

# ***The Boston Red Sox***

## ***Wednesday, November 14, 2018***

### **\* *The Boston Globe***

**Here are 10 options for the Red Sox as possible closers in 2019**

Alex Speier

It's official: The Red Sox are looking for a closer.

As expected, Craig Kimbrel declined the team's one-year, \$17.9 million qualifying offer and will test the market.

That doesn't preclude a return to Boston, but the Red Sox now must decide who should anchor their bullpen, as president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski already has stated that he wants to have a clearly identified pitcher for that role.

The pursuit is not as simple as finding the best pitcher on the free agent market. Cost (years and dollars) is obviously a consideration. But so is the Red Sox' longer-term payroll structure — they are trying to keep chunks of money available for long-term deals with core players — as is their belief that they have internal options in both the short term (Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier) and the longer term (Durbin Feltman and perhaps Darwinzon Hernandez).

The Red Sox also could pursue options via trade — though the cost for closers tends to be high in the offseason, and relatively modest for rentals at the trade deadline — or look to find a starter who could slot into the back end of the bullpen.

There are no fewer than 10 players on the market with the sort of late-innings experience to merit consideration by the Red Sox:

■ **Craig Kimbrel, 30, RHP**

2018 (Red Sox): 2.74 ERA, 13.9 K/9, 4.5 BB/9, 1.0 HR/9, 42 saves

Kimbrel has one of the greatest relief résumés in major league history, yet it's fair to question whether that track record is predictive of who he will be going forward.

Since his trade from Atlanta to San Diego just prior to the 2015 season, he has been very good rather than otherworldly in three of four seasons. And in 2018, he saw his strikeout rate drop significantly, his walk rate spike, and his fly ball and home run rates likewise soar.

It shouldn't be overlooked that Kimbrel's ability to prepare for last season was affected tremendously by the medical ordeal of his newborn daughter, and that with a normal winter schedule, he could rebound.

Still, 2018 suggested that Kimbrel could be vulnerable to fly balls and homers as his velocity ticks down. He may be better-suited to a bigger park when he's not striking out half the batters he faces.

■ **Andrew Miller, 33, LHP**

2018 (Indians): 4.24 ERA, 11.9 K/9, 4.2 BB/9, 0.8 HR/9, 2 saves

Miller was as dominant as any reliever in the game from 2014-17, posting a 1.72 ERA with 14.5 strikeouts and 2.3 walks per nine innings while accelerating the evolution of the modern bullpen with his willingness to work at any stage of the game.

But in 2018, as he continued to navigate injuries with his right knee, his fastball velocity dropped (93.8 m.p.h., his lowest since he was in the Red Sox rotation in 2011) and the ability to pour strikes that characterized his rise took a steep hit.

There will be plenty of interest in Miller, given that he's not far removed from years of dominance, and he has the added benefit of demonstrated success in Boston. But if his knee is a long-term issue, he is no longer the force he was in past years.

■ Adam Ottavino, 32, RHP

2018 (Rockies): 2.43 ERA, 13.0 K/9, 4.2 BB/9, 0.6 HR/9, 6 saves

Ottavino represents a fascinating test for what the market values. He has limited experience as a closer, never recording more than seven saves in a season. Yet among this year's class of free agent relievers, no one had a more dominant 2018 season.

The Northeastern alum added a nasty cutter to his fastball/slider combination, which helped his entire arsenal to play up, resulting in more chases outside the strike zone and less contact on pitches in the strike zone.

Yet Ottavino has struggled with health issues and inconsistency over his career. Still, the ability to strike out batters and keep them from barreling the ball in the air will make him coveted this winter.

■ Jeurys Familia, 29, RHP

2018 (Mets, Athletics): 3.13 ERA, 10.4 K/9, 3.5 BB/9, 0.4 HR/9, 18 saves

The Red Sox saw Familia as a great fit in July, a pitcher who throws strikes, gets swings and misses, and keeps the ball on the ground. He's been a workhorse in three of the last four years, reaching 70 innings and appearances in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2018.

That said, there's evidence to suggest that he might be well-served to be managed a bit more carefully, as he had an 8.03 ERA when pitching on the second of back-to-back days in 2018, up from a 2.11 mark when getting at least one day of rest.

Still, if a team is looking for a less expensive (yet still expensive) alternative to Kimbrel who is in his prime and has a strong history of work in the ninth inning, Familia could be the guy.

■ Joakim Soria, 34, RHP

2018 (White Sox, Brewers): 3.12 ERA, 11.1 K/9, 2.4 BB/9, 0.6 HR/9, 16 saves

Soria had a terrific year for the White Sox, but after the Brewers acquired him prior to the trade deadline, he became a lower-leverage complementary piece. His relatively low ground-ball rate suggests that, in the wrong parks, he could be more vulnerable to homers than he showed in 2018.

Given his age, he's unlikely to get more than two years, so a team searching for an established closer on a shorter-term deal could consider him intriguing.

■ David Robertson, 33, RHP

2018 (Yankees): 3.23 ERA, 11.8 K/9, 3.4 BB/9, 0.9 HR/9, 5 saves

Robertson had a fantastic year working in the middle innings, holding opponents to a .183/.258/.337 line. And though he allowed six homers to lefties, three were as much a product of the park (two at Yankee Stadium, one at Camden Yards) as the pitches.

He has proven adaptable, adding a slider to his curveball and cutter to create deception against both righties and lefties.

■ Zach Britton, 30, LHP

2018 (Orioles, Yankees): 3.10 ERA, 7.5 K/9, 4.6 BB/9, 0.7 HR/9, 7 saves

Britton took time to round into form following his midseason return from a ruptured Achilles' tendon. Still, there were plenty of promising glimpses from a pitcher who was little short of amazing from 2014-16 (1.38 ERA), when his sinker/slider combination produced historically high ground-ball rates that allowed him to excel even in the small parks of the AL East.

Britton once again elicited grounders in rare fashion last year, and over the last three months of the season, he had a 2.25 ERA and held hitters to a .186/.285/.257 line.

In some ways, he represents the fascinating middle ground of market options — a pitcher with the pedigree and stuff of a dominant closer, but without the recent track record, and that will prevent him from getting top-of-the-market money.

■ Greg Holland, 32, RHP

2018 (Cardinals, Nationals): 4.66 ERA, 9.1 K/9, 6.2 BB/9, 0.4 HR/9, 3 saves

Holland twisted in last winter's free agent winds until signing with the Cardinals in the opening days of the season. Like many free agents who don't sign until after spring training, he struggled badly, performing so poorly with the Cardinals (7.92 ERA, an equal number of strikeouts and walks) that he was released Aug. 1 after no one traded for him at the deadline.

But after signing with the Nationals, he posted an 0.84 ERA with strong strikeout and diminished walk rates. Despite declining ground-ball rates, he has a long track record of keeping the ball in the park, save for a 2017 season in Colorado.

■ Kelvin Herrera, 28, RHP

2018 (Royals, Nationals): 2.44 ERA, 7.7 K/9, 2.0 BB/9, 1.2 HR/9, 17 saves

The Red Sox thought they might land Herrera at the trade deadline, but the Nationals did not opt for a July selloff. Instead, the righthander — a postseason standout for Kansas City in 2014-15 — remained in Washington and suffered a season-ending tear of the Lisfranc ligament in his foot in late August.

