyone."

Mookie Betts smacked a leadoff double off the wall in left in the third and Benintendi dragged a bunt up the first base line for a single, putting runners at the corners and signaling the end for Happ. Pearce's single through the left side and a sacrifice liner to right by Xander Bogaerts against Chad Green tagged Happ with the last of his five earned runs.

"Happ's thrown well against us this year," Benintendi said. "To jump out there and put the pressure on from the get-go, that's what we wanted to do."

Sox win Game 1, but we're in for a rocky ride

Kevin McNamara

BOSTON – Leave it to Aaron Boone to come up with the perfect word for the atmosphere floating around Fenway Park as the sun set on a beautiful early fall afternoon Friday in the Back Bay.

“Buzzy,” said the New York Yankees manager just hours before his team hooked up with the rival Red Sox in a series that everyone in baseball just knew was bound to happen in 2018.

The buzz certainly rattled around the Fens for the start of the first Boston-New York playoff series since the famed 2004 Reverse the Curse season. Now, to be truthful, we’d love it if this series was a seven-gamer for the right to advance to the World Series. But baseball beggars can’t be choosers. Instead, we are left with a best-of-five Division Series that began with all the pressure on the shoulders of the Red Sox.

In Game 1, the Sox flashed their record-setting offense out of the gate and then survived a horrific effort from their ever-shaky bullpen to hang on for a 5-4 win. Game 2, set for Saturday night, promises to be just as nerve-wracking.

Why are the Red Sox the team that needs to show up more in this series? After winning just one playoff game in the last four seasons, it’s time for this franchise to show it can make waves again in October. There is also plenty of pressure to legitimize a truly special 108-win regular season. There’s also the fact that the Red Sox made a decision to go all-in financially this season and own the highest payroll in the sport at \$228 million, or nearly \$48 million more than the Yankees.

Should we keep going?

There are also a slew of players who need to step up and be counted as playoff-ready talents. At the top of that list are pitchers Chris Sale and David Price. Both are two of the best left-handed starters in baseball but when October rolls around bad things happen. They carried a combined 0-9 record as playoff starters into this series. Throw in Game 3 starter Porcello and no one at the top of the Sox rotation owns a win in 14 playoff starts.

This needs to change, because as first-year manager Alex Cora said, his team isn’t constructed to hand the ball off to the bullpen in the sixth inning every night like the Yankees and the Indians.

“We work differently than other teams. We relied on our starters throughout the season. They carry us,” Cora said.

That did not happen in Game 1. Sale got the start, with good reason. After developing arm soreness in July, the lefty was babied the remainder of the season. This was the smart move, especially for a team that was already on a record pace and running away with the A.L. East crown.

But after pitching just 29 innings in the second half of the season, no one could really tell what Sale would bring to the mound in Game 1. Was the ace ready for the playoffs?

The answer was he looked good, but not nearly long enough. Sale mixed a mid-90s fastball with some sharp sliders to work his way through the first five innings. He carried a 5-0 lead into the sixth but tired and left after throwing 93 pitches. That turned the spotlight to the team’s bullpen and boy did that group stink.

From Ryan Brasier to Brandon Workman to Matt Barnes, the relievers confirmed every worst fear of Sox fans who’ve fretted over the pen all summer. The trio pulled the Full Monty of relief pitching gaffes: walking the first hitter faced, falling behind weak hitters and sending heart monitors at hospitals across New England into overdrive.

To restore order to open the eighth inning, a shaken Cora had to turn to a starting pitcher. Rick Porcello nearly walked Gary Sanchez (.186 average) but was bailed out by a bad call and retired the first two Yankees. Craig Kimbrel, another pitcher with something to prove, came on and secured the third out. In the ninth, Aaron Judge pounded a Kimbrel offering into the bullpen in right to make it a 5-4 game but the

closer blew away Giancarlo Stanton (four strikeouts) and Luke Voit to record his first playoff save as a Red Sox.

So the Sox found a way and won a game they badly needed to open what promises to be a long series. How did they deal with the playoff pressure?

Shakily, at best. Batten down the hatches, the buzz is back.

Red Sox Journal: Matchups led Cora to select Kelly, Workman

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Four pitchers were considered for two spots at the tail end of the Red Sox 25-man roster entering the American League Division Series against the Yankees.

Brandon Workman and Joe Kelly were selected ahead of Heath Hembree and Bobby Poyner, slotting into a bullpen that already includes Craig Kimbrel, Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Steven Wright and Eduardo Rodriguez. Workman's versatility and Kelly's raw stuff were more appealing to Boston manager Alex Cora, who cited Hembree's recent struggles and Poyner's lack of a definite role as reason enough to leave both out of the mix.

"It came down to Poyner, Workman — I think everybody knew," Cora said, stopping himself in the middle of his thought process.

Workman has held opponents scoreless in 10 of his last 13 appearances, and Cora saw enough despite the five earned runs coughed up by Workman in just 1 1/3 innings over two outings against New York in that span. The right-hander is the only Red Sox pitcher with a World Series ring and has almost identical career splits against right-handed and left-handed hitters (.256/.321/.425 against righties, .256/.323/.426 against lefties). Shortstop Didi Gregorius, first baseman Neil Walker and outfielders Aaron Hicks and Brett Gardner are a combined 5-for-23 career against Workman from the left side.

"He matches up well with [Gregorius]," Cora said. "He has good numbers against Walker and against Gardner."

Cora is attempting to catch lightning in a bottle with Kelly. The right-hander allowed just one earned run in a span of 24 appearances from April 1 to May 29 and has hit the wall ever since, pitching to a 6.13 earned-run average in his last 48 games. Kelly's saving graces are his 100-mph fastball and his low home-run rate — 0.5 allowed per nine innings — against a New York team that set a major-league record with 267 this season.

"When he's mixing up his pitches and he's landing his breaking ball, he's tough to hit," Cora said. "Hopefully, we can get the April-May guy and he can dominate for three weeks."

Hembree enjoyed a stretch midway through the season during which he stranded 19 straight inherited runners. The right-hander faded over the last two months, pitching to a 6.14 ERA and allowing five home runs in his last 21 games. Hembree allowed 10 of his 17 inherited runners to score during that span, including five of six in four appearances against the Yankees.

"He knows that toward the end, the role that we were using him in throughout the season, he wasn't successful," Cora said. "And he wasn't keeping the ball in the ballpark, which is important."

Poyner dominated against right-handed hitters in the minor leagues this season, allowing just 25 hits and six earned runs while recording 84 outs against them. Those numbers swelled to a .292/.329/.554 slash line with the Red Sox. Facing the Yankees also inserted Rodriguez into Boston's bullpen mix. Nathan Eovaldi, thanks to no earned runs allowed in his last three appearances against New York, earned a Game 4 start, if necessary, on Tuesday.

“We’re not going to carry a lefty just to carry a lefty,” Cora said. “We’ve got Eduardo, who can give us multiple innings, and we can match up.”

7 righties in lineup

Cora used a similar approach toward determining his Game 1 lineup, trotting out seven right-handed hitters against Yankees left-hander J.A. Happ.

Steve Pearce, Ian Kinsler and Eduardo Nunez were preferred over Mitch Moreland, Brock Holt and Rafael Devers in the infield. Pearce slotted into the No. 3 spot in the batting order, a move that raised some eyebrows, with J.D. Martinez dropping to the cleanup spot. Xander Bogaerts played shortstop and hit fifth.

“That one, the 3-4-5, we had three options,” Cora said. “At the end, that was the winner.”

Pearce (11-for-32, six home runs, 16 RBI) had punished Happ in his career entering Friday night’s game, while Moreland was hitless in five at-bats. Kinsler was slashing .259/.286/.556 against Happ, compared to just .250/.294/.375 for Holt. Nunez (.258/.281/.323) was also a superior option to Devers (.167/.167/.167).

Andrew Benintendi and Jackie Bradley Jr. were the only two left-handed hitters to draw a start against Happ, and with good reason. The trade deadline acquisition from Toronto treated lefties brutally in 2018, holding them to a .487 OPS compared to the .722 posted by right-handed hitters.

“With Happ, you see the splits,” Cora said. “We have two lefties out there. [Benintendi] got two hits the last game [Sept. 28, an 11-6 Boston loss] — he was going to play anyway. Jackie has put good at-bats against him.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Chris Sale battles his way past New York Yankees for first postseason win

Matt Vautour

One batter into the game and the most pressing question was answered.

Yes.

Chris Sale was healthy enough to put the Boston Red Sox in position to win Game 1 of the ALDS against the New York Yankees, Friday at Fenway Park.

After spending much of the last two months battling a balky shoulder, Sale's status had the attention of all of baseball. Chris Sale the ace made the Red Sox a legitimate contender and possible favorite to win the World Series. A struggling Sale put them at serious risk of a first-round exit.

On Friday he was healthy enough to be good enough to set the table for a 5-4 win.

Was this Sale getting healthy enough to be dominant again or a gutty competitor figuring out how to win at less than full strength. Alex Cora didn't know. Maybe he didn't want to. Only Sale knows and he's not telling.

When Pedro Martinez offsped his way to a legendary relief outing win in Cleveland in 1999, he was more than happy to revel in the adulation that came from it. When attention addict Curt Schilling pitched through the bloody sock game, he couldn't wait to address reporters.

Sale isn't built that way. He thinks it's his job to be the No. 1 starter. If he doesn't win, regardless of his physical status, he thinks he's letting the team down. Healthy isn't a binary state for him. He'll pitch until somebody takes the ball away at whatever strength level he's at and expects to figure out a way to win.

Sale wasn't the guy who can touch 100 mph and he wasn't the guy who was just clearing 90 mph at the end of the regular season. His fast ball was in the mid-90s all night. But over half of his 93 pitches were sliders and change ups.

He said he wasn't avoiding his fastball, just following catcher Sandy Leon's instructions.

"I go based on what my catcher says, and that was Sandy's game plan tonight was doing whatever we had to do to get outs," he said. "There's no holding back now. It's everything on the table, everything you've got."

If it were up to Sale he might pitch like that all the time. But the Red Sox protected him from himself during the regular season, shutting him down at any hint of discomfort.

There's no holding him back now. His effectiveness was faltering when he came out in the sixth, but not his will.

"If he didn't take the ball out of my hand, I would have kept throwing," Sale said. "There's no holding back. They want me to throw 150, I'm throwing 150. If they ask me to throw tomorrow, I'll throw tomorrow."

He won't pitch tomorrow (Saturday) and by winning, Sale took some of the pressure off the guy who will. David Price and all his postseason question marks, has a much larger cushion with Boston being up 1-0 compared to the alternative. The worst the Red Sox can be is tied heading to New York and game 3.

If there's a Game 5, Sale is likely starting it and eager to pitch until they stop him.

"You know, AC said something to me the other night that really stuck, that was, 'win the first pitch and then win every pitch after that.' I threw every pitch tonight like he was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch I threw. You have to go up there and do what you have to do to get a win."

So far so good.

Brandon Workman: Boston Red Sox bullpen 'definitely been under scrutiny. The guys we have are more than capable'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- The Red Sox escaped with a 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1 of the ALDS despite a near bullpen meltdown.

Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes allowed three runs (two inherited runs), three hits and three walks in 1.2 innings after ace Chris Sale left with a 5-0 lead, two men on base and one out in the sixth.

"I feel like our bullpen's definitely been under scrutiny," Workman said in the Red Sox clubhouse after the Game 1 win. "But when you look at it, we really did put up good numbers this season. So the guys we have out there are more than capable in doing the job we need to get done throughout this playoffs."

Red Sox relievers have confidence in themselves. Barnes said Sept. 22 he was very confident in the bullpen's ability to get the job done this postseason.

"Very. Very. It's that simple," Barnes told MassLive.com. "I don't think anybody in this room has a doubt."

The Red Sox bullpen did post some "good numbers" during the regular season as Workman pointed out. It finished with a 3.72 ERA, tied for eighth in the major leagues.

But it posted a 4.84 ERA and 4.52 FIP during September. It finished with a 4.32 ERA and 4.46 FIP during the second half.

The Red Sox and Marlins each blew 12 saves during the second half, tied for the second most in the big leagues. The Diamondbacks were the only team with more blown saves (16).

The Red Sox ranked 20th in the majors in eighth inning ERA (4.28) during 2018. Boston relievers also had the ninth highest walk rate (3.75 BB/9) in the majors.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora used Rick Porcello for two outs in the eighth inning here Friday.

"I mean, one thing I learned last year to win a World Series is going to take 25, 27 guys to do it, regardless of their roles," Cora said. "In a perfect world the starter goes six. You have the seventh-inning guy, eighth inning and ninth inning and you move on. To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult. And sometimes you have to go to plan B or plan C."

Cora treated this game too much like a regular season game before turning to Porcello. He should have turned to either Game 4 starter Nathan Eovaldi, Porcello or Eduardo Rodriguez to relieve Sale. Or at least he should have used one of the three pitchers in the seventh and eighth innings.

He needs to get creative. He needs to use Eovaldi and Porcello for an inning on the days of their bullpen sessions (in place of their bullpens).

Knuckleballer Steven Wright underwent an MRI on his knee Friday. It appears he won't pitch again. Eduardo Rodriguez should be used in a Super Reliever role (bridging the gap from the starter to the setup man/closer) like some anticipated Wright would fill.

How about Barnes even filling a multi-inning role earlier in games? Barnes pitched well here Friday despite allowing a walk. He hurled a scoreless seventh (allowed one inherited runner to score).

Workman recorded a crucial out to end the sixth before allowing two singles to lead off the seventh.

Workman replaced Brasier in the sixth. He walked Gary Sanchez to load the bases before striking out Gleyber Torres swinging on a 3-2, 79.5 mph curveball to end the frame.

"Honestly none of them (the pitches to Sanchez) were really even close," Workman said. "So I just had to take a deep breath and get back to executing. I was able to get that first pitch strike swinging with the cutter. And it kind of settled me in a little bit. And I was able to work from there."

The Red Sox have a 1-0 lead in the best-of-five series but the bullpen certainly didn't instill confidence.

"We'll be back ready to go tomorrow, and I feel like all of us will be a little bit sharper than we were today," Workman said.

We'll see. The bullpen hasn't been sharp since June. Why should we believe it will be sharp Saturday in Game 2?

Porcello, Sox's Game 1 star, felt legs shake in 8th; 'I was really looking forward to that opportunity'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Red Sox righty Rick Porcello, who is scheduled to start Game 3 of the ALDS, threw a bullpen session of approximately 25 pitches before batting practice Friday.

"I told (pitching coach) Dana (LeVangie) to take the ball out of my hand at 15 (pitches)," Porcello said. "But it was more like 25."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora then informed Porcello right around batting practice he might use him in relief during Game 1 vs. the Yankees.

"He said he was going to try not to use me but to be ready to go," Porcello said.

Cora did use Porcello -- for two majors outs.

"It was definitely a cool little surprise," Porcello said.

Porcello recorded the first two outs of the eighth inning after Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes had allowed three runs (two inherited runs), three hits and three walks in the previous 1.2 innings.

The Red Sox held on for a 5-4 win over the Yankees here at Fenway Park. Porcello and closer Craig Kimbrel, who recorded the final four outs, saved Boston from a massive bullpen collapse in Game 1.

Kimbrel wasn't flawless. The fireballer allowed a 108.8 mph, 382-foot solo homer to Aaron Judge to lead off the ninth.

Red Sox fans booed when Cora visited the mound to remove Porcello with two outs in the eighth. The righty allowed a soft infield single to Gleyber Torres, then Cora replaced him with Kimbrel.

"I told him I needed a couple minutes to think about it," Porcello joked about his reaction to Cora telling him he might use him in relief. "Of course it was instantaneous. I was really looking forward to that opportunity and I'm happy I got it. Any time he asks me to pick up the ball and step on the mound, I'll do it."

Porcello is willing to make relief outings between other starts this postseason.

"I'll do whatever we need," Porcello said. "Until my arm falls off, yeah."

"It doesn't matter this time of year," Porcello added. "You get out there, you get the adrenaline going, you don't feel a thing."

He felt the adrenaline pumping.

"My legs were shaking a little bit," Porcello said. "I was throwing 94 (mph). I don't think I've hit that since before the All-Star Break."

It's unlikely Porcello will start Game 3 after throwing both a bullpen session and recording two outs in eighth inning here Friday. Nathan Eovaldi likely would start in his place.

"We'll figure out how I feel tomorrow and go from there," Porcello said. "It's not going to matter. This is the biggest stage. This is what we play for."

The Red Sox, meanwhile, took a 1-0 lead in their best-of-five ALDS after falling behind 0-2 each of the past two years.

"Different teams, different year," Porcello said. "The entire season this year has had a different feel to it than the last two years."

Boston Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez on Game 1: 'I was more pumped up than every other home run I hit during the season'

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez doesn't usually show emotion. So when he celebrated while rounding first base after hitting a three-run homer in the first inning of Game 1 of the ALDS on Friday night, it was clear he knew he had produced a special moment.

"When I hit it, obviously I was a little bit more pumped up than every other home run I hit during the season," Martinez said. "But that's just because of the stage."

Martinez had previously hit three postseason homers with the Tigers and Diamondbacks and had 42 home runs during the regular season. But giving the Red Sox a 3-0 lead in a playoff game against their arch-rivals meant Friday's homer was one of the biggest hits of his career.

"He got a good pitch to hit down in the zone," manager Alex Cora said. "As you know, (J.A.) Happ lives upstairs in the edges of the strike zone. He was disciplined enough to get him down and put a good swing on it."

Martinez's home run provided most of the offense in Boston's 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1. But more importantly, it provided an early spark on a night when Boston didn't know exactly what it would get out of starter Chris Sale or the relievers behind him.

"Any time you go into the playoff game, everyone's adrenaline is high and tensions are going," Martinez said. "I think giving Chris that lead, being able to let him settle in and go out there and pitch, I think definitely just helped relax everybody."

J.D. Martinez homers, Chris Sale K's 8, Boston Red Sox hold on to beat Yankees in ALDS Game 1 despite shaky bullpen

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez belted only five home runs in his final 33 games of the regular season (142 plate appearances).

But his power swing reappeared in the first inning of the postseason.

Martinez, who blasted 43 home runs in 2018, crushed the third pitch thrown to him, a 93.8 mph four-seamer from Yankees starter J.A. Happ. He sent it 107.0 mph and 374 feet into the first row of the Monster Seats for a three-run homer.

His blast put Boston ahead 3-0 in the first inning.

The Red Sox scored five runs early and they escaped with a victory in Game 1 of their best-of-five ALDS against the Yankees despite a shaky outing from the bullpen.

Boston won 5-4 over New York here at Fenway Park.

Game 3 starter Rick Porcello even made a surprise appearance. Porcello recorded the first two outs of the eighth inning. Craig Kimbrel recorded the final four outs.

The closer allowed a solo home run to Aaron Judge with no outs in the ninth, cutting the Yankees' deficit to one run.

Game 2 is Saturday. David Price (16-7, 3.58) starts for Boston opposite Yankees righty Masahiro Tanaka (12-6, 3.75).

Sale strikes out eight

Chris Sale's velocity disappeared in September. But it reappeared here in Game 1 like Martinez's power. He topped out at 96.6 mph on the radar gun.

Sale hurled 5.1 innings. He allowed two runs, five hits and two walks while striking out eight.

Sale left with the Red Sox ahead 5-0, one out and two runners on in the sixth.

Shaky bullpen then takes over ...

Ryan Brasier relieved Sale. He allowed both inherited runners to score. The righty gave up a single and walk.

Brandon Workman replaced Brasier. He walked Gary Sanchez to load the bases before striking out Gleyber Torres swinging on a 3-2, 79.5 mph curveball.

But Workman allowed the first two batters to reach in the seventh. Andrew McCutchen and Aaron Judge each singled.

Matt Barnes relieved Workman. He walked Brett Gardner to load the bases.

Barnes struck out Giancarlo Stanton swinging for the first out. Luke Voit, the next batter, grounded to third. The Red Sox failed to turn the double play and McCutchen scored. That cut the Yankees' deficit to 5-3.

Sale's velocity

Sale averaged 94.6 mph and topped out at 96.6 mph with his 31 four-seam fastballs. He got 12 swings-and-misses: five with his slider, four with his changeup and three with his four-seamer.

Sale's four-seam fastball velocity since returning from the DL:

Sept. 11: 15 four-seamers: averaged 96.2 mph, topped out at 97 mph.

Sept. 16: 20 four-seamers: averaged 94.9 mph, topped out at 96.8 mph.

Sept. 21: 25 four-seamers: averaged 93.4 mph, topped out at 95.7 mph.

Sept. 26: 33 four-seamers: averaged 90.2 mph, topped out at 94.5 mph.

Oct. 5: 31 four-seamers: averaged 94.6 mph, topped out at 96.6 mph.

Happ allows 5 runs

The Red Sox knocked out Yankees starter J.A. Happ with no outs in the third inning.

Happ posted 1.99 ERA (22.2 innings, five earned runs) in four starts against the Red Sox during the regular season. But he allowed five runs in 2-plus innings. He gave up four hits and one walk while striking out two.

Mookie Betts led off the third inning with a double. Andrew Benintendi followed with an infield hit.

Reliever Chad Green then replaced Happ.

Steve Pearce stroked an RBI single off Green, making it 4-0 Red Sox. Xander Bogaerts added a sacrifice fly to right field, putting Boston ahead 5-0.

Boston Red Sox ALDS: Steven Wright's knee makes his status uncertain for remainder of ALDS

Matt Vautour

Part of the reason that Rick Porcello came out of the bullpen for the first time in his Red Sox career was that Steven Wright wasn't available in the Boston bullpen with a knee injury.

Wright had discomfort in his knee Thursday night and told manager Alex Cora he couldn't go.

"Steven complained about his knee and he wasn't available," Cora said. "Actually he had an MRI during the night. We'll know more about it tomorrow."

The 34-year-old knuckleballer was 3-1 with a 2.50 earned run average this season, but he missed all of July and August with a knee injury. When he returned in September, Cora moved him to the bullpen and Wright thrived.

In 10 games, he was 1-0 with a save. He allowed 11 hits and six walks in 13.2 innings. He allowed two runs and only one was earned.

That success, coupled with struggled and fatigue among some of the other relievers, made many people project that right could be a late inning option.

If he's not able to go the Red Sox could have questions in an already thin bullpen. Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes all struggled Friday leaving an uncertain path between the starters and closer Craig Kimbrel.

Boston Red Sox ALDS roster: Alex Cora explains decision to take Joe Kelly, Brandon Workman over Heath Hembree

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox finalized their ALDS roster Friday, with the big takeaway being that Joe Kelly and Brandon Workman made the bullpen over Heath Hembree.

Manager Alex Cora said that Hembree's recent struggles combined with Kelly and Workman matching up well with the Yankees contributed to the decision. Hembree, who was Cora's choice with runners on base all season, allowed 10 of the last 17 runners he inherited to score.

"He was doing a good job throughout the season but at the end, it didn't work out," Cora said. "Actually, he wasn't keeping the ball in the ballpark which is the No. 1 goal against these guys. You've got to keep the ball in the ballpark. He struggled with his slider, his off-speed pitches and he paid the price."

Kelly's command has been an issue throughout the year, but Cora believes he can still be effective in short spurts. With Workman, Cora believes his stuff will play against a free-swinging New York lineup.

"We do feel that Joe is trending up," Cora said. "His velocity is still up there. It's still 100. His changeup is getting better. His slider is getting better. With Workman, the combination up fastball up and curveball. It fits what we're trying to accomplish against them."

*** *The Cape Cod Times***

Former Y-D star Sale hears Fenway cheers

Paul Bowker

BOSTON — The cheers first started thirty-one minutes prior to the opening pitch Friday night.

Chris Sale, the ace pitcher of the Boston Red Sox and the former ace of the Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox, began his pregame ritual in the Red Sox bullpen.

A group of Red Sox fans crowded along the fence separating the center field bleacher seats from the bullpen and wildly cheered.

Fenway was still half empty, but the cheers echoed around the place on such a memorable night: the first Red Sox vs. Yankees postseason game in 14 years. Sale was still a 15-year-old teen in Florida when the Red Sox finished off the Yanks in the 2004 American League Championship Series.

A little more than a half hour after those bullpen cheers, after both teams lined up for the pregame introductions and after retired Sox star Trot Nixon threw out the ceremonial first pitch, the Fenway noise erupted into a deafening roar.

