

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, May 15, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Rockies punch out Red Sox; Chris Sale K's 17

Alex Speier

Chris Sale loves strikeouts, relishes the act of “punching tickets” (a favored phrase) in a way that has earned him a designation among teammates: The Conductor. And so, his performance against the Rockies on Tuesday represented a performance to savor.

On the strength of what Sale described as fastball and slider command that ranked among the best he’s ever had, the lefthander both dissected and dominated the Rockies over seven innings. He allowed just three hits and two runs, walked none, and struck out a career-high 17.

When Alex Cora offered a handshake after the seventh inning, Sale offered an impish smile.

“He goes, ‘You’re not going to let me get 20?’ ” the manager recounted.

Sale was well aware that history was within his reach — that he was three strikeouts away from matching the major league record of 20 strikeouts in a game.

“I don’t think there’s a pitcher on the planet, you’ve got 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go out for the last inning,” said Sale. “But I respect him as much as anybody on the planet and I’ll never question anything he does.”

Still, as dominant as Sale had been, there was also a significant element of dissatisfaction for the lefthander following his outing. After all, though he struck out the final three batters he’d faced, he also gave up a two-run homer at the start of the seventh to Nolan Arenado, a long ball that started the Rockies on the road to a 5-4, 11-inning comeback victory that snapped the Red Sox’ five-game winning streak.

“Seven innings is great and 17 punchouts is great, but at the same time, I had terrible timing with giving up the runs I did,” said Sale. “I appreciate what happened tonight. I’m not taking away from that. But at the same time, it’s pretty crappy timing to give up a two-run homer and give a team a new life.”

Indeed, Sale was not alone in achieving milestones made somewhat hollow by the game’s final score.

The Red Sox tied a franchise record by striking out 24 batters in a game, yet their night was undone by the two-run homers allowed by Sale and Brandon Workman (in the eighth inning), and then a single run plated by the Rockies against reliever Ryan Brasier in the 11th.

Brasier — who’d walked just two batters entering the night — issued a pair of free passes, one to Ryan McMahan to start the inning, another understandably against Arenado, before Mark Reynolds got on top of an elevated 96-mile-per-hour fastball and dropped it into center for the game-winning run.

The outcome offered a surprising reversal to the game’s early innings, when Sale utterly dominated the Rockies — matching a Red Sox Expansion Era record (since 1961) by striking out the first six batters of the game. He struck out nine through four innings and gave up just three hits while walking none.

He featured a dazzling arsenal — a mid-90s fastball, a wipeout slider, and a changeup with significant fade, a combination that allowed him to carve up the Rockies for most of the night.

Sale joined Roger Clemens (2), Pedro Martinez (2), and Bill Monbouquette as the only Red Sox pitchers ever to strike out as many as 17 batters in a game. The questions that surrounded Sale's first half-dozen starts of the season now seem like a cruel daydream for his opponents. In his last five starts, he's struck out 59 batters in 33 innings, while posting a 1.91 ERA.

Still, it wasn't enough to guarantee a victory. Michael Chavis, leading off the second against Colorado starter Kyle Freeland, blasted a ball that scraped the sky before crashing to earth 451 feet from home plate for a 1-0 lead.

In the third, the Sox cleared the fences twice more. J.D. Martinez crushed a Freeland cutter into the Monster seats. He's now 14 for 33 (.424) with five homers against lefties this year.

Rafael Devers, adding to the mounting evidence of his potential as a middle-of-the-order force, then stayed on a Freeland cutter and lofted it above the Wall for his third homer of the year — and his first to the opposite field at Fenway in nearly a year.

Yet the trio of solo shots proved inadequate to earn a victory. With the Sox up a run, Cora turned to Workman, who hadn't allowed a hit since April 17 — a run that extended to 41 consecutive batters faced without allowing a hit, the longest by a Sox pitcher since at least 1970, according to Elias Sports Bureau.

That streak ended with one out, when Chris Iannetta blasted a ball off the top of the Green Monster for a double and Charlie Blackmon followed by hammering a curveball into the first row of the center-field bleachers to give Colorado a 4-3 lead. It was the first hit of the year by a lefty against Workman, who'd held lefthanded hitters to an 0-for-19 mark before Tuesday.

But the Sox rallied to tie the game, 4-4, in the bottom of the inning when Mitch Moreland — a pinch-hitting weapon — entered in place of Steve Pearce against righthander Scott Oberg and drilled a single to center to tie the contest. Since 2014, Moreland has a whopping .382/.477/.545 line as a pinch-hitter.

That clutch knock merely prolonged a game that the Red Sox lost.

Even so, whereas a month ago, the reeling Red Sox might have faced a sky-is-falling outlook following the waste of a performance like Sale's, on Tuesday night, the team's first loss in a week represented a disappointment but one that could be softened by the broader context of a team playing well, and one that is again led by one of the most dominant pitchers in baseball.

"It sucks because of the way he pitched, but it is what it is," said Cora. "We show up [Wednesday] and go play again."

Alex Cora, Chris Sale stand by tough call in the eighth

Peter Abraham

It falls on every manager to do what is right for his team, even if it's unpopular. Such a moment came for Alex Cora on Tuesday night.

Chris Sale struck out 17 Colorado Rockies through seven innings, three short of tying the major league record. But the lefthander had thrown 108 pitches on a cold and rainy night at Fenway Park and lost a shutout earlier in the inning when Nolan Arenado hit a two-run homer.

Cora told Sale he was finished for the night when he came off the mound.

"You're not going to let me get 20?" Sale said in the tunnel that leads up to the clubhouse.

"Sarcastic, but probably seriously," Cora said.

Tying a record that had been accomplished four times was not a good reason to have Sale throw what would have been at least 120 pitches. Not given the shoulder issue he had last season and what he means to the Sox over the long run.

It reminded me of John Farrell's decision in 2017 to let Sale chase his 300th strikeout of the season on Sept. 20 in Baltimore.

Sale reached the mark, throwing 111 pitches over eight innings. But he allowed five runs in five innings in his next start, then got rocked in Game 1 of the Division Series against Houston.

Cora went the other way. He picked the safe route.

"It's not a win-win situation. It's tough on anybody," Cora said. "You have to be careful. There's a bigger goal here. We've been very disciplined throughout the process. You still have to be disciplined. I think he understands.

"It's one of those, as a manager, you put in balance. We need this guy to pitch deep into the season. You have to be disciplined."

Cora had Brandon Workman warmed up for the bottom third of the Rockies' order. But Workman, who had not allowed a run since April 17, gave up a double to Chris Iannetta and a home run to lefty Charlie Blackmon.

Lefthanded hitters were 0 for 21 against Workman before that homer.

"I think we had the right matchups," Cora said. "You don't expect that."

The Sox went on to lose, 5-4, in 11 innings. They wasted one of Sale's signature games.

"It sucks because of the way he pitched," Cora said.

Sale wanted to stay in the game, but understood what Cora did.

"I respect him as much as anyone on the planet. I'll never question anything he does, even in regards to me with that," Sale said. "Look at where we're at in the game and who we have coming in. Our bullpen has been as good as it's ever been. They've been a strong point for our team all year.

"Workman, especially, has been probably the most consistent guy down there all year. You want a shot at it, but it's an easy pill to swallow."

Sale blamed himself for allowing the two runs.

"I had terrible timing with giving up the runs I did," he said. "I think [NESN's Jerry] Remy said it in the 10th or 11th inning, that was the one that got them back in the game. It gave them a breath of fresh air. It was a pretty crappy time to give up a two-run homer."

Sale said his mistake was trying to induce Arenado into a double play instead of going for another strikeout.

It was a bad loss, but the Sox have to be heartened with how Sale is pitching after a rough start to the season. He has struck out 31 without a walk in 15 innings his last two starts, giving up only three runs.

Sale has a 1.91 ERA in his last five starts, with an incredible 59 strikeouts in 33 innings. The return of catcher Sandy Leon from the minors has made a difference, along with Sale building up innings after a cautious spring training.

“Fastball command and my slider were probably as good as they’ve ever been,” Sale said.

Sale joined Cy Young as the only Red Sox pitchers to have consecutive starts with at least 10 strikeouts and no walks.

Old Denton True did that in 1905.

Tuesday also was the 16th time a pitcher struck out 17 or more without getting a win. It happened to Pedro Martinez against Tampa Bay in 2000 and to an assortment of other Hall of Famers, including Randy Johnson three times.

“Anybody can get a win. But how many people can do that?” Sale cracked later. “It’s a crazy game sometimes.”

Sale also was the ninth pitcher with 17 or more strikeouts and without a walk. Roger Clemens and Johnson did it three times, and Max Scherzer twice.

Sale, Martinez, Clemens, and Bill Monbouquette are the only Red Sox pitchers to strike out 17 or more in a game.

It didn’t happen Tuesday, but count on Sale making another run at 20. There are plenty of bad, free-swinging teams out there and the ace seems to be just getting warmed up.

Marcus Walden working himself into trusted arm

Peter Abraham

That the Red Sox knew what they were doing when they put their bullpen together this season is perhaps best represented by the performance of Marcus Walden.

Walden is a 30-year-old righthander who has played for five organizations. He made his major league debut with the Sox last season but appeared in only eight games before he returned to the minors.

Walden then strained his elbow and didn’t pitch for seven weeks.

When the Sox elected not to call him back up in September when rosters expanded, Walden assumed he would be designated for assignment and asked the team not to wait.

“I wanted to go play winter ball and show people I could pitch,” Walden said. “But they gave me reassurance they wanted to keep me.”

Now we know why. Walden has been one of manager Alex Cora’s most important and versatile relievers, a pitcher he has twice used to face two batters and two other times for three innings.

Walden’s two scoreless innings against the Mariners on Sunday dropped his earned run average to 1.61 over 14 appearances.

Walden has joined Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Brandon Workman as trustworthy late-inning options in a bullpen that has defied expectations so far. Going into Tuesday night’s game against the Colorado Rockies, Red Sox relievers were among the American League leaders in strikeouts per nine innings (10.5), strikeout-to-walk ratio (3.07), and WHIP (1.20).

The Sox also are 15-2 when leading after six innings, the latter of those losses coming Tuesday when Workman squandered a 3-2 lead in the eighth and Brasier gave up a hit and two walks for a 5-4, 11-inning crusher.

All those who thought the Red Sox were making a mistake in not replacing Joe Kelly and Craig Kimbrel with major league talent — and I was certainly among them — have so far been wrong.

Cora and pitching coach Dana LeVangie have made it work by exploiting matchups and not being locked into a particular closer.

It has been cost effective, too. The Red Sox have used 15 relievers at various points. None will make more than \$1.75 million this season unless you want to count infielder Eduardo Nunez, who pitched an inning on April 5.

“You see what’s going on. The bullpen has been pretty good except for a couple of hiccups,” Walden said. “People who had questions about us have seen we have some pretty good arms.

“We talked about it during spring training with our group, we don’t have that big name, that \$10 million guy. But we have some big arms.”

Walden watched the playoffs from his home in California last season, rooting for Barnes, Brasier, and Workman while attending to his family. His wife, Nichole, had a baby on Sept. 28.

“It worked out pretty well. I was home from Sept. 5 until I went to spring training,” Walden said. “That was the longest since we’ve been married and that’s six years.”

Walden, with the team’s permission, had an injection of platelet-rich plasma in November to help his elbow further heal. He has been pitching well since, combining a 96-mph fastball with a sinker, cutter, and slider.

The slider, which has produced 30 swings and misses, is the foundation of his success this season.

“I’m throwing it the way I did in college. Except now I have more confidence in what I’m doing,” Walden said. “I know how to shape it. I didn’t throw it from 2009–17, really. It was more of a curveball.”

Walden grips his slider like a knuckle curve, but the ball sweeps across the plate because of his arm angle.

“The rap against me was that I threw strikes with sinkers and cutters, but couldn’t strike anybody out,” Walden said. “The slider has been a strikeout pitch. It’s a put-away pitch, especially against lefties.”

Walden doesn’t throw a changeup, so the slider is effectively a change of pace at 86 mph.

“It gets hitters off my heater,” Walden said.

The Sox have exploited the slider much the same way they have with Barnes and his curveball, hunting matchups where the pitcher has the advantage.

Of late, that has been in long relief. In time it could be in shorter stints later in the game.

“He’s one of the guys that the way he’s throwing the ball, he can get three outs in the seventh, eighth, ninth. It really doesn’t matter,” Cora said. “He’s a good athlete, moves well around the mound. He’s quick to the plate, which is very important late in games.”

Whether it’s Walden or somebody else, the Sox will need to supplement Barnes, Brasier, and Workman late in games. Hector Velazquez, filling a rotation spot with Nate Eovaldi on the injured list, is a candidate.

There are minor leaguers who will figure in that mix, too.

For now, the Sox are looking smart. Zack Britton and Adam Ottavino have been strong for the Yankees, but most of the other high profile free-agent relievers have been disappointments.

Pitchers who appeared to be good fits for the Sox — Andrew Miller, David Robertson, Kelvim Herrera, and Joakim Soria among them — have been ineffective or injured.

Meanwhile, Kelly has been awful for the Dodgers and Kimbrel remains unsigned.

Bullpens change over the course of the season, even for the best teams, and the Sox will have to adjust over time. But the discount approach has worked.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Chris Sale strikes out 17, but Red Sox lose to Rockies in 11

Jason Mastrodonato

As far as “personality starts” go, it’ll take a team of psychologists to diagnose the 2019 Red Sox after what happened Tuesday night.

Rick Porcello used the term “personality start” on Saturday, when the Sox won a game in which he allowed four runs in the first inning. Porcello settled down and completed six. The Sox scored eight in the third. Porcello correctly noted the game proved the Sox’ ability to recover quickly instead of getting buried by first-inning failure.

What did Tuesday’s game reveal?

Chris Sale was in Pedro Martinez form at Fenway Park, where he set a career high with 17 strikeouts against the Colorado Rockies. He said afterward his slider was as good as it’s ever been as he carved up MLB’s eighth-ranked offense without ever throwing harder than 96 mph.

But Sale didn’t get the win. And in the end, neither did the Red Sox, who took a 5-4 loss in 11 innings. They fell to 22-20, four games behind the first-place Rays.

Afterward, the two relievers responsible for blowing the game exited the park before the media was allowed into the locker room.

Sympathy for Sale will likely be outmatched only by frustration with Brandon Workman, who allowed a two-run homer to Charlie Blackmon to erase the Sox’ 3-2 lead in the eighth inning, and Ryan Brasier, who walked two batters then allowed the game-winning run to score on a single by Mark Reynolds in the 11th.

As he typically does, Sale blamed himself. It was his fault, he said, for allowing a two-run homer to Nolan Arenado on his only bad pitch of the night, a 92 mph fastball up in the zone in the seventh inning.

“That was the one that got them back in this game and gave them a breath of fresh air,” Sale said. “Everything else is cool. I appreciate what happened tonight. I’m not taking away from that. But at the same time, it’s pretty crappy timing to give up a two-run homer and give a team a new life.”

Workman coughed up Sale’s win in the eighth, when manager Alex Cora replaced the lefty on 108 pitches rather than let him get a chance at 20 strikeouts.

Workman hadn’t allowed a hit since April 17, a span of 11 appearances and 27 days. But Chris Iannetta smoked one of Workman’s signature curves to the tippy-top of the Green Monster for a double. Two batters later, Blackmon crushed another curve for a two-run homer.

“You don’t expect that, with the way he’s been throwing and the matchups,” Cora said.

Mitch Moreland tied things up with a pinch-hit single in the bottom of the inning to force extras until Brasier allowed the winning run.

“It sucks because of the way (Sale) pitched, but it is what it is,” Cora said. “We show up tomorrow and go play again.”

All year the Sox haven’t played well for Sale. They lost his first six games, won his next two when he allowed just one combined run in 14 innings, then lost on a night he struck out 17.

Sale wasn’t throwing particularly hard on this cold evening — gametime temperature was 44 degrees and was down to 30 with the wind chill by the eighth inning — and his fastball averaged 93 mph, below normal for him but plenty good enough when he’s spotting corners with heaters and sliders alike.

The first five outs Sale recorded were strikeouts, as were the final eight.

“Fastball command and my slider was probably about as good as it’s ever been,” he said.

With no-no stuff, he was perfect until the fifth, when J.D. Martinez couldn’t get to a hanging fly ball in the right field corner and it bounced over the wall for a double by Reynolds. (Gold Glover Mookie Betts vacated his normal position in right to play center with Jackie Bradley Jr. getting the night off.)

The only damage came on a single by Trevor Story and then the homer by Arenado in the seventh.

The pitch was suppose to be “down and away,” Sale said. “And that’s kind of another thing that makes me mad is I’m out there punching tickets the whole night and I’m out there pitching for a double play against one of the best home run hitters in the league. ... You want a double play right there, but at the same time, that really wasn’t my game up to that point.”

Sale finished with eight swinging strikes on his fastball. So maybe velocity wasn’t everything.

He became just the fourth pitcher in Red Sox history with 17 punchouts, joining Martinez, Roger Clemens and Bill Monbouquette. The most Martinez ever struck out while with the Sox was 17, once in 1999 and once in 2000. Clemens, of course, had a pair of 20-strikeout games in a Sox uniform, once in 1986 and then again 10 years later.

But nobody had struck out 17 since Max Scherzer in 2016. No lefty had struck out 17 since Johan Santana in 2007. And nobody had ever struck out 17 in seven innings or fewer.

In his past three starts, Sale has 41 strikeouts to one walk in 21 innings.

“Now he’s finding it,” Cora said.

All of Sale’s run support came via the long ball, with Michael Chavis yanking one just to the right of the left field foul pole in the second inning for his seventh homer in 21 games. Martinez connected on his eighth of the season and the red-hot Rafael Devers drove his third, each in the third inning.

The Sox ran out of gas late. The bullpen couldn’t hold it. And for the seventh time in nine tries this year, they lost with their ace on the mound.

Denying Chris Sale a shot at 20 strikeouts was the right call

Michael Silverman

History could wait.

On a night when the Red Sox' best pitcher was throwing one of the best games of his career and was just three strikeouts shy of reaching the gold standard for starting pitchers — 20 strikeouts — manager Alex Cora faced a decision.

Did he want Sale to tie Kerry Wood and Roger Clemens (twice) on a chilly night in the middle of May, or did he want to see Sale pitch from a mound in October?

The ideal answer is both.

But this is 2019.

And because we know what Sale means to the Red Sox for this season and the next four as well, and because we know his track record for staying sharp and strong in the closing months of the season, and because we know the bullpen has been lights out for most of the season, and because we know the ace threw 108 pitches and had a one-run lead, we all knew what Cora would do.

He made the right decision and told Sale he was done for the night.

History could wait.

But so could a win for Sale and the Red Sox, since the bullpen failed and allowed the Rockies to eventually win in 11 innings.

But one loss versus the rest of the season with Sale?

History will show Cora made the right call. It was a tough one, but really, it was easier than it looked and felt.

“I mean, it’s hard, but at the same time, (Sale) understands,” Cora said after the 5-4 loss. “He comes from a long one in Baltimore (also 108 pitches), and there’s a lot of effort there, you know? I don’t know. It’s one of those that, it’s not a win-win situation. It’s one of those that is a tough one anyway regardless.”

It was both the pitch count and the score — the Red Sox led 3-2, their lead cut from 3-0 when Sale left a two-seam fastball too high and over the plate for Nolan Arenado, who smashed it for a two-run homer — that added up in Cora’s mind.

“I think both, honestly,” Cora said. “He made a lot of pitches the last one, so you have to be careful. There’s a bigger goal here, and we’ve been very disciplined throughout the process. You still have to be disciplined, and I think he understands. It’s one of those that, as a manager, where you put and balance, and we need these guys to pitch deep into the season, so just need to be disciplined.”

Cora said Sale half-jokingly asked him in the tunnel about going for 20.

Sale was more than half-serious.

“Yeah, I don’t think there’s a pitcher on the planet, you’ve got 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go out for the last inning, but I respect him as much as anybody on the planet, and I’ll never question anything he does, even in regards to me with that,” Sale said. “You look at where we’re at in the game, and who we’ve got coming in, our bullpen has been as good as it’s ever been. They’ve been a strong point for our team all year. And (Brandon) Workman (who allowed a two-run home run to Charlie Blackmon in the eighth) especially has been probably the most consistent guy down there all year.

“So at the end of the day, obviously you want a shot at it, but it’s an easier pill to swallow knowing the situation and the circumstances and who you’ve got coming out of the bullpen too.”

Still, it kind of would have been cool, Sale said, to go back out.

“AC’s got two handshakes and you get one or the other and you know which one is the done one,” Sale said. “Like I said, I’d love to have gone back out there, but also, like I said, I’ll never question anything he does. He knows more about this game than anybody I know. Given the circumstances, our bullpen and where they’ve been and who’s coming in after me, I had all the confidence in the world in the rest of that game.”

More than confidence, Sale had the best stuff on the best night of his career, as far as strikeouts go. He re-wrote his own record book, beating his previous best of 15 strikeouts. He just was not allowed a shot at inscribing his name in baseball’s history books.

His reputation will live to see another day.

And so will the Red Sox’ 2019 season.

Cora: Emerging Red Sox reliever Marcus Walden earning more responsibility

Jason Mastrodonato

It won’t be long before Marcus Walden stops being used like the last man in the Red Sox’ bullpen.

Three of his last four outings have been at least two innings, and twice in his last four has he completed three innings. There’s no questioning the value of those innings, particularly given how dominant he’s been, but the long relief role is traditionally reserved for the low man on the totem pole.

Clearly, Walden isn’t that guy. With a mid-90s heater and a fierce slider that moves right-to-left in a hurry, he’s compiled 26 strikeouts (sixth-most on the team) and just five walks to go with a 1.61 ERA in 22- $\frac{1}{3}$ innings this season.

“I mean, in a perfect world, when everybody is healthy, probably we’ll use him (in other ways),” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Tuesday. “Well, he’s pitching in high leverage situations anyways, but he’s one of the guys that the way he’s throwing the ball, he can get three outs in the seventh, eighth, ninth, it really doesn’t matter.”

The last four times Walden has pitched, he’s entered the game in the third inning, the eighth, the fourth and the sixth.

But the Sox have been in need of multiple innings with David Price and Nathan Eovaldi on the shelf and spot-starters being used regularly in their places. When Price and Eovaldi return, Walden could be seen more consistently in important spots.

“We’ll see where we go with David and Nate, when everybody is back and obviously it’s going to be a different situation,” Cora said. “We’ll use (Walden) in high-leverage situations.”

Price is throwing a bullpen session on Wednesday and then “we’ll decide if goes on Saturday or if he’ll pitch in Toronto (next week),” Cora said.

Eovaldi has begun playing catch but is still recovering from surgery to remove loose bodies in his elbow.

Eduardo Rodriguez starts for the Sox on Wednesday.

BRADLEY ON THE BENCH

The Red Sox have largely stuck by Jackie Bradley Jr. during his seven-week slump to start the year, but against the left-handed Kyle Freeland on Tuesday night, the Sox turned elsewhere.

With the Colorado Rockies in town for two days, Bradley began the series on the bench as the Sox moved Mookie Betts to center field, stuck J.D. Martinez in right and opted to go with Eduardo Nunez in the designated hitter spot.

It didn't work out as Chris Sale struck out 17 but the Sox lost, 5-4, in 11 innings.

Nunez was 1-for-4 and is hitting .194 with a .483 OPS on the year, but with Bradley hitting just .132 with a .312 OPS against lefties this year, the change made sense to Cora for last night's game.

Steve Pearce was at first base again and went 0-for-3 as the Sox keep trying to get the struggling World Series MVP going. He's hitting .111 with a .339 OPS to start the year.

"It was very tricky today," Cora said. "Very tricky. But we have to get those two guys going, Eduardo and Steve, they're here for that. It's one of those that you have to trust the player. And they know it."

The difficult part about making Tuesday's lineup was keeping Christian Vazquez on the bench. With Sandy Leon behind the plate to call the shots for Chris Sale, Vazquez could've been a good choice at DH considering he's hit .382 with a 1.201 OPS against lefties this year.

"I talked to Christian, too," Cora said. "I said, 'hey man, this is where we're at, keep doing what you're doing.' His swing has actually been a lot better lately against righties, too. He's been amazing against lefties. Today was one of those that I was debating between breakfast and changing diapers about how we're going to go."

Dustin Pedroia on latest set-back with injured knee: 'I'll get through it'

Jason Mastrodonato

In the face of yet another set-back related to his balky left knee, Dustin Pedroia remained stoic on Tuesday afternoon.

"I'll get through it," the 35-year-old second baseman said before the Red Sox took on the Rockies at Fenway Park. "Just trying to figure some things out, that's basically it. We're changing braces, orthotics, a lot of different things, you know, to try to help me out. Just getting used to some things."

Pedroia played in five games over an eight-day period with Double-A Portland before the Red Sox pulled him off his rehab assignment due to soreness in his surgically-repaired knee.

He returned to Boston for more testing on Monday and the testing revealed no new concerns, according to manager Alex Cora.

"Nothing major with the knee," Cora said. "He had some test yesterday and everybody feels comfortable. Not comfortable, but better than Sunday so he'll workout with us the next few days. Let's see how he reacts to it. And hopefully we can go back and send him on rehab assignment whenever we can."

Pedroia doesn't really see it as a set-back, but more of a routine part of this lengthy process that's left him riding only small waves of success before crashing down and starting over multiple times.

"I had some discomfort the other day and it got checked out yesterday, so all is good," Pedroia said. "I think my time was up on Friday, you know, and I still need some more at-bats and getting used to some things before I'm ready. That was it."

He began the assignment on May 2 and by MLB rules has up to 20 days to stay in the minors, which could have kept him on rehab through next Tuesday. Instead, the clock will reset after a minimum of five days of rest. Then he can begin a new rehab assignment if he's ready.

“Playing, what did I play, four or five games?” he said. “It wasn’t enough for me and the team to be confident that I’ll be back and fine. I had to get checked out. I had some bruising in a certain spot in my knee. That was it.”

Cora noted that Pedroia is “a lot smarter than in the past,” given he was willing to admit he was feeling sore and didn’t try to play through it.

The Sox feel confident this set-back is nothing like last year’s, when Pedroia’s season ended after just three games.

“I know I haven’t played many games but I think I’ve surprised some people to where I’m at,” Pedroia said. “There’s going to be a time when I’m out there all the time. It’s coming. Just got to stick with it.”

Alex Cora has history with Colorado’s Nolan Arenado

Michael Silverman

Nolan Arenado is the one who got away.

To Alex Cora at least.

Two years ago, when Cora was the general manager of Team Puerto Rico for the World Baseball Classic, he did all he could to make Arenado play him instead of Team USA. Arenado grew up in California, but because his mom is Puerto Rican, he had a choice.

And Cora badly wanted him to play for his team.

“It was going to be tough because we had some other talented players, so it was going to be Francisco (Lindor) at second, Carlos (Correa) at short, Nolan at third with (infielder) Javy (Baez) playing the outfield,” Cora said before Tuesday night’s game against Arenado’s current team, Colorado. “It was like, ‘You’re going to be playing with Carlos, Francisco and Javier in this tournament.’ I think we were close.”

Arenado agreed.

“It was a really good pitch,” the Rockies third baseman said. “I was definitely thinking about it because my mom’s Puerto Rican, so I wanted to represent my mom a little bit. But at the end of the day, my heart was with USA.”

Cora appreciated how fair Arenado was about his decision, which he completely understood.

“It’s tough in his situation, Nolan, he doesn’t speak (Spanish), so to spend two or three weeks with a group of guys that are mainly going to talk a different language, it was probably going to be tough for him,” Cora said. “He was honest. He kept me until the end, which was cool. It was one where I really wanted him to play for us. His dad was really into it. But in the end, it worked out for both teams.

“Talking to him throughout the process, very polite, very good kid. He kind of like apologized when he said no to us. (I was) kind of like, ‘You don’t have to do that. You play for whoever you want.’”

In the end, the U.S. beat Puerto Rico, 8-0, in the final.

“It was amazing, it was awesome beating them, it was great. I know I made the right decision,” Arenado said. “I have no regrets about it, then also winning the championship kind of put the stamp on it, too.”

Count Arenado as a Cora fan.

“He’s always been really cool with me, great with me, ever since I think it was the end of High-A (2011, Modesto), because you know he wanted me to go play in the Puerto Rican League,” Arenado said. “I’ve always kept in touch with him through High A all the way to the big leagues. He’s always been really respectful toward me, always treated me right. Super great guy.”

Arenado has won a Gold Glove in each of his six seasons with Colorado, and has been an All-Star for his past four. Since signing his eight-year, \$260 million contract extension this spring, Arenado is the second highest paid position player in the game by annual average value, \$32.5 million.

“Well deserved, the extension. I was paying attention to it,” Cora said. “He’s amazing. He plays hard. He runs the bases. Defensively, we’ve seen (Oakland third baseman Matt) Chapman and (San Diego third baseman Manny) Machado, but this kid, he is great. Hopefully we don’t hit too many to him the next two days. It will be fun to watch.”

Again, Cora will have to watch Arenado from a different dugout.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Rockies 5, Red Sox 4 (11 innings): Boston wastes historic Sale performance

Bill Koch

BOSTON — It was an outing from Chris Sale that will live in baseball history.

It was not a night, however, when the Red Sox recorded their latest victory.

Two-run homers by Nolan Arenado and Charlie Blackmon put Boston in danger. An RBI single in the top of the 11th inning by Mark Reynolds pushed the Red Sox over the edge.

The Rockies withstood a record haul of strikeouts to snap Boston’s five-game winning streak. Reynolds made the difference with his liner to center against Ryan Brasier, clinching a 5-4 win for the visitors at chilly, soggy Fenway Park.

Not even the tying pinch-hit single to center by Mitch Moreland in the eighth was enough to spark the Red Sox to life. That made it a 4-4 game, and Boston’s recent form suggested the inevitable would eventually unfold in front of the 35,804 fans on hand. It was not to be for the Red Sox on this wretched night, one in which the weather matched the feeling of missed opportunity.

“It sucks because of the way he pitched,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “But it is what it is. We show up tomorrow and go play a game.”

Reynolds caught up with an 0-and-2 fastball from Brasier to chase home Trevor Story, who had reached on a fielder’s choice. A leadoff walk set the wheels in motion for Colorado and Wade Davis worked around a two-out single to nail it down in the bottom half of the inning.

Sale set a career-high with 17 strikeouts, a number eclipsed by only one Boston pitcher in club history. Roger Clemens recorded a pair of 20-strikeout games, in 1986 and 1996, three ahead of Sale and two other men. Pedro Martinez (1999, 2000) and Bill Monbouquette (1961) are now a quartet that stands above all others.

“To be able to have a chance to do something like that, it’s special,” Sale said. “But at the same time, it’s still a close game. You still have a job to do and try to hold it down when you can.”

Sale became the first pitcher in Major League Baseball history to strike out as many as 17 batters in seven innings or less. He’s also the first pitcher to strike out as many as 14 men, walk none and allow three or

fewer hits in back-to-back outings. Johan Santana was the last left-hander to fan as many as 17 in an August 2007 outing with the Twins.

“That was fun to watch,” Cora said. “First time I’ve been in something like that watching the strikeouts and watching the pitch count. You want him to go as deep as possible.”

It was the third straight outing of 10 or more strikeouts for Sale and the fourth in his last five. He now boasts 68 career games with 10 strikeouts or more, including 33 in just 68 starts with the Red Sox since 2017. Sale has rebounded from a tepid beginning to the season that saw him fan just eight men through his first three starts.

“In the tunnel he goes, ‘You’re not going to let me get 20?’ ” Cora said. “Sarcastic, but probably seriously — that was fun to watch. What a performance.”

“I don’t think there’s a pitcher on the planet who has 17 punchouts and doesn’t want to go out for the last inning,” said Sale, who threw 108 pitches. “But I respect (Cora) as much as anybody on the planet. I’ll never question anything he does, even in regards to me with that.”

Sale struck out the first six batters he faced, only the second Boston pitcher to do so since the beginning of the Expansion Era in 1961. Ray Culp fanned six straight California Angels in a 2-1 loss on May 11, 1970. Culp worked the first 7 1/3 frames in a 16-inning thriller, punching out only two more to finish with eight.

None of that was enough to ensure Sale the victory, as Arenado sent a towering fly to the front of the Monster Seats in the seventh. That cut a 3-0 Red Sox lead to just a single run. Brandon Workman spoiled the party further in the eighth. Chris Iannetta doubled off the Green Monster and Blackmon sent a towering drive to the bleachers in center, giving the Rockies a 4-3 edge.

The Red Sox looked firmly in command to that point thanks to three solo home runs. Michael Chavis sent one into orbit down the line in left to lead off the second and two more balls found the Monster Seats in the third. J.D. Martinez and Rafael Devers joined Chavis in roughing up Colorado starter Kyle Freeland, who wriggled off the hook.

Red Sox Journal: Rockies’ Arenado has a fan in Cora

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Perhaps the premier all-around third baseman in baseball returned to Fenway Park on Tuesday night.

Nolan Arenado is squarely in his prime at 28 years old and is at the start of a seven-year, \$260-million contract extension with the Rockies. The four-time National League All-Star and six-time Gold Glove winner — one for every season he’s played — is the unquestioned face of the franchise and a favorite of Red Sox manager Alex Cora.

“He’s amazing,” Cora said. “He plays hard. He runs the bases. Defensively, we’ve seen (San Diego’s Manny) Machado and (Oakland’s Matt) Chapman — this kid, he’s great. Hopefully we don’t hit too many to him the next few days.”

Arenado combines his defensive prowess with a thumping bat. His career .889 OPS includes marks in excess of that number in each of the last four seasons. Arenado has closed inside the top eight of the N.L. Most Valuable Player voting four times, including a career-best third place in 2018.

It was with all this in mind that Cora attempted to recruit Arenado to play for Puerto Rico in the 2017 World Baseball Classic. Cora served as the team’s general manager and Arenado, a California native, was eligible to play for the club due to his mother Millie’s Puerto Rican roots. Arenado ultimately won a gold

medal with the United States, spurning the chance to join Cora's dream infield of Houston's Carlos Correa, Cleveland's Francisco Lindor and Chicago Cubs star Javier Baez.

"Talking to him throughout the process — very polite, very good kid," Cora said. "He kind of apologized when he said no to us. I was like, 'You don't have to. You play for whoever you want.'"

Arenado was selected 59th overall out of El Toro High School by Colorado in the 2009 draft. He opted to pass up a college career with Arizona State and made his debut in April 2013, squaring off against the Diamondbacks just 12 days after his 22nd birthday.

Price, Eovaldi on track

David Price (left elbow tendinitis) and Nathan Eovaldi (right elbow) both went through an early workout on Tuesday.

Price could return in time for the weekend series with the Astros or make his next start during a four-game series at Toronto next week. Eovaldi remains in the beginning stages of his recovery from arthroscopic surgery to remove some loose bodies from his throwing elbow.

Cora said Price is scheduled to throw a second bullpen session on Wednesday before discussing his possible return. His first came Sunday prior to an 11-2 hammering of the Mariners that completed a three-game sweep. Eovaldi is limited to playing catch at the moment, something he did for the fourth time since the middle of last week.

"I don't know how many (throws) today, but he's excited," Cora said. "We've got to be careful with him — not slow him down, but harness him."

Walden thrives

Marcus Walden is working in a multiple-inning role for Boston at the moment, but that could soon change.

The eventual return of Price, Eovaldi and Brian Johnson (left elbow) should knock Hector Velazquez back to his long-relief role in the bullpen. That would free Walden up for some high-leverage work at the back end, and the righthander's numbers suggest he could be ready.

"In a perfect world, when everybody's healthy, he's pitching in high-leverage situations," Cora said. "He's one of the guys, the way he's throwing the ball, where he can get three outs in the seventh, eighth, ninth — it really doesn't matter."

Walden's refined slider has helped him take the next step this season, adding the pitch to a fastball that runs into the mid-90s and a cut-fastball. Walden's hits allowed per nine innings have been cut almost in half (from 8.6 to 4.8) and his strikeouts per nine innings have risen (from 8.6 to 10.5). He's allowed just 12 hits in 22 1/3 innings of work.

"He's a good athlete," Cora said. "He moves well around the mound. He's quick to the plate, which is very important late in games."

*** *MassLive.com***

Chris Sale strikes out 17, but Boston Red Sox fall to Rockies, 5-4 in 11 innings

Chris Cutillo

BOSTON -- The Rockies spoiled an all-time pitching performance from Chris Sale on Tuesday night.

Sale became the first major-leaguer ever to strike out at least 17 batters in seven or fewer innings, but relievers Brandon Workman and Ryan Brasier allowed late runs as the Red Sox lost to the Rockies, 5-4. Mark Reynolds' go-ahead, RBI single in the 11th off Brasier was the difference.

The Red Sox gave Sale an early cushion as he dominated, with Michael Chavis, J.D. Martinez and Rafael Devers each hitting solo homers to put Boston up 3-0 through three. Sale didn't allow his first baserunner when Reynolds hit a doubled fifth and first run when Nolan Arenado hit a two-run homer in the seventh to make it a 3-2 game.

Alex Cora ended Sale's bid at the all-time strikeout record by pulling him after 108 pitches, replacing him with reliever Brandon Workman. Charlie Blackmon followed a Chris Iannetta double with a two-run homer to give the Sox a 4-3 lead and leave Sale with a no-decision.

Boston tied things up in the eighth, when Arenado let Devers reach base with his second error of the game and Mitch Moreland delivered his latest pinch-hit heroics with an RBI single off Scott Oberg. Matt Barnes' five strikeouts in two innings helped the Red Sox tie their franchise record for strikeouts in a game with 24.

Brasier continued his recent struggles by walking two of the first Rockies he faced before Reynolds drove a high fastball into center field for the go-ahead run. Closer Wade Davis worked around a Christian Vazquez single to set the Sox down in the 11th and clinch the comeback win for Colorado.

The loss snapped a five-game winning streak for the Red Sox, dropping them to 22-20. They'll look to salvage a split of their quick two-game series with Colorado on Wednesday night.

Sale, Sox set records

The records set or tied in Tuesday's loss:

*** The Red Sox tied a team record with 24 total strikeouts, matching a mark they set on Sept. 15, 2017 against the Rays (in 15 innings)

*** Sale is the first major-leaguer ever to strike out at least 17 batters in seven or fewer innings.

*** Sale struck out the first six batters he faced, tying the longest streak to begin a game by a Red Sox pitcher in the expansion era (since 1961). Righty Ray Culp also struck out six against the Angels in 1970.

*** Sale became the first pitcher ever to strike out 14 or more batters, walk none, and allow three or fewer hits in consecutive starts.

Sale only the fourth Sox starter with 17 Ks in game

Sale became just the fourth pitcher in Red Sox history to record at least 17 strikeouts, joining Roger Clemens (20, twice), Pedro Martinez (17, twice) and Bill Monbouquette (17).

Martinez was the last to do it, on May 6, 2000 against Tampa Bay.

Chavis' homer the second-longest for the Sox this year

Chavis' 451-foot second-inning homer was the second-longest for the Red Sox this year, trailing only a 459-foot blast he hit in Chicago last weekend. It was the seventh of his career.

Chris Sale's dominance shows Boston Red Sox were right to believe in him despite early-season struggles

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- In five weeks' time, Red Sox starter Chris Sale has gone from feeling more lost than he ever has on a mound to claiming that the feel for his slider and his fastball command are better than they ever have been. Those 35 days have done more than just resurrected a potential lost season for Sale-- they've proven the Red Sox were right for believing in their ace all along.

Sale started his season in just about the worst way possible, posting a 6.30 ERA and losing his first five starts after signing a five-year, \$145 million extension. As the struggles worsened, the questions got louder.

Did Sale not pitch enough in spring training to be ready for Opening Day? Had teams studied the Sox enough to figure out how to beat their pitchers? Did Sale and others miss Sandy Leon? Should Boston have made the deal with Sale considering his shoulder problems last year?

Besides admitting a mistake by swapping Leon in for Blake Swihart in mid-April, the Sox largely stayed the course and insisted Sale would round into form. Alex Cora promised his velocity would come. Dave Dombrowski vowed he was fully healthy. And even on a night when Sale called his performance "flat-out embarrassing" to his family, team and fans back in April, Cora said it was only a matter of time before Sale put together all the ingredients it would take to be dominant again.

"I'm not gonna be surprised if in his next outing, he's right where we need him to be," Cora said after that night's loss to the Yankees. "I think stuff-wise, if you compare it to the first three, the velocity was there and the slider was better today. I think he's very close to the quote-on-quote real Chris Sale."

The real Chris Sale has shown up ever since, as the lefty has posted four quality starts and a 1.91 ERA in the last five outings following that night in New York. His seven-inning, 17-strikeout masterpiece Tuesday set a new career-high and gave him 59 strikeouts in his last 33 innings.

The Red Sox improved to 23-19 with their sixth win in a row.

"He was amazing," Cora said Tuesday. "Like we've been saying all along, the slider is obviously back and the fastball command was there."

Sale's only mistake of the night was a costly one, as Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado hit a two-run homer off him in the seventh in an eventual extra-innings win for Colorado. Results aside, the night was about Sale, whose outing was as good as any he has had in a Red Sox uniform.

"It's one thing to throw strikes," Cora said. "Another one is to do what he's doing right now. Where he's throwing his fastball, the slider, the changeup. He has been able to repeat his delivery. This is what we worked for."

Sale's last two outings-- a 14-strikeout game in Baltimore and Tuesday's gem-- were precisely what the Sox were working for when they tinkered with Sale's mechanics throughout April and repeatedly promised their best pitcher would be perfectly fine. Now, the Sox have their ace back and might see a prolonged stretch of dominance if the temperature ever rises and Sale can reignite the famous Ferrari he unleashed for the first time a year ago.

Suddenly, the doubts surrounding Sale have vanished as he has reclaimed his rightful place as one of the most feared pitchers in baseball. Even if Cora was one of the few to see past the lefty's early-season valleys, he's not taking extra credit for sticking by his beliefs.

"It's not gratifying," Cora said. "Just something that we believed. We believe in the players. We believe in what we mapped out. We did it last year and we did it this year. It's something that takes a lot of time."

Boston Red Sox's Chris Sale not questioning Alex Cora for pulling him with 17 strikeouts: 'I respect him as much as anybody on the planet'

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox lefty Chris Sale had a chance at history Tuesday night, striking out 17 Rockies through seven innings. Manager Alex Cora made the tough decision to pull Sale, who had thrown 108 pitches through seven frames, turning to reliever Brandon Workman with the Sox leading, 3-2.

Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora removed Chris Sale after seven innings. Sale threw 108 pitches and struck out 17.

Sale, who set a new career-high in strikeouts, would have needed just three strikeouts in the last two innings to tie the all-time record for Ks in a game and four to break it. But he didn't question Cora's decision.

"I don't think there's a pitcher on the planet who has 17 punch-outs and doesn't want to go out for the last inning," Sale said. "But I respect (Cora) as much as anybody on the planet. I'll never question anything he does, even in regards to me with that."

With the Sox up 3-0 in the seventh, Sale allowed a two-run homer to Nolan Arenado to make it a one-run game. He punctuated his outing by striking out the next three batters he faced and knew his night was done when he came off the mound.

"(Workman) has been probably the most consistent guy down there all year," Sale said. "At the end of the day-- obviously you want a shot at it-- but it's an easier pill to swallow knowing the circumstances and knowing who you've got coming out of the bullpen."

Workman had one of his worst innings in a tremendous season, allowing Colorado to take a 4-3 lead with a Chris Iannetta double and Charlie Blackmon homer in the eighth. Mitch Moreland sent the game to extras with an RBI single in the ninth before Mark Reynolds won it for the Rox with an RBI hit in the 11th.

The Rockies may have won, but the night was all about Sale. The lefty said his fastball command and feel of his slider were as good as they had been in any of his 296 big-league experiences.

"It's awesome. I love this game," Sale said. "To be able to have a chance at doing something like that is special."

Cora recognized Sale's shot at history but stayed true to his focus on keeping the starting rotation as fresh as possible throughout the season. A year after leading the Sox to a World Series championship with excellent in-game managing throughout October, the manager has earned his players' deference when it comes to tough calls.

"(Cora) has got two handshakes, and you get one or the other," Sale said. "You know which one is the 'done' one. Like I said, I'd loved to have gone back out there. I'd never question anything he does. He knows more about this game than anyone I know."

Red Sox strikeout record: Team ties franchise-high with 24 Ks in game vs. Rockies

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox made franchise history in their loss Tuesday, tying a team record with 24 total strikeouts in the game.

Boston's 24 strikeouts tied the mark it set against the Rays on Sept. 15, 2017. Chris Sale had 17 strikeouts in seven innings, Matt Barnes had five in two innings and Brandon Workman added two in his inning.

Boston had 21 strikeouts through nine innings, which would have set a major-league record for strikeouts in a nine-inning game. The game went to extra innings, leaving the Sox two punch-outs short of the major-league record of 26.

Sale also started the previous game in which the Sox had 24 strikeouts, getting nine of his own in 5.2 innings. The Sox beat the Rays, 13-6, in 15 innings in that one.

Ryan Weber, Boston Red Sox's 'babyface' pitcher, still sometimes gets ID'd buying lottery tickets

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Red Sox reliever Ryan Weber is 28, and he made his major league debut in 2015 for the Rays. But he looks about 10 years younger.

"I still get ID'd to buy lotto tickets," Weber said.

The Red Sox signed the righty to a minor league deal Dec. 20. They promoted him May 6 to take injured David Price's spot on the 25-man roster. He is in competition with Rafael Devers for youngest-looking Red Sox player. Except Devers is young (22). Weber will turn 29 in August.

"I get it all the time. My wife (Mallory) gets it, too," Weber said. "She's 28 as well and she's got a babyface just like me, too."

Weber never has had a security guard question whether he's actually a major leaguer when entering a ballpark.

"Coming in here was fine. They actually knew my name out front, which I was surprised with," Weber said. "They did their research. But I could see where somebody could get confused because of the babyface and a little thrown off on why I'm in here. They were good here. And on the road and stuff, we kind of travel in packs, getting on the bus. So nobody's going to say anything."

Weber has thrown five scoreless innings in two relief outings so far. He has allowed four hits and no walks while striking out six.

"I have to throw all my pitches for strikes," Weber said. "I have throw all my pitches for strikes in any count. And I have to keep the ball down. And it's gotta be moving, the sinker. As of late, I've had pretty good feel for glove-side, arm-side with everything. Knock on wood, I haven't made a costly mistake yet."

Sinkerball relievers are becoming more and more rare. Most relievers are throwing four-seam fastballs up in the zone to counter launch angle.

"Growing up, you were taught to keep the ball down, outside corner," Weber said. "Now you have to throw it up. But if I throw the ball up, it's get hit out of the park."

He throws a sinker, curveball and changeup. His two-seamer averages 88.9 mph, per Statcast.

"There's a fine line of where the guys are swinging now where you can still get underneath the bat," Weber explained. "Because obviously they have to recognize the pitch first. And they say to themselves, 'Oh, fastball.' But it just has to move an inch to just get below the barrel. And it's such a drastic change from all the other guys in the bullpen. A change of pace. So it has to be uncomfortable for those guys. 'Now we've gotta guy with a two-seamer, sinker.' I don't know if they readjust or do something but it's just a change of pace for everyone else."

The righty hurled 4 scoreless innings in relief of Josh Smith against the Orioles the day they promoted him.

"Keeping my fastball down in the zone and just mixing it up," Weber said about the outing. "Changing speeds. In and out."

Michael Chavis has 5 longest Boston Red Sox home runs in 2019, traveling combined 2,230 feet

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Red Sox rookie Michael Chavis belted a 451-foot home run Tuesday against Rockies starting pitcher Kyle Freeland. That wasn't even his longest home run this season.

Chavis has hit the five longest Boston Red Sox home runs so far in 2019. His 459-foot home run against White Sox's Reynaldo Lopez in Chicago on May 3 is the longest.

His 111.2-mph 451-foot blast over the Green Monster on Tuesday is his second longest.

He also hit a 441-foot home run on April 28 vs. Tampa, a 441-foot blast April 23 vs. Detroit (G2) and a 438-foot rocket May 4 at Chicago.

Those five home runs traveled a combined 2,230 feet.

Boston Red Sox prospect Michael Chavis discussed several topics, including his power, an early minor league slump, his photo with lemurs, not having enough socks, the book he has with him in the dugout and much more.

Chavis also hit home runs of 470 feet, 467 feet and 434 feet for Triple-A Pawtucket in April before being promoted.

“(PawSox manager) Billy (McMillon) told me he hit one on a 3-0 count that went like 500 feet,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “He’s got power. He’s compact. He understands his swing. ... You can see him again hitting the ball in the air. And that’s a good sign.”

Boston Red Sox power prospect Josh Ockimey bashes 9th, 10th homer; Thad Ward tosses 7.1 scoreless

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox prospect Josh Ockimey bashed two home runs Tuesday, but Triple-A Pawtucket lost 5-4 to Columbus.

The 23-year-old is batting .230 with a .403 on-base percentage, .610 slugging percentage, 1.013 OPS, 10 homers, six doubles, one triple and 20 RBIs in 32 games (100 at-bats).

Ockimey, a left-handed hitter, has been much better against right-handed pitching with a .296/.468/.746/1.215 line, eight homers, six doubles, one triple and 18 RBIs. He projects as a major league platoon player (first base/DH) vs. righty starters.

The Red Sox didn't add him to the 40-man roster last November after he struggled late in the season following a promotion from Double-A Portland to Pawtucket. He then struggled in the Arizona Fall League.

Boston would need to select him to the 40-man roster by this coming November to protect him from the 2019 Rule 5 Draft.

Taylor pitches well again

Josh Taylor continues to impress in relief for Pawtucket. He pitched a perfect ninth inning and struck out two.

The 26-year-old lefty, who is on the Red Sox's 40-man roster, has a 2.87 ERA, 1.40 WHIP, .246 batting average against, 22 strikeouts and eight walks in 14 relief outings (15.2 innings).

The Boston Red Sox acquired Josh Taylor for Deven Marrero last season. They added him to the 40-man roster in November.

Ward dominates again

Thad Ward, a 2018 fifth-round pick out of UCF, hurled 7.1 shutout innings but Low-A Greenville lost 4-3 to Hickory. He gave up four hits and one walk while striking out seven.

Ward has a 2.91 ERA, 1.18 WHIP, 51 strikeouts and 18 walks in 43.1 innings (eight starts).

Casas continues to hit for power

Red Sox 2018 first-round pick Triston Casas went 1-for-4 with a double for Greenville.

He is 14-for-45 (.311) with a .380 on-base percentage, .667 slugging percentage, 1.047 OPS, four homers, four doubles and 15 RBIs in 12 games (45 at-bats) during May.

Boston Red Sox 2018 first-round draft pick Triston Casas is only 19 years old but he already is bigger than 6-foot-3, 232-pound J.D. Martinez.

Duran batting .410

Jarren Duran continues to lead all of the minor leagues in batting average (.410). The 2018 seventh-round pick out of Long Beach State went 1-for-3 with two RBIs, one walk and a run in High-A Salem's 10-7 win over Fayetteville.

He's slashing .410/.473/.545/1.018 with nine doubles, three triples, one homer and 12 RBIs in 33 games (134 at-bats).

Boston Red Sox could use Marcus Walden as ninth-inning option eventually; 'He can get 3 outs in the seventh, eighth, ninth'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Red Sox manager Alex Cora has used Marcus Walden for two three-inning outings and five two-inning appearances so far this season.

"It seems like we use him a lot when we go with the bullpen (games), starting with Hector (Velazquez)," Cora said.

Five of Walden's seven multi-inning outings have come in relief of Velazquez, who has replaced Nathan Eovaldi in the starting rotation. Eovaldi underwent a right elbow arthroscopy and loose body removal. He's in the midst of about a six-week rehab.

But Cora said Walden will be used in more high-leverage late-game situations — potentially even occasionally pitching the ninth inning — when Eovaldi and David Price (elbow tendinitis) return from the injured list. Price could return as early as Saturday.

Walden is 5-0 with a 1.61 ERA, 2.75 FIP and 0.76 WHIP in 14 outings (22.1 innings) this season. He has struck out 26 and walked five.

"He's pitching in high-leverage situations anyway," Cora said. "But he's one of the guys that we look the way he's throwing the ball that he can get three outs in the seventh, eighth, ninth. It really doesn't matter. He's a good athlete. He moves well around the mound. He's quick to the plate, which is very important late in games."

“So we’ll see where we go with David and obviously Nate, when everybody’s back,” Cora added. “Obviously it’s going to be a different situation. But we’ll use him in high-leverage situations.”

Eight of his 22.1 innings have been categorized as medium-leverage situations by Fangraphs.com while 2.2 innings are high-leverage spots.

Cora consistently has used Matt Barnes in the highest leverage spot late in games. That has created more save opportunities for Ryan Brasier (six saves) than Barnes (three saves).

Walden maybe will join Brasier receiving some ninth-inning save opportunities.

“He’s been able to get lefties and righties out,” Cora pointed out.

Walden has held righties to a .140 batting average and lefties to a .167 batting average.

His four-seam fastball has averaged 94.2 mph, per Statcast. The opposition is 6-for-32 (.188) vs. his slider, 2-for-16 (.125) vs. his cutter, 1-for-17 (.059) vs. his sinker and 3-for-13 (.231) against his four-seam fastball.

“Slider is a plus pitch for him,” Cora said. “Velocity’s up. So he stepped up.”

Dustin Pedroia, Boston Red Sox 2B, on injury setback: ‘There’s going to be a time when I’m out there all the time’

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia insisted Tuesday that the latest setback in his recovery is a minor one.

“I had some discomfort the other day and it got checked out yesterday,” Pedroia told reporters. “So all is good. I think my time was up on Friday, you know, and I still need some more at-bats and getting used to some things before I’m ready. That was it.”

Dustin Pedroia underwent tests Monday after he was scratched from his rehab game with Double-A Portland on Saturday because of knee soreness.

Pedroia, who re-injured his knee on April 17, played five rehab games at Double-A Portland before experiencing discomfort over the weekend. He had expected to play three straight days over the weekend but was off Friday and scratched Saturday with minor soreness. Portland’s game was rained out Sunday.

Pedroia was returned from his rehab stint Monday and underwent testing in Boston. He still believes he can return to the lineup as an everyday player despite lasting just six games in the majors after returning April 12.

“I know I haven’t played many games but I think I’ve surprised some people to where I’m at,” he said. “There’s going to be a time when I’m out there all the time. It’s coming. Just got to stick with it.”

Pedroia said he is working with the medical team to find equipment that works, trying new braces, orthotics and cleats.

“It’s a lot of things to process and then try to compete at this level,” he said.

Pedroia has some bruising in his knee that he believes will resolve itself soon. He’ll work out with the Red Sox in Boston for the next few days and could join an affiliate when the team heads out for a seven-game road trip early next week.

“It just takes some time to get used to that and make sure that when I’m ready, it’s not a week and then I’m hurt again,” Pedroia said. “I’m just trying to find a way.”

David Price injury: Boston Red Sox starter to throw one more bullpen before decision is made when to activate him

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Boston Red Sox starting pitcher David Price (elbow) will throw one more bullpen session. It likely will happen Wednesday here at Fenway Park.

Manager Alex Cora said the Red Sox then will decide whether the lefty will start here vs. the Astros on Saturday or next week in Toronto. Boston plays four games against the Blue Jays at Rogers Centre beginning Monday.

The Red Sox placed Price on the 10-day injured list with elbow tendinitis May 6 (retroactive to May 3). He threw his first bullpen since being placed on the IL on Sunday.

He has a 3.75 ERA, 3.41 FIP and 1.14 WHIP in six starts.

Eduardo Rodriguez will start Wednesday for the Red Sox vs. the Rockies.

Dustin Pedroia underwent tests Monday after he was scratched from his rehab game with Double-A Portland on Saturday because of knee soreness.

Eovaldi throws again

Red Sox starting pitcher Nathan Eovaldi threw again Tuesday.

The righty underwent right elbow arthroscopy and loose body removal April 23 at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. The exception was for him to make a full return within six weeks. He underwent the same procedure last March.

“Just baby steps,” Cora said. “Just playing catch, building up. I don’t know how many (throws) today, but he’s excited. We’ve got to be careful with him. Not slow him down but harness him.”

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Five Red Sox Takes: Bullpen blows beautiful Chris Sale start

Chris Mason

BOSTON — On a frosty night at Fenway Park, the only player in either starting lineup without sleeves stayed white hot.

Chris Sale delivered perhaps his most dominant start in a Red Sox uniform, setting a career high with 17 strikeouts against a legit Rockies lineup. Sale wound up with a no decision because of two hanging breaking balls from Brandon Workman, and Ryan Brasier lost it in the 11th, 5-4.

Here are five takes from a spoiled Sale start:

1. Sale is on another level

Chris Sale wasn’t sugarcoating his early performance four weeks ago in the Bronx.

The ace delivered a scathing self-assessment, saying, “This is flat-out embarrassing, for my family, for my team, for our fans.”

He’s been ridiculous in his five starts since. Sale has struck out 59 batters in 33 innings and posted a 1.91 ERA over that span. Last night he became the first pitcher to post back-to-back outings with at least 14 strikeouts since Clayton Kershaw in 2015.

The lone blemish was a Nolan Arenado two-run shot that found a home in the front row of the Monster Seats, hit by a worthy adversary.

2. Cora sticks to the book

Alex Cora was faced with a fascinating decision after the seventh, but ultimately went with his head over his heart.

Sitting at 108 pitches, there were six outs left to get and Sale had a chance to break the all-time record of 20 strikeouts. But in the age of closely monitored pitch counts — especially in Sale’s case — Cora stuck to the plan and pulled him, much to the dismay of the Fenway crowd.

“We want Sale!” chants broke out, but the lefty’s evening was done as Workman trotted in from the bullpen.

3. Workman and Brasier blow it

Workman hadn’t given up a hit in his last 11 outings, but almost gave up the lead with one pitch, as Chris Iannetta slapped a breaking ball off the very top of the Green Monster.

The potential home run was reviewed and ruled a double, but Workman couldn’t capitalize on his good break. Two batters later he hung another curveball, and All Star Charlie Blackmon deposited it in the center field bleachers.

Matt Barnes was razor sharp in his two innings of relief, but Brasier wasn’t in the 11th. The de facto closer didn’t have any command, walked two batters, and then gave up the go-ahead single to Mark Reynolds, who came into the game batting .181.

4. Another clutch hit for Mitch

Pinch-hitting Mitch Moreland for Steve Pearce in the eighth inning was a no-brainer, but we’ll give Cora some credit for that call anyway.

With runners at first and second, Moreland did what he’s been doing all season, and roped a liner to center to knot the game, 4-4.

Nobody has come through with more timely hits than Moreland early in the season.

5. Chavis croaks one

A right-handed power hitter with a lofty swing, Michael Chavis is bound to luck into a few homers with the short left field at Fenway Park.

There was nothing lucky about the bomb he hit last night.

With temperatures in the low 40s, Chavis blasted a home run an estimated 451 feet. A quick look at Google Maps will show you that ball is probably bouncing off the top of the Cask ‘n Flagon.

*** *RedSox.com***

Sale fans 17 in just 7 innings -- an MLB record

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- For a while, it felt like Chris Sale was going to put together one of those historic performances that would be remembered forever in the annals of Red Sox history.

That's how dominant Sale was on this frigid Tuesday night at Fenway Park in which he struck out a career-high 17 against the Rockies. Perhaps most impressively, Sale became the first pitcher in history to strike out 17 or more batters in a start lasting seven innings or fewer.

After no-hitting the Orioles for 5 2/3 innings and striking out 14 in his last start, Sale was perfect through 12 batters against the Rockies. He was at his overpowering best, allowing three hits and no walks over seven innings. It was the first 17-K game for a lefty pitcher since Johan Santana for the Twins in 2007.

"Yeah, fastball command and my slider was probably about as good as it's ever been," said Sale.

The only problem is that the Red Sox lost to the Rockies, 5-4, in 11 innings.

Sale had a 3-2 lead and 17 K's after seven. Which is when Boston manager Alex Cora decided to pull Sale at 108 pitches. After the shoulder problems Sale experienced in the second half last year, the Red Sox have been conservative in building him back up. They weren't going to jeopardize that plan so he could break a record.

"That was fun to watch," said Cora. "The first time [I've] been in something like that, you know? Watching the strikeouts and watching the pitch count. You want him to go as deep as possible. In the tunnel he goes, 'You're not going to let me get 20?' Sarcastic, but probably serious. Great performance. Fastballs, changeups, sliders. In and out. Up. That was pretty cool to watch."

Sale could taste the chance to make history and he wanted to go after it. But he didn't argue with Cora.

"I don't think there's any pitcher on the planet ... you've got 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go out for [another] inning," said Sale. "But I respect him as much as anybody on the planet and I'll never question anything he does, even in regard to that."

Brandon Workman allowed the Rockies to take the lead in the eighth with a go-ahead, two-run homer by Charlie Blackmon. After Mitch Moreland tied it for the Red Sox in the bottom of the 8th, Mark Reynolds reclaimed the lead for good in the 11th with an RBI single against Ryan Brasier.

Accountable Sale

Sale bemoaned the one hiccup that cost his team. That would be the two-run homer Nolan Arenado tagged him for in the seventh to trim Boston's lead.

"Baseball is very much a timing game," said Sale. "Seven innings is great and 17 punchouts is great but at the same time, I had terrible timing with giving up the runs I did. I think [NESN announcer Jerry] Remy said it in like the 10th or 11th inning. That was the one that got them back in this game and gave them a breath of fresh air.

"So you know, all things aside, I think that was the one that kind of got us the most and gave them a new life and put some pep in their step. I appreciate what happened tonight. I'm not taking away from that. But at the same time, it's pretty crappy timing to give up a two-run homer and give a team a new life."

The Red Sox tied their own franchise record with 24 strikeouts in a game. Boston pitchers struck out 21 over the first nine innings. The only other time that has happened in MLB history was when the Red Sox did it against the Rays on Sept. 25, 2016.

Big picture -- Sale is back!

The Red Sox can take heart in the fact that Sale has been filthy in his last three starts, striking out 41 of the 76 batters he's faced while walking just one. Sale's early-season slump feels like a long time ago.

Sale worked tirelessly with Cora, pitching coach Dana LeVangie and bullpen coach Craig Bjornson to become himself again. And now he is.

"I talked a lot with CB and Dana and even AC about just pitch selection, where my hands are breaking, arm path stuff, it was just kind of getting back to things that made me successful before," said Sale. "Picked up a couple of bad habits, tried to kick those, just delivery stuff, just putting it all together at the right time."

More numbers

Sale became the first pitcher to strike out 14-plus batters in consecutive starts since Clayton Kershaw in 2015. When Kershaw did it, it was a week after Sale had accomplished the feat for the White Sox.

No MLB pitcher had struck out 17 or more in a game since Max Scherzer's record-tying, 20-K performance on May 11, 2016. Sale was the first AL pitcher to get at least that many strikeouts since Corey Kluber had 18 on May 13, 2015.

He was also the first Sox pitcher to punch out as many as 17 since Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez hit that number on May 6, 2000. The down note was that Sale became the first pitcher since Martinez on that May night in 2000 to have his team lose a game with that many strikeouts.

Bitterness of wasting top effort

"It sucks, honestly," said Cora.

Nobody will ever know how the night might have turned out if Cora had thrown caution to the wind and sent Sale back out for the eighth. But it took no more than a handshake for Sale to know his night was over.

"AC's got two handshakes and you get one or the other and you know which one is the done one," Sale said. "He knows more about this game than anybody I know. Given the circumstances, our bullpen and where they've been and who's coming in after me, I had all the confidence in the world in the rest of that game."

10 facts to know about Sale's 17-K performance

Andrew Simon

It wasn't so long ago that Chris Sale was making Red Sox fans worry -- about his health, his velocity and his results.

The left-hander had pretty much put those concerns to rest over his past few starts, but he buried them deep on Tuesday night, with one of the most dominant performances of his accomplished career. Facing the Rockies at Fenway Park, Sale struck out a career-high 17 without issuing a single walk over seven innings.

Although he did allow two runs -- and ultimately took a no-decision in a 5-4 Boston loss in 11 innings -- Sale still authored an outing worthy of a closer look. Here are 10 facts to know about the latest gem from the Red Sox ace:

- The 17 strikeouts were a career high for Sale, whose previous best was 15. He'd done that three times, most recently on May 11 last year against the Blue Jays.
- Sale's 17 strikeouts are a record for any pitcher who went no more than seven innings.

- Sale was the first left-handed pitcher to strike out 17 in a game since Johan Santana did it for the Twins against the Rangers on Aug. 19, 2007. He was the third pitcher to do it in Red Sox history, joining Pedro Martinez, Roger Clemens and Bill Monbouquette, with Martinez the most recent to do it, on May 6, 2000, against Tampa Bay.
 - This was the 16th time in MLB history that a pitcher struck out at least 17 without walking anybody, and Sale was the 11th to accomplish the feat. He was the first since Max Scherzer, who didn't have a walk in his 20-strikeout game for the Nationals on May 11, 2016.
 - Sale also had no walks when he struck out 14 in his previous start, last Wednesday at Baltimore. That makes him just the second pitcher in baseball history to put together back-to-back outings of at least 14 K's and no walks. The other was Dwight Gooden, who did it on Sept. 12 and 17, 1984, toward the end of his electric National League Rookie of the Year Award season for the Mets.
 - The Red Sox elected to remove Sale at the end of the seventh inning, after he'd thrown 108 pitches, even though he had a real shot at 20 strikeouts. No pitcher since at least 2008 had recorded 17 or more strikeouts through the first seven frames -- not even Scherzer, who had 15 when he got to 20 three years ago. In fact, out of the five 20-K games that have been produced, only one featured 17 K's through seven. That was Clemens' second 20-K game, for the Red Sox on Sept. 18, 1996.
 - With his 10th career game of at least 14 strikeouts, Sale passed Curt Schilling and Tom Seaver on the all-time list, and tied Hall of Famer Steve Carlton for seventh place. Of the six pitchers with more, four are also in Cooperstown (Randy Johnson, Nolan Ryan, Martinez and Sandy Koufax). Clemens and Sam McDowell are the others.
- Sale also has 68 games with double-digit strikeouts, which ranks 12th. He's now two behind the Hall of Famer Seaver in that category.
- Sale piled up 24 swinging strikes for the second outing in a row. The only other pitcher with more than one such game this season is Tampa Bay's Blake Snell.
 - Sale now has recorded 17 strikeouts on four-seam fastballs over his past two games, matching his total from his first eight outings of the season.
 - Thanks largely to Sale, the Red Sox as a team struck out 21 Rockies through nine innings, before the game went into extras. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, that tied an MLB record originally set by Boston, at Tampa Bay, on Sept. 25, 2016. In that game, the Sox finished with 23 K's in 10 innings. On Tuesday, they finished with 24 in 11 innings, tying the franchise record for strikeouts in a game -- also set against the Rays, in a 15-inning game on Sept. 15, 2017.

Boston finished just two strikeouts shy of the single-game MLB record of 26 strikeouts.

Pedroia on rehab setback: 'I'll get through it'

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Dustin Pedroia thinks his latest stoppage in play due to discomfort in his left knee is more of a hiccup than a setback. A check-up with the Red Sox's medical staff gave him some reassurance.

"I had some bruising in a certain spot in my knee. That was it," said Pedroia.

Pedroia was scratched from the lineup for Double-A Portland on Saturday when he felt some discomfort. He was returned from the rehab assignment on Monday.

“I mean, I had some discomfort the other day and it got checked out yesterday,” Pedroia said. “So all is good. I think my [rehab] time was up [soon], you know, and I still need some more at-bats and getting used to some things before I’m ready. That was it.”

It has been a long road back for Pedroia, who played just three games in 2018 after having a cartilage replacement procedure on his left knee. Pedroia played six games for the Red Sox this season before feeling a popping sensation in his knee on April 17 at Yankee Stadium.

Though it’s easy for people to be skeptical that Pedroia’s knee will ever be able to withstand the rigors of a Major League season again, the veteran continues to believe in himself throughout a patience-trying process.

“I know I haven’t played many games, but I think I’ve surprised some people to [be] where I’m at,” Pedroia said. “There’s going to be a time when I’m out there all the time. It’s coming. Just got to stick with it.”

Part of the process of coming back for Pedroia is trying out different equipment that will allow him to play effectively.

“I’ll get through it,” said Pedroia. “Just trying to figure some things out. I’m using a different brace, different orthotics, shoes. Yeah, a lot of things to process and then try to compete at this level.”

When Pedroia goes back on a rehab assignment, the clock will re-start, meaning he can spend a full 20 days playing in the Minors again if he needs to.

“He’ll work out with us the next few days,” said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. “Let’s see how he reacts to it. And hopefully we can go back and send him to a rehab assignment again, whenever we can. Talking to him, he’s in good spirits. He’s comfortable with what they saw yesterday and everything they did.”

Price could pitch Saturday

David Price, who is on the injured list due to left elbow tendinitis, will throw another bullpen session before returning to the rotation. That bullpen could be on Wednesday.

After that, the Sox will determine if Price will be activated to pitch on Saturday at home against the Astros or if his return will come during next week’s four-game series in Toronto.

Cora recalls recruiting Arenado

Cora, who managed against Rockies superstar Nolan Arenado for the first time on Tuesday, recalled the time he recruited him for Team Puerto Rico in the 2017 World Baseball Classic. Cora was the general manager for Puerto Rico.

Arenado wound up choosing Team USA, which beat Puerto Rico in the championship game.

“Yeah, he’s one of my favorites, actually, the way he goes about his business,” said Cora. “He’s amazing. Actually, I tried to recruit him for the WBC, the last one. His dad is Cuban. His mom is Puerto Rican, so I tried. I think Team USA and MLB did a better job of recruiting.”

“Talking to him throughout the process, very polite, very good kid. He kind of like apologized when he said no to us. I was kind of like, ‘You don’t have to do that. You play for whoever you want.’ Got to know him a little and it was well deserved, the [contract] extension.”

Arenado also has fond memories of Cora.

“Yeah, it was a really good recruiting job,” Arenado said. “It was a really tough phone call to let him know I was going to go with USA but that’s where my heart was, my heart was with USA. But he’s always been really cool with me, great with me, ever since I think it was the end of High A, because you know he wanted me to go play in the Puerto Rican [Winter] League. I’ve always kept in touch with him through High A all the way to the big leagues.

“He’s always been really respectful towards me, always treated me right. Super great guy.”

Arenado went 1-for-4 in Tuesday's 5-4, 11-inning Rockies win, smashing a two-run homer against Chris Sale on a night Boston's ace set a career high with 17 strikeouts.

*** ESPN.com**

Real or not? Sale's exit costs him a shot at 20 K's

David Schoenfield

When Roger Clemens first set the major league record with 20 strikeouts in a nine-inning game in 1986, he threw 138 pitches. When he did it again 10 years later, he needed 151 pitches. Kerry Wood threw 122 pitches, Randy Johnson 124 and Max Scherzer a relatively efficient 119 pitches when he fanned 20 in 2016.

How many Colorado Rockies could Chris Sale have punched out? Would he have set the record? Would he have fanned at least four batters with six outs to play?

We'll never know. Sale was magnificent on a February-like night at Fenway Park, striking out a career-high 17 batters through seven innings. He would not pitch the eighth inning. Nolan Arenado had broken up his shutout with a two-run home run in the seventh, so maybe Alex Cora saw some fatigue settling in, but Cora also saw the pitch count: 108. The 21-strikeout game remains an elusive ambition.

Sale's season high in pitches is 111. His season high last year was 116. In 2017, it was 118. Leaving him in for a shot at the record would have required another 30 pitches or so, given his game average of 15.4 pitches per inning. That kind of pitch count is unheard of in today's game -- only Mike Fiers in his no-hitter and Trevor Bauer (twice) have reached even 120 pitches this season. Last season, a starter threw 120 pitches just 12 times and only Sean Newcomb, in a no-hit bid, threw 130. It just doesn't happen.

I have no doubt Sale was strong enough to set the record. After the Arenado home run with no outs, he fanned the next three batters on 12 pitches. It certainly appeared he had enough left in the tank. Cora played it safe and probably played it smart. It's a long season, after all, and those would have been high-stress pitches. Still, when Sale didn't come out for the eighth, there was a twinge of disappointment. Maybe one more inning, Alex?

You know, for all the changes in recent years -- the shift, the advanced analytics available via Statcast data, all the home runs -- the biggest change in the game over two decades is pitch counts. In 1998, the year Wood struck out 20 batters, a starter threw 120-plus pitches 498 times. That's 10.2 percent of all games compared to 0.2 percent last season.

That doesn't mean the 21-strikeout game is impossible -- Scherzer had a shot at 21, but James McCann managed to ground out -- but the strict limits on pitch counts make it more difficult and less likely, even with strikeouts on the rise. Scherzer threw 96 strikes out of 119 pitches (80.7 percent) and actually allowed six hits, but throwing 80 percent strikes is almost impossible. Sale was at 68.5 percent, 74 of 108 pitches. (The highest strike rate this season is Kyle Hendricks at 77.8 percent in his absurd 81-pitch shutout against the Cardinals.)

Anyway, the Rockies got the last laugh in this game: They won 5-4 in 11 innings. After Sale departed with a 3-2 lead, the Rockies scored twice in the eighth on Charlie Blackmon's home run, the Red Sox tied it, and then Mark Reynolds drove in the winning run with a two-out single. Yes, in 2019 baseball, you can strike out 24 times and still win the game.

Sale is the 42nd pitcher to strike out 17-plus in a game (since 1908, via Baseball-Reference.com). He's only the eighth to not get the win. Remarkably, four of the previous seven were Randy Johnson (plus Pedro Martinez, Steve Carlton and Bob Feller). Yes, we need to list those games:

- May 5, 2001: 9 IP, 3 H, 1 R, 0 BB, 20 SO, 124 pitches. No decision as the game went extras.
- June 30, 1999: 8 IP, 7 H, 2 R, 0 BB, 17 SO, 134 pitches. Lost 2-0 as Ron Villone allowed one hit.
- June 24, 1997: 9 IP, 11 H, 4 R, 0 BB, 19 SO, 142 pitches. Lost 4-1.
- Sept. 27, 1992: 8 IP, 6 H, 2 R, 4 BB, 18 SO, 160 pitches. No decision in 3-2 loss.

Vladdy Jr. hits one out: In his 53rd major league appearance and 48th at-bat, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. finally homered and fantasy owners can take a deep breath. It was a beauty, in the top of the first:

Guerrero's slow start hasn't been via some bad luck. According to Statcast data, he had "barreled" just one of 35 balls in play prior to Tuesday's game. Twenty-one of those 35 outs had been ground balls. Pitchers have been showing him a lot of respect -- just 40 percent of the pitches he'd seen were in the strike zone -- but he hadn't done much damage against the strikes he did swing at. He'll be fine. Just lay off those breaking balls off the plate, kid.

Indeed, after I wrote that blurb, Guerrero did this in the sixth inning:

Astros still good, Marlins still bad: On Monday night, I wrote about the historic levels of greatness and ineptitude we've seen so far from the Houston and Miami offenses and, well, this happened on Tuesday:

- The Astros hit three home runs in an 11-4 victory over the Tigers, giving them 33 in their past 11 games. George Springer hit his 16th homer (an inside-the-park job), part of a 2-for-3, two-walk game. In his past 11 games, Springer is hitting .488/.538/1.023 with seven home runs, 15 RBIs and 18 runs. Imagine what this offense might do once we get into summer and pitching staffs get beaten down by injuries and fatigue - plus, have you seen the pitching in the AL West this season? The last team to score 900 runs was the 2009 Yankees, who scored 915, an average of 5.65 per game. The Astros are at 5.58 runs per game.
- The Rays blanked the Marlins 4-0 as Charlie Morton and friends spun the six-hit shutout. The Marlins are not averaging 5.58 runs per game. Avisail Garcia clubbed a 471-foot home run, the longest for the Rays in the Statcast era and ... wow, it looked even longer:

Sell your Nationals stock: The Mets beat the Nationals 6-2 as Noah Syndergaard took a no-hitter into the sixth and pitched eight strong innings (his one mistake was Victor Robles' two-run home run). Wilson Ramos hit a grand slam off Jeremy Hellickson in the first inning, but the key play came with one out and a runner when the Nationals failed to turn a routine double play on Robinson Cano's grounder. Shortstop Wilmer Difo's relay throw was off target -- but catchable -- and outfielder-turned-first baseman Gerardo Parra stretched and dropped the ball. Inexcusable.

"Like I've said before, we've got to play clean baseball," Nationals manager Dave Martinez said after the game in the ridiculous understatement of the season. "We really do. Got to give us a chance." Dead man talking? Probably. The Nationals are now 16-25 and, injuries or not, playing bad, sloppy baseball. This tweet from a self-described huge Nats fans sums things up:

It's time for a Mitch Garver highlight: The part-time catcher for the Twins cranked his ninth home run in a 4-3 win over the Angels and Byron Buxton preserved the lead when he threw out Shohei Ohtani at home plate in the eighth. Here's the home run, with Garver looking like he was barely swinging hard:

Garver, hitting .329/.418/.747, left the game after Ohtani slid into his ankle, so let's hope he's OK. After all, he's part of the MVP catching trio for the Twins.

Brewers call up Hiura: Congrats to Keston Hiura for going 2-for-3 with a walk in his debut for the Brewers. The team's top prospect hit seventh and singled in his first at-bat:

The first of many. The interesting scenario here is what the Brewers will do once Travis Shaw returns from a little wrist injury that has been bothering him. If Hiura hits well out of the gate, do you send him back down? Shaw has struggled all season, but has back-to-back 30-homer seasons. With Hiura at second, Mike Moustakas is also back at third base instead of forced into learning second. Let's see if the kid hits, of course, but my prediction is he ends up playing more games at second base than any other Brewer the rest of the season.

*** *WEEI.com***

5 thoughts on a memorable night Red Sox want to forget

Rob Bradford

For those Red Sox fans in attendance at Tuesday night's frigid Fenway Park affair, it seemed like an occasion that would have been worthy of saving that ticket stub.

Then, out of nowhere, it became simply a game those same fans probably just wanted to forget.

Few saw the end of the script playing out like this.

When the Red Sox were left to reflect on their 5-4, 11-inning loss to the Rockies there were certainly plenty echoing Chris Sale's comments of, "Take it for what it is and keep grinding and get back on it tomorrow." For the first seven-plus innings that wasn't the predicted postgame tenor. This was supposed to be the latest celebration for a team that was feeling like they had finally fallen back into form. Nope.

A two-run home run by the Rockies in the seventh. Another in the eighth. And then just enough offense against Red Sox reliever Ryan Brasier in the 11th. Colorado was efficient in offering just enough of a reminder that it has the kind of hitters Sox fans might have been a bit more worried about.

Here are five thoughts regarding the bizarre end to the Red Sox' five-game winning streak:

WE SHOULD REMEMBER SALE'S PERFORMANCE

This was Pedro-esque.

There was the career-high 17 strikeouts without a single walk, making the lefty the first pitcher since Dwight Gooden in 1984 to go back-to-back games in fanning at least 14 without issuing a free pass. It was the first Red Sox starter to strikeout 17 since Pedro Martinez did it in 2000.

Sale carried a no-hitter through the first four innings for a second straight outing, punching out nine of his first 12 batters.

He was unreal. Until the seventh.

With everyone solely focused on how many strikeouts Sale would end up with the Rockies snuck back into the picture with a leadoff single from Trevor Story followed by Nolan Arenado's 354-foot homer that brought the visitors within a run.

"Fastball command and my slider was probably about as good as it's ever been," said Sale regarding what was working for him. "On the flip side of things, this isn't really about numbers or stats or stuff. Baseball is very much a timing game and I picked a ... seven innings is great and 17 punchouts is great but at the same time, I had terrible timing with giving up the runs I did. I think (NESN analyst Jerry) Remy said it in like the 10th or 11th inning. That was the one that got them back in this game and gave them a breath of fresh air. So you know, all things aside, I think that was the one that kind of got us the most and gave them a new life and put some pep in their step. Like I said, everything else is cool. I appreciate what happened tonight. I'm not taking away from that. But at the same time, it's pretty crappy timing to give up a two-run homer and give a team a new life."

BRANDON WORKMAN'S HICCUP CAME AT A BAD TIME

It would be difficult to blame Alex Cora for trusting Workman with the eighth inning.

After retiring David Dahl to begin the eighth he had claimed a streak of getting out 41 straight batters, the longest streak by a Sox pitcher since 1970. And even though Chris Iannetta doubled to ruin the stretch, Workman was still one pitch away from holding onto the lead after fanning pinch-hitter Ryan McMahon with lefty-hitting Charlie Blackmon at the plate.

While Blackmon is appreciably better against righty pitching (.337-.260), Workman hadn't allowed a hit to a left-handed hitter all year, striking out 10 in 26 chances. But then came a misplaced curveball on the outside edge against a hitter whose strength is hitting fastballs and everything changed.

THE RED SOX ARE HITTING A LOT OF HOME RUNS

A bunch of strikeouts. The flirtation with a no-hitter. And, to top it all off, the image of the ball leaving the yard left and right. Before the eighth, the Red Sox' three homers heading into the late innings had seemed to be the subtle punctuation for this whole night.

Michael Chavis was first with a mammoth, 451-foot blast. The rookie not only is one of four Red Sox players since 1908 to have seven homers through his first 21 games, but he also owns the five longest homers by a Sox hitter this season.

The other two came from J.D. Martinez and Rafael Devers. For Martinez that makes four homers in his last six games after a 15-game drought, with Devers simply using the long ball as a reminder of how hot a hitter he is. In the last 26 games he is hitting .381 with a 1.012 OPS.

Since April 30 (13 games) the Red Sox have hit 27 homers, notching at least one in each of their last six games. It is their longest homer streak since 2016.

MATT BARNES, RYAN BRASIER CLOSING COMBO WAS HALF-GOOD

Barnes continued his eye-popping season with two innings of relief in which five of the six outs came on strikeouts. He has now fanned half of the batters faced (33 of 66).

The other piece of the closer equation, however, has hit a bump in the road.

Brasier has now given up runs in three of his five May outings, with this misstep coming courtesy a pair of walks and Mark Reynold's two-out single in the 11th. The pair of free passes marked just the second time in the righty's Red Sox career he has allowed more than one walk in an outing.

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, THE RED SOX HAVE BEEN GOOD PINCH-HITTERS

Lost in the loss was Mitch Moreland's run-scoring, pinch-hit single in the eighth that allowed the game to head into extra innings. An inning later Jackie Bradley Jr. also reached base while pinch-hitting, drawing a leadoff walk.

For the season the Red Sox lead the majors with a .521 batting average (11-for-21) and 1.392 OPA from their pinch-hitters (11-for-21).

The problem this time around was once Cora navigated his way through the bottom of his order, the top wasn't able to produce with Andrew Benintendi and Mookie Betts going a combined 0-for-11 with six strikeouts. Benintendi is in a particularly bad skid, failing to notch a hit in his last 14 at-bats, including nine strikeouts.

The anatomy of a Dana LeVangie mound visit

Rob Bradford

You might remember the scene from the movie "Bull Durham" when Robert Wuhl's character -- the Durham Bulls' pitching coach -- goes out to visit the mound where Crash Davis (Kevin Costner) and others are trying to make sense of a myriad of items.

Crash Davis: We're dealing with a lot of shit.

Larry Hockett: Okay, well, uh... candlesticks always make a nice gift, and uh, maybe you could find out where she's registered and maybe a place-setting or maybe a silverware pattern. Okay, let's get two! Go get 'em.

So, there you have a mound visit, or at least that's what Hollywood wanted us wanted to believe.

The reality is, well, different.

"I want to get in and get out," explained Red Sox pitching coach Dana LeVangie.

"You better be specific. They're fighting the fight out there. They're competing their butts off. If you're trying to get a point across about delivery you better be specific. Or be specific about an approach with the hitter coming up. There are times you might go out there and say, 'Let's get on the same page. Let's get the defense off the field and make them swing the bat.' But that's rare.

"The more you have to do it is a bad thing but the more you go out there you tend to have a little better feel to it. You're going out there usually to get a message across because something isn't going right, so you have to go about it the right way. The biggest thing I respect is that this game is hard and they're doing their best to make it happen and more often than not they are. I respect that. You're just trying to get a clear message across."

The execution of a mound visit by the pitching coach might seem like an innocuous exercise, but there is also an art to it.

There is the temperament of each specific pitcher. And, of course, the 30 seconds in which Major League Baseball mandates coaches make their trip to the mound in. (LeVangie can only remember one time he might have run over the allotted time, occurring this past spring training when telling Matt Barnes he was tipping his pitches.)

But what is most noticeable when it comes to the modern day mound visit is the secrecy.

You will never see LeVangie's mouth move. Why? From the minute he steps on the mound his hand is hiding whatever movements his lips are making.

"You don't do anything naked in this game. Everything is on camera now," he said. "You have people reading lips. Maybe I'm telling myself I'm an idiot while I'm going out there, but I'm just trying to cover what I'm saying, what I'm trying to get across.

"The thing is if I go out there and say without covering my mouth, 'Hey, we're going to pound fastballs in.' Somebody is watching it and they can gain an edge. Pitchers cover their mouth. Catchers, same thing. I would like to think we as an organization try and stay on top of everything. Try and maintain and gain the edge as much as possible. It's just the way I've gone about it."

For LeVangie, this strategy wasn't any sort of well-thought-out plan. As a catcher he had oftentimes used his glove to shield what his message might be to his pitcher, so when those first few trips to the mound as a pitching coach came along the execution was second nature.

"I'm going to say I did and I didn't think about it before," he noted. "I didn't have a plan to do it. I just felt like whatever I'm going to say America doesn't need to know. I get (expletive) all the time about it."

Now it's not only LeVangie who is hiding his words during Red Sox get-together. Usually, it's everybody involved. The pitcher. The catcher. The infielders.

Welcome to the new generation of mound visits.

"There's nothing wrong with not doing it," LeVangie said. "Again, I didn't pre-think this out about how I was going to go about it. It just happened."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

No-hit stuff, secret handshakes, and the temptation of 20 K's - inside Chris Sale's latest masterpiece

John Tomase

BOSTON -- Twenty uniformed personnel took the field to start a dank, miserable evening at Fenway Park on Tuesday, including players, coaches, umpires, bat boys, and ball girls. Nineteen of them wore long sleeves to combat 44-degree temperatures that felt like late October.

The other was Chris Sale.

His knotty biceps defiantly exposed to the elements, Sale decided to bring an October feel to the yard, too. Except his contributions had nothing to do with heat and everything to do with electricity.

By the time he left the mound two hours later, after seven innings and a career-high 17 strikeouts, fans were chanting, "We want Sale." With the Bruins on the cusp of the Stanley Cup Finals and the Celtics hoping to conjure some more lottery magic, only an extraordinary performance could divert fans to an interleague baseball game, and hot damn if Sale didn't deliver.

Even with mist falling and the mercury dropping, Sale made Fenway Park crackle. He emphatically dispelled the notion that he is even remotely diminished by delivering his best outing in a Red Sox uniform, which is saying something.

Broadcaster Dennis Eckersley called it the best performance he had ever seen. Rockies slugger Nolan Arenado believed he was reliving the nightmare of Clayton Kershaw's 15-strikeout 2014 no-hitter. Red Sox manager Alex Cora admitted that a piece of him wanted to send Sale back out for the eighth inning and a shot at 20 strikeouts. And Sale?

"It was awesome," he said. "I love this game."

The record will show Brandon Workman served up the go-ahead two-run homer to Charlie Blackmon to deny Sale the win before the Rockies won it on Mark Reynolds' single in the 11th. But history will remember the game very differently because, on this night, Sale performed at a level matched perhaps only

by Pedro Martinez and Roger Clemens in a Red Sox uniform. If there's been a similar game in the last 20 years, it was Pedro dropping a 1-0 decision to Steve Trachsel, of all people, while striking out 17 himself in May of 2000.

"That was fun to watch," Cora said of Sale. "The first time being in something like that, you know? Watching the strikeouts and watching the pitch count. You want him to go as deep as possible."

Sale's velocity, the barometer by which we gauged him in his terrible start, was hardly vintage. He hit 96 mph once on the stadium gun, though Baseball Savant technically had the pitch at 95.9 mph. He threw only 10 fastballs above 94 mph, instead content to treat the Rockies like so many cats swatting at so much yarn.

His slider was otherworldly, alternately sweeping, darting, and biting. The Rockies only touched two of his 12 changeups, including a foul ball. He threw but one curveball, which Pat Valaika dutifully flailed at for strikeout No. 8 to end the third inning. He had pinpoint command of his entire arsenal.

Sale's velocity spike: real or a mirage?
You want mastery? This was mastery.

"When he went eight of nine to start the game, he could've had no fielders out there and we'd still have been losing," Reynolds said.

Sale made but one mistake, and Arenado didn't miss it, sneaking a 92 mph fastball into the Monster seats to pull the Rockies within a run at 3-2 in the seventh.

Sale kicked himself for trying to get a double play grounder against a superstar. Arenado breathed a sigh of relief.

"It was getting a little scary there," he said. "I thought a no-hitter was coming. In '14 we faced Kershaw and he threw a no-hitter at home and it was kind of like that, where he was just kind of dominant. I feel like we kind of just stole that one.

"What he did today was pretty unique. He struck out a lot of us."

Sale recorded strikeouts with every one of his pitches: four-seamer, two-seamer, slider, curve, change. Colorado had no idea what was coming as he constantly varied his plan of attack.

"A lot of people were worried and making a deal about him not pitching well at the beginning of the year, but over the course of a season he's going to be dominant, and you saw that tonight," said Rockies catcher Chris Iannetta. "That kind of stuff, all you have to do is throw strikes and he was definitely throwing strikes, and on top of that, he was throwing quality strikes. We have a really good team and a really good lineup, but he's a great pitcher. And great pitching always shuts down a great offense."

That time Cora tried to recruit Arenado

Sale wanted to come back out for the eighth despite being at 108 pitches, joking with Cora, "You're not going to let me get 20?" But the manager has two handshakes for his starters, and he gave Sale the one that said, "You're done."

"I don't think there's a pitcher on the planet, you've got 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go out for the last inning, but I respect him as much as anybody on the planet and I'll never question anything he does," Sale said.

Sale instead settled for the first seven-inning, 17-strikeout start in major league history. Coming on the heels of a brilliant 14-strikeout effort against the Orioles, it was the kind of performance that makes you want to fast-forward five days just to see what magic Sale has planned for us next.

After latest setback, Dustin Pedroia guarantees return as everyday player: 'It's coming. Just got to stick with it'

John Tomase

BOSTON -- Dustin Pedroia isn't ready to give up on the 2019 season, and he's definitely not calling it a career.

Speaking before the game Tuesday night against the Rockies, and after suffering yet another setback in his two-year return from knee surgery, Pedroia made one thing clear.

"There's going to be a time when I'm out there all the time," he said. "It's coming. Just got to stick with it."

The cartilage restoration procedure Pedroia underwent on his left knee following the 2017 season limited him to three games last year. He went 2-for-20 in six games this season before being placed on the injured list. He began a rehab assignment at Double-A Portland on May 2, going 4-for-16 in five games. He scratched from his Saturday rehab start and the Red Sox announced it had halted his rehab assignment on Monday.

"I had some discomfort the other day and it got checked out yesterday," said Pedroia, who turns 36 Aug. 17. "So, all is good. I think my time was up on Friday, you know, and I still need some more at-bats and getting used to some things before I'm ready. That was it."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora has maintained that he won't bring Pedroia back to the major leagues until he can play on multiple consecutive days. He termed this latest setback "nothing major" and said Pedroia will work out with the team for a few days before resuming a rehab assignment.

"I think honestly, he's a lot smarter than in the past," Cora said. "When he doesn't feel right, he'll communicate it. Back in the day, a few years ago, he would have been like, 'Forget about it. I'm going to get through this.' So he was smart about it. There's been a lot of rainouts too. He hasn't been able to play consistently. I think that's something we have to pay attention to. He'll be with us and whenever he's ready, we'll send him out and get back at it."

Pedroia noted that he plans to change braces and orthotics in an attempt to find comfort.

"Playing, what did I play, four or five games, wasn't enough for me and the team to be confident that I'll be back and fine," he said. "I had to get checked out. I had some bruising in a certain spot in my knee. That was it. . . . We want to make sure that when I'm ready, it's not a week and then I'm hurt again. I'm just trying to find a way."

There's no reason to rush Pedroia back as rookie Michael Chavis continues to impress (six homers, 19 RBI, .282 BA, .970 OPS) with the Red Sox at second base. Eduardo Nunez recently was activated from the injured list as well and provides added depth at the position.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Alex Cora opts for the big picture and Chris Sale's bid for history is put on hold

Sean McAdam

Alex Cora was watching, carefully, two sets of numbers as Chris Sale kept overpowering the Colorado Rockies Tuesday night: the 'K' cards being displayed by fans in the center field bleachers, and more ominously, Sale's climbing pitch count on the center field scoreboard.

Sooner or later, something was going to have to give.

“First time I’ve been in something like that,” Cora would say later, “watching the strikeouts and watching the pitch count.”

It was a constant tug at Cora’s emotions. On the one hand, Sale was utterly and completely dominant. He fanned the first six hitters of the night and eight of the first nine. He didn’t allow a baserunner until the fifth and after he struck out the side in the sixth, the Rockies had put the ball in play five times and just twice did they manage to get the ball out of the infield.

Sale’s combination of mid-90s fastball, sweeping slider (“probably the best it’s ever been,” Sale said) and changeup was too much for the Rockies.

So Cora watched and fidgeted, knowing a reckoning was, at some point, inevitable.

“There was an at-bat with Nolan (Arenado, All-Star third baseman) and (Sale) got him on, like, three pitches,” recounted Cora. “I was like, ‘Thank God.’”

In the seventh, Sale allowed a leadoff single to Trevor Story and then a two-run homer to Arenado, a ball that cleared The Wall by inches and landed in the first row of the Monster Seats. That belt made it a one-run game, 3-2.

Sale, true to form, recovered and fanned the final three hitters that inning, boosting his total to 17 and establishing a career high. But his pitch count had grown to 108 and Cora had a rested bullpen with plenty of options.

Decisions, decisions.

“In the tunnel, he goes, ‘You’re not going to let me get 20?’” said Cora. “Sarcastic ... but probably serious, too.”

After all, only three pitchers have registered 20 strikeouts in a major league game. Roger Clemens did it twice, both times for the Red Sox. So did Kerry Wood, and more recently, Max Scherzer.

“I love this game,” said Sale, “and to be able to have a chance to do something like that is special. I don’t think there’s a pitcher on the planet who, when you have 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go back out for the last inning.”

History was just an inning or so away, and Cora felt the push and pull — personal glory vs. long-term health of his most important pitcher.

“It’s hard,” conceded Cora of the call. “But at the same time, he understands. He’s coming off a long one in Baltimore (in his last start) and there was a lot of effort there. I don’t know ... it’s one of those that it’s not a win-win situation. It’s one of those that’s tough on anybody, regardless.”

Ultimately, Cora chose to lift Sale after seven. He had Brandon Workman ready for some lefties in the Colorado eighth and Workman had not allowed a base hit to a lefty all season, holding them hitless in 39 at-bats.

That the move backfired when Workman gave up a go-ahead, two-run homer — to a lefty, of all things — and the Sox went on to lose in the 11th, 5-4, was almost incidental.

Cora wasn’t about to second-guess himself for putting the health of his ace first and foremost.

“You’ve got to be careful,” concluded Cora. “There’s a bigger goal here and we’ve been very disciplined throughout the process and you still have to be disciplined. I think he understands. Like I said, it’s one of those, as a manager, you balance. And we need this guy to pitch deep into the season.”

The move had the full endorsement of Sale, too.

“I respect (Cora) as much as anyone on the planet,” said Sale, “and I’ll never question anything he does, even in regards to me, with that. You look at where we’re at in the game and who we’ve got coming in ... our bullpen has been as good as its ever been and they’ve been a strong point for our team all year, and Workman especially has probably been the most consistent guy down there all year.

“At the end of the day, obviously you want a shot at it, but it’s an easier pill to swallow, knowing the situation.”

Increasingly, managers wrestle with these calls. Former Mets manager Terry Collins still regrets allowing Johan Santana to complete a no-hit effort with 134 pitches in 2012, knowing that the lefty was never the same after that night. A few times this season, managers have lifted starters from no-hitters in progress in the late innings, ever mindful of pitch counts and health.

So Cora made the tough call, choosing to protect his pitcher. His faith in the bullpen wasn’t rewarded on this night.

That made it feel like a double loss, as both history and the win slipped away.

BSJ Game Report: Rockies 5, Red Sox 4 (11) – Rockies overcome Sale’s historic night

Sean McAdam

Sale makes history: In Red Sox history, only four pitchers have ever recorded games with 17 or more strikeouts and now Chris Sale is one of them, joining Bill Monbouquette (1961), Pedro Martinez (1999, 2000) and Roger Clemens, who twice fanned 20 — once in 1986 and again in 1996. And like Clemens in his two record-setters, Sale racked up his huge whiff totals without issuing so much as a single walk. It was evident that Sale was on from the very beginning, as he struck out the side in the first and second, and had fanned eight through the first three innings. It wasn’t until the sixth that the Rockies had their first baserunner — a leadoff double by Mark Reynolds. In his last three starts, Sale has struck out 41 hitters and walked just one, an incredible ratio. And after striking out just 14 in his first four starts, he’s since struck out 59 in his last five. He became just the second pitcher with 14 or more strikeouts and no walks in consecutive games, matching Dwight Gooden (1984). But at the end of the night, the start was the 16th time that a pitcher struck out 17 or more hitters and took either a loss or a no-decision.

Bullpen has a rough night: The Red Sox owned a 3-2 lead in the eighth inning when Brandon Workman entered the game in relief of Sale. He got the first hitter, but allowed a one-out double to Chris Iannetta and one out later, a two-run homer to Charlie Blackmon. It was the first hit by a lefty against him this season; they had been 0-for-20 before that homer. After Matt Barnes threw two perfect innings, striking out five of the six hitters he faced, Ryan Brasier entered for the 11th and immediately got into trouble by walking the leadoff man, Ryan McMahon. After a flyout and a forceout thanks to a diving play by Xander Bogaerts, Brasier was an out away from getting out of the inning. Instead, he issued a walk and then a run-scoring single by Mark Reynolds. It was the fifth blown save of the season for the Red Sox bullpen. The two walks in the 11th by Brasier matched his season total before Tuesday night.

Homers build a lead: The Red Sox used the long ball to stake Sale to a 3-0 lead in the first three innings. First, Michael Chavis hit his seventh homer of the year in the second. Then, in the third, J.D. Martinez hit his third homer in the last two games, and one out later, Rafael Devers hit his third. That gave the Red Sox 27 homers in the last 13 games and they’ve hit multiple homers in each of the last six games, the team’s longest streak since 2016. But the homers were part of all-or-nothing approach by the lineup. The Sox had just six other hits all night and scored only one more run from the third inning through the 11th. Andrew Benintendi and Mookie Betts, the top two hitters in the order, combined to go 0-for-11 with six strikeouts.

TURNING POINT

With two out and an 0-2 count on Reynolds in the top of the 11th, Brasier was a strike away from getting out of a first-and-second jam. Instead, Reynolds managed to line the ball into center field to score what turned out to be the winning run.

TWO UP

Michael Chavis: Fully past his 0-for-19 slump from earlier, Chavis hammered his seventh homer in the second and added a single in the eighth. He's got 20 RBI in 21 games.

Mitch Moreland: Moreland came off the bench to deliver a game-tying, pinch-hit single, giving him 12 RBI this season that have either tied the game or put the Red Sox ahead.

TWO DOWN

Brandon Workman: Workman came into the game having not allowed a hit to the previous 40 batters he faced, but after getting the leadoff man, allowed a double and a two-run homer to the next three.

Andrew Benintendi: The Red Sox' leadoff hitter was 0-for-6 with four strikeouts.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"It sucks, honestly. It sucks, because of the way he pitched. But it is what it is." Alex Cora on the team wasting Chris Sale's 17-strikeout performance.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The loss was the first for the Red Sox in extra innings this year.

The 24 strikeouts by the Red Sox tied a franchise record. They also fanned 24 Sept. 15, 2017 at Tampa Bay.

Rafael Devers has eight RBI in his last four games.

Matt Barnes has struck out 33 of the 66 batters he's faced this year.

UP NEXT:

The Red Sox and Rockies wrap up their two-game series Wednesday at 7:10 with LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (4-2, 4.53) vs. RHP German Marquez (4-2, 3.43)

* ***The Athletic***

With a historic strikeout performance, Chris Sale answers nagging questions and then some

Jen McCaffrey

Less than a month ago, Chris Sale stood in the visitors' clubhouse at Yankee Stadium and lambasted himself for what he termed a performance embarrassing to his family and his team.

He'd allowed four runs in five innings that day en route to losing his fourth straight decision to begin the year. There were questions about his health, his arm strength, about the slow spring build-up. Had the best of Chris Sale come and gone? Was the dip in velocity his new reality? Was that \$145 million contract extension prior to the start of the season the best idea?

On Tuesday night, in raw 44-degree temperatures, Sale took the mound in short sleeves and flat-out dominated the Colorado Rockies, providing good answers to some of those nagging questions.

Sale struck out the first six batters he faced and eight of the first nine. He didn't allow a hit until the fifth inning, a ground-rule double to right field. He struck out the side for the third time in the sixth inning, and though his pitch count was climbing, memories of Roger Clemens' pair of 20-strikeout performances persisted.

Sale came back out for the seventh inning having thrown 90 pitches and allowed a leadoff single before Nolan Arenado pummeled a pitch into the Monster seats for a two-run homer, slicing Boston's lead to 3-2.

Rather than let the homer derail his start, Sale buckled down, struck out the next three batters and walked off the mound with a career-high 17-strikeout performance. He'd allowed two runs on three hits and no walks, throwing 108 pitches, 74 strikes and inducing an eye-popping 24 swings-and-misses.

"That was fun to watch," manager Alex Cora said after the game, which Colorado won 5-4 in 11 innings. "The first time being in something like that, you know? Watching the strikeouts and watching the pitch count. You want him to go as deep as possible."

Sale became the first pitcher in baseball history to strike out 17 batters in seven innings or fewer and the first pitcher in baseball to strike out at least 17 batters since Max Scherzer struck out 20 for the Washington Nationals over nine innings on May 11, 2016.

Sale was so good on Tuesday he kept the Elias Sports Bureau busy. According to Elias:

Sale has at least 14 strikeouts and no walks in each of his past two starts. Since 1893, when the mound moved to its current distance, the only other pitcher in baseball history with two straight starts of this type was Dwight Gooden in Sept. 1984, with 16 strikeouts in each of his outings.

Sale is the second Red Sox pitcher ever to post back-to-back starts of at least 10 strikeouts and zero walks. The other is Cy Young (Sept. 19 and Sept. 23, 1905).

Sale tied Randy Johnson (April 21, 2002) for the most strikeouts by a starting pitcher against the Rockies in a single game in franchise history.

The 17 strikeouts are tied for second-most in Red Sox history with Pedro Martinez (5/6/00 vs. TB; 9/10/99 at NYY) and Bill Monbouquette (5/12/61 at WAS).

Yet it was Clemens' 20 K's that were on everyone's mind. Despite how close Sale came to the single-game strikeout record, the pitch count played spoiler.

"He made a lot of pitches the last (start), so you have to be careful," Cora said. "There's a bigger goal here, and we've been very disciplined throughout the process. You still have to be disciplined, and I think he understands."

Sale didn't argue the decision.

"You've got 17 punchouts, you definitely want to go out for the last inning," he said. "But I respect (Cora) as much as anybody on the planet, and I'll never question anything he does, even in regards to me with that."

Well, maybe he argued it a little bit.

"All of a sudden they scored two," Cora said of the seventh-inning Arenado homer. "In the tunnel (Sale) goes, 'You're not going to let me get 20?' (He was) sarcastic, but probably serious. But that was fun to watch. Great performance. Fastballs, changeups, sliders. In and out. Up. That was pretty cool to watch."

Over his past three starts, Sale has allowed three runs on nine hits, walked just one batter and struck out 41 in 21 innings. The difference from April to May has been overwhelming.

“I talked a lot with CB (bullpen coach Craig Bjornson) and (pitching coach) Dana (LeVangie) and even AC (Cora) about just pitch selection, where my hands are breaking, arm-path stuff,” Sale said. “It was just kind of getting back to things that made me successful before. Picked up a couple of bad habits, tried to kick those, just delivery stuff, just putting it all together at the right time.”

Cora wouldn't admit it, but the recent performances from Sale likely offer a sliver of validation to the gradual-buildup strategy the club took with its rotation this spring. It remains to be seen how much the ugly start to the season will affect the team down the road in the division race, but the Red Sox are still standing by their process, even with Nathan Eovaldi and David Price on the injury list.

“It's not gratifying. It's just something that we believe,” Cora said of Sale's dominance. “We believe in the players. We believe in what we mapped out. We did it last year. We did it this year. It's something that takes a lot of time – Brad (Pearson) and the medical staff – they worked the whole offseason trying to map this out and how we're going to do it. You look at the history of the last whatever years, how it works out with teams that play deep into the playoffs or play in the World Series, how it goes, you want to make sure those guys, they last.

“It didn't work out early, I guess, whoever wants to see it that way, but there's more,” Cora added. “There's 162 and we plan on playing more games after that. If we do that, we're going to be in a good spot.”

Keeping Sale healthy is a big part of the plan, and he looked about as good as ever on Tuesday night.

*** *Associated Press***

Sale strikes out 17 in 7 innings, Rockies top Red Sox in 11

BOSTON -- Chris Sale pleaded but did not push when manager Alex Cora told him his day was done.

Cora was not about to risk the health his ace left-hander, even after he struck out a career-high 17 over seven innings. Sale may have righted whatever went wrong during an 0-5 start, but Cora still went to the bullpen for the eighth, costing Sale the chance to chase the major league record of 20 strikeouts in a nine-inning game.

Even after the Rockies rallied to a 5-4 win in the 11th, Cora and Sale seemed comfortable saying the skipper made the right call.

"AC's got two handshakes, and you get one or the other. And you know which one is the 'done' one," Sale said. "I'd love to have gone back out there, but as I said, I'll never question anything he does."

Sale became the first pitcher in major league history to fan 17 in a start of no more than seven innings. Boston pitchers combined to strike out 24, but the Red Sox had their five-game winning streak come to an end.

Sale, who isn't the most cheerful guy in the clubhouse even after a win, couldn't help but smile a little after this one.

"I love this game and to be able to have a chance at doing something like that is special," Sale said. "But at the same time, it's still a close game. You've got a job to do and you just try to hold it down when you can."

Mark Reynolds, whose fifth-inning double was the first runner allowed by Sale, drove in the go-ahead run with a two-out single in the 11th against Ryan Brasier (2-2).

"You never know what's going to happen. So I think all of us who were here tonight witnessed two walks, 24 strikeouts, but a Rockies win," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "We just stayed at it. Man, it was a hell of a game."

Sale struck out the first six batters and fanned eight through three innings. He dominated the Rockies with a firm fastball and sharp slider, topping his previous best of 15 strikeouts, which he had done three times.

The All-Star lefty sported his signature short-sleeves despite the 44-degree temperature at the start of the game and had a shutout through six innings.

Nolan Arenado's two-run homer in the seventh was one of only three hits the Rockies managed against Sale.

"I had terrible timing with giving up the runs I did," Sale said. "That was the one that got them back in this game and gave them a breath of fresh air."

Sale stopped the damage with three straight strikeouts, placing him within range of the major league record shared by Roger Clemens, Kerry Wood, Randy Johnson and Max Scherzer.

"That was fun to watch. First time I've been in something like that, you know, watching the strikeouts and watching the pitch count," Cora said. "We wanted him to go deep. He was amazing."

Boston fans chanted "We want Sale!" after the bottom of the seventh, but his night was done. When Cora told him he was coming out, Sale used his fingers to form the number 20.

Cora didn't bite and went to Brandon Workman, who allowed a double by Chris Iannetta and Charlie Blackmon's two-run homer with two outs in the eighth to give Colorado its first lead at 4-3.

Sale's 17 strikeouts were the most for a Red Sox pitcher since Pedro Martinez fanned 17 against Tampa Bay on May 6, 2000.

Mike Dunn (1-0) got the win with one inning of scoreless relief and Wade Davis got his seventh save.

Michael Chavis, J.D. Martinez and Rafael Devers homered for Boston.

Boston made it 4-all in the eighth on a pinch-hit single by Mitch Moreland.

Chavis led off the second with his seventh homer, a 451-foot shot to left that survived a video review ordered crew chief Larry Vanover. Martinez and Devers added solo homers in the third to put Boston up 3-0.

Kyle Freeland got the start for Colorado on his 26th birthday and went six innings, allowing three runs on five hits, striking out seven and walking three.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rockies: LHP Tyler Anderson (left knee inflammation) saw a specialist Monday and will consult with team doctors about potential surgery, Black said. "I think a decision on some surgery is in the works here probably within the next couple days," Black said. ... Colorado recalled 3B Pat Valaika from Triple-A Albuquerque and optioned 2B Garrett Hampson to the Isotopes.

Red Sox: 2B Dustin Pedroia (left knee) remained in limbo after a rehab assignment was postponed over the weekend. Cora said Pedroia and the Red Sox are being careful not to rush the 35-year-old's return. "He'll go out there and then take grounders and move around and we'll decide what we do next," Cora said. ... LHP David Price (left elbow tendinitis) will likely throw another bullpen session Wednesday and could return to the rotation Saturday against Houston, Cora said.

UP NEXT

Rockies: RHP German Marquez (4-2, 3.43 ERA) has struck out 59 through 57 ²/₃ innings this season.

Red Sox: LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (4-2, 4.53) has won two straight starts and three of his last four.