

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, November 8, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Scott Boras says writers got it wrong with client J.D. Martinez

Nick Cafardo

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Agent Scott Boras was in a complimentary mood when it came to discussing the Red Sox. And a not-so-complimentary mood in discussing Baseball Writers' Association of America members who snubbed his client, Boston's J.D. Martinez, in the American League MVP vote.

In an interesting hour with Boras Wednesday at the GM meetings, Boras put his spin on all things baseball as they pertain to his high-profile clients, as well as the tanking by numerous teams, which he feels has a direct correlation to sinking attendance.

Boras echoed what this reporter wrote earlier this week, that BBWAA voters got it wrong because Martinez should have been among the three finalists for the award.

The winner will be announced next Thursday, and it's expected to be Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts. Angels outfielder Mike Trout and Indians third baseman Jose Ramirez are the other finalists.

"Can I get a list of the people accountable for casting a vote without doing the proper preparation to understand what went on with J.D.'s role?" Boras asked. "And I understand the component of — and this has nothing to do with Mookie, or the other great players who had wonderful years who are in that group. It's just that being involved with Xander Bogaerts and Jackie Bradley and knowing what they've said to me, and of course Alex Cora and the Coralytics concept — the idea of what J.D.'s role was beyond an MVP performance on the field. It was a participation of the evolution of a hitting theory, a concept, an approach that had wide-range impact on so many players on that team.

"I remember when Kirk Gibson won the MVP in 1988. His numbers were not MVP numbers, but his leadership and impact on the team was extraordinary where the writers were well aware of it and there was recognition for it. I don't know of any player at any time in my career who's had a greater impact on a team, apart from his performance, his leadership in the locker room, and the unique information he conveyed and the interaction with ownership and the coaching staff.

"I don't know of any player ever who had more of an impact on a team than what J.D. did in 2018."

I asked Boras if there is too much emphasis placed on WAR. Betts, Trout, and Ramirez all had higher WARs than Martinez, who was penalized for being a DH 62 percent of the time.

"WAR is such an overrated stat because the value of defense, particularly in the sense of outfielders, is something dramatically overvalued, and we can measure that by the compensation scale rewards for really high OPS players who do not have power, that do not drive in runs," said Boras. "So when we see that model is not reflective in the practical and actual marketplace, we know the weights attached to the defensive aspects of WAR are not certainly too great."

Boras's opening statement cited the drop in attendance mainly because numerous teams do not engage in building a winner and bringing players that would attract fans into those markets. And then the ones who do it right are hurt in attendance because they have to host teams that are not competitive.

He said that Louisiana State University, minus great stars this past season, drew more fans on average than some major league teams.

“We have teams who have responded appropriately,” said Boras. “The Indians have been able to keep their players, and signed players. They’ve won their division and won in the playoffs, but the Indians play in a division with noncompetitive teams. They’ve had a decline in attendance in their division where the mystique of the game is lost because of a noncompetitiveness and fans don’t show.”

Boras complimented the World Series champions, saying, “The Red Sox use trade, they use free agency, and they use the development of five or six of their core players to develop a championship team. Those three operative methods have to be in place to create a dynamic where fans believe that they have the ability to operate all three arms of success needed to build a winning franchise.

“It’s gotten so bad even when teams come to Minnesota only one of the Twins show up,” joked Boras. “The Red Sox have a remarkable season, become a World Series champion, do all of the things they can do make winning a priority, and not thinking about the CBA or the luxury tax but focused on a championship. Because of tanking by other teams the Red Sox attendance was less in 2018 than 2017, and it had nothing to do with performance of the team.”

Boras also talked about one of his free agent clients, Bryce Harper, and that “Harper’s bazaar” has begun.

In fact, the Nationals already have offered a 10-year, \$300 million deal, which was not accepted, though Boras refused to discuss it except to accentuate the multitude of assets Harper could bring to any team and the notion that because of his accomplishments through age 25, he’s already likely headed to the Hall of Fame.

A few thoughts on the Red Sox’ top prospects and trade chips

Alex Speier

It’s a strange, challenging time for ranking the Red Sox’ top prospects — an undertaking that, in theory, affects what they would be able to do in the trade market.

The Red Sox are two years removed from the landmark trade that sent Yoan Moncada, Michael Kopech, and Luis Alexander Basabe to the White Sox for Chris Sale. Prior to that deal, with Moncada, Kopech, Andrew Benintendi, and Rafael Devers, no other team in baseball could claim to match the inventory of top-shelf prospects that the Red Sox had.

Since the deal, and with the graduations of Benintendi and Devers to the big leagues, the top of the Red Sox system is considered one of the weakest in baseball.

That doesn’t mean the system lacks those who might one day emerge as at least above-average everyday players. It simply means that it’s difficult to forecast who has the best chance. The result is that Red Sox prospects aren’t getting named in top-100 lists, creating murky conversations about who qualifies as the team’s top prospect and constraining what the organization might be able to accomplish in the trade market this offseason.

My recent list of the top 10 prospects in the Red Sox system for Baseball America identified third baseman Bobby Dalbec, who combines impressive defense with elite power, as No. 1.

Yet in a survey of evaluators, five players – Dalbec, third baseman Michael Chavis, lefthander Jay Groome, corner infielder Triston Casas, and shortstop Antoni Flores — were mentioned as candidates for the top spot. While Dalbec and Chavis were most frequently cited as the top prospect, some evaluators questioned whether either was even a top-five prospect in the system, and some even had questions about the top 10.

That lack of consensus likely will keep the Red Sox on the sidelines for any of the biggest names on the trade market this winter.

That said, in the last couple of years, the Red Sox have started the process of refilling the pipeline. Through the draft and the international amateur market (after penalties kept them from pursuing overseas talent in 2016-17), there is a growing population of teenagers in the lower levels with a chance to become standout prospects. But they are at such an early stage of their career development that they aren't in conversations about top prospects.