Sale struck out Andrew McCutchen, the Yankees' leadoff hitter, on four pitches to open up the game.

Then he struck out former Cape Leaguer Aaron Judge, getting him on a nasty pitch that broke from outside to inside as the ball crossed the plate.

Following a walk to Aaron Hicks, Sale finished off the inning by striking out Yankees power swinger Giancarlo Stanton as every person in the park rose to their feet.

Four Yankees, three strikeouts. Almost the way it was drawn up by Red Sox pitching coach Dana LeVangie, a former ballplayer at Cape Cod Community College.

Sale, who won both his starts against the Yankees in the regular season, added a strikeout in the second inning and another in the third.

This was actually a night that has been in waiting since the summer of 2009, when Sale spent a season with the Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox in the Cape Cod Baseball League and simply put on a dazzling performance all summer long.

He won the league's Most Outstanding Pitcher award. Sale led the league in strikeouts with 57 and innings pitched with 55. His four wins tied for the best that year.

When he pitched in the All-Star Game that summer at Fenway Park, he threw just six pitches. That's how long it took him to retire the side in his one inning.

"You could tell then," Y-D manager Scott Pickler told the Cape Cod Times last year, "he's going to be in the big leagues."

And on its biggest stage, as he was Friday night.

If striking out the side in the opening inning didn't bring a smile to Sale's face, then J.D. Martinez did. With two runners on base in the bottom of the first inning, Martinez smashed a ball over the monster, giving the Red Sox as a 3-0 lead.

Among those jumping up to greet Martinez in the dugout was Sale.

It marked the beginning of what Red Sox (Boston and Y-D) fans hope is a very long postseason run.

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

Price wants to change the narrative

Bill Doyle

BOSTON – Since the All-Star break, David Price has compiled a 6-1 record with a 2.25 earned run average in 11 starts. For the season, he posted a more than respectable 16-7 record with a 3.58 ERA.

Of course, none of that matters to most Red Sox fans. Ever since the Sox signed him to a seven-year, \$217-million contract, the richest ever for a pitcher, in December of 2015, all fans have cared about is when he'll end his postseason nightmare.

When the 33-year-old southpaw starts Game 2 of the ALDS at 8:15 p.m. Saturday against the Yankees at Fenway Park, he'll be looking for his first victory as a starter in his postseason career.

During his 11 seasons in the majors, he's gone 143-75 with a 3.25 ERA during the regular season, but in the playoffs he's only 2-8 with a 5.03 ERA. His two victories came in relief. As a starter, he's 0-8 with a 5.71 ERA. In his only postseason start for the Sox, he allowed five runs on six hits and two walks in 3-1/3 innings in a 6-0 loss to the Indians in Game 2 of the 2016 ALDS.

Price realizes beating the arch-rival Yankees in Game 2 would go a long ways towards finally being accepted by the Fenway faithful.

"Yeah," he said with a laugh, "but if I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I'll take that. That's what I'm here for. I don't want this to be about me and me not winning. I want to go out there (Saturday) and throw the ball well and help the Red Sox win whether we're up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is. I want the Red Sox to win (Saturday). That's what I worry about."

Price was asked if he had to be careful not to put too much pressure on himself to finally earn his first postseason victory as a starter and he said no.

"Don't treat it any differently than any other game," he said, "I've been a part of this year or in my career."

So had he failed to do that for past postseason starts?

"No, I just don't have an answer for you guys," he said. "I've been asked that quite a while now. I can't really put my finger on it. That was my generic answer."

Rookie Sox manager Alex Cora didn't feel compelled to meet with Price ahead of his start in Game 2.

"I'm treating the guys the same way I treat them in the regular season," he said. "That's a guy I trust. We saw him pitching in the second part of the season. He was probably the second best lefty in the league after (Tamp Bay's Blake) Snell."

Price wasn't anywhere near the second best lefty when he pitched against the Yankees this season. In four starts against them, he was 0-3 with a 10.34 ERA. In 15-2/3 innings, he surrendered 18 earned runs on 21 hits, including nine home runs, and nine walks.

Five of those home runs came in an 11-1 loss at Yankee Stadium on July 1. So he realized he needed to get back to working both sides of the plate. That approach worked well except on Sept. 19 at Yankee Stadium when he suffered his only loss since the All-Star break, allowing three round-trippers and six runs in five innings in a 10-1 loss. So Price won't start in New York this postseason.

Price had best outing against New York at Fenway on Aug. 5 when the Yankees reached him for only four hits and two earned runs in six innings. Price didn't earn a decision in a 5-4 Red Sox victory.

Price was roughed up for four runs in only one inning in a 10-7 loss to the Yankees on cold April 11 night at Fenway and he left the game complaining of numbness in his pitching hand. Price blamed the numbness

on a long-time circulation problem, but he said he's not concerned about the numbness reoccurring if the temperature drops.

"Just don't worry about it," he said. "Don't think about it. I'll be all right."

After an elbow injury bothered him for much of the 2017 regular-season, Price pitched well in the postseason in relief, blanking Cora and his Astros over two appearances covering 6-2/3 innings. The Sox would take similar numbers from him in Game 2.

Price can opt out of his contract after this season, but he said last month that he has no plans to do so because he thinks he can help the Sox win for the next several years. They'll likely need his help to win championships.

"For him," Cora said, "it's about health. He's healthy."

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Red Sox bullpen holds on, barely, in Game 1 win over Yankees

Kevin Thomas

BOSTON — Andrew McCutchen swung and missed the first pitch Friday night.

The radar gun reading on Fenway Park's scoreboard flashed a 96.

All was good for the Boston Red Sox, for the moment.

Chris Sale followed that 96 mph fastball with one recorded at 94. Then he froze McCutchen on an 81 mph slider for Strike 3.

That's one big sigh of relief over Sale's health and velocity.

What followed was an even bigger exhale after Boston escaped with a 5-4 win, beating the New York Yankees in Game 1 of their American League Division Series.

Sale left with a 5-0 lead, with two runners on base, and one out in the sixth inning.

Over the next 10 New York batters, Boston's bullpen allowed three hits, three walks and three RBI.

Shaky ground.

The situation forced Alex Cora to use starter Rick Porcello in eighth inning, and call on closer Craig Kimbrel for a four-out save.

"To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult," Cora said. "We had an idea Rick was going to be in a bullpen ... Sometimes, you have to go to plan B or plan C.

"In a perfect world, the starter goes six. You have the seventh inning guy, eighth inning, and ninth inning, and you move on."

This is hardly a perfect world for the Boston bullpen. Ryan Brasier allowed both inherited runs to score. Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes were good and bad.

Two factors saved the Red Sox: That 5-0 lead, thanks in part of J.D. Martinez's three-run home run – and New York's lack of clutch hitting.

With the score 5-2, New York loaded the bases with two outs in the sixth. Workman escaped by striking out Gleyber Torres, swinging at a full-count curveball out of the strike zone.

In the seventh, the Yankees loaded the bases with no outs – two singles off Workman, and a walk by Barnes. But Barnes struck out Giancarlo Stanton and induced two groundouts, allowing only one run.

“We made some pitches,” Cora said.

Two squanders for New York; part of 10 men left on base.

“They did a good job of minimizing and staying away from trouble against us,” Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

“But, yeah, we just couldn’t get that really big hit, to have that big inning.

“I thought we did a good job of pecking away ... just ran out of time.”

The last “peck” was an Aaron Judge homer to lead off the ninth against Craig Kimbrel.

Boston did not use knuckleball pitcher Steven Wright because his knee is sore again (status TBA).

Another starter, Nathan Eovaldi, was available, but Cora said he liked the match-ups with Porcello.

Porcello was supposed to start Game 3. But Cora can’t wait for later games, especially if his bullpen is going to deliver the kind of performance Friday night.

“We’ll talk about it,” Cora said. “You might say (plan) C and a half.”

The good news is that Sale was dealing. He did give up five hits and those two runs, but he gave Boston enough.

“I thought he was good,” Boone said. “Not his dominant self, necessarily.”

Sale used a lot more sliders and change-ups.

“That’s part of the game, changing speeds and eye levels,” Sale said. ”

“There’s no holding back now. It’s everything on the table, everything you’ve got.”

By the sixth, Sale looked tired. He gave up a hard-hit, line-drive single to Judge. After Judge would have been Aaron Hicks (who walked and singled already against Sale), but he had injured his hamstring. Brett Gardner filled in and grounded into a fielder’s choice. Stanton followed with a hard-hit single, and Cora came for Sale, after 93 pitches.

Short outings may be the postseason trend, but Boston’s bullpen makes that nerve-wracking.

Boston won on Friday because the Red Sox were able to ounce on starter J.A. Happ, who was “just not having his real airtight command that he usually has,” Boone said.

J.D. Martinez stroked an inside fastball for a first-inning, three-run homer. Mookie Betts and Andrew Benintendi reached in the third, with no outs. Happ exited, and both Betts and Benintendi eventually scored.

New York’s bullpen kept the game in reach with six scoreless innings.

“That’s one of our ultimate strengths,” Boone said. “If we’re going to get where we want to go, the bullpen is going to play a big role in that.”

Cora is still trying to figure out what his pen can do. He’ll use a starter here and there and hope matters fall into place.

Boston will count on big hits (Martinez and company) and solid fielding (Betts ran down a slicing line drive in the third inning with a runner on, and catcher Sandy Leon was blocking balls in the dirt all night).

As for the relief pitching ... be ready for more white-knuckle adventures.

Red Sox Notebook: Price hopes to snap dubious playoff streak

Kevin Thomas

BOSTON — David Price takes the mound Saturday night for the Boston Red Sox in Game 2 of the American League Division Series, winless in his nine previous postseason starts.

“Just another game,” Price said of facing the New York Yankees. “Don’t treat it any differently. ... That’s what I need to do.”

Price later admitted with a laugh, “that was my generic answer ... I’ve been asked (about his postseason record) quite a while now.”

Price, 33, holds a 2-8 playoff record – both wins in relief – and 5.03 ERA.

Boston manager Alex Cora, not surprisingly, said he’s not worried.

“He’s been one of the best pitchers in the big leagues for a long, long time,” Cora said. “We get caught up in the numbers and the playoffs and all that.

“I still remember he pitched Game 163 in Texas and he threw a complete game (a 5-2 win for Tampa Bay in 2013).”

In Price’s Boston playoff debut in 2016, he lasted 31/3 innings against Cleveland, allowing six hits and five earned runs.

Price battled injuries last year, but threw 62/3 scoreless innings in the playoffs against Houston.

Price is 16-7 this year with a 3.58 ERA. Concerns elevated on July 1 when he gave up five runs at Yankee Stadium in an 11-1 loss. But Price made adjustments and started to pitch up in the zone.

He struggled in his next start, but since then has been 7-1 with a 2.41 ERA. In a game against the Yankees in Fenway in August, he allowed two runs in six innings while getting a non-decision in a 5-4 Boston win.

“I moved the ball round,” Price said. “It’s something I’ve done a really good job of in my career.

During a press conference Friday, Price was asked continually about his postseason struggles.

“I don’t want this to be about me, and me not winning,” he said. “I want to go out (Saturday) and help the Red Sox win.

“But if I lose the entire playoffs, and we win the World Series, I’ll take that.”

THE RED SOX roster was set Friday for the ALDS and did not include reliever Heath Hembree. Boston opted for Joe Kelly and Brandon Workman as early right-handed options. Hembree had a 4.20 ERA and

1.33 WHIP (compared to Kelly's 4.39/1.36), but Hembree was hit hard over most of August and September (14 innings, 10 earned run, five homers).

"He was doing a good job throughout the season," Cora said of Hembree. "But towards the end, it didn't work out. Actually, he wasn't keeping the ball in the ballpark. ... He struggled with his slider, his off-speed pitches, and he paid the price.

"We do feel Joe is trending up. His velocity is still there. It's still 100. His change-up is getting better. His slider is getting better. Workman, the combination of fastball and curveball, it fits what we're trying to accomplish against (the Yankees)."

JOEY CORA, Alex's older brother – and the Pittsburgh Pirates' third base coach – was at Fenway Friday night.

"He stays away from the baseball side of it with me," Alex said. "He's just here as a fan to cheer his brother. ... Hopefully, he has good tickets and he enjoys it."

TROT NIXON threw out the ceremonial first pitch Friday, caught by Dustin Pedroia. The last time the Yankees and Red Sox met in the postseason in 2004, Nixon started in right field for Boston. Nixon, 44, is from North Carolina and, before the game, was outside Fenway collecting donations for victims of Hurricane Florence.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox win Game 1 nail-biter over Yankees

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- The current of electricity that ace Chris Sale created from his highly-anticipated first pitch of the American League Division Series against the Yankees -- a 95.8-mph fastball -- was short-circuited for a bit once Boston's bullpen entered the fray in Game 1.

And while that bridge between Sale and closer Craig Kimbrel definitely did more than teeter, it never collapsed. The Red Sox survived the stress of it all and held off the Yankees for a tense 5-4 victory Friday night to take the lead in the best-of-five series and first postseason matchup between the rivals since 2004.

By the time it was over, manager Alex Cora was remarkably relaxed given the numerous late-game situations when the Yankees could have turned the game on its ear with one big swing.

"We made some pitches," said Cora. [Brandon Workman] with the big strikeout, [Matt] Barnes did a good job. Rick [Porcello] coming in and giving us two [outs] and then Craig got us four [outs]. It's about getting 27 outs, having the lead and we did it."

Helping to stem the tide was an unlikely source in Porcello, who was projected to start Game 3 but instead quieted the Yankees by getting the first two outs in the eighth after the madness of the sixth and the seventh, when a 5-0 lead was trimmed to 5-3.

"It's all hands on deck. It's win at all costs," said Barnes, who got three big outs in the seventh. "We have to win 11 to win the World Series. You win Game 1 and move on and try to win Game 2, and that's kind of how you approach it."

Kimbrel, who was touched up for a solo rocket by Aaron Judge in the ninth to make it a one-run game, recorded the final four outs to earn the save.

"I was just rooting for my guys, for them to get out of the inning, and hopefully I would have that opportunity late in the game, which I did," Kimbrel said.

After going down 0-2 in the ALDS the past two years, the Sox can finally play from ahead this year. In the history of five-game series with the 2-2-1 format, teams that have won Game 1 at home have gone on to take the series 27 of 36 times (75 percent).

"It's huge," said Porcello. "A short series, it's not a seven-game set. The first game is big. Now [Game 2] is the biggest game of the series."

J.D. Martinez helped make the win possible with a three-run laser over the Green Monster against J.A. Happ in the bottom of the first. For the rest of the night, the bats were mostly quieted, creating more stress on the bullpen.

"You know, obviously it was important to get that lead right away," said Martinez. "And I think it kind of took a little pressure off everyone. Any time you go into a playoff game, everyone's adrenaline is high and tensions are going, stuff like that. I think giving Chris that lead, being able to let him settle in and go out there and pitch, I think definitely just helped relax everybody."

Coming into the game, all eyes were on Sale, who had pitched with significantly diminished velocity in his final start of the regular season and had logged just 17 innings after July 27 due to left shoulder inflammation.

But Sale came out firing, striking out three of the four batters he faced in the first. Over 5 1/3 innings, Sale held the high-powered Yankees to five hits while walking two and striking out eight.

"And also being here pitching at Fenway, that was awesome," said Sale. "This was obviously my first postseason start here at Fenway. That's something I'll never forget. That was incredible. Three runs on the board after your first inning doesn't hurt either. We'll take that again tomorrow."

With Sale appearing to run out of gas when he gave up a 110.4-mph single to Judge and a 109.2-mph single to Giancarlo Stanton, Cora came out to get him with two on and one out and the Sox up by five.

The Yankees charged back immediately against Ryan Brasier, getting an RBI single by Luke Voit and a fielder's choice RBI groundout by Didi Gregorius to make it 5-2. Both runs were charged to Sale.

While Workman was able to rescue Brasier in the sixth, the big righty got himself into a mess in the seventh, giving up two straight singles to open the inning. Barnes hardly calmed the situation when he walked Brett Gardner to load the bases with nobody out. He did well to minimize the damage, allowing just one run when it could have been a lot worse.

Helping to keep things calm was catcher Sandy Leon, who stopped several bouncers from going to the backstop, looking like a hockey goalie on a few of them.

"That's my job," said Leon. "Anything close, I've got to block it. I've been doing that the whole year and that's what we work for."

In the end, the bullpen created a scare, but the job wound up getting done during an ultimately thrilling game at Fenway befitting the rivalry.

"Everyone was amped up at the beginning and then especially at the end," said shortstop Xander Bogaerts. "I think the fans did a really great job. Hopefully they come back tomorrow and do it again."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Workman escapes with big K: Workman's outing didn't start the way he wanted when he walked Gary Sanchez to load the bases with two outs in the sixth, the Sox up three at the time. But he struck out Gleyber Torres on a wicked knuckle-curve on a 3-2 count.

"It was a big spot right there with the bases loaded, three-run game at the time, he's the winning run at the plate," said Workman. "Either way, bases loaded, if I throw a ball there or he gets a base hit, 3-2, two outs, they're running on the pitch, so multiple runs come in. It was a big pitch and I was able to execute it."

Showdown with Stanton: Never did Fenway have a more collectively nervous feel to it than in the seventh inning, when Barnes had to face the dangerous Stanton with the bases loaded and nobody out. Barnes got ahead 1-2 and then got Stanton lunging for a curveball for one of the biggest outs of the night.

"That's what we train to do," said Barnes. "It's what you live for. You live for these moments in October and playoff baseball. You've got to kind of slow it down and take it pitch by pitch. With everything going on and how everything matters so much. You can't get caught up in what's going on. That's the hardest thing, is to be able to slow it down and do what you know how to do. Was able to settle down on Stanton and make some big pitches when I had to."

SOUND SMART

The best thing that happened for the Red Sox was scoring five runs. They are 80-12 this season when scoring five runs or more.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

In the top of the third, the Yankees thought they had some life when Andrew McCutchen sliced one into the corner in right. With one out and Torres on first, the drive would have gotten a run home if it dropped. But Betts reminded everyone he is arguably the best right fielder in the game, racing over to snag it. The most artistic part of the play was when Betts quickly turned his body and fired a laser beam to first, where he just missed doubling off McCutchen. It was a three-star catch, according to Statcast™, and it drew loud roars from the Fenway faithful.

HE SAID IT

"I'll do whatever we need. Yeah, [I'll pitch] until my arm falls off." -- Porcello

UP NEXT

After narrowly escaping with the big win in the opener, the Red Sox turn to lefty David Price (16-7, 3.58 ERA) in Saturday night's Game 2. Price hopes to reverse his well-chronicled struggles in October. As a starter in the postseason, Price is 0-8 with a 5.74 ERA. The Yankee counter with righty Masahiro Tanaka (12-6, 3.75 ERA). Tanaka is 2-2 with a 1.44 ERA in four postseason starts. First pitch at Fenway is slated for 8:15 p.m. ET.

Sale ramps up velocity in passing playoff test

Anthony DiComo

BOSTON -- More eyes than usual flitted toward the Fenway Park radar gun on Friday night, as Chris Sale uncorked his first pitch in Game 1 of the American League Division Series. When the board registered 95 mph, relief washed over those concerned that Sale -- who had not pitched in nine days, who had thrown just 17 innings since July 28, and whose average fastball velocity had dipped into the low 90s in September -- might not be his typical self.

Any lingering worries evaporated when Sale hit 97 mph later in the game, averaging 95 in the 5-4 win over the Yankees. The only two runs on Sale's line crossed home after he departed. Otherwise, Sale was Sale, striking out eight and allowing five hits over 5 1/3 innings.

"He commanded the game from the second he stepped on the rubber until [manager Alex Cora] took the ball from him," reliever Matt Barnes said. "I think we all know he was going to be good."

A favorite to win the AL Cy Young Award for much of the early season, Sale dropped out of realistic contention for that honor when a bout of left shoulder inflammation forced him to rest for most of the second half. Given the luxury of a sizeable AL East lead, the Red Sox put Sale in bubble wrap, never using him past the fifth inning of any September game. As his teammates finished off the division title, Sale's life became a slog of extra rest and bullpen work.

That placed a film of uncertainty over his first postseason start, without even considering Sale's struggles -- 0-2 and an 8.38 ERA -- in his two previous career playoff starts. But the mystery lasted only until Sale began lighting up the radar gun, and logging zeros on the Green Monster scoreboard.

Sale tonight:

Avg. 4-seam velo: 94.6 mph

Max 4-seam velo: 96.6 mph

Sale's previous start (Sept. 26):

Avg. 4-seam velo: 90.2 mph

Max 4-seam velo: 94.5 mph

"I felt more like myself because I felt like this was just a normal start," Sale said. "There were no restrictions. There was no going out to the bullpen after my start to add pitches. I knew I was going to get my 100-plus pitches, or somewhere around there. That's a very freeing feeling."

What Sale did with his 93 pitches became even more critical given Boston's bullpen issues behind him. Striking out the first two batters he faced and four of the first six, Sale did not allow a runner into scoring position until there were two out in the fourth inning. He struck out Miguel Andujar to blunt that rally, recording his eighth and final whiff of the night.

A bit more trouble found Sale in the fifth, when the Yankees chased him from the game with a pair of singles, then Ryan Brasier allowed both inherited runners to score. Even in his final moments, however, Sale's velocity stayed strong. His final pitch of the night crackled in at 96 mph. That Sale threw more sliders than four-seam fastballs, he said, was merely a product of catcher Sandy Leon's game plan.

"Not his dominant self necessarily, but I thought he did a really nice job of mixing his pitches, changing speeds," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "He could reach back for a little bit on the heater when he really needed to. So I think he gave them a strong outing, no doubt about it."

For the Red Sox, Sale's performance was as important to their October outlook as it was to their Game 1 victory. The AL's All-Star Game starter for a third consecutive season, Sale went 12-4 with a 2.11 ERA in 27 starts, including an 11-4 mark and 2.04 ERA before his first trip to the disabled list. Since breaking into the Majors in 2010, Sale holds the AL's lowest ERA, making him one of the most critical components of this Red Sox team.

Friday was a new beginning of sorts for the left-hander, the unraveling of a mystery. It was the performance Sale had been waiting to deliver for most of the second half of the season.

"I threw every pitch tonight like [Cora] was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch I threw," Sale said. "You have to go up there and do what you have to do to get a win."

Yanks-Red Sox G2: Lineups, matchups, FAQs

Ian Browne and Bryan Hoch

BOSTON -- The Red Sox and Yankees created plenty of dramatic moments in Game 1 of their American League Division Series, as Boston emerged with a nail-biting 5-4 win on Friday night in which the bullpen seemed to be hanging on for dear life.

The anticipation has already started for Game 2. Can David Price finally come through in a postseason start? Will Masahiro Tanaka build off his previous October excellence? How will Red Sox manager Alex Cora navigate his bullpen this time against the dangerous Yankees?

Here's a primer for Game 2.

What might the starting lineups look like?

Yankees: New York will alter its lineup slightly depending on Aaron Hicks' availability. Though Hicks said he is not overly concerned about the right hamstring tightness that forced him to exit Game 1, manager Aaron Boone seems unlikely to write his name in the lineup hours after he undergoes an MRI.

1. Andrew McCutchen, LF
2. Aaron Judge, RF
3. Luke Voit, 1B
4. Giancarlo Stanton, DH
5. Didi Gregorius, SS
6. Miguel Andujar, 3B
7. Gary Sanchez, C
8. Gleyber Torres, 2B
9. Brett Gardner, CF

Red Sox: Cora will make a couple of changes in this one with Tanaka, a right-hander, on the mound. Mitch Moreland should play first, and Rafael Devers is likely to start at the hot corner. After a big three-run homer by J.D. Martinez in the first inning of Game 1, the Sox were largely held in check by the Yankees. They will try to put pressure on Tanaka early, much like they did against J.A. Happ.

1. Mookie Betts, RF
2. Andrew Benintendi, LF
3. J.D. Martinez, DH
4. Xander Bogaerts, SS
5. Mitch Moreland, 1B
6. Ian Kinsler, 2B
7. Rafael Devers, 3B
8. Sandy Leon, C
9. Jackie Bradley Jr.

Who are the starting pitchers?

