

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, November 7, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Why the Red Sox should rebel against the save

Peter Abraham

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Managers have learned that only their best starters should face a lineup for a third time around. Modern bullpens are stocked with hard-throwing pitchers who can get through the sixth, seventh and eighth inning.

Every move to the bullpen is based on the best available information culled from scouting reports and the latest analytical trends.

Then the ninth inning rolls around and everybody shuts their brain off. The closer must come in to get the final three outs if the other team is within three runs. The save, a virtually useless statistic, becomes paramount.

Three All-Stars can be coming up in the eighth inning and it doesn't matter. The closer must wait, with the exception of a four-out save on occasion.

It's senseless and I've sat in the press box for years wondering when a manager will decide he's had enough and use his relievers as he sees fit. But they all want the cover of having done "the right thing" in case something goes wrong. Then the closer takes the blame.

Now that Craig Kimbrel is a free agent, I've started to wonder if Alex Cora will be the first manager to rebel against the save.

It has become evident in the early days of free agency that retaining Kimbrel will be an expensive proposition. It should be, too, as he is one of the best relievers in the history of the game. If Aroldis Chapman was worth \$17.2 million a season over five years, so is Kimbrel for four years.

But is keeping Kimbrel, who showed troubling signs of decline last season, worth not being to retain Nathan Eovaldi for the rotation?

Cora adeptly handled the bullpen last season. Red Sox relievers had a 3.72 earned run average, fourth in the American League. The Sox also were 84-6 when leading after six innings.

A team with Eovaldi in the rotation could have Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Andrew Miller as late-inning choices.

And Miller is not a random choice. At age 33 and coming off an injury-filled season, he would be much cheaper to sign than Kimbrel. He's also shown he can be successful in Boston and in the postseason.

And, most of all, he has no ego.

The Yankees signed Miller to close in 2015 and he did it well. When they traded for Chapman in 2016, he moved into the eighth inning without complaint and was dominant. With Cleveland, he pitched in any role Terry Francona asked.

Signing Miller would allow Cora to manage the game as he sees fit. Miller could matchup against lefthanded hitters in the eighth or ninth inning with Brasier and Barnes against righties.

Miller is at a stage in his career where he wants to win the World Series, not collect saves.

The Sox could further bolster their bullpen by trading one of their catchers for a good arm. And don't sleep on the idea of Darwinzon Hernandez as a bullpen option in the second half of the season. The 21-year-old lefthander has struck out 18 in nine innings in the Arizona Fall League.

After winning the World Series, Cora has built up enough capital to say he'll manage the late innings based on matchups, not tradition. He also has earned the trust of the clubhouse.

Deep down, every manager wants this. They're tired of being slaves to the save. The difference is the Sox are positioned to make it happen.

A few other thoughts and observations on the Sox from the GM Meetings:

- The Celtics, Patriots and Bruins were 3-0 when the Red Sox visited with the World Series trophy. Maybe they should tote it over to BC for Saturday's game against No. 2 Clemson.

- Cora called the starting pitchers who were used as relievers in the postseason his "rovers."

He used the rovers 15 times in 14 games. They allowed four earned runs over on eight hits over 18 innings with five walks and 18 strikeouts.

Eduardo Rodriguez worked in relief six times with Eovaldi (4), Rick Porcello (2), Chris Sale (2) and David Price (1) also coming out of the bullpen.

The rovers threw 64 percent of their pitches for strikes.

- The Dodgers will be at Fenway Park July 12-14 coming out of the All-Star break.

- Eduardo Nunez did a media tour in New York City on Tuesday and visited the offices of Sirius/XM to be on the several shows. Nunez followed Sean Spicer and Swedish porn director Erika Lust as a guest on "The Jenny McCarthy Show." Now there's a trio.

Jenny didn't seem to be exactly sure who Nunie was. But her husband, Dorchester's own Donnie Wahlberg, handled the questions.

- Don't expect the Sox to start 17-2 again next season. They play the final two games of spring training in Arizona against the Cubs then travel to Seattle to start 11 games in as many days against the Mariners, Athletics and Diamondbacks.

They'll cover 6,576 air miles before playing their first home game.

- Why not just sign Steve Pearce now instead of the inevitable trade for him in July? He's a perfect platoon player with Mitch Moreland.

- Next time you're tempted to complain about the Red Sox, consider that the Baltimore Orioles ended their season on Sept. 30 and have yet to select a new general manager or manager.

- Imagine if over the course of the NBA playoffs LeBron James or Steph Curry were made available in the postgame interview room just three times.

You can't imagine that. The NBA would never be that stupid.

But that's what happened with Mookie Betts. The Sox played 14 games in the postseason and Betts was in the interview room three times either before or after the game. Andrew Benintendi also went three times, J.D. Martinez four times and Xander Bogaerts twice.

Baseball does an awful job of promoting its best players when compared to the NBA and even the NFL. Betts is arguably the best player in the sport right now and on its biggest stage he went into the interview room three times over a span of 23 days?

Yes, Betts was theoretically available in the clubhouse after the game. But crowded conditions, particularly at Fenway Park and Dodger Stadium, did not make for good television.

The tradition in baseball is to make the stars of the game from the winning team available with, perhaps, one player from the losing team.

It's antiquated thinking. Certain players should always be available regardless of how they play, or certainly more often than once in a series.

- My guess is David Robertson knows he can make a deal to stay with the Yankees and that is why he dropped his agent.

But the Red Sox should find a way to at least talk to Robertson before he does. His wife, Erin, is a Massachusetts native and they have a home in Rhode Island. He'd be a good fit for the Sox.

- Congratulations to Pawtucket Red Sox vice chairman Mike Tamburro, who was named "King of Baseball." Minor League Baseball presents the award for long-time dedication and service.

Tamburro has been with the Paw Sox since 1977 and anybody who has been to a game knows what a well-run franchise they are.

- Fred Lynn lives here in Carlsbad and has a home close to the Omni Resort where the GM Meetings are being held. When Jackie Bradley Jr. finally won a Gold Glove on Sunday, Lynn reached out on Twitter to congratulate him.

How heavily will the Red Sox spend in the 2019 season?

Alex Speier

In 2018, the Red Sox were rewarded handsomely for spending lavishly. The team carried its highest payroll in franchise history, committing to absorb the highest penalties that came with spending more than \$237 million (as calculated for luxury tax purposes).

To field a roster that they viewed as championship-caliber, the Red Sox committed to additions both large (a five-year, \$110 million deal for J.D. Martinez) and modest (in-season pickups of Steve Pearce, Nathan Eovaldi, and Ian Kinsler). The Red Sox outspent the other 29 teams by a healthy margin, but they were rewarded for doing so with a title.

"You can't do it all the time," Red Sox principal owner (and Globe owner) John Henry said on the field at Dodger Stadium. "But we were missing one piece this year, it was over our budget, and we went out and did that."

Now, as the Red Sox plan for their title defense, it makes sense to examine their resources. How heavily might they spend in an effort to become the first team this century to win back-to-back World Series?

They do have players coming off the books: Hanley Ramirez (\$22 million), Craig Kimbrel (\$12 million as calculated for luxury tax purposes), Drew Pomeranz (\$8.5 million), and Joe Kelly (\$3.825 million). But that money will be offset in no small part by arbitration-based raises for Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts,

Jackie Bradley Jr., and Eduardo Rodriguez, along with the contract structures of the deals for Chris Sale and Christian Vazquez.

The combined salaries of David Price, J.D. Martinez, Rick Porcello, Pablo Sandoval (yes, the final year of the released third baseman's five-year, \$95 million deal counts against the payroll as calculated for luxury tax purposes), Dustin Pedroia, Sale, Mitch Moreland, Eduardo Nunez, and Vazquez will account for roughly \$136 million.

On top of that, they have 12 players eligible for arbitration. Betts, whom MLBTradeRumors.com projects at \$18.7 million, Bogaerts (\$11.9 million), and Bradley (\$7.9 million) top a group that the website projects at a cumulative \$57.9 million.

The Red Sox also will have a few inexpensive players on the roster who have not yet reached arbitration eligibility. Andrew Benintendi and Rafael Devers are critical players, given their potential to offer high production for salaries in the mid six figures, while Brian Johnson (out of options) and Hector Velazquez proved their value in 2018.

Those salaries, in combination with a couple million dollars for salaries for players who are on the 40-man roster but in the minor leagues and nearly \$15 million in benefits (a standardized chunk that all teams must contribute), suggest that the Sox' current commitments for 2019 already sit north of \$212 million. Assuming that they want to keep a nugget of roughly \$10 million for in-season additions, that number bumps up to roughly \$222 million.

With the luxury tax threshold at \$206 million for 2019, the question is not whether the Red Sox will spend to the point of getting hit with penalties. They're already into that red zone. The only uncertainty is how far beyond the threshold they will spend, with a need to add (at a minimum) a couple of arms in the bullpen and perhaps a righthanded bat capable of filling the Pearce role (with Pearce himself representing an option).

For any spending between \$206 million and \$226 million, the Sox will get hit with a 30 percent tax; for spending of \$226 million to \$246 million, they will get taxed at 42 percent; and for any spending beyond \$246 million, they will absorb an 87 percent tax rate, as well as a draft-pick penalty (their top pick in the 2020 draft would move down by 10 spots).

Unless the Red Sox trade players who are currently under team control, it will be almost impossible for them to avoid the second tax tier that takes effect at \$226 million. Moreover, it's hard to see them bringing back, say, both Kimbrel and Eovaldi while staying below the third tier.