A few other thoughts on the Red Sox' inventory of trade chips:

- For all of the industry criticism levied at their farm system, the Red Sox were able to get two players last summer who made huge postseason impacts in Steve Pearce (acquired for 2016 10th-rounder Santiago Espinal) and Nathan Eovaldi (landed for Jalen Beeks, a 14th-round pick in 2014).

Neither Beeks nor Espinal was heralded when drafted; both improved once in the system, a credit to the players themselves, the scouts who knew them well enough to believe in their ability and commitment, and the coaches and executives who helped them advance their skill sets.

The Red Sox have had sufficient capital in their system the last two years to make several moves involving rentals. The cost of doing business in the offseason has been higher, and the Red Sox have acted accordingly.

- While not a "prospect," given how long he's been in the big leagues, Blake Swihart is the biggest chip the Red Sox may play this winter. President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski is on record saying that it would be hard, if not impossible, to keep three catchers on the big league roster for another year.

With Christian Vazquez looking in October like the catcher who could lead the staff behind the plate while also contributing adequate offense, and Sandy Leon a trusted option behind the plate, it makes sense for the Sox to explore Swihart's value now.

- If the Red Sox do make a move, their pool of third base prospects is an area that could give them flexibility. In October, Devers reinforced the view that he is a potential star with game-changing ability. Behind him, Dalbec and Chavis have spent most of their pro careers at third base.

The team also has as many as four additional top 15-20 prospects who are slated to continue their development at third: 2018 first-rounder Triston Casas, 2018 21st-rounder Brandon Howlett, 2018 11th-rounder Nick Northcut, and 17-year-old slugger Danny Diaz.

"I have really never found any negatives to [a concentration of talent at one position]," Dombrowski said in September. "The reality is you never can have too much talent.

"The more talent you have that's legitimate talent, you can either have those players progress with you at that position, you can switch positions with them, or you can use them in trades."

Here is a look at my top 10:

NO. 1: 3B BOBBY DALBEC, 23

.257/.361/.558 WITH 32 HOMERS AND 109 RBI IN HIGH-A SALEM AND DOUBLE-A PORTLAND

Dalbec has several tools that play as above-average to elite. He's got immense power that led to 32 homers, he shows a good ability to discern balls and strikes, and while big at 6 feet 4 inches, he showed surprising range at third and a fantastic arm that permitted him to throw 98 miles per hour as a college pitcher. There's a Matt Chapman-type starter kit there.

But his strikeout rate is so high (32 percent) that some evaluators wince at the idea of Dalbec at No. 1. Still, others believe that between his walks and his ability to clear fences with ease he has the best chance of being an impact player in the Red Sox organization.

There's significant risk in his profile, as he does swing-and-miss at fastballs in the strike zone at times and with his size, he'll be vulnerable to breaking balls that dart out of the zone. If his strikeouts remain extreme, there's a chance he never gets an opportunity as a big league regular. But if he builds on the progress he made in his approach in 2018 — and notably, Dalbec showed an ability to reduce his strikeout rate considerably in specific situations such as with men in scoring position — he can become a valuable No. 5 or No. 6 hitter.

Dalbec is playing first and third base in the Arizona Fall League. In all likelihood, he needs another full year of development before a 2020 big league ETA.

NO. 2: 1B/3B MICHAEL CHAVIS, 23

.298/.381/.538 WITH 9 HOMERS AND 27 RBI IN SHORT-SEASON, DOUBLE-A, AND TRIPLE-A

Chavis started his year ignominiously, getting hit with an 80-game suspension for a positive test for a PED. (Chavis vehemently denies ever knowingly taking a banned substance.) When he returned to games over the final months of the season, he showed improvement. His at-bats were under control in his return to Double-A Portland, resulting in improved contact rates and a more consistent up-the-middle approach that allowed his power to play well.

He probably has a higher floor than Dalbec given that he's a better pure hitter with a smaller hole to cover. Moreover, Chavis made defensive strides at third base, convincing some evaluators that he can stay at the position as an everyday option, while looking to others like someone who can at least have third as one of a few positions as he moves around the field.

Still, questions remain. His solid offensive line included an incredible batting average on balls in play (.382), and his strikeout rate spiked when he got to Pawtucket at the end of the year. There's uncertainty about whether Chavis ends up being an everyday player or a platoon option. He's similar in size and strength to Pearce, with greater positional flexibility, traits that suggest a valuable big leaguer.

NO. 3: LHP DARWINZON HERNANDEZ, 21

9-5, 3.53 ERA, 11.3 K/9 AND 5.6 BB/9 IN HIGH-A SALEM AND DOUBLE-A PORTLAND

Hernandez has overwhelming stuff, the best fastball in the system — a nasty pitch that tops out at 98 — a slider that can get swings-and-misses in bunches, and a curveball that is at least a solid big-league offering. He's working to develop a changeup, but that pitch is behind the other three.

At times, Hernandez struggles to throw strikes, thus running up pitch counts in a way that raises serious questions about whether he can start in the big leagues. Even so, he's made enough control gains to give him a chance to be an impact five-inning starter with high strikeout rates, and if that doesn't pan out, he has a chance to be an elite reliever. While the Sox plan to have him work as a starter in Double-A at the start of 2019, they exposed him to work out of the bullpen in Portland at the end of 2018, and his work as a reliever in the Arizona Fall League (9 innings, 18 strikeouts, 2.00 ERA) had evaluators raving. There's a very good chance he's in the Red Sox bullpen mix by the end of 2019.

NO. 4: LHP JAY GROOME, 20

DID NOT PLAY IN 2018

In spring training, Groome showed the sort of standout stuff — a mid-90s fastball, a hammer of a curve, a changeup that disrupted timing and got ground balls while helping the fastball to play up — to offer credence to the belief that he is the best starting pitching prospect in the system. But at the end of spring, he experienced forearm soreness, and ultimately required Tommy John surgery that likely will keep him out until mid- to late-2019. He's young enough that he still has time to develop into a good big league starting

pitcher, but at the end of 2019, there's a good chance that he won't have progressed above A-ball through three full pro seasons, increasing the air of uncertainty around him.