Yankees: Tanaka (12-6, 3.75 ERA) struggled over his final two regular-season starts, giving up eight earned runs in eight innings (9.00 ERA), including a no-decision to the Red Sox on Sept. 20 in New York that saw Tanaka permit five runs and eight hits over four-plus innings. In four career postseason starts, Tanaka's ERA is 1.44.

Red Sox: Price (16-7, 3.58 ERA) gets another chance to change the narrative from his previous October clunkers. In nine career starts in the postseason, Price is 0-8 with a 5.74 ERA. The other subplot is that he's had plenty of rocky moments against the Yankees since joining baseball's most storied rivalry. In 11 rivalry starts, Price is 2-7 with a 7.71 ERA. He did pitch well against the Yanks at Fenway Park on Aug. 5, allowing four hits and two runs over six innings.

How will the bullpens line up after the starter?

Yankees: Chad Green permitted a pair of inherited runners to score in Game 1, but otherwise, the relief crew of Green, Lance Lynn, Zach Britton and David Robertson combined for six scoreless innings behind Happ. Dellin Betances could be available for multiple innings, as he last pitched in the AL Wild Card

Red Sox: As chaotic as Game 1 was for Cora's bullpen, no reliever threw more than the 22 pitches by closer Craig Kimbrel, who recorded four outs. Nobody else was asked to get more than three. One thing that hurts

is the loss of knuckleballer Steven Wright, who is likely to be taken off the Division Series roster after undergoing an MRI on his troublesome left knee on Friday. Cora will mix and match, and hope that Price can give him an extended outing.

Are there any relievers who are unavailable?

Yankees: Green is likely unavailable after throwing 24 pitches over two innings in Game 1, as is Lynn, a converted starter who threw 32 pitches over two innings.

Red Sox: It's doubtful the the Sox will ask Rick Porcello to come out of the bullpen again in this one. Porcello threw a side session before Friday's game, and he then recorded two outs in the eighth. He will likely start Game 3 or 4 at Yankee Stadium.

Any injuries of note?

Yankees: Hicks is expected to be limited to DH duties, at best, for Game 2 after exiting Game 1 early with right hamstring tightness.

Red Sox: The loss of Wright stings for sure. He was looked at as an "X" factor for Cora due to his ability to provide length and keep opposing hitters off-balance. The Red Sox are likely to add either righty Heath Hembree or lefty specialist Bobby Poyner to the roster, though swingman Brian Johnson is at least a dark-horse candidate.

Who is hot and who is not?

Yankees: Voit continued to crush the ball in Game 1, going 2-for-5 with two RBIs. Over his past 13 games (regular season and postseason), Voit is batting .404 (21-for-52) with 13 runs, seven homers and 20 RBIs. Judge has homered in both of the Yankees' postseason games this year, and five of his last seven. Stanton went 1-for-5 with four strikeouts in the Game 1 loss.

Red Sox: Martinez could carry the Red Sox this month. He clubbed a three-run homer to set the tone in Game 1, and he later added a single. Catcher Leon, who provides excellence with his glove and game-calling ability, continues to be almost an automatic out at the plate. After going 0-for-3 in Game 1, Leon has just two hits in his last 48 at-bats.

Anything else fans might want to know?

The Red Sox have definitely put the pressure on the Yankees with Friday's win. In the history of five-game series with the 2-2-1 format, teams that won Game 1 at home went on to take the series 27 of 36 times (75 percent)

J.D. sets tone for Sox with early 3-run homer

Anthony DiComo

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez kept his hands tight toward his body, snapping his wrists forward as he uncoiled his swing. The ball was a hair off the plate and a tick shy of 94 mph, a difficult pitch for most hitters to do much with other than pull it foul.

From their perspective atop the Green Monster, a cluster of fans knew immediately that Martinez had kept it plenty fair. One stuck his arm into the air as the three-run homer landed in his glove. His companion wrapped him in a bear hug, elated without knowing that Martinez's blast would be the difference in the Red Sox's 5-4 win over the Yankees on Friday night in Game 1 of the American League Division Series.

With that swing, Martinez not only put his team on an early path to victory, but he continued the process of vindicating Boston's five year, \$110 million investment in him.

"Obviously I was a little bit more pumped up than every other home run I hit during the season," Martinez said. "That's just because of the stage."

Considering Boston's bullpen would later threaten to unravel Martinez's work, the outfielder's first-inning homer provided some needed cushion. After Andrew Benintendi singled and stole second base with one out, Steve Pearce walked to bring up Martinez. Yankees starter J.A. Happ threw him a fastball inside and another low, before delivering a third heater off the inner edge of the plate.

The result was Martinez's 45th homer in 151 games with the Red Sox, counting the regular season, and his first extra-base hit in 21 career at-bats against Happ. He entered the night 4-for-20 with four singles off the left-hander.

"My execution wasn't as sharp as it's been," Happ said. "The big hit cost me."

The big hit also gave Martinez four home runs, five extra-base hits and nine RBIs in eight career postseason games. He hit a home run in each of his first two playoff appearances with the Tigers in the 2014 ALDS, then another for the D-backs in last year's National League Division Series.

Boston's marquee offseason addition, Martinez batted .330 with a 1.031 OPS in his first season with the club. His 130 RBIs led the Majors, but meant little heading into the ALDS.

"It's definitely a different feeling," Martinez said. "Everything you did before in the season doesn't matter anymore. This is the playoffs. From here on out, everything starts at zero. Look at the scoreboard, all your numbers are zero, zero, zero. So you know what's at stake."

Source: Wright (knee) likely off ALDS roster

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Entering the playoffs, Red Sox manager Alex Cora was enthused with the role knuckleballer Steven Wright could play, figuring he could be an "X" factor who could provide length and keep the Yankees off-balanced.

But that plan was foiled before Friday's 5-4 victory in Game 1 even started. Wright underwent an MRI on his surgically repaired left knee on Friday night and is likely to be removed from the Division Series roster, a source told MLB.com.

If Wright is taken off the roster, he won't be eligible for the American League Championship Series either. He would be eligible for the World Series if the Red Sox make it that far.

Righty Heath Hembree and lefty specialist Bobby Poyner are two candidates to replace Wright. If Cora feels length is more important, lefty Brian Johnson, a valuable swingman all season, could get the spot.

The subtraction of Wright created chaos for Cora, who had to navigate his bullpen through several stressful situations in the late innings of the Game 1 win.

Without Wright, Rick Porcello -- who was supposed to start Game 3 -- came on and recorded two crucial outs in the eighth inning. Given that Porcello also threw a bullpen session prior to the game, his status for Game 3 is certainly in question.

The Red Sox could potentially move Nathan Eovaldi up to Game 3, and Porcello could start Game 4 if necessary.

"I don't know," Porcello said. "We won tonight. We're going to enjoy this one. We have to play them again tomorrow. We'll see what happens tomorrow."

Without question, the potential loss of Wright hurts. The righty had been brilliant since coming off the disabled list at the start of September, posting a 0.66 ERA over 10 relief outings.

Wright underwent a cartilage restoration procedure on his left knee in May of 2017. It is the same surgery that limited Dustin Pedroia to just three games this season.

Price seeks redemption in 10th playoff start

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- In case you haven't heard, David Price has never won a postseason start in his otherwise illustrious career.

The lefty, who can change that narrative with a big performance in Saturday's Game 2 of the American League Division Series against the Yankees, disarmed the media by having some fun at his news conference on Friday.

When the session started, Price came out slinging cliches regarding his past postseason failures. At one point, he noted that he can't treat it differently than any other game he's pitched in his career.

After that statement, Price was asked if he had treated his previous postseason starts differently, and maybe that's why he had trouble. And that was when he displayed his lighter side.

"No, I just don't have an answer for you guys," said Price. "I've been asked that quite a while now. I can't really put my finger on it. That was my generic answer."

Fair enough. It is the topic that won't go away, which is why Game 2 presents Price with such a prized opportunity.

In nine career postseason starts, Price is 0-8 with a 5.74 ERA. Interestingly, he has often come up big in the bullpen in October, going 2-0 with a 2.35 ERA in eight outings.

But unlike last year, when Price was coming off an injury and he was used exclusively as a reliever in Boston's four-game ALDS loss to Houston, he is back in his preferred role.

When Price takes the ball Saturday, it will mark just his second playoff start for the Red Sox, and first since Oct. 7, 2016, when the Indians hit him hard (six hits, five runs, 3 1/3 innings) to pin Boston in a 2-0 series hole en route to an ALDS sweep.

In other words, it's been a long wait for Price to get another chance.

"Yeah. It's been 300-something games, however long it's been," Price said. "It has been a while. I look forward to getting back to that point, going out there and starting a baseball game and giving us a chance to win."

If Price did squeeze the ball too tight in some previous October encounters, he feels he has another influence in his life these days that takes the edge off and helps him to tune out all the external hype. That would be in the form of his 17-month-old son Xavier, who wasn't around the last time Price started a postseason game.

"I've got a son now, he manages my time. I don't really have a schedule; it's whatever he feels like doing, we do," said Price. "So managing my time and what I hear and what I see and all that, that's easy."

Healthy again, Xavier's father has been a force for the Red Sox, particularly down the stretch.

From July 12 through the end of the regular season, Price was 7-1 with 2.41 ERA and with a 0.96 WHIP and .204 opponents batting average in 12 starts.

"That's a guy I trust. We saw him pitching the second part of the season. He was probably the second best lefty in the league after [Blake] Snell," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "The way he went about his business, he pitched against the Yankees, he pitched against the Astros, he pitched against the Indians; he did a good job."

Price's struggles against the Yankees both this season (0-3, 10.34 ERA) and since he joined the Red Sox (2-7, 7.71 ERA) have been well-chronicled. At Fenway, however, his troubles haven't been nearly as pronounced. In fact, his last start in Boston against the Yankees was a good one back on Aug. 5, when he allowed four hits and two runs over six innings and left with a lead.

The fact that the Red Sox and Yankees are playing in October for the first time since 2004 is something that Price relishes being a part of.

"That's what we're thinking about in November and December when you're working out and getting ready for Spring Training," said Price. "You're going through Spring Training and waking up early and having 1 p.m. games every day. Going through all that, and then playing 162 games to get to this point. It is a very good feeling, but we want to have a better feeling at the end of the year."

And there is nobody more eager to have a better finish to the season than Price.

*** *ESPN.com***

Chris Sale helps deliver crucial Game 1 win for Red Sox; now it's David Price's turn

David Schoenfield

BOSTON -- This is postseason baseball. You hope for your stars to carry the team and produce plenty of decisive plays, but you know that any game -- any series -- could come down to one of the unlikeliest of contributors getting a key out or critical hit.

Two teams, 208 regular-season wins. It was a banner year for the rivalry. Now, it's a best-of-five series. Here's how we got here.

The Boston Red Sox beat the New York Yankees 5-4 in Game 1 of this highly anticipated American League Division Series between two 100-win teams on Friday, and their stars delivered. Chris Sale took a 5-0 lead into the sixth and finished with eight strikeouts in 5½ innings. J.D. Martinez lined a three-run homer over the Green Monster off J.A. Happ in the bottom of the first. Mookie Betts started a two-run rally in the third with a double high off the wall in deep left-center and added a nice running catch near the right-field foul pole with a runner on.

While Sale's performance eased some of the concern about his health and ability to perform after pitching sparingly the final two months, the bullpen worked itself into some trouble -- and out of some trouble. In the end, it survived, even if it gave Red Sox fans a few heart attacks along the way.

Sox manager Alex Cora was the bench coach with the Houston Astros last season when they won the World Series. "One thing I learned last year, to win a World Series is going to take 25, 27 guys to do it, regardless of their roles," he said after the game. "To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult, and sometimes you have to go to Plan B or Plan C."

Indeed, before the game, Cora talked about learning from A.J. Hinch's managing the Astros last postseason and having to make adjustments on the fly in handling a pitching staff. Cora had to do that in this game -- even using starter Rick Porcello to get the first two outs of the eighth inning. "Might say [Plan] C and a half probably," Cora admitted after the game.

It all started with Sale. He was effective, if not quite the dominant pitcher we saw in midseason when he was cranking upper-90s velocity and threw zeroes in five out of six starts at one stretch. He threw 24 pitches in the first inning and settled down after that, mixing in four-seamers that touched 96 mph a couple of times and keeping the Yankees off balance with a dancing mix of sliders and changeups. When Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton reached on hard-hit singles in the sixth, he was out after 93 pitches.

"I go based on what my catcher says," Sale said, giving props to Sandy Leon's work behind the plate, "and that was Sandy's game plan tonight." While it felt like Sale was throwing an unusual number of sliders, his pitch percentages were essentially on par with his seasonal averages. "You know, AC [Cora] said something to me the other night that really stuck, that was, win the first pitch and then win every pitch after that. I threw every pitch tonight like he was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch."

When Cora finally did take the ball from Sale, the Red Sox were up 5-0. A few minutes later it was a 5-2 game with the bases loaded and two outs and Brandon Workman -- arguably the 11th pitcher on Boston's 11-man staff -- pitching to Gleyber Torres, the heralded rookie who hits ninth in the Yankees lineup.

Workman got ahead with a swinging strike, then fell behind with three balls. Torres took a fastball on the outside corner to make it a full count. One pitch could change the complexion of the game, shift all the energy to the Yankees, or find Boston suddenly at a deficit. Nobody was warming up. No margin for a mistake. Workman threw a curveball that tumbled below the knees, Torres swung and missed, Workman pumped his fist in celebration, and Fenway erupted. Crisis averted.

At least for that inning. The Yankees loaded the bases again in the seventh, but Matt Barnes struck out Stanton -- one of four on the night for Stanton -- and the Yankees would get just one run in the inning. They stranded 10 runners in the game.

"We just couldn't get that backbreaking hit that allowed us to have that big inning," Yankees skipper Aaron Boone said.

The takeaway from this game: The Boston bullpen labored to get those final 11 outs. With Steven Wright unavailable to pitch the eighth after coming up with a sore knee before the game, Cora was forced to try to get a few extra outs from Workman in the seventh (that didn't work) and then use Porcello.

That all means Game 2 starter David Price might be expected to pitch a little deeper than Sale did Friday. And we all know Price's postseason history, which hasn't exactly inspired a modern-day Franklin Pierce Adams to pen a poem in tribute.

Price has started nine postseason games in his career; his team has lost all nine. He has had some good starts, some bad ones, some bad luck and a couple of blow-up innings. The end result has been the same: He didn't win, his team didn't win. As a starter, he's 0-8 with a 5.74 ERA and 11 home runs allowed in 58 innings.

Asked on Friday about putting too much pressure on himself -- or how not to put too much pressure himself -- he gave a non-answer about just treating it as another game. He was asked a follow-up question and at least could laugh at himself. Maybe that's a good sign.

"I just don't have an answer for you guys," he said. "I've been asked that quite a while now. I can't really put my finger on it. That was my generic answer."

Some of Price's postseason numbers are better than the results otherwise indicate. Just counting the games he has started, he has 52 strikeouts and 10 walks in 58 innings. That's fine. He has always pounded the strike zone. He has allowed a .262/.300/.450 batting line. It's that slugging percentage that's a little high. So I watched all postseason 11 home runs he has allowed. Working backward:

Lonnie Chisenhall: 2-1 fastball
Mike Moustakas: 1-2 changeup

Ben Zobrist: 1-1 slider/cutter
Rougned Odor: 0-0 cutter
Robinson Chirinos: 1-0 fastball
Nelson Cruz: 1-1 changeup
David Ortiz: 1-0 cutter
David Ortiz: 1-0 fastball
Mike Napoli: 2-2 fastball
Bengie Molina: 0-1 fastball
Nelson Cruz: 3-0 fastball

The pitch to Chisenhall was a fastball in, but not at the knees like the catcher wanted. Chisenhall yanked it down the line, clearing the fence by a few inches. The home runs to Moustakas and Zobrist came in the same game in the first two innings. The pitch to Moustakas was terrible -- a lefty-on-lefty changeup left over the middle of the plate. On the Zobrist pitch, the catcher set up outside and Price left it low and in. Odor turned on an inside cutter, another one that barely cleared the wall.

That first Cruz home run came after Adam Jones had reached on a little dinky single; catcher Alex Avila had just left the game after getting injured on the bases. It was a pretty good pitch off the plate that Cruz muscled down the right-field line, just 342 feet. Those were the only runs in a 2-1 loss.

The two home runs from Ortiz came in the same game at Fenway, in the first inning and eighth inning, one blast off a low cutter into the bullpen and then an inside fastball on the hands that Ortiz wrapped around the foul pole. And so on. The second Cruz home run came on a green light and he crushed a middle-middle fastball 461 feet to center field.

Still, some cheap home runs in there. It happens. It has happened to Price more often than is probably fair. Cora even referenced a game against the Royals while he was with the Blue Jays when a popup was followed by a few seeing-eye singles to knock Price from the game.

Cora said he didn't have any special message or meeting with Price. "I'm treating the guys the same way I treat them in the regular season. That's a guy I trust," Cora said. He referenced Price's second-half performance, how he turned things around after a brutal five-homer game against the Yankees on July 1. Price has a 2.25 ERA over his final 11 starts.

After Game 1, Sale said there are no limits on his usage. "They want me throw 150 [pitches], I'm throwing 150. ... We are fully prepped for everything thrown our way."

Price won't throw 150 pitches on Saturday. But given the uncertainty in the Boston bullpen, he might need to throw more than the 93 that Sale threw on Friday.

*** *WEEI.com***

Red Sox' Game 1 win puts good, bad on full display

Rob Bradford

Dig in.

That's probably the best direction anyone could offer after watching the Red Sox' 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1 of the American League Division Series Friday night. (For a complete recap, [click here](#).)

As WEEI.com's John Tomase tweeted in the middle of the Yankees' sixth- and seventh- inning comeback: "Imagine needing to win 10 more games like this?"

As much as the Red Sox should feel a sense of accomplishment in many ways after winning their first Game 1 of a postseason series since 2013, the notion that Alex Cora's team could accomplish their ultimate goal of winning the World Series in this fashion seemed somewhat implausible.

It is what it is: An imperfect step in the right direction. You can thank the bullpen for that.

The good for the Red Sox wasn't hard to uncover, starting with J.D. Martinez's first-inning, three-run homer off New York starter J.A. Happ. In fact, up until the sixth inning, there really wasn't much that didn't go wrong for the hosts.

They not only drove Happ from the game after just two innings, building a 5-0 lead after three frames, but perhaps the biggest focal point of the night, Chris Sale, showed his best self. The Red Sox ace came out of the gate with a 96 mph fastball and didn't look back, getting his first four outs on strikeouts.

For the most part, Sale dominated his 5 1/3 innings, ending up with eight punchouts while allowing five hits. He was charged with a pair of runs, but that was a product of two runs surrendered by reliever Ryan Brasier. It was after the lefty's exit where the narrative did an about-face.

Brasier could only get one out, allowing a hit and a walk, before giving way to Brandon Workman. Workman saved himself and the Red Sox after walking Gary Sanchez on four pitches and loading the bases, getting Gleyber Torres to swing and miss at a 3-2 curveball to end the threat.

Things only got more uncomfortable in the seventh inning when Workman allowed the first two batters in the inning to reach. On came Matt Barnes, who first moved the runners along on a wild-pitch before loading them by walking Brett Gardner. Barnes did come back to fan Giancarlo Stanton before allowing Luke Voit to bring the Yankees within a pair with a fielder's choice, run-scoring groundout. Then, with Rick Porcello and Joe Kelly warming up in the bullpen, Barnes finished off his half inning with a weak groundout off the bat of Didi Gregorius.

Cora managed to get the Red Sox through the eighth inning using the unconventional path of bringing in Porcello -- who was slated to start Game 3 -- for two outs before bringing in Craig Kimbrel for his eighth eighth-inning appearance this season.

But just because Kimbrel was in didn't mean all was solved.

Facing his first batter of the ninth inning, the closer allowed an opposite-field homer to Aaron Judge to close the gap to one. But in the end, the Red Sox still finished their roller coaster without any further malfunctions thanks to three straight strikeouts -- Brett Gardner, Giancarlo Stanton, and Luke Voit.

Chris Sale gives Red Sox five-plus solid innings in Game 1 vs. Yankees

John Tomase

Chris Sale gave the Red Sox virtually everything they could've reasonably expected.

Asked to record 18 outs, Sale delivered 16 in Game 1 of the American League Division Series vs. the Yankees.

He departed with one out in the sixth and two on, with the Red Sox leading 5-0. Both runners ended up scoring, leaving Sale's final line at 5 1/3 innings, five hits, and two runs. He struck out eight and walked two.

With questions over Sale's velocity, he averaged over 95 mph on his fastball over his first five innings before tiring in the sixth. He opened the game by striking out Andrew McCutchen and Aaron Judge looking before walking Aaron Hicks and striking out Giancarlo Stanton swinging.

Sale pounded the strike zone and had the Yankees fishing for his vicious slider. He threw 93 pitches, 61 strikes.

Perhaps you haven't heard, but David Price struggles in postseason -- he hopes that ends Saturday

John Tomase

David Price fielded the first question about his playoff struggles.

"Just focus on every pitch," he said.

David Price fielded the second question about his playoff struggles.

"Just another game," he said. "Don't treat it any differently than any other game I've been a part of this year or in my career."

David Price fielded the third question about his playoff struggles and finally he couldn't help but laugh.

"I just don't have an answer for you guys," he said. "I've been asked that quite a while now. I can't really put my finger on it. That was my generic answer."

Price spoke on Friday afternoon, 24 hours before taking the mound for Game 2 of the American League Division Series against the Yankees. In case you haven't heard, Price still hasn't won a playoff start in his career, a streak he hopes to end on Saturday.

Ironically, manager Alex Cora points to the worst start of Price's life -- a five-homer stinker in Yankee Stadium in July -- as the turning point in his season. From there, Price remade his approach with clear results: Over his final 12 starts, he went 7-1 with a 2.41 ERA.

"Move the ball around," Price said. "It's something I've done a really good job of in my career. And at that point in this season I was really one side of the plate the entire -- for a while. So to switch that back up, making pitches on both sides of the plate, that did a lot for me."

Price has awaited this moment for a long time, since losing Game 2 of the 2016 ALDS in Cleveland with a lackluster performance of five runs in 3 1/3 innings. He was dynamite last postseason against the Astros, but out of the bullpen.

"It's been 300-something games, however long it's been," Price said. "It has been a while. I look forward to getting back to that point, going out there and starting a baseball game and giving us a chance to win."

He feels the same way about his team, which has gained valuable experience over the last two years despite bowing in the ALDS both times.

"This team has two more years of playoff experience under their belt, especially with our young group of guys who got to experience their first playoff atmosphere in 2016," he said. "For us to be able to get back to that point last year and this year, it's two more years of experience under everybody's belt. That helps everybody out."

And as for shaking his postseason legacy, Price could only laugh when asked if a win would earn him a place in the hearts of Red Sox fans.

"Yeah, but if I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I'll take that," he said. "That's what I'm here for. I want to -- I don't want this to be about me and me not winning. I want to go out there tomorrow and throw the ball well, and help the Red Sox win. Whether we're up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is, I want the Red Sox to win tomorrow. That's what I worry about."

Tomase: This Red Sox bullpen is going to be the death of us all

John Tomase

Uh, are we supposed to survive 10 more games of this?

On Friday night, the Red Sox won Game 1 of the American League Division Series with a 5-4 nail-biter over the Yankees that felt kinda like a loss by the time the middle relievers were done leaving their foul imprint on the game.

Things got so bad in the setup corps after Chris Sale carried a 5-0 lead into the sixth that manager Alex Cora was forced to use presumptive Game 3 starter Rick Porcello for the first two outs of the eighth and closer Craig Kimbrel for the last four outs of the game.

That's called living dangerously, and it's definitely not how Cora drew up plan A, B, or C.

"Might say C and a half, " he admitted.

The Red Sox somehow survived. I'm guessing not everyone in New England can say the same. R.I.P. No one said winning a World Series would be easy.

That the Red Sox are trying to do it with what easily qualifies as the worst bullpen in the postseason adds a degree of difficulty that shouldn't exist on a 108-win team.

The Red Sox bullpen is not very good and this is not revelatory. Watching the middle men struggle through meaningless extended spring training games in September was one thing. Watching through interlocked fingers as they tested the outer reaches of the K zone graphic in the first game of October was something else entirely.

To those who questioned the wisdom of Dave Dombrowski's decision not to acquire reinforcements by July 31 or Aug. 31 (or March 31, for that matter), we were all on to something.

