

The Boston Red Sox Friday, November 9, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox special adviser Bill James draws a rebuke from Sox, players union

Peter Abraham

Bill James, a senior adviser to baseball operations for the Red Sox, came under fire from the Major League Baseball Players Association and eventually the Sox Thursday for disparaging comments he made about the worth of players.

On Wednesday, James opined via Twitter, "If the players all retired tomorrow, we would replace them, the game would go on; in three years it would make no difference whatsoever. The players are NOT the game, any more than the beer vendors are."

James, in response to agent Scott Boras's criticism of noncompetitive teams, also wrote, "Because, of course, some players getting more money than they are worth doesn't have ANYTHING to do with it."

The comments, since deleted, drew the ire of MLBPA executive director Tony Clark.

"The comments Bill James made yesterday are both reckless and insulting considering our game's history regarding the use of replacement players," Clark said. "The players ARE the game. And our fans have an opportunity to enjoy the most talented baseball players in the world every season.

"If these sentiments resonate beyond this one individual, then any challenges that lie ahead will be more difficult to overcome than initially anticipated."

Clark was referring to MLB using so-called "replacement players" during baseball's 1995 work stoppage.

About two hours later, the Red Sox issued a statement sharply condemning James: "Bill James is a consultant to the Red Sox. He is not an employee, nor does he speak for the club. His comments on Twitter were inappropriate and do not reflect the opinions of the Red Sox front office or its ownership group.

"Our championships would not have been possible without our incredibly talented players — they are the backbone of our franchise and our industry. To insinuate otherwise is absurd."

Present and former players — among them Justin Verlander, Torii Hunter, Al Leiter, and Michael Young — also criticized James, who is considered one of the founding fathers of statistical analysis in baseball.

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James, 69, has been with the Red Sox since 2002. While they may not count him as an employee, he is among the 21 executives with a photo and profile in the first 35 pages of the team's 2018 media guide.

James also was invited to the gala the club hosted before Game 1 of the World Series last month.

James softened his remarks via Twitter Thursday and said he does not consider players to be commodities.

“I do my best not to offend people,” James wrote. “Can’t say that I have much talent for it.”

This is not the first time the Red Sox have publicly admonished James for controversial opinions.

In 2012, the team issued a statement saying principal owner John Henry (who also owns the Globe) spoke to James regarding comments he made supporting former Penn State football coach Joe Paterno in the wake of the school’s sexual abuse scandal.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox distance themselves from Bill James after Twitter comments

Jason Mastrodonato

Less than 10 days after winning the World Series, the Red Sox were distancing themselves from one of their senior advisers.

Bill James, known by many as the godfather of sabermetrics for his analytical work that led to his hiring by the Red Sox in 2002, was publicly reprimanded by the team Thursday for comments made from his personal Twitter account.

In an email to the Herald, James acknowledged the repercussions of his words.

“I understand that the Red Sox are not in business to offend people, and certainly regret that I gave offense to anyone,” he wrote.

James had spent some time on Wednesday engaging with folks about the perceived value of major league players, particularly as it relates to their salaries. From a series of tweets with various users, it appeared James’ point was that, in theory, there is no such thing as an underpaid baseball player in the big leagues.

But as James delved further into the discussion, he made some comments that caught the attention of the Players Association, a few All-Star players, current and retired, and the organization he works for.

The now-deleted tweet that caused some controversy read: “If the players all retired tomorrow, we would replace them, the game would go on; in three years it would make no difference whatsoever. The players are NOT the game, any more than the beer vendors are.”

He added: “The entire GAME is the product.”

Another tweet read: “We’re all replaceable, the players as much as the beer vendors. If they’re unhappy about that, talk to God about it; I don’t make these rules.”

Naturally, the idea of players being replaceable did not rub the union in a positive way. And by Thursday morning, Tony Clark issued a statement.

“The comments Bill James made yesterday are both reckless and insulting considering our game’s history regarding the use of replacement players,” the MLBPA head said. “The Players ARE the game. And our fans have an opportunity to enjoy the most talented baseball Players in the world every season.”

Thursday afternoon, the Red Sox chimed in with their own remarks, which focused heavily on distancing themselves from a man who has his own profile on their website reading, “He works with senior management and the baseball operations department to provide research and analysis of special projects, and on-going (sic) concerns.”

The Sox' statement regarding James' Twitter comments were less friendly: "Bill James is a consultant to the Red Sox. He is not an employee, nor does he speak for the club. His comments on Twitter were inappropriate and do not reflect the opinions of the Red Sox front office or its ownership group. Our Championships (sic) would not have been possible without our incredibly talented players — they are the backbone of our franchise and our industry. To insinuate otherwise is absurd."