Even before the injury, Herrera had performed poorly in Washington, allowing nine runs and four homers in 18⅓ innings, and his strikeout rate was a career low. So there are questions related not just to his health but also his stuff, despite solid overall numbers last year.

■ Cody Allen, 29, RHP

2018 (Indians): 4.70 ERA, 10.7 K/9, 4.4 BB/9, 1.5 HR/9, 27 saves

Allen combined with Miller to give Cleveland a formidable back end of the bullpen in 2016 and 2017, but his trend lines are ominous. He has given up more and more homers each of the last three years, his walk

rate was up significantly in 2018, his strikeout rate was well below career norms, and lefties — whom he dominated in 2017 — had an .800 OPS against him.

His average four-seam velocity also went down for the fourth straight year.

There's a buy-low opportunity, likely on a shorter-term deal, as he still showed the ability to get swings and misses with his fastball and especially his curveball. But given his career path, he'd represent a risk rather than a certainty.

Allen and Kimbrel were the only two pitchers on this list to spend virtually all of 2018 in the traditional closer's role.

A look at the free agent closer class

There are no fewer than 10 players on the market to merit consideration by the Red Sox

Name	Saves	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	GB%	ERA	WAR
Adam Ottavino	6	77.67	13.0	4.2	0.6	43.0%	2.43	2.0
Joakim Soria	16	60.67	11.1	2.4	0.6	35.7%	3.12	1.8
Jeury Familia	18	72	10.4	3.5	0.4	46.3%	3.13	1.8
David Robertson	5	69.67	11.8	3.4	0.9	45.3%	3.23	1.5
Craig Kimbrel	42	62.33	13.9	4.5	1.0	28.2%	2.74	1.5
Andrew Miller	2	34	11.9	4.2	0.8	47.7%	4.24	0.4
Kelvin Herrera	17	44.33	7.7	2.0	1.2	35.6%	2.44	0.4
Greg Holland	3	46.33	9.1	6.2	0.4	40.0%	4.66	0.3
Zach Britton	7	40.67	7.5	4.7	0.7	73.0%	3.10	0.1
Cody Allen <sup>27</sup>	67	10.8	4.4	1.5	30.0%	4.70	0.0	

SOURCE: Fangraphs

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In sum: Would the Red Sox be happy to have Kimbrel back? Sure. The fact that they made him a qualifying offer suggests as much. But in a free agent class that is deep in options, they have plenty of potential directions to turn while trying to strike the right balance of resources for 2019 and beyond.

Evan Drellich of NBC Sports Boston surveyed general managers about the fluctuating state of the closer role.

Free agent Joe Kelly said on "The Jim Rome Show" (in remarks captured by Chris Cotillo of MassLive.com) that he can't imagine pitching for a team other than the Red Sox, to the point where he sometimes forgets that he's a free agent.

### **Alex Cora beaten out for AL Manager of the Year by Bob Melvin**

Peter Abraham

In his first season as a manager, Alex Cora led the Red Sox to a franchise-record 108 victories and the best record in baseball by five games.

But that was not enough to be American League Manager of the Year.

Bob Melvin of the Oakland Athletics was named the winner on Tuesday night with Cora second and Kevin Cash of the Tampa Bay Rays third.

In voting done by the Baseball Writers' Association of America before the postseason, Cora was first on only seven of 30 ballots and received 79 points. Melvin had 18 first-place votes and 121 points. Cash had five first-place votes and 57 votes.

A.J. Hinch of the Astros was fourth and Aaron Boone of the Yankees was fifth.

Cora was on 29 of the 30 ballots. Nobuhiro Saito of Nikkan Sports, one of the Los Angeles representatives, voted for Melvin, Hinch, and Boone.

Melvin is a three-time winner of the award. He won with the Athletics in 2012 and the Diamondbacks in 2007. Oakland opened the season with a \$75 million payroll and went on to win 97 games, despite numerous injuries to its pitching staff.

Since the award was instituted in 1983, the only Red Sox managers to win are John McNamara (1986) and Jimmy Williams (1999).

Cora may be better off. Three of the last four winners in the American League — Paul Molitor (Twins, 2017), Jeff Banister (Rangers, 2015), and Buck Showalter (Orioles, 2014) were fired this year.

Atlanta's Brian Snitker was the National League winner with Craig Counsell of Milwaukee second and Bud Black of the Rockies third.

The Cy Young Awards will be presented on Wednesday and the Most Valuable Player awards on Thursday.

Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts is one of the finalists for MVP, along with Mike Trout of the Angels and Jose Ramirez of the Indians.

## **\* *The Boston Herald***

### **Alex Cora finishes second to Bob Melvin for AL Manager of the Year**

Jason Mastrodonato

The most ambiguous award in baseball was handed out on Tuesday night, and though Alex Cora led the Red Sox to one of the best seasons in baseball history, he was not named the American League Manager of the Year.

Instead, Oakland A's manager Bob Melvin took home the award for his third time, which put him in the company of only seven other managers.

By leading an injury-plagued A's team with a \$66-million opening day payroll to a 97-win season, an increase of 22 wins from 2017, Melvin joined Bobby Cox, Tony La Russa, Jim Leyland, Lou Piniella, Dusty Baker, Buck Showalter and Joe Maddon as the only managers ever to win three times. La Russa and Cox are the only managers with four wins since the award was introduced in 1983.

Melvin finished with 18 first-place votes out of a possible 30. He also had 10 second-place votes and one third-place vote. Cora had seven first-place votes, 11 second-place votes and 11 third-place votes while Rays manager Kevin Cash finished third with five first-place votes, six second-place votes and 14 third-place votes. Astros manager A.J. Hinch and Yankees manager Aaron Boone also received votes.

It's always important to remember that the Manager of the Year is voted on before the playoffs start.

Had the 30 members of the Baseball Writers Association of America known that Cora would hit on almost every bold decision while maneuvering a questionable bullpen through three of the best offenses in baseball during October, the voting might have been different.

Cora impressed in the regular season, too, but big-market managers on expensive teams aren't typically given the accolades. A Red Sox manager hasn't won since Jimmy Williams in 1999.

It's difficult enough to pinpoint exactly how much of an effect a manager has on his ballclub, and even more difficult to do it while covering just one team all season long, as most of the voting writers do. The awards most often go to managers like Melvin, who over-performed with an A's team that wasn't expected to be very good.

The A's used a franchise record 15 starting pitchers during the season while 10 of them saw time on the disabled list, most notably Sean Manaea, who pitched a no-hitter against the Red Sox in April.

But Melvin patched together the pitching staff and was carried by a potent offense. The A's got 48 homers from Khris Davis and a breakout season from sophomore Matt Chapman at third base. They finished third in the majors with 227 homers while scoring more than five runs per game.

The A's were 34-36 on June 15 and then went 63-29 to finish the season.

The Red Sox began the year with a \$234-million payroll, roared out to a 17-2 start and never lost more than three games in a row on their way to a third straight American League East title. They held the lead from July 2 through the end of the season, winning by eight games and finishing with a franchise record 108 wins.

In the National League, Atlanta Braves manager Brian Snitker took home the Manager of the Year honors, narrowly winning over Brewers manager Craig Counsell. The young Braves team won the National League East with 90 wins, an increase of 18 wins from 2017.

## **\* *MassLive.com***

### **Boston Red Sox contracts 2019: Xander Bogaerts, Rick Porcello, Chris Sale among 7 players entering final contract years**

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox's 2018 payroll soared over \$237 million and it likely will remain near that figure in 2019.

The Sox freed up \$49.395 million with seven players electing free agency: Hanley Ramirez (\$22M average annual value), Craig Kimbrel (\$12M), Drew Pomeranz (\$8.5M), Joe Kelly (\$3.825M), Steve Pearce (\$1.5M AAV with Boston), Carson Smith (\$850,000) and Nathan Eovaldi (\$720,430 with Boston).

But president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski likely is interested in bringing back Eovaldi, Kelly and Pearce at the right price. They all will earn raises as free agents.

Boston also will pay approximately \$21.965 million more in arbitration salaries during 2019.

Below are the contract details for all 34 players on the current 40-man roster.

Estimated \$21.965 million more in arbitration salaries

The Red Sox will spend approximately \$21.965 million more in arbitration salaries during 2019. How did MassLive.com arrive at that figure?

MLBTradeRumors.com estimated the 2019 salaries for each arbitration-eligible player in the major leagues.

We took the projected salaries of all 12 Red Sox arbitration-eligible players and subtracted them by the salaries they earned last year. We then totaled all 12 salaries.

Mookie Betts: \$10.5M (2018 salary) to \$18.7M (estimated) = \$8.2M estimated raise

Xander Bogaerts: \$7.05M to 11.9M (estimated) = 4.85M estimated raise

Jackie Bradley Jr.: \$6.1M to \$7.9M (estimated) = 1.8M estimated raise  
Eduardo Rodriguez: 2.375M to \$4.8M (estimated) = \$2.425M estimated raise  
Brock Holt: \$2.225M to \$3.4M (estimated) = \$1.175M estimated raise  
Tyler Thornburg: \$2.05M to \$2.3M (estimated) = \$250,000 estimated raise  
Sandy Leon: \$1.95M to \$2.3M (estimated) = \$350,000 estimated raise  
Matt Barnes: \$605,000 to \$1.5M (estimated) = \$895,000 estimated raise  
Brandon Workman: \$835,000 to \$1.4M (estimated) = \$565,000 estimated raise  
Steven Wright: \$1.1M to \$1.4M (estimated) = 300,000 estimated raise  
Heath Hembree: \$581,500 to \$1.2M (estimated) = \$618,500 estimated raise  
Blake Swihart: \$563,500 to \$1.1M = \$536,500 (estimated) estimated raise

Estimated total in raises: \$21.965 million

Free agents after 2019

AP Photo/Matt Slocum

Free agents after 2019

Seven Red Sox players are eligible to become free agents after the 2019 season:

Xander Bogaerts

Chris Sale

Rick Porcello

Mitch Moreland

Eduardo Nunez

Brock Holt

Tyler Thornburg

\* J.D. Martinez also has an opt-out clause after the 2019 season

Mitch Moreland, 1B

2019 salary: \$6.5M

Average annual salary: \$6.5M

Remaining contract: Moreland is entering the final year of a two-year, \$13-million contract. He will be eligible for free agency after the 2019 season.

Dustin Pedroia, 2B

2019 salary: \$15M

Average annual salary: \$13.75M

Remaining contract: Pedroia enters the fifth year of his eight-year, \$110-million contract he signed in July 2013. He will earn \$15 million in 2019, \$13 million in 2020 and \$12 million in 2021.

Xander Bogaerts, SS

2019 salary: \$11.9M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$11.9M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Bogaerts enters the final year of arbitration. He's eligible for free agency after the 2019 season. The shortstop earned \$7.05 million in 2018. MLBTradeRumors.com projects Bogaerts to earn \$11.9 million in arbitration this coming season.

Rafael Devers, 3B

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined.

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD).

Remaining contract: Devers, who earned \$564,500 in 2018, remains pre-arbitration eligible. He'll be eligible for arbitration in 2021 for the first time. He's not eligible for free agency until after the 2023 season.

Eduardo Nunez, 3B/2B  
2019 salary: \$5M

Average annual salary: \$5M

Remaining contract: Eduardo Nunez will earn \$5 million in 2019 after he exercised his player option worth \$4 million. The 2019 salary increased to \$5 million after reaching \$1 million in incentives during 2018. Nunez earned \$4 million in 2018. He'll become a free agent after the 2019 season.

Andrew Benintendi, LF  
2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration (TBD)

Remaining contract: Benintendi, who earned \$620,500 in 2018, remains pre-arbitration eligible. He becomes arbitration eligible for the first time in 2020. He's eligible for free agency after the 2022 season.

Jackie Bradley Jr., CF  
2019 salary: \$7.9M (arbitration estimated)

Average annual Salary: \$7.9M (arbitration estimated)

Remaining contract: Bradley is a four-year arbitration player. This marks his third season of salary arbitration. He'll be eligible for free agency after the 2020 season. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$7.9 million in 2019, up from \$6.1 million in 2018.

Mookie Betts, RF  
2019 salary: -- \$18.7M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$18.7M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Betts is in his second year of arbitration. He's eligible to become a free agent after the 2020 season. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$18.7 million in arbitration for 2019 after he earned \$10.5 million in 2018.

J.D. Martinez, DH/OF  
2019 salary: \$23.750M

Average annual salary: \$22M

Remaining contract: Martinez can opt out of his five-year, \$110-million at the end of the 2019 season. He also can opt out after 2020 and 2021. If he opts in, he'll earn \$23.750 million in 2020, \$19.350 million during 2021 and \$19.350 million during 2022.

Brock Holt, IF/OF  
2019 salary: \$3.4M (arbitration projected)

Average annual value: \$3.4M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Holt is entering the final year of his contract. He is eligible for free agency next offseason. He's estimated to earn \$3.4 million in 2019, per MLBTradeRumors.com. He earned \$2.225 million last year.

Tzu-Wei Lin, IF/OF

2019 salary: Pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: Pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Lin is eligible for arbitration in 2022. He's eligible for free agency after the 2024 season.

Sandy Leon, C

2019 salary: \$2.3M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$2.3M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Leon is entering his third year of arbitration. He's a four-year arbitration player. So he's not eligible for free agency until after the 2020 season. Leon earned \$1.95 million in 2018. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$2.3 million in arbitration during 2019.

Christian Vazquez, C

2019 salary: \$2.85M

Average annual salary: \$3.74M

Remaining contract: Vazquez signed a three-year, \$13.55-million contract extension through 2021 last spring training. It includes a \$7 million team option and \$250,000 buyout for 2022. He signed the extension before Opening Day 2018, and so last year's arbitration salary is added to the contract to determine his average annual value. The deal essentially is four years, \$14.975 million (\$3.74 million average annual value).

Blake Swihart, C

2019 salary: \$1.1M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$1.1M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: The 2019 season marks Swihart's first arbitration year. He's eligible for free agency after the 2022 season. He's a four-year arbitration player.

Sam Travis, 1B/LF

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined.

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Travis is arbitration eligible in 2022. He's eligible for free agency after the 2024 season.

Marco Hernandez, IF

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined.

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Hernandez is arbitration eligible in 2020. He's eligible for free agency after the 2022 season.

David Price, SP  
2019 salary: \$31M

Average annual salary: \$31M

Remaining contract: Price opted into the remaining four years of his seven-year, \$217-million contract. He'll earn \$32 million in 2020, \$32 million in 2021 and \$32 million in 2022.

Chris Sale, SP  
2019 salary: \$15M

Average annual salary: \$15M

Remaining contract: The Red Sox exercised Sale's \$15 million option. The lefty is eligible to become a free agent after the 2019 season.

Eduardo Rodriguez, SP  
2019 salary: \$4.8 million (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$4.8 million (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Rodriguez is in his second year of arbitration. He's a four-year arbitration player. He's eligible for free agency after the 2021 season. He earned \$2.375 million in 2018. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$4.8 million in 2019.

Rick Porcello, SP  
2019 salary: \$21.125M

Average annual salary: \$20.625M

Remaining contract: Porcello is eligible for free agency after the 2019 season. This marks the final year of his four-year, \$82.5-million contract extension.

Steven Wright, SP  
2019 salary: \$1.4M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$1.4M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Wright is in his second year of arbitration. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$1.4 million in 2019 after he earned \$1.1 million in 2018. He's eligible for free agency after the 2020 season.

Matt Barnes, RP  
2019 salary: \$1.5 million (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$1.5 million (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: The 2019 season marks his first season of arbitration eligibility. He's eligible for free agency after the 2021 season. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$1.5 million in 2019 after he earned \$605,000 in 2018.

Hector Velazquez, SP/RP  
2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Velazquez is eligible for arbitration in 2021. He's eligible for free agency after the 2023 season.

Bobby Poyner, RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined.

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Poyner still is under rookie status. He's arbitration eligible in 2022 and free agent eligible following the 2024 season.

Tyler Thornburg, RP

2019 salary: \$2.3M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$2.3M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: Thornburg is in his third season of arbitration. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$2.3 million in 2019 after earning \$2.05 million both in 2017 and 2018. He's eligible for free agency after the 2019 season.

Brian Johnson, SP/RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Johnson's first arbitration eligible year is 2021. He's eligible for free agency after the 2023 season.

Heath Hembree, RP

2019 salary: \$1.2M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$1.2M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: This marks Hembree's first arbitration year. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$1.2 million after he made \$581,500 in 2018. He's eligible for free agency after the 2021 season.

Brandon Workman, RP

2019 salary: \$1.4M (arbitration projected)

Average annual salary: \$1.4M (arbitration projected)

Remaining contract: The 2019 season marks Workman's second season of arbitration eligibility. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn \$1.4 million in 2019 after he earned \$835,000 in 2018. Workman will be eligible for free agency after the 2020 season.

Ryan Brasier, RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined.

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Brasier is eligible for arbitration in 2021. He's eligible for free agency after the 2023 season.

Austin Maddox, RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Maddox is arbitration eligible in 2021. He's free agent eligible after the 2023 season.

Chandler Shepherd, SP/RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Shepherd has yet to make his major league debut. The Red Sox have six years of big league control.

William Cuevas, SP/RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Cuevas is eligible for arbitration in 2022 and eligible for free agency after the 2024 season.

Marcus Walden, RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Walden is arbitration eligible in 2022. He's free agent eligible after the 2024 season.

Robby Scott, RP

2019 salary: pre-arbitration, to be determined

Average annual salary: pre-arbitration salary (TBD)

Remaining contract: Scott is arbitration eligible in 2021. He's free agent eligible after the 2023 season.

### **Boston Red Sox sign catcher Juan Centeno to minor-league deal, per source**

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox signed catcher Juan Centeno to a minor-league deal, a source confirmed Tuesday.

Centeno, who turns 29 this month, has appeared in 111 major-league games over parts of six years with the Mets (2013-14), Brewers (2015), Twins (2016), Astros (2017) and Rangers (2018). He hit .162/.184/.270 with a homer in 22 games with Texas last season.

Centeno hit .234 with two homers in 59 games for the Rangers' Triple-A affiliate last year. He'll likely provide catching depth at Pawtucket behind Christian Vazquez, Sandy Leon and Blake Swihart with Dan Butler potentially departing in free agency.

Centeno, a native of Puerto Rico, is familiar with Sox manager Alex Cora from his time with the Astros in 2017. He also played for Cora's winter ball team in Caguas before the 2016 season.

In total, Centeno owns a .227/.278/.331 line with six homers in the majors.

### **AL Manager of Year award 2018: Red Sox's Alex Cora finishes second to Athletics' Bob Melvin**

Christopher Smith

Bob Melvin, who led the small-market Athletics to a 97-65 record, is the 2018 American League Manager of the Year.

He beat out Red Sox's Alex Cora and Rays' Kevin Cash, the other two finalists. Melvin received 18 first-place votes. Cora, who finished second, earned seven first-place votes. Cash, who placed third, finished with five first-place votes.

Melvin earned Manager of the Year honors for the third time in his 15-year managerial career. He won the National League award in 2007 with the Diamondbacks and the American League award in 2012 with the Athletics.

Cora led the Red Sox to a franchise-record 108 regular season victories as a rookie manager.

But the voters likely considered the significant discrepancy in payroll between the big-market Red Sox and small-market Athletics. The 2018 Red Sox's payroll soared over \$237 million. The Athletics had the lowest 2018 Opening Day payroll, per USA Today.

The Athletics earned the second Wild Card spot.

Cora's Red Sox won their third straight AL East title and fourth World Series title since 2004. But this is strictly a regular season award. Votes are submitted before the postseason begins.

Both Boston chapter writers, WEEL.com's Bradford and The Athletics' Jen McCaffrey, with a vote selected 1. Cora; 2. Melvin; 3. Cash.

## **\* *RedSox.com***

### **Cora the runner-up for AL Manager of the Year**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Though the Red Sox have won the World Series an MLB-high four times in the 21st century, the American League's Manager of the Year Award continues to elude their candidates.

Rookie manager Alex Cora, who guided Boston to a franchise-record 108 wins, finished second to Oakland's Bob Melvin in the race for Manager of the Year.

#### AL Manager of Year Voting

Bob Melvin, OAK	18	10	1	121
Alex Cora, BOS	7	11	11	79
Kevin Cash, TB	5	6	14	57
AJ Hinch, HOU	3	2	11	
Aaron Boone, NYY			2	2
Name, team	1st	2nd	3rd	Pts.

It was Melvin's third time winning the award, as he guided the Athletics to 97 wins and a Wild Card berth despite a barrage of injuries to his starting rotation.

Kevin Cash, a former teammate of Cora's on the 2008 Red Sox, finished third after the fine job that he did with the Tampa Bay Rays.

Since the inception of the BBWAA Manager of the Year Award in 1983, John McNamara (1986) and Jimmy Williams (1999) are the only two Boston skippers to bring home the trophy.

Melvin finished with 19 first-place votes, while Cora had seven and Cash had five. Cora also garnered 11 second-place votes and 11 third-place votes and finished with 79 overall points, compared to 121 for Melvin.

Just like John Farrell and Terry Francona for recent Red Sox championship teams, Cora might have been hurt in the Manager of the Year voting by Boston's high payroll, which was tops in MLB this season. Francona went on to win Manager of the Year twice (2013, '16) for the Indians.

Votes for all BBWAA Awards are submitted before the start of the postseason. Even without those 11 wins his Red Sox tacked on in October, Cora had a strong candidacy this year.

The Red Sox had a unified approach that was evident all season long, and players lauded Cora for his communication and organizational skills.

"He put together a clubhouse that had more unity than I had ever seen," said Red Sox owner John Henry. "It showed day to day perseverance, sense of purpose, dedication every day. He had them ready every day. On every level, he was a superior manager. He was every bit as good as our best player."

Cora came just one win away from equaling Ralph Houk (1961 Yankees) for the most ever by a rookie manager.

For his hitters, Cora preached hunting for pitches, rather than being passive early in the count. This resulted in MVP finalist Mookie Betts and shortstop Xander Bogaerts both having major upticks in their numbers from the previous season.

Cora also kept his entire position-player roster involved all season, which made role players effective and also kept his starters fresh.

From a pitching standpoint, Cora closely managed the workload of the staff from the start of Spring Training through the end of the regular season, always with the postseason in mind. That enabled him to empty the tank in October as pitchers David Price, Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi went back and forth from the rotation to the bullpen -- "rovers," as Cora called them.

In pressurized Boston, Cora remained unflappable. When he made a mistake, he usually owned up to it before anyone got the chance to criticize him.

"He's been great," said Red Sox ace Chris Sale. "I've said it a million times, it can be 10-0 or 1-1, he's the same guy. You can look at your manager and he's just over there eating sunflower seeds, having a good time, just ready for the next big thing to happen, and it sends a shockwave through the dugout and helps you relax a little bit."

## **\* *WEEI.com***

### **Bob Melvin, not Alex Cora, named AL Manager of the Year**

John Tomase

Alex Cora arrived in Boston with the goal of winning a World Series. He delivered.

It still wasn't enough to win him the Manager of the Year Award.

That honor instead went to Oakland's Bob Melvin, was selected American League Manager of the Year by members of the Baseball Writers Association of America on Tuesday, beating out Cora and fellow finalist Kevin Cash of the Tampa Bay Rays.

Melvin received 18 first-place votes and 121 points. Cora finished second with seven first-place votes and 79 points, and Cash was third with five first-place votes and 57 points.

While Red Sox fans may cry foul over the selection, voting was conducted prior to the postseason, when Cora pushed virtually every right button while losing just three games before beating the Dodgers in the World Series.

It's also not as if Melvin is a horrible choice. He led the unheralded A's to 97 wins and a wild card berth. Oakland's starting rotation was so devastated by injuries, Melvin had little choice but to turn over his starters twice during the course of the season.

By the end of the year, he was following a tactic employed to impressive success by Cash in Tampa and employing "an opener" instead of a starter, turning over game after game to his outstanding bullpen. This is his third Manager of the Year Award.

The Red Sox, with the highest payroll in baseball, owned significant advantages over the A's and Rays. The A's won with players like Jed Lowrie and Matt Chapman and Khris Davis playing major roles, whereas the Red Sox were able to pencil presumed MVP Mookie Betts and Triple Crown threat J.D. Martinez into their lineup every night.

## **\* *NBC Sports Boston***

### **Alex Cora didn't stand much of a chance in Manager of the Year voting**

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — Manager of the Year should be more interesting than this, but it rarely is.

The Most Valuable Player award drives people crazy because of the built-in ambiguity of its criteria: everyone can define value a little differently. But from a hand-wringing and hair-pulling standpoint, Manager of the Year is actually more compelling, or at least, it should be.

There's no great way to settle a debate about skippers. There is no set of reliable or popular statistics for managers, aside from team wins. And the worst part of the vote's tendency — 30 writers in all — is that the expectation of team wins seems to dictate the outcome. The award seems to most consistently speak to surprise teams and underdogs above all.

There's no way to prove that the job Bob Melvin did in Oakland — where he was given a pitiful payroll and piloted an upstart, small-market team to the postseason — is actually more impressive than what Alex Cora did as a rookie manager, in Boston, in a setting that had been somewhat combustible with the previous manager, with a ton of talent on hand.

Inherently, the vote compares apples and oranges, people in vastly different circumstances.

Understanding how a manager actually impacted a team is difficult. A lot of what a manager does is never known publicly, inside the market or out. Players always spew the cliches about their boss, because they feel they have to — and maybe they do.

The gentle or angry closed-door conversation with a player who needs it. The fires put out almost daily. Those are hard matters to gauge if they're never learned about.

But big-market managers with large payrolls can do tremendous jobs with those moments as small-market managers can. And they may be more frequent in the spotlight.

Melvin was not in a position to create a culture change as Cora was. If anything, Oakland has had an established culture for some time, with leadership stability under Billy Beane and David Forst.

The Red Sox, meanwhile, went through well known turbulence. But Cora clearly came in and spearheaded a change in how the team conducts its business, be it in the implementation of analytics in cooperation with the front office, to person-to-person dynamics behind the scenes.

Punishing Melvin for enjoying continuity in his organization (if not on the field) isn't fair. But this isn't about fair, about leveling the playing field between managers, because that's a virtually impossible task.

Cora deserved credit for taking on a new scene. Just as Kevin Cash in Tampa Bay deserved credit for implementing "the opener."

The debate about the best manager is difficult to settle, if not impossible, in most any year. But the end result seems to too often skew toward an upstart team, rather than an in-depth evaluation of what the manager actually did for a team, expectations aside.

Not every team that exceeds expectations did so because the manager was a genius. Sometimes, repeating can be harder than succeeding for the first time. The Astros, like the Red Sox, set a franchise record for wins too in 2018.

But everyone thought the Astros would be good as defending champs; just as everyone thought the Red Sox would be a contender again. That doesn't mean a manager has it easier than an underdog, yet, the vote always seems to reach that conclusion.

### **Michael Brantley as far down on Red Sox' free-agent list as you can get**

Evan Drellich

BOSTON -- There is probably no area the Red Sox are stronger than their outfield, leaving Michael Brantley about as far down on the list of viable free-agent pursuits as one could imagine.

The only way adding Brantley would make a lick of sense is if the Red Sox were to flip someone presently on the team in an effort to prevent this group from breaking up all at once. Hypothetically moving Jackie Bradley Jr., and then pushing Andrew Benintendi to center field and playing Brantley in left, for example.

But there's no evidence yet the Sox are ready to act that way, and they haven't yet under Sox president of baseball operations of Dave Dombrowski.

Assume, then, that Brantley's movements will largely be a spectator sport for the Red Sox this winter. His presumed departure from the Indians is significant, considering Cleveland has been one of the consistent powers in the American League along with the Red Sox in recent years. Brantley played a combined 101 regular-season games in 2016-17, but was able to stay on the field for 143 in 2018.

Entering his age-32 season, Brantley represents a high-upside signing for a potential rival. The Sox had the best offense in the majors in 2018, but Brantley was the 17th-best offensive producer in the outfield, by one advanced metric, weight runs created plus -- a hair better than Benintendi, who was 22nd.

But that kind of production comes with the risk seen in recent years: Whether Brantley stays on the field.

**\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

**In finishing second in A.L. Manager of the Year voting, Alex Cora a victim of his own success**

Sean McAdam

The name of the award, officially, is American League Manager of the Year. But really, it should be titled: "Manager who most exceeded expectations."

Because that's what it has become.

Bob Melvin of the Oakland A's won the 2018 A.L. Manager of the Year award Tuesday, capturing 18 first-place votes to seven for the Red Sox' Alex Cora (and another five for Tampa Bay's Kevin Cash). In points total, Melvin finished with 121, followed by Cora at 79 and Cash at 57.

This marks the third time Melvin has won the honor, and to be clear, he was a deserving winner. Melvin took a team with the lowest payroll in the game (\$66 million) and led them to a wild card spot.

Cora, though, set a franchise record by managing the Red Sox to 108 wins in his first head job anywhere. But Cora also inherited a team coming off back-to-back division titles and playoff appearances. And, importantly, the Red Sox had the game's biggest payroll, somewhere near \$240 million, or, more than three times the payroll of the A's.

And that's a significant factor here. Some voters undoubtedly expected the Sox to reach the postseason a third straight season, aided and abetted by their enormous resources. The A's, meanwhile, were no one's choice to qualify for the playoffs, but did anyway.

Put another way: the Red Sox paid nearly \$30 million to two players who played elsewhere (Pablo Sandoval in San Francisco and Rusney Castillo in Pawtucket) and another \$15 million to someone who was gone from their organization on May 26 (Hanley Ramirez). That's about 70 percent of the entire A's payroll for 2018.

This has been a hallmark of this award for some time: successful managers from big-market teams are routinely overlooked because they were supposed to win, while managers from small-market teams are rewarded for overachieving.

How else to explain that Terry Francona, despite five trips to the postseason, never won a Manager of the Year award in eight seasons with the Red Sox, but has since won twice since moving on to Cleveland. Did Francona become a smarter or more accomplished manager when he took over the Indians? Of course not. But he does have the handicap of far fewer resources, thus earning the attention of the voters.

The same "expectations game" worked against Cora. He took over an already talented roster, one was immeasurably improved by the addition of J.D. Martinez, the missing link for the team's underperforming lineup the year before. So when he beat out the Yankees — the Sox were in first-place to stay from July 2 on, or nearly the entire second-half of the season — it wasn't considered much of a surprise.

That calculus, however, fails to take into account all that Cora achieved in his first season. It fails to take into account how he pulled the team together in spring training, or the patience he showed with struggling players such as David Price or Jackie Bradley Jr., or how he stuck his neck out to recommend the team move on from Ramirez, or how he bolstered the confidence of Mookie Betts and Xander Bogaerts, each of whom enjoyed career years after disappointing seasons in 2017.

It fails to consider how he helped change the culture around the team, or deftly incorporated the analytics data he received on a daily basis. Or how he survived (virtually) the entire season without Dustin Pedroia, or how he navigated the final two months without much from Chris Sale.

And while it's true that Melvin didn't have the luxury of the game's biggest payroll, it's safe to assume that he didn't have anywhere near the pressures that come with managing in Boston, a team that hadn't gotten out of the first round of the playoffs since 2013.

Once more: this isn't to denigrate Melvin, who's now won the award as often as Joe Maddon, Dusty Baker, Jim Leyland, Buck Showalter and Lou Piniella. That's pretty good company.

The voting, of course, was completed at the conclusion of the regular season, so it doesn't take into account that while Melvin's team was ousted in the wild card game, Cora's club went 11-3, defeated two 100-win teams to win the pennant, then won the Red Sox' ninth world championship in beating the Los Angeles Dodgers in five games.

Just a guess, but I'm betting that Cora wouldn't trade what he experienced in October for the award he lost out on Tuesday night.

### **Hot Stove Lunch: Wright on the mend; award week continues**

Sean McAdam

Like Dustin Pedroia, Steven Wright underwent microfracture surgery in 2017. And like Pedroia, it's taking some time for Wright to fully recover.

Wright underwent an arthroscopic procedure Monday to clean up some loose bodies in the knee — just as Pedroia did last August.

Live Q & A – Chat Red Sox and MLB with Sean McAdam, Tuesday at 5 p.m.

The hope is that Wright will be fully recovered by the time spring training begins. When I spoke to Wright the morning of the World Series parade late last month, he was fully confident he would be ready to resume a normal off-season after a period of a few weeks.

But with surgeries this complicated, there are no guarantees. And Wright's recent medical history is a complicated one. He missed a chunk of time with a shoulder separation prior to his knee problem, which first surfaced in the spring of 2017.

When healthy, Wright has been effective. In 20 appearances — in between DL stints — he had a 2.68 ERA in 2018.

But it's hard to count on Wright holding up for an entire year. In parts of six seasons with the Red Sox, he's topped 73 innings just once — in 2016.

With Drew Pomeranz eligible for free agency, the Sox could use some depth in their starting rotation, to back up Chris Sale, Rick Porcello, David Price and Eduardo Rodriguez. But it's difficult to know whether Wright can be counted on for that role.

### **AL EAST**

Two Yankees lost out in the American League Rookie of the Year balloting — and that's how it should have been, writes Kevin Kernan.

The Rays' Joey Wendle came in fourth in the AL ROY voting.

There are some free-agent pitchers who could help the Orioles.

### **AL CENTRAL**

It wasn't a fun year for the Tigers, but at least their farm system is improving.

The White Sox are trying to decide what to do with Yoan Moncada.

Joe Mauer had an emotional farewell as he officially announced his retirement.

## AL WEST

Shohei Ohtani became the fourth Japanese-born player to win a ROY award.

Could a reunion with pitcher Sonny Gray work for the Oakland A's?

Like most of the players given qualifying offers, Dallas Keuchel rejected his.

## NATIONAL LEAGUE

Jacob deGrom is trying to determine where he stands with the Mets.

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## HOT TAKE I MIGHT SOON REGRET

In the spirit of transparency and full disclosure, he's my American League Rookie of the Year ballot:

1. Shohei Ohtani
2. Miguel Andujar
3. Joey Wendle

I voted for Ohtani — as did 24 of the other 29 voters — because he had a historic season, serving as both a starting pitcher (albeit for just 10 starts before being sidelined with an elbow injury that required Tommy John surgery) and a DH/OF. That sort of multi-purpose contribution hadn't been seen in baseball — for an extended period, anyway — since Babe Ruth and I thought that should be honored.

Andujar had a strong year offensively, though his poor defensive play detracted from his overall accomplishments.

After much debate, I voted Wendle over Gleyber Torres. True, Torres had better offensive numbers, but Wendle, I believed, contributed more as a versatile player who played a number of positions for the Rays.

## **\* *The Athletic***

### **Why I voted Alex Cora for Manager of the Year**

Jen McCaffrey

It's been 388 days since the Red Sox named Alex Cora manager.

In that span, Cora guided the club to a franchise record 108 regular-season wins and maneuvered them through 14 tough postseason games to win their ninth World Series title. But he'll have to settle as runner up to Oakland's Bob Melvin for the 2018 American League Manager of the Year.

As a member of Baseball Writers Association of America, I had an AL Manager of the Year vote this year. I voted for Cora.

The ballots were due on the last day of the regular season so none of Cora's postseason work was taken into consideration.

That being said, how Cora managed throughout October, posting an 11-3 record in toppling two 100-win teams in the Yankees and Astros en route to the World Series title, seemed to further justify why he should have won the award. The expectations on the 2018 Red Sox were immense and Cora helped them live up to it in his first year as a manager.

Yes, Cora stepped into a prime situation with a capable Red Sox team and an ownership willing to pay for the best players available, but getting a team of high-priced, highly-qualified individuals to mesh requires a bit of work. The Red Sox had similar talent and payroll for the last several seasons and fell far short of the ultimate goal until this year.

A big payroll means managing big personalities and Cora seemed to do that with ease this season. From cutting ties with Hanley Ramirez to sticking by David Price to protecting Chris Sale from himself with a modified pitching schedule, the manager navigated potentially difficult situations with ease.

There were a lot of factors to consider in voting. In my mind, three AL managers stood out this season: Cora, Melvin and Tampa Bay's Kevin Cash. All three were named finalists last week. I voted Melvin second and Cash third.

Melvin earned 18 of 30 first-place votes for a total of 121 points while Cora earned just seven first-place votes for 79 points. Cash was third with five first-place votes and 57 total points.

In choosing Cora for the award, it was hard to look past how far he brought this team – 15 extra wins in the regular season, to be exact – in comparison to the previous two years. There was a culture change in the clubhouse, a manager that relaxed his players, and a revitalized use of the analytics staff that had played a lesser role in previous years. It wasn't so much how Cora managed the games day in and day out, but that he got the most of his roster, trusting players when it seemed unwise, all while doing so in his first year in the position. The Red Sox got off to such a strong start and held first place easily for much of the season, which might have hurt Cora's case nationally.

That's not to say it was an easy vote, though. Melvin and Cash each presented strong cases.

The A's and Rays were both projected to finish with win totals in the high 70s. Fangraphs had the A's with 77 wins and the Rays with 76. By the end of the regular season, the Rays had 90 wins and pushed the Yankees for a wild card spot. The A's gave the Astros a run for their money with a second-place finish in the West, and 97 wins.

The A's won 22 more games than they did in 2017 despite losing four starting pitchers over the course of the year to ailments (three to Tommy John surgery) and another two starters on the disabled list with lingering arm and elbow issues. They also entered the season with baseball's lowest payroll.

Meanwhile, Cash helped implement the radical opener system — using relievers to start games in order to take maximum advantage of matchups — that flipped traditional pitching matchups on their head and made the most of his roster. Not only was it a risky proposition, but Cash made it work with adept maneuvering of his pitchers around opposing lineups. He led the Rays to the 90-win threshold that Tampa Bay hadn't reached since 2013.

All that said, it was hard to look past Cora, the manager at the helm of the winningest team in baseball since the 2001 Seattle Mariners. Cora finished one win shy of tying the all-time record for most wins by a manager in his first year (Ralph Houk had 109 wins for the 1961 Yankees).

Melvin and Cash were handed tough situations and turned middling team into very good ones. Cora, meanwhile, took a very good team and turned it into a great one, in the conversation for the best of all time.

Some voters focused on which manager got the most out of his team. Others placed a greater value on tactical managing skills. It's up for interpretation what Manager of the Year means to each voter and there's solid argument for Cora, Cash or Melvin. But to me, Cora's body of work outshone the competition.

## **50 years after catch heard around the Ivy League, Harvard's Pete Varney comes full circle at Fenway Park**

Steve Buckley

The plan, the original plan, was that we were to meet at 10 in the morning at the Dunkin' Donuts on Route 2A out in Acton, across from the Colonial Chevrolet car dealership.

A text message arrived at a little after 9. Turns out the guy was already there.

"I am on Vince Lombardi time," read the text. "Got honey-do list done early lol."

And right away we had something of a revelation about Pete Varney: Though he is 69 years old and a card-carrying throwback, a former big-league catcher, an Ivy League football star and a long-long-long time college baseball coach, his fingers are as comfortable handling a newfangled smart phone as they were back in the days when he was handling Wilbur Wood's knuckle ball. Lol.

When I arrived — late, but not really, because we aren't all governed by Vince Lombardi time — Varney was seated at a table to the right of the counter, looking exactly like a retiree who has been running errands, his white hair falling in this or that direction, his old jeans, blue sweat shirt and weather-beaten jacket suggesting a man liberated from caring what you think.

And the thing is, we could have done without the sit-down, considering I really had just one question: When Pete Varney steps inside Fenway Park on Saturday afternoon for the 135th edition of the Harvard-Yale football game, what does he think will be the pleasant, nostalgic thoughts dancing around inside his head?

The supposition was that it would be an either/or question. As in:

- Either he'll be thinking about what happened almost exactly 50 years ago, when the Crimson hosted Yale at Harvard Stadium. Amazingly, both teams were undefeated. Even more amazingly, this happened: Harvard, trailing 29-13 with just 42 seconds remaining, staged a comeback for the ages that culminated with tight end Pete Varney catching backup quarterback Frank Champi's game-tying two-point conversion on the last play of the game, thus inspiring The Harvard Crimson to drum up one of the greatest headlines in sports history: "Harvard Beats Yale, 29-29."

- Or, he'll be thinking about how this son of Boston — born in Roxbury, raised in Quincy — went on to play parts of four seasons of big-league baseball, and that on Aug. 19, 1974, right there at Fenway, with his entire family and a host of friends cheering for him, he was the starting catcher for the Chicago White Sox in a 6-1 loss to the Red Sox. In the seventh inning he singled to left field off Sox starter Bill Lee.

But to speak to Pete Varney is to learn, quickly, that there's no such thing as just one question and that there's no such thing as either/or. This is a robust, bear of a man whose life is right out of "Forrest Gump," a man whose travels and adventures have placed him in the company of all sorts of figures who have played prominent roles in Boston sports history and far beyond.

Ask him about his academics at Harvard and he'll tell you he once took a course on the American presidency taught by Doris Kearns — the future Doris Kearns Goodwin and future Pulitzer Prize winner whose baseball fandom is such that years later she was used as a talking head in Ken Burns' award-winning 18-part documentary on the history of the game. "It was a great course," said Varney. "But I wish I had known how much she liked baseball."

Ask him about that first time he played at Fenway Park as a member of the Chicago White Sox and how he managed to procure tickets for the many friends and family members he planned to have in attendance and

he says, "Well, Boston fans are not going to want to hear this, but I got them from my roommate. My roommate was Bucky Dent."

And ask Pete Varney what he thinks he'll be thinking about when he arrives at Fenway Park on Saturday and you get this:

"Long story, but at some point I actually got a call from the Ted Williams," he said. "I thought it was a prank. I thought it was a friend who was calling me, joshing me and stuff."

No josh: It really was Ted Williams, who in April 1969 returned to Fenway Park in his new role as manager of the Washington Senators. Seems the Senators were interested in selecting Varney in the upcoming June draft, and somebody thought it would be a great idea to have their manager, Teddy Ballgame himself, a Red Sox legend, personally reach out to the kid and invite him to come by Fenway for a workout.

"I was in there at 10 in the morning, and as I'm getting dressed I get a tap on the shoulder," he said. "I turn around and I say, 'Holy Christ, who is this?'"