That said, the draft-pick hit may be something the Red Sox consider absorbing for a second straight year — particularly if they want to extend one of their key contributors such as Betts, Sale, Bogaerts, or Bradley, while also moving to address multiple positions of need. Certainly, the Red Sox can use Blake Swihart or one of the other catchers as a chip to try to address one of those spots, but there just isn't a lot of financial laxity available with the current roster.

Does that matter? The Sox made the decision to spend big in 2018, and they don't regret it. Their efforts to make another run in 2019 are unlikely to come at any sort of discount compared with this championship run.

How many of the Red Sox' own free agents can come back?

Peter Abraham

CARLSBAD, Calif. — The Red Sox have seven free agents from the roster that won the World Series and all have expressed a desire to return next season, president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Tuesday.

That's not going to happen, of course.

The Sox saw 36-year-old Ian Kinsler as a temporary solution to what at the time was poor depth at second base. Drew Pomeranz also is likely to move on after losing his spot in the rotation and not pitching in the postseason.

Brandon Phillips, a September call-up who had 23 at-bats, will get a World Series ring but probably not a contract offer.

The others — Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly, Craig Kimbrel, and Steve Pearce — are in different categories.

"Some of the guys we would like to re-sign . . . and we'll continue to stay in contact with them," Dombrowski said. "We'll see what happens. They know we're interested."

None of the now-former Red Sox promised Dombrowski the right to match or top any offer. But all left on good terms and agreed to stay in touch.

Barring a trade, the Sox will start next season with a payroll of at least \$212 million when factoring in raises via arbitration. That's already over the luxury-tax threshold of \$206 million.

The Sox blew past luxury-tax limits last season but will need to make tough decisions at some point. Retaining Pearce and one of the pitchers could work, but probably not Pearce and two of the pitchers.

That Kimbrel's agent, Dave Meter, is reportedly marketing his client as the greatest closer ever suggests he will view Aroldis Chapman's five-year, \$86 million deal with the Yankees as a reference point.

That could be too much for even the Red Sox. Dombrowski already has mentioned Ryan Brasier and Matt Barnes as closer candidates. Or the Sox could look for a cheaper version in what is a deep free agent class.

Eovaldi, a solid starting pitcher who last month showed he could pitch in relief in the postseason, may be the best fit.

"I want to stay here," the righthander said after the World Series. "I loved the guys here and what they did for me in terms of pitching. It was a great fit. But we'll see where it goes."

How are the knees?

One winter priority for the Sox will be determining the status of Dustin Pedroia and Steven Wright by getting further medical opinions.

Both had cartilage restoration surgery on their left knees by the same surgeon, Riley Williams III.

Wright had his surgery 18 months ago and Pedroia a year ago. The results have been disappointing. Pedroia played only three games last season and needed another procedure in July. Wright appeared in 20 games and had to come off the postseason roster after one game because of soreness.

"We don't have a time frame on that exactly," Dombrowski said. "We're still working on that. We'll get a pulse of it relatively soon to see what we do for the winter time."

Pedroia is a particular concern. The Red Sox planned around his being available last season, then had to trade for Kinsler in July.

Topics at hand

From a media perspective, the GM Meetings are largely about potential roster moves. But there are actual meetings run by Major League Baseball that the executives take part in. They address such issues as pace of play, replay reviews, and teams using technology to steal signs. Dombrowski said one issue he would like to see addressed is September roster expansion. Like many around baseball, he doesn't understand how in

September some teams will have close to 40 players and others only a handful over 25. “I don’t like all those players,” Dombrowski said. “I don’t think it’s right. It’s a different game in September. The roster is unbalanced. I don’t think it’s really right but I don’t have a say on it, either.” . . . Dombrowski said the Sox would be adding to their analytics department with an emphasis on integrating analytics into their scouting . . . Mookie Betts is a new father. His girlfriend, Brianna Hammond, had a baby girl on Tuesday. The announcement was made on Instagram.

Red Sox bullpen door may be closing for Craig Kimbrel

Nick Cafardo

CARLSBAD, Calif. — The future of Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel has been discussed quite a bit here at the GM Meetings this week.

There’s speculation as to whether the Red Sox will go all out to keep him, or whether they would prefer to spend the resources in a different way. The Red Sox did make Kimbrel a qualifying offer of \$17.9 million. But they don’t expect Kimbrel to take it since he’s likely to get a multiyear deal in the Aroldis Chapman neighborhood of five years, \$86 million.

Given that Kimbrel struggled during the postseason (10 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings, 9 hits, 7 runs, 8 walks) in the Red Sox run to the championship, the question is do they think they’ve squeezed the most they can out of the 30-year-old closer? If they think the answer is yes, then moving on is probably the right decision.

Kimbrel did not close out Game 5 of the World Series against the Dodgers with the Red Sox leading by four runs. That may have been a forerunner to what the Red Sox are thinking.

Chris Sale pitched the final inning because Alex Cora wanted Sale to feel a part of the World Series victory after the Red Sox manager went with David Price as his Game 5 starter.

Kimbrel has expressed a desire to stay in Boston. He has made an impact with the team in his three seasons and developed a special bond with Boston Children’s Hospital this year after his infant daughter was born with a heart condition.

Kimbrel went through a lot in spring training. He left the team in March to be with his family during his daughter’s recovery, then was light’s out with seven saves in the first month of the season as the Red Sox bolted to a 21-7 start.

The 2018 postseason struggles aside, the Red Sox certainly have not regretted the blockbuster trade they made in November 2015 to acquire Kimbrel. Boston gave up four prospects, including highly touted center fielder Manuel Margot, to get the best closer in baseball from the Padres. Kimbrel made \$13 million last season — and \$37.5 million in three seasons in Boston — but that contract is up.

There’s speculation Kimbrel might return to the up-and-coming Atlanta Braves, where he started his career. The Cardinals, Nationals, and Phillies also are reportedly interested.

Now, Red Sox officials usually shrug their shoulders when asked about Kimbrel’s future. If the righthander, who will turn 31 in May, would accept a contract of no more than three years in the neighborhood of his 2018 salary, the Red Sox likely would bring him back.

Working against Kimbrel are Red Sox needs in other areas. It appears that late-season acquisition and World Series hero Nathan Eovaldi is their No. 1 priority, and the 28-year-old righthanded starter may command at least four years for \$60 million.

The Red Sox also know that Xander Bogaerts, Sale, Mookie Betts, and possibly Jackie Bradley Jr. will be due large raises in the near future. A healthy Sale, for example, could command something akin to Price’s \$217 million deal.

Replacing Kimbrel would be difficult, but there are established closers on the market.

The Red Sox coveted Zach Britton before the Orioles closer was dealt to the Yankees in July. The lefthander regained his form in New York after rehabbing from an early-season Achilles' injury.

Another lefty bullpen piece to keep in mind is Andrew Miller, who battled through leg injuries and pitched just 34 innings for the Indians in 2018.

The Red Sox may toy with the idea of pairing Miller, perhaps the best setup man in baseball when healthy, with free agent Kelvin Herrera to replace Kimbrel and Joe Kelly, also a free agent.

Miller, who has a long history with Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski from his Tigers days, would give the Red Sox a lot of flexibility in the late innings to go along with Matt Barnes. And the Red Sox actively tried to acquire Herrera (who suffered a season-ending foot injury in August) from the Royals in July before he was traded to the Nationals.

If the Red Sox decide to go in a different direction, Dombrowski and his staff have a long list to comb through.

There's Jeurys Familia (51 saves with the Mets in 2016), Dave Robertson, Adam Ottavino, Joakim Soria, Cody Allen, Bud Norris, Brad Brach, Jesse Chavez, and Adam Warren to name a few.

So despite their fourth championship in 15 years, the Red Sox bullpen could have a decidedly different look in 2019.

Mike Hazen and a piece of advice that would change Alex Cora's career

Peter Abraham

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Alex Cora interviewed to be manager of the Arizona Diamondbacks two years ago knowing it was likely that general manager Mike Hazen would hire Torey Lovullo, which he did.

But Cora wanted to go through the process if only to gain more insight into what teams valued in a manager.

Hazen, ever straightforward, provided that. He told Cora he would benefit from being on the coaching staff of a major league team. It was the one thing missing from an otherwise impressive resume.

Cora took that advice and joined the Astros as their bench coach shortly after. That helped lead to his being hired by the Red Sox.

Throughout the season, all the way through to winning the World Series, Cora referenced that conversation with Hazen as being instrumental in his career and how much he appreciated the honesty.

"I told Alex that teams would want to see how he would fit on the bench, interact with players, develop relationships," Hazen said Tuesday at the GM Meetings. "It was pretty apparent that the next step was being on the bench."

Hazen, who was with the Red Sox from 2006-16, knew Cora as a player and felt all along he would be a good manager.

"I don't know if he needed that one year of experience under [Astros manager A.J. Hinch] or if was going to alter him significantly. But maybe it did," Hazen said. "The job he did this year was unbelievable. He did a tremendous job."

Hazen had a hand in helping to develop or obtain many of the Sox players who won the World Series. He was rooting for them from afar.

“Hard not to think about those guys,” Hazen said. “Look at the Mookie Betts story. Jackie Bradley Jr., Xander Bogaerts, Christian Vazquez. You can keep going. They were a great team.”