Red Sox relievers turned Game 1 into something like a slow-motion heart attack. Catcher Sandy Leon spent the latter third of the game sprawling like a cat chasing yarn, or in this case, spiked curveballs. Because Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman, and Matt Barnes couldn't throw strikes, Porcello needed to bridge the gap.

It worked, but not before New York cut a 5-0 lead to 5-4 in the ninth with mashers Giancarlo Stanton and Luke Voit getting their shots against Kimbrel. He struck out each as New England breathed a giant sigh of relief followed immediately by dry heaves.

This can't be sustainable, can it?

"I feel like our bullpen's definitely been under scrutiny, but when you look at it, we really did put up good numbers this season," Workman said. "The guys we have out there are more than capable of doing the job we need to get done throughout these playoffs. (Fans can) ask questions, do whatever, but I believe we're the guys for the job and we're going to get it done."

When Sale cruised into the sixth with a 5-0 lead and his pitch count climbing, the uneasy ripple that coursed through Fenway Park was 36,000 people simultaneously realizing what lay ahead: traversing the chasm between Sale and Kimbrel felt like Frodo Baggins stumbling towards Mt. Doom.

One by one, Brasier, Workman and Barnes searched in vain for the strike zone. Nearly half of their 52 pitches were balls. And so the Yankees pecked away with two in the sixth and one in the seventh. They pulled within a run when Aaron Judge ripped a Kimbrel offering into the bullpen in the ninth, but the closer slammed the door thereafter.

If the sound startled you, it's OK. We're all a little jumpy right now.

"We got through it," Barnes said. "When it comes down to October, wins are wins and it doesn't matter how you get them."

Welllll . . . can we agree that's not exactly true? When pretty much everyone who has ever watched a second of baseball agrees the bullpen represents the primary impediment to the Red Sox winning it all, and then that bullpen justifies every concern in Game 1 before we even learn that knuckleballer Steven Wright is probably done for the postseason with a knee injury, it's fair to label that result suboptimal.

And so it is that David Price will take the mound in Saturday's Game 2 with his own host of postseason demons to exorcise, but with this added twist: Red Sox fans who once would've preferred he not pitch in the playoffs at all are now hoping he throws a complete game.

Because when it comes to the Red Sox bullpen, there's only so much we can take.

Game 1 of ALDS showed exactly why Red Sox signed J.D. Martinez

Ryan Hannable

What were some of the reasons for the Red Sox' lack of success in the playoffs during recent years?

An inability to hit home runs, and also falling behind early in the series.

After being signed this offseason, Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez made sure that didn't happen again this year, as his three-run home run in the first inning set the tone in the 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1 of the ALDS. It was the Red Sox' first Game 1 win in a playoff series since Game 1 of the 2013 World Series.

"You know, obviously it was important to get that lead right away," Martinez said. "And I think it kind of took a little pressure off everyone. Any time you go into the playoff game everyone's adrenaline is high and tensions are going, stuff like that. I think giving Chris [Sale] that lead, being able to let him settle in and go out there and pitch, I think definitely just helped relax everybody."

It was Martinez's fourth career postseason home run and the three RBIs tied a postseason career high.

Also, it was the first go-ahead three-run homer or grand slam by a Red Sox hitter in the postseason since Jonny Gomes' game-winning three-run homer in Game 4 of the 2013 World Series.

Martinez admitted rounding the bases after the homer was a different feeling than any of the 43 he hit during the regular season.

"It's a different feeling," he said. "Everything you did before in the season doesn't matter anymore. This is the playoffs. From here on out everything starts at zero. Look at scoreboard, all your numbers are zero, zero, zero. So you know what's at stake. You know what the situation is. You're playing the Yankees. This is the playoffs. You have to go. And now is the time to get it going and stuff like that. When I hit it, obviously I was a little bit more pumped up than every other home run I hit during the season, really. But that's just because of the stage, really."

And for the Red Sox to keep winning and moving along in the postseason, it likely won't be the last time he gets that feeling.

Chris Sale attitude on full display in postgame presser: 'They want me to throw 150 [pitches], I'm throwing 150 [pitches]'

Ryan Hannable

Chris Sale's first playoff start at Fenway Park wasn't vintage Sale, but it was one he won't forget.

The Red Sox left-hander went 5 1/3 innings and allowed two runs on five hits, while walking two and striking out eight to pick up the win, as the home team took down the Yankees, 5-4 in Game 1 of the ALDS. It was his first career postseason win.

Sale was pulled in the middle of the sixth inning and received a loud ovation from the Fenway Park crowd.

"Being here pitching at Fenway, that was awesome," Sale said. "This was obviously my first postseason start here at Fenway. That's something I'll never forget. That was incredible. Three runs on the board after your first inning doesn't hurt either. We'll take that again tomorrow."

Sale threw 93 pitches, which were the most he's thrown in a game since July 27 as he's been working his way back from a shoulder injury.

"I felt more like myself because I felt like this was just a normal start," he said. "Not normal in terms of not being a postseason start, but just like there's no restrictions. There's no going out to the bullpen after my start to add pitches. I knew I was going to get my 100-plus pitches or somewhere around there. That's a very freeing feeling."

Given it's the postseason, pitchers need to ready for anything -- like Rick Porcello pitching the eighth inning -- and Sale has the perfect attitude.

"If [manager Alex Cora] didn't take the ball out of my hand, I would have kept throwing," said Sale. "I said it, I think this is my third time saying it, there's no holding back. They want me to throw 150 [pitches], I'm throwing 150 [pitches]. If they ask me to throw tomorrow, I'll throw tomorrow. I think that's the mindset for every person in this clubhouse. Up and down the lineup and pitching staff, we are fully prepped for everything thrown our way. We're not going to shy away from it."

Game 2 is set for Saturday night with David Price being opposed by Masahiro Tanaka.

Steven Wright (knee) may be unavailable for rest of ALDS

Ryan Hannable

Obviously, the Red Sox bullpen was not at its best in Game 1 of the ALDS despite hanging on for a 5-4 win, and they may need to go the rest of the series without one of the pitchers it was counting on.

Knuckleballer Steven Wright was unavailable Friday night after getting a MRI on his knee Thursday. The team will know more on Saturday. This was part of the reason Game 3 starter Rick Porcello got the start of the eighth inning.

"Steven complained about his knee, and he wasn't available today," Cora said afterwards. "Actually, he had an MRI during the night. And we'll know more about it tomorrow."

"Before the game we kind of looked at Game 3 and Game 4 where we were, and we felt that in that slot that pocket [Miguel] Andujar, [Gleyber] Torres -- the bottom three hitters, [Gary] Sanchez. It was a good one for Rick. We'll talk about it tomorrow where we're going to go next, either Game 3 or 4. But we felt that was a good spot for him."

Wright appeared to be someone Cora could count on in relief as down the stretch in 10 games, he was 1-0 with a save. He allowed 11 hits and six walks in 13 2/3 innings.

If Wright is unavailable for the rest of the series, the Red Sox could get an exemption and add another player, like they did when Eduardo Nunez got injured last year against Houston.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Matt Barnes can be bullpen force Red Sox need

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — Aside from actually winning Game 1, the good news for the Red Sox is that their bullpen probably can't run into this much trouble every night.

What's also encouraging is that if the bullpen is to succeed beyond Friday, the pitcher the Sox need to step up in a huge way, Matt Barnes, seems up to the task.

Barnes made a little more work for himself than was necessary — a rite of passage for anyone leaving the Sox 'pen, apparently — when he entered a jam in the seventh inning with the Sox ahead 5-2. He threw a wild pitch to his first batter, Brett Gardner, with two on and none out. Then he walked Gardner, which rendered the wild pitch irrelevant, but also brought up a fellow named Giancarlo Stanton.

"You've got to kind of slow it down and take it pitch by pitch," Barnes said. "You can't get caught up in what's going on. That's the hardest thing to do. With everything going on and how everything matters so much, is to be able to slow it down and do what you know how to do."

Now, Stanton didn't have a good night. He struck out four times, in fact, including that match-up with Barnes, who allowed just one of his inherited runners to score in the inning. But Barnes was the man handed the mop, and he's going to have to continue to be. The righty buried a nasty 1-2 curveball low and over the middle, too tantalizing for Stanton to take and too nasty for him to touch.

"I thought Barnes made a great pitch against him, and just seeing the replay, where he started a tough pitch — sometimes you know that goes with Giancarlo sometimes," Yanks manager Aaron Boone said. "If you make pitches against him, his outs are a lot of times strikeouts."

And a lot of Barnes' outs are strikeouts, as well. He fanned 14 batters per nine innings in 2018, slightly better than Craig Kimbrel's 13.9. Their walk rates were virtually identical as well at 4.5 per nine.

Barnes took a remarkable step forward in 2018, with his average fastball nearly a full 2 mph more than it was a year ago, from roughly 95 to 97.

Kimbrel, who allowed a home run, can't go it alone. Maybe Brandon Workman, who threw a nasty curveball to Gleyber Torres in the sixth inning, can inject himself into the most dependable, high-leverage mix too.

Pitching coach Dana LeVangie said he didn't think he saw nerves from his guys with all the balls in the dirt, wild pitches and general inability to find the strike zone. (Sandy Leon was a saint behind the plate.)

"If you asked him, he might tell you," LeVangie said of Ryan Brasier, who allowed two inherited runners to score in the sixth. "But I expect him to be a lot better tomorrow than he was tonight."

The Red Sox must hope that for all their relievers. With Steven Wright and his sub-2 ERA as a reliever this season now likely off the Sox roster due to a knee problem, one of their prime candidates to emerge out of the 'pen disappears.

Cora didn't want to turn to Barnes so early on Friday. He didn't want to use scheduled Game 3 starter Rick Porcello in the eighth, either, but to Cora's credit, his moves worked with what amounted to a 24-man roster.

“In a perfect world it was going to be to be Barnes with two outs in the seventh,” Cora said. “That’s the game right there. We needed to shut it down and he did a good job.”

There will have to be more of the same.

“We’re all in, we’re all in to win this,” LeVangie said. “We expect our guys in the bullpen to be available every game this series. If we play five we expect them to be available five games. And our training room has become an emergency room, so we’re expecting — we’re asking a lot from these guys and it might be six outs. That’s the way it is.”

Three Strikes: Sale delivers, bullpen underwhelms in Game 1

Evan Drellich

Three quick thoughts from the Red Sox' 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1 of the ALDS at Fenway Park on Friday night:

1. Chris Sale topped out at nearly 97 mph and was every bit the ace he was not in Game 1 a year ago. He sat at 94-95, struck out eight in 5 1/3 innings and walked only two. Both runs he was charged with came home after he left. He wasn't in midseason form in terms of velocity, but he backed up everything he said going into the start: that he would be effective no matter what the radar gun said. He didn't overthrow in the first inning only to see his velocity dip later on, either. The Yankees worked hard (and smartly) to build his pitch count, and he ended the day at 93 with a pair of runners on base. Sale did everything the Red Sox could have asked, earning his first postseason win along the way.

2. The Red Sox bullpen is in deep, deep trouble if they keep missing the zone this badly. You knew it, and now you saw it. Ryan Brasier and Brandon Workman embarked along the most frightening of tightropes in the sixth inning. Brasier let in two inherited runners to cut the lead to 5-2. Workman threw a nasty curveball away to strike out Gleyber Torres on a full count with the bases loaded after walking a pair to load 'em up. Workman's K of Torres ended the inning but Workman got into trouble again in the seventh. On came Matt Barnes, who, after a walk, got a huge strikeout of Giancarlo Stanton with the bases loaded and none out. One run came in during the frame. Rick Porcello, the scheduled Game 3 starter, had the bottom of the order in the eighth inning, and looked more confident than anyone. Kimbrel handled the four-out save.

3. The big-ticket signing of last winter took the stage immediately. The situation reeked of a three-run home run and that's exactly what happened, which speaks to the unbelievable consistency J.D. Martinez has played with since he joined the Red Sox. Between Sale and Martinez, the narrative of Boston eating up players in their first year in town is on shakier ground than it used to be. J.A. Happ fell behind 2-0 and Martinez crushed one 107 mph off the bat, a laser into the Green Monster seats. Martinez smoked a fly out to right field later on that would have been a home run easily at Yankee Stadium, with a 97 percent hit probability. He added a single in the seventh inning for good measure. If the Yankees are going to beat the Red Sox, they're going to have to find a way to contain Mookie Betts (he had a double) and Martinez. They didn't do that well enough on Friday, but maybe the lesson is what we saw all year is true: that duo cannot be contained, at least not for long.

Sources: Steven Wright likely to be replaced on playoff roster

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — The Red Sox are likely to replace Steven Wright on the roster for Game 2 of the American League Division Series, sources told NBC Sports Boston on Friday night after a nail-biter, 5-4, win that saw scheduled Game 3 starter Rick Porcello pitch in the eighth.

Wright, recovering from major left knee surgery while pitching well, felt the knee bother him prior to Saturday's game.

"Steven Wright before the game he complained about his knee, and he wasn't available today," manager Alex Cora said after the game. "Actually, he had an MRI during the night. And we'll know more about it tomorrow."

The results of the MRI were not encouraging for Wright's ability to return this series.

Heath Hembree and Bobby Poyner were two relievers the Red Sox were considering to make the roster before Wright's injury. They'd likely move to the top of the list for a replacement. If the Sox wanted length, which Wright provided, they could also turn to Hector Velazquez or Brian Johnson.

Wright had a 2.68 ERA in 53 2/3 innings, and a 1.52 ERA in 29 2/3 innings as a reliever.

David Price focused on team success heading into Game 2 start

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — David Price has run out of ways to pinpoint why his postseason performance hasn't matched his regular-season success.

Speaking on the eve of his Game 2 start against the Yankees in the ALDS, the Red Sox lefty noted he wanted to focus more on each pitch. (He's said as much before.)

He was then asked if that meant in the past he felt he had looked beyond each pitch.

"No, I just don't have an answer for you guys," Price said, laughing in the press conference room at Fenway Park. "I've been asked that quite a while now. I can't really put my finger on it. That was my generic answer."

The attention has been on Price because of his postseason record (winless in nine starts - his two playoff wins are as a reliever) and his \$31-million-a-year contract, but he was trying to refocus it on the team's effort.

"If I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I'll take that," Price said Friday. "That's what I'm here for. I want to — I don't want this to be about me and me not winning. I want to go out there tomorrow and throw the ball well, and help the Red Sox win. Whether we're up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is, I want the Red Sox to win tomorrow. That's what I worry about."

Price earlier in the year had a circulation issue that caused numbness. He said that as the weather gets colder, he's trying to keep that out of his mind.

"No, I don't think so," Price said. "Just go out there and pitch. Just don't worry about that. Don't think about it. I'll be all right."

*** NESN.com**

Red Sox Wrap: Boston Survives Late Yankees Rally To Secure 5-4 Game 1 Win

Joshua Schrock

After a 14-year October hiatus, the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees renewed their rivalry in the postseason Friday at Fenway Park.

It was worth the wait.

Game 1 of the American League Division Series between the hated rivals was a high-drama act fit for baseball's best rivalry.

The Red Sox jumped all over noted Sox-killer J.A. Happ, taking an early 5-0 lead, thanks in large part to J.D. Martinez's monster three-run home run in the first inning.

New York battled back against Chris Sale and the Boston bullpen, scratching across two runs in the sixth, one in the seventh and one in the ninth, courtesy of an Aaron Judge solo home run, to send the pucker factor through the roof at Fenway.

But Boston's much-maligned bullpen was able to escape numerous late-inning jams to preserve a nail-biting 5-4 Game 1 win.

The Red Sox now lead the series 1-0. Here's how it all went down:

GAME IN A WORD

Anxiety.

The Sox saw their five-run lead whittled to one late in the game, but they were able to hang on to grab a crucial series-opening win.

ON THE BUMP

— Sale came out of the chute firing. The left-hander struck out Andrew McCutchen looking with a nasty slider to open the game and followed that up by freezing Judge on the same pitch. After issuing a two-out walk to Aaron Hicks, Sale punched out Giancarlo Stanton with a changeup to end the inning.

The Sox ace gave up a leadoff single to Luke Voit in the second, but responded by striking out Didi Gregorius and getting Miguel Andujar to bounce into a 4-6-3 double play. Sale opened the third inning by freezing Gary Sanchez for his fifth K of the game. The left-hander walked Gleyber Torres with one out, but retired McCutchen and Judge to end the threat.

Hicks tried to get a rally going by leading off the fourth with a single to right field. Sale followed by ringing up the next two batters before giving up an infield single to Gregorius to put runners at first and second with two outs for Andujar. The Yankees rookie was overmatched, though, as Sale blew him away with a fastball to notch his eighth strikeout.

After recording a 1-2-3 fifth inning, Sale ran into some trouble in the sixth when Judge opened the inning with a single. Following a Brett Gardner fielder's choice, Stanton laced a single into left-center field to end Sale's night.

When the book was closed, Sale allowed two runs on five hits while walking two and striking out eight in 5 1/3 innings.

— Ryan Brasier took the ball from Sale and immediately gave up an RBI single to Voit that plated Gardner. Gregorius followed by bouncing a ball to second base that looked tailor-made for two, but the shortstop beat the return throw, allowing Stanton to score. The right-hander then issued a two-out walk to Andujar to put runners on first and second, prompting Alex Cora to take the ball from him.

— Brandon Workman entered the game and walked Sanchez on four pitches to load the bases for Torres, but the right-hander got the rookie to wave at a 3-2 curveball to escape the jam.

Workman came back out for the seventh and gave up back-to-back singles to McCutchen and Judge to open the inning before giving way to Matt Barnes.

— Barnes entered the game and issued a walk to Gardner to load the bases in front of Stanton. The right-hander struck out the power-hitting slugger to record the first out of the inning. Voit followed by rolling a ball to third base that had the potential to be a double play, but he beat the return throw, allowing McCutchen to score to make it 5-3. Barnes got Gregorius to ground out to second to end the inning.

— Rick Porcello got the eighth inning. After getting the first two batters to ground out, Torres reached on an infield single, spelling the end of Porcello's brief outing.

— Craig Kimbrel came on and got McCutchen to fly out to end the eighth inning. The Red Sox closer came back out to nail down the win, but Judge trimmed the lead to one by crushing a solo home run to right field to open the inning. Kimbrel bounced back, though, striking out Gardner, Stanton and Voit to end the game.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— Boston pounced on Happ right off the bat in the first. Andrew Benintendi laced a one-out single to left and stole second base. After Steve Pearce worked a four-pitch walk, Martinez hammered a laser into the Green Monster seats to give the Sox a 3-0 lead.

— The Sox chased Happ in the third when Mookie Betts started the inning with a double off the Monster and Benintendi followed with a bunt single to put runners at the corners with no outs. Chad Green relieved Happ and was greeted by an RBI single from Pearce to make it 4-0. Two batters later, Xander Bogaerts lifted a sacrifice fly to right to plate Benintendi.

— Benintendi and Martinez each had two hits for the Sox.

— Betts, Pearce, Bogaerts and Kinsler had one hit apiece.

— Eduardo Nunez, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Leon each went hitless.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Chris Sale calms fears with strong start (8 Ks in 5.1 innings), first postseason win

Greg A. Bedard

If you polled Red Sox Nation what their biggest worry was before Game 1 of the AL Division Series, the health and effectiveness of ace Chris Sale would have been the runaway winner.

If Sale came out against the Yankees and wasn't effective, there's no way the Red Sox would be able to mount a strong postseason run. They had to have their ace, or at least a reasonable facsimile of him.

After his performance Friday, consider those fears alleviated (we'll get to the bullpen ... the new runaway leader).

Sale might not have had his best stuff in the eventual 5-4 victory over the Yankees, but we now know this: Sale has enough to shut down baseball's best lineups.

"I thought he was good," said Yankees manager Aaron Boone. "You know, not his dominant self necessarily, but I thought he did a really nice job of mixing his pitches, changing speeds. His change-up, slider were a factor. He could reach back for a little bit on the heater when he really needed to. So I think he gave them a strong outing, no doubt about it. And did a good job I think of keeping us off balance enough.

"We were able to get his pitch count up and get him out of there, and then keep crawling back into it. But overall I thought he pitched pretty effective against us."

It took all of about five minutes for Sale to stake his claim of the Fenway sod, as he struck out Andrew McCutchen, Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton — while averaging 95 on his fastball (a far cry from the 89-90 he threw in his last regular-season start) — to excite the Faithful.

“Early in the season, he wasn’t throwing 99. He was throwing 95, 96,” said Alex Cora. “He pitched well. Tonight from the get-go, after McCutchen, he was very aggressive in the strike zone, you could see good extension. Repeating his delivery. Breaking ball was good, changeup was good.”

For all the fretting about Sale’s fastball, his off-speed stuff was lethal. Of the 15 outs Sale record (one was a double-play ball to end the second), 10 came from off-speed pitches. Eight came via his slider — which was especially effective backdoor against righties — and two with his changeup. Sale got three outs from his two-seam fastball, and two from the four-seam variety that both hit 96 on the gun.

“That’s part of the game: changing speeds and eye levels, in and out, up and down, hard and soft,” said Sale. “So my game plan has been the same since the day I got here.

“I felt more like myself because I felt like this was just a normal start. Not normal in terms of not being a postseason start, but just like there’s no restrictions. There’s no going out to the bullpen after my start to add pitches. I knew I was going to get my 100-plus pitches or somewhere around there. That’s a very freeing feeling. And also being here pitching at Fenway, that was awesome. This was obviously my first postseason start here at Fenway. That’s something I’ll never forget. That was incredible. Three runs on the board after your first inning doesn’t hurt either.”

Three times the Yankees were able to get the lead-off batter on against Sale (second, fourth and sixth innings). But he never let New York get any momentum. He struck out the next batter the first two times it happened, and he was able to get a fielder’s choice in the sixth before a one-single by Stanton knocked Sale from the game (thanks to the dumpster fire of a bullpen, both runners came in to score and were charged to Sale).

“If he didn’t take the ball out of my hand, I would have kept throwing,” Sale said. “There’s no holding back. They want me to throw 150, I’m throwing 150. If they ask me to throw tomorrow, I’ll throw tomorrow. I think that’s the mindset for every person in this clubhouse. Up and down the lineup and pitching staff, we are fully prepped for everything thrown our way. We’re not going to shy away from it.”

For the game, Sale’s fastballs averaged 95.02, 95.13, 94.6, 93.6, 89.9 (only one) and 94.4 in each of his six innings. Probably the best news? His final four fastballs averaged 95.2 — same as the first inning.

Sale, who lost his only other previous postseason starts last year in the Division Series to Houston (0-2, 8.38 ERA) said that a chat with Cora recently got him in the right mindset and set the stage for him to earn his first career playoff start.

“AC said something to me the other night that really stuck, that was, ‘Win the first pitch and then win every pitch after that,’” Sale recalled. “I threw every pitch tonight like he was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch I threw. You have to go up there and do what you have to do to get a win.”

It wasn’t the way anyone drew it up, but they’ll take it. And, at least when it comes to Sale’s health in the postseason, Red Sox Nation can breathe a little easier.

“I think giving Chris that lead, being able to let him settle in and go out there and pitch, I think definitely just helped relax everybody,” said J.D. Martinez.

ALDS Notebook: Steven Wright off roster with knee injury; Sandy Leon proves his worth

Sean McAdam

It didn't take long for the Red Sox to get struck by the injury bug in the postseason. This time, it hit even before the first pitch had thrown.

Knuckleballer Steven Wright, who was expected to play a critical role in the bullpen with the ability to pitch multiple innings and offer a different look from the rest of the Sox' hard-throwing staff, felt some knee soreness and was ruled out of Game 1.

A baseball source confirmed after the Red Sox' 5-4 win over the Yankees that Wright was being taken off the roster and will be replaced Saturday. The move makes Wright ineligible for the ALCS, too, should the Sox advance from the Division Series.

"He had an MRI during the night," said Alex Cora. "We'll know more about it tomorrow."

Wright underwent major reconstructive knee surgery in May of 2016, and missed all of that season and the first two months of this one. He also was forced onto the DL in mid-season when the knee flared up on him, only to return for the final five weeks of the season.

The Red Sox have a number of options to replace Wright. If they're seeking length, they could go with either lefty Brian Johnson or righty Hector Velazquez, each of whom moved back and forth between the rotation and bullpen during the year. Or, they could go with Heath Hembree, who narrowly missed being included on the original 11-man staff.