That the Red Sox chose not to better understand or explain James' ideas in a public forum and instead scolded him for them did not bother James.

"I'm not offended," he wrote in an email to the Herald. "None of us in the organization — or, like me, sort of attached to the organization although not exactly in the organization — none of us should give offense unnecessarily. If I did that — and obviously I must have — it isn't their fault; it's mine."

"I do think that my remarks, taken in context, could not be misunderstood in the way that they have been. But it is pathetic for a writer to say 'I've been misunderstood.' Our job is to make ourselves understood."

Former Mets pitcher Al Leiter wrote on Twitter that James' comments about players being replaceable were "disturbing." Justin Verlander wondered if the Red Sox would've won the World Series without their star players, a tweet for which Jackie Bradley Jr. thanked him.

It was quite the chain reaction of comments, and a reaction to be expected if the players felt a war brewing about their value to the game of baseball.

But James usually speaks in broad terms, sharing big picture ideas and opinions that relate to theory more so than practical action.

"What I said here yesterday, I once said to (former union head) Marvin Miller," James tweeted. "Marvin very strongly disagreed with it, but we were still friends. He understood that it was not in any way disrespectful to the players; he just thought it was factually wrong."

Perhaps the discussion would be better in a different forum. The Red Sox might prefer it. The players certainly would.

As James later tweeted, "Twitter is inherently frustrating as a place to have a serious conversation."

*** *MassLive.com***

GMs debate impact of postseason performance for free agents like Boston Red Sox' Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly

Chris Cutillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- It happens every October. Pending free agents perform well on the biggest stage in the postseason and the baseball world assumes that they'll hit a cash windfall as a result.

So does one short month really play a big role in how teams value free agents? It depends on which executive you ask.

Some top executives highly value how a player does in the postseason before hitting free agency, while others try not to be beguiled by recency bias. Entering a winter in which postseason heroes Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly and Steve Pearce are all free agents, the Red Sox are about to find out exactly how their 29 competitors value postseason success.

Boston's own president of baseball operations, Dave Dombrowski, believes it's a major factor.

"I think it factors in that the whole world sees you," Dombrowski said. "You perform at the highest level. I think it counts. How much everybody determines, I think it varies. I don't think they discount the regular season. I think it comes into play. You're front and center. That's just the way it is."

Of the eight baseball operations heads surveyed by MassLive at the GM Meetings, Diamondbacks (and former Red Sox) GM Mike Hazen was the most bullish on the topic. He emphatically denied that players making themselves money in October is overblown.

"I think it's the most recent thing that we've all seen, so it's definitely a feather in the cap of the player," Hazen said. "I think for all of us, watching them perform on that stage and feeling some surer things that they can do that definitely adds to their resumes significantly."

Rockies GM Jeff Bridich agreed, noting that he sees value in adding a postseason veteran to a team with players that have never played past the end of September. He said that postseason experience has factored into Colorado's free agent signings since he took over in 2014.

"I think that generally, in this game, such as most walks of life, the more experience you have, the better off you tend to be," Bridich said. "So having the postseason experience, living that and understanding what that's like, is a positive."

Bridich believes it's impossible to quantify that impact in dollars, a sentiment echoed by many of his peers. His belief in the importance of October performance is not one shared by all of his competitors.

"I think that's a bit of a narrative after the fact," said White Sox GM Rick Hahn. "If a guy does well (in free agency), better than people originally anticipated, it's because he added value in the postseason. If he doesn't, it's because they had the history on these guys and they're not going to be swayed by three good weeks."

Hahn referenced Carlos Beltran's 2004 postseason with the Astros (in which he hit .435 with eight homers in 12 games before signing an \$119 million deal with the Mets) as an example of people falsely thinking a team was forced to pay up for postseason heroics. In reality, Hahn said, Beltran received his deal because he was a very good player with a track record of success.

"I think it's a positive that a guy has success on the biggest stage," Hahn said. "But I don't think it's going to necessarily change your evaluation that goes beyond just a month. It goes multiple years on these guys by the time they hit free agency."

Two experienced GMs, Atlanta's Alex Anthopoulos and the Yankees' Brian Cashman, were unsure which side of the fence they each fell on. Cashman said he believed in the simple principle that better performance would lead to more opportunities to cash in. Anthopoulos said he believes that the sample size is too small, and that narratives about certain players (like David Price, who he had with the Blue Jays in 2015) evolve and change over time.

"I'd like to think that it's one-seventh of the year, if you're playing the full month," Anthopoulos said. "Maybe you weight it the same as the other six months. The competition is better. People are (advance scouting) you more. I'd like to say that's the amount that you actually weigh it. You certainly know that the six months during the season were very important, too. And you look at the players' careers."