Lovullo is 175-149 in two years with Arizona, leading the Diamondbacks to a playoff berth in 2017.

It’s ridiculous that J.D. Martinez wasn’t an MVP finalist

Nick Cafardo

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Most valuable.

Do the baseball writers just pick the highest WAR rating and base “most valuable” on that?

What’s missing is the true meaning of most valuable, and it’s been missing for some time. We’re now voting on who’s the best player according to WAR (wins above replacement). We’ve accepted it as gospel.

There’s no way that the Red Sox’ J.D. Martinez should not have been one of the three finalists for American League MVP as announced on MLB Network Monday. The Baseball Writers’ Association of America selected Mookie Betts, the Angels’ Mike Trout, and the Indians’ Jose Ramirez as the finalists. All three had higher WARs than Martinez, who played the majority of his time as a DH.

Betts led AL position players in WAR at 10.9, while Trout was second at 10.2 and Ramirez tied for fourth at 7.9.

Martinez was seventh at 6.4.

That he wasn’t an MVP finalist is ridiculous.

Was he penalized for being a DH? Since 1973, it’s been a position in all American League lineups. And Martinez may have been a DH 62 percent of the time, but so what? Was he valuable or wasn’t he?

Here is what’s missing in this vote: the intangibles. Did the voters consider what Martinez meant to the remainder of the Red Sox lineup? Did they consider how much he influenced the offensive season of the likely winner of the award, Betts? Did they consider the endless amount of tutelage he gave Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, and others?

And did they consider what was the biggest and most impactful addition to the Red Sox lineup since last season?

Those things are being lost in baseball — the intangibles, which, yes, Ramirez has, and Trout obviously has. But we get so deep into analytics that it’s all we can see.

For a guy who hit .330 with 43 homers, 130 RBIs, and an OPS of 1.031 (third behind Trout and Betts), those stats alone should have gotten him in the top three. Ramirez, by the way, hit .270.

Not saying Martinez should win it, but to be left off the top three?

The BBWAA missed this one.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Yankees GM Brian Cashman: Red Sox were ‘unstoppable’

Michael Silverman

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Dave Dombrowski and his crew are in town laying the groundwork for something that hasn't happened in 20 years — a World Series repeat.

The last team leader to do that was Brian Cashman of the Yankees, who managed to go back-to-back-to-back from 1998 to 2000 and came very close to a four-peat in 2001.

Cashman was clearly impressed with the buzzsaw that was the 2018 Red Sox.

“They had something special clearly with their group and they were able to reinforce that specialness not just in the regular season but in the postseason as well,” Cashman said yesterday, the first full day of the GM meetings. “We missed the opportunity to win the division in the regular season and I was looking forward to taking our shot in the postseason to change that narrative, but they had none of it. They took us out, and moved forward and took everybody out in front of them so, they were just unstoppable.”

Stopping them or not in 2019 is impossible for Cashman to say. All he knows is that the Yankees will try.

“How that translates as we move forward, we'll see,” he said. “A lot of great talent on that team, a lot of good people on that team, tremendous competitors. You don't have to like them but you still have to respect them. You certainly have to respect who they are, what they did and how they went about it, and you move forward and see if you can find a way to get past it next year.”

Cashman does not believe it's impossible for a team to repeat but he has yet to discover a current formula.

“It's hard no doubt about it, those teams were different but there were some similarities at the same time we had back then,” he said. “You just have to be willing to adjust on the run and be willing to plug holes that pop up and thankfully back then we were able to do that. But, this is now and now we're continuing to focus on ways to take a 100-win team that didn't even win the division and improve upon it.”

Dombrowski said until Craig Kimbrel turns down, as the club expects, the qualifying offer extended to him, he is not diving too deeply into the closer-relief market.

“I don't think he is going to (accept) it but until he officially turns it down, don't know what you're going to do because he may be calling around to see what else is out there and we don't want to get caught by surprise and pursue something real strong and then he accepts the offer,” Dombrowski said.

Should Kimbrel sign a multi-year deal elsewhere, Dombrowski sounded willing to enter spring training without having snagged a replacement closer from outside the organization.

“I don't think we'll go in with that idea of closer by committee,” he said. “I can't tell you what's an established closer — I mean Ryan Brasier has closed games for some established big league clubs. Is Matt Barnes? But I don't think we'd feel uncomfortable with either one of them. Could there be other alternatives? Sure.”

Dombrowski said the Red Sox spent much of Monday evening meeting with other clubs to discover their general offseason plans. The Sox president of baseball operations is still battling a case of laryngitis, so “I said ‘hi,’ other people talked to them to get a feel for what they're going to do.”

The Sox are making more hires in their analytics department, with the hope of integrating them with the scouting department. Dombrowski said he would elaborate as soon as his voice improves.

The Sox also are waiting for medical examinations later this month on the surgically repaired knees of second baseman Dustin Pedroia and pitcher Steven Wright to see about their availability for next season.

Dombrowski said the club may not have definitive results on Pedroia so soon but time does not appear to be a big issue.

“There are a lot of second basemen out there,” Dombrowski said. “But our first pulse will be to see how Dustin does. I don’t have a time frame when that will be exactly, we’re still working on that.”

Dombrowski is waiting to hear from the commissioner’s office about the Red Sox’ complaints concerning the Astros having uncredentialed employees taping their dugout as well as the insinuation the Red Sox were cheating.

“The commissioner’s office said they were (investigating) — that’s out of our hands, it really makes no difference to me at this point,” Dombrowski said. “We’ve expressed our situation but I do believe that they were going to follow up.”

The general managers and team presidents will meet with a representative from the commissioner’s office this morning to discuss big-picture items such as sign-stealing, pace of play, etc. One issue Dombrowski does not like is expanded rosters in September.

“I don’t like seeing all those players, I don’t think it’s right, the roster’s unbalanced, I don’t think it’s really right,” he said .

Arizona GM Mike Hazen, who was Dombrowski’s second in command from August 2015 until after the 2016 season, was thrilled to see the Red Sox win it all.

“They have a great team — Dave’s done a fantastic job, and obviously Ben (Cherington) before that and with some players all the way back to Theo (Epstein) so it’s great watching those guys celebrate another World Series,” Hazen said. “Having experienced a couple there, you remember what it felt like when you did, the way the city gets behind the team and the players.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Dave Dombrowski says all of Boston Red Sox free agents 'have expressed a desire to come back'

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- On the heels of a World Series title, the first priority for the Red Sox this off-season is to attempt to re-sign at least some of their seven free agents. According to president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, the interest in reuniting with those players is mutual.

Dombrowski said Tuesday that all of the Sox' free agents (Nathan Eovaldi, Craig Kimbrel, Joe Kelly, Steve Pearce, Ian Kinsler and Drew Pomeranz) have told the team they have interest in returning.

"We have an abundance of free agents," Dombrowski said. "We have seven, so they're in different categories. Some of the guys that we'd like to re-sign, they know that. But they're also free agents. We'll continue staying in contact with them and see what happens. They know we're interested, but they also want to find out what the market is. All of them have expressed a desire to come back, but only time will tell."

Dombrowski has told "most, but not all" of Boston's free agents that they are a priority for the team. In turn, he believes most of the seven will give the Red Sox a chance to match any offer before departing.

"I think they all will stay in contact with us," he said. "I think most of them will do that, but if somebody says here's an offer that blows you away and you sign it right now or not, they'll probably sign it."

Kimbrel and Eovaldi stick out as the top guys the Sox would want to bring back, with Pearce also fitting well into the projected 2019 roster. Kelly and Kinsler are considered less likely.

Boston issued a qualifying offer to Kimbrel, meaning he has the option to return on a one-year, \$17.9 million deal instead of testing free agency. Dombrowski expects him to reject that offer, at which point Boston's off-season plan will be "somewhat" determined by the pursuit of its closer.

"He may be calling around seeing what else is out there," Dombrowski said. "You don't want to be caught by surprise when you're out there pursuing something real strong."

Boston Red Sox have scouted Yusei Kikuchi

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- The Red Sox have scouted Japanese left-hander Yusei Kikuchi and could be among the teams to pursue him this winter, according to president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

Dombrowski refused to comment on the extent of Boston's interest in the lefty, who is expected to be posted by the Seibu Lions at some point this winter. He did confirm that Boston has scouted Kikuchi.

"We've been doing that for years," Dombrowski said. "He's a guy who has been a quality pitcher there for a while, so we watch him on a regular basis. Yes, we have a pulse of him."

Kikuchi, 27, was 14-4 with a 3.24 ERA in 23 starts for Seibu last year. In total, he owns a career 2.81 ERA in eight seasons in Japan.

Kikuchi hired Scott Boras to represent him last week.

The latest on Boston Red Sox, other teams from Carlsbad

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- Day 1 of the annual GM meetings at the Omni La Costa Resort and Spa has largely wrapped up, with executives continuing the informal part of the evening. Here's a recap of what took place Tuesday for the Red Sox (and some of their key competitors):

Though dealing with a bout with laryngitis, Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski met with the media and confirmed that all seven of Boston's free agents have interest in returning to the Sox. He also said the Sox have scouted Japanese lefty Yusei Kikuchi and did not rule out a pursuit of him.

Dombrowski said that Dustin Pedroia and Steven Wright will visit with doctors later this month to determine the next steps as they rehab injured knees. He wouldn't rule out the Sox signing a second baseman as insurance for Pedroia.