It was Frank Howard, the Senators' 6-foot-7, 255-pound outfielder/first baseman, who that season would hit 48 home runs.

"He said, 'Good luck today, sir,'" Varney said. "So I went out and had batting practice. Hit a couple into the (left-field) net. Hit one to center. I had a good day. So good that they asked me to throw infield."

Small problem: Varney had been told the Senators only wanted to see him hit, which means he didn't bring his catching gear, which means he didn't bring his mitt.

"All I had was my S&H Green Stamps glove," he said. "So I threw with that, and the infielders were awesome. They'd catch my throws, and they'd take off their gloves and blow on their hands, you know, playing it up like I had a good arm or something.

"Afterwards, I go into the clubhouse, shower and everything, and again I get a tap on the shoulder, and there's Frank Howard again," he said. "He says, 'You did a good job today but I notice you didn't have a catcher's glove.' I told him that's all I had and he says, 'Come with me,' and we go up to Paul Casanova, who was their catcher, and he says, 'Give the kid a glove,' and Casanova says, 'I'm not giving the kid a glove.'"

Frank Howard asked again.

Casanova gave the kid a glove.

Two months later, the Senators selected Varney in the second round of the draft. He didn't sign. Two years after that, he was drafted by the White Sox. This time he did sign. He made his big-league debut on Aug. 26, 1973, with the ChiSox hosting the Detroit Tigers at old Comiskey Park. It was the second game of a doubleheader, and the designated hitter for the Tigers was Frank Howard, now 36 years old and in the last weeks of his big-league career.

"Honest to God," said Varney, "he comes up, taps the plate with his bat, and then looks at me and says, 'How's that glove I gave you, Pete?' I just love telling that story. Still my favorite after all these years."

And yet he knows it's not the story he'll be asked to tell on Friday afternoon when members of Harvard's fabled 1968 football team meet for a luncheon. It's not the story he'll be asked to tell at a dinner that night. It's not the story he'll be asked to tell when he takes his seat at Fenway Park Saturday afternoon, joined by his wife Marti, their two sons, their three grandchildren and other family members.

And it's not the story he'll be asked to tell during a pre-game hospitality function for various Harvard types.

So let's get to it, Pete Varney. Tell us about the catch you made in The Game. Tell us what you're going to be telling everyone else.

"Well, it seems like yesterday," he said. "But what I treasure most about that season and that game is my teammates, the sacrifices everyone made, and all the things that had to happen in that game for us to be remembered."

"Yale was a juggernaut," he said. "(Yale quarterback) Brian Dowling hadn't lost a game in high school or college. And they had (future Dallas Cowboys star) Calvin Hill. They were stacked. The first half we didn't even belong on the field with them."

To put this into terms the modern-day New England Patriots fan could understand, the '68 Harvard-Yale game was the 28-3 of its time: Yale led 22-0 in the first half.

"We never stopped competing," Varney said. "It was that Belichickian phrase, play for 60 minutes. That's what we were doing."

Back-up quarterback Frank Champi was, like Varney, a local kid. From Everett. Taking over late in the first half, he threw a 15-yard touchdown pass to Bruce Freeman to make it 22-6; with Harvard trailing 29-13 with 42 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter he engineered the great comeback by playing "ring-around-the-rosey with Yale's defenders" (so said The New York Times) and throwing two TD passes sandwiched around the recovery of an onside kick. The first of those two fourth-quarter TD passes was followed by a run by junior fullback Gus Crim on the conversion try.

Now Champi's touchdown pass to Harvard captain Vic Gatto made it 29-27.

On the conversion try, Champi reached back and. . . and. . . stop!

Wait!

If Varney misses the pass, you don't have one of the most memorable comebacks in college football history.

If Varney misses the pass, you don't have 300,000 fans talking about having been there that day. (The actual attendance was 40,280.)

If Varney misses the pass, you don't have the Harvard marching band taunting the Yale Bulldogs with its rendition of "Where Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?"

If Varney misses the pass, you don't have "Harvard Beats Yale, 29-29," the magnificent headline that in 2008 became the title of an equally magnificent documentary commemorating the 40th anniversary of the game.

If Varney misses the pass . . .

"I was so sick that whole week," he said. "I had the flu. And my only day of practice was Friday. So everything after that is kind of a blur."

If Varney misses the pass . . .

"I didn't have that great of a game," he said. "I just happened to be the right person at the right time."

Champi threw a bullet at Varney's midsection, the kid from Everett looking for the kid from Quincy by way of Roxbury. Varney wrapped his hands around the ball, held it, and can be seen racing out to about the 25-yard line before disappearing into the bedlam.

"It was a play we had run a lot during the season," he said. "I was split out. I was almost the biggest guy on the team. I was 6-2, 240, and I was splitting out. But that was the formation. Sometimes I would split out and sometimes Bruce Freeman would split out and I would be in tight."

Back then, he said, his thoughts were focused solely on catching the ball.

"It's like every athlete," he said. "You're not thinking about anything else."

And now, looking back 50 years?

"I'm sure glad I caught it rather than dropping it," he said.

The Dallas Cowboys later showed some interest in Varney, but, as he put it, "Football was hard. I didn't have the mentality. I knew from the get-go that baseball was a path that I could follow."

He hit his first big-league home run on Aug. 19, 1975, off the Yankees' Larry Gura at Shea Stadium (during the Yankee Stadium renovation), and 11 days later he belted one off future Hall of Famer Jim Palmer at Baltimore's Memorial Stadium. He hit three home runs in 1976, one of them off Red Sox righthander Luis Tiant at Comiskey Park.

His tenure with the White Sox ("I mostly sat in the bullpen," he said) ended on June 15, 1976, when he was traded to the Atlanta Braves, for whom he had a cup of coffee, his big league career concluding after 69 games over four seasons. But bullpen or no bullpen, it was in baseball that Pete Varney had his greatest successes. He hit .370 in his three varsity seasons at Harvard and was an All-America selection in 1971. After his playing days he went on to coach the baseball team at Brandeis University for 34 seasons before retiring in 2015. Among the hundreds of players he coached was Nelson Figueroa, a skinny righty out of Brooklyn who went on to play nine seasons in the big leagues.

Pete Varney spent 34 seasons coaching baseball at Brandeis. Credit: Courtesy of Brandeis University  
But with apologies to Ted Williams, Frank Howard, Luis Tiant, Nelson Figueroa and all the rest, Pete Varney will forever be known for what he did as a football player. From North Quincy High to Deerfield Academy (where he prepped for a year) to Harvard, he's the guy who caught the game-winning — er, game-tying — conversion in the '68 Harvard-Yale game.

"I was very blessed," he said. "I went to a great school, great teammates, I was able to go on and play professional baseball. My father was a roofer with nine kids. So going to that type of school was something awesome for the family."

And yet this is one veteran of baseball and football who isn't thrilled that Saturday's Harvard-Yale game is being played at Fenway Park.

"I know they're doing some renovations there but the game belongs in (Harvard) Stadium, in my opinion," he said. "I'm sure for the kids playing right now that playing in Fenway is a great thing. But I would have liked for the 50th anniversary of that game to be played at Harvard Stadium."

He talks a lot of baseball, Pete Varney does, but those are the words of a football player.