Of all the teams who have added players with postseason pedigree in recent years, the Cubs stand out. As their contention window opened, players like Jon Lester, John Lackey, David Ross and Ben Zobrist signed as free agents.

While October success was one factor considered by president of baseball operations Theo Epstein and his staff, it was just one piece of a very large puzzle.

"It's a case-by-case basis," Epstein said. "You're dealing with a small sample, no matter what. Usually, the evaluation falls back on the biggest possible sample. It's relevant, and they're big games, and there's a recency bias. I think it's a factor. Every team probably weighs it a little differently."

Epstein's assistant, Jed Hoyer, agreed. And in doing so, he asked a question that decision-makers for all 30 teams likely ask themselves every fall.

"I don't think there's any real answers, but you have you ask yourself that question," Hoyer said. "Did this guy have a great October or is this guy making real adjustments?"

Boston Red Sox 2018 Report Cards: David Price, Nathan Eovaldi, Steve Pearce earn 'A' grades after postseason dominance

Christopher Smith

The 2018 Red Sox won a franchise record 108 regular season games and then went 11-3 during the postseason on their way to their fourth World Series title since 2004.

That means a lot of 'A' and 'A-' report card grades were handed out this year.

Below are the final grades for Red Sox players as well as president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and manager Alex Cora.

David Price, SP
Grade: A

David Price received a 'C' on his MassLive.com midseason report card. But his grade has been bumped up to an 'A' after a terrific second half and dominant postseason.

The \$217 million lefty, who announced he has opted into the remaining four years of his seven-year contract, went 6-1 with a 2.25 ERA, 0.97 WHIP, 68 strikeouts and 16 walks in 11 starts (68 innings) during the second half.

He posted a 3-0 record with a 2.59 ERA, 1.03 WHIP, 23 strikeouts and 10 walks in five outings (four starts) during the ALCS and World Series after a loss in Game 2 of the ALDS. He recorded wins in the ALCS clincher and World Series clincher.

Chris Sale, SP
Grade: A-

Durability remained an issue for the ace. That and his average postseason lowered his midseason 'A' grade to an A-. He pitched only 29 innings during the second half.

His season stats were incredible. He recorded a 2.11 ERA, 1.98 FIP and 0.86 WHIP in 27 starts. The averaged 13.5 strikeouts per nine innings compared to 1.9 walks. The opposition slashed only .181/.243/.288/.532 vs. him.

But he pitched 4.2 innings or fewer in six of his seven starts, including postseason starts, after returning from the DL. His 5.1 innings against the Yankees in Game 1 of the ALDS marked his longest start after returning from the DL on Sept. 11.

Nathan Eovaldi SP/RP
Grade: A

How can Nathan Eovaldi not receive an 'A' after his remarkable postseason?

The fireballer went 2-1 with a 1.61 ERA, 0.81 WHIP, 16 strikeouts and three walks in six outings, two starts (22.1 innings). His only loss came in Game 3 of the World Series, an 18-inning marathon when he tossed 6 innings of relief in the middle of the night.

Eovaldi also posted an impressive 3.33 ERA, 2.88 FIP and 1.28 WHIP in 12 regular season outings (11 starts) after Boston acquired him from the Rays on July 25.

Drew Pomeranz, SP/RP
Grade: F

Pomeranz finished with a 6.08 ERA, 5.43 FIP and 1.77 WHIP in 26 outings (11 starts). The opposition batted .297 with an .894 OPS against him. Not ideal heading into free agency.

Alex Cora and Dave Dombrowski left him off the ALDS and ALCS rosters. He surprisingly made the World Series roster but Cora never used him, even in Game 3 which took 18 innings (7 hours, 20 minutes).

Rick Porcello, SP
Grade: B

Porcello finished 17-7 with a 4.28 ERA, 4.01 FIP, 1.18 WHIP, 190 strikeouts and 48 walks in 33 starts during the regular season. He posted a 3.52 ERA (15.1 innings, six earned runs) in five postseason outings (three starts) and won the clinching game in the ALDS vs. the Yankees with one run over 5 innings at Yankee Stadium.

Known for his durability, he led Boston with 191.1 innings during the regular season.

Home runs were an issue, especially at Fenway Park. The righty allowed 17 homers in 88.2 innings at Fenway compared to 10 home runs in 102.2 innings on the road during the regular season.

Eduardo Rodriguez, SP
Grade: C+

The lefty went 13-5 with a 3.82 ERA, 3.65 FIP, 1.26 WHIP, 146 strikeouts and 45 walks in 27 outings (23 starts). He averaged double digits in strikeouts (10.1 per nine innings) for the first time in his career.

The concern: He might have the most talent of any Red Sox starter but it took an 18-inning World Series game for Rodriguez finally to make his first ever postseason start after three straight years with Boston in the playoffs.

