

The Boston Red Sox Friday, November 16, 2018

*** *The Boston Globe***

In voting Mookie Betts MVP, writers got it right

Nick Cafardo

Mookie Betts won his first American League Most Valuable Award on Thursday, but it should have been his second. And that should signal to the Red Sox that he will be in the Bryce Harper/Manny Machado neighborhood in terms of future salary and this might be the best time to tie Betts to Boston for the remainder of his career, even though he's two seasons away from free agency.

Betts should have won the award in 2016, when he finished as runner-up with a .318 average, 31 homers, 113 RBIs, and an .897 OPS, compared with winner Mike Trout's .315 average, 29 homers, 100 RBIs, and .991 OPS. Betts also had 26 stolen bases to Trout's 30, and Trout had a 10.5 WAR to Betts's 9.7. But Betts was the better defensive player.

The big thing for me in 2016 was that Betts had led his team to a division title. Trout's Angels finished in fourth place in the AL West. Not saying that Trout should be penalized for being on a lousy team, but his numbers appeared hollow when not applied to a winner. And Betts's numbers should have been given greater significance because of the division title. But as we've opined on many occasions, WAR seems to carry the MVP voting these days. In this year's vote, WAR won out again, as Betts had a 10.9 to runner-up Trout's 10.2.

At least the right choice was made this time, as Betts again was most valuable on a team that won its division. The voting is done prior to the start of the playoffs, of course, but once again Trout had a great season on a team that didn't go anywhere. Not a reason to disqualify him, but a reason to catapult Betts over him.

For years I've thought there should be two awards — MVP and Player of the Year. While the current voting seems to blend the two, sometimes they can be different. In 2016, for instance, Trout should have been the Player of the Year and Betts the MVP.

And then you have the ridiculousness of J.D. Martinez not even making the top three, finishing fourth in the voting despite hitting .330 with 43 homers and 130 RBIs for a winner. Why Martinez wasn't second in the voting is anyone's guess. His numbers alone indicate he's the best hitter in baseball, but it appears he was penalized for spending 60 percent of his time as a designated hitter.

Overall, though, we feel the voters finally got it right. Betts's salary is likely to jump from \$10.5 million to somewhere in the \$17 million-\$20 million range in arbitration, unless the Red Sox and Betts get together on a long-term arrangement this offseason.

Betts could define a new market when he comes up in free agency if a deal isn't done before then. If Harper and Machado are looking at north of \$400 million for a 10-year term, will Betts surpass even that? The Red Sox have tried in the past to tie up Betts, but he and his representation have been content to go year to year. Could that change this offseason to ride the Harper/Machado wave?

Betts had an incredible season, where a combination of manager Alex Cora's advice and teammate Martinez's hitting approach and philosophy worked to optimize his offensive numbers. Betts was told by Cora last offseason that if he became a more aggressive hitter and not afraid to swing at the first pitch or at least early in the count, that good things could happen. Cora wanted Betts to be more like the 2017 version of George Springer of the Astros. Betts surpassed that.

Betts continued to be an outstanding right fielder, winning his third consecutive Gold Glove. He also was credited with 20 Defensive Runs Saved, which tied him with the Brewers' Lorenzo Cain for second among outfielders to the Tigers' JaCoby Jones.

Betts, Harper, and Machado are all 26. Trout is 27. Betts wasn't as fortunate as Harper and Machado, who both came up in 2012, while Betts debuted in 2014. Another thing about Betts: Will he have a position change back to his natural second base before his career is over? If Dustin Pedroia doesn't make it all the way back, would the Red Sox consider moving Betts to second? Certainly, Betts would be all for it. He never expected to have to change positions, but once the Sox committed to Pedroia long term, moving to the outfield was Betts's ticket to the big leagues, and he did it very well.

Betts is a great athlete and is very committed to his craft. He loves to play. One doesn't have to worry about Betts getting nonchalant. He always plays hard. He never gives away anything. In fact, he led the majors with a .300 average with two strikes, a sign that there's no count where Betts is at a disadvantage. In 2018, Betts was also a 30/30 player at 5 feet 9 inches. Scouts will tell you he has the fastest hands and hips in the majors, both of which create great power, and despite his small size he plays like someone who's 6-2, such as Trout.

I remember writing early in 2018 that I and others felt we'd rather have Betts than Trout. And that was never meant to disrespect Trout, who's a fabulous player. But the story was met with some skepticism from Trout's fans. How could anyone choose Betts over Trout? Well, watch the game. Watch the five tools in action. There's no question Betts and Trout are just about equal offensively, but Betts has overtaken Trout as a defensive star. Both are excellent base runners, but Betts was not thrown out at home all season.

In 2018, the voters did what they should have done in 2016, and with 28 out of 30 first-place votes they named Mookie Betts the MVP of the American League.

Six memorable performances from Mookie Betts's MVP season

Alex Speier

Here are six memorable performances from Mookie Betts's MVP season:

April 17: A three-homer outing, Part 1

In a 10-1 win over the Angels, Betts stated his case as the best player in the game while playing on the same field as his primary rival (Mike Trout) for the distinction. He led off the game with a homer off Shohei Ohtani, his first of three long balls in a 3-for-3 game in which he reached base in all five of his plate appearances (two walks).

Read on: The Shohei Ohtani show turned into the Mookie Betts show

May 2: A three-homer outing, Part 2

In a 5-4 win, Betts hit three homers off Royals starter Danny Duffy, jump-starting the Red Sox in the fourth when they were down, 3-0, giving them the lead one inning later with a solo shot, then adding a run that gives them the necessary pad to withstand an eighth-inning Royals homer.

May 13: A full repertoire on display

A 5-3 win over Toronto highlighted the diverse ways in which Betts can impact games. He went 2 for 4 with a pair of singles and a walk, stole a pair of bases, and made a spectacular diving catch that showcased his Gold Glove defense in right.

July 12: A 13-pitch at-bat, and a grand slam

With the Red Sox trailing the Blue Jays, 2-1, in the bottom of the fourth, Betts hit a grand slam on the 13th pitch of his at-bat — the longest at-bat to yield a grand slam since 1992. The Red Sox went on to win, 6-4.

Aug. 9: Hitting for the cycle

In an 8-5 defeat at Toronto, Betts hit for the cycle, going 4 for 4 with a single, double, triple, ninth-inning homer, and a walk. It was one of a major league-high seven four-hit games for him and one of five in which he reached base five times, also a major league-high.

