

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, November 15, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox and Alex Cora agree to contract extension

Alex Speier

It took little time to recognize that Alex Cora offered a hand-in-glove fit for the 2018 Red Sox. Even in spring training, he earned raves. All that followed — 108 regular-season wins (second most ever by a rookie manager), a championship, and a tight-knit clubhouse that paid obsessive attention to the detail — merely validated and added to that impression.

On Wednesday, in recognition of that body of work in his first season, the Red Sox announced that they'd renegotiated the original three-year deal that Cora signed with the team last fall, replacing it with a new deal that will run through 2021 with a team option for 2022.

Financial terms were not disclosed, but a major league source said Cora was given a raise. According to USA Today, Cora earned an \$800,000 salary in 2018, tied for the lowest in the majors by a manager not hired on an interim basis.

“Alex did a tremendous job for our club all year long and we wanted to reward him for his efforts after an amazing season,” president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said in a press release. “We are extremely happy that he will be with us and leading our club.”

Cora was runner-up to Bob Melvin in AL Manager of the Year voting after earning raves throughout the year for several traits: his ability to communicate with players, coaches, and front-office members (the latter trait having helped to modernize the Red Sox' application of analytics at the field level); his management of player workloads to keep his team performing at something close to its peak through the end of the playoffs; his cultivation of a clubhouse culture in which players focused on preparation for the next game rather than dwelling on disappointments; and his in-game management.

“We have consistently been impressed by Alex at every turn,” chairman Tom Werner said in the statement. “His knowledge of the game, ability to connect with our players, and his incredible instincts and decisiveness led us to an historic championship season. We know we are in good hands, and could not be more pleased to know he will be with us for the foreseeable future.”

Cora became the fifth big league manager to win a championship in his rookie season. He likewise became the fifth manager in Red Sox history to win a World Series in his first year at the helm of the team, joining John Farrell (2013), Terry Francona (2004), Ed Barrow (1918), and Jake Stahl (1912).

Of course, an extension at improved terms requires mutual interest in extending a relationship — and just as there's little surprise that the Sox wanted to extend Cora, there's little surprise that the 43-year-old wanted to lengthen his term in Boston. Late in the season, Cora recalled that he had told other organizations last offseason that he wanted to prioritize Boston over other job opportunities, and wanted to try to bring to fruition a job with the Red Sox before interviewing with them. Those additional conversations, Cora happily reported, proved unnecessary.

“This is the place I wanted to be . . . It's a fun place to play. I loved it. And the whole baseball thing kind of fits who I am,” Cora said in September. “Here kind of was the perfect fit.”

Told that such an outlook compromised his negotiating leverage, Cora cracked a smile.

“We’ll talk about that later,” he chuckled. “I know they’re happy.”

In the announcement of the deal, Cora expressed appreciation for what transpired in 2018, while also looking ahead toward a chance to repeat.

“They talked about it right after we won. I actually had no leverage because I signed what I signed and I was happy with it,” said Cora. “But I’m glad that they came up to me and they talked about it. My family, we appreciate that. We’re just happy to be here. We have a great team, and we’re going to be good next year. Hopefully, we can do the same thing we did this year.”

The Red Sox could have had both Mookie Betts and Christian Yelich

Alex Speier

In some ways, it seems fitting that the Red Sox’ Mookie Betts and the Brewers’ Christian Yelich are likely to claim MVP awards on the same day.

There are a lot of similarities between the two corner outfielders with wonderfully balanced skill sets: They’re batting champions who exceeded 30 homers, stole a ton of bases, posted high OBPs, and played excellent defense this past season.

“They’re very similar,” said Red Sox assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett, who managed Yelich in the Marlins system. “They both have happy-go-lucky, goofy personalities. They’re a joy to be around. They both work their tail off and are driven to get better.”

“What comes to mind is the pitch recognition. You see Mookie right away. He lays off pitches most people don’t lay off of, and he’s able to barrel pitches most people don’t hit. Christian has that same capability. It’s almost like this different vision and body control that they possess that most don’t have.”

Betts and Yelich almost shared something else: the Red Sox outfield.