Nathan Eovaldi was scheduled to start Game 4. But he tossed 6 innings of relief in Game 3. So Alex Cora started Rodriguez in Game 4.

Rodriguez pitched his way out of the postseason rotation in September for a third straight year. He returned strong from his ankle injury Sept. 1 at Chicago, striking out 12 and allowing just one run in 5.2 innings. But he then allowed 11 runs in 13 innings in his next three starts. The Red Sox sent him to the bullpen.

He pitched well in Game 4 of the World Series, holding the Dodgers scoreless into the sixth when Yasiel Puig belted a three-run homer against him. Cora admitted he kept Rodriguez in the game too long.

Craig Kimbrel, RP
Grade: B-

Kimbrel converted 42-of-47 save opportunities during the regular season. He finished with a 2.74 ERA, 3.13 FIP and 0.99 WHIP in 63 outings (62.1 innings).

But he averaged 4.5 walks per nine innings, an increase from 1.8 walks per nine innings in 2017. He also recorded a 4.57 ERA during the second half and struggled throughout the postseason with a 5.91 ERA (10.2 innings, seven earned runs).

The righty posted a 5.01 ERA (32.1 innings, 18 earned runs) and 1.33 WHIP in 31 outings during the second half and postseason combined.

Joe Kelly, RP
Grade: B

Joe Kelly's 6.13 ERA in his final 48 outings of the regular season (beginning June 1) didn't inspire confidence heading into the postseason. He had ERAs over 8.00 in June, July and September.

But he proved his doubters wrong with a dominant postseason. He allowed just one earned run in 11.1 innings (0.79 ERA) over nine outings. He struck out 13 and didn't walk anybody.

Ryan Brasier, RP
Grade: A

Brasier, who pitched in Japan during 2017 and hadn't appeared in a major league game since 2013, posted a 1.60 ERA, 2.83 FIP and 0.77 WHIP in 34 outings (33.2 innings) during the regular season.

He allowed just one earned run in 8.2 postseason innings.

Dave Dombrowski named Brasier and Matt Barnes as the leading internal candidates to take over as closer if Craig Kimbrel leaves via free agency.

Steven Wright, RP
Grade: B+

The knuckleballer was effective when healthy. But durability continued to be an issue for him in 2018.

He posted a 2.68 ERA and 1.25 WHIP in 20 outings, four starts (53.2 innings). He recorded a 1.52 ERA in 16 outings (29.2 innings) as a reliever.

The Red Sox removed him from the ALDS roster after Game 1 because of an injured left knee.

He'll undergo arthroscopic surgery on his left knee this offseason. Wright underwent a left knee cartilage restoration procedure in May 2017. It's the same surgery Dustin Pedroia underwent last October.

Matt Barnes, RP
Grade: B+

Barnes struggled during the second half with a 6.41 ERA (19.2 innings, 14 earned runs) after he recorded a 2.36 ERA (42 innings, 11 earned runs) during the first half.

But he allowed just one run in 8.2 innings during the postseason.

He finished with a 3.65 ERA, 2.71 FIP and 1.26 WHIP in 62 outings (61.2 innings) during the regular season.

Boston Red Sox' J.D. Martinez is first player ever to win two Silver Sluggers in same year; Mookie Betts also wins

Chris Cotto

The Red Sox took home three Silver Slugger awards Thursday, with Mookie Betts winning one and J.D. Martinez becoming the first player ever to win two of them in the same year.

Betts and Martinez both won as outfielders, with Martinez also winning the designated hitter category. No player had ever won two Silver Sluggers in the same season in the award's 39-year history.

The award marked the second of Betts' career, as he also won in 2016. Martinez's pair gave him three for his career, as he also won back in 2015.

Martinez was also named the A.L. Hank Aaron Award winner as the best hitter in the league last month. Betts won his third career Gold Glove last week and is a finalist (and likely favorite) for A.L. MVP, which is announced next Thursday.

The Red Sox tied the Rockies for most honorees with three, marking the fourth time in team history the team has taken home three Silver Sluggers in a single season (2005, 2011, 2016). Boston has been represented on the Silver Slugger team in 15 of the last 18 seasons.

Boston Red Sox call Bill James' tweets on value of players 'inappropriate' and 'absurd' in statement

Chris Cutillo

CARLSBAD, Calif. -- The Red Sox issued a statement Thursday in response to controversial remarks made by team consultant Bill James regarding the value of players in Major League Baseball.

"Bill James is a consultant to the Red Sox," the team said. "He is not an employee, nor does he speak for the club. His comments on Twitter were inappropriate and do not reflect the opinions of the Red Sox front office or its ownership group. Our Championships would not have been possible without our incredible talented players - they are the backbone of our franchise and our industry. To insinuate otherwise is absurd."