An unsung hero for the night was catcher Sandy Leon, who was hitless in three at-bats, but also performed heroically behind the plate, managing to keep an untold number of bounced pitches from the Red Sox bullpen in front of him as the Yankees threatened to overtake the Red Sox' early 5-0 lead.

"He's really good at blocking pitches," said Cora. "And actually, I don't know how he does it, but he blocks it and he keeps the ball in his hand. There was one today that was a breaking ball by (Matt Barnes) that almost bounced (short) in the grass (in front of the plate). I'll tell you right now, he was able to block it. That's what he brings."

Despite that, there's a good chance that Leon could sit Saturday, with Christian Vazquez getting the start to pair with David Price.

"(Leon), Blake (Swihart) and Christian do an outstanding job at the plate blocking pitches," said Cora. "We're very comfortable with all of them."

McAdam: Red Sox take unusual bullpen path to Game 1 win

Sean McAdam

You can plan all you want. You can play the game out in your head, and think about matchups beforehand. You can even run simulations and try to anticipate what might unfold.

But then a game comes along like Game 1 of the American League Division Series against the New York Yankees and, before long, you realize that everything you had scripted has been tossed aside.

Time for a new plan.

Then, you don't about anything else except getting to the finish line. You become, in essence, Malcolm X in the dugout and operate by a singular philosophy, rooted in survival — by any means necessary.

That's what happened to Alex Cora on Friday night. When Chris Sale gave up a couple of hits in the sixth, nearing 100 pitches, it was time for the parade from the bullpen to begin.

In rapid succession, Cora tried Ryan Brasier, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes over the span of two innings with varying levels of anxiety and success. Sale had entrusted the bullpen with a 5-0 lead, but before long, the margin was chipped away. Two runs, both inherited, scored with Brasier on the mound. In the seventh, as Barnes entered, two singles, a wild pitch and a walk led to a bases-loaded fielder's choice, and now the lead was shaved to just two.

That's when Cora got creative.

In a development that no one saw coming, he called on Rick Porcello in the eighth, despite the fact that Porcello is the scheduled Game 3 starter Monday night in New York. Steven Wright, who had been a slotted as an intriguing multi-inning relief option, was ruled out of the game beforehand with a knee injury and someone was needed to take his place. Porcello was placed on call.

And it didn't seem to matter one bit that, in anticipation of his start at Yankee Stadium, Porcello had thrown his customary 20-25 pitch bullpen session earlier in the afternoon. So much for best-laid plans and all.

"Doesn't matter this time of year," shrugged Porcello after the fact. "You get out there, the adrenaline's going and you don't feel a thing."

Immediately, Porcello began pouring strikes into the zone, something the previous trip of relievers had struggled with.

"That's the name of the game," said Porcello. "If you fall behind with Yankee batters, they're going to make you pay. They've been doing it all year. That's why they've hit the amount of home runs they've hit. They're dangerous and you're only hurting yourself if you fall behind. So that was kind of the mentality — attack the zone and go from there."

He got two quick outs before Gleyber Torres reached on a 40-foot squibber down the third-base line. Then came Kimbrel, embarking on a four-out save, interrupted by a fabulous piece of hitting by Aaron Judge, who muscled a solo shot to the opposite field with one out.

Otherwise, Kimbrel navigated, like tiptoeing through the minefield that is the Yankee lineup.

Cora, of course, is no stranger to unorthodox bullpen methodologies. Last October, he part of a Houston Astros brain-trust that utilized starters in the eighth and ninth innings, in place of experienced late-inning relievers who had fallen short.

"One thing I learned last year..." Cora said, "to win a World Series it's going to take 25, 27 guys to do it, regardless of their roles."

Lesson learned. And copied, apparently.

It was not a traditional route to victory for the Red Sox. Each out recorded felt like some improbable feat of strength.

Surely, this can't continue. The Red Sox couldn't possibly plot this kind of journey through the Division Series, on to the ALCS, and finally the World Series.

That's just not possible, someone asked Barnes. I mean, is it?

"Yes," said Barnes, almost starting down the question. Then, he waited a beat and repeated for emphasis: "Yes."

It won't be easy. Even with allotted days off and the requisite rests, the longer the postseason lasts, the steeper the climb becomes.

But Friday represented the first step. Having grabbed a 5-0 lead, at home, the Red Sox couldn't let this one slip through their hands. Not at home, not as they tried to shed the disappointments of their last two trips to the postseason. Not after Sale had made a triumphant return to form, and had been staked to that five-run cushion.

So, the Red Sox got out the duct tape, and the bailing wire and made do with what they had.

"When it comes down to October, a win's a win," said Barnes. "It doesn't matter how you get 'em."

"We had a nice regular season," concluded Porcello, "but now, it's all about whatever you can do to win 11 ballgames."

One down, 10 to go.

By any means necessary.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 – After quick 3-0 lead in first, Sox somehow survive

Sean McAdam

HEADLINES

Sale checks out: There was great uncertainty about what the Red Sox were going to get out of Chris Sale on Friday night. After all, his fastball averaged just 90 mph in his last regular-season tuneup and he had pitched a grand total of 17 innings over the final two months. But Sale calmed those fears right from his first few pitches, which registered 96 mph and 94 mph. "I'm pleased with what I saw," said Alex Cora. "Like I said before the game, it really didn't matter if it was 91 or 99 — we knew he was going to compete. But that was good."

Indeed, it was. Sale pitched into the sixth, and though he wasn't exactly the picture of efficiency — thanks to an eight-pitch at-bat in the first with Giancarlo Stanton and an 11-pitch at-bat in the fourth against Aaron Hicks — he showed periods of domination, with eight strikeouts and 10 swing-and-misses, allowing two runs on five hits. Sale said his outing "felt more like myself because I felt this was just a normal start. Not normal in terms of not being a postseason start, but just like there's no restrictions." If a Game 5 is necessary, Sale will be coming back on five days' rest. But he's not looking that far ahead. "If they ask me to throw tomorrow," said Sale, "I'll throw tomorrow."

Bullpen pieces it together – barely: It took five relievers, some tense moments and 89 pitches, but somehow, somehow, the much-maligned Red Sox bullpen escaped with a Game 1 win. It was far from pretty, with three walks and two wild pitches, but ultimately, the Sox preserved the margin of victory. That included two big outs from starter Rick Porcello, who was told before the game that he might be needed and was ready to go in the eighth when called upon. "It's about getting 27 outs, having the lead," said Cora. "And we did it." There were moments when it didn't seem likely. Brandon Workman struck out Gleyber Torres with a 3-and-2 curveball with two outs and the bases loaded in the sixth inning, which probably represented the biggest out of the game. When Aaron Judge powered a ball into the bullpen in the ninth, the Sox lead was cut to one. But Kimbrel came back to strike out Brett Gardner, Giancarlo Stanton and Luke Voit to close it out.

Martinez strikes fast in Sox playoff debut: In their last two trips to the postseason, the Red Sox were seemingly always playing from behind. Indeed, last year, in their four-game series with Houston, the Astros scored first in every game. But the Sox changed that pattern in a hurry in the first inning, and they have J.D. Martinez to thank. With Andrew Benintendi on second (single, stolen base) and Steve Pearce on first (walk), Martinez connected with a line shot off New York starter J.A. Happ into the Monster Seats, and four batters in, it was 3-0 Boston. "Obviously, it was important to get that lead right away," Martinez said. "And I think it kind of took a little pressure off everyone. Anytime you go into a playoff game, everyone's

adrenaline is high and tensions are going. I think giving Chris that lead definitely just helped relax everybody.”

TURNING POINT

It looked on the verge of going horribly wrong in the top of the sixth. The Yankees had scored twice and loaded the bases as Brandon Workman ran the count full to Gleyber Torres. The runners were in motion, which might have enabled all three runners to score on a single. But Workman dropped a hellacious curveball in the bottom of the zone for a called third strike, stranding three, and giving fans at Fenway a chance to breathe again.

TWO UP

Sandy Leon: He was 0-for-3 at the plate, but he masterfully blocked balls in the dirt all night and helped the bullpen navigate its way through 14 treacherous outs.

“I mean, we put him through the ringer tonight, top to bottom, from the start of the game to the very end,” Sale said of his catcher. “So I think when you look back at this game and you go see look at how many balls we threw in the dirt to try to get swings and misses, and he was as solid as you can possibly be behind the plate. I think that helps tremendously.”

Andrew Benintendi: He had two hits in his role as table-setter at the top of the Red Sox lineup and came around to score two runs.

TWO DOWN

Ryan Brasier: The reliever’s playoff debut was far from smooth: he faced four hitters, allowed two singles, a walk and threw a wild pitch.

Brandon Workman: Though he recorded the big inning-ending strikeout, he too, struggled, with two hits and a walk.

QUOTE OF NOTE

“To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult.”
— Cora, in what may qualify as the understatement of the year.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Red Sox have won their last eight postseason games when they score five or more runs.

The extended their postseason winning streak against the Yankees to five games.

Sale had eight strikeouts; the last Red Sox starter to have more strikeouts in a postseason game was Daisuke Matsuzaka.

Rick Porcello’s relief appearance was the eighth of his career in the postseason.

Kimbrel recorded his first postseason save in five years.

The three RBI for Martinez represented a career high.

UP NEXT

Game 2 of the ALDS is at 8:15 p.m. Saturday, with LHP David Price (16-7, 3.58) vs. RHP Masahiro Tanaka (12-6, 3.75).

Final: Red Sox 5, Yankees 4 – Bullpen barely survives in Game 1 victory

Greg A. Bedard

Well, that wasn’t easy.

After being staked to a 5-0 lead in the third inning thanks, in good measure to a three-run homer by J.D. Martinez in the first, the Red Sox barely pieced it together with their beleaguered bullpen to escape with a 5-4 victory over the Yankees to take a 1-0 lead in their AL Division Series.

Chris Sale showed better velocity in getting his first-ever postseason victory as he went 5.1 innings. He cruised with eight strikeouts until the sixth inning when he allowed two singles and was lifted.

That started a parade of relievers, and all of them were an adventure except Rick Porcello — yes, the Game 3 starter — and Craig Kimbrel. Both combined to get the final six outs to secure the victory.

Kimbrel allowed a lead-off homer to Aaron Judge in the ninth, but then struck out the final three batters to finish off the game.

In addition to Martinez, Andrew Benintendi had two hits and two runs scored for the Sox' offense.

More coverage to come.

LIVE GAME COVERAGE FROM BEDARD

Live Box: MLB Gameday

Top of the ninth

Here we go.

Home run by Judge to RF. 1-1 pitch. RUN: Red Sox 5, Yankees 4.

Gardner strikes out.

Stanton looks terrible striking out looking on three pitches.

Voit strikes out. Game over.

Bottom of the eighth

Nunez, whose swing is in about eight pieces right now, strikes out.

Kinsler strikes out for the third time.

Leon pops out and we go to the ninth. Hold on to your butts.

Top of the eighth

Mitch Moreland now in at first base.

Porcello starts. Kimbrel warming up.

Porcello gets ahead 0-2, and gets a weak ground ball by Andujar.

Sanchez lines out to third.

Swinging bunt by Torres will bring on Kimbrel. But well-done by Porcello. Sounds like the crowd was in favor of Cora leaving Porcello in. Can't say I disagree.

After falling behind, Kimbrel gets McCutcheon to pop out to right.

Aaron Judge, Brett Gardner and Giancarlo Stanton are waiting in the ninth.

Bottom of the seventh

Benintendi grounds out.

Pearce strikes out.

Single to right by Martinez.

Bogaerts grounds back to the pitcher to end it. Britton threw a missile to first base and it nearly got away.

Top of the seventh

Back-to-back singles to lead off the inning and Matt Barnes will enter.

Second pitch is a wild pitch to move the runners up. Good lord.

Breaking: Rick Porcello is warming up. That's not a typo.
Walk to Gardner to load the bases with no outs and Stanton up.
Stanton whiffs. Joe Kelly is now also warming. That's all this game needs.
Barnes gets the ground ball he wanted, but a good takeout slide by Gardner keeps the double play from happening. RUN: Red Sox 5, Yankees 3.
Gregorius bounces out to end the inning. Damage limited.
Bottom of the sixth

Kinsler strikes out on three pitches.
Leon out, 3-1.
Bradley walks ... Betts takes strike three.
Top of the sixth

Brasier warming.

Chris Sale fastballs: 91.4, 94.2, 95, 94.9, 95.2, 95.6
Judge singles to lead off the inning. Sale's pitches are definitely losing steam.
Felder's choice eliminates Judge.
Stanton singles sharply to left field. That's it for Sale. He leaves to a warm ovation. Brasier in. Two on, one out.
Brasier lines a single down the right-field line. RUN: Red Sox 5, Yankees 1.
After a full count with some nice stops by Leon, Gregorius grounds into an RBI fielder's choice. RUN: Red Sox 5, Yankees 2.
Wild pitch from Brasier moves up Gregorius into scoring position.
Walk to Andujar will bring up Sanchez as the tying run. Brasier's done. Brandon Workman will enter.
Man, this is the first inning of the Sox bullpen and I'm already worn out.
Workman starts by throwing three balls
Four-pitch walk to load the bases.

Bottom of the fifth

Pearce grounds out to third.
Martinez pops out to first.
Infield single for Bogaerts with two outs.
Nunez out on a groundout off the pitcher's glove.
Top of the fifth

Chris Sale fastballs: 89.9,
Sanchez bounces out to second.
Comebacker to Sale for the second out.
Pop out to right ends it quickly.
Sale pitches: Inning 9/6. Game 83/55.
Bottom of the fourth

Kinsler, Leon and Bradley due up.

Kinsler singles and Leon advances him with a sac bunt.
Bradley pops out to short.
Intentional walk to Betts. First and second two outs.
Benintendi grounds out to end it.
Top of fourth

Chris Sale fastballs: 90, 92, 92.5, 94.3, 94, 95.4, 95.7, 94.2, 94.3.
11-pitch at-bat by Hicks ends with a single to right. Sale's velocity has dropped a little.
Hicks is checked on after reaching. He will be removed for Brett Gardner.
Stanton strikes out on three pitches.

Voit strikes out looking on a backdoor slider. That's seven Ks.
Gregorius, who just missed a double down the left-field line in the second, just misses a HR to right. He reaches on an infield single up the middle. Two on, two out.
Andujar becomes Sale's eighth strikeout victim as he again strikes out the side. But a lot of pitches that inning,
Sale pitches: Inning 25/19. Game 74/49.
Bottom of the third

Betts doubles to center.
Benintendi drags a bunt to the right side and there is no play. First and third, nobody out. That's it for Happ. Chad Green is entering the game.
Pearce greets Green with an RBI single on the first pitch. RUN: Red Sox 4, Yankees 0.
Deep fly out to right by Martinez. Benintendi moves up to third.
Bogaerts lines one sharply to right, it stays up but it's deep enough to score the run. RUN: Red Sox 5, Yankees 0.
Nunez pops out to second.
Top of the third

Sale fastball speeds: 93.7, 95.9, 94.1, 94.3, 94.6, 93.4, 96.2
Sanchez strikes out looking. That's five K's in six outs.
Walk to Torres.
Mookie makes a Mookie play on a McCutchen liner to right. Betts tracks it down, makes the play and nearly doubles off Torres. Sensational.

Judge bounces out weakly into a fielder's choice to end the inning.
Sale pitches: Inning 15/8. Game 49/30
Bottom of the second

Kinsler strikes out.
Leon pops out to left.
Happ snares a ground ball up the middle by Betts to retire the side.
Top of the second

Sale fastball speeds: 93.9, 95.2, 95, 96.4
Voit singles up the middle on a 1-0 fastball.
Gregorius narrowly misses extra bases on a foul down the left-field line. After two more foul balls, Gregorius becomes the fourth strikeout.
Andujar ends the inning on a 4-6-3 double play.
10 pitches in the inning, 34 for the game (22 strikes).
Bottom of the first

Betts strikes out
Benintendi bounces a single in the third base hole, and steals second on the first pitch.
Walk to Pearce
Line-drive, three-run bomb by Martinez into the first row of the Monster. 2-0 pitch. RUNS: Red Sox 3, Yankees 0.
Bogaerts fouls out, and Nunez lines out to end the inning.

Top of the first

Sale's fastball speed: 95.4, 94.1, 93, 95.1, 95.1, 95.6, 94.6, 95, 95.7, 96.6
Sale's first two pitches were 95.4 and 94.1 on a four-pitch strikeout looking of McCutchen.
Sale strikeouts out Judge on backdoor slider. That's two.
Two-out walk to Hicks after Sale bounces a few sliders.
Goes to 3-1 on Stanton, but comes back to strike him out and the side. Good start.

WHO: Red Sox vs. New York Yankees

WHEN: 7:32 p.m.

WHERE: Fenway Park

WHAT'S UP: This is the first postseason meeting between the teams since the 2004 ALCS. This is Boston's third straight postseason appearance, but they've won just one game in their last two trips. It's the 13th appearance in the ALDS for the Red Sox, but just the third time they've opened the series at home and the first time since 2013 when they beat Tampa Bay. Boston won a franchise record 108 games during the season, the best record in either league. This also marks the second straight year that the Red Sox begin the playoffs against the team with which they finished the regular season. Last year, it was Houston; this year, the Yankees. The two teams played 19 times during the regular season, with the Sox holding a slim 10-9 edge...This will mark the first time since 2005 in which the Red Sox don't have Dustin Pedroia as their starting second baseman in a playoff game. The last time it happened was Game 3 of the 2005 ALDS against the White Sox, when Tony Graffanino was their starter at the position...Of the 25 players on the Red Sox' active roster, 21 have appeared in at least one playoff game. The four who haven't: Blake Swihart, Ryan Brasier, Steven Wright and Nathan Eovaldi...In Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez, the Red Sox have two players in their lineup who hit .300 or better with an OPS of 1.000 or greater. The last to do that was the 2001 Colorado Rockies (Larry Walker and Todd Helton)...In two starts against the Yankees this season, Chris Sale was 2-0 with a 0.69 ERA...Aaron Hicks has had the most success against him in the past, going 8-for-25 (.320)...Giancarlo Stanton, in a much smaller sample size, is 2-for-6...This is the 20th appearance in the ALDS for the Yankees. They're in the playoffs for the 19th time in the last 24 seasons....The Yankees are 12-7 in Game 1 of the ALDS, including winning six of their last eight...Overall, this is the fourth meeting in history between the teams, with the Yankees winning in 1999 and 2003 before the Sox won in 2004...Over his last 12 games, first baseman Luke Voit is batting .404 with seven homers and 18 RBI.

STARTING PITCHERS: LHP Chris Sale (12-4, 2.11) vs. J.A. Happ (17-6, 3.65)

TV/RADIO: TBS/WEEI 93.7 FM

LINEUPS

RED SOX

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

YANKEES

McCutchen LF
Judge RF
Hicks CF
Stanton DH
Voit 1B
Gregorius SS
Andujar 3B
Sanchez C
Torres 2B

NEWS AND NOTES

Alex Cora said the last two spots on the pitching staff “came down to four in the end.” The Sox went with Joe Kelly and Brandon Workman over Heath Hembree and Bobby Poyner. Cora said Hembree was hurt by his difficulty with runners on base in the last month, along with his propensity for giving up homers in the second half. “He wasn’t keeping the ball in the ballpark,” said Cora of Hembree, “which is important.” He also cited the fact that the Sox don’t have to match up with two many lefty hitters in the New York lineup and not wanting to take a lefty (Poyner) for the sake of having a lefty. Also, Kelly has handled lefties pretty well during the season, giving them another option in addition to Eduardo Rodriguez.

Cora said he it’s likely that Rafael Devers will play third base against righthander Masahiro Tanaka Saturday.

Readying to manage his first postseason game, Cora admitted he was a bit nervous Thursday night and watched a lot of video until almost midnight, but felt essentially the same Friday.

Cora on Blake Swihart: “Everyone sees him as a third catcher. I see him more as a utility guy. He can pinch-hit, pinch run, he can catch, he can play the outfield.”

Brock Holt is seen as the likely first pinch-hit option off the bench. “I told him to be ready at any time,” said Cora

With so much still unknown about 108-win team, Red Sox’ October fate is uncertain

Sean McAdam

You might think that, after covering the 2018 Red Sox since Day 1 of spring training, all the way through a six-month, 162-game season, I would have a pretty good idea about what to expect from this team as the postseason gets underway Friday night.

Think again.

The truth is, the ultimate destination for this team’s playoff run is unknown. They could get hot, steamroll opponents the way they often did during the course of the season, and wind up as 2013 world champions.

Or, they could get knocked off in the Division Series for the third straight October, sent home just as things are getting interesting.

Frankly, neither would surprise me.

That’s how much uncertainty surrounds this edition. It’s a commentary about the unpredictability of baseball’s post-season, about the parity that exists in the game and the presence of two other 100-win teams in their own league.

And, yes, it’s a commentary about, after all these months and all these games, how little we know about this Red Sox team.

Are they paper tigers, a product of a top-heavy American League, fattening up on the likes of the Orioles and Blue Jays (combined Red Sox record against: 31-7), while compiling a losing record (18-21) against the other four playoff teams?

Or are they deserving of their status as No. 1 seed, having played .600 ball in each of the six months, claiming first place in East on July 2 and never letting go?

The next few weeks — or next few days — will tell us the answer.

This much is certain: the Red Sox are a much better offensive team than the one which was unceremoniously outclassed by the Houston Astros last October. They led the American League in runs scored — and a host of other categories, from OPS to slugging percentage — and went from dead last in the American League in homers to a far more respectable sixth-place showing, largely because of the acquisition of J.D. Martinez.

Martinez nearly won the A.L. Triple Crown and gave the Red Sox the dynamic, middle-of-the-order hitter they so clearly needed a year ago in the wake of David Ortiz's retirement.

The outfield defense is elite, the baserunning much improved and the mood around the team far lighter than last season. The lineup seemed to thrive in scoring opportunities, with an MLB-best .872 OPS with runners in scoring position.

But questions — most of them center around the pitching staff — remain.

Although the Red Sox got strong work from their rotation during the season, finishing fourth in the A.L. in ERA and four starters reached double-figures in wins, the forecast is murky for October.

Between Chris Sale, David Price and Rick Porcello, the team's Big Three, the Sox have zero career post-season wins and a combined 6.18 ERA.

Ordinarily, Sale would give the Red Sox a huge advantage in any playoff series. He's been the best lefty in the American League the last two seasons and arguably, the best starter overall. But questions surround both his health and mechanics as the playoffs begin.

Sale has pitched just 17 innings since July 27 and as he rebuilt arm strength and ramped up his workload down the stretch, his velocity dipped instead of surged. Sale maintained that he was past the mild shoulder inflammation that has limited him the last two months, but the subtext seemed to suggest: "And even if I'm not, I'll go out and compete and make no excuses."

That's not exactly inspiring.

Neither is the performance of the bullpen. While Craig Kimbrel is a lockdown closer, the rest of the relievers don't inspire nearly as much confidence: Matt Barnes, who couldn't crack the post-season roster a year ago, has battled a hip injury and wasn't as effective in the final two months; Ryan Brasier, one of the season's best stories, has 33.2 innings of major league experience in the last five years; Joe Kelly, unhittable for the first two months before dive-bombing through the last four, couldn't be beaten out for a postseason roster spot.

Much is made about the post-season being a long grind, one that can potentially last almost a month, but for the Red Sox, a lot is riding on Game 1 Friday night. Should Sale shake the rust, become dominant again and get the Sox off to their first series lead since 2013, the Sox might just ride that momentum to the end of October.

If, however, he stumbles, the Red Sox could immediately cede the home field advantage they worked the previous 162 games to attain, invite questions about their postseason suitability and be done by Monday night.

Could they win it all? Sure. They clearly were the best team over a six-month slog.

Could they get bounced in the first round? You bet. Forget the standings, as there's clearly not much difference in talent between the Sox and the rival Yankees.

Champs or chumps – it could go either way.

Buckle up.

*** *The Athletic***

Red Sox rewind: A mini-oral history of how the bullpen bent but didn't break in Game 1

Jen McCaffrey

The Red Sox bullpen bent about as far as it could without breaking on Friday night.