In 2011, the belief of area scout Danny Watkins led the Red Sox to make a franchise-changing selection of Betts out of high school in the fifth round — where, in retrospect, he had no business being available.

One year earlier, the Red Sox had the 20th pick in the first round. They saw Yelich as the best high school position player at that spot, with some in the organization seeing him as a potential perennial All-Star. While they ended up taking Ball State infielder/outfielder Kolbrin Vitek in the first round, multiple major league sources said they strongly considered Yelich.

“Interest was extremely high,” recalled one party to the team’s decision in 2010. “It was right there. We’d definitely have taken him [in the supplemental first round at No. 36], but we had to talk about him at 20.”

Yelich wasn’t as overlooked as Betts would be the following year, but the industry had a measured view of him. Baseball America ranked Yelich 52nd, suggesting that his arm limited him to first base, his primary position at Westlake (Calif.) High School.

His potential to hit for a high average but with limited power was evocative of players such as Casey Kotchman and James Loney. That made for a somewhat confusing profile for scouts.

“When he came in, he couldn’t throw,” said Barkett. “He looked like he was uncoordinated. Then you saw him swing the bat and you were like, ‘OK, I get it now.’”

“There’s a lot of, I think, back-office things that happened around Christian Yelich. I’ve heard different stories about people trying to get him. There were a lot of people that liked him.”

The Red Sox were among them. John Burtzloff, the assistant coach at Westlake at the time, recalled them as one of five teams that showed the most interest, along with the Padres, Dodgers, Marlins, and Cubs.

In addition to sending several evaluators to look at Yelich at Westlake, the Red Sox also worked out the teenager, and he made an excellent impression with his natural instincts in the outfield.

Offensively, Yelich had years in which he was the best hitter in his league. Though he was contact-oriented, team evaluators saw him driving balls off the top of an oak tree beyond the center-field fence at Westlake and backspinning the ball to left field, creating a sense that he could tap into power as his wiry frame filled out.

Moreover, the team viewed him as an atypical high school prospect given his obvious passion for the game and attention to detail — including a willingness, for instance, to work on baserunning in his spare time.

High school position players are a hard demographic to project given the massive learning curve they face ahead, but in the eyes of the Red Sox, Yelich showed not just the physical skills but the personality traits to travel that hard path.

So why didn't they take him over Vitek, who wound up retiring prior to the 2014 season after a rash of injuries?

First, the Red Sox were drawn to Vitek, a good athlete whose college and Cape League performances suggested a player with a decent chance at having an average to above-average across-the-board skill set at third base or in the outfield.

They had used their top picks in two of the prior four drafts on high school position players Jason Place (2006) and Rey Fuentes (2009). Both disappointed in ways that underscored the risks of that demographic.

Entering 2010, the Red Sox thought it might make more sense to use their top pick on a college player and spend on high school talent later in the draft. They hoped that Yelich might slide to No. 36, but that didn't happen. The Marlins took him in the first round at No. 23.

Eight years later, Yelich didn't have a recollection of the Red Sox' interest.

"I do remember talking to them," he said at the World Series. "It was just one of those things that ended up not working out.

"They never told me they were going to pick me, or we never had a conversation where it was like, 'Hey, we're really thinking about taking you with that pick.' It was just the standard home visits and workouts, nothing I wasn't doing with other teams at the time."

But evaluators who were in the Red Sox draft room remember vividly how highly Yelich was regarded, and have played the what-if game. Yet to them, Yelich is less a story of one who got away as he is a lesson in the amazing difficulty of the draft.

It's possible to do an excellent job of evaluating one player, to reduce the choice to something close to an either/or, and still go wrong at the fork in the road. In this case, it was choosing a player who never reached Triple A (Vitek) over one who is an MVP favorite (Yelich).

It's also possible to underrate a player even when doing a great job of scouting him. After all, no one projected Betts to become an MVP finalist who was the best player on a World Series champion.

There is no clear crystal ball, only cloudy glimpses of the future. Misreads are unavoidable. The goal, then, is to have enough accurate forecasts to yield a preponderance of good predictions that serve as the basis of a championship-caliber team.

With the homegrown outfield of Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., and Andrew Benintendi, the Red Sox managed to do just that, even without selecting Yelich.