James argued with various people on Twitter on Wednesday, largely stating his case against agent Scott Boras, who argued against teams tanking at the GM meetings in Carlsbad. In a since-deleted tweet that has caused the most controversy, James downplayed the value of major-league players.

"If the players all retired tomorrow, we would replace them, the game would go on; in three years it would make no difference whatsoever," he said. "The players are NOT the game, any more than the beer vendors are."

James, who is widely thought of as the godfather of sabermetrics, drew ire from many current and former players on Twitter, including Justin Verlander, Torii Hunter and Al Leiter.

*** *RedSox.com***

J.D. first to win 2 Silver Sluggers in same year

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- J.D. Martinez had such an impressive offensive season that he pulled off an unprecedented feat on Thursday, becoming the first player to win American League Silver Slugger Awards at two positions in the same season.

The right-handed-hitting masher, who helped the Red Sox win the World Series, received Silver Slugger Awards at designated hitter and outfielder.

The announcement came just three days after many were stunned when Martinez was not selected as one of the top three finalists for the AL Most Valuable Player Award, which will be announced next Thursday.

Each year, Louisville Slugger recognizes the best offensive player at each position (including three outfielders) in both leagues with Silver Slugger Awards. The winner is determined by managers and coaches throughout MLB, and voters aren't eligible to select players on their own team.

In the previous 38 seasons in which the Silver Slugger Award has existed, no player had ever been victorious at two positions.

How did Martinez do it?

For starters, Martinez was a force all season, slashing .330/.402/.629 with 37 doubles and 43 homers, while posting Major League highs with 130 RBIs and 358 total bases.

And Martinez's playing time was split just enough between DH and the outfield for him to rack up enough votes at both positions.

Martinez started 93 games at DH and had 350 at-bats. He had 57 starts in the outfield (32 in left and 25 in right) while accumulating 219 at-bats.

Winning at both positions was made possible by the way Martinez seemed to rake whenever he got to play defense. In those 57 outfield starts, Martinez slashed .384/.450/.680 with 16 homers and 51 RBIs. As a DH, his line was .297/.373/.597 with 27 homers and 79 RBIs.

It is rare for a player to even get votes at multiple positions. It happened in 2017 for Nelson Cruz (OF and DH) when he won at DH. Edwin Encarnacion received votes in '15, '16 and '17 at first base and DH, but he didn't win at either position in those three years.

Martinez wasn't the only Silver Slugger Award winner for the World Series-champion Red Sox. Superstar outfielder Mookie Betts won the award for the second time in his career. Betts is one of the finalists for the AL MVP Award.

The 26-year-old Betts was a force in every aspect of the game, winning the batting title with a .346 average while belting 32 homers and stealing 30 bases.

Betts honored with overall Heart & Hustle Award

Bill Ladson

NEW YORK -- The awards keep coming for Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts. A few hours after winning an American League Silver Slugger Award, Betts was named the overall Heart & Hustle Award winner Thursday night at the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association's 19th annual Legends for Youth Dinner at Capitale in Manhattan. The last member of the Red Sox to win the award was Dustin Pedroia, in 2013.

The award was created in 2005 as a way to honor active players who "demonstrate a passion for the game of baseball and best embody the values, spirit and tradition of the game."

It was quite a year for Betts, who is an AL MVP candidate and Gold Glove Award winner. Besides guiding the Red Sox to their fourth World Series championship in 15 years, Betts led the Majors in runs scored (129), batting average (.346) and slugging percentage (.640).

Off the field, Betts was active in the community, and he brought hot meals to the homeless outside the Boston Library after the Red Sox defeated the Dodgers, 4-2, in Game 2 of the World Series.

Betts did not attend the dinner because of the birth of his daughter, but he left a video message, thanking the MLBPA for the award.

"It means a lot to me, to my family. We take those things seriously. Thank you for noticing," Betts said. "I did want to say, thank you to the alumni association, the Red Sox, my teammates."

Outfielder Brandon Nimmo, who was the Heart & Hustle recipient for the Mets, said Betts deserved the overall award.

"We all believe Mookie plays the game the right way. What an award to win, to add to his accolades," Nimmo said. "He will probably end up winning the AL MVP. Not only does he play the game extremely well, he plays it extremely hard. He plays it with a passion and joy that we really enjoy. He is definitely the winner. We are happy for him."

Betts wasn't the only award winner at the MLBPA dinner. Indians manager Terry Francona received the Brooks Robinson Community Service Award for his accomplishments on and off the field.