"There's a lot of second basemen who are out there," Dombrowski said. "Our first pulse there will be seeing how Dustin does. We don't have a timeframe on that exactly. We're still working on that. We'll get a pulse of it relatively soon to see what we do for the winter time."

Dombrowski revealed that the Sox have expanded their analytical department, having added "quite a few people" to the organization with the focus on further integrating analytics and scouting. Boston is not expected to add any of the analytical executives who just left the Astros (Mike Fast, Sig Mejdal and Ryan Hallahan).

Dombrowski said that he was more "along for the ride than anything" in terms of the formal meetings about league procedures this week, adding that he is strongly in favor of changing the rule that lets teams expand their rosters to 40 players in September.

"I don't like all those players," he said. "I don't think it's right. It's a different game in September. The roster is unbalanced. I don't think it's really right but I don't have a final say on it either.

Dombrowski also noted that the commissioner's office has not given him any update on its investigation into potential sign-stealing during the ALCS against the Astros.

"it really makes no difference to me at this point. We expressed our situation, but I do believe they were going to continue to follow up," he said.

Two of Boston's most prominent American League competitors saw their 2019 rotations come more into focus Tuesday, in much different ways.

According to a baseball source, the Yankees agreed to a one-year, \$8 million deal with lefty CC Sabathia that will keep him in New York for what is expected to be the last year of his career. The Astros received bad news, as righty Lance McCullers Jr. will miss the entire 2019 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery.

In other places around the league, managers Rick Renteria (White Sox) and Dave Roberts (Dodgers) received contract extensions from their respective clubs while the Giants reportedly zeroed in on Dodgers general manager Farhan Zaidi as their next GM.

*** *WEEI.com***

Many baseball voters have a problem and it's a blind devotion to WAR

John Tomase

The MVP finalists are in and you're never gonna believe this, but they're ordered almost exactly like WAR.

In the American League, the finalists are Mookie Betts (10.4), Mike Trout (9.8), and Jose Ramirez (8.0). They ranked 1-2-3 in Fangraphs WAR, or fWAR, which is not the kind of thing you'll find on the back of a baseball card.

In the National League, the finalists are Christian Yelich (7.6), Javier Baez (6.3), and Nolan Arenado (5.6). They ranked 1-2-5 in Baseball-Reference WAR, or bWAR, which sounds like something that makes your eyes glaze over in a Stats 101 textbook.

The slavish devotion to WAR has poisoned not only postseason awards voting, but Hall of Fame voting, too, even though the very people who created and regularly update the various formulas comprising it routinely note that differences smaller than one to two wins should not be considered definitive.

And yet we've had entire discussions hijacked by it. TIM RAINES IS A HALL OF FAMER BECAUSE WAR DEMANDS IT. TROUT MUST WIN THE MVP AWARD EVERY SEASON BECAUSE WAR DEMANDS IT. JUSTIN VERLANDER WAS ROBBED IN THE 2016 CY YOUNG RACE AND WAR PROVES IT.

For the uninitiated, WAR stands for Wins Above Replacement, and it's not a stat, per se. It's not like batting average, which is computed with one fixed formula. To steal the language of ESPN analyst and former Blue Jays executive Keith Law, who wrote a book called Smart Baseball, it's a construct.

The idea is that WAR combines a player's various contributions – offense, defense, pitching, baserunning – and assigns them a number of wins relative to what a team could expect if an average Triple-A player started in his place. There are many different ways to arrive at this number – bWAR and fWAR differ in

their lifetime assessment of Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan, for instance, by a whopping 22 wins – but the more detailed the data, the better a player can be evaluated.

I'm not a WAR denialist. I use it as part of my Hall of Fame evaluation, and I've referenced it in years when I've had MVP or Cy Young votes. It's a useful tool. My problem is with WAR absolutists who vote based on differences that are statistically insignificant, or who ignore other means of evaluating a player. A 6.0-WAR player and an 8.0-WAR player might be the same; it's not enough to stop there.

Take this year's AL MVP race. Betts led the league in WAR, will win the award, and deserves it. Hard to argue with Trout or Ramirez, either, based on performance, though I'm certainly open to the idea of an MVP coming from a winning team, and not Trout's sub-.500 Angels.

But there are other deserving candidates whose WAR won't give them a sniff. Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez is one of them. For five months, he flirted with the Triple Crown. Because he's mostly a DH and no better than an average fielder when he does don a glove, he never had a chance, though his 5.9 fWAR is roughly in range of Ramirez.

Some advanced stats make a case for Martinez, such as his weighted runs created (170, 3rd), base-out runs added (73.36, 1st), win probability added (5.4, 3rd) and . . . there's no need to lose ourselves any further in those weeds.

But there's also the non-statistical measure of Martinez's impact. The Hank Aaron Award means something. That teammates such as Betts considered his David Ortiz-like presence the key to the lineup means something. The way he impacted his teammates' approach to launch angle and batting practice and video study means something.

WAR measures none of that, and there's a safety in shrugging that if it can't be quantified, it's not worth considering, just as there's safety in submitting a WAR-approved ballot, content in the knowledge that no one on Twitter will yell at you.

If I had an MVP ballot this year, I would've ranked Martinez ahead of Trout. The fact that the Red Sox were the best team in baseball, with Martinez posting monster numbers in the heart of their lineup, has to mean something. And I know the counter-argument – swap Trout in his place and the Red Sox might be even better – but this isn't a hypothetical exercise. Martinez actually produced there, impacting actual wins, and delivering an actual World Series.

Sometimes it feels like WAR tells us more about what a player should've done than what he actually did. Bill James ignited a fierce discussion on this front last year when he noted that WAR rated Aaron Judge and Jose Altuve as virtually equivalent, even though Altuve clearly had the better season (and, it should be noted, was rewarded with the MVP).

James' point is that the "wins" in "wins above replacement" should relate to real-life ones. Others argue that we should only measure a player's underlying contributions and not, say, penalize Bryce Harper for walking 130 times if the Nationals couldn't drive him in on 110 of them. I'll leave that discussion to the experts.

All I know is that anyone who starts and ends their evaluation with WAR isn't forward-thinking. They're lazy.

J.D. Martinez, Chris Sale shut out of finalist spots for MVP, Cy Young Award

John Tomase

J.D. Martinez and Chris Sale played pivotal roles in the Red Sox winning a franchise-record 108 games and the World Series, but neither will be up for year-end awards.

Martinez was not named a finalist for MVP, while Sale didn't make the final three in the Cy Young race.

Because Sale basically didn't pitch for real over the final two months, his snub is no surprise. The Cy Young finalists were Tampa's Blake Snell, Cleveland's Corey Kluber, and Detroit's Justin Verlander.

Martinez, who flirted with a Triple Crown and was recently named the American League Hank Aaron Award winner for best hitter in his league, was bypassed in favor of teammate Mookie Betts (the runaway favorite), Anaheim's Mike Trout, and Cleveland's Jose Ramirez.

Also, Red Sox manager Alex Cora was named a finalist for Manager of the Year, along with Tampa's Kevin Cash and Oakland's Bob Melvin. One award a day in each league will be announced next week, starting on Monday with Rookies of the Year, followed by Manager, Cy Young, and MVP.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Why baseball players, execs often stay out of politics

Evan Drellich

CARLSBAD, Calif. — A platform of potentially immense power in baseball appears to often go unused, perhaps more so than in the past.

For those inside the sport, be they players or executives, public avoidance of politics and social issues seems a more common tack than in leagues like the NBA and NFL.

"It's so combative, and it's gotten worse," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said Tuesday, as elections went on throughout the country. "It's hard. Just, it's not easy. So I respect those who do [chime in]. But I also understand those who choose not to."

Baseball, historically, has been tied to tremendous civic and social impact. But these days, anything that may be polarizing or create controversy appears a no-fly zone largely, save for some exceptions. Players and clubs do tremendous charity work and support many causes, but typically, they are causes that are not likely to alienate a portion of fans.

Mookie Betts, for example, may someday be more vocal about issues that move him. We don't know, at this point, what those are. He might not either, in fact. In a way, he's acting judiciously and wisely, because he doesn't want to speak on topics he is not well versed in — a sense of how powerful his words could eventually be as one of the game's brightest stars.

"Some of it is still learning," Betts said in a midseason interview. "I haven't really gotten [into] a lot of issues that are going on, social issues and all those type of things. So yeah, I still learn about it. And some of it is just, pick your battles. I mean, sometimes you can speak on a matter and be OK at it, and sometimes you speak on the matter, if you don't know, there's extremists, and no matter what you say it's going to be wrong. No matter what you say it's going to be right."

"Those people that, when you're going to be wrong, you're going to be so wrong, you get a lot of backlash, and all those types of things. So those are just battles that I'd like to think that, OK, the negative, it won't be that much negative. It won't be all the way to the bottom negative."

"Those type of things, when I get to a certain point, I won't care about that. But right now it's just, I feel like I'm still building, still building, still building. I feel like I don't have that platform just yet, and I don't know a lot about a lot that's going on. So I try to keep my head out of it. 'Cause this [baseball] is already hard enough."

Sox manager Alex Cora this year defended his native Puerto Rico after President Donald Trump made comments that did not sit well with Cora. Earlier in the season, Cora was asked about players speaking out and his own platform.

“I guess that’s the difference between [Michael] Jordan and LeBron [James]?” Cora said. “All depends how comfortable you are. If you’re not comfortable talking about it, obviously, you have your views and everything. But if you’re not comfortable doing it, then you keep it to yourself. I think at the end of the day that’s what guys do, you know.”

“There are certain things that, especially back home with the reactions of the people [in Puerto Rico], I didn’t know it was this big. And it is. Like, people paying are attention. There are certain things I feel comfortable talking about it. With this platform, I was able to help everybody, a lot of people down there. We’re still doing it. ... Whatever we can do in our power to help, then we’ll do it.”

The difficulties, as Cashman sees them, are “the examples of examples of examples” of backlash and criticism.

“I’m being paid to be general manager of the New York Yankees,” Cashman said. “Have I ventured in at times? Yes. But I try on behalf of myself, my family, my organization to tread lightly. But I have entered the arena on a few occasions, because I did go to high school with the two Supreme Court justices who just recently got in.”

“With the knowledge of either going to school directly with them, in [Neil] Gorsuch’s case, or [Brett] Kavanaugh was two years behind me, I supported their letters of recommendation from classmates. But other than that, I choose to duck.”

Players and executives, like anyone else, have free will. There is no obligation here, only a sense of choice.

J.D. Martinez found himself in a brief controversy this year because of an old Instagram post he shared supporting gun rights. The post, from 2013, used Adolf Hitler’s image to show support for gun ownership — an ahistorical suggestion that guns would prevent the rise of someone like Hitler.

Martinez said he meant no offense.

“I love my country. I love this country and I stand by the Constitution,” Martinez said at the time. “And I stand by the Second Amendment and it’s something that I take pride in and it’s something that I’ll back up.”

Asked the day he explained the post if he wanted to use his platform as a player to address politics in the future, Martinez said he did not.

“We come here and we play baseball,” Martinez said. “This isn’t the environment to get into that. I’m a baseball player. That’s how I want people to view me. That’s how I want people to look at me. I’m not here to start a movement or start anything else. I play baseball and I want to win a championship. That’s all I’m here for.”

That is in line with how some fans prefer their sports consumption: separate from everything else in the world, as often as possible. That separation is impossible to maintain permanently, but it can be the wisest business choice for the sport’s stakeholders — even if business is not what is driving everyone to their ultimate decision.

But one general manager and one longtime player agent both declined to talk about the matter Tuesday, in a sign of how sensitive people are to even the broad topic of speaking out.

“It’s a double-edged sword, because so many fans are on both sides of every issue,” Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow said Tuesday. “If as an industry you choose to take a side, you’re going to alienate half the people no matter what the topic. I wouldn’t say that players and teams are not active in trying to

make our world a better place. But they are not necessarily doing it in a public platform, and using their platform as a general manager, as a pitcher or as an owner to do it.

“But I do see a lot of activity that’s not necessarily visible that players are doing on their own, or other people are doing on their own, our owner [Jim Crane] does on his own. And I think that’s probably better rather than getting into the quagmire of controversial issues. Now, there’s some issues that are black and white. Domestic abuse, racism, those sorts of things. And as an industry, we should be doing everything we can that we’re in a fair society where people are treated well.”

MLB cheaters beware: Baseball finally addressing sign-stealing problem

Evan Drellich

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- Sign stealing via electronic means will be among the first topics to be addressed today in the breakout sessions at the general managers’ meetings. Less than a week-and-a-half after the Red Sox won the World Series a couple hours north from here at Dodger Stadium, Major League Baseball is going to address an issue it has let fester.

MLB and its clubs have a daunting task ahead of them, one they did not proactively combat or at least not to a great enough extent -- although league officials disagree with that characterization. Paranoia and sometimes warranted worry have taken hold for players and organizations about impermissible sign stealing, in part because MLB lacks significant safeguards.

Baseball needs to adapt its rules to modern times. That may be through potential deregulation, allowing teams to do whatever they want with video feeds and signs they pick up during a game, or through greater restriction, a la NFL-style communications and earpieces.

One high-ranking club official in the National League said that last offseason, MLB started asking some clubs about potentially allowing pitchers and catchers to communicate with an earpiece, or the like. As an American League front office member noted: Why hasn’t that technology already been tested in the Arizona Fall League, or some other venue?

Now the matter is at least at the top of the docket. The next steps, however, are unclear.

“I have no idea,” said one high-ranking league official involved with the matter, who does not have permission to speak publicly. “Hopefully the GMs, we’ll get them in a room, we’ll have an idea.

"There’s two ways to go: Cut back on what clubs are allowed to do, you know in terms of cameras in the park, although that presents an enforcement issue.

“Or go the other way, allow it.”

* * * * *

MLB’s general sentiment is this: We’ve been presented a ton of whispers and a clear sense of a problem, but not concrete evidence enough to hammer any individual clubs.

Even though ignorance is easy to plead, it’s actually believable. In baseball’s culture, cheating is to be kept quiet, lest you become an outcast for ratting on your team -- and there are likely plenty of other forms of technical cheating that go on undetected by the public.

Nonetheless, it should have been clear that teams would find clever ways to gain a leg up via technology as they invest in research and development. More than a year ago, baseball hinted at the climb it faced in policing sign stealing.

On Sept. 15, 2017, Commissioner Rob Manfred issued a statement addressing punishments issued to the Red Sox, who were found to be using wearable technology in their dugout.

“The prevalence of technology, especially the technology used in the replay process, has made it increasingly difficult to monitor appropriate and inappropriate uses of electronic equipment,” the statement read.

Baseball showed a tough stance then, too. The statement continued: "all 30 Clubs have been notified that future violations of this type will be subject to more serious sanctions, including the possible loss of draft picks."

But MLB has done little else to show actual strength in this arena, besides issuing memos to teams about the seriousness of these offenses. The league absolved the Astros of wrongdoing this postseason, when they had an employee going around to other dugouts to "monitor the field." That effort was described as counter-surveillance.

Maybe so. But the league did not pull out any stops to investigate any other claims, simply quelling the matter that was right in front of them.

* * * * *

The allegations heard around the game feel universal. Banging on garbage cans in the tunnel. Someone standing up in center field to indicate a fastball when a slugger is at the plate. Security guards assisting players. Scoreboard operators getting in on the act. But investigations have not followed, in part because of the difficulty of proving such incidents after the fact and, likely, because of how arduous the task would be of investigating such complaints without hard evidence behind them.

Baseball didn't play catch up quickly enough, and now everyone is suspicious of everyone.

Stealing signs on the field with one's eyes is legal. Many organizations have a center-field camera feed for the purposes of studying signs later. That use of a camera has been permissible, and remains permissible so long as the footage and its findings are not used during the game. (Notably, those cameras were not allowed to be used during the 2018 postseason.)

But studying signs via a camera in realtime, during a game, is a violation. It's a fine line that may be arbitrary, but nonetheless exists.

MLB feels it took appropriate measures in this year's postseason, when resident security agents monitored video rooms and beyond. It also believes it is aware of all cameras installed in stadiums.

Some people with 2018 playoff clubs suggested these measures amounted to merely visuals, rather than strong deterrents.

“The problem with that approach is that considering how big stadiums are and the multitude of ways that teams could try to cheat, they have a resource, or during the playoffs, maybe more than one resource, that are not formally trained into looking into these issues,” the American League front-office member said. “I think that you would find complaints from across the league that these people are altogether . . . incompetent in performing the duties.”

MLB, which did not want to see a distraction from the postseason and World Series over an integrity issue, disagreed.

Either way, what now?

* * * * *

Baseball needs to decide if it wants to both retroactively investigate what was allowed to happen in recent years — as technology and the search for competitive advantages helped bring the the game to this point -- or if it wants to only look forward.

Opening Pandora's Box is an appropriate cliché.

What's to stop a player from putting a wearable device in his wrist guard, or in his sliding shorts or back pocket? When he steps to the plate, someone else can alert him with a small vibration what's coming. What's preventing a video feed from a camera from going three buildings away to a secret office, and then someone alerting that wearable device? A security agent in a designated video room would not be the wiser.

There are as many as 20 to 40 "scouting cameras" in each park, and the technology has repercussions on player mindsets beyond signs.

A pitcher may study every little movement of his own to be sure he's not tipping, an Orwellian fear taking grip (of their grips). Bullpen coaches open binders of scouting reports only a crack, to avoid a camera picking up proprietary attack plans and information.

Punishing one team or three probably doesn't affect that mindset, which may just be the new norm.

Starting in the 2018 regular season, MLB monitored video rooms with security agents who would roam between those rooms on both sides. Dugout phones were also recorded. But video rooms are not the only place a feed can be routed.

Teams have forever sought edges, and they won't stop doing so. With no moral absolution for clubs that violate the rules, MLB has to legislate to curb behavior in a sport where everyone seeks tiny gains, and regard for the rules varies.

Cheating in general, its boundaries, and the silence it involves are all tied into baseball's complex culture. The sport has never been clean and never will be. There's always pine tar on someone's glove, or maybe a therapeutic use exemption for a drug that just didn't need to be given out.

The easiest example in today's game: The shiny substance on a pitcher's arm, or their cap or their belt, is not sweat and everyone knows it. Some rules, like those about foreign substances, are outwardly meant to be broken. During the World Series, Dodgers pitcher Ryan Madson talked publicly about using substances to get a better a grip in the cold.

Baseball is a sport that condones cheating, only until it does not. Arbitrary lines are everywhere.

* * * * *

Sign stealing isn't universally regarded as helpful.

For example: a player who is told what pitch is coming may feel more obligated to swing at that pitch. And the system isn't foolproof. If the batter is told a pitch is headed for one location and it ends up being another, the batter can be frustrated.

That's not to minimize the potential advantage to knowing what's coming.

Reliever Josh Fields, traded from the Astros to the Dodgers in 2016, said he had no direct knowledge of any illegal sign stealing, but explained his outlook.

"If they know I'm throwing a fastball, they know they have to be ready for a specific timing of that pitch," Fields said. "Now, I can throw a pitch that's right at the top of the zone that's hard to hit. Sometimes, when

they know what's coming, it's hard to not swing at it, because they're anticipating, if it's there they want to be. There's still some leeway where I can throw it to perhaps where they're not looking for it.

"I don't want them to have it. I want them to be guessing between curveball, changeup or fastball. It's not foolproof still. But it definitely is a huge advantage if you have plate discipline and a lot of these guys now, they're better and better at that. I'd for sure be for something, especially from the electronic side of it.

"Now, you're doing it longhand, that's a different story."

In a way, sign stealing is another microcosm of the old school and the new, and how the game changes with time.

The technology exists to see everything inside a ball park. Why ignore it?

"If you're putting the time and effort in to saying, 'Hey, this pitcher's doing this on this certain pitch,' that's what guys have been doing for decades in the game," Fields said. "That's a different story. But I think pitch-by-pitch electronics, and then relaying that, say, with Apple watches, or relaying that with however they choose to do it, I don't think that's part of it."

Not yet, anyway.

* * * * *

The rules do not adequately address the modern state of the field. They may never. Baseball is behind, but it can start to catch up more in earnest now, starting at the GM meetings.

"If you're going to cheat, it's hard -- it's just like drugs," the high-ranking league official said. "You're never going to catch somebody right away. And sometimes it takes a long time to catch somebody, if you put a lot of resources in to it.

"We put some resources into it this season, more than we ever did before. But we didn't spend millions of dollars in terms of locking down the stadium, and we're going to have that discussion."

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

In contemplating three of their own free agents, Red Sox must determine value of 'stepping up' in October

Sean McAdam

CARLSBAD, Calif. — On the way to their recent World Series championship, the Red Sox got huge contributions from three somewhat unlikely sources: pitchers Nathan Eovaldi and Joe Kelly, as well as first baseman Steve Pearce.

Eovaldi performed brilliantly throughout October, appearing in six games — including two starts — and compiling a 1.61 ERA. His six-inning, 97-pitch relief appearance in Game 3 of the World Series was heroic.

Kelly, meanwhile, overcame an inconsistent regular season to toss six scoreless innings in the World Series and allowed just one earned run over 11.1 postseason innings. Pearce enjoyed two monster games in the World Series, with three homers and a bases-clearing double in Games 4 and 5 to capture the World Series MVP trophy.

As fate would have it, all three are now eligible for free agency, which surely represents good timing for them as they enter the market.

But it leaves unanswered a bigger question: how much more should the Red Sox — or any other team, for that matter — be willing to pay in free agency in recognition of the monster postseasons enjoyed by all three.

“I think it factors in,” said Dave Dombrowski, when asked how teams value postseason performance. “The whole world sees you when you perform at the highest level, so I think it counts. How much everyone determines, I think it varies. I don’t think they discount the regular season. But I think it comes into play — you’re front-and-center. That’s just the way it is.”

In the case of the three Red Sox free agents, each is somewhat different. Eovaldi, obtained in July from Tampa Bay, was finally healthy following a second Tommy John procedure and demonstrated his durability by pitching in any capacity — and on short rest. Of the three, there’s little doubt his stock has been boosted the most by his performance last month.

For Kelly, as dominant as he was, there will likely exist lingering questions about his overall consistency — unless some team becomes convinced that his new pitch mix has finally unlocked his potential. As for Pearce, it’s doubtful that teams will view him altogether differently at the age of 35. He remains a good, solid role player, but one whose stature is enhanced by his recent ability to come through in the biggest games of the season.

“When you’re in free agency, you’re typically overpaying (to begin with),” noted New York Yankees GM Brian Cashman. “It’s hard to say, from a general standpoint. Obviously, players benefit from great performance and on the biggest stages, the more notoriety, the more opportunities (exist), I’m sure. Players are competing on a daily basis to make a name for themselves and if they’re having a lot of success, on the biggest stage at the right time, (it helps).”

Cashman noted that Yankee adviser Reggie Jackson literally made a (nick)name for himself with his postseason heroics in the late 1970s. Some forty years later, Jackson is still known as “Mr. October.”

“He’s 72 years old and we’re still talking about Mr. October,” said Cashman. “It has a long-term impact, and a short-term impact, as well, potentially in marketing yourself, whether it’s as a free agent or off-field opportunities or what have you.”

Jed Hoyer, formerly the assistant GM with the Red Sox and now the GM of the Cubs, agrees that the question is sort of a never-ending debate among evaluators.

“We’re trained to have skepticism (in viewing spikes in performance),” said Hoyer. “It’s a short burst and while it’s obviously impressive that a guy can perform on the biggest stage. But at the same time, it’s quick snapshot.”

Hoyer points to infielder Daniel Murphy, who enjoyed a terrific postseason run with the New York Mets in 2015, as someone who should have benefitted more from his October performance.

“The market treated him with some amount of skepticism, (asking) ‘Was that real?’ ” said Hoyer. “And the answer, in retrospect, was: Yeah. It ended up being a really good contract (three years, \$37.5 million with the Washington Nationals before being traded, ironically, to the Cubs last August). He proved that the ’15 playoff was not an aberration.

“So you have to ask yourself: Did this guy (just) have a really good October or is he making real adjustments (that portend well for the future)?”

Even if the jump in performance isn’t necessarily permanent, teams can note that players aren’t awestruck by the big moment or the pressure of the postseason.

“And just that has value,” Hoyer noted, “and if you’re expecting to play for championships, it’s nice to have that on your roster.”

But in general, executives caution against overreacting to what could be viewed as small sample sizes.

“From a player’s standpoint,” said Cashman, “clearly the more notoriety you create (in the postseason), the more opportunities should open up for you. But from my standpoint, we’ve already got our assessments in place. We’ll take all the information and react to it.”

GM Meetings Notebook: Astros could emerge as prime bidders for Eovaldi; Kimbrel looking for big payday

Sean McAdam

CARLSBAD, Calif. — The news that Lance McCullers Jr. underwent Tommy John surgery and will be out for the entire 2019 season is bad news for the Houston Astros, and also, perhaps the Red Sox.

The Astros were already going to be in the marketplace for starting pitching, with two key members of their rotation — lefty Dallas Keuchel and righthander Charlie Morton — headed for free agency. What’s more, the other two mainstays of their rotation — Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole — will be eligible for free agency after 2019, making it imperative that the Astros begin rebuilding their staff.

That could well result in the Astros putting on an aggressive pursuit of free agent Nathan Eovaldi, who grew up in the Houston suburb of Alvin, Texas – hometown of Nolan Ryan. During the ALCS when Eovaldi pitched Game 3 against the Astros, he recalled pitching in Minute Maid Park as a high schooler and talked about his roots in the area.

Eovaldi was already going to be in-demand, based on his postseason performance, with the Yankees, Los Angeles Angels, Atlanta Braves and other contenders in search of experienced starters. Now, the increasing likelihood that the Astros will be aggressive in the same search makes it even more problematic from the Red Sox’ standpoint.

Just in case the Red Sox weren’t quite sure whether free agent closer Craig Kimbrel would be shooting for a huge contract, they’ve probably now heard otherwise.

David Meter, the agent who represents Kimbrel, is telling prospective teams that Kimbrel is the greatest closer of all time, and presumably, should be compensated accordingly. Jon Heyman of FanCred reports that Meter is highlighting the fact that Kimbrel, over his career, has the lowest ERA, lowest batting average against, lowest OPS against and was the quickest to 300 saves.

Of course, that skirts the issue that Kimbrel compiled a 5.91 ERA this postseason and the Red Sox didn’t have him close out the climactic Game 5 in the World Series. He also displayed control issues throughout October, issuing eight walks in 10.2 innings.

Meter counters that by noting that Kimbrel converted the save opportunity in every instance.

For a time, it was thought that Kimbrel’s issues in October were the result of tipping his breaking ball, making it easier for hitters to lay off that offering while focusing on his fastball. But even after that was addressed, Kimbrel still had some rocky outings.

Kimbrel would seem to be in the market for a deal of at least four seasons in length, with an AAV in excess of \$18 million. That, almost certainly, would not interest the Red Sox, especially with so many other more affordable options on the table, including lefties Zach Britton and Andrew Miller as well as righthanders Adam Ottavino, Kelvin Herrera, Jeurys Familia and others.

It was inevitable that the Yankees were going to be linked to one — if not both — of the premium free agents on the market — infielder Manny Machado and outfielder Bryce Harper.

From a positional need standpoint, Machado makes more sense since the Yankees are going to be without shortstop Didi Gregorius (Tommy John surgery) for much of next season. Machado could either remain at short when Gregorius is eligible for free agency after 2020, or shift to third.

The case for Harper is tougher to make, since the Yankees have Aaron Judge, Aaron Hicks, Brett Gardner and Giancarlo Stanton under control for 2019, with Judge and Stanton under long-term control.

One report Monday suggested that the Yankees were discussing using Harper at first base.