In that sense, if Yelich and Betts are announced as MVPs Thursday, it will serve as a moment of pride for the Red Sox — while also offering a reminder of the remarkable rewards and enormous challenges presented by the draft.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox extend Alex Cora through 2021 with new contract

Jason Mastrodonato

Alex Cora was rewarded for his historic season as rookie manager of the Red Sox with a new contract on Wednesday.

The Sox announced that they had negotiated a new deal that would extend Cora's contract an extra year through 2021, while adding a club option for 2022.

Cora was originally signed to a three-year deal and was making just \$800,000 per year, according to USA Today, which ranked him among the lowest-paid managers in the game. But after the Sox won the World Series and principal owner John Henry said Cora was "every bit as good as our best player," it seemed inevitable that Cora would get a new deal.

Cora made it clear in the past that his priority was philanthropy. He said one of the only things he asked for in his original contract negotiations was that the Red Sox take a plane full of supplies to Puerto Rico, which was suffering after the effects of Hurricane Maria.

"Since day one, John and Linda Henry, Tom Werner, Mike Gordon, Sam Kennedy, and Dave Dombrowski have been incredibly supportive of me and my family, and for that I am extremely grateful," Cora said in a statement released yesterday. "For me, 2018 was not only historic, but it was special as well, both on and off the field. We have a great appreciation for our accomplishments this past year, but now our focus moves forward to the season ahead and defending our World Series title."

Henry was asked after the World Series if the Sox would renegotiate Cora's deal but said he hadn't thought about it yet.

Two weeks later, Cora has a new contract.

"We have consistently been impressed by Alex at every turn," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said in a statement. "His knowledge of the game, ability to connect with our players, and his incredible instincts and decisiveness led us to an historic championship season. We know we are in good hands, and could not be more pleased to know he will be with us for the foreseeable future."

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, who signed a five-year deal when he joined the Sox in 2015, could also be of interest for the Red Sox this offseason. Unprompted, Henry mentioned taking care of Dombrowski when asked about player contracts during the World Series parade.

Wednesday, Dombrowski had kind words for Cora.

"Alex did a tremendous job for our club all year long and we wanted to reward him for his efforts after an amazing season," Dombrowski said in a statement. "We are extremely happy that he will be with us and leading our club on the field."

*** *MassLive.com***

Will Boston Red Sox re-sign Nathan Eovaldi, Joe Kelly? Will Mookie Betts get paid? 10 important offseason questions

Christopher Smith

Red Sox manager Alex Cora agreed to a contract extension Wednesday. He said in a statement he had "a great appreciation" for the 2018 season but he added "now our focus moves forward to the season ahead and defending our World Series title."

Cora, Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and the front office have put 2018 behind them. It's time for them to make important free agent/trade decisions and build a roster for 2019.

Below are the 10 most important offseason questions with the Winter Meetings in Las Vegas less than a month away.

1. Will Red Sox commit to Blake Swihart and just two catchers?

The Red Sox carried three catchers, Christian Vazquez, Sandy Leon and Blake Swihart, during 2018. They likely will carry only two catchers in 2019.

"I'd say it's unlikely but not impossible that you'd have three guys," Dombrowski said Nov. 1.

Swihart is entering his first year of arbitration. He is a rare four-year arbitration player, and so the Red Sox have him under control through 2022. He has the most offensive potential of the three catchers. He showed improvement both blocking balls in the dirt and throwing to bases this past season. He also will earn the lowest salary of the three in 2019.

It makes sense to keep both Swihart and Vazquez, who last March inked a three-year contract extension with a team option for 2022.

The pitching staff loves working with Leon. But Leon posted a .177/.232/.279/.511 slash line during 2018. It's difficult to rely on a catcher who provides almost no offensive production. Leon also is eligible for free agency after 2020, two years before both Swihart and Vazquez.

2. Matt Barnes? Ryan Brasier? Who's the closer?

The Red Sox are unlikely to re-sign closer Craig Kimbrel who declined his \$17.9 million qualifying offer.

Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier are the top two internal candidates to take over as Boston's closer if Kimbrel leaves, Dombrowski said.