It sure wasn't comfortable, but five Red Sox relievers combined for 3 2/3 innings in relief of Chris Sale as the Red Sox eked a 5-4 win over the Yankees in Game 1 of the American League Division Series.

A series of high-pressure situations buoyed the Red Sox through the latter part of the game to save a strong start (all things considered) from Sale. This is, in essence, an inning-by-inning oral history of how the Sox bullpen was able to hang on:

SIXTH INNING

Sale turned over a 5-0 lead to Ryan Brasier with two on and one out in the sixth inning and Brasier promptly allowed both runs to score. After Brasier walked Miguel Andujar to put runners on first and second, manager Alex Cora turned to Brandon Workman.

Workman initially wasn't much better, throwing seven of the first eight pitches for balls. He walked Gary Sanchez to load the bases with nine-hole hitter Gleyber Torres coming to the plate. Pitching coach Dana LeVangie visited Workman on the mound with a message.

LeVangie: "Slow things down, let's get it back, a little bit of a reset button here and we talked about the pitches and how we're going to start them off and how we're going to finish them and really important that one of his pitches we want to make sure we're not in the zone with it."

Workman: "I walk Gary on four pitches, and honestly, none of them were even close, so just had to take a deep breath and get back to executing. I was able to get that first pitch strike swinging with the cutter and it settled me in a little bit and was able to work from there."

After the first strike to Torres, Workman threw three more balls before closing him out on back-to-back strikes.

Workman: "I threw a strike to get back in the count. Fastball away, able to throw that on the corner. At that point, my command had been a little erratic, so I wasn't too surprised he made me throw a strike."

Workman: "Then 3-2, the curveball is kind of my out pitch, so me and Sandy (Leon) decided to go with that and I was able to execute a good one and get a swing. It was a big spot right there with the bases loaded, three-run game at the time, he's the winning run at the plate. Either way, bases loaded, if I throw a ball there or he gets a base hit, 3-2, two outs, they're running on the pitch, so multiple runs come in. It was a big pitch and I was able to execute it."

SEVENTH INNING

Workman started the seventh inning, but after allowing two straight singles, Cora turned to Matt Barnes.

He fired a wild pitch to advance the runners into scoring position before walking Brett Gardner to load the bases for Giancarlo Stanton.

Barnes: "We had bases loaded and nobody out at that point, you've got to make some pitches. We have scouting reports and I knew exactly what I wanted to do to him."

He got two fast strikes and was helped by Leon blocking and chasing down a ball that, with the count 0-2, bounced well in front of the plate.

LeVangie: "It was the perfect matchup, he's just got to make pitches against them and we feel like we can get him out if we do what we're supposed to do."

Stanton: "I had pitches to hit in the zone that I fouled off and I didn't get to them. You can't give them too many strikes in the zone like that. You wind up having a game like I did."

Aaron Boone: "Thought Barnes made a great pitch against him, and just seeing the replay, where he started a tough pitch. Sometimes you know, that goes with Giancarlo sometimes. If you make pitches against him, his outs are a lot of times strikeouts."

Barnes: "Was able to make some pitches and get the punch out which is huge especially from a guy like that that has the ability to drive the baseball, get the ball in the air."

Barnes induced a groundout to second from Didi Gregorius to end the inning.

EIGHTH INNING

Rick Porcello, pitching out of the bullpen for the first time since Game 1 of the 2017 ALDS, took over. He recorded two groundouts before allowing a single to Torres. Cora then turned to closer Craig Kimbrel for the four-out save attempt, and Kimbrel got Andrew McCutcheon to fly out to end the eighth.

Cora: "We went to Barnes probably a little bit earlier than expected. That's why you saw Rick in the eighth inning."

Barnes: "I found out Porcello was in the bullpen when he started walking out with us, but everything, other than Craig throwing the ninth inning and coming in the eighth, everything else is everybody on deck. Doesn't matter when, where, what the situation is. And you've got to be ready for that."

Kimbrel: "I knew going into the game if the top part of the lineup was coming around in the eighth inning, I was going to get ready for them. Top of the lineup came up, so I was ready to go in."

NINTH INNING

Kimbrel hadn't recorded a four-out save since July 11. This one wouldn't come easily. Aaron Judge crushed a solo homer to right field to lead off the ninth, making it a one-run game.

Kimbrel: "My initial reaction was, 'He did a good piece of hitting on that ball.' Staying inside it and drive it like that, there's not too many guys who can do it like that. It was just a good piece of hitting, but at the end, we still had the lead and I still had a job to do. Just had to bear down, focus, and get the last three outs."

Levangie: "Craig has a pretty set routine. He goes over each hitter before he gets into the game, he's in in the eighth he'll go through all the hitters he's going to face going out to the ninth and we just had a small conversation before he headed out and that's it."

Kimbrel settled down after the home run to strike out Gardner swinging, Stanton looking and then Luke Voit swinging to end the game.

Levangie: "We're all in, we're all in to win this. We expect our guys in the bullpen to be available every game this series. If we play five we expect them to be available five games. And our training room has become an emergency room, so we're expecting — we're asking a lot from these guys and it might be six outs. That's the way it is."

Jennings: Alex Cora was brought to Boston to win. In Game 1, he did just that for Red Sox.

Chad Jennings

Alex Cora stepped out of the dugout, took a few steps forward, then stopped and watched.

Out on the mound, his Red Sox players were high-fiving and shaking hands. Right at the edge of the first-base line, but never crossing onto the field of play, Dustin Pedroia stood shouting and cheering. Mookie Betts, Chris Sale, J.D. Martinez, Craig Kimbrel all came off the field, celebrating the kind of win Fenway Park hadn't seen in five years.

Cora stood and watched and let the players come to him. He still had so much more to ask of them. Friday night was just the first one, a 5-4 Red Sox win against the Yankees in Game 1 of the American League Division Series. It gave the Red Sox a playoff series lead for the first time since the 2013 World Series.

For almost six innings, the game went exactly the way the Red Sox drew it up. Then the whole thing very nearly fell apart and a guy who opened the year in Triple A had to pitch out of a bases-loaded jam, a starting pitcher had to come out of the bullpen to pitch the eighth, and Kimbrel just had to give up a home run before finally closing out the ninth.

But it worked. In a best-of-five series, the Red Sox found a way to take control. How they go about winning the next two games, and the two series after that, is anyone's guess, but that's what Cora is here for. He's here to move slowly, act deliberately, and let the players dictate whatever happens next.

"One thing I learned last year," said Cora, who was the bench coach on the champion Astros last season, "to win a World Series is going to take 25, 27 guys to do it, regardless of their roles. In a perfect world, the starter goes six, you have the seventh-inning guy, eighth inning and ninth inning, and you move on. To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult, and sometimes you have to go to Plan B or Plan C."

So, how deep into the contingencies and worst-case scenarios did the Red Sox have to reach before Rick Porcello emerged to pitch the eighth?

"Might say C-and-a-half," Cora said.

Don't forget what Cora saw at this time last year, as the Astros used starter Lance McCullers to close out Game 7 of the ALCS and starter Charlie Morton to close out Game 7 of the World Series.

For all the talk about his inexperience coming into this job, having never managed in the majors or the minors, Cora now finds himself on somewhat familiar ground. He's been in this spot, trying to game-plan in the moment through a series of crucial, whatever-it-takes events. The Red Sox had lost in the division series the past two years. Cora's here to show them how to win one.

"There's no holding back," Sale said. "They want me to throw 150 (pitches), I'm throwing 150. If they ask me to throw tomorrow, I'll throw tomorrow. I think that's the mindset for every person in this clubhouse, up and down the lineup and pitching staff, we are fully prepared for everything thrown our way. We're not going to shy away from it."

The Red Sox clearly had a plan Friday. They wanted to use Ryan Brasier early and save Matt Barnes for the eighth. They decided to make Porcello available but told him they would try to stay away from him (he's scheduled to start Game 3 on Monday). Steven Wright was supposed to fit into that picture somewhere, but before the game, he complained about fresh soreness in his surgically repaired knee and wound up getting an MRI instead. It's unclear whether he'll even remain on the roster, much less pitch pivotal innings out of the bullpen.

So, Plan A was falling apart even before the Red Sox took the field, but Plan B was still awfully good.

Sale came out throwing 96 mph, easing concerns about his recently diminished velocity while he struck out Andrew McCutchen, Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton.

Martinez came to the plate with two on in the bottom of the first and attacked a 2-0 fastball for a three-run homer in his first Red Sox postseason at-bat.

The Red Sox manufactured two more runs in the third, beating the Yankees with small ball, including an Andrew Benintendi bunt single that their infield clearly did not see coming. It was all going to plan until the sixth, when Sale's pitch count crept near 100 and the Yankees put two on with one out for right-handed slugger Luke Voit.

Even then, the Red Sox followed their script and went to the bullpen, but Brasier was erratic and let both inherited runners score.

"So, we had to go to work," Cora said.

Going to work meant summoning Brandon Workman, who was cut from the roster in spring training, and who walked the bases loaded before striking out Gleyber Torres to avoid a seventh-inning disaster.

Going to work meant calling on Barnes earlier than expected when Workman allowed back-to-back singles to start the seventh. Barnes walked a batter to create his own bases-loaded jam, but he struck out Stanton and got back-to-back ground balls that limited the damage to one run.

And going to work meant getting Porcello loose in the bullpen. The only other options were lefty starter-turned-long-man Eduardo Rodriguez, scheduled Game 4 starter Nathan Eovaldi, inconsistent reliever Joe Kelly and closer Kimbrel, who would have needed six outs. Cora said the bottom of the Yankees' lineup created the most favorable matchup for Porcello, so that was the move. Porcello retired two of three before Kimbrel got a four-out save.

"What am I going to say, no?" Porcello said. "It's cliché, but whatever it takes. They needed me to cover the eighth and get the ball to Craig. That was my job."

Said pitching coach Dana LeVangie, "You try to (map it out) but sometimes it's in the moment. At times you have to put the best guy available, who you think the best guy available at the time is to make it work and tonight it was Rick Porcello to help us out."

How that affects his job next week, when he's supposed to start a game at Yankee Stadium, is a problem for another day. Cora said he still needed to talk about it with his staff. Porcello pitched an inning of mop-up duty in last year's division series opener, and he still started Game 4, so maybe that's a guide. Or, maybe the whole thing will have changed by the time the Red Sox get that far.

On Friday night, the Red Sox needed Game 1, and they got it.

"You know," Sale said. "(Cora) said something to me the other night that really stuck. That was, 'Win the first pitch, and then win every pitch after that.' I threw every pitch tonight like he was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch that I threw. You have to go up there and do what you have to do to get a win."

Sale won the first pitch, the Red Sox won the first game, and on Saturday we'll find out what it takes to win a second one.

Buckley: Red Sox win was thrilling, but this isn't a sustainable path to the title

Steve Buckley

Starting pitchers being pulled aside during batting practice and asked if they'd be willing to make themselves available to work out of the bullpen.

And then doing just that.

Curveballs that travel 55 feet and then crash into the dirt like kites without tails.

Closers delivering four-out saves.

This is the formula used by the Red Sox in emerging with a 5-4 victory over the Yankees in Game 1 of their Division Series showdown Friday night at Fenway Park. Was it nerve-wracking? Oh, yeah.

Was it fun? Absolutely. But here's a question some of you may have been mulling as you turned the lights out last night: Is it sustainable?

Probably not. You can't play an entire month of Game 7s, which was the look and feel of this Game 1. There are only so many times you can call on a parade of unsteady relievers whose pitches have catcher Sandy Leon sprawling at the plate like Tuukka Rask. There are only so many times you can call on Rick Porcello, who is scheduled to start Game 3 on Monday night at Yankee Stadium, to work two-thirds of an inning of relief. There are only so many times closer Craig Kimbrel can take over in the eighth inning, as he did after Porcello had done his job.

For Red Sox fans, these are major concerns.

And yet there's this: As if to nail the point that perhaps this will be a month of nonstop Game 7s, the Red Sox did everything but put on goggles and uncork champagne during the aftermath of Game 1.

Let's begin with Chris Sale, who made some history by becoming the first member of the Red Sox to win a postseason start since John Lackey in the clinching Game 6 of the 2013 World Series. He also became the first current member of the Sox pitching staff to win a postseason start, and in doing so he fired up Fenway Park by striking out the side in the first inning.

He gave the Sox 5 1/3 innings and wound up being charged with two runs, thanks to some shaky relief pitching by Ryan Brasier. But it's what Sale gave the Red Sox after the game that was important on a different level, as he stared into the cameras and said, "If (Red Sox manager Alex Cora) didn't take the ball out of my hand, I would have kept throwing ... I think this is my third time saying it: There's no holding back. They want me to throw 150 (pitches), I'm throwing 150. If they ask me to throw tomorrow, I'll throw tomorrow. I think that's the mindset of everyone in this clubhouse."

It was certainly the mindset of Porcello, who was approached by Cora during batting practice and asked if he would be available to pitch an inning in relief.

He said, "Yes."

And then came the eighth inning, and Cora said, "Porcello."

After the game, Porcello was asked how he reacted to Cora's request to go to the bullpen. Did he answer instantaneously, or did he mull the question before responding?

"I told him I needed a couple of minutes to think about it," he said, and then he waited a beat, and then another beat, and then maybe an eighth of a beat, and then he continued.

"Of course it was instantaneous," he said. "I was really looking forward to that opportunity, and I'm happy I got it. Any time he asks me to pick up a ball and step on the mound, I'll do it."

Lastly, we bring you reliever Matt Barnes, who took over for Brandon Workman in the seventh and promptly wild-pitched Andrew McCutchen to third and walked Brett Gardner. He struck out Giancarlo Stanton, but McCutchen scored on a force play.

But, said Barnes, "When it comes down to October, wins are wins no matter how you get them."

Oh? Barnes was asked point-blank: Can the Red Sox win the World Series playing games like this throughout October?

“Yes,” he said, quickly and strongly.

No, probably not. Sooner or later, the Red Sox are going to need quick, strong innings from their relievers, not quick, strong answers to reporters’ questions. Sooner or later they are going to need seven innings from a starting pitcher. And come on: They can’t keep sending Rick Porcello to the bullpen between postseason starts.

But, said Porcello, “This entire season this year has had a different feel to it than the last two years. I think that’s sort of carried into this series. We have different guys, and those guys are key players for us. J.D. (Martinez), Kins (Ian Kinsler), those guys are huge. It’s different than the last two years.”

Last year’s Red Sox would have been incapable of winning this game.

This year’s Red Sox won’t win too many more games like this.

But they think they can do it that way. And after two years of kitten-like performances in the Division Series, that’s not a bad thing.

As Dave Dombrowski knows, World Series titles are elusive even for the best of his peers

Chad Jennings

There aren’t many who know the highs and lows as well as Dave Dombrowski.

He was, for a while, the youngest general manager in major league history, but that was for a Montreal franchise that no longer exists. He took over an expansion team in Florida and built it into a World Series champion, only to be ordered by ownership to rip its roster to shreds that very winter. He moved to Detroit, suffered a 119-loss season, built that team, too, into a perennial contender and went to the World Series twice more, but won just one of nine games when he got there. He came to Boston in 2015 to a club in the midst of a second straight last-place finish, and made a series of high-profile moves that resulted in an immediate turnaround to win the division three years in a row.

But so far, his Red Sox have not won a single postseason series.

“(The postseason) can be the happiest moments that you’ll have in your baseball life,” Dombrowski said. “Or it can be the most heartbreaking.”

This was Dombrowski’s 40th season in Major League Baseball, and it was his 30th at the helm of an organization. On Friday, he will oversee a playoff series for the 17th time. His postseason record as a head of baseball operations: 37-37, an even split of highs, and lows, and everything in between.

“Knowing that’s how it can be, that’s really the reality of it,” Dombrowski said. “Some of your most happy moments and celebrations, but there are some excruciating time periods. But, sort of, that’s the game, and it comes with the territory. And you would rather have that opportunity to participate than be on the outside looking in.”

Dombrowski’s current title is Red Sox president of baseball operations, but the team doesn’t have a general manager, so Dombrowski might as well have that title as well. The only active general manager with more playoff experience is his division series opponent, the Yankees’ Brian Cashman, who has by far the most playoff wins and the most playoff losses of any current GM. After Wednesday’s wild card victory, Cashman’s record is 92-64, with more than half of those wins coming in his first 10 years on the job when the Yankees went 63-40 while advancing to five World Series from 1998 to 2007.

Dombrowski has the second-most playoff wins and second-most playoff losses of his active colleagues, but his career has been the exact opposite of Cashman's.

Named Expos general manager in the middle of the 1988 season when he was just 31, Dombrowski advanced to the playoffs only once in his first 17 years as a GM. It was after he was hired to be the first GM in Marlins history and built a team from literally nothing in 1992 to a World Series winner in 1997. That's still his only World Series title, and it came in the 11th inning of Game 7.

He has not experienced a Game 7 in either an LCS or a World Series since.

"I was an assistant general manager in '83 with the White Sox when we lost to a really good Baltimore team that won the championship," Dombrowski said. "I think, at that time, you think, oh, this is going to be normal. You think it's going to be more often. And you don't realize how difficult it can be."

Dombrowski did lift the Tigers from the depths of atrociousness and got them to the World Series in 2006, but they lost that series in five games and didn't get back to the playoffs for another five years. It's been only in Dombrowski's fourth decade as a baseball executive that he's become a postseason regular.

From 1988 to 2010, Dombrowski went to the playoffs twice with three different franchises, but since 2011, he's been every year but one. The lone exception was that weird 2015 season when he was fired in Detroit and immediately hired in Boston.

His Tigers won the American League Central four years in a row before he was let go. In those playoffs, Dombrowski lost in the division series once, lost in the ALCS twice and got swept by the Giants in the 2012 World Series. Total playoff record those four years: 17-21 while winning exactly as many series as he lost.

The past two years in Boston, it's been nothing but early exits. The Red Sox were swept by the Indians in 2016 and lost to the Astros in four games last year.

"It's just the basic reality of being in the postseason," Dombrowski said. "And I think part of it is, we have a good team, but so does everybody else that's in there. So, you know, you have to play well at a particular time. Things have to go your way. So, there's so much that's involved in that."

Eight current general managers have never sat at the head of the table and experienced that harsh reality. The Athletics' David Forst just experienced his first playoff game as GM on Wednesday, joining two others, including Rockies GM Jeff Bridich, whose only postseason experience before Thursday's NL Division Series was the one-game wild card. More than half of current GMs can count their playoff game experience in single digits.

Of his contemporaries, Dombrowski's postseason experience and record most closely mirrors the Cardinals' John Mozeliak, who's also an even .500 at 32-32. Former Cardinals general manager Walt Jocketty, now a special advisor in Cincinnati, is also comparable at 41-39. Those two represent Cardinals history since 1995, a successful period with 13 playoff appearances, four National League pennants and two World Series wins, yet their collective postseason record is just seven games above .500 during their time in St. Louis, and Jocketty went just 2-7 in the playoffs when he went on to serve as GM of the Reds for eight years.

All of this suggests it's difficult to judge a general manager based on his postseason performance, and it seems Cooperstown agrees.

Hall of Fame executive John Schuerholz won a championship in Kansas City and built a dynasty in Atlanta, but his playoff record, like Dombrowski, is an even .500 at 71-71. It's the sheer volume of playoff games that stand out about his numbers. Another Hall of Famer, Pat Gillick, had a losing playoff record until his farewell season in 2008 when his Phillies won a World Series while losing just three playoff

games along the way. Gillick's final postseason tally was 50-46 across 27 seasons as a GM in Toronto, Baltimore, Seattle and Philadelphia.

Former Red Sox general manager Dan Duquette is 11-20 in the playoffs. His successor, Theo Epstein, went 34-32 in Boston while winning two World Series with four-game sweeps. Epstein has since won another World Series as the Cubs' President of Baseball Operations while someone else (Jed Hoyer) holds the GM title. Even there, Epstein and Hoyer have a playoff record of just 19-18.

The Dodgers' Andrew Friedman, Giants' Brian Sabean and Athletics' Billy Beane are among the most well-known executives in the game today, but none is technically still a general manager. They all hold some sort of president/vice president title while someone else serves as GM. Despite their notoriety, Their postseason records are hit-and-miss.

Friedman went 13-17 in the playoffs as the GM in of the Rays, and he's so far 18-17 in Los Angeles. Beane had a 15-23 postseason record with his Moneyball A's while losing six different division series two games to three. Sabean has been the postseason winner of the bunch going 46-30 as general manager — 48-33 if you count the past four years when Bobby Evans has served as GM — but nearly all of Sabean's postseason success came in his championship years of 2010, 2012 and 2014. Each of those seasons was followed by a year of missing the playoffs, and Sabean went 12-16 in the postseason his first 13 years as a GM despite six different years of 90-plus wins in the regular season.

So, how does a GM or head of baseball operations prepare for such uncertainty and unpredictability? How do those who oversee the most successful regular season teams adjust their big-picture rosters and 162-game strategies to fit the short-series mentality of October?

"You're always cognizant of (the playoffs) during the season, if you have a good club," Dombrowski said. "Usually, the moves you're making to make us more competitive to win the division will also make you more competitive in the postseason. So, for example, for us, we thought we were a little bit susceptible to left-handed pitching, so now we've got (Steve) Pearce and (Ian) Kinsler, and I think we're better against left-handed pitching. That may serve us in the postseason depending on who we play. But you always have that in your mind. It's like, when we made the (Nathan) Eovaldi trade, we kind of were thinking, well, if he doesn't start for us (in the playoffs) he can always go into the bullpen. Or else, it will force someone else into the bullpen and help your pen in another way. So, those are always in the back of your mind."

Dombrowski's been through it more than most, and at this stage of his career, he's had to prepare for it more than ever. When he was young and perhaps a bit naïve, he assumed the postseason would hold a spot for his team year after year. He learned the hard way that he had to earn it, and that earning it was difficult enough.

Now, Dombrowski keeps earning his place in the October spotlight, but if there's a secret to consistently winning in the postseason — a tangible thing that a general manager or president of baseball operations can do to assure success — Dombrowski hasn't found it, and neither have some of the best baseball executives of our lifetimes.

"You just keep hoping you're going to win it," Dombrowski said. "That's really what it comes down to. You hope that's the year that your club puts it together at the right time."

If not, you prepare for the next time. And for Dombrowski, the next time begins on Friday.

How the GMs have fared

A look at the postseason records ahead of the Division Series for the general managers who led MLB teams this season and others notables from this era:

AL East

Red Sox, Dave Dombrowski — 37-37

Yankees, Brian Cashman – 92-64
Rays, Erik Neander – 0-0
Blue Jays, Ross Atkins – 1-4
Orioles, Dan Duquette – 11-20* (not returning)
AL Central

Indians, Mike Chernoff – 12-8
Twins, Thad Levine – 0-1
Tigers, Al Avila – 0-0
White Sox, Rick Hahn – 0-0
Royals, Dayton Moore – 22-9
AL West

Astros, Jeff Luhnow – 14-10
Athletics, David Forst – 0-1
Mariners, Jerry Dipoto – 0-3
Angels, Billy Eppler – 0-0
Rangers, Jon Daniels – 20-22
NL East

Braves, Alex Anthopoulos – 5-6
Nationals, Mike Rizzo – 7-12
Phillies, Matt Klentak – 0-0
Mets, Sandy Alderson – 27-20* (not returning)
Marlins, Mike Hill – 0-0
NL Central

Brewers, David Stearns – 6-9
Cubs, Jed Hoyer – 19-18
Cardinals, John Mozeliak – 32-32
Pirates, Neal Huntington – 3-5
Reds, Nick Krall – 0-0
NL West

Dodgers, Farhan Zaidi – 17-14
Rockies, Jeff Bridich – 1-1
Diamondbacks, Mike Hazen – 1-6
Giants, Bobby Evans – 2-3* (not returning)
Padres, A.J. Preller – 0-0
Other notables:

Kenny Williams – 12-4 He led a 2005 World Series run during which the White Sox lost just one game. Williams went to the playoffs only one other time at GM and lost in a four-game division series.

John Hart – 29-28. All his postseason experience came with the Indians. His teams in Texas and Atlanta never went to the playoffs when Hart was general manager.

John Schuerholz – 71-71. His final few years in Atlanta ended with quick playoff exits (and his stint with Kansas City included an 8-9 playoff record despite his 1985 World Series title). At his peak, Schuerholz had a 52-43 postseason record during the Braves' tremendous run from 1991 to 1999.

Billy Beane – 15-23. The vast majority of that record coming from six different division series in which the Athletics lost two games to three.

Pat Gillick – 50-46. The Hall of Famer had a losing record in the playoffs before his final season in 2008 with the Phillies, who won the World Series while losing just three playoff games along the way. Even

Gillick's tenure with the Blue Jays, which included two World Series titles, resulted in just a 21-20 postseason record.

Theo Epstein – 34-23. The vast majority of those wins coming during the Red Sox' World Series runs of 2004 and 2007. During his other seven years in Boston, Epstein went 12-17 in the playoffs. As President of Baseball Operations with the Cubs, Epstein has a 19-18 playoff record, which is attributed to GM Jed Hoyer.

Walt Jocketty – 41-39. He had a 39-32 tenure with the Cardinals from 1995 to 2007 during which Jocketty went to two World Series and won one of them. During his time with the Reds, Jocketty never advanced beyond the division series.

Brian Sabean — 46-30. He went 34-14 record during a five-year window from 2010 to 2014 when the Giants alternated between winning the World Series three times and missing the playoffs completely. His record is hurt a bit if you include his current title of Vice President of Baseball Operations, with Bobby Evans serving as GM until recently, during which the Giants were 2-3 in the playoffs.

Who has the edge? Talent overflows in Red Sox-Yankees ALDS

Chad Jennings and Marc Craig

Let's all pretend we didn't watch these two teams play a week ago. That was the end of the regular season, and not much mattered. Even Red Sox manager Alex Cora said they felt like spring training games.

So, erase those games from your mind.

It's Yankees vs. Red Sox! And this time, it means something!

For this much-anticipated division series between old rivals, The Athletic beat writers Marc Carig and Chad Jennings went position-by-position – Carig writing about the Yankees, Jennings about the Red Sox – to find the advantages and disadvantages for this five-game set.

I'm sure you're looking for a prediction. We have none. These are two good teams looking for three wins, and in a series this short with rosters this talented, feel free to predict anything you want. The real show is going to be what plays out on the field.

CATCHER

Yankees: Gary Sánchez — Just how far has the baseline standard fallen for Sánchez? It was news when his defense didn't cost the Yankees in the wild card game. There's still time for his shoddy glove work to appear. It's no accident that he led baseball with 18 passed balls despite two stints on the DL with a groin injury. Despite his .697 OPS, Sánchez is still capable of popping a homer.

Red Sox: Sandy Leon – The backup coming out of spring training, Leon's become a go-to option behind the plate because of his defense and comfort with the pitching staff. As for his .117 batting average, if Leon comes up in a big spot, the Red Sox have plenty of pinch-hit options and two extra catchers to make sure Leon never takes a key at-bat. By the way, it could also be Christian Vazquez starting. Or even Blake Swihart.

Edge: Yankees – Yes, there was some debate about whether Sanchez should even be the starter in the postseason, and there's no question he's struggled, but he's far more likely to be an impact bat in this series. The Red Sox have strong defenders behind the plate, but they sacrifice almost all offense unless Swihart is in the game.

FIRST BASE

Yankees: Luke Voit — For years, first base has been a black hole for the Yankees. It appeared Voit would be the latest to squander a chance to make a difference. His first two games after joining the Yankees came against the Red Sox. He went 0-for-6, eventually earning a demotion to the minors. Following his return, he posted an 1.186 OPS. His ability to stay up the middle and to the opposite field has served him well. No one acquired at the deadline has had more impact for the Yankees.

Red Sox: Mitch Moreland/Steve Pearce – It seems the Red Sox will use a true platoon at first base. Moreland was an All-Star, but his bat faded considerably after the break. Pearce provided a much-needed lift when he arrived from Toronto in late June, and he's one of the few Red Sox who's actually had success against Game 1 starter J.A. Happ.

Edge: Even – Depends. If you believe Voit will continue his absurd level of production, then it's a slam dunk for the Yankees. If you preferred tried-and-true, the Red Sox are probably more reliable.

SECOND BASE

Yankees: Gleyber Torres — Here's a sign of depth. With the Yankees as healthy as they're going to get, Torres batted ninth in the wild card game even though his 77 RBIs ranked second among rookies and his 24 homers ranked fourth. He hit 13 homers from the nine-hole, a franchise record.

Red Sox: Ian Kinsler – Dustin Pedroia played three games all season. Eduardo Nunez played second to start the year, but he's more of a third baseman these days. So, it's Kinsler – with maybe a little Brock Holt – who will handle second base in the playoffs. He's been a big boost on defense, but at 36, his bat has not been what it once was.

Edge: Yankees — At times, Torres has seemingly lost focus on defense and he has committed gaffes on the basepaths. Either could haunt him in the postseason. That said, Torres is an impact player at the plate and he hasn't shied away from big moments.

THIRD BASE

Yankees: Miguel Andújar — No Yankees rookie has hit more doubles in a season than Andújar, whose total of 47 eclipsed the old record set by Joe DiMaggio in 1936. The Yankees began the season hesitant to lean on the 23-year-old, even swinging a trade to land Brandon Drury. But when blurred vision sent Drury to the DL, Andújar seized the job and never looked back.

Red Sox: Rafael Devers/Eduardo Nunez – Cora hasn't said exactly how he'll split playing time at third base, but has just a .619 OPS against lefties this season, so Nuñez might be the platoon starter for Game 1. That said, Devers did look better in the second half than in the first half.

Edge: Yankees – Clearly, Andújar hits well enough to give the Yankees the advantage at the hot corner. But it's not as wide a margin as it should be because Andújar's defense has been such a glaring issue that he's an automatic replacement near the end of games. Expect defensive whiz Adeiny Hechavarria to take over when the Yankees hold a late lead.

SHORTSTOP

Yankees: Didi Gregorius — Injuries slowed Gregorius near the end of the season. Had he stayed on the field, he would have been on pace to be a five-win shortstop according to Fangraphs' version WAR. Only five shortstops reached that threshold. Still, he finished with career highs in homers (27), on-base percentage (.335) and OPS (.829) while playing strong defense at short. He remains one of the sport's more underrated players.

Red Sox: Xander Bogaerts – On a team with two MVP candidates, Bogaerts is easy to overlook, but according to FanGraphs, he had a higher WAR than Jose Altuve this season, and the Red Sox' new emphasis on defensive positioning plays into Bogaerts' strength as a steady rather than flashy fielder.

Edge: Red Sox – Early in the season, it seemed Gregorius was going to play his way into the MVP conversation, but the Red Sox’ lefty starters should minimize his power output, and Bogaerts ultimately finished with a better year. Two good shortstops, with a slight edge in the Red Sox favor.

LEFT FIELD

Yankees: Andrew McCutchen — Since his arrival, McCutchen has taken over in left and slotted in nicely at the top of the lineup. His .892 OPS with the Yankees had been fueled by his 22 walks in 25 games. He helped the Yankees get on the board quickly in the first, getting on base to set the table for Judge’s two-run homer. You guessed it, McCutchen reached on a walk.

Red Sox: Andrew Benintendi – Very nice year for Benintendi, who deserved to make the All-Star team and was an impact hitter between MVP candidates in the lineup. Two points of concern: His OPS is nearly 200 points lower against lefties, and he hit just two home runs in the second half, none in the past month.

Edge: Red Sox – This one is close to a push, but three of the games are at Fenway Park, where Benintendi is familiar with The Wall and where his batting average and OPS are considerably better than on the road. Even with his underwhelming second half, Benintendi remains a pest in the No. 2 spot in the order, and he’s a nice fit within the context of this Red Sox roster.

CENTER FIELD

Yankees: Aaron Hicks — Despite winning 100 games, the Yankees might not have a player finish in the top 10 in American League MVP voting. They don’t even have a clear-cut team MVP. But Hicks should be in the conversation. It helps that he stayed relatively healthy, playing in a career-best 137 games. He hit a career-high 27 homers and he’s been an above-average defender at a premium position.

Red Sox: Jackie Bradley Jr. – For three months, Bradley couldn’t hit. And not in his usual “ups and downs” kind of way. As of July 1, he was at .198 with a .616 OPS through 242 at-bats. He couldn’t hit. But the Red Sox kept pointing to positive signs – bad luck and hard contact – and sure enough, since July 2 he’s had an .823 OPS to go with his usual brand of brilliant defense.

Edge: Yankees – Don’t sleep on Bradley. He could be a deciding factor with his glove or with the bat, but Hicks’ year is just too much to overlook. Would you believe he has the highest WAR on the Yankees roster? And while he might not have Bradley’s ability to make highlight plays, he at least partially makes up for it with a strong arm.

RIGHT FIELD

Yankees: With a two-run shot in the wild card game, Aaron Judge allayed concerns about a fractured wrist that sidelined him for seven weeks. His return came without the benefit of a typical minor-league rehab. But his eye at the plate as been sharp and he’s starting to make harder contact. His homer on Wednesday was measured at 116.1 mph.

Red Sox: Mookie Betts – It’s hard to overstate Betts’ all-around game, which reached new height this season. He won a batting title, joined the 30-30 club for home runs and stolen bases, and he tied for the major league lead for outfield defensive runs saved. Batting him leadoff puts the pressure on the Yankees’ starter from Pitch 1. He’s an MVP favorite for a reason.

Edge: Red Sox – We see you, Aaron Judge. That wild card game home run was crushed, and we’re willing to believe the wrist is healthy enough to make a difference. There was real consideration toward making this one even, but Betts is just too much to ignore. Two excellent players. Arguably the best of the best even in a series with this much talent.

DH

Yankees: Giancarlo Stanton played 1,144 regular season games before his first taste of the postseason. He celebrated the occasion with a wild card game homer clocked at 117.4 mph — the hardest hit playoff home run since Statcast began measuring in 2015. He's always been a boom and bust player. For much of the final month, he's been in a down period. But in the last week or so, he's showing signs climbing out. The timing would be ideal for the Yankees.

Red Sox: J.D. Martinez – Not sure how high expectations were set when the Red Sox signed Martinez at the start of spring training, but it seems safe to assume he met or exceeded all of them. Career-highs in hits, doubles, RBIs and total bases, while coming two shy of a career high in home runs and finishing behind Betts and Mike Trout for wRC+.

Edge: Red Sox – Another terrific matchup between big offseason additions for each club. Stanton was good this year, but Martinez was better. And file this under intangible impact: Martinez has also done a lot to change the culture and preparation within the Red Sox clubhouse, which surely impact this series as well.

ROTATION

Yankees – J.A. Happ, Masahiro Tanaka, Luis Severino, CC Sabathia — Even players within the Yankees' clubhouse assumed Happ would start the wild card game. That he didn't means the Yankees can start him twice if needed in this best-of-five ALDS. Why's that a big deal? He's got a 1.99 ERA in four starts against the Red Sox. With a loaded bullpen, expect manager Aaron Boone to have a quick hook with his starters.

Red Sox: Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, Nathan Eovaldi – Sale says he's healthy after missing a month with a shoulder injury and throwing 91 mph fastballs in his last start. If he's not at 100 percent, the Red Sox are missing perhaps their biggest weapon in this series. At his best, Sale's better than anyone the Yankees can throw against him.

Edge: Even – Just too many unknowns. If Sale were definitely healthy, the edge would go to the Red Sox because of that one-two punch in the first two games (starting Sale and Price in three out of five is a huge advantage). But with Sale's status a bit uncertain, the Yankees depth stands out. Also standing out: Happ's success against the Red Sox.

BULLPEN

Yankees: Aroldis Chapman and assorted other hard-throwers — No bullpen in the history of baseball had struck out at least 30 percent of batters faced until the Yankees this season. Chapman has regained the closer's role, though the most critical arm may be Dellin Betances. A non-factor a year ago, he tossed two scoreless innings in the wild card game, a fitting postseason debut in what has been a bounce-back year for the righthander.

Red Sox: Craig Kimbrel and assorted guys Yankees fans have never heard of – Kimbrel is the most accomplished closer in the game, and even with his walks up, his WHIP was still below 1.00. Getting the ball in his hands, though, might be tricky. Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Steven Wright seem to be the go-to weapons in the late innings, with Wright's knuckleball serving as a true wild card.

Edge: Yankees — While the Red Sox have a rickety bridge to Kimbrel, the Yankees have a plenty of choices. In Wednesday's wild card game, their bullpen covered five innings without needing Chad Green to throw a single pitch. Adding lefty Stephen Tarpley gives the Yankees yet another wrinkle for the likes of Benintendi. The Yankees' advantage here is overwhelming.

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

J.A. Happ gets knocked around early and Yankees can't complete comeback in Game 1 of ALDS against Red Sox

Kristie Ackert

BOSTON — It didn't take long to figure out that J.A. Happ didn't have it Friday night. The veteran lefty could not command his fastball and struggled to get ahead of the dangerous top of the Red Sox lineup. With two on and one out in the first inning, Happ dropped a fastball low in the zone against Boston designated hitter J.D. Martinez.

The Red Sox slugger dug down and crushed a three-run homer over the Green Monster to stun Happ and send the Yankees scrambling. The Bombers fell flat against lefty Chris Sale and came up short against Boston's shaky bullpen, dropping Game 1 of the American League Division Series, 5-4, at Fenway Park.

"J.A. obviously got in a little bit of trouble in that first inning, just not having his real airtight command that he usually has, especially with the fastball," Yankee manager Aaron Boone said. "Obviously J.D. made him pay on a pitch down that he probably wanted to get a little more elevated there.

"And then being at the score and where we're at we were a little aggressive going to our pen. The pen did a great job to allow us to get back in the game and give us a chance, and we almost caught them."

Almost, but not quite.

Friday night was a huge blown opportunity for the Yankees. Not only were the Bombers unable to capitalize on their many chances against Boston's shaky bullpen, but they lost with the pitcher that they thought gave them the best chance to hold this dangerous lineup in check. Now, Saturday becomes a must-win game for the Yankees, who do not want to return to the Bronx facing elimination from the the best-of-five series.

"It's very important," Brett Gardner said of Game 2. "Obviously we want to win every game, but coming on the road playing the first two here, it's not easy. Now, this becomes a must-win game for us."

If the Yankees are going to pull that off, they are going to have to do a better job of taking advantage of the offensive opportunities than they did Friday night. The Yankees went 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position and left 10 runners on base. After scoring two, the Yankees left the bases loaded in the sixth on Gleyber Torres' strikeout.

"Yeah, we just have to capitalize in certain situations with runners on base," said Aaron Judge, whose ninth-inning leadoff homer cut the Boston lead to a run. "They had pitchers all night working the edges; it's not easy. It's frustrating, but we just have to build off of that and get ready for tomorrow."

It was more than the wasted opportunities at the plate; the Red Sox upset their plan heading into the series. Friday had been seemingly set up perfectly for the Yankees, who wanted Happ on the mound for this game because of his history.

This season, Happ made four starts against the Red Sox, pitching to a 1.99 ERA, striking out 29 in 22.1 innings pitched against them. In 21 career appearances against Boston, 20 starts, Happ had a 2.98 ERA over 117.1 innings pitched.

But maybe the Red Sox learned from that history, too.

He allowed five runs on four hits, including that first-inning three-run homer to Martinez. After giving up a leadoff double to Mookie Betts and a single to Andrew Benintendi in the third, Happ was pulled for Chad Green, who let both inherited runners score.

It was the shortest outing for a Yankee pitcher in the playoffs since Luis Severino could not get out of the first inning in last year's wild card game and the shortest for Happ since he went just two innings May 16, 2016 with the Blue Jays against the Rays.

“No excuses, it’s the playoffs, I need to be sharper,” said an obviously frustrated Happ. “If I get another opportunity, hopefully I will be.”

The Yankees have to hope they can get this series to a Game 5 now.

Masahiro Tanaka has splitter working and is ready for his first taste of the Yankees/Red Sox playoff atmosphere

Kristie Ackert

Masahiro Tanaka is ready for his close up. The Yankees’ right-hander said he has his most effective pitch, his split-finger fastball, in a good place as he gets ready to start Game 2 of the American League Division Series against the Red Sox Saturday at Fenway Park.

“I think it’s at a good place right now. You know, since I had my last outing, it’s been a while. So I had that time to make the necessary adjustments,” Tanaka said through a translator. “I like where my splitter is at at this time. And hopefully I can have that pitch with me tomorrow when I go into the game.”

That’s good news for the Yankees.

When Tanaka has good command on his splitter, he is a very effective pitcher. When he doesn’t, he often struggles. With the Yankees locked into a best-of-five game series with their division rivals and in a 1-0 hole, they need good pitching to try and upset the Red Sox.

Tanaka finished the regular season 12-6 with a 3.75 ERA.

He was 1-0 with a 7.58 ERA in four starts against the Red Sox this season. They had a .345 batting average against him. He also has a history of stepping up in the postseason, though, with a 1.44 ERA in four playoff starts.

“You know, I think that experience does help, and maybe you rely on it a little bit,” Tanaka said of his success in the playoffs. “But my mentality right now is just go into this postseason freshly, as a new experience.”

Tanaka was brilliant in three starts in the postseason last year, but even he knows that with the Yankees playing the Red Sox, this will be a whole new level.

“I think I have an idea that it’s going to be intense,” Tanaka said. “But me personally I haven’t experienced the Yankees versus Red Sox playoff atmosphere yet. So you know at this point it’s a guess, but I’m sure it’s going to be intense.”

PRICE IS RIGHT?

David Price goes into Saturday night’s Game 2 looking for his first-ever postseason win. The left-hander is 0-8 with a 5.74 ERA in nine playoff starts.

“Just another game. Don’t treat it any differently than any other game I’ve been a part of this year or in my career,” Price said of how he will approach his 10th playoff start. “That’s what I need to do tomorrow. That’s what I look forward to doing.”

The Yankees have not been an easy team for him to face. Price is 2-7 with a 7.71 ERA in eight starts against the Yankees since joining the Red Sox. After his last start in the Bronx, Price said he made adjustments that will help him going forward.

“Move the ball around. It's something I've done a really good job of in my career,” Price said. “And at that point in this season I was really one side of the plate the entire — for a while. So to switch that back up, making pitches on both sides of the plate, that did a lot for me.”

While Price said he'd like to shed this burden, he'll be OK as long as the team wins.

“If I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I'll take that. That's what I'm here for,” Price said. I want to — I don't want this to be about me and me not winning. I want to go out there tomorrow and throw the ball well, and help the Red Sox win. Whether we're up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is, I want the Red Sox to win tomorrow. That's what I worry about.”

NOT LOOKING AHEAD

Brian Cashman would not talk about who his first baseman of 2019 will be Friday night. The Yankees GM said that Luke Voit, acquired from St. Louis at the deadline, has “exceeded expectations,” but he also said that Greg Bird, who did not make the playoff roster, still has the same ceiling.

“Not much to really talk about with next year with the present,” Cashman said. “Bird's ceiling is still what it was. The way the season played out has been a head scratcher. Great thing about our game is he'll go home and have a chance to regain all the accolades that was coming his way with performance, that can start obviously next spring.”

*** *The New York Post***

Giancarlo Stanton vanished in big moment while a Red Sox star shined

Joel Sherman

OSTON — Giancarlo Stanton is not only lugging the largest contract in major league history, but comparisons that will be inescapable — unless he escapes them.

The Yankees ignored Justin Verlander during the 2017 season because, yes, they thought he was down from his peak, but also because they did not see shoeorning his 2018-19 salaries into their planned sub-\$197 million luxury-tax threshold payroll this season.

Houston landed Verlander as August 2017 ended and he proved seminal in eliminating the Yankees in the ALCS and winning the Astros' first-ever title. His dominance Friday afternoon in Division Series Game 1 against the Indians hints more of the same is possible.

Plus with what the Tigers were willing to pay down to facilitate the trade, Verlander cost \$20 million for 2018 — or \$2 million less than what Stanton costs the Yankees this season for luxury-tax purposes. You know who else costs \$22 million for tax purposes? J.D. Martinez, who inked a five-year, \$110 million free-agent contract last offseason, a few months after the Yankees landed Stanton.

Verlander might win another Cy Young and Martinez has been in the MVP discussion. Stanton was good in his maiden Yankees season — but not in that award kind of way.

He could make that narrative all vanish with a big postseason. But in his first taste of Yankees-Red Sox playoff intensity, he lost his matchup against Martinez and the Yankees, not coincidentally, lost Division Series Game 1.

Martinez hit a three-run homer in the first to put Boston ahead to stay. Stanton struck out with the bases loaded in the sixth and again on three pitches as the tying run in the ninth against Craig Kimbrel, his fourth whiff of the game. That helped a wobbled Red Sox bullpen survive in a 5-4 triumph.

“I had pitches to hit in the zone,” Stanton said. “I fouled them off and didn’t get to them. You can’t give away strikes in the zone or else you wind up having a game like I did.”

Game 1 had a chance to be a 2004 ALCS microcosm, just in reverse, with Boston dominating early before collapsing against the Yankees.

Chris Sale, who had two DL stints and just 17 innings since the outset of August, eradicated concerns about his health by throwing hard and with dominance over the first five innings. Aaron Hicks, who had the two best plate appearances against Sale to that point, had to be removed in the fourth with a tight right hamstring.

J.A. Happ’s excellence against the Red Sox and in Fenway did not extend to October. He surrendered a homer to Martinez and never got an out in the third, his performance not all that dissimilar to the Kevin Brown disaster in 2004 ALCS Game 7 — the last game these rivals had played against one another in the playoffs before Friday.

But Sale left with two on and one out in the sixth and the concerns expressed about how the Red Sox would get from a starter to Kimbrel were real. The Yanks scored twice in the sixth, helped by a Stanton single, to close to 5-2 and loaded the bases, but Brandon Workman struck out Gleyber Torres.

The Yanks loaded the bases anew in the seventh with none out. Dread was palpable at Fenway. Stanton had a chance to deliver the kind of blow that could alter a series — and a narrative. In the wild-card game, he hit the hardest playoff homer since the tracking began in 2015.

But that produced a pile-on run in a 7-2 win.

This was a grander scale. To win this Game 1 matchup against Martinez and win a game for the Yankees. Even a sac fly would have extended a positive vibe, but Stanton waved at a Matt Barnes curve, flunking center stage.

“Any of those guys get the big blow, it doesn’t matter who it is,” Stanton said in dismissing that answering Martinez, in particular, would be precious.

Look, Stanton was not alone in bringing this defeat. Happ was a bigger culprit. Boston manager Alex Cora said perhaps the biggest key of this series was keeping the homer-record-setting Yankees in the park, and they had nine hits — all singles — until Aaron Judge went deep off Kimbrel to open the ninth.

But Stanton, like Alex Rodriguez in his first Yankee season in 2004, arrived as an MVP with the largest contract in history. When the Yanks fell apart against the Red Sox in that ALCS there were many co-conspirators. But A-Rod received the worst of it — such is the responsibility that comes with money and arriving to be the difference-maker on a win-now team.

A-Rod tended to compound his problems by over-stressing and overthinking situations. Both Brian Cashman and hitting coach Marcus Thames insisted Stanton was good at dispatching one day — good or bad — to focus on the next.

“He is not wired that way,” Cashman said. “He does not complicate things.”

He needs to move on, but also to move up into the Verlander class and now the Martinez group.

Stanton had his biggest at-bats to date as a Yankee end in a few more strikeouts. He lost his heavyweight matchup against Martinez and the Yankees lost a game.

The bullpen gave the Yankees a chance at a comeback

Ken Davidoff

BOSTON — At the worst, it represents a silver lining. In the best-case scenario? It means the Yankees lost the micro of American League Division Series Game 1 while winning the macro of the series as a whole.

For the Yankees lost the game, 5-4 Friday night at Fenway Park, yet they most certainly won the battle of the bullpens.

While the Red Sox's relievers struggled to command their pitches as they worked to protect the lead that Chris Sale and the offense built, the Yankees' bullpen silenced the Boston offense and made a comeback attempt possible.

"The pen did a great job to allow us to get back in the game and give us a chance," manager Aaron Boone said. "And we almost caught them."

Starting pitcher J.A. Happ, who had shined since joining the Yankees in a July trade, fizzled in his first postseason outing for his new team. The veteran lefty gave up five runs in two-plus innings, getting the hook from Boone with no outs and runners on first and third in the bottom of the third.