On the field, he won two World Series titles as the Red Sox manager, in 2004 and '07. He also led the Indians to the AL pennant in 2016. Off the field, Francona raised money for cancer research and created a pasta sauce to help fund inner-city participation in sports and education.

"I'm honored just to be here, to be a part of the night," Francona said. "Any time we do something for other people, regardless of what area it is, we're OK. To be honored tonight, especially [to receive] something with Brooks' name attached to it, is extremely meaningful."

Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Gibson was given the Lifetime Achievement Award.

"When you are playing the game, you don't think about awards you receive after you get through," Gibson said. "But when somebody decides you are worthy [of the Lifetime Achievement Award], it's just wonderful."

And what a career he had. All of his 17 seasons were spent with the Cardinals, from 1959 to '75. During that period, Gibson won two Cy Young Awards and guided the Cardinals to three National League pennants and two World Series titles.

His best year was in 1968, and what a season to remember. He had an incredible 1.12 ERA, 28 complete games and 13 shutouts. Believe it or not, what Gibson accomplished in '68 is not what fills him with the most pride.

"The fact that I played Major League baseball for 17 years," Gibson said. "I gave it everything I had. Sometimes, I stunk a little bit. Every time I went out there, I tried to be the best that I could be and I'm proud of that."

Off the field, Gibson gave back. He hosted an annual golf classic in Omaha, Neb., for 12 years, raising millions of dollars for local and national charities, including the Boys and Girls Clubs of Omaha and the Baseball Assistance Team.

Sox's window to repeat as champs wide open

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- If you're the Red Sox, how do you follow up a season unlike any other in team history?

It's simple. You have another historic season.

The opportunity is an enticing one for these two reasons: No MLB team has repeated as World Series champions since the Yankees won their third straight Fall Classic in 2000. And no Red Sox team has gone back to back since 1915 and '16.

Though president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski has some key decisions to make in the coming weeks regarding some free agents -- Craig Kimbrel, Joe Kelly, Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce -- who were important to the 2018 team, the roster figures to be a loaded one no matter how the offseason shakes out.

"We're set up for next year," owner John Henry said the night his team won it all at Dodger Stadium. "Could we be better set up for next year?"

Adding to the motivation for next year is that the 2019 roster has three core players -- Chris Sale, Xander Bogaerts and Rick Porcello -- who are in the final seasons of their contract. J.D. Martinez also has an opt-out at the end of '19.

American League Most Valuable Player Award finalist and Gold Glove Award winner Mookie Betts and Gold Glove Award winner Jackie Bradley Jr. are free agents after 2020.

In other words, the window for the Red Sox to maximize their talent is wide open. And that quest will be real as soon as Spring Training starts.

"I do feel that we have a good team, very athletic, very versatile. Wherever the offseason takes us, we're going to be fine, we're going to be good," said manager Alex Cora, who is among the finalists for the AL Manager of the Year Award.

With the energetic Cora steering the ship, the Red Sox could avoid the dreaded hangover effect that has hindered past champions.

"They talk about the hangover effect next year, and I don't know if this group is going to feel it," said Cora. "I can't wait for the offseason to be over with, to get there in February and start preaching what we're going to do next year. We have a great core of players, young and hungry. The way they talk after each series, even the World Series, obviously the goal is to repeat."

Not only do the Red Sox have most of their key cogs coming back, but it's a core that is still very much in its prime. Betts is 26. So is Bogaerts. Bradley is 28. Andrew Benintendi (24) and Rafael Devers (22) are still babies.

Martinez is 31 with plenty of greatness still left in him. Entering his free-agent year, the 29-year-old Sale will be plenty motivated to have a monster season. David Price evolved wonderfully in 2018, mixing in his offspeed pitches, and he should be positioned nicely to have a strong age 33 season in '19. And in case you hadn't heard, Price also flipped the narrative that he can't win in the postseason.

Porcello, the man with the rubber arm, will be 30 when next season starts. Eduardo Rodriguez, who was strong when the Sox needed him to be in Game 4 of the World Series, will turn 26 in April.

Key role players Brock Holt and Eduardo Nunez will also be back to provide depth to the lineup, and relievers Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier will be impact righties in the bullpen.

Cora's biggest challenge will be for his pitchers not to be affected by all they went through this past October.

"I was joking with Chris, and I said, 'Your first Spring Training start might be March 20.' And the season starts March 27," said Cora. "So, we'll talk about it. [Trainer] Brad [Pearson] knows we have to really take care of these guys, not only because of the month [of October], but the way we did it. We were very aggressive with them. That's an ongoing project already."

"We'll take care of them. We have to do it. I mean, you saw Houston. Houston played all the way to the end [last year], Nov. 1, and they came out of the gates hot, throwing the ball well. So we'll take a look at what other teams have done the past few years, and we'll map out our own plan."