Kimbrel is a traditional closer, being used mainly to record the game's final three outs. But Brasier, Barnes or whoever is the next Red Sox closer likely will be used in a non-traditional way. He'll be used in the highest leverage spot late in a game. That means pitching the eighth inning if the middle of the lineup is due.

Kimbrel's replacement also likely will be asked to record four-and five-out saves more frequently than Kimbrel did.

3. Might the Red Sox bring back Andrew Miller?

The Indians didn't extend a qualifying offer to Miller, who pitched for Boston from 2011-14. The Red Sox, therefore, wouldn't give up a compensation draft pick if they signed the hard-throwing lefty.

Miller's stock is down some at the moment. He was one of the major's most feared relievers from 2014-17. But the 33-year-old dealt with injuries, and posted a 4.24 ERA and 3.51 FIP in 34 innings during 2018.

Fancred Sports national baseball reporter Jon Heyman predicted Miller will receive one year, \$13 million in free agency. That seems low. A two- or three-year deal seems more likely.

His personality fits any clubhouse. He could be used as either a closer or setup man in Boston.

4. Will the Red Sox go to another arbitration hearing with Mookie Betts?

Mookie Betts and the Red Sox failed to agree on a contract both in 2017 and '18.

Betts was Boston's lone pre-arbitration player of 19 who the team failed to reach an agreement with in 2017. The Sox gave him \$950,000.

He and the club again failed to agree on a salary for 2018, Betts' first arbitration year. They went to an arbitration hearing, just the third arbitration hearing for the Red Sox since 2002. The arbiter ruled in Betts' favor and he received a \$10.5 million salary for 2018.

MLBTradeRumors.com projects Betts will earn \$18.7 million in salary arbitration for 2019.

Betts has said multiple times contract disputes haven't strained his relationship with the front office.

He's an AL MVP finalist. He likely will win the award Thursday. The Red Sox should pay him what he wants and deserves. They need to show their commitment and how much they value him, especially if they want to negotiate an extension before he's eligible for free agency after the 2020 season.

5. Will the Red Sox trade any big-name players to slash payroll?

The Red Sox's 2018 payroll soared over \$237 million, the highest figure in franchise history by far. The 2019 payroll could look very similar.

Dombrowski said "there has been no mention of (reducing it) for the next season."

But another season over \$237 million means another top draft pick moved back 10 slots (2020 draft). Dombrowski and the front office likely will aim for the payroll to sit under \$237 million (even if it's only slightly under).

The Sox freed up \$49.395 million with seven players electing free agency. But Dombrowski will spend money re-signing some of his own free agents or other other available free agents this offseason. Boston also will pay approximately \$21.965 million more in arbitration salaries during 2019.

Rick Porcello is in the final year of his four-year contract. Dombrowski could slash some payroll by trading Porcello (\$20.625 million average annual value).

Jackie Bradley Jr.'s stock is high right now after a strong second half (.827 OPS) and clutch postseason in which he earned ALCS MVP honors. MLBTradeRumors.com projects Bradley will earn \$7.9 million in 2019. The Red Sox could slash payroll by trading Bradley and Porcello and using some of the money to sign other free agents while also staying under \$237 million tax threshold.

6. Will the Red Sox extend any of the 7 players who will be free agents after 2019?

Xander Bogaerts, Chris Sale, Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland, Eduardo Nunez, Brock Holt and Tyler Thornburg all are eligible for free agency after the 2019 season. J.D. Martinez also has an opt-out clause after the 2019 season.

Martinez, Bogaerts and Sale likely are the top three priorities.

Martinez has expressed interest in an extension. But the Red Sox are unlikely to negotiate this offseason.

"You're open-minded to anything, but I would say unlikely," Dombrowski said at the GM Meetings.

Sale's health is an issue. He pitched just 29 innings during the second half because of shoulder inflammation. Durability issues could keep the Red Sox from re-signing him.

Xander Bogaerts is a Scott Boras client. Boras encourages his clients to test free agency but there certainly have been exceptions over the years.

7. Which Rule-5 players will the Red Sox add to the 40-man roster?

The Red Sox's 40-man roster as of now consists of 34 players. The Red Sox have plenty of room to add players via free agency and trades without designating anyone for assignment.