Sept. 20: A towering homer, and a division title

At Yankee Stadium, Betts punctuated the Red Sox' American League East-clinching win — and quite likely his own MVP case — with a towering homer to left off Aroldis Chapman in the eighth inning, the final note of a 4-for-5 night in which he also had two doubles. The Red Sox won, 11-6.

For the season, Betts hit .415/.506/.738 with 14 extra-base hits and 15 RBIs against the Yankees. He joined Wade Boggs (1989) as the only players in the expansion era (1961-present) with three four-hit games against the Yankees in one season.

Mookie Betts is the American League Most Valuable Player

Alex Speier

For Mookie Betts, a remarkable 2018 of on- and off-field feats culminated in entirely expected and entirely fitting fashion, with the Red Sox right fielder being named the Most Valuable Player in the American League on Thursday night.

Two years after Betts finished as the runner-up to Mike Trout for the award, he won handily, claiming 28 of 30 first-place votes and two second-place votes for a total of 410 points. Trout, who received one first-place vote, finished a distant second with 265 points.

“Obviously, I really wanted to win [in 2016]. Just being in that spot, you don’t ever know if you’re going to make it back,” Betts said in a conference call. “[Winning the MVP has] been everything I imagined and more. [But] I think the most important thing is that World Series. That’s what kind of sticks in my head first and foremost about the season.”

The award backs what members of the Red Sox and the larger baseball industry observed repeatedly during the season: No one did more to help his team than Betts, whose performance ranks not only as one of the best of his career but as one of the top seasons in Red Sox franchise history. He became the first AL player to win MVP, Gold Glove, and Silver Slugger awards in the same year he won the World Series.

“It’s one of the best [seasons] I’ve seen. It’s just all parts of the game – the way he plays the outfield, the way he throws, the way he runs the bases, and that’s not even mentioning his hitting,” said teammate Dustin Pedroia, the 2008 AL MVP. “I’ve played with some great players. I don’t think I’ve seen a season with an all-around game like that. He’s always been elite, but he’s gone to another level.”

Betts proved among the best in the majors in virtually every facet of the game. He led the big leagues with a .346 average and .640 slugging percentage, hitting 32 homers, stealing 30 bases (in 36 attempts), and posting a .438 OBP. He became the second player in Red Sox history to hit 30 homers and steal 30 bases in the same year, and the first 30/30 player in big league history to win a batting title.

On top of his steady offensive contributions, Betts once again delivered game-changing defense, mostly in right field. He won his third straight Gold Glove Award, and the two most popular public defensive metrics suggested that Betts made an enormous mark in the outfield, as he was credited with 20 Defensive Runs Saved (tied for fifth most in the majors) by Sports Info Solutions and 15.3 runs saved by Fangraphs (second most in the majors) relative to an average defensive right fielder.

“He’s the best right fielder I’ve ever seen defensively,” former Orioles manager Buck Showalter said late in the season. “I don’t think people fully realize the impact he has on [the Red Sox] in right field in [Fenway].”

His performance as a five-tool player landed Betts in rare historical company. Fangraphs pegged his season as having been worth 10.4 Wins Above Replacement, the highest mark by any player since 2004; Baseball-Reference.com credited Betts with 10.9 WAR, best for any player since 2002.

In other years, runners-up Trout of the Angels (who hit .312/.460/.628 with 39 homers, 24 steals) and Jose Ramirez of Cleveland (third place with a .270/.387/.552 line with 39 homers and 34 steals) would have had compelling cases to win the award. But Betts's overall contributions on a team that claimed a franchise-record 108 victories made him the clear front-runner for the award.

Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez received one first-place vote. He finished in fourth place in voting with 198 points, just behind Ramirez (208 points). Betts and Martinez are the first Red Sox teammates to crack the top four in MVP voting in the same year since Pedroia and Kevin Youkilis (third) in 2008.

"I'm glad he was recognized," said Betts, who credited the arrival of Martinez and manager Alex Cora as key reasons behind his landmark season. "He had a great year, definitely an MVP year. I'm just glad to know that at least he was recognized for it."

Betts is the 11th Red Sox player to receive the MVP, joining Tris Speaker (1912), Jimmie Foxx (1938), Ted Williams (1946 and 1949), Jackie Jensen (1958), Carl Yastrzemski (1967), Fred Lynn (1975), Jim Rice (1978), Roger Clemens (1986), Mo Vaughn (1995), and Pedroia (2008).

Christian Yelich of the Brewers was named National League MVP, claiming 29 of 30 first-place votes, after leading the NL in average (.326) and OPS (1.000) while hitting 36 homers and stealing 22 bases. Cubs infielder Javier Baez finished second, and Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado finished third.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Mookie Betts caps magic year with AL MVP award

Michael Silverman

You Betts believe it.

Mookie Betts won the 2018 American League Most Valuable Player Award last night, beating Mike Trout (second place) and Jose Ramirez in voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Red Sox designated hitter J.D. Martinez finished fourth.

After finishing second two seasons ago and then tailing off slightly in 2017, the 26-year-old Betts surged to another level of all-around play this season to earn his first MVP award. After four full seasons, the trophy further legitimizes Betts' already secure spot on center stage as one of the top five players in the majors and arguably the face of baseball's future.

Betts said he is ready to take the greater exposure the MVP and the Red Sox season will create and embrace it even more to become an ambassador for the game.

"Absolutely, I think I enjoy being a face around the game," Betts said. "I can use this pedestal, or whatever you want to say, to spread knowledge that this game is fun. We have a bunch of great personalities, great athletes in this game, and it's definitely something that's getting younger, that's growing and something I take pride knowing I can make a difference in a kid's life."

Winning the award after coming so close two years ago means a great deal to Betts but not as much as the leap his team took.

“Obviously I really wanted to win then (in 2016) being in that spot because you never know if you’re going to make it back,” Betts said. “It’s been everything I imagined and more. The most important thing is that World Series, that’s what sticks in my head, first and foremost, about this season.”

In a year in which he became a world champion and a father, the MVP adds an exclamation point for the dynamic five-tool right fielder and leadoff hitter, who became the first Red Sox to win the award since Dustin Pedroia in 2008.

The voting was not that close.

Betts received 28 of 30 first-place votes, with the other first-place votes split between Trout and Martinez. Betts finished with 410 votes, while Trout garnered 265.