* **WEEI.com**

Why the Red Sox are targeting Nathan Eovaldi

Rob Bradford

Think back to when the Red Sox acquired Nathan Eovaldi.

He was a pitcher who was somewhat familiar in these parts because he had been a Yankee, along with the fact he had spent the first chunk of 2018 with American League East foe Tampa Bay. Eovaldi had two Tommy John surgeries. Eovaldi threw hard. Eovaldi had a decent first few months leading into the non-waiver trade deadline. That was it.

Now we sit here still nodding in admiration for what the righty did throughout the postseason, most notably for those final six innings of that 18-inning, Game 3 in the World Series. Eovaldi as defined himself, not only in the history books but in terms of what might be a solution for this Red Sox' pitching staff going forward.

Who knew? Not even the Red Sox.

"The beauty of today's game is that there is so much untapped potential in players of all shapes and sizes," Red Sox assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister told WEEI.com. "I always loved watching Nate pitch and I felt like there was another level like I do with all the pitchers we acquire. What I didn't know was how amazing a guy he was. His character. His makeup. He's a family guy. He made some amazing adjustments. He brought to the table his tremendous arm strength. His durability was insane these last couple of months.

"That acquisition happened at a time when Eddie (Rodriguez) got hurt and we were talking about making the team better. We felt like he was the guy who was not only going to be a dominant starter and bridge that gap with Eddie going down but also be a weapon in the postseason in a variety of roles. I think he performed beyond our wildest dreams. That's just a testament to him, who he is and how hard he works."

Eovaldi isn't likely going to make as much money as Patrick Corbin or Dallas Keuchel in this year's free agent market in large part because of past performance. Despite the fact the 28-year-old righty is younger than either of the aforementioned starters, with less wear and tear, there isn't the track record that often times serves as acquiring clubs' security blanket.

But a sure-fire tell in terms of how the Red Sox view the free agent landscape is where they would put Eovaldi on their power rankings. By all accounts, in large part because of what they uncovered over the season's final three months, Dave Dombrowski and Co. would prioritize the guy with career 44-53 record and 4.16 ERA.

For the Red Sox, this is about what Eovaldi is becoming not what he has been. And while that can be dangerous when allocating free agent dollars, this seems like it might be a unique case.

"His bullpens are a work of art," Bannister said. "He knows exactly where he lands on the mound every time. He works with unbelievable precision. He doesn't walk people for as hard as he throws, which is an insane combination. He made his curveball better, changing his grip and adding more spin and movement. He kept working on his splitter. He's got that mid-90's cutter. He started elevating his fastball more. He just brought everything to the table. To have a reliever in the postseason throwing 100-plus with five well-

above-average pitches is the ultimate weapon. It was just a privilege to be a coach for him, but to watch him work every day."

And it doesn't hurt that there was that one defining moment at Dodger Stadium.

"Everybody talks about your record in one-run games, but it's totally true that bad teams win by one and good teams win by four. I took everything to beat that guy," the assistant pitching coach added. "He was just out there. He might have thrown another five or seven innings. That's what it took to beat that guy."

"That guy put it all on the line for his team. He didn't have to but he did. What he did a year off of his second Tommy John surgery was incredible. Words can't describe how much respect I have for Nate Eovaldi and what he did for this franchise. I'm going to be his biggest cheerleader going forward."

Bryce Harper contract talk leads to Mookie Betts reminder

Rob Bradford

Life is good for Mookie Betts, and it only figures to get better.

Just a few days removed from his 26th birthday the Red Sox outfielder won a World Series and welcomed his first child into the world. And in one week he will likely be named American League MVP.

Then comes the really interesting stuff.

Within the next month or so Bryce Harper is likely to be signing his free-agent contract. That would be the same player and deal Betts discussed at this past season's All-Star Game.

"I'm really curious to see how it's going to play out," Betts said back in July. "We'll see what kind of records he breaks. We all know what kind of player he is. I think that may affect some things going forward." The outfielder added, "Things kind of come full circle now. My peers are going through what is soon to come. I'll definitely be locked in to see what they get."

Harper, who is nine days younger than Betts, has been the talk of the very young offseason thus far. His agent, Scott Boras, has already termed the free agency as "Harper's Bizarre" while calling the outfielder "generational" and "iconic." And that's just the start.

It has been reported that the Nationals already offered Harper a deal worth around \$300 million, which was turned down and then taken off the table. But at least we have somewhat of a starting point, with an inkling of where things will ultimately land. The current highest paid player? The Yankees' Giancarlo Stanton who is existing under a 13-year, \$325 million deal. With both Harper and Manny Machado on the market this year, the educated guess is Stanton will drop to No. 3 by the time next season rolls around.

That brings us to Betts.

If the Red Sox outfielder keeps doing what he's doing there is little question his figure will blow by these two guys we're zeroing in on this time around. Heck, if Betts was to become a free agent right now he probably would be king of the financial hill. As good as Harper and Machado are, who is a more overall impactful player than Betts? Maybe Mike Trout, whose six-year, \$140 million extension runs out the same year Betts becomes a free agent after the 2020 season.

It should be realized that as good as Harper is, his last Betts-like season came in 2015 when he totaled a .330 batting average and 1.109 OPS to go along with 42 homers. Since then? A 2016 campaign that finished with a modest .814 OPS. An injury-plagued 2017 season that resulted in 111 games played. And this past year where the "generational" player hit just .249 with an .889 OPS.

The Red Sox knew this reality would springboarded with the likes of Harper and Machado. It will be no surprise, which is why they have unsuccessfully attempted to ink Betts to some sort of extension prior to the leadoff hitter winning his record-setting \$10.5 million arbitration case last offseason. (He refused to talk contract during the season.)

But even with the previous expectations, there is something about seeing the Harper conversation officially kicking off that should truly start bringing Betts' future into focus.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Don't expect a lot of offseason activity from Red Sox

Sean McAdam

CARLSBAD, Calif. — A little more than a week into the start of baseball's offseason, it's becoming increasingly clear that this figures to be a relatively quiet winter for the Red Sox.

At the GM Meetings here, which wrapped up Thursday morning, Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski spent far more time listening than he did speaking — and that was only partially because he battled a severe case of laryngitis during the week.

Dombrowski, of course, is open to hearing what his colleagues have to say. You never know when something will be proposed to improve your team — now, or in the future.

But for the most part, Dombrowski is intent on keeping together the roster which won a franchise-record 108 games before steamrolling (11-3) three of the best teams in the game during the postseason.

It's a strategy that he put to good use a year ago.

Following a second straight first-round exit in 2017, Dombrowski, somewhat curiously, chose to make only two significant changes. But they were, with the benefit of hindsight, huge in impact. First, he dismissed John Farrell and weeks later replaced him with Alex Cora. Then, after a winter-long dance with agent Scott Boras, Dombrowski landed free agent slugger J.D. Martinez.

The former transformed the team's attitude and culture, while the latter turned an underperforming lineup into an offensive juggernaut, with his presence, his run production and his willingness to help other hitters off the field.

It's doubtful that Dombrowski will make a move this offseason to match the impact of those two. Then again, he doesn't have to. As baseball's defending champions, the onus is on other teams to match the Red Sox.

Which isn't to suggest that the Red Sox are perfect as presently constituted. They risk losing their closer, a second key late-inning bullpen piece and, arguably, the most valuable pitcher from their recent triumphant postseason run.

But Dombrowski has options to replenish his roster.

If, as expected, Craig Kimbrel signs elsewhere with a team willing to give him a long-term deal at the top of the marketplace, the Sox have a number of ways to proceed. They can choose from a handful of established relievers in free agency (Andrew Miller, Zach Britton, Jeurys Familia). Or, they could turn inward and give the role to either Matt Barnes or Ryan Brasier.

Should Joe Kelly yearn to pitch closer to his West Coast home, the Sox would be similarly positioned to find alternatives to help re-stock the spot vacated by his leaving.

Nathan Eovaldi, who is already finding himself in high demand, would be the toughest free agent to piece to replace, since there are few free agents who can match his combination of pure stuff and flexibility — to say nothing of the shocking durability Eovaldi demonstrated in October.

But beyond those three items on the shopping list, Dombrowski has remarkably few needs. Every regular position player is under control to return for 2019, and the same is true for a number of reserve players to provide depth.

This sort of constancy is rare in the game. Consider that, in the mere five years between the last Red Sox championship and the most recent title, just two players — Xander Bogaerts and Brandon Workman — were common threads to both postseason rosters.

Now, however, the Red Sox are situated to have essentially the same lineup for the third year running — with Martinez the lone impact addition.

After 2019, it starts getting far more complicated, with half of the rotation (Chris Sale and Rick Porcello) along with Bogaerts on the brink of free agency. The year after, MVP-to-be Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. can walk.

(In fact, Dombrowski's time may be best utilized over the new few months in getting a head start on determining which of his upcoming free agents he should keep and then working toward getting extensions done.)

But for now, there's a stability in place and little in the way of pressing needs. Dombrowski's to-do list will certainly get longer in the coming weeks as the offseason pace intensifies and decisions have to be made.

In the immediate afterglow of the World Series, however, the Red Sox can maintain their perch with only a few tweaks to the pitching staff — and watch the rest of the league scramble to match them.