NO. 5: 1B/3B TRISTON CASAS, 18

0-FOR-4 WITH A WALK IN THE ROOKIE LEVEL GULF COAST LEAGUE

The Red Sox were elated to have Casas on the board where they drafted, late in the first round. He shows enormous power for a high-school player, displays the size and athleticism to suggest the possibility of Gold Glove defense at first, and he's not an all-or-nothing hitter, as he showed an unusual ability to hit the ball to the opposite field. While high school first basemen are rarely viewed as top prospects who are considered for top draft picks, some scouts believe he has the upside of Braves star Freddie Freeman.

NO. 6: RHP BRYAN MATA, 19

6-3, 3.50 ERA, 7.6 K/9, AND 7.3 BB/9 IN HIGH-A SALEM

The 2018 season was a learning year for Mata, who struggled to keep his fastball in the strike zone as he transitioned from being primarily a four-seam thrower to putting a greater emphasis on the two-seamer. He has a starter's size, physicality, and mix, with a mid-90s fastball that opponents rarely drive, a good feel for a changeup that could play as above-average, and a solid curveball. He'll likely work to develop a fourth pitch at some point, but for now, he'll continue to be challenged as one of the youngest pitchers at his level (he was, in fact, the youngest pitcher in the High A Carolina League in 2018), with the chance to emerge as a solid No. 4 starter with the upside of a No. 3.

NO. 7: RHP TANNER HOUCK, 22

7-11, 4.24 ERA, 8.4 K/9, AND 4.5 BB/9 IN HIGH-A SALEM

Houck started the year enduring a profound struggle, as he tried to change from a sinker/slider pitcher as an amateur to a four-seam/curveball pitcher in pro ball, while slightly elevating his arm slot to further move from an east/west to a north/south attack. It didn't go well early, as Houck struggled to throw strikes, and when his four-seamer did land in the strike zone, it got crushed.

But in the second half, he re-emphasized his strengths, and his two-seamer got a ton of ground balls, his slider showed the ability to generate swings-and-misses, and he did a better job of locating his four-seamer above the strike zone to miss bats while posting a 2.86 ERA in his last 12 starts. The sinker/slider combination from a low arm slot make him a tough matchup for righties and give him a solid setup profile. Many evaluators believe he's a future reliever. But if he can develop his changeup, he has a chance to emerge as a starter.

NO. 8: RHP MIKE SHAWARYN, 24

9-10, 3.44 ERA, 8.0 K/9, AND 2.3 BB/9 IN DOUBLE-A PORTLAND AND TRIPLE-A PAWTUCKET

Shawaryn combines a low-90s fastball with excellent feel for his slider and a breaking ball that he turns into multiple pitches by varying its speed and break. He's not afraid to throw strikes, and he tended to show sharper stuff in the early innings of his outings, suggesting a pitcher with a chance to emerge as an interesting bullpen option. He's also intelligent enough about how to execute a game plan that he shows back-end starter potential if he can develop a changeup, an area of focus for him in Pawtucket this year. His fastball results in a lot of fly balls, an issue that could be problematic at Fenway, but he also shows dogged competitiveness and the possibility of a swing-and-miss slider that creates a good likelihood that he'll be contributing in the big leagues at some point in 2019.

NO. 9: SS ANTONI FLORES, 18

.340/.435/.528 WITH 1 HOMER AND 14 RBI IN THE DOMINICAN SUMMER LEAGUE AND ROOKIE BALL

Flores played just two games in Fort Myers before getting shut down with lower body injuries, but as an up-the-middle player who has shown a consistently strong feel for hitting with the potential for at least solid power and speed, some feel that his profile stands out among Red Sox prospects. His 2018 season was so brief (15 games) and he's so far from the big leagues that there's a lot of risk attached to the Venezuelan shortstop's future, but if he cements what he showed in a brief glimpse in 2018 with a full, healthy season in 2019, he'd vault up the list.

NO. 10: SS C.J. CHATHAM, 23

.314/.350/.389 WITH 3 HOMERS AND 52 RBI IN SINGLE-A GREENVILLE AND HIGH-A SALEM

After he lost his first full pro season almost completely to hamstring injuries, Chatham combined solid defense at shortstop with a surprisingly consistent hit tool in the batter's box in 2018. He competed until the final days of the season for the Carolina League batting title. Based on what Chatham showed in college, the Red Sox believe that he does have more power than he showed in 2018. At the least, his glove and ability to put the bat on the ball suggest a solid utility player, and Chatham has a chance to emerge as an everyday shortstop if he can build on his significant step forward in 2018.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Future is now for Dave Dombrowski

Michael Silverman

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Lost in the discussion at the GM meetings of what happens if the Red Sox lose closer Craig Kimbrel is how what happens beyond next season affects this offseason.

That's because the nucleus of this team has a one-year shelf life the Red Sox need to address sooner than later.

Four players — Chris Sale, Rick Porcello, J.D. Martinez and Xander Bogaerts — are guaranteed to be with the Red Sox for only next season before either their contracts expire (Sale, Porcello), they enter free agency (Bogaerts) or opt out of their deal (Martinez).

With Sale and Porcello in particular, the Red Sox may decide to enter the starter market now rather than wait for next year. Some of that is simply forward-thinking, while it could also reflect concern or insurance over Sale's shoulder and the two bouts of inflammation he had in 2018.

Regardless, don't think for a second the 2020 season does not affect how the Red Sox make moves from here on out.

"It factors in — how much, we'll wait and see," president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said about the pending final seasons of Sale and Porcello. "We've got a lot of decisions to make. We've got Bogey for another year, Mookie (Betts) and Jackie (Bradley Jr.) a couple of years, so we've got some big numbers. We have great ownership, wherewithal, but still everybody has some limitations, too. We have to make some tough decisions but we'll be prepared to keep a lot of our players, but I'm not sure which ones it will end up being as time goes on."

The Red Sox have already expressed a desire to re-sign Nathan Eovaldi to a deal, but they will have plenty of competition. A backup plan will be necessary, and at this stage it is too soon to tell exactly how high-end the Red Sox' list for starters will be. Free agents Patrick Corbin and Dallas Keuchel could wind up being

too rich for the Sox' tastes, which would mean they turn their attention to trades or some lesser-known, younger arms.