The arrival of Martinez helped Betts move to a higher level. He picked the brain of the hitting-savant Martinez, followed the mandate from the coaches for all the hitters to become more aggressive in the strike zone and also altered his swing to get more lift on the ball. As a result, he became a more dangerous and powerful hitter, setting highs in home runs (32), doubles (47), runs (129), stolen bases (30), batting average (.346), on-base percentage (.438) and slugging percentage (.630).

“With J.D. and (manager Alex Cora) coming over, that kind of made things a little easier on me, kind of gave me a new perspective on the game and how to go about taking care of business,” said Betts, who is just the second Red Sox to have a 30-30 season. “Playing the game, I learned so much and they put me in the right spot to succeed, hitting home runs and whatnot, but it was maybe the things you didn’t see that made the year so special.”

Betts’ 10.9 WAR the majors and was the highest for any position player since Barry Bonds (11.8) in 2002. He tied Ted Williams (1946) for the second-highest single-season WAR in club history, with Carl Yastrzemski at 12.5 in 1967 still tops.

Betts led the majors in batting average, slugging percentage, and ranked second in OBP, OPS and extra-base hits (84). The batting title was the first for a Red Sox since Bill Mueller in 2003.

Betts is the only player in MLB history to steal 20-plus bases and hit 40-plus doubles in four consecutive seasons.

Defensively, Betts won his third Gold Glove in a row, and was tied for third-most defensive runs saved in the majors.

Betts has two more seasons before he can hit free agency. The Red Sox have stated they wish to make him a Red Sox for life, but Betts did not want to entertain speculation about his long-term future.

“Right now, just focused on 2019 season coming up,” Betts said. “It’s a great organization, I love being a part of it and the 2019 season is the most important coming up.”

And yes, he does love Boston.

“This is definitely one of the best organizations in baseball, I can’t ask to be part of a more historic organization with the fan base the way they are,” Betts said. “It’s been amazing, definitely a different part of the country so I get to see a difference in how life goes, it’s definitely been a great time being in Boston. I’ve grown a new love for this city, just being there for so long and just appreciating the everyday life of being a Bostonian.”

*** *The Providence Journal***

Betts brings home American League MVP award

Bill Koch

There was one final first to come for Mookie Betts in 2018.

The Red Sox outfielder set records by the handful this season, and the ultimate individual reward will now take its place on his mantle.

Betts was the runaway winner of the American League Most Valuable Player award, with the results of this year's voting announced Thursday night. The 26-year-old bested fellow finalists Mike Trout and Jose Ramirez by a healthy margin, denying the Angels' outfielder his third MVP trophy and the Indians' infielder his first.

Betts finished runner-up to Trout in 2016 and sixth last season. He captured 28 of 30 first-place votes, relegating Trout to the second spot for the fourth time. Ramirez has now finished third in consecutive years and J.D. Martinez closed fourth, with the Boston slugger claiming a solo first-place vote along with Trout.

"Obviously, I really wanted to win (in 2016)," Betts said. "Being in this spot, you never know if you'll ever make it back. It's been everything I imagined and more."

Betts becomes just the 11th Red Sox player to capture the award, with Tris Speaker first doing the honors in 1912. Only Ted Williams (1946, 1949) has won twice. Dustin Pedroia (2008) was the last Boston player to take home the honor, and Mo Vaughn (1995) is the only other member of the Red Sox to win the award over the last 32 years.

Betts was sensational while helping lead Boston to a franchise-record 108 wins in the regular season and a ninth Fall Classic crown in club history. According to FanGraphs, Betts topped the A.L. in Wins Above Replacement (10.4) and was best among outfielders in defensive runs saved. He was first in batting average (.346), slugging percentage (.640), extra-base hits (84) and – despite appearing in 22 fewer games – tied Cleveland's Francisco Lindor for first in runs scored with 129.

"How the whole year kind of played out, it was just a lot of things that went right," Betts said. "J.D. and (manager Alex Cora) coming over, it made things a little easier on me. They kind of gave me a new perspective on the game and how to go about taking care of business."

Betts set new career highs in homers (32), doubles (47), runs, walks (81), stolen bases (30), on-base percentage (.438), slugging and OPS (1.078). He's the only player in Major League Baseball history with at least 40 doubles and 20 homers in as many as four straight seasons and joined Jacoby Ellsbury (2011) as just the second Red Sox player to total at least 30 home runs and 30 steals in a single season. Betts also took home a third straight Gold Glove for his play in right field, became the seventh Boston player to make as many as three straight starts in the All-Star Game and was the 21st member of the Red Sox to hit for the cycle in a game.

"I'm a hard worker," Betts said. "I want to be the best to ever play right field. My drive is going to put me in that spot to be the best."

Betts owns something approaching his own chapter of the Boston record book after just his fourth full season. His four games with three home runs are the most in club history, and he also leads in career home runs from the leadoff spot, multi-homer games from the leadoff spot and home runs leading off a game. Betts became the youngest Red Sox player to reach 100 career homers and 100 career stolen bases, and he's the only Red Sox hitter to record at least three extra-base hits in consecutive four-hit games.

"It's definitely one of the best organizations in baseball," Betts said. "I couldn't ask to be a part of a more historic organization with the fan base the way they are. It's been amazing."

Betts also shares a chapter of Boston history with Williams, widely considered among the premier hitters in the game's history. Betts and Williams are the only two Red Sox players with at least 30 homers, five triples and 40 doubles in a season, and both men have done it twice. They're the only two Boston players to record three 100-run seasons before turning 26.

Betts has never been better in terms of plate discipline, a quality that paid great dividends this season. He swung at a career-low 19.8 percent of pitches he saw outside the strike zone and walked in a career-best 13.2 percent of his plate appearances. Among the top 35 home run hitters in the A.L., Betts was one of just five players to strike out less than 100 times.

"I was just able to battle every pitch," Betts said. "I guess when I get two strikes I focus a little more – I'm not exactly sure."

Martinez received two runner-up votes and eight third-place votes, totaling 198 points. Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts appeared on four ballots, closing 13th overall. Boston left-handed pitcher Chris Sale received a lone 10th-place vote, finishing 24th overall.

Betts was awarded \$10.5 million in salary arbitration prior to the 2018 season and remains under team control for at least two more years. He is arbitration eligible in 2019 and 2020 before hitting free agency for the first time. Should the Red Sox and Betts fail to reach a contract agreement prior to arbitration hearings in February, Betts is likely to be awarded a salary approaching \$20 million for next season.

"Right now I'm just focused on the 2019 season coming up," Betts said. "It's a great organization. I love being a part of it."

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox 2019 payroll: Examining penalties if Dave Dombrowski exceeds second surcharge rate threshold (again)

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox are set to incur draft pick and competitive balance tax penalties for exceeding the \$237 million tax threshold in 2018.

Major League Baseball has yet to announce whether Boston's 2018 payroll exceeded \$237 million. But president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said the Red Sox did. MassLive.com also calculated the payroll at approximately \$239.193 million in early September.

What are the penalties for exceeding \$237 million, the second surcharge rate threshold?

The Red Sox's top selection in the 2019 June Draft will be moved back 10 slots. The club also will pay a competitive balance tax of more than \$10.4 million. For example, Boston will pay a \$12.275 million tax if the payroll sits at exactly \$240 million.

Boston again might exceed the second surcharge rate threshold in 2019. The second surcharge threshold will increase from \$237 million in 2018 to \$246 million in 2019.

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski recently said, "There has been no mention of (reducing the payroll) for the next season."

The Red Sox would have to exceed \$246 million in 2019 for their top draft selection in 2020 to be moved back 10 slots.

Boston also would pay higher tax penalties than in 2018 because they exceeded the base tax threshold for a second straight year. See the chart below:

The 2019 Red Sox would be considered a "Second-Time CBT Payor" if their payroll exceeds \$206 million.

The base tax threshold will increase from \$197 million in 2018 to \$206 million in 2019.

The first surcharge rate threshold will increase from \$217 million in 2018 to \$226 million in 2019.

The second surcharge rate threshold will increase from \$237 million in 2018 to \$246 million in 2019, as already mentioned.

The Red Sox would incur a \$17.4 million tax penalty, for example, if their payroll was at exactly \$250 million in 2019 along with the draft pick penalty.

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 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.

Boston Red Sox' Mookie Betts caps off year to remember with first MVP award

Chris Cotillo

Mookie Betts capped off an other-worldly 2018 by capturing the American League MVP award Thursday.

Being named MVP was the latest highlight in a long year of them for Betts, who won his first World Series title, took home both a Gold Glove and Silver Slugger, and, most recently, welcomed his first child, a daughter named Kinley.

"I think just how the whole year kind of played out, honestly... It was just a lot of things that went right," Betts said.

Betts became the second player in major-league history to capture a World Series ring, Gold Glove, Silver Slugger and MVP award in the same season. The other was Phillies third baseman Mike Schmidt, who did it in 1980.

Betts was widely expected to be named MVP ahead of Thursday's announcement, and he did so in a landslide. He received 28 of 30 first-place votes, with the other two going to teammate J.D. Martinez and Angels outfielder Mike Trout (who finished second).

Betts finished second in MVP voting in 2016, falling to Trout after posting an .897 OPS and winning his first career Gold Glove. Though he was just 24 and had become one of baseball's brightest young stars, Betts wondered if he'd ever have a chance to win the award again.

"Obviously, I really wanted to win then," he said. "You never know if you'll ever make it back. It's been everything I imagined and more."

Armed with a World Series ring and MVP trophy, Betts has now emerged as one of the game's preeminent superstars. Though he's as laid back as they come, Betts said that he'd be willing to embrace his newly acquired superstar status to help baseball grow.

"I enjoy being a face around the game," he said. "To kind of use this pedestal to spread knowledge that the game is fun. We have a bunch of great personalities and great athletes in this game. It's definitely something that's getting younger and growing. It's something that I take pride in, that I can make a difference in a kid's life."

Boston Red Sox 2019: tickets to increase by average of 2.5 percent for second straight season

Christopher Smith

The defending World Series champion Boston Red Sox announced ticket prices for the 2019 season will increase by an average of 2.5 percent.

Ticket prices also increased by an average of 2.5 percent from 2017 to 2018.

Tickets for six games will increase an average of 10 percent. Those games: the home opener April 9 against the Blue Jays, July 12, 13 vs. the Dodgers, July 26, 27 vs. the Yankees and Sept. 7 vs. the Yankees.

The other 73 home games will increase by an average of 1.6 percent. Two home games this year will be played in London.

The Red Sox have raised prices an average of 1.8 percent per season since 2009.

The Red Sox's 2018 payroll soared over \$237 million, the highest in franchise history. Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Dombrowski said "there has been no mention of (reducing it) for the next season."

*** *RedSox.com***

Betts caps honors season with AL MVP Award

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- A batting title, a World Series championship, a Gold Glove, a Silver Slugger and a baby daughter had already made 2018 the most gratifying year in the life of Mookie Betts. And then there was a sweet capper on Thursday, when the superstar right fielder of the Red Sox was named the American League's Most Valuable Player, winning the award in a romp.

Betts received 28 of a possible 30 first-place votes from the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez also received a first-place vote and finished fourth overall. Runner-up Mike Trout got the other first-place vote.

AL MVP Award voting

Mookie Betts, BOS	28	2				410
Mike Trout, LAA	1	24	2	1	2	265
Jose Ramirez, CLE		1	10	11	3	208
J.D. Martinez, BOS	1	2	8	5	5	198
Alex Bregman, HOU		1	4	10	9	192
Name, team	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Pts.

With 410 total points, Betts outdistanced Trout (265 points) and third-place finisher Jose Ramirez (208 points) by a large margin.

As Betts was announced as the winner in a live show on MLB Network, he held his daughter, Kynlee, who was born Nov. 6, and was flanked by his mother, Diana, and his girlfriend, Briana. A large contingent of Betts' family and friends sat behind him and cheered.

"It's been a pretty good 2018," Betts said. "I enjoy these moments while I can because 2019, hopefully we can make it better."

Betts is the first Red Sox player to win the MVP since Dustin Pedroia in 2008. The other players to win the MVP for Boston? Tris Speaker (1912), Jimmie Foxx ('38), Ted Williams ('46 and '49), Jackie Jensen ('58), Carl Yastrzemski ('67), Fred Lynn ('75), Jim Rice ('78), Roger Clemens ('86) and Mo Vaughn ('95).

"This is definitely one of the best organizations in baseball," Betts said. "I couldn't ask to be part of a more historic organization with the fanbase the way they are, so it's been amazing."

The five-tool star Betts, who stayed in the leadoff spot the entire season for the World Series champions, had the best Baseball Reference WAR (10.9) for a position player since Barry Bonds in 2002.

"I mean, it means a lot," Betts said. "It's definitely a special award and something that I cherish, but I think the most important thing is that we won a World Series and got to bring a trophy back to Boston."

After finishing second in the MVP race to Trout two years ago, Betts turned the tables in a big way this time.

"Obviously, I really wanted to win then. Just being in that spot, you don't ever know if you're going to make it back," Betts said. "It's been everything I imagined and more. I think the most important thing is that World Series. That's what kind of sticks in my head first and foremost about the season."

Betts was a force in every way possible, winning the batting title with a .346 average while adding 42 doubles, five triples, 32 homers, 129 runs, 80 RBIs and 30 stolen bases. The 26-year-old led MLB with a 1.078 OPS and earned his third consecutive Rawlings Gold Glove Award for his defensive excellence.

His numbers were remarkable across the board: Betts was a .364 hitter at home while hitting .331 on the road. He belted 13 homers at home and nine on the road. Against lefties, Betts had an OPS of 1.207. Against righties, it was 1.037. Betts hit .300 or better in every month except June, when he still hit at a .290 clip.

"He impacts the game like no other player in the big leagues -- running the bases, playing defense, hitting for power," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said during the team's playoff run. "You see the numbers. It was a special season for him."

Trout had yet another monster year, leading the Majors with a 1.088 OPS, a .460 OBP and finishing second to Bryce Harper with 122 walks. The fact that Betts played for a team that notched a franchise-record 108 wins helped his cause. Trout's Angels finished 80-82.

Martinez was also a force for Boston in 2018, leading the Majors with 130 RBIs, and finishing second with 43 homers and a .330 average.

The key new addition to a Red Sox team that had won the AL East with 93 victories the previous two seasons, Martinez gave the lineup the middle-of-the-order bat it had lacked since David Ortiz's retirement. Martinez also helped change the culture of Boston's offense with his maniacal work habits and his non-stop enthusiasm for talking hitting.

"Obviously [Martinez] deserves to be where he is. He's worked and done everything he can to put himself in the right spot to be recognized," Betts said. "I'm glad he was recognized. He had a great year, definitely an MVP year. I'm just glad to know that at least he was recognized for it."

While Betts appreciates winning such a prestigious individual award, what will stick out most from the 2018 season is the juggernaut his team turned into from the outset that didn't relent until that championship celebration at Dodger Stadium.

"I think throughout the year, we were winning games left and right and were rolling pretty well," Betts said. "You kind of step back and say, 'Man, we have a pretty special team. I wonder if we're going to win the World Series?' AC told us from the beginning we had what it takes to win. We just had to execute, and that's kind of what our mindset was all year, day in and day out, making sure we did what we could to win each and every game."

*** *WEEI.com***

Mookie Betts named American League MVP after leading Red Sox to championship

John Tomase

Mookie Betts was the best player on the best team in baseball, so it should come as no surprise that he was named the American League MVP on Thursday.

Betts received 28 first-place votes and 410 points, easily outdistancing two-time MVP Mike Trout (265 points) of the Angels and third baseman Jose Ramirez (208) of the Indians. Teammate J.D. Martinez finished fourth with 198 points and received one of the two first-place votes that didn't go to Betts (Trout got the other).

Betts was a force from the start. He won the AL batting title with a .346 average and also paced the league in slugging (.640) while becoming the second Red Sox player in history to record a 30-30 season, joining Jacoby Ellsbury.

Betts finished with 32 homers, 30 steals, and a league-leading 129 runs. He also won his third straight Gold Glove in right field, earned his second Silver Slugger, and reached his third straight All-Star Game.

Betts provided more than numbers, however. He delivered some of the biggest hits of the season, including a marathon 13-pitch at-bat that ended in a grand slam vs. Blue Jays left-hander J.A. Happ in mid-July, as well as a walkoff homer vs. the Twins two weeks later.

Though he didn't perform to his standards in the playoffs, hitting .210 with one homer, he made a number of pivotal defensive plays in right field, include the fan-interfered out on what looked like a home run by Jose Altuve in the first inning of Game 4.

Meanwhile, Milwaukee's Christian Yelich fell one vote shy of being a unanimous MVP in the National League.

Betts has finished second, sixth, and now first in the last three MVP votes. As good as he was in 2016, when he hit 31 homers and drove in a career-high 113 runs en route to a second-place finish behind Trout, Betts took his game to another level this season.

He became the first Red Sox player to win the batting title since Bill Mueller in 2003, and his 1.078 OPS ranks 14th in team history, trailing nine seasons from Ted Williams, two from Jimmie Foxx, and one each from Babe Ruth and Manny Ramirez.

Betts, who just turned 26, was drafted by the Red Sox in the fifth round of the 2011 draft as a high schooler out of Tennessee. He began his career as a second baseman, but reached the big leagues as an outfielder and hasn't looked back.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Mookie Betts outvotes Mike Trout to win first career A.L. MVP award, Martinez 4th

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — The do-it-all star has now done it all.

Two years after finishing runner-up in the American League's Most Valuable Player race, Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts took the top honor on Thursday night, when the Baseball Writers' Association of America voting was revealed.

The 26-year-old Betts becomes the first American League player to win an MVP award, a Gold Glove, a Silver Slugger and a World Series title in the same season. Mike Schmidt is the only other player in either league's history to do the same, in 1980.

Betts, the expected winner, finished with 28 out of 30 first-place votes, ahead of the Angels' Mike Trout, who had one first-place vote and finished second for a record fourth time, and Cleveland's Jose Ramirez, who finished third. J.D. Martinez got the remaining first-place vote and finished in fourth place overall. The ballot was 10 places and voted on by 30 writers, two from each American League chapter.

Betts finished second in the MVP race to Trout in 2016, a year when Betts certainly had a case to win it all. The right fielder's 2017 was a small step backward — but still incredibly productive — before making a huge leap forward this year, even beyond the '16 level.

This season, Betts led the majors with a .346 average and .640 slugging percentage. He ranked second in on-base percentage (.438), OPS (1.078), and extra-base hits (84).

With 32 home runs and 30 steals, Betts became just the second player in team history to have a 30-30 season, following Jacoby Ellsbury's 2011. He also became the first player in history with a 30-30 year and a batting title in the same season (in either league).

Betts was the first Sox player to win an A.L. batting title since Bill Mueller in 2003 (.326), and the first Sox player to lead the majors in average since Wade Boggs in 1988 (.366).

No Sox player had led the majors in both average and slugging since Ted Williams in 1957.

The arrival of J.D. Martinez helped Betts tremendously. Betts reworked his swing with Martinez's help, and got off to a poor start in spring training.

"This whole season, hitting has been kind of that anxiety – you know, fear," Betts said during the season. "We all saw how I started in spring training, and I was trying to learn something new. I was like, 'Phew, I don't know, this may be my end.'"

Betts laughed during that interview. But he was in fact hitless through his first 16 at-bats in spring training, which can feel like an eternity when trying something new. On March 16, after hitting safely in five straight games, Betts was still batting just .179.

"It was bad," he said. "I was actually really scared. Luckily, I was able to use my abilities that God gave me at picking up on things and kind of adapting. You give me a little something, I'll work it and kind of make it my own within that structure. Seemed to work so far."

The award was the only major moment left in the annals of 2018, a fitting ribbon tied to an amazing season not only for the Red Sox, but for Betts, who recently welcomed his first child, as the baseball world now turns its attention to the hot stove and the future.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Mookie Betts caps an unforgettable year – on and off the field – with MVP honor

Sean McAdam

It's a safe bet that Mookie Betts will never forget the fall of 2018.

First, Betts and his Red Sox teammates capped a franchise record-setting 108-win regular season with a World Series win. Then, Betts became a first-time father. And Thursday night, he topped his year by being named American League Most Valuable Player.

It's enough to make Betts feel like the whole season was a bit of a dream.

"Just how the whole year kind of played out," said Betts in a conference call. "A lot of things just kind of went right, with J.D. (Martinez) and (Alex Cora) coming over, that kind of made things a little easier on me, kind of gave me a new perspective on the game and how to go about taking care of business. Playing the game, I learned so much and it put me in the right spot to succeed.

"Getting the hits and the home runs and whatnot (was huge), but I think it was the things that you didn't see that made the year so special."

His season itself, however, was the very definition of special. He became just the second player in baseball history to win a Gold Glove, a Silver Slugger, a World Series and an MVP. Mike Schmidt (1980) was the only other.

Betts easily beat out two-time winner Mike Trout to become the first Red Sox player since Dustin Pedroia in 2008 to capture the award. Betts won 28 first-place votes to one for Trout and one for teammate J.D. Martinez. Cleveland's Jose Ramirez finished third in the voting. Betts finished with 410 points, followed by 265 for Trout, 208 for Ramirez and 198 for Martinez.

Betts led baseball in batting average, slugging percentage, runs scored and WAR. He posted a slash line of .346/.438/.640 while adding 32 homers and 30 stolen bases. He also won a Gold Glove in right field, while saving 20 defensive runs.

He became the 11th player in Red Sox history to win the award, following Tris Speaker, Jimmy Foxx, Ted Williams, Jackie Jensen, Carl Yastrzemski, Fred Lynn, Jim Rice, Roger Clemens, Mo Vaughn and Dustin Pedroia.

Betts can be eligible for free agency in two more years, but he sidestepped a question about whether he'd like to remain with the Red Sox for the remainder of his career.

"Right now, I'm just focused on the 2019 season coming up," Betts said. "It's a great organization and I love being a part of it and now the 2019 season is the most important one, coming up."

But seemingly in something of a pivot, Betts later made mention of how he's grown to like Boston.

"This is definitely one of the best organizations in baseball," he said, "and I can't ask to be part of a more historic organization, with the fanbase the way they are. It's been amazing. It's a different part of the country, so it's been different to see how life goes. It's definitely a great time to be in Boston. I'm growing a new love for the city, being there for so long, just to appreciate everyday life and being a Bostonian."

As one of the game's top stars — and now a world champion and MVP to boot — his visibility will increase. And at a time when baseball is looking to do a better job marketing its best players, Betts indicated he'd be willing to embrace that role.

“Absolutely, I enjoy being kind of a face around the game,” said Betts. “I can kind of use this pedestal to spread knowledge that the game is fun. We have a bunch of great personalities, great athletes in this game and it’s definitely (a group that’s) getting younger and growing. And I take pride in knowing that I can make a difference in a kid’s life.”

Two other Red Sox players also received votes: Xander Bogaerts finished 13th in the voting, with Chris Sale finishing 24th.

Hot Stove Lunch: Mookie Betts poised for first MVP award; Alex Cora gets rewarded

Sean McAdam

It seems all but certain that Mookie Betts will be named American League MVP tonight when the results of balloting by the BBWAA is revealed, marking the first Red Sox MVP since Dustin Pedroia (in 2008) and the first Red Sox outfielder to win the award in 40 years (Jim Rice, 1978).

In all, 10 Red Sox players have won the award, with Ted Williams (1946, 1949) the only Sox player to capture the award more than once. In one 11-year span, the Red Sox had three outfielders (Carl Yastrzemski in 1967, Fred Lynn in 1975 and Rice in '78) win the award, but have had just two winners in the last 32 years (Pedroia in '08 and Mo Vaughn in 1995).

Betts, of course, has come close before: he finished second to Mike Trout in 2016; tonight, it’s quite likely that the voting will flip, with Betts winning and Trout finishing second. The other finalist is Cleveland’s Jose Ramirez.

Winning the MVP will only boost the value of Betts, who is eligible for free agency after two more seasons. It will be interesting to see how aggressive the Red Sox are this winter in trying to get Betts signed to a contract extension. They’ve tried to do so in each of the last two off-seasons with little progress made, as Betts and his representatives have signaled a willingness to go year-to-year in salary arbitration.

MLBTradeRumors.com projects that Betts will make \$18.5 million in arbitration this winter, but that number could go up after tonight’s voting is made official.

Around the game:

AL East

George King has a story about reliever David Robertson apparently urging teammates to stiff some members of the Yankees’ organization on playoff shares.

A closer look at the incoming Orioles president of baseball operations.

Blake Snell won the A.L. Cy Young award.

Blue Jays president Mark Shapiro promises that the Toronto payroll will be bolstered....in time.

AL Central

Cy Young award voting isn’t what it used to be, writes Paul Hoynes

Dan Gilbert maintains that, evidence to the contrary, he’s not interested in buying the Tigers.

The Royals still have some time to figure out their bullpen.

AL West

It appears as though Mike Trout might once again be a runner-up in MVP balloting.

The Rangers have re-made their coaching staff for 2019.

If the Mariners trade James Paxton, who will emerge as their rotation leader?

NATIONAL LEAGUE

The Pittsburgh Pirates made one of the first trades of the offseason.

HOT TAKE I MIGHT SOON REGRET

Some were shocked late in the season when USA Today revealed that Alex Cora was making only \$800,000 in his first season as manager of the Red Sox. The report illustrated how underpaid MLB managers are in general – especially in comparison with the NBA, where new coaches routinely make millions in their first season.

Cora's low salary was a reflection of his inexperience – he had no past managerial success to leverage. But after directing the Red Sox to a 108-win season and a World Series victory in his inaugural year in the dugout, Cora was rewarded Wednesday with a new deal.

The new pact adds another guaranteed year (2021) and pushes the team option to 2022. It also, according to an industry source, includes a financial reworking of his present deal, though exact details aren't known.

Whatever the outlay, it was the smart — and right — thing for the Red Sox to do. Chances are good, too, that it will be the best money the Sox spent all winter.

*** *The Athletic***

Now Red Sox have to make sure they keep Mookie Betts in Boston long term

Steve Buckley

It's possible the Red Sox pulled a fast one Thursday morning by announcing a 2.5 percent increase in ticket prices for 2019.

Knowing, of course, that the news would get drowned out by the New England-wide cheering later in the day when Mookie Betts was unveiled as the American League's 2018 Most Valuable Player.

Coincidence? Clever plan? Doesn't make any difference, because this is one time when no Sox fan should be griping about a bump in ticket prices. In fact, the Red Sox could have done some one-stop shopping by issuing the following announcement: "MOOKIE BETTS NAMED AMERICAN LEAGUE MOST VALUABLE PLAYER. . . AND, OH, BY THE WAY, WE'RE RAISING TICKET PRICES FOR NEXT YEAR TO MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T GO ANYWHERE."

It's not just that Betts is one of the game's premier players. It's not just that his glove work in right field has reached the point where even stodgy old-timers are beginning to whisper he's just as good out there as Dwight Evans was, maybe better. It's not just that he has emerged as a certified team leader.

And it's not just that the very manner in which Mookie Betts carries himself is a billboard celebrating the pure joy of baseball. A non-baseball fan watching a Sox game from the Skyway Observatory at the Pru would be able to pick out Betts as the player having the most fun.

No, it is for all these reasons, and many more, that the Red Sox should start planning for the day when it's going to take a contract of history-making oomph if they hope to keep Betts in Boston. The AL's newly crowned MVP can become a free agent following the 2020 season, and, well, it must be said: If you're the Yankees, Dodgers, Cubs are any of the other usual suspects, wouldn't you want a guy who hits for average and power and makes the kind of catches that fans talk about all the way home?

And if you're the Yankees, Dodgers, Cubs are any of the other usual suspects, wouldn't you want a guy who is just now taking his place as one of the faces of baseball?

Betts knows this. His reps certainly know it as well. Imagine Mookie Betts going Hollywood (Dodgers), or reuniting with the man who was running baseball ops when he was first drafted (current Cubs president Theo Epstein), or . . . stepping into pinstripes and playing right field at Yankee Stadium.

Imagine.

This possible Brave New World for Mookie Betts — and while we're at, yes, let's add the Braves to the list — is a long ways off. But you know the drill: Pretty much every utterance by Betts is going to be placed under a microscope and examined for possible signs that, yes, he very much wants to remain in Boston. . . or, uh oh, he wants to move on.

But while this is guaranteed to be a wasteful and frustrating exercise, Betts did say something Thursday night that will please Red Sox fans.

For not only did he speak the words, "I'm growing new love for the city, being there for so long," which, OK, is boilerplate. He also said he likes being recognized when he's out and about.

This is an important statement, because it's hard to hide when you're a professional athlete in Boston. This holds true from Tom Brady and Mookie Betts to the newest kid up from Triple-A or signed off the practice squad. There's just no disappearing into the shadows here, and some players hate that.

Yet here's Betts, talking Thursday night "of being able to go out and eat and kind of being known as far as being recognized. (People saying), 'You guys did a great job,' even though (they'll say) the opposite, 'You guys stink this year.' You learn to love the fans and just the city in general."

The thrill of being recognized while riding with his little baby on the Swan Boats isn't going to keep Mookie Betts in Boston. Boatloads of money will keep Mookie Betts in Boston. But at least there's a hint, albeit just a couple of lines delivered during a teleconference, that he doesn't find Boston to be suffocating. That's a start.

Moving forward, it might do Betts well to ponder what life would be like playing for another team. Fred Lynn, who was AL MVP and Rookie of the Year in 1975, eventually came to a contract impasse with the Red Sox, who traded him to the Angels. Lynn enjoyed a fine big-league career, but not a Hall of Fame career. He has often said he may well have received the Cooperstown call had he remained with the Sox.

As for the Red Sox, they need to avoid repeating the past mistakes that have resulted in disgruntled star players being traded or moving on via free agency. True, there's a different management team in place now, but it still stings Sox fans that lefty Jon Lester, who loved Boston, was dealt to the Oakland A's at the July trade deadline in 2014.

The lesson is simple: Not every player is a good fit in Boston. And when you have one who not only is a good fit but excels here, great effort should be made to hold onto the player.

It's rare, especially these days, for a marquee player to remain with one team his entire career.

Derek Jeter did it with the Yankees, and for the simple reason that each side knew what a perfect fit it was.

That's Mookie Betts and the Red Sox, right?

* ***The New York Times***

Mookie Betts and Christian Yelich Easily Win M.V.P. Awards

Billy Witz

As baseball has been redefined by analytics in recent years, one role that has been largely reconsidered is that of the leadoff batter. No longer is it the realm of the pesky, pitch-spoiler who gets on frequently and steals bases.

The Houston Astros put their leading home run hitter, George Springer, at the top of the order and rode his hot bat to a World Series title in 2017. In spring training, the Yankees tinkered with their lineup briefly by batting Aaron Judge first in an exhibition game.

It was on that day in March when Alex Cora, the new Boston manager who had previously been a coach with Houston, was asked what his prototype leadoff hitter looked like.

“For me, somebody very close to Mookie Betts,” Cora said. “That’s my vision of the leadoff guy.”

That assessment proved to be prescient this season as Betts, who led his team to a franchise-best 108 wins and a World Series title, followed that up by winning the American League Most Valuable Player Award on Thursday. Christian Yelich of the Milwaukee Brewers was named M.V.P. of the National League.

Betts was a leadoff batter and more for Boston. He displayed a dizzying degree of offensive versatility in his lithe 5-foot-9, 180-pound frame. He batted .346 and posted a .640 slugging percentage — the highest figures in the majors — while stealing 30 bases and hitting 32 home runs, both career-highs.

And if the essence of a leadoff batter remains scoring runs, Betts did that, too. He scored 129 times, the most in the majors.

Such dynamic offense paired with his stellar defense in right field — he recently won his third consecutive Gold Glove — got Betts the first-place vote on 28 of 30 M.V.P. ballots.

While there was some discussion during the Red Sox playoff run about who the most valuable member of the team was — Betts or the designated hitter J.D. Martinez — the baseball writers who voted left little doubt as to their opinion.

Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels, who finished second to Betts, and Martinez, who finished fourth, each got one of the two remaining A.L. first-place votes. Cleveland Indians third baseman Jose Ramirez, who was named either third or fourth on 21 ballots, finished third. It was the fourth second-place finish in seven seasons for Trout, who has won the award twice.

Betts is the first M.V.P. to serve primarily as a leadoff batter since Jimmy Rollins of the Philadelphia Phillies won the National League award in 2007, and the first in the American League since Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners won in 2001.

Just as Betts lapped the field, so, too, did Yelich. He garnered 29 of 30 N.L. first-place votes to easily outpace Chicago Cubs second baseman Javier Baez and Colorado Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado.

The only first-place vote that did not go to Yelich went to Mets pitcher Jacob deGrom, who finished fifth in the voting after being named the winner of the N.L.’s Cy Young Award on Wednesday. Freddie Freeman, a first baseman for the Atlanta Braves, finished fourth in the M.V.P. voting.

The left-handed hitting Yelich, like Betts, led his league in hitting with a .326 average and also led the N.L. with a 1.000 on-base-plus-slugging percentage. He hit 36 home runs and stole 22 bases.

The National League race was considered wide open entering the final month. But Yelich's dominant second half — he had a 1.129 O.P.S. after the All-Star break — fueled the Brewers' September surge that led them to the best record in the National League after defeating the Cubs in a playoff for the Central Division title. It was the team's eighth consecutive win.

Yelich's victory on Thursday was also a nice reward for Brewers General Manager David Stearns, who acquired Yelich from the Miami Marlins last winter for four prospects. Yelich, who will turn 27 in December, is under contract through 2022.

The Red Sox have a similar anchor in Betts, 26, who does not reach free agency for two more seasons. As the Red Sox burst out of the gate this season, winning 18 of their first 20 games, it was fitting that Betts was their catalyst in the leadoff spot nearly every night.

In an era of carefully tracked launch angles and fly-ball rates, Betts distinguished himself by hitting the ball hard, but also with a discerning eye. He was at his best against the division-rival Yankees, who could not push their way past Boston. In 17 games against the Yankees, Betts batted .415 with 10 doubles, three homers, 13 walks and 15 runs batted in.

The victory by Betts marked the third consecutive year that a league M.V.P. had also won a World Series title, following Jose Altuve of the Astros last year and Kris Bryant of the Chicago Cubs in 2016. Before that, it had been exceedingly rare. Between Kirk Gibson, who won the M.V.P. for the World Series-champion Los Angeles Dodgers in 1988, and Bryant, the only other league M.V.P. to win a World Series title in the same season was Buster Posey of the San Francisco Giants in 2012.

*** *The USA Today***

Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts caps historic season with AL Most Valuable Player award

Gabe Lacques

Mookie Betts' 2018 campaign wasn't so much a baseball season as it was a journey through history.

The Boston right fielder's accomplishments were so vast, he kept bumping up against Red Sox Hall of Famers, from Jim Rice to Ted Williams and Carl Yastrzemski until, Thursday night, he was shoulder to shoulder with Tris Speaker.

Betts on Thursday was named the overwhelming choice for American League Most Valuable Player, capping a season in which he dominated the major leagues across several statistical categories.

Come October, the Red Sox put a cap on their fourth World Series championship since 2004, with Betts hitting a home run in the Game 5 clincher.

Betts won the 12th MVP award in Red Sox history, but he and Speaker now stand alone: The only Sox to claim an MVP and World Series championship in the same season.

Speaker pulled that double in 1912, when the Red Sox won the World Series in eight games and Speaker batted .383.

Betts didn't have such a singularly absurd stat as that. His body of work, however, was second to none.

He led the major leagues in batting average (.346) and slugging (.640), the first Red Sox to lead both those categories in one season since Williams in 1946. He hit 32 home runs as part of a startling 79 extra-base

hits. His 10.9 Wins Above Replacement, as measured by Baseball-Reference, are the most by a position player since Barry Bonds' 11.8 in 2002.

He also stole 30 bases, and according to the Elias Sports Bureau, is the only major leaguer to win a batting title while also posting a 30-homer, 30-steal season.

Little wonder, then, that he received 28 of 30 first-place votes to easily out-point Los Angeles Angels outfielder Mike Trout, who along with Betts' teammate J.D. Martinez received the other first-place votes.

Trout, a two-time MVP, joins Ted Williams, Albert Pujols and Stan Musial as the only players with four runner-up MVP finishes.

Cleveland's Jose Ramirez finished third and Martinez finished fourth.

Betts and Martinez did damage all season and reached several historic benchmarks. Perhaps most impressively, they were the first set of teammates since 1903 to finish 1-2 in the major leagues in both slugging and batting average; the Pirates' Honus Wagner and Fred Clarke were the last to do so.

Betts reiterated Thursday that Martinez's addition to the squad, along with first-year manager Alex Cora, made him a better player, one who finished as AL MVP runner-up in 2016, regressed a year later and then became undeniably the league's best player after the addition of a new manager and designated hitter.

"The things you didn't see," Betts said, "made the year so special."

And in the end, Betts stood alone.