Chad Green entered and allowed both inherited runners to score, yet he closed the gates from there with two shutout innings. Lance Lynn followed suit with a pair of zeroes, and Zach Britton and David Robertson each contributed a shutout frame as the Yankees slowly chipped away at their five-run deficit. Even though the Yankees' lineup couldn't complete the mission, they most certainly rattled the Red Sox's relievers while Boston's hitters did nothing of the sort the other way.

"That's one of our ultimate strengths," Boone said. "You know, if we're going to get to where we want to go, you know, the bullpen is going to play a big role in that. They stepped up for us tonight and allowed us to get back in that game. And did the job they've pretty much done all year.

David Price saved season after nightmare vs. Yankees in July

Dan Martin

BOSTON — July 1 was one of the worst days of the year for David Price. As the Boston lefty had yet another awful outing against the Yankees in The Bronx.

He allowed five homers and eight earned runs, both season-highs against the pitcher.

But both Price and Boston manager Alex Cora believe that nightmare was a turning point for Price, who will start Game 2 of the ALDS Saturday night against the Yankees at Fenway Park.

"He said that, 'Hey, I need to make adjustments,' " Cora said of Price's reaction following the outing. "The next start against Kansas City you [could] see that he was making them, but it didn't work out. He hit a few guys ... [and his] command wasn't there. He started to pitch up in the zone. And then the next start kind of like everything changed."

That second start after his meltdown was against the Blue Jays, and beginning with that outing, Price finished with a 2.42 ERA over his last dozen starts.

Price said he began moving his pitches around more in his ensuing starts.

"At that point in this season, I was really on one side of the plate ... for a while," Price said. "So to switch that back up, making pitches on both sides of the plate, that did a lot for me."

The Red Sox hope that success continues into the postseason, but the stage and the opponent present additional challenges for Price, who has struggled throughout his career both in October and against the Yankees.

The left-hander pitched well twice out of the bullpen last postseason, tossing 6 ²/₃ shutout innings, but Saturday will be his first start in the playoffs since he was knocked around for five runs in 3 ¹/₃ innings in Game 2 of the 2016 ALDS against the Indians.

That ended a 10-game stretch in the postseason in which Price had a 5.90 ERA.

On Friday, he insisted he doesn't care if he gets the win in Game 2.

"If I lose the entire playoffs and we win a World Series, I'll take that," Price said. "That's what I'm here for. ... I don't want this to be about me and me not winning. I want to go out there [Saturday] and throw the ball well and help the Red Sox win. Whether we're up 1-0 or down 1-0 or whatever it is, I want the Red Sox to win. That's what I worry about."

Cora said he is confident Price's woes from earlier in the season are behind him.

"That's a guy I trust," Cora said. "We saw him pitching the second part of the season. He was probably the second-best lefty in the league after [Tampa Bay's] Blake Snell. The way he went about his business, he pitched against the Yankees, he pitched against the Astros, he pitched against the Indians; he did a good job."

The Yankees, though, have usually had his number. Most recently, they scored six runs off Price in 5 ¹/₃ innings on Sept. 19.

In four starts against the Yankees this season, Price has a 10.34 ERA, and his 4.90 lifetime ERA versus the Yankees is his worst against any team he has faced more than 15 times.

"I do feel that he's ready for this one," Cora said. "This guy, I mean, he's been one of the best pitchers in the big leagues for a long, long time."

Chris Sale wasn't ace-like but good enough to stymie Yankees

Dan Martin

BOSTON — Chris Sale wasn't exactly Chris Sale on Friday night, but he was still good enough to beat the Yankees in Game 1 of the ALDS.

He may not have been as overpowering as he normally is against the Yankees, but Sale used his off-speed pitches effectively and allowed just two runs in 5 ¹/₃ innings in Boston's 5-4 win at Fenway Park.

"He wasn't his dominant self necessarily, but I thought he did a really nice job of mixing his pitches, changing speeds," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

If Sale had been in typical form, the five-run cushion the Red Sox provided him by the third inning would have been insurmountable — especially given that he historically has dominated the Yankees.

Entering the game, Sale had the lowest WHIP and opponents' batting average of any pitcher who had pitched at least 100 innings against the Yankees, as well as the second-lowest ERA (1.61). And he was superb against the Yankees during the regular season this year.

But Sale has yet to completely return to form after being sidelined by left shoulder inflammation. He needed 24 pitches to get through the first inning.

But he struck out eight, and when he left the mound in the sixth after 93 pitches, the Yankees hadn't scored a run.

Sale, though, left a pair of baserunners for Ryan Brasier and the right-hander allowed both to score.

That sixth inning gave the Yankees a bit of life, but the embattled Red Sox bullpen was able to keep Boston ahead.

In his final outing of the regular season, Sale's average velocity on his fastball was just over 90 mph — down roughly 5 mph from his usual speed.

On Friday, some of that velocity returned and his slider frequently gave the Yankees fits.

"It really didn't matter if it was 91 [mph] or 99, we knew he was going to compete," Boston manager Alex Cora said.

If Sale is needed again in the ALDS, he insisted he would be prepared — and he said he could have kept going Friday.

"I threw every pitch tonight like [Cora] was going to take the ball out of my hand after the pitch I threw," Sale said. "If he didn't take the ball out of my hand, I would have kept throwing. ... There's no holding back. [If] they want me to throw 150 [pitches], I'm throwing 150. If they ask me to throw [Saturday], I'll throw [Saturday]. I think that's the mindset for every person in this clubhouse."

Yankees lose 1st battle to Red Sox on the October health front

Ken Davidoff

BOSTON — Baseball's biggest house of cards can be described in two words: October health.

You can catch every break and rest every ailment in September to put your contender in optimal condition for the postseason. Alas, winning the championship requires the playing of games, and folks oftentimes get hurt in those games.

Hence this long-awaited return to Yankees-Red Sox postseason action kicked off with a notable diversion of fortunes:

Chris Sale looked healthy, and Aaron Hicks didn't.

Sale shut down the Yankees, the underrated Hicks departed with right hamstring tightness and the Red Sox bullpen bent without breaking as the Yankees lost American League Division Series Game 1 by a 5-4 margin Friday night at Fenway Park, falling into a 1-0 hole in this best-of-five cage match.

If the Yankees can't even this up Saturday night against old pal David Price ... well, they did overcome a 2-0 ALDS deficit last year against the Indians, but do they really want to attempt that high-wire act again?

The Red Sox's ace Sale had registered just 17 innings pitched in the last two months due to left shoulder issues, and in his last appearance, Sept. 26, he set off alarms with his diminished velocity, his fastball hovering at about 90 miles per hour. He silenced the alarms this time, his fastball jumping up to the 95-96 mph neighborhood — a vast improvement, if short of his season peak of 99 — as he limited the Yankees to a pair of runs over 5 1/3 innings, scattering five hits while walking two and striking out eight.

"There's no holding back now," Sale said. "It's everything on the table. Everything you've got."

"I'm pleased with what I saw: 96, good command," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "... It really didn't matter if it was 91 or 99. We knew he was going to compete. But that was good."

Said Yankees manager Aaron Boone: "I thought he was good. You know, not his dominant self necessarily, but I thought he did a really nice job of mixing his pitches, changing speeds."

Hicks started the fourth inning by lining a single to right field, and then he went down in a more unusual circumstance, as he aggravated the hammy taking off on a Giancarlo Stanton grounder that went foul. Veteran Brett Gardner pinch-ran for Hicks and stayed in the game to patrol center field.

“Before the game, it started cramping up a little bit,” said Hicks. “It sucks have to come out of this game.”

He added, “I feel good right now,” yet the MRI exam he undergoes on Saturday morning will determine his fate.

Just a few hours earlier, before first pitch, both Boone and Cora were expressing their appreciation for their team’s physical soundness and strong confidence.

“I feel like our club is as healthy and as whole as we’ve been throughout the year,” Boone said. “I feel like we finished the season playing well, and we [were] able to carry it into the first game of the postseason.”

Said Cora: “We are healthy, that’s the most important thing. We’re rested. That’s one of the topics throughout the season, to give these guys enough rest that when October started, we were right where we want to be.”

It can take so little for that positive feng shui to get thrown off. Sometimes it’s obvious, like with last year’s Yankees, whose Kryptonite was playing at home. Sometimes less so, like when John Olerud’s left foot injury in 2004 AL Championship Series Game 3 kept him out of the Yankees’ subsequent starting lineups and, in the view of players from both sides, changed the tone of the series as the Red Sox recorded a historic comeback.

Here in 2018, the Yankees have suffered the first bad break. They know that negativity can snowball quickly in these short series. Can they restore their house of cards in time, especially knowing that a restored Sale awaits them in the potential Game 5?

J.A. Happ’s mastery of Red Sox comes to a quick end

Dan Martin

BOSTON — Evidently, John Henry still owns the Red Sox — not J.A. Happ.

Much had been made of Happ’s history against Boston and the fact he was well-suited to containing Boston’s lineup at Fenway Park in Game 1 of the ALDS.

But as is often the case in October, previous numbers didn’t amount to much, especially when J.D. Martinez came to the plate with two on and one out in the bottom of the first inning in Boston’s 5-4 win.

Martinez turned on a 2-0 fastball and drilled it over the Green Monster in left to give the Red Sox a quick 3-0 lead.

“I felt I made a good pitch and J.D. put a good swing on it,” Happ said. “In this situation in the playoffs, you don’t know how long you are going to be in there and we made a move pretty early in the game.”

Though the left-hander got out of that inning without further damage and then retired the side in order in the second, he failed to record an out in the bottom of the third.

Mookie Betts started the inning with a double and moved to third on Andrew Benintendi’s bunt single, forcing manager Aaron Boone to go to Chad Green after Happ threw just 44 pitches — and recorded just six outs.

“No excuses,” Happ said. “I just didn’t get it done.”

Green wasn't able to bail out Happ, as he allowed a run-scoring single to Steve Pearce and a sacrifice fly to Xander Bogaerts. All five runs were charged to Happ, in what turned out to be his worst performance of the year.

The left-hander entered the game with a 2.98 ERA in 21 games against the Red Sox. That's the third-lowest among active pitchers who have thrown at least 50 innings versus Boston, behind the Cubs' Drew Smyly and Houston's Justin Verlander.

Before the game, general manager Brian Cashman was asked if he traded for Happ prior to the non-waiver deadline from Toronto because of his ability to handle the Red Sox. The GM insisted that wasn't the case.

"No," Cashman said. "He was, we felt, the best starter we could acquire."

And Happ had performed up to expectations — if not exceeded them — until Friday's disaster.

He was 7-0 with a 2.69 ERA in 11 starts after his arrival from the Blue Jays and the Yankees went 9-2 in those games.

The 35-year-old had pitched well in a pair of postseason starts with Toronto two years ago, but he was ineffective against Boston from start to finish.

Boone blamed Happ's ineffectiveness on a lack of fastball command, which has been a key to the lefty's success.

"Obviously J.D. made him pay on a pitch down that he probably wanted to get a little more elevated there," Boone said. "And then being at the score and where we're at, we were a little aggressive going to our pen."

*** *The USA Today***

Red Sox draw first blood, hang on for 5-4 ALDS Game 1 win over Yankees

Ted Berg

BOSTON -- After four days off before Game 1 of the American League Division Series on Friday at Fenway Park, the Red Sox did not need long to remind the world why they won 108 games in the 2018 regular season.

The Boston club scored three runs in the bottom of the first inning on a J.D. Martinez homer over the Green Monster in left field and chased New York Yankees starter J.A. Happ two batters into the third inning in a rally that would extend their advantage to five runs in Boston's eventual 5-4 win.

Red Sox starter Chris Sale quieted concerns over his late-season shoulder issues and ensuing drop in velocity, flashing his typical mid-90s fastball, flummoxing hitters with his sweeping slider, and keeping the potent Yankees offense off the board for the first five innings.

Sale ran into trouble in the sixth, allowing a pair of singles to Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton before leaving the game with one out in the frame.

The pitchers called upon to relieve Sale made the inning more interesting than it should have been, allowing both inherited runners to score but escaping further damage when Brandon Workman fanned Gleyber Torres on a 3-2 cutter just below the bottom of the strike zone. The Yankees rallied for another run against the Boston bullpen in the seventh.

Turning point

The Fenway faithful had hardly found their seats when Martinez's homer gave the Red Sox a lead they would never relinquish. The righty-swinging slugger led the majors in RBI and total bases in the regular season and finished second in homers with 43 in the first year of the five-year, \$110 million free-agent deal he signed with Boston late in the offseason.

Man of the moment

Though the final line -- two earned runs over 5 1/3 innings -- hardly does his effort justice, Sale showed why he ranks among the most dominant pitchers in the game when he's healthy. Question marks surrounding Sale loomed large entering play Friday, especially given No. 2 starter David Price's history of postseason struggles. Sale's Game 1 effort makes the Sox appear stronger than they did coming into the series.

State of the Red Sox

With a 1-0 lead in the series, Boston now turns to Price for Game 2. Price was awful against the Yankees in the regular season, yielding a 10.34 ERA in four starts, and -- despite some huge games in big spots in the past -- has earned a reputation for struggling in the postseason. At his best, Price is one of the safest bets in the majors to pitch deep into a game, and the Sox will hope for length after needing five relievers to get through Friday's win.

State of the Yankees

The Yanks' fortunes undoubtedly looked more promising by the late innings of Friday's game than they did in the early ones, as their patient approach exposed a soft underbelly in the Red Sox' bullpen. Their Game 2 starter, Masahiro Tanaka, was dominant for most of the second half until two shaky outings to finish the season. Despite needing six innings from his bullpen, Aaron Boone managed to avoid using most of his best relievers -- namely Aroldis Chapman and Dellin Betances -- and will have options for keeping the Yankees in the game should Tanaka need a quick hook.

Boston's Rick Porcello answers call as Red Sox relievers stumble

Bob Nightengale

BOSTON -- The Boston Red Sox were hanging on for dear life late Friday night when the phone rang in the bullpen.

The message was succinct: "Porcello, warm up, you're going in the game."

Rick Porcello's response? "Oh, [bleep]!"

"Really," Porcello said, "that's what I said."

The Red Sox had jumped out to a 5-0 lead after J.D. Martinez's three-run homer in the first inning, and ace Chris Sale pitching like a Cy Young award winner, but suddenly, the Red Sox were fighting off those pesky New York Yankees.

One run came in. Then another. And another.

The Red Sox went through three relievers, recording just five outs, when they got desperate, calling on the 2016 Cy Young winner to put out the fire, and save the all-important opening game at Fenway Park in what promises to be another nail-biting series between these rivals.

Porcello did his job, getting two outs in the eighth, closer Craig Kimbrell did the rest, recording the next four outs for his first postseason save in five years, and the Red Sox won, 5-4 to take a 1-0 lead in the best-of-five American League Division Series.

The Red Sox retreated to the clubhouse and were too emotionally spent to celebrate, instead sitting back and exhaling, wondering if this is how it felt 14 years ago, the last time the Red Sox faced the Yankees in the postseason.

“I mean, one thing I learned last year to win a World Series is it’s going to take, 25, 27 guys to do it, regardless of their roles,” said Red Sox manager Alex Cora, the Houston Astros’ bench coach a year ago. “In a perfect world, the starter goes six. You have the seventh-inning guy, eighth inning and ninth inning and you move on.

“To get 27 outs at this stage right now is very difficult. And sometimes you have to go to plan B or plan C.”

How far down was the plan to use Porcello?

“Might say C and a half,” Cora said. “Probably.”

Cora realized he had problems before the game started when Steven Wright, who had yielded just a 0.66 ERA in 10 relief appearances in September, informed the team his knee was aching, requiring an MRI.

Still, everything was going smoothly when Sale left the game with one out in the sixth, striking out eight without giving up a run, when Cora called on Ryan Brasier. He lasted one out. Cora went to Brandon Workman, who lasted another out. And then Matt Barnes, who pitched a scoreless seventh.

He needed someone now for the eighth.

He called upon Porcello.

“You don’t ask any questions,” Porcello said, “you just do it. It doesn’t matter this time of year. You just pitch until your arm falls off. You got to do it.”

Porcello, asked to protect a 5-3 lead, came in and couldn’t believe how good his arm felt. His first pitch was 94 mph. He figures he hadn’t thrown a pitch that hard since July. The next thing he knew, Miguel Andujar was hitting a soft grounder to him for the first out, and Gary Sanchez was lining out to third baseman Eduardo Nunez for the second out. When Gleyber Torres hit a slow roller for an infield single, Cora took Porcello out after 15 pitches.

He turned to All-Star Craig Kimbrell, who got the final out of the eighth, gave up a leadoff homer to Aaron Judge in the ninth, but came back to strike out the side.

“There was no doubt in our minds that Rick could do that for us,” Barnes said. “He’s a pro’s pro. He’ll do whatever it takes.”

And just like that, the Red Sox won Game 1, beating the Yankees for the first time in a postseason game since Game 7 of the 2004 ALCS.

“We’re not worrying about what happened before,” Porcello said, “but what we’re doing now. That’s all that matters.”

Can he possibly pitch Game 3 as he was originally scheduled?

“I don’t know,” Porcello said. “Really, I have no idea how I’ll feel. I’ve never done something like this before.”

The Red Sox, despite the near collapse, kept saying to anyone who’d listen that they still believed in their bullpen. Sure, it looked ugly this night, they said, but ultimately, they still won the game. Should anything else matter?

“We were the best team in baseball during the regular season with our bullpen,” said Red Sox catcher Sandy Leon, whose staff threw 182 pitches -- only 111 for strikes -- leaving him diving behind the plate blocking balls in the dirt after Sale’s departure.

“We put him through the ringer tonight,” said Sale, “top to bottom, from the start of the game to the very end. He was as solid as you can possibly be behind the plate.”

Certainly, it was a game the Red Sox had to win, with their ace on the mound. Now, they will turn to 16-game winner David Price, who was 6-1 with a 2.25 ERA the second half, but has a 2-7 record and 7.71 ERA in his Red Sox career against the Yankees.

If the Red Sox went to Porcello for emergency duty Friday, who knows what could be in store Saturday? Sale volunteered to come back and pitch in relief.

“It’s postseason baseball, you have to be prepared for anything,” Sale said. “ ... Anything can be thrown at you.

“This is crunch time.”

Red Sox's Chris Sale fools Yankees, gives award-winning performance in 5-4 win

Bob Nightengale

BOSTON -- It was the perfect setup, an exquisite acting job worthy of Broadway, and the New York Yankees absolutely fell for it, hook, line and sinker.

Take a bow, Boston Red Sox ace Chris Sale.

Sale had the Yankees and everyone else believing he had a sore shoulder, wouldn’t have the velocity to blow away hitters, and would resort to a performance as a soft-tossing finesse pitcher.

Suckers.

Sale was back to his ol’ fire-balling self, snuffing out the Yankees just long enough Friday at Fenway Park to survive the Red Sox’s bullpen fire, with a 5-4 Boston victory in Game 1 of the American League Division Series.

It was the first time the Red Sox beat the Yankees in a postseason game since being down 3-0 in the 2004 American League Championship Series. They came back to win the next four, relegating the Yankees to the biggest collapse in baseball postseason history.

Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts, the heavy favorite to win the MVP award, was just 11 years old during that classic 2004 ALCS. Yankees All-Star Aaron Judge was only 12. Yankees rookie-of-the-year candidate Gleyber Torres was 7.

With the torch now passed to their generation, they are carrying out the latest version of this storied rivalry.

If Game 1 was any indication, this series should be a doozy. The Red Sox jumped out to a 5-0 lead in the third inning, only for their bullpen to nearly blow it once Sale departed in the sixth inning. Manager Alex Cora turned to scheduled Game 3 starter Rick Porcello to enter the eighth, with closer Craig Kimbrell closing out in the ninth.

It was vintage Yankees-Red Sox, with plenty of twists, turns, drama, and of course, a hero.

This time, Sale.

Sale, who had pitched just 17 innings since Aug. 12, let everyone know he was just fine on his first pitch, throwing a 96-mph fastball past Andrew McCutchen, striking out the side in the first. Sale pitched 5 1/3 innings, yielding just three hits until the sixth inning, and striking out eight. He became the first Red Sox starter to go past five innings since John Lackey in Game 6 of the 2013 World Series.

And, all of those concerns by the New England faithful were tossed into the Chesapeake Bay.

“He’s still Chris Sale,” Red Sox catcher Sandy Leon said before the game. “He’s been waiting for this game.”

The Red Sox won for the 109th time this season, and for the 44th time, J.D. Martinez homered, hitting a three-run shot in the first inning just to let the Yankees know they’ve got plenty of pop, too.

It was the first time the Red Sox scored first in a postseason game since Game 1 of the 2016 AL Division Series against Cleveland. They had fallen behind in six consecutive games.

They pounded their long-time nemesis, J.A. Happ, who had a career 2.98 ERA against the Red Sox, including a 1.99 ERA in four starts this season. Happ lasted just two innings, coughing up four hits and five earned runs, throwing just 44 pitches.

It was the most runs he ever surrendered in a start against the Red Sox since 2014, and even if his low pitch count provides the Yankees the option of bringing him back early, why would they considering the Red Sox have now scored nine runs off him in his last eight innings?

The Red Sox really don’t care who they face on the mound, going to bed late Friday night knowing they’ve got their ace back. And for Game 2 on Saturday, 16-game winner David Price, who was 6-1 with a 2.25 ERA the second half - albeit 2-7 with a 7.71 ERA in his Red Sox career against the Yankees - takes the mound.

All they know is Sale, with his longest stint since July 27, before shoulder inflammation derailed his Cy Young hopes, is his old self.

The Cy Young can wait, Sale says.

He’s got the World Series on his mind.

“This is everything we show up for,” Sale said Thursday. “We don’t play the game for anything else. Personal stats, winning the division and having the record, we appreciate it, don’t get me wrong. We grinded for that, and we earned it. But now is the crunch time.

“We know what’s ahead of us. And we know what we have to do.”

*** *Associated Press***

Happ-less: Poor start dooms Yankees in Game 1 loss to Red Sox

BOSTON — J.A. Happ seemed to be the perfect choice to start Game 1 of the AL Division Series for the New York Yankees in Boston.

The veteran left-hander had excellent numbers against the Yankees’ biggest rivals, and manager Aaron Boone was counting on him to neutralize a Red Sox lineup that produced some of the best offensive statistics in the majors this season.

Happ went 1-1 with a 1.99 ERA in four starts versus the Red Sox this year and entered 8-4 with 2.98 ERA against them during his career.

That was one reason the Yankees traded for him from Toronto in July and perhaps at least part of the reason why Boone held him back in favor of Luis Severino in the wild-card game Wednesday against Oakland.

Instead, Happ put the Yankees in a big hole.

He lasted just two-plus innings in Friday night's 5-4 loss, giving up five runs and four hits, including a homer. That gave Boston's beleaguered bullpen the cushion it needed to stave off New York's late comeback attempt.

"I'm certainly not going to make any excuses," Happ said. "I just didn't get it done. ... I need to be sharper. If I get another opportunity, hopefully I will be."

After the third inning, the Yankees' bullpen allowed just three hits and kept Boston scoreless the rest of the way.

"J.A. obviously got in a little bit of trouble in that first inning, just not having his real airtight command that he usually has, especially with the fastball," Boone said. "The 'pen did a great job to allow us back in the game and give us a chance. And we almost caught them."

Happ's troubles started at the outset.

He struck out leadoff man Mookie Betts before giving up a single to Andrew Benintendi and a walk to Steve Pearce. J.D. Martinez laced a three-run homer that just cleared the top of the Green Monster in left field.

Happ said getting behind 2-0 in the count to Martinez allowed him to jump on a good pitch.

"I thought I threw it to the glove and he put a good swing on it," the pitcher said.

Happ retired Boston in order in the second before being removed in the third after Betts led off with a double off the Green Monster, followed by a bunt single from Benintendi. Both scored when reliever Chad Green allowed an RBI single to Steve Pearce and Xander Bogaerts' sacrifice fly.

Happ was frustrated that he wasn't able to provide more innings.

"My execution wasn't as high as it's been," he said. "That's the reason I always stress trying to get strike one. I wasn't very good at that tonight. The big hit cost me."

Yankees first baseman Luke Voit said despite Happ's difficult night, his teammates still have faith in him going forward.

"He made one bad pitch to one of the better hitters in baseball. It's frustrating. But he knows he's going to get another opportunity," Voit said. "He still competes and he still did a good job. But sometimes bad things happen."