But a source familiar with the Yankees thinking seemed to debunk that Tuesday, noting: “I’m not sure it makes a lot of sense committing \$400 million to an idea that hasn’t been tried before.”

Teams in the marketplace for catching help seem to be first focused on trying to pry J.T. Realmuto from the Miami Marlins. That, of course, is going to require a bundle of top prospects in return, even if Realmuto’s agent last week suggested that Realmuto would not be with the Marlins by spring training.

For teams seeking catching help, the Red Sox have excess at the position, though none, obviously, has anywhere near Realmuto’s upside.

The Sox have three catchers under control — Sandy Leon, Christian Vazquez, and Blake Swihart — and would, presumably, be interested in making any of the three available for the right price. Dave Dombrowski said last week that while the Sox weren’t actively shopping any of the trio, returning all three would be “unlikely but not impossible that you have three” catchers.

Vazquez signed a team-friendly extension last spring training and offers cost control for a team acquiring him while Swihart offers athleticism and versatility, but nowhere near the major league experience the other two have.

Dombrowski wouldn’t comment on the Red Sox’ level of interest in Japanese lefty Yusei Kikuchi, who has been posted by the Seibu Lions, but did acknowledge that the Sox — as they do routinely do with foreign pitchers — had scouted him the last few seasons...Dombrowski said the Sox will be expanding their analytics department, but offered no specifics other than to say the goal was to add “quite a few more people,” with the plan of integrating analytics with the scouting process more...General managers will discuss some potential rule changes and one Dombrowski would favor is September roster limits. Under the current rules, teams can add as many as 15 players in the final month as rosters expand, making for uneven roster sizes and seemingly endless managerial moves thanks to the excess of players on the bench. “I’d love to see September baseball changed,” Dombrowski said. “I don’t like all those players. I don’t think it’s right. It’s a different game in September, rosters are unbalanced. I don’t think it’s really right.”

*** *The Athletic***

Mookie Betts is a new dad. So we asked his fellow dad teammates how his life will change now

Chad Jennings

For my mother, it was Christmas morning, and her other gift was a microwave oven. For me, it was last March, right in the middle of a snowstorm. For Mookie Betts, it was Tuesday, one of those days in between his first World Series and what might be his first MVP award.

That's when the Red Sox right fielder held his first child for the first time and realized nothing would ever be the same.

"Never knew what unconditional love meant or how it felt," he wrote on Instagram after welcoming a daughter with his girlfriend, Brianna, "until I met this little princess."

Welcome to the club, Mookie. We've got hand-me-downs.

The Athletic spent some time late in the season asking 10 of the fathers in the Red Sox clubhouse if they could explain all the ways their leadoff hitter's life was about to change.

The short answer: Every way possible, and in ways no one can possibly explain.

"It's kind of hard to tell people what to expect," said David Price, whose son Xavier was born in May 2017. "I mean, this my first time doing it, and I heard different stories from everybody that's gone through it, and I feel like everybody's story is kind of different. But it's going to change his life for the better, you know? Bree's a great girl, going to be a great mom. They've got both of their families in Nashville and can have all the help they need, or want, or don't want. They're going to have it all. So, just enjoy it. Enjoy it."

Those last two words might sum it up as well as any.

"Oh man," said Mitch Moreland, a dad of three kids. "I can't even remember back that far to when I only had one, to be honest with you. But, it's fun, man. It kind of puts everything into perspective. There's nothing like it.... There's really no words that I can describe it other than, it's a blessing. It puts everything in perspective. Obviously, a little bit busier, little less free time, but something that you're obviously willing to sacrifice to be a parent and be a dad."

So willing to sacrifice, in fact, that it quickly becomes difficult to remember life before life's priorities were so drastically and perfectly rearranged.

"Everyone tells you, just wait," said Brock Holt, father of Griffin, born in 2016. "And you're like, there's no way it changes that much. And it does. I remember when we brought Griff home from the hospital, we had him for a couple of days, and me and my wife were sitting there like, 'What did we do before we had him?' He'd only been there two days, and we're like, 'What was our life like before?' We don't even remember. This is it, now. Best thing ever."

There was one constant from almost everyone we talked to.

"He's not going to sleep!" Dustin Pedroia said.

"Especially for the first couple of months," said Chris Sale.

"Hopefully the baby sleeps," Steven Wright said.

"I know Mookie values his sleep already," Price said. "And he's going to value it even more once his little girl comes. It's probably going to be the most tired he's ever felt, but at the same time, it's going to be the most energized he's ever felt. He's going to get that Daddy Strength, too, so these 30 home run seasons could turn to 40 pretty quick."

How many Wins Above Replacement does Daddy Strength add?

"What it takes to get to this level (of baseball)," Craig Kimbrel said. "It takes a lot of heart and a lot of passion, and it takes a lot of time. And obviously when you bring a child into this world, it takes a lot of heart, passion and time. So, learning how to balance the two and still be focused takes some time to learn, but it's definitely doable. Everybody in this room is doing it."

Maybe not everybody, but certainly a lot of people on the Sox have done it, and kids are regulars in the Red Sox clubhouse, something that has continued from the days of John Farrell, and before that, Terry Francona.

“You’re going to want to – well, I know, (for) me personally – help your wife and significant other (as much as possible),” Jackie Bradley Jr. said. “Obviously, we’re dealing with a lot of traveling and getting away from our families. Just making sure when you’re there, you’re there. Not just being there, but being there to help out. That means a lot to them.”

“I think it’s better,” Sandy Leon said. “Sometimes you get home, sometimes you have a bad game, you get home and see your wife and the baby, you see the baby is almost smiling. They’re just playing. They see you and smile, and that changes your day right there.”

“This year is the biggest change for me,” Moreland said. “Because I have one starting school, so they’ve been gone. That’s been the biggest transition for me. I’ve always had them there. The good thing about that is, you’ve got five years (before they start school) to look forward to them being there every time you get home.... There’s nothing like having them there when you get home from the games.”

Take it from me, that’s true whether you’re playing, managing or writing.

“Mook’s a good dude,” Sale said. “And he comes from a good family, so I think he’s going to be ready for it. You know, when kids come in the clubhouse, he’s always great with them. But just more than normal things. This is a crazy lifestyle, a crazy schedule with kids and being away from your family, so everybody has to go through that process and figure out what’s going to be good for him and his family. But, we’re all excited for him.”

That excitement hits on every level: it hits because of the moment itself, because of the happiness it brings a family, and because of the impact a baby has on multiple lives going forward.

“The emotional stuff, you know,” Wright said. “You’re a dad, and for most guys, it’s good. I thought it was a great positive change for me, and I think it will be for him, too. I mean, it’s just new. Everything is new. That’s the thing. There’s no preparing for it. That’s probably the hardest thing is, people can tell you as much as you want to know about being a dad, but at the end of the day, it’s all about everything new.”

Bradley had a kind of checklist of changes, one which seemed to form slowly and methodically off the top of his head.

“Sleep. Patience. The way you love,” he said. “The amount of time you sacrifice, and the willingness to do just about anything for your kid.”

Kimbrel had a similar list. His own daughter, Lydia, had her first birthday earlier this month, and she’s doing much better after a series of heart procedures in the days and months after she was born last November.

“Everything changes,” Kimbrel said. “Perspective changes. Importance changes. And, especially if you have a little girl, everything changes.”

“It’s a girl, right?” asked Ryan Brasier, who has a 7-year-old son and a 3-year-old daughter. “I think it’s a girl. It’s going to be a lot different. Boy was easy. Girl was a lot different.”

“His little girl’s already going to have a boyfriend in Xavier,” Price said, already smiling, having clearly shared this plan with Betts. “I told him that. I told him, ‘X is not signing no prenup!’ Not signing it. Whatever Mookie makes is half mine, so I’m rooting for them!”

If the current living situation holds, Price’s son and Betts’ daughter will both grow up in the Nashville area, where their dads grew up. They’ll take some early steps through the Red Sox clubhouse. They’ll come

together again whenever the franchise celebrates its 2018 championship. But that's a long way down the road. For now, Betts is in those early days of bottles and swaddles, having already realized that he'll never live or love the same way again.

"It'll change your life," Holt said. "Every aspect. You go from almost being selfish, doing what you want to do, to now you're having to take care of another human being. It's the best thing in the world. I mean, you don't realize how much you can love someone, so much, until you have your first child.

"So, we're all excited for Mookie. He's going to be a great dad. It's the best thing. It's the best thing that's ever happened to me, and I'm sure anyone else would say the same thing."

We sure would, Brock. And congratulations, Mookie. Like your daughter's future father-in-law said, enjoy it. Just enjoy it.

Finally, Dave Dombrowski has a chance to build on his time as a 'defending champion'

Chad Jennings

It occurred to him within minutes of the final out. The World Series was over, the Red Sox were champions, the team was still on the field and president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski was already looking ahead to spring training.

"I think for me," Dombrowski said, "the one part that will even be more enjoyable is the one thing I haven't ever done, [which] is gone to spring training as the world champion with your club [still together]."

To be clear, Dombrowski has won a World Series before. In 1997, he took the expansion Marlins, in only their fifth season, to a Game 7 thriller against the Indians. Edgar Renteria hit an unforgettable walk-off single in the 11th inning — and seven months later, Renteria was one of only two lineup regulars still in the Marlins organization.

Dombrowski, the general manager, had been ordered by then owner Wayne Huizenga to disassemble the team he'd built from the ground up. He made 11 offseason trades in a roster-gutting bloodbath that continued into the following May when Dombrowski traded five players for Mike Piazza, then traded Piazza eight days later.

There will be no such dismantling in Boston this offseason.

Red Sox owner John Henry is no Huizenga. In fact, it was Henry who, in 1999, purchased the Marlins from Huizenga, the one-time owner of the Miami Dolphins and Florida Panthers who'd brought the Marlins into existence, built them into winners and then ordered their demolition while citing massive financial losses.

Henry owned the Marlins for three years before purchasing the Red Sox, a team he's kept well-financed through four titles in his 17 years of ownership. Henry has maintained high payrolls and brought back key players so that his next championship was never more than six years away. And this time, he sees a chance to repeat.

"We're set up for next year," Henry said, adding rhetorically: "Could we be better set up for next year?"

Craig Kimbrel, Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly and Steve Pearce are the Red Sox' most significant free agents, and the team has freed additional payroll through the expiring contracts of Hanley Ramirez and Drew Pomeranz.

At long last, after more than 40 years in baseball, Dombrowski gets to put some of that spending power to use while making a run at back-to-back titles, something no team has done since the 2000 Yankees. We'll see how Dombrowski handles his first opportunity to build upon a winner, and how his approach differs from the previous Red Sox general managers who failed to repeat.

“There’s something special about not only winning a championship,” Dombrowski said, “but being in a position and who knows what ends up happening — but where you can defend that title, and you can go to spring training with those same guys and spend all winter with those same guys. And we were never able to do that before. And that’s a new emotion and a new feeling for me.”

That 1997 championship was something of an oddity to begin with. The Marlins were the first wild-card team to win a championship, and that championship came just four years after the franchise’s debut.

They’d finished second in their division behind the 101-win Braves, but their 92 victories were more than four of the other five division winners. They were good, and their roster was a blend of young and old with 21-year-old up-and-comer Renteria batting in front of 28-year-old superstar Gary Sheffield, who was batting in front of 35-year-old and soon-to-be-retired Darren Daulton.

The Marlins had spent heavily the previous offseason, amassing the fifth-highest payroll in baseball according to the New York Times, and added to their roster with trade deadline deals for Daulton and Craig Counsell. They won the World Series by beating the slugging Indians of Jim Thome, Manny Ramirez, Matt Williams and David Justice.

And then they ripped the whole thing apart.

“We really got away from calling ourselves the defending champions that (next) year,” Dombrowski said. “And it was because we didn’t have our club.”

Some two weeks after Game 7, the Marlins traded their best all-around hitter, Moises Alou, to the Astros. With that, the fire sale was off to a roaring start. Over the next three months, the Marlins:

- Traded closer Robb Nen to the Giants.
- Traded leadoff hitter Devon White to the Diamondbacks
- Traded two-time all-star Jeff Conine to the Royals.
- Traded just-acquired reliever Ed Vosberg to the Padres.
- Traded Opening Day starter Kevin Brown to the Padres.
- Traded lefty reliever Dennis Cook to the Mets.
- Traded utility infielder Kurt Abbott to the Athletics.
- Traded Game 7 starter Al Leiter to the Mets.

There were other, smaller deals up to and throughout spring training until the Marlins opened 1998 with a lineup that had only three holdovers from the 1997 opener, but even that was not enough. On May 16, with twice as many losses as wins, the Marlins sent Sheffield, Bobby Bonilla, Charles Johnson, Jim Eisenreich and Manuel Barrios to the Dodgers for Piazza and Todd Zeile. The Times called it an “unprecedented swap of nearly \$100 million in contracts,” trimming the Marlins payroll to just \$24 million, the sixth-lowest in the majors.

Eight days later, Piazza was shipped to the Mets, and five weeks after that, Zeile was traded to the Rangers. The most notable franchise additions from that total dismantling: Preston Wilson, A.J. Burnett and Derrek Lee. The “defending champions” lost 108 games.

No wonder Dombrowski already sees next season as a completely different experience.

“This will really be the first time my career we’re going to spring training as part of a club that we’d consider the defending champions,” he said.

How have the Red Sox responded to championship seasons? With more of the same, really. If anything, the Red Sox typically have gone out of their way to bring back as many key players as possible after winning it all.

According to Cot's Baseball Contracts, Boston's Opening Day payroll went down slightly from 2004 to 2005, down by nearly \$10 million from 2007 to 2008, and up slightly from 2013 to 2014. That one time they raised payroll following a World Series title was the only time they failed to reach the playoffs the following season. The year they cut payroll the most was the closest they came to a repeat.

"I think efforts will be made to keep as many players together as we can, ideally," Dombrowski said. "But I also know baseball rules, finances, make it difficult because sometimes your guys become free agents and receive offers they can't refuse."

Consider the key moves in each of the past three Red Sox championship offseasons:

2004-05

'05 Opening Day payroll: \$123,505,125 (down from \$127,298,500 the year before)

Key free agent losses: Pedro Martinez, Derek Lowe, Orlando Cabrera, Scott Williamson

Key free agent signings: Jason Varitek (re-signed), Edgar Renteria, David Wells, Matt Clement, Wade Miller, Matt Mantei

Key trades: Dave Roberts for Jay Payton and Ramon Vazquez; Doug Mientkiewicz for a minor leaguer

If there's an exception to the bring-back-everyone approach, this is it. The curse-breaking '04 team famously traded Nomar Garciaparra at the deadline, so the big changes began early, and ownership proved willing to cut ties with iconic players.

After winning the title, the Red Sox again had a hole to fill at shortstop, and they did so with a four-year, \$40-million deal for Renteria. They gave a nearly identical deal to keep Varitek as their captain behind the plate.

The most significant changes were in the rotation. Martinez and Lowe were both entering the mid-30s, and the Red Sox did not re-sign them. Martinez got \$54 million from the Mets, and Lowe got \$36 million from the Dodgers. Rather than commit to such large deals — the Red Sox tried to keep Martinez — the Red Sox signed Clement, Wells and Miller to smaller deals that did not work out particularly well. It was Lowe who they really missed. He played out four good seasons in Los Angeles while the Red Sox' rotation struggled in 2005, and the rest of the roster seemed to age and evolve quickly.

2007-08

'08 Opening Day payroll: \$133,390,035 (down from \$143,026,214 the year before)

Key free agent losses: Matt Clement, Eric Hinske

Key free agent signings: Curt Schilling (re-sign), Mike Lowell (re-sign), Mike Timlin (re-sign)

Key trades: Two minor leaguers for David Aardsma (it wasn't until the trade deadline that the Red Sox swapped Manny Ramirez for Jason Bay).

Rather than lose two of their top postseason performers, the Red Sox started the offseason by signing Schilling to a one-year deal and giving Lowell a new three-year contract (Schilling would ultimately miss the entire season with an injury). They also re-signed Timlin, who responded with his career-worst season at age 42.

That was something of a theme for the 2008 team, which returned nearly every key player from the 2007 championship. Every lineup player remained the same at every position, and the biggest change to the pitching staff was increased reliance on 24-year-old Jon Lester. The Red Sox basically kept the band together, while moving minor leaguers Jacoby Ellsbury, Jed Lowrie and Clay Buchholz into key roles.

The result was a remarkably similar regular season. The Red Sox dropped from 96 wins to 95 wins before losing to David Price and the Rays in a seven-game ALCS.

2013-14

'14 Opening Day payroll: \$156,350,125 (up from \$154,555,500 the year before)

Key free agent losses: Jacoby Ellsbury, Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Andrew Bailey

Key free agent signings: Mike Napoli (re-sign), A.J. Pierzynski, Grady Sizemore, Edward Mujica

Key trades: Minor leaguer for Burke Badenhop

Similar to the winter following the 2007 championship, the Red Sox spent their time after the 2013 World Series re-signing a few players while creating opportunities for minor leaguers to play bigger roles. Even Stephen Drew, who held out until May, ultimately re-signed with the Red Sox.

The result was a complete mess. The defending champs won just 71 games and wound up conducting a mid-season fire sale which netted Heath Hembree, Eduardo Rodriguez and Joe Kelly, all of whom would end up on the most recent postseason roster.

While payroll increased, the Red Sox let Ellsbury, their most expensive free agent, sign with the rival Yankees, which might have been the best Red Sox decision of that ill-fated winter. They gave Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Brock Holt more playing time in 2014, while giving Mookie Betts, Christian Vazquez and Matt Barnes their first tastes of the majors.

If there's a post-championship Red Sox season that set the stage for what happened this year, it was clearly that disappointing 2014. But if there's a post-championship offseason that might give us a glimpse of what's to come this winter, it might be '07 to '08 — when the Red Sox had almost everyone under contract and brought back all of the key components.

“If you told me today we could bring the same club back together totally and fit in everything, we'd be thrilled with that,” Dombrowski said. “I don't think that's probably realistic because you see (the money) in free agency and what that brings, but I would think we'll have a real core of our group of players together, and we'll find out and see how many of our guys actually stay. I don't have any idea at this time. I do think all things being equal that they would like to stay here, but again, sometimes people make offers you can't refuse.”

For the first time in his long career, Dombrowski has a chance to keep a championship team together and make a run at a second straight title. He's won before, but he's never gone into spring training with a roster worthy of defending its crown.

That changes now, and Dombrowski was looking forward to it even before the champagne had dried.