Dombrowski made it clear he did not wish to elaborate on the irritation Sale had or what his late-season MRI revealed.

"I'm not going to discuss that," he said. "We're comfortable with the MRI."

Martinez can opt out after next season because the Red Sox placed contingencies in his contract concerning what they felt was a pre-existing foot injury. Dombrowski said he did not anticipate restructuring the contract.

Bogaerts, like Martinez, is a client of agent Scott Boras, who usually does not have players sign extensions before they can enter free agency.

"I've heard Scott do some earlier deals — not regularly but he does do it once in a while, so we'll find out as time goes on," Dombrowski said. "He's got a lot of big guys out there at this time so he has a tendency to focus on them. But Bogey is only one year away, so that's important for us."

Red Sox notes

Boras held court and was upset Martinez did not finish in the top three of vote-getters for the AL MVP award. Betts, Mike Trout of the Angels and Jose Ramirez of the Indians are the finalists. The results will not be known until next Thursday, so there's no way of telling yet how voters assessed Martinez' season or how close he came to finishing in the top three.

"Can I get a list of the people who are accountable for casting a vote without doing the proper preparation to understand what went on with J.D.'s role?" Boras said. "This has nothing to do with Mookie or the other great players who had wonderful years that are in that group. It's just that being involved with Xander Bogaerts and Jackie Bradley and knowing what they've said to me and of course Alex Cora and the Coralytics concept, the idea of what J.D.'s role was, was beyond an MVP performance on the field.

"I remember when (Kirk) Gibson won the MVP (with the Dodgers) back in '88," Dombrowski added, "his numbers were not MVP numbers but his leadership and impact on the team was extraordinary where the writers were very well aware of it and there was recognition for it. I don't know of any player at any time in my career that's had a greater impact on a team apart from his performance with his leadership, influence in the locker room and the unique information he conveyed and his interaction with ownership and the coaching staff, I don't know any player ever that's had more of an impact on a team than what J.D. did in 2018."

Dombrowski said the Sox are "close" to naming a new manager for Triple-A Pawtucket.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox wary of extensions for stars, Rays and Mariners close on Mike Zunino trade

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- Some news and notes from a slow Day 2 at the GM Meetings in Carlsbad:

As Dave Dombrowski approaches free agency this winter, he's doing so with the Red Sox' upcoming free agents in mind. Chris Sale, Rick Porcello and Xander Bogaerts are free agents after the season and Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. will hit the open market after 2020.

"We have a lot of free-agent players coming up and we have a lot of decisions to make," Dombrowski said. "I don't think you make any of them in a vacuum. You look at different alternatives as you go along. I'm not sure where we'll stand, it depends on how things take place."

Dombrowski could look to discuss extensions with Bogaerts and Betts, two of the team's homegrown stars. He's unsure if that will happen before spring training.

"We have to make some tough decisions," he said. "We'll be prepared to keep a lot of our players but I'm not sure which ones it'll end up being as time goes on."

The Red Sox are close to naming a new Triple-A manager, though Dombrowski said he wasn't ready to announce it yet. Double-A manager Darren Fenster and Triple-A hitting coach Rich Gedman appear to be the most likely candidates to replace Kevin Boles if the Sox take an internal option.

Boston is making one change to its major-league staff, replacing physical therapist Adam Thomas with Brandon Henry (who was on the minor-league staff).

The Sox also made some promotions in their front office, with Brian O'Halloran and Eddie Romero each earning the title of Executive Vice President/Assistant General Manager, Zack Scott being named Senior Vice President/Assistant General Manager and Raquel Ferreira earning the title of Senior Vice President/Major and Minor League Operations.

Brian Abraham was promoted to Director of Minor League Operations.

An A.L. East rival made a move for the second straight day, with the Rays working to finalize a deal that would send outfielder Mallex Smith to the Mariners for catcher Mike Zunino and outfielder Guillermo Heredia.

Out west, the Giants officially hired Dodgers general manager Farhan Zaidi as their president of baseball operations.

Boston Red Sox, J.D. Martinez unlikely to negotiate long-term deal this winter

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- The Red Sox are not likely to negotiate a long-term deal with J.D. Martinez this off-season, according to president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. Martinez can opt out of his contract after next season and hit free agency.

"I don't think it will change," Dombrowski said. "Again, you're open-minded to anything, but I would say unlikely."

Martinez will earn \$23.75 million in 2019 before deciding whether or not to return to Boston. If he stays, his deal gets significantly more complicated, with his opt-outs after the 2020 and 2021 seasons potentially being converted to mutual options if Martinez suffers a recurrence of a Lisfranc foot injury that he suffered in 2017.

"There was a reason why we put those opt-outs in, and they're all medical," Dombrowski said. "The medical hasn't changed. So I don't think (we'll look at changing the deal) at this point."

Martinez will be able to decide whether or not to opt out, as long as he stays healthy. In the complicated re-working of the deal during spring training, the sides agreed that the Red Sox would be able to opt out of the deal after either 2020 or 2021 if Martinez had spent 60 days in the previous season (or 120 combined over the two previous seasons) due to the Lisfranc injury.

"The reason we put them in there was medically oriented, as we went through at the time," Dombrowski said. "There was concern, so that's why they were in there. It took a long time to get the deal done."

Martinez told reporters at the All-Star Game that he was "absolutely" open to negotiating a firmer pact with Boston that didn't include any opt-out provisions. That feeling does not appear to be shared by the Red Sox, who clearly still have at least some concern about Martinez's foot despite him playing 150 games in 2018.

Martinez will approach his second season in Boston knowing he can become a free agent after the year. If he does return, his future with the Sox will likely depend on a foot injury that gave him no trouble in Year 1.

Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen on Alex Cora, Boston Red Sox: 'I root for all those guys'

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- With his Diamondbacks falling short of the postseason this year, former Red Sox general manager Mike Hazen found himself rooting for a lot of friends in Boston throughout October.

"I root for all those guys," Hazen said Tuesday. "Players and front office."

Hazen, who served as Dave Dombrowski's main lieutenant for a year before leaving for Arizona, reached out to his former front office colleagues to congratulate them after the World Series. He wasn't sure if he was allowed to reach out to Sox players, so he held back on texting them.

Hazen's Red Sox connections run deeper than the front office, as he has a strong relationship with manager Alex Cora and spent a half-season with J.D. Martinez in Phoenix in 2017. Cora credits Hazen as a major factor in his rise to Sox manager, as Hazen advised him to get into coaching during an interview for the Diamondbacks' managerial job in 2016.

"He's an easy guy to root for," Hazen said of Cora. "He does such a good job, he's so charismatic and he's so intelligent. What he did with that team was pretty impressive."

Hazen said Cora has been exactly what expected as a manager, noting that he impressed him as a player in Cleveland and Boston and a managerial candidate in Arizona. He said that Boston's fourth World Series championship since 2004 can be traced back to three of his former bosses.

"Dave has done a fantastic job, and obviously Ben before that," Hazen said. "With some players, even all the way back to Theo. It's great watching those guys being able to celebrate another World Series. Having been able to experience a couple there, you can remember what it felt like when you did."

Craig Kimbrel free agency rumors: Phillies, Cardinals, Braves interested in former Red Sox closer

Chris Cotillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- The market for free-agent closer Craig Kimbrel is beginning to take shape.

According to Jon Morosi of MLB.com, the Phillies are showing interest in Kimbrel, with the Cardinals and Braves among his other early suitors at the GM Meetings. Philadelphia is expected to be a major player in free agency this winter, with Manny Machado and Bryce Harper among its other expected targets.

The Red Sox remain interested in Kimbrel but could be outbid by one of the National League teams with interest. All three of the clubs Morosi mentioned are known to be looking for a back-end bullpen piece, with Kimbrel being the best available option ahead of Jeurys Familia, David Robertson, Zach Britton and Andrew Miller.

It's unclear if the Phillies (or any other team) have made an offer to Kimbrel. He does already have one offer on the table-- a one-year, \$17.9 million qualifying offer from the Red Sox that he is sure to turn down.

Kimbrel, who will turn 31 next May, is expected to command a four-year deal on the open market. The Red Sox could decide that he is out of their price range and build their bullpen a different way, either by using internal options like Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier or by signing a lesser free agent.

* **RedSox.com**

Winners of Wilson defensive honors unveiled

Chad Thornburg

Major League Baseball's best defenders were honored on Wednesday with the unveiling of this year's Wilson Defensive Player of the Year Award winners during a telecast on MLB Network.

Athletics third baseman Matt Chapman was named the Wilson Defensive Player of the Year, and the D-backs earned Defensive Team of the Year status for the second time in four years.

The Angels' Andrelton Simmons led the pack with his fifth award, the most at any position since the award was established in 2012, and Colorado's DJ LeMahieu and Kansas City's Alex Gordon each won for a third time. The list also included three first-time winners: Mariners catcher Mike Zunino, Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman and Chapman.

The awards, given to the top defensive player at each position across both the National League and the American League, are determined using a formula that accounts for traditional defensive stats and advanced metrics as well as data from the scouting service Inside Edge.

Below is a look at the winner at each position:

Pitcher: Zack Greinke, D-backs (second Wilson Defensive Player of the Year Award)

Greinke has been among the game's most reliable pitchers for more than a decade, and he's consistently one of the best at fielding his position, with five consecutive Gold Glove Awards and two Defensive Player of the Year honors. Greinke leads all pitchers in Defensive Runs Saved since 2014, per Fangraphs, with 32, 10 more than second-place Julio Teheran.

Catcher: Mike Zunino, Mariners (first)

Zunino lost out to Salvador Perez for the AL Gold Glove Award, but his defensive prowess didn't go unrewarded, as he earned the Defensive Player of the Year distinction at catcher. The 27-year-old backstop slugged 20 home runs this season and added even more value for the Mariners with his glove and presence behind the plate.

First base: Freddie Freeman, Braves (first)

In his ninth year in the big leagues, Freeman had arguably his best defensive season, earning his first Defensive Player of the Year honor as well as his first Gold Glove Award. Freeman ranked second in the NL with 12 Defensive Runs Saved at first base.

Second base: DJ LeMahieu, Rockies (third)

Despite missing time with three trips to the disabled list, LeMahieu had a career-best 18 Defensive Runs Saved this season and earned his third defensive honor. LeMahieu, now a free agent, also led all NL players in SABR's Defensive Index at 19.5.

Third base: Matt Chapman, A's (first)

After a strong rookie campaign, Chapman earned a reputation as one of the game's top defenders in 2018. He not only won his first award at third base, but also was recognized as the overall winner across all

positions. Chapman ranked first in the Majors with 29 Defensive Runs Saved and routinely provided highlight reel plays in the A's infield. His Ultimate Zone Rating (10.9), total chances (484) and assists (331) led all MLB third basemen.

Shortstop: Andrelton Simmons, Angels (fifth)

No player has won more Defensive Player of the Year Awards than Simmons, who continued his defensive excellence in his third year in Anaheim and picked up his fifth award in six seasons. Simmons had 21 Defensive Runs Saved, seven more than the second-place shortstop, Francisco Lindor.

Left field: Alex Gordon, Royals (third)

Gordon took home his sixth Gold Glove Award and third Defensive Player of the Year honor this season after leading all left fielders with 18 Defensive Runs Saved. He had nine outfield assists, his most since 2013 (17), and his 91 career assists is tied with Colorado's Gerardo Parra for the most in baseball since '10.

Center field: Kevin Kiermaier, Rays (second)

Kiermaier routinely delivers highlights while patrolling the Rays' outfield, and now he's got some additional hardware to show for it with his second Defensive Player of the Year Award. Kiermaier tied for first in the Majors with a 93 percent catch percentage, three percent above his expected catch rate, per Statcast™.