But they also have a Nov. 20 deadline to add Rule 5 eligible players to the 40-man roster. Any eligible minor leaguer left unprotected can be selected by another club in December's Rule 5 Draft.

Power-hitting prospects Michael Chavis and Josh Ockimey as well as right-handed reliever Travis Lakins are locks to be added to the 40-man roster. Pitchers Darwinzon Hernandez and Denyi Reyes also have a chance. Reyes posted a 1.97 ERA and 0.91 WHIP in 27 outings (24 starts) between Low-A Greenville and High-A Salem last year. He struck out 145 and walked 19.

SoxProspects.com provides a full list of Red Sox minor leaguers eligible for the Rule 5 Draft.

8. Will the Red Sox re-sign any of their own free agents?

Joe Kelly recently told Jim Rome, "It's gonna be fun to see what teams are interested in me. Hopefully, I can be a Red Sox though, for the rest of my career."

Kelly -- who allowed just one earned run, struck out 13 and didn't walk anyone in 11.1 innings (0.79 ERA) over nine postseason outings -- seems like the most likely Red Sox free agent to return.

Steve Pearce also is a candidate to return at the right price. He'd complement Mitch Moreland nicely, although the Red Sox could choose a cheaper alternative (Michael Chavis).

"That's something I leave up to my agent to do, but myself personally, I would love to come back," Pearce said. "This has been a fun year. And I'd love to do it again next year."

Eovaldi seems like the best fit but he also will be in high demand after his dominant postseason (1.61 ERA, 22.1 innings). At least 10 teams likely will show interest in signing him.

9. Will the Red Sox non-tender Tyler Thornburg, any other arbitration-eligible player?

The non-tender deadline -- the final day to offer 2019 contracts to unsigned 40-man roster players -- is Nov. 30.

The Red Sox have 12 arbitration players.

Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Eduardo Rodriguez, Brock Holt, Matt Barnes, Steven Wright and Blake Swihart definitely will be tendered contracts.

Tyler Thornburg, Sandy Leon, Brandon Workman and Heath Hembree are tougher calls. Workman is projected to earn over \$1 million for the first time in his career. The 2019 season also will mark the first time he's out of minor league options.

Hembree struggled down the stretch. Meanwhile, Leon might be a non-tender candidate because of the Red Sox's preference to carry two catchers in 2019 (see above).

The Red Sox have an interesting decision to make with Thornburg. They paid the righty reliever \$4.1 million combined the past two years and he posted a 5.63 ERA in just 24 innings.

Thornburg had difficulty bouncing back in 2018 from thoracic outlet syndrome surgery. And Dombrowski already has parted ways with Carson Smith (shoulder).

But Dombrowski traded four players, including Travis Shaw, to acquire Thornburg. So he has more invested in Thornburg than he did Smith who he acquired for much less.

Salary arbitration contracts aren't guaranteed until Opening Day. The Red Sox could tender Thornburg a contract Nov. 30, then evaluate him during spring training before making a decision.

10. Are the Red Sox OK with their second base depth behind Dustin Pedroia?

Dustin Pedroia appeared in only three games during 2018 after he underwent a cartilage restoration procedure on his knee in October 2017. He also had scar tissue removed during an arthroscopic surgery in late July in Arizona.

Eduardo Nunez exercised his 2019 player option. He provides depth at second base again, although he doesn't play the position very well (negative-14 Defensive Runs Saved in '18, per Fangraphs.com.) The Red Sox always could play Nunez at second for a couple months, then trade for a better defensive second baseman like they did in 2018 with Ian Kinsler.

Tzu-Wei Lin and Marco Hernandez, who missed all but 21 games the past two seasons because of a shoulder injury, provide second base depth. Hernandez is expected to return healthy.

Dombrowski even mentioned top prospect Michael Chavis as a potential candidate to play some second base in 2019.

Dombrowski needs to A.) determine if he has enough second base depth entering 2019 in case Pedroia's knee remains an issue; B.) begin to consider longterm replacements for Pedroia.

Chris Sale, Boston Red Sox ace, finishes fourth for 2018 AL Cy Young; Blake Snell beats out Justin Verlander

Christopher Smith

Red Sox ace Chris Sale finished fourth for 2018 AL Cy Young.

Rays' Blake Snell won with 17 first-place votes. Astros' Justin Verlander who received 13 first-place votes, finished second.

Sale has finished in the top five in the AL Cy Young voting the past six years (2013-18). He finished in sixth place in 2012.

He recorded a 2.11 ERA, 1.98 FIP and 0.86 WHIP in 27 starts. He 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 only 158 innings. Two DL stints (shoulder inflammation) limited him to 29 innings during the second half.

Voting results:

1. Blake Snell, Rays, 17 first-place votes (169 points)
2. Justin Verlander, Astros, 13 first-place votes (154 points)
3. Corey Kluber, Indians, 4 first-place votes (71 points)
4. Chris Sale, Red Sox, (59 points)
5. Gerrit Cole, Astros, (26 points)
6. Trevor Bauer, Indians, (13 points)
6. Blake Treinen, Athletics, (13 points)

8. Edwin Diaz, Mariners, (4 points)
9. Luis Severino, Yankees, (1 point)

Boston Red Sox extend Alex Cora's contract through 2021 with option for 2022

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox and manager Alex Cora have agreed to a new contract, according to an announcement from the team. Cora's new deal includes a one-year extension through 2021 and a club option for 2022.

Cora originally signed a three-year deal with a club option through 2021 when he was hired a year ago. He reportedly made \$800k in 2018, so the new deal likely includes a substantial raise for his second season.

Cora was extremely impressive in his first season, winning a franchise-record 108 games and leading the Sox to their fourth World Series title in 15 years. He finished second to Athletics manager Bob Melvin in the voting for the American League Manager of the Year award.

"Alex did a tremendous job for our club all year long and we wanted to reward him for his efforts after an amazing season," president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said in a press release. "We are extremely happy that he will be with us and leading our club on the field."

"We have consistently been impressed by Alex at every turn," said Red Sox chairman Tom Werner. "His knowledge of the game, ability to connect with our players, and his incredible instincts and decisiveness led us to an historic championship season. We know we are in good hands, and could not be more pleased to know he will be with us for the foreseeable future."

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox, Cora agree on new deal through '21

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- A day after Alex Cora finished second in the American League Manager of the Year Award race, the Red Sox gave their skipper the ultimate vote of confidence by redoing his contract to include a raise, an extra guaranteed year in 2021 and a club option that can keep him in Boston through '22.

Behind Cora, the Red Sox notched a franchise-record 108 wins in the regular season and rolled through the competition in the postseason, going 11-3 to bring home a World Series championship -- Boston's fourth in the last 15 seasons.

The contract that Cora signed last November was a three-year deal that went through 2020 and included an option for '21.

The new contract boosts the amount of money Cora will make per season while tacking on an additional year.

By taking such swift action on Cora's contract, the Red Sox are demonstrating how much they believe their manager had to do with the team's success.

"We have consistently been impressed by Alex at every turn," said Red Sox chairman Tom Werner. "His knowledge of the game, ability to connect with our players, and his incredible instincts and decisiveness led us to a historic championship season. We know we are in good hands and could not be more pleased to know he will be with us for the foreseeable future."

Cora drew rave reviews for a variety of things, including his ability to communicate, his tactical decisions and the way he integrated analytics into daily life in the dugout.

Without question, Cora won over his players and also earned the confidence of ownership and the front office.

"Alex did a tremendous job for our club all year long and we wanted to reward him for his efforts after an amazing season," said Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. "We are extremely happy that he will be with us and leading our club on the field."

The 43-year-old Cora expressed gratitude after receiving the new contract.

"Since Day 1, John and Linda Henry, Tom Werner, Mike Gordon, Sam Kennedy and Dave Dombrowski have been incredibly supportive of me and my family, and for that I am extremely grateful," said Cora. "For me, 2018 was not only historic, but it was special as well, both on and off the field. We have a great appreciation for our accomplishments this past year, but now our focus moves forward to the season ahead and defending our World Series title."

The Red Sox are aiming to become MLB's first repeat champion since the Yankees won their third straight in 2000.

Cora came just one win shy of tying Ralph Houk (1961 Yankees) for the most wins by a rookie manager. He was the first rookie manager to win a World Series since Bob Brenly for the D-backs in 2001. Cora joined Jake Stahl (105 wins in 1912) as the only skipper to win 100 games in his first season with Boston.

*** *WEEI.com***

Alex Cora agrees to contract extension with Red Sox

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox and Alex Cora have come to an agreement on a contract extension that will commit to the manager through the 2021 season with a team option for 2022. It adds one year to Cora's original contract with an undisclosed in salary. In his first year with the Red Sox Cora was the lowest paid manager in Major League Baseball, making \$800,000.

"We have consistently been impressed by Alex at every turn," said Red Sox Chairman Tom Werner in a press release. "His knowledge of the game, ability to connect with our players and his incredible instincts and decisiveness led us to a historic championship season. We know we are in good hands, and could not be more pleased to know he will be with us for the foreseeable future."

"Alex did a tremendous job for our club all year long and we wanted to reward him for his efforts after an amazing season," president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said. "We are extremely happy that he will be with us and leading our club on the field."

"Since day one, John and Linda Henry, Tom Werner, Mike Gordon, Sam Kennedy, and Dave Dombrowski have been incredibly supportive of me and my family, and for that I am extremely grateful," said Cora, who was named the 47th manager in Red Sox history on October 22, 2017. "For me, 2018 was not only historic, but it was special as well, both on and off the field. We have a great appreciation for our accomplishments this past year, but now our focus moves forward to the season ahead and defending our World Series title."

Cora, who finished second in the American League Manager of the Year balloting, won 108 regular season games in his managerial debut before going on to claim the World Series title.

Red Sox offseason begins with Juan Centeno signing

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox' newest catcher is no stranger to Alex Cora.

Juan Centeno, who has agreed to a minor-league deal with the Red Sox per a major league source, played for Cora's team in Caguas in the Puerto Rico Winter League, while also joining the Sox manager in Houston during the 2017 season.

The 28-year-old catcher, a native of Puerto Rico, is coming into the organization with 111 major league games under his belt, having played five organizations. Centeno spent 2018 with the Rangers, appearing in 10 big league games. He is a career .227 hitter with a .609 OPS in, having seen his most extensive action in the bigs with the Twins during the 2016 season (55 games).

After the trio of Sandy Leon, Christian Vazquez and Blake Swihart, the only other catcher to appear in the major leagues for the Red Sox in 2018 was Dan Butler, who is currently a free agent.

According to SoxProspects.com, the top-ranked catching prospect in the Red Sox system is last year's fourth-round pick Cole Kottam, a 21-year-old from the University of Kentucky who spent all but one game in his first pro season at short-season Single-A Lowell.

MassLive.com was first to report the Red Sox' agreement with Centeno.

Tim Dierkes: Industry wants to love Nathan Eovaldi

Rob Bradford

The Nathan Eovaldi market is certainly in the crosshairs of anyone following the Red Sox' offseason maneuvering.

Not only will the pitcher's free agent status be of particular interest because of the perceived interest by Dave Dombrowski and Co., but also due to the unique nature Eovaldi's case represents. He is the youngest starting pitcher on the market, coming off an epic postseason run while possessing some of the best stuff in the big leagues. But there is an uneasy track record heading into this offseason, which includes two Tommy John surgeries.

Appearing on the Bradfo Sho podcast, Tim Dierkes of MLB Trade Rumors discussed how he viewed a player his team projects will get a contract in the vicinity of four years, \$60 million.

"Out of the gate he didn't feel to me like a four-year guy," Dierkes said. "He doesn't have the innings or durability to get there. If you look at some of the comparable contracts, I think if he gets a four-year deal, which is my current guess, that it would be fairly unprecedented. We looked at Brandon McCarthy who had a pretty spotty injury history before he got one, but he was coming off a 200-inning season and that's not true of Eovaldi at all. Sometimes me and my team get a little caught up in the comparables in what happened before and forget that free agency is just a bidding war. You hear so many teams would love to sign Eovaldi in particular and you know that even though the money keeps going and going it's still going to stop I think well short of (Patrick) Corbin. Even if it's not four years, \$60 (million) but four years somehow \$70 (million) would be a real ceiling on a guy with his history, but still a lot less than Corbin is going to cost and if you think they are going to be comparable pitchers than there you go.

"I think Eovaldi is a guy the industry probably has wanted to love for a long time because the stuff looks so good. He has never seemed to get those strikeouts that you would expect with it. So at least with the Red Sox he started to. He looked great in the playoffs. He left a great last impression. I think too that some of the teams that are maybe on the rebuild type of cycle but trying to pull out of it they can look at a guy like him. So I think interest is going to be wide-spread."

Another aspect of Eovaldi's free agency that should be interesting is how much his postseason dominance will impact the pitcher's payday.

"Sometimes it's tough because what is the cause and what is the effect," Dierkes explained. "You remember when Daniel Murphy went nuts. He did not get paid from that. So it doesn't always happen. He got three years, \$37 million. He could have got a lot more if people were suddenly were buying into it. The funny thing about him is he should have (gotten paid) and it would have been good and it would have been smart because it was him showing he changed as a hitter. I think free agency can be very irrational. I think it really does matter. As much as the GMs are making the call, if you're talking \$50 million or more I certainly think the owners have some kind of presence in those discussions. I don't want to characterize as dumb or reactionary.

*** *Associated Press***

Red Sox reward Alex Cora for World Series title

BOSTON — Alex Cora brought a new voice and culture to the Boston Red Sox that helped propel them to their latest World Series title.

The Red Sox rewarded him for bringing home a championship in his first year with the team by giving him a new contract with an additional guaranteed year through the 2021 season.

The deal containing the extension was announced Wednesday by Boston also includes a club option for 2022.

In his rookie season as a major league manager, Cora guided the Red Sox to a franchise-record 108 victories and the team's fourth championship in 15 seasons.

He finished second in the AL Manager of the Year voting announced Tuesday.

"We have consistently been impressed by Alex at every turn," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said in a statement. "His knowledge of the game, ability to connect with our players, and his incredible instincts and decisiveness led us to an historic championship season. We know we are in good hands and could not be more pleased to know he will be with us for the foreseeable future."

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski was in search of new direction for the club when he fired former manager John Farrell after back-to-back AL Division Series losses in 2016 and 2017.

After the historic regular season, Cora then steered Boston past the 100-win Yankees and Astros in the AL playoffs before downing the Dodgers in the World Series.

"For me, 2018 was not only historic, but it was special as well, both on and off the field," Cora said in a statement. "We have a great appreciation for our accomplishments this past year, but now our focus moves forward to the season ahead and defending our World Series title."

During Boston's run Cora got the best out his young talent, led by AL MVP favorite Mookie Betts. They shined in player-centric approach in which Cora encouraged an aggressive hitting mentality, lots of hit-and-runs and active running of the bases.

Cora also got the most out of his pitching staff, which included clutch performances in the postseason by Chris Sale and David Price. Neither pitcher had logged a playoff victory as a starter prior to this season.

Price had a tough time acclimating to Boston's rugged sports environment during his first two seasons of the seven-year, \$217 million deal he signed in 2015.

He's found a groove late in the season, pitching the clinching Game 5 of the ALCS to help the Red Sox advance.

"Just his demeanor. It doesn't change," Price said last month. "I know it's easy to not change when your team wins 108 games in the regular season. But he hasn't changed one bit."

A member of the Red Sox's 2007 World Series title team as a player, Cora was the bench coach on Houston's 2017 championship team. He learned from manager A.J. Hinch that being close to players would be beneficial.

"Talking to players is not bad, having a relationship with players is not bad," Cora said in describing his managerial philosophy. "Doing that, you're going to get the best out of them. People may think that crossing that line is not helpful, but I see it the other way around, and I lived it."

Cora became the first manager from Puerto to guide a team to a championship. It came more than a year after Hurricane Maria devastated island, prompting Cora during initial contract negotiations last October to ask the Red Sox to help his people with relief efforts. Ownership responded by sending a chartered plane full of supplies.

Days after winning the World Series, they again obliged Cora's request to take the trophy to his hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico.