

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, July 11, 2019***

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

#### **J.D. Martinez will get chance to call his own option play**

Julian McWilliams

J.D. Martinez peeked to the right of his microphone and into a flock of reporters. He then took a glance to the opposite side of the mic. In front of him was a camera that would capture each of his movements. Martinez's head quickly darted back to his right side, surveying the crowd yet again. Still no luck.

"Where's he at?" said Martinez, seated at a podium during his All-Star media availability Monday. "I just saw him."

It took just moments into his news conference for questions surrounding the opt-out in his contract with the Red Sox at the end of the season to emerge, and he wanted to find the person who could speak best on it: agent Scott Boras. Finally, he found his guy.

"Oh, there he is right there. You see?" Martinez said.

Boras stood in the middle of his own media scrum in a navy blue suit. Reporters stayed put at Martinez's podium for the time being, but the message was clear: Boras will spearhead this process surrounding Martinez.

"I just listen to him," Martinez said. "That's what I pay him for. He gives me his opinion. He gives me his advice and it's up to me after that to make my decision. We're really not there yet, but he's giving me his opinion and advice."

If Martinez does elect free agency after the 2019 season, he would leave \$62.5 million on the table. He also has an opt-out at the end of 2020 — the third of his five-year deal — allowing him even more flexibility, Boras said. Yet Martinez remained adamant he wanted to stay with the Sox.

"Boston's been my favorite team since I was a kid," Martinez said. "I always dreamt of being there and loved the family side of it and how they treat the players. It's just a first-class organization"

He's beloved in the clubhouse, too, amongst the younger guys — especially when it comes to hitting.

"I remember last year, it was his first year and everyone wanted to go to J.D. for advice. Even me a couple times," Xander Bogaerts said. "Whenever stuff isn't going right, you either go to the hitting coach or you go to J.D. He's definitely changed a lot of us on this team with the mind-set and the advice. He's definitely huge."

From a market value standpoint, opting out at this point could be tough. As teams become more analytically driven, players aren't paid for what they've done, but what they might do. Martinez is one of the better hitters in the game.

He comes out of the All-Star break with a .304 batting average, 18 homers, and a .918 OPS but still says he doesn't quite feel himself in the box. That speaks to how good he is.

But he also has to consider the market under the current collective bargaining agreement, with a noticeable number of free agents struggling to find work. Martinez also will be a 32-year-old DH, which might be

reason enough to stay put. And although baseball has flirted with adding the DH to the National League, MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said Tuesday that a change is not coming anytime soon.

“I think it’s probably a 2021 issue before anything else meaningful happens,” Manfred said. “I do not think that the [DH in both leagues] is inevitable. It depends on how the bargaining unfolds and how my politics develop on that one. I’m not quite sure where I am on that one.”

Without a universal DH, Martinez, who also plays the corner outfield positions, would have limited options.

Boras, however, tried to put things in perspective.

“He’s a guy who can DH and play an outfield position,” he said. “He can play a number of roles other than DH for the team, and when you go look at DH production, he gives you not only slugging [percentage] he gives you average and on-base. He’s a weapon that no teams have.”

Boras mentioned they will sit down with Red Sox front office and evaluate what both sides want to do. Yet a new market really won’t hit until the CBA is reworked after the 2021 season. By that time, it would be a year past Martinez’s final opt-out.

Boras countered that.

“J.D. is different,” he said. “The age component is no different than David Ortiz. David Ortiz’s age did not affect his performance because he was David Ortiz. So, when you go through all of this and look at it, maybe you can say that the 31-, 32-year-old player doesn’t get the 10-year contract, but on the other hand it has nothing to do with what his average annual value will be because that production is so rare.”

Martinez, like the Red Sox, is still trying to find it at the plate this season, a year after he hit .330 with 43 homers, 130 RBIs, and a 1.031 OPS. He mentioned the season has been a grind by his standards. Boras agreed, but had this final note to offer.

“It’s been a grind. But remember where he’s sitting,” Boras said. He paused and then pointed to Martinez, 20 feet away from him. “He’s an All-Star.”

### **Breaking down a bizarre first half for the Red Sox**

Alex Speier

What a bizarre first half.

The Red Sox arrived at the midseason respite with a head-scratching 49-41 record – far from elite, and far from terrible. The team is on a pace that would yield 88 wins, but that projected total is dragged down by the sleepwalking start to the season, when the team opened with a 6-13 record. Since then, the Sox are 43-28 (.606) and have outscored their opponents by 100 runs, tied for the second-best run differential in the majors since April 18.

Still, the improvement doesn’t mean that there haven’t been deficiencies in the first half — and with them, opportunities to improve after the All-Star break. That being the case, at the 90-game checkpoint, here’s a look at some of the defining elements of the Red Sox season to date:

Offense great – if inefficient

After a slow start, the Red Sox are again steamrolling opposing pitching staffs. The club entered the break with 5.66 runs per game, just behind the Twins and Yankees (5.72) as the best offense in the majors.

Even with down years to date from Mookie Betts and Andrew Benintendi, the Sox enter the break with seven players who have at least 13 homers (tied for second most in the majors) and six with OPSs of at least .850 (most in MLB).

Rafael Devers has emerged as a star in the making, Xander Bogaerts is better than he was in his 2018 career-best season, Michael Chavis has made an impact through some of the ups-and-downs of his transition to the big leagues, and Christian Vazquez has achieved a stunning remake as a hitter to become a legitimate threat at the bottom of the order. And while Jackie Bradley Jr.'s full-season numbers are roughly league average, he's been on a tear since mid-May.

Top to bottom, the Red Sox possess a deep, loaded, championship-caliber lineup. However, it is also one that has left runs on the board with far greater frequency than a year ago. Whereas the 2018 Red Sox did a remarkable job of turning runners in scoring position into runners crossing the plate, this year's team has been worse (relative to the league) with runners in scoring position than overall – and particularly bad with runners on third and less than two outs. The club is hitting just .283/.344/.392 in such situations, with a spiking strikeout rate that has prevented the team from taking advantage of situations where even an out can score a run.

Between that inefficiency and the potential for more from Betts and Benintendi (as well as the return of Mitch Moreland), the Red Sox lineup has a chance to be even more explosive in the second half. Of course, there's also a chance that the team could continue to struggle with its situational execution, or that Betts and Benintendi fail to gain traction, or that Devers or Vazquez prove unable to sustain their huge performances to this point.

Still, while the team can't take its upward run-scoring trend for granted, the lineup remains an obvious, powerful strength of the 2019 Red Sox.

#### RISPy business

The Red Sox staff features pitchers with swing-and-miss stuff that ranks with the best staffs in the game. The team has struck out 25.9 percent of the hitters it faces, fourth best in the big leagues — the sort of performance that typically correlates with excellent results.

Instead, the Sox have gotten a pitching performance that across the board — in both the rotation and bullpen — has been thoroughly middling. The crux of the problem, as Red Sox pitching analyst Brian Bannister recently noted, has been the team's poor performance with runners in scoring position. In those most damaging situations, Sox pitchers have yielded a .272 average (21st in the majors), .362 OBP (27th), and .464 slugging mark (22nd).

The Red Sox seem likely to make a move to bolster their pitching staff, with the team in both the starting and bullpen markets. But unless the team cleans up its own execution with runners in scoring position — better location, better pitch selection — then a single upgrade will prove inadequate to correct a group whose collective performance has been a drag on the season.

#### A rotating problem

In 16 starts from Hector Velazquez (8), Ryan Weber (3), Josh Smith (2), Brian Johnson (2), and Darwinzon Hernandez (1), the Red Sox have gotten a combined average of just under 3⅓ innings per start and a 6.79 ERA. Given that the team is bringing back Nate Eovaldi from the injured list as a reliever — a product, in part, of the fact that he wouldn't be stretched out enough to start until August — the idea that the team is searching for starting pitching help is unsurprising.

But the team needs more from Chris Sale, who has shown flashes of dominance and other days of complete vulnerability while going 3-8 with a 4.04 ERA, as well as Rick Porcello, whose 5.33 ERA is the fifth worst in the majors among the 78 pitchers who have enough innings to qualify for the ERA title, and Eduardo Rodriguez, whose 9-4 record belies a 4.65 ERA and unreliable innings contributions.

Of note: opponents have a .978 OPS against Porcello with runners in scoring position, and a 1.015 OPS against Rodriguez in such situations. They're giving up the most damage at the most damaging times, contributing to early exits and an immense strain on the pitching staff as a whole. (Sale has allowed a .672 OPS in such situations — in the upper third of big leagues, though not his typical complete dominance.)

Can't pin it all on 'pen

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski has repeatedly noted his belief that the bullpen receives an unfair degree of blame, and that their inconsistency as a group is a by-product of the lack of excellence from the rotation. Still, with 18 blown saves (tied for the most by an AL team), the Red Sox recognize that they can't simply take improvement for granted by hoping for a better performance from the rotation in the second half. As such, the Sox are surveying the market for relievers as well as starters in hopes of creating a deeper overall staff — a mission that might be helped by the presence of Eovaldi, Heath Hembree, and Steven Wright in the bullpen after the All-Star break, with minor leaguers Darwinzon Hernandez and perhaps Tanner Houck waiting in the wings.

The Red Sox bullpen possesses power stuff. The team's relievers have struck out a higher percentage of opposing hitters than the Yankees' celebrated bullpen. The bullpen isn't as bad as perception suggests — but with a slightly less efficient offense, and an underperforming rotation, the group has spent most of the year pitching in high-leverage situations (as opposed to blowouts) where a single mistake can cost the Red Sox the lead.

The Red Sox are simply asking for too much from too many of their late-innings contributors. It seems safe to guess that the team is less than thrilled to see Brandon Workman tied for third in the AL in appearances (43), and Ryan Brasier tied for ninth (41), while the struggles of Matt Barnes in June (2.08 ERA through May 31, 9.69 ERA in 15 June appearances) seemed directly related to workload.

There is a puzzle that isn't far from being well-assembled with this group, but there has been a missing piece or two or three for the Sox to date. It remains to be seen if Eovaldi, Wright, Hembree, or a prospect can stabilize the situation, but the Red Sox clearly could use additional arms to ease workloads and keep their pitchers from cratering down the stretch.

Home not where heart is

On the road, the Red Sox have been one of the best teams in the majors, forging a 29-19 record (.604), including a 14-2 road run through Kansas City, Baltimore, Minnesota, Toronto, and Detroit dating to early June. They've rolled the bottom feeders and won a series against a first-place team.

Yet at home (a designation that technically includes London), they've been consistently mediocre or worse. On the year, they're 20-22 at home (20-20 excluding London), including 9-15 (9-13) dating to the series against the Astros in mid-May. Some of that relates to the caliber of opponent, but much of the performance letdown has been on the shoulders of the pitching staff. The Sox have a 5.04 ERA at home (23rd in the majors).

Such a home struggle almost never characterizes a postseason team. Outside of the bifurcated schedule that arose from the 1981 player strike, there has been just one team — the 2001 Braves (40-41) — who made the playoffs with a sub-.500 home record.

If the Red Sox can find their Fenway footing, however, considerable second-half improvement isn't hard to imagine.

### **Former baseball commissioner Bud Selig can finally speak his mind**

Dan Shaughnessy

Being commissioner of a major sport means never having to answer a question candidly. It means you can maneuver around difficult issues.

When Michael Jordan, at the height of his powers, abruptly “retired” in 1993, I asked NBA commissioner David Stern if Jordan’s curious “retirement” was actually a way for MJ to serve a gambling suspension without having any disgrace attached to it.

“I don’t answer ridiculous questions,” replied Stern — a perfectly evasive way of not answering a question.

“Well, just answer this one please, so we have you on record,” I ventured.

He did. So we have it on record that Jordan’s short-lived retirement was officially not a gambling suspension levied by the commissioner. I’m not sure I believe it, but such is the nature of the reporter-commissioner word dance.

We had a couple of classic examples of this Tuesday when baseball commissioner Rob Manfred was at his All-Star Game news conference being asked about “juiced baseballs” at the same time NBA commissioner Adam Silver was at the Summer League in Las Vegas getting grilled about clear tampering violations regarding free agent negotiation moratoriums.

Manfred played Mickey the Dunce and said the balls are not juiced while admitting there might be “less drag” on the baseballs that keep sailing over the fences. Silver admitted to some obvious tampering violations, then said, “We have rules we can’t enforce.”

Excuse me?

Reading those goofy interviews was especially timely for one who just finished Bud Selig’s “For the Good of the Game,” a 319-page autobiography by the man who served as baseball commissioner for 22-plus seasons.

Liberated from the office, Bud is finally able to spill some truths about how he really felt during baseball’s tumultuous Steroid Era.

Regarding Barry Bonds’s overtaking of Hank Aaron as baseball’s home run king, Selig writes, “It was not one of the highlights of my life . . . Bonds simply wasn’t likeable . . . The reality is this was an ongoing nightmare for me . . . he was doing things that I certainly didn’t like . . . This was an age when sluggers found extra power through chemistry, and, of course, Barry was one of the leading men . . .”

Selig knows he’ll go down in history as the Steroid Commissioner. In the book he admits, “There is plenty of blame to spread around in this sad chapter, and I’ll accept my share of the responsibility.”

I asked him what he means by this.

“I was the commissioner,” he said Wednesday afternoon via phone from Milwaukee. “I’ll always accept responsibility. But I don’t know what else I could have done. It’s a subject of collective bargaining. We fought, we argued, went to mediation, but I am the commissioner and the buck stops here. I’m proud of what we did. We wound up with the toughest testing program in American sports. I’m not saying we solved the problem, because I’m not sure anyone will ever know if we’ve solved the problem completely or not . . . I had to live through all that stuff and it was painful.”

My favorite portion of Selig’s book is near the end when he comes clean on the 2001 sale of the Red Sox from the Yawkey Trust to a group led by current Globe owner John Henry. I have always characterized the transaction as a “bag job” orchestrated by Selig. After claiming for years that he had nothing to do with it, Selig in his book characterized the transaction as, “a three-headed solution that I put together to help revitalize one of our most valuable franchises, the Red Sox . . . I orchestrated one of the greatest triple plays in baseball history . . . I favor local ownership. I always have. But in this case the creative solution, the one I engineered, was the right one.”

Asked about this Wednesday, Selig said, “John Harrington and myself went through names. We do that everywhere. The idea that this was some kind of inside job is nothing because, No. 1, the Henry group had the cash and others didn’t have the cash. That’s all I’m going to say to you.

“The commissioner has to deal with facts. As it turns out — what can I say to you? They’ve won four world championships, saved Fenway Park, did a lot of stuff. So I think the judgment was the correct one.”

Selig also claims in the book that he was involved in negotiations that allowed Theo Epstein to leave the Red Sox for the Cubs.

“Both teams needed to get on with their futures,” Selig writes on page 294. “I finally persuaded Henry, [Tom] Werner and [Larry] Lucchino to do what was good for baseball, which was for Theo to come to Chicago. They agreed to a deal that involved some minor compensation, and [Cubs owner Tom] Ricketts had his man.”

Refreshing. A man who is no longer a commissioner is liberated.

Someday Rob Manfred, Adam Silver, Roger Goodell, and Gary Bettman will be able to talk like this.

“I did that job for 22½ years,” said Selig. “I understand that there are some things that sometimes . . . There are difficult decisions that involve a lot of constituents and sometimes you just can’t move ahead like you want to . . . It’s a sensitive job. There’s a lot of politics. When I was writing this book, I found it easier to be candid than in all the years I was commissioner.”

### **Red Sox release Tyler Thornburg**

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox finally gave up on Tyler Thornburg and released the righthanded reliever on Wednesday, bringing to an end 2½ years of frustration.

Thornburg competed a 30-day rehabilitation assignment with Triple A Pawtucket on Tuesday but remained on the injured list. Once Thornburg refused to continue his minor league assignment, which was his right, he was released.

The Sox owe him the balance of his \$1.75 million contract and Thornburg is free to sign with another organization.

The move puts a cap on the failed December 2016 trade that saw the Sox send four players to the Milwaukee Brewers for Thornburg, who had been one of the best relievers in the National League that season.

But Thornburg reported to spring training in 2017 with a sore shoulder and was eventually diagnosed with thoracic outlet syndrome. He underwent surgery on June 16 of that season and did not return to the majors for 13 months.

Thornburg had a 5.63 earned run average in 25 appearances last season before he was shut down in September and left off the postseason roster.

He pitched poorly in spring training this year but still made the team, the Sox stubborn in their belief that he could return to form.

But Thornburg had a 7.71 ERA and 1.661 WHIP in 16 appearances with the Sox. He was placed on the injured list in May with what the team said was a right hip impingement.

Thornburg tried pitching again in June and the results only worsened. He appeared in 11 games for Pawtucket and allowed 15 runs on 17 hits and nine walks over 10⅓ innings.

As Thornburg struggled, Milwaukee reaped the benefits of the trade. Infielder Travis Shaw has hit .244 with 69 home runs and 200 RBIs in 353 games for Milwaukee, although he is now in Triple A.

Another infielder, 24-year-old Mauricio Dubon, made his major league debut with Milwaukee last week and is thought to have a bright future after strong play in the minor leagues.

. . .

The Red Sox signed righthander Blake Loubier, their 13th round draft pick, to a \$500,000 bonus. Loubier, from Oviedo, Fla., had been committed to Wake Forest.

The deadline for picks to sign is Friday at 5 p.m. The Sox have deals with at least 23 of their 40 picks, including 15 of the first 20.

One notable exception is North Andover High righthander Sebastian Keane, who appears likely to stick with his commitment to Northeastern. He was taken in the 11th round.

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

### **Red Sox release reliever Tyler Thornburg**

Steve Hewitt

The Red Sox had high hopes for Tyler Thornburg when they traded for him in 2016, and though injuries derailed him, the team was optimistic he could be effective coming into this season.

But his tenure in Boston just never came together.

The Red Sox on Wednesday cut ties with the right-handed reliever, officially announcing they have released Thornburg. It came just a day after he refused a minor league rehab assignment, according to WEEI.com.

Thornburg missed the entire 2017 season after he underwent thoracic outlet syndrome surgery. He returned midway through last season and showed flashes of what the Red Sox had hoped for, and was re-signed to a one-year deal after the season.

But Thornburg struggled in 2019. He posted a 7.71 ERA in 16 appearances before being placed on the injured list with a right hip impingement. His struggles continued during a rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket.

The 30-year-old Thornburg finished his Red Sox career with a 6.54 ERA in 41 appearances.

After a strong 2016 season in Milwaukee, Thornburg came to the Red Sox in a deal that sent Travis Shaw, Mauricio Dubon and three other minor leaguers to the Brewers.

### **Enduring memories for Red Sox from 90th All-Star Game**

Tom Keegan

None of the three Red Sox who played for the American League in the 90th All-Star Game injured themselves Tuesday night and they played for the winning side, so in that regard it was a successful experience for designated hitter J.D. Martinez, shortstop Xander Bogaerts and right fielder Mookie Betts.

Other than that, it was a quiet evening for the trio, who will be back together Friday at Fenway Park for the opener of a three-game series against the Dodgers, their victims in the World Series last October. Martinez went 0-for-2, Bogaerts bounced into a double play in his lone at bat and Betts played two innings in right field but did not bat.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora had a hand in one of the more memorable moments of the American League's 4-3 victory at Progressive Field, the seventh consecutive Midsummer Classic win for the AL.

Cora sent Yankees left-hander CC Sabathia, who started his career with the Indians, to the mound for a visit with Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman with two outs in the ninth so that Sabathia could receive one more ovation from the Cleveland fans as he walked back to the dugout. Sabathia received one earlier in the night when he threw out the ceremonial first pitch.

"It was recognized that he's one of the best pitchers in the big leagues for the last, what, 15 years," Cora said. "The guy has won more than 250 games, 3,000 strikeouts. Everything started here in Cleveland. We all know he's going to retire, so we wanted to let everybody know who he is and I think it was a nice tribute."

The Cleveland fans also showered lots of love on former Indians outfielder Michael Brantley, now of the Astros, when he came to the plate, and saved the loudest ovations for 24-year-old Indians right-hander Shane Bieber. He became the third All-Star in history to win All-Star MVP honors playing in his home ballpark, following Sandy Alomar of the Indians in 1997 and Pedro Martinez of the Red Sox in 1999.

All of the Indians took part in another big moment during Tuesday's game. At the end of the fifth inning, fans and participants held Stand Up to Cancer signs. Indians manager Terry Francona and his All-Star players, Bieber, Brad Hand, Francisco Lindor and Carlos Santana all wrote: "I stand up for: Cookie" on their cards. Cookie is Indians pitcher Carlos Carrasco, who recently revealed that he has been diagnosed with leukemia.

"We all know the type of person he is," Bogaerts said of Carrasco. "He's a good competitor and an even better person. I think that moment really touched us. Also, CC in the last inning, I mean, moments like that are once in a lifetime."

The memories that will endure for the Red Sox from the night won't have anything to do with what they did on the field.

In his first at-bat in the second inning, Martinez faced Dodgers left-hander Clayton Kershaw, possible starter Sunday in the finale of a three-game series at Fenway Park. Batting fifth, Martinez flied to the warning track in left. Reds lefty Luis Castillo struck out a swinging Martinez for the second out of a 1-2-3 fourth.

Bogaerts entered as a pinch hitter with runners on the corners and nobody out with the American League leading 2-1. He bounced to short into a double play. Matt Chapman scored on the play and Joey Gallo followed with a home run to give the AL a 4-1 led.

Reigning American League MVP Mookie Betts entering in the top of the eighth in right field, but didn't get a chance to hit because the AL didn't need its ninth-inning at bats.

## **\* *The Providence Journal***

**Red Sox release Tyler Thornburg**

Bill Koch

Tyler Thornburg's difficult tenure with the Red Sox is over.

Boston released the right-handed relief pitcher on Wednesday. The clock on Thornburg's 30-day rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket had run out, and he reportedly exercised his right as a player with five years of service time or more to refuse an outright demotion to the minor leagues.

Thornburg pitched in just 41 games for the Red Sox over three seasons after being acquired from Milwaukee in December 2016. He posted a 6.54 earned-run average with Boston, including a 7.71 ERA in 2019. Thornburg was pounded to the tune of a 12.66 ERA in 11 rehab appearances with the PawSox beginning on June 9, attempting to return from a right hip impingement.

Thornburg missed all of the 2017 season after being diagnosed with thoracic outlet syndrome and undergoing surgery. The 30-year-old made his Boston debut in July 2018 against Kansas City and was never able to capture the form that made him a standout bullpen option with the Brewers in 2016. Thornburg pitched to a 2.15 ERA and struck out 90 over 67 innings.

In hindsight, the deal that brought Thornburg to the Red Sox is unquestionably one of the worst personnel moves made by president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. Boston's centerpiece going the other way was infielder Travis Shaw, who has posted an .802 OPS and slugged 132 extra-base hits in parts of three seasons with Milwaukee. The three minor leaguers who accompanied Shaw to the Brewers included infielder Mauricio Dubon, who made his big league debut on Sunday.

Thornburg's release strips the Red Sox of what they projected to be another bullpen option coming into the season. Brandon Workman, Ryan Brasier and Matt Barnes have all reached 40 appearances. Marcus Walden and Colten Brewer have each made 36.

Boston is expected to be in the market for pitching ahead of the July 31 trade deadline. Nathan Eovaldi (right elbow) will make his return in the bullpen, and the Red Sox could opt to add another starter to increase the depth in their rotation. Some potential names that could be heard over the next three weeks include Giants left-hander Madison Bumgarner, Mets right-hander Zack Wheeler and Blue Jays right-hander Marcus Stroman.

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

### **Boston Red Sox release Tyler Thornburg (7.71 ERA), who was acquired in 2016 trade with Brewers for Travis Shaw, Mauricio Dubon**

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have released right-handed reliever Tyler Thornburg.

Thornburg posted a 7.71 ERA, 1.66 WHIP and .280 batting average against in 16 outings (18.2 innings) for the Red Sox this season. He allowed four homers.

He spent the maximum 30 days on a minor league rehab assignment after being placed on the injured list with a hip impingement May 23. But his rehab assignment expired Monday. He posted a 12.66 ERA, 2.44 WHIP and .333 batting average against in 11 outings (10 2/3 innings) for Triple-A Pawtucket. He allowed five home runs.

Thornburg is Boston's highest-paid reliever this season. His entire \$1.75 million salary will count toward the Red Sox's Competitive Balance Tax.

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski acquired Thornburg from the Brewers at the 2016 Winter Meetings for Travis Shaw and minor leaguers Mauricio Dubon, Josh Pennington and Yeison Coca.

Thornburg missed the 2017 because of thoracic outlet syndrome surgery. The righty posted a 6.54 ERA and 1.62 WHIP in 41 outings (42 2/3 innings) in 2018 and '19 combined.

Shaw belted 31 homers for Milwaukee in 2017 and 32 homers in 2018. But he has struggled this year (.164/.278/.290/.568 line, six homers in 57 games) and the Brewers optioned him to Triple-A San Antonio on June 28.

Dubon, a top prospect, made his major league debut Sunday. He batted .307 with a .343 on-base percentage, .491 slugging percentage, .835 OPS, 14 homers, 19 doubles, one triple and 42 RBIs in 83 games for San Antonio before his promotion.

**Kyle Hart: meet Boston Red Sox prospect (2.82 ERA, 15 starts) who has 'bit of a Patrick Corbin-style to him with his mix'**

Christopher Smith

Kyle Hart isn't considered a top prospect. The Red Sox drafted the 6-foot-5 left-hander in the 19th round out of Indiana in 2016.

But four other players — Twins' Sean Poppen (19th round), Phillies' J.D. Hammer (24th round), Rockies' Phillip Diehl (27th round) and Pirates' Geoff Hartlieb (29th round) — selected after him in the 2016 Draft already have made their major league debuts.

Maybe Hart will be next.

He has dominant stats this season.

The lefty began 2019 at Double-A Portland where he posted a 2.91 ERA (55.2 innings, 18 earned runs), .199 batting average against and 1.01 WHIP in nine starts. He then earned a promotion to Triple-A Pawtucket where he has a 2.68 ERA (37.0 innings, 11 earned runs), .248 batting average and 1.08 WHIP in six starts. He tossed a complete shutout in his Triple-A debut, allowing five hits and no walks while striking out eight in the PawSox's 4-0 win over Leigh Valley on May 30.

SoxProspects.com has him ranked No. 36 on its top 60 list after he went unranked to begin the season.

"He's got a little bit of a Patrick Corbin-style to him with his mix," Red Sox vice president of pitching development Brian Bannister told MassLive.com. "He's gone heavier with two different shapes of cutters and sliders and made it a bigger part of his mix. So I think he's a little more complete and well-rounded vs. both right-handed and left-handed hitters. He's able to attack."

Bannister obviously isn't saying Hart will be the next Corbin, who has made two All-Star Games. He's simply comparing their pitch mixes.

Corbin is heavy with his slider, which he has thrown 35.6% of the time this year, and his sinker/cutter (34.4%), per Baseball Savant. He has used his four-seam fastball, which has averaged 91.4 mph this season, 20.8%.

Hart features a fastball in the upper-80s and low 90s.

"He's a really mature kid who can really repeat his delivery," Bannister said. "But I think the two shapes of the breaking ball have really allowed him to take off."

Hart has struggled in two relief outings for Pawtucket (seven earned runs, 8 innings) but he clearly has been outstanding as a starter this year.

He already is 26 because he spent five years at Indiana. His 2014 season was cut short after undergoing Tommy John surgery. He redshirted and returned strong in 2015, going 5-0 with a 1.21 ERA in 10 outings (eight starts).

The southpaw has a 2.98 ERA in 67 outings (62 starts) since the Red Sox drafted him.

He's averaging 8.2 strikeouts per nine innings compared to 2.5 walks this season.

## **\* RedSox.com**

### **Red Sox looking to deal for proven pitching**

Ian Browne

It hasn't always been pretty, and for much of the time, it has felt like a grind. Yet the 49-41 Red Sox are still in the mix and hold a strong belief that their best baseball is yet to come.

The bright spots of the first half were breakout performances by Rafael Devers and Christian Vázquez, not to mention the rock-solid level of play by All-Star Xander Bogaerts. There are also concerns. Ace Chris Sale just completed the most inconsistent first half of his career. And the bullpen has let far too many late-inning leads slip away.

When the Red Sox take the field on Friday night for a rematch against their World Series foes, the Dodgers, they will do so trailing the Yankees by nine games in the American League East while trailing the Indians by two games for the second AL Wild Card spot.

"I think for as bad as everyone says it's been and this and that, if you really look at it, it hasn't been that bad," said slugger J.D. Martinez. "Last year, in my opinion, was an extreme, and to have those expectations to come back and do exactly that, that's pretty tough. I think we've done a really good job of giving ourselves a chance for the second half and putting ourselves in a position where we can make the playoffs."

Current status: Buyer

Unless the bottom truly falls out in the three weeks prior to the Trade Deadline, president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski will be in his customary position of trying to add pieces to a contender. For all the inconsistency they've displayed, the Red Sox have nearly their entire team back from last year. The chance to be MLB's first back-to-back champions since the 2000 Yankees is likely too enticing for Dombrowski not to add a chip or two.

What they are seeking

The offense has been rounding into form rather nicely of late, which makes pitching the clear area of emphasis for Dombrowski. A year ago, everyone thought the Sox would look to acquire bullpen help at the Deadline. Instead, Dombrowski got a starter in Nathan Eovaldi. Once again, Eovaldi could influence Dombrowski's decision-making. With the recent news that Eovaldi will go to the bullpen once he returns from his near three-month stay on the injured list, Dombrowski could feel more compelled to add a starter. The fifth-starter spot has been a severe weakness all season for Boston.

What they have to offer

The farm system is thin at the moment, particularly at the upper levels. But the one area of depth is at the corners. Michael Chavis has had some strong moments as a rookie. Devers has turned into a stud. Triston Casas and Bobby Dalbec, the team's top two prospects as ranked by MLB Pipeline, are both corner infielders. If Dombrowski can land an upper-tier starter or reliever by dangling one of those two young power hitters from the farm system, it just might happen.

Possible scenario

While you can never rule out a splashy trade with Dombrowski, the most likely move for the Red Sox is acquiring a fourth or fifth starter. Mets righty Zack Wheeler could fit the profile. MLB Network contributor Joel Sherman was first to report the Red Sox and Mets have already discussed a potential swap involving Wheeler. Considering Wheeler is entering his walk year, the price could be reasonable.

### **Red Sox release reliever Thornburg**

Andrew Simon

The Red Sox released relief pitcher Tyler Thornburg on Wednesday after he declined a Minor League assignment, ending the right-hander's disappointing three-year tenure with the club.

Thornburg had been on the 10-day injured list with a right hip impingement since May 23. He was sent to Triple-A Pawtucket on a Minor League rehab assignment on June 9 and had pitched 11 times there, allowing 15 earned runs over 10 2/3 innings, although four of his past five outings were scoreless. The Red Sox faced a deadline Wednesday to activate or release Thornburg.

Hopes were high for Thornburg when the Red Sox acquired him from the Brewers in December 2016 for four players, including infielder Travis Shaw and shortstop prospect Mauricio Dubon. In 67 games for Milwaukee in '16, Thornburg had produced a 2.15 ERA and 90 strikeouts in 67 innings.

But things never clicked in Boston. Thornburg didn't pitch in 2017 due to a right shoulder injury, eventually undergoing surgery to address thoracic outlet syndrome. He didn't make his Sox debut until July 6, 2018, but he struggled to a 5.63 ERA out of the club's bullpen and didn't factor into its postseason run.

The situation did not improve this year for the 30-year-old, as he produced a 7.71 ERA in 16 appearances for a Boston bullpen that has been in need of reliable arms. Thornburg struggled with his control while allowing multiple runs six times.

"The most frustrating thing for him is that the stuff is there," Boston manager Alex Cora said when Thornburg was placed on the IL in May. "You see it -- 94, 95 mph. He hasn't been able to locate his fastball when he's ahead in counts. He hasn't been able to put people away. The breaking ball has been inconsistent."

### **5 in AL East who will influence Deadline deals**

Ian Browne

As players look to get back in the groove coming out of the MLB All-Star break, executives from every team in the Majors will be working the phones to try to get their roster just right prior to the July 31 Trade Deadline.

In the American League East, this means three teams (Yankees, Rays and Red Sox) will be doing everything they can to pave the way for a deep October run. And it leaves two (Blue Jays and Orioles) that need to do what is best for the future.

It makes for some interesting scenarios. Whether they're focusing on today or tomorrow, all five teams have one key player to watch over the next couple of weeks.

Blue Jays

Player to watch: Marcus Stroman

The 28-year-old right-hander has been the most consistent member of Toronto's rotation this season and was named the club's lone All-Star after a first half that saw him post a 3.18 ERA over 18 starts and 104 2/3 innings with 81 strikeouts. Stroman skipped his last start before the break as he works through a left shoulder and pectoral cramp, but he and the club insist it's nothing to worry about. The homegrown product

of the Blue Jays has been with the organization since he was picked in the 2012 MLB Draft out of Duke University, but he is now in a situation where he could end up in new surroundings, with Toronto gaining a chip in return that could help it in the future.

“Marcus has put himself in an incredible position, throughout his career, not just over the last four months,” Blue Jays general manager Ross Atkins said. “He has been durable, he has performed at an exceptionally high rate, he’s been one of the better pitchers in baseball over the last three years and because of that, he’s in a great position for his future.”

#### Orioles

Player to watch: Trey Mancini

The resurrection of Mancini has been a rare bright spot in another difficult season for the Orioles. More important, the right-handed hitter has turned himself into an attractive piece for contenders. Mancini is hitting for average (.291) and production (17 homers, .868 OPS). He also has some versatility on defense, as he can be plugged in at first base or in the outfield. Mancini isn’t eligible for free agency until 2023, which means the O’s won’t feel compelled to deal him unless they get the right offer. Baltimore has some leverage here, so it will only move Mancini in a deal that lands a legitimate prospect or two.

#### Rays

Player to watch: Chaz Roe

With the Rays possibly exploring the trade market for bullpen help, the bulk of the attention now falls on Roe and what he’ll be able to show the rest of the month. Powered by his signature slider, Roe hasn’t had nearly the same amount of success that he did a year ago, where he posted a 3.58 ERA in 61 appearances. This season, Roe has a 5.27 ERA in 39 appearances, and his lack of control has been evident throughout the season.

Roe doesn’t have any options left, so the Rays will continue to be patient with the right-hander. But if the struggles continue for Roe, he could end up being the odd man out if the Rays add one or two bullpen arms.

#### Red Sox

Player to watch: Nathan Eovaldi

The loss of Eovaldi since April 18 has had a big impact on the Red Sox, who have wrestled with depth issues in both the rotation and the bullpen. Due to Eovaldi’s bout with right biceps tendinitis that prolonged his return from right elbow surgery, Boston has made the decision to use the flamethrower in the bullpen when he comes back within the next week or so. All eyes will be on Eovaldi, and how well he can adapt to life as a reliever. Eovaldi was obviously magnificent in that role last October in the Red Sox’s championship run, but doing it day after day and week after week in the regular season is a different calling.

If Eovaldi doesn’t look comfortable as a reliever, the Sox might have to move him back into the rotation, which could affect the moves president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski makes in the days leading up to the Deadline. The hope is that Eovaldi can emerge as the closer Boston so desperately needs coming down the stretch.

#### Yankees

Player to watch: Luis Severino

The fact that the Yankees have the best record in the AL (57-31) without their projected staff ace having thrown a single pitch is impressive. However, life without the 19-game winner from last season might not be sustainable for very much longer. Within the next week or so, Severino is expected to start a throwing program. The Yanks will be watching closely, because their championship hopes look far better with Severino as a contributor down the stretch. But no matter what Severino does, you can expect that general manager Brian Cashman will be on the hunt for a starting pitcher.

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

### **North Andover's Sebastian Keane picks Northeastern over Red Sox**

Rob Bradford

Even though Sebastian Keane was drafted in the 11th round, the pitcher was one of the more notable Red Sox picks last month.

The North Andover High star, however, won't be joining up with Sox after all ... at least not for the next three years.

According to the Eagle-Tribune, Keane has decided to attend