Right field: Mookie Betts, Red Sox (second)

An AL Most Valuable Player finalist, Betts had a stellar 2018 campaign both at the plate and in right field. He had 20 Defensive Runs Saved and produced 11 Outs Above Average.

*** *WEEI.com***

Red Sox lukewarm on Japanese pitcher Yusei Kikuchi

Rob Bradford

Don't expect another pursuit similar to what we witnessed last offseason.

According to a major league source, the Red Sox' interest in the most highly-touted Japanese pitcher on the market this offseason, Yusei Kikuchi, is viewed as lukewarm. The 27-year-old is slated to be posted by the Seibu Lions this offseason, a process that would need to be done before Dec. 5 with a 30-day negotiating window to follow.

Under the new posting rules, the release fee paid by whatever team acquires Kikuchi is contingent on the value of his MLB contract, starting with 20 percent of the deal's first \$25 million, with another 17.5 percent for the next \$25 million. An additional 15 percent is then added to any amount over \$50 million.

The approach is a far cry from the stance taken by the Red Sox when pursuing Shohei Ohtani last offseason. It was a quest that ultimately fell short, with Ohtani landing with the Angels after not even giving the Sox a meeting.

Speaking to reporters at the GM meetings Tuesday Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski would only say his club has scouted Kikuchi, who went 14-4 with a 3.24 ERA in 23 starts with the Lions last season. For his eight-year pro career in Japan, the starter has a 2.81 ERA.

"He's a guy who has been a quality pitcher there for a while, so we watch him on a regular basis," Dombrowski told reporters in Carlsbad, Calif. "Yes, we have a pulse of him."

Kikuchi, who is represented by Scott Boras is viewed by scouts as a No. 3 or 4 starter, possessing a fastball that touches 96 mph.

Scott Boras decries J.D. Martinez MVP snub as 'negligence' on part of voters

John Tomase

J.D. Martinez is not an American League MVP finalist, and agent Scott Boras is hopping mad about it.

Talking to Casey Stern on MLB Network Radio, Boras unloaded on voters who didn't place his client in the top three.

"Every voter should be brought publicly into a forum and be taken to task for their negligence," Boras said. "There's a complete breach of understanding of the value of the player."

Martinez delivered a career year while helping lead the Red Sox to a World Series championship. He hit a career-best .330 with 43 home runs and a career-high 130 RBIs, not bad production from someone who didn't even sign as a free agent until spring training had already started.

His five-year, \$110 million contract looks like a bargain based on that production, and Martinez will get a chance to prove it at this time next year, when he can potentially exercise the first in a series of opt-outs.

Why you shouldn't discount a Drew Pomeranz return to the Red Sox

Rob Bradford

Low risk, high reward.

It's what every team is looking for when scouring through the free agent market. That's why Drew Pomeranz's existence should be of some interest to the Red Sox.

"We'll see what happens," the free agent lefty pitcher told WEEI.com "I literally have no idea what to expect, or where to expect it, here or anywhere else. I have no idea.

"I have no idea what their thought process is. I know I have a good relationship with everyone here. They believe I'm going to have a much better year next year, but I don't know how that fits in with this organization. I would love to be here. It's the best group of guys I've ever been around. I've also moved around so many times you understand it's a business and you have to make the best decision for yourself and see what opportunities are given to you."

Most would discount Pomeranz as an option to return to the Red Sox considering his struggles throughout 2018. Twenty-six appearances. Eleven starts. A 6.08 ERA. Not good.

It's why almost every projection for the 30-year-old free agent pitcher has him settling for a one-year deal this offseason. But that's exactly why the Red Sox' interest remains a possibility.

There are undoubtedly some in the organization that believes that Pomeranz turned a corner at the tail-end of 2018 season, hence the willingness to add him to the World Series roster. (And, yes, there were three different occasions he was slated to go in the game but due to home runs -- Jackie Bradley Jr. and Max Muncy in Game 3, Mitch Moreland in Game 4 -- the chance came and went.)

This is the same guy who went 17-6 with a 3.32 ERA just the year before. If there is a semblance of that pitcher available then something along the lines of one year, \$7 million is certainly worth the risk, particularly if a perceived top-of-the-rotation starter (such as Nathan Eovaldi) isn't reeled in.

Maybe Pomeranz wants a clearer path to clear-cut innings with another team if he is riding a one-year deal. But at the same time, the familiarity with pitching coaches Dana LeVangie and Brian Bannister, along with the Red Sox' faith in his abilities, makes a return something palatable for both sides.

"I felt normal. I felt back to myself," Pomeranz said regarding the finish to his season. "I kept working during the whole playoffs. They told me to stay ready so I acted like I was pitching every day. They wouldn't have put me on the roster if they didn't think I was able to help or back to myself again. I think they all saw I was feeling good, and feeling great. I'm happy about finishing up that way from a confidence standpoint because I know where to pick up next year, wherever that is."

Brian Cashman: Yankees were wise not to trade for Chris Sale

Rob Bradford

Of course, the Yankees would love to have Chris Sale. But their general manager has absolutely no regrets about not making a deal for the lefty ace two years ago when presented the opportunity.

Speaking at the general managers' meetings in Carlsbad, Calif. Brian Cashman told reporters that the asking price for Sale leading into the 2017 season was not palatable, and such a deal would have significantly slowed their current trajectory.

"Thank God I didn't do that, actually," Cashman told the New York Post, "because you'd be missing some serious components of our major league club right now that are under control. We wouldn't have gotten anywhere if I did anything like that with the White Sox back then."

Cashman revealed that the White Sox were asking for Luis Severino as well as one of the team's core position players (which, according to the Post, he wouldn't identify).

Since being acquired from the White Sox in exchange for top prospects Yoan Moncada, Michael Kopech and two other minor leaguers Sale is 29-12 with a 2.56 in 59 regular season starts, with the Red Sox going 40-19 in his starts. He will be eligible for free agency following the 2019 season.

During those same two seasons, Severino is 33-14 with a 3.18 ERA 63 starts. The Yankees' record on the mound over that time is 44-19. The righty is entering his first year of arbitration-eligibility.

"In this case, you'd be losing starting position players that you have that are young and controllable as well as a pitcher who was a Cy Young Award candidate in his own right," Cashman said according to the Post. "We just weren't in the position back then. No regrets on that. Good, sound business decisions then."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Why Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez are likely to test free agency

Evan Drellich

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Top agent Scott Boras held the Red Sox up as something of a model franchise on Wednesday. Naturally, he would: they had the highest payroll in baseball, and won a world championship.

Boras lamented the noncompetitive nature of many other clubs, and would love nothing more than for the Red Sox to keep spending.

"I told John Henry, he does not look good in soccer shorts," Boras said, referring to Henry and Co.'s stake in Liverpool. "So to [divest] him of that and devote all to the baseball wellbeing of his interests. The soccer coach was there with him."

"You have a proven commodity [with the Red Sox]. You have players that are in their mid-20s. You have a team winning when you have a whole group of players that are in their mid- and early 20s. It's really a model that's going to allow you a great amount of success if you can retain those players. I think that the baseball algorithms will demonstrate they're in for a good run if they retain those players."

But will they retain them all?

“I don’t know,” Boras said. “I was just getting champagne dust, so I have not talked to them at length about that yet.”

Doubtful. Not all of them. And a year from now, the likeliest outcome is that if Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez do sign long term deals here, they’ll have tested free agency first.

Two of the best Sox players entering potential walk years in 2019 are Boras clients. And virtually every factor suggests they’ll test the market, rather than ink new deals ahead of time.

When it comes to Martinez, Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski essentially said as much himself Wednesday at the general managers’ meetings.

There are opt-outs in Martinez’s deal, which could go as long as five years. But he can also walk away after next season. And there are also protections for the Red Sox if Martinez has a specific health situation arise.

Redoing the deal now would mean guaranteeing more of the contract, and Dombrowski made that sound like an uncomfortable proposition for the Red Sox, despite how successful Martinez has been.

“He can choose to leave, it’s his opt out,” Dombrowski said Wednesday. “But the reason we put ‘em in there were medically oriented as we went through at the time.”

“That medical hasn’t changed,” Dombrowski noted.

Martinez, who didn’t make as much money as he wanted to last winter, probably will be more than happy to go back on the market himself.

Bogaerts is a different story from a Sox’ perspective. But Both Dombrowski and Boras have matters to tackle first.

For one, Boras has a huge spotlight on him as free agent outfielder Bryce Harper’s representative. Harper reportedly turned down a contract worth \$300 million to stay with the Nationals. On a basic level, Boras will be focused on what he has to do immediately: get Harper the kind of mega-deal everyone has always expected he would receive.

“I have had Scott do some earlier deals,” Dombrowski said regarding timing. “Not regularly, but he does do it once in a while, so we’ll find out as time goes on. You know, he’s got a lot of big guys out there at this time, so he has a tendency to focus on them. But Bogey’s only one year away, so that’s important for us.”

But Dombrowski also needs to figure out his priorities, with Chris Sale also set to become a free agent next winter, Mookie Betts two years away from free agency, and also plenty of choices to make this winter with present free agents.

“We got a lot of decisions to make,” Dombrowski said. “You know you got Bogey in another year. Mookie, Jackie [Bradley Jr.] in a couple years. So you got some big contracts. And we have great ownership, wherewithal. But still, everybody has some limitations too. So we have to make some tough decisions. But we’ll be prepared to keep a lot of our players, but I’m not sure which ones it’ll end up being as time goes on.”

Even if Boras and Dombrowski were to clear their schedules and slates to discuss Bogaerts right now, there’s good reason for Bogaerts to wait.

Harper's presence in the free-agent market, along with Manny Machado's, has long been considered a possible reset, a time when the pay scale can be changed for the players' betterment. If they're both paid handsomely, the worth of subsequent free agents increases.

"I sit and listen," Boras told NBC Sports Boston on Wednesday. "And my attitude is, I always listen. And so I'm open to any thoughts they have on the subject. And then we go from there."

Another Boras client, Jose Altuve of the Astros, agreed to an extension last spring training, for five years and \$151 million in additional money. Altuve is 28 now, Bogaerts is 26.

"Well Bogaerts is [two and a half] years younger. But he's a shortstop," Boras said of Bogaerts. "So he's done a lot."

That's Boras code for: "Bogaerts is going to be really rich, and I'm going to make sure of it."

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Ranking the likelihood of seven Red Sox free agents for return

Sean McAdam

CARLSBAD, Calif. — According to Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, all seven of the Red Sox eligible free agents have signaled a willingness to re-sign with the Red Sox.

Retaining all of them, of course, wouldn't be prudent. For one thing, the cost of doing so would be prohibitive, with the Red Sox already committed to approximately \$200 million in salary obligations. For another, at least some roster turnover is a welcome thing, even for a team which won 108 games and has aspirations to become baseball's first back-to-back champion since the New York Yankees of 1998-2000.

With that in mind, here's a list of the players and their chances of returning to the Sox in 2019, ranked from most likely to least likely:

1. Steve Pearce

Pearce proved to be a perfect complementary piece for the Red Sox roster when he was obtained in June to help the team overcome its struggles against lefty pitching. He further solidified his worth with his performance in Games 4 and 5 of the World Series (three homers, one three-run double) to earn himself World Series MVP. At 36, he's unlikely to become an everyday player elsewhere, and he's signaled a willingness to return to the Sox in the same role as Mitch Moreland's platoon partner at first base and pinch-hitter deluxe. Given his age and what he'd be asked to do, Pearce won't get too much more than last year's salary (\$6.25 million) and that affordability makes him a decent chance to return.

2. Joe Kelly

In recent years, power set-up arms have cleaned up in free agency, often among the first players to sign in the offseason. It wouldn't surprise anyone if Kelly fit into this category, especially since he's represented by Seth and Sam Levinson, who have a track record of striking quickly for their clients. Kelly's career-long problem has been consistency, and in 2018, that was again the case. After getting rocked for four runs on Opening Day, Kelly then went two months (April and May) in which he allowed a total of one run. Then came two months (June and July) in which he had ERAs over 8.00, before compiling a 1.42 ERA in August and an 8.31 ERA in the final month. Maybe it's true that something finally got unlocked in the postseason, when he narrowed his pitch mix. Either way, the Sox would welcome him back...as long as the bidding doesn't get crazy.

3. Nathan Eovaldi

Eovaldi was already someone the Red Sox would have pursued even before his magical October. But his performance in the Red Sox championship run and his willingness to take the ball in any role, at any time, only further endeared him to the organization. The problem, of course, is that other teams were watching and that greatly enhanced his leverage and what he'll be able to command on the open market. A number of teams could see him as the best value out there, including his hometown Houston Astros. He'll be expensive, sure, but with the Sox in position to lose both Chris Sale and Rick Porcello after 2019, it's time to start assembling a rotation for 2020 and beyond. Eovaldi would be a nice — if pricey — place to start.

4. Craig Kimbrel.

If money weren't the issue, the Red Sox would welcome Kimbrel back tomorrow. Despite his struggles in October, he remains one of the game's most elite and dependable closers, with a proven track record few can match. But Kimbrel is hitting free agency at the right time — at 30 years old, with no signs of arm trouble. He'll be targeted by a handful of teams (the Phillies, Cardinals and Braves are all said to be interested) and someone will make him an offer he can't — or shouldn't — refuse. The Red Sox may find it more difficult then they think to replace him since closers with eight consecutive seasons of 30-plus saves aren't exactly commonplace. But for a team with other options, it's probably hard to justify a multi-year deal for \$18 million (or more) annually.

5. Drew Pomeranz

Hey, stranger things have happened. After a highly disappointing season, Pomeranz doesn't have much leverage this off-season, which could make him an affordable and experienced option for the Sox. A year ago, he was coming off a 17-win season and a 3.32 ERA; this year, he was 2-6, 6.08. Timing is, indeed, everything. But if the Red Sox are convinced that Pomeranz is over his forearm issues, they could do worse than to bring him back as a swing candidate.

6. Ian Kinsler

Kinsler helped stabilize second base when he was obtained, but was a disappointment offensively. At 36, he wants to continue playing, but with Brock Holt, Tzu-Wei Lin and Eduardo Nunez providing depth and insurance behind Dustin Pedroia, there seems little role or space for Kinsler.

7. Brandon Phillips.

Phillips won a game on Labor Day with a ninth-inning homer...and then contributed little for the rest of September. He was sent home at the end of the season, rather than invited to remain with the team or travel to Fort Myers to stay ready in the event of an injury to someone on the roster, which seemed odd and makes you wonder if something happened to make the organization sour on the veteran infielder.

GM Meetings Notebook: Dombrowski already looking ahead to future Red Sox free agents

Sean McAdam

CARLSBAD, Calif. — Even as the Red Sox grapple with how to maintain most of the roster which just won a World Series, they also have to keep an eye on future seasons.

After next year, Chris Sale, Rick Porcello and Xander Bogaerts are heading toward free agency. After 2020, the Sox could lose Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts.

All of those remain on the mind of Dave Dombrowski.

“We’ve got a lot of decisions to make,” acknowledged Dombrowski at the GM Meetings here. “We’ve got some big guys (coming up). We have great ownership, wherewithal, but still, everybody has limitations,

too. So we have to make some tough decisions, but we'll be prepared to keep a lot of our players. But I'm not sure which ones it'll end up being as time goes on."

Two of the players — Bogaerts and Bradley — are represented by Scott Boras, who typically advises against his clients signing extensions before they reach free agency.

Asked how problematic that was, Dombrowski smiled and said: "I don't know yet. We'll find out. But I have had Scott do some (of those) deals. Not regularly, but he does do it once in a while. We'll find out as time goes on. He's got a lot of big guys (free agents, including Bryce Harper) out there now, so he has a tendency to focus on that. But Bogey's only one year away, so that's important for us."

Dombrowski indicated that, when it comes to assembling a bullpen for next year, the Sox are waiting until Monday — when Craig Kimbrel has to either accept or decline the qualifying offer — before moving forward.

"We can do anything, technically, about a bullpen guy until Kimbrel gets past the date of acceptance," said Dombrowski. "I don't think he'll accept it, but we have to know for sure. I'd be more open-minded to doing something once we get to that point. I don't think there's any rush. There's a lot of bullpen people out there."

Dombrowski reiterated that he believes a "traditional closer" is still important for a contending team.

"I don't know how you describe 'traditional,' but we'd like someone to pitch the ninth inning," he said. "We do like someone to close the game, to be that designated guy."

Agent Scott Boras, in his annual state of the game address, sounded the alarm again about teams "tanking," labeling the practice "a competitive cancer" on the game. Armed with several pages of notes, Boras cited game-wide declining attendance as one of the results of the practice.

"In our game, we've got owners doing correct things who aren't getting rewards," Boras said, "we have divisions that are absolutely upside down because the mystery of the game is gone. We've had the Red Sox have a remarkable season, be a world champion, do all of the things that they can do to make their franchise successful.

"Winning was the priority in Boston; it wasn't about CBA dynamics of the luxury tax. It was about winning. They rewarded their fan base with a championship and what they're left with, because of tanking and because of non-competitive members of their (division), the Red Sox attendance in 2018 was less than it was in 2017. And it had nothing to do, obviously, with the performance of their team."

The Sox drew 2,917,678 fans in 2018 for an average attendance of 36,020; in 2017, they drew 2,895,575, for a 35.747 average.

The Sox have a vacancy with their Triple-A managerial job after Kevin Boles elected to leave the position after five seasons on the job.

Dombrowski said the organization is "close" to naming his replacement.

"We're not in a position to announce it at this time," he said, "but we're pretty sure where we're going with it."

Asked if the hire might be an internal one for the organization, Dombrowski said: "I would not say. That would kind of limit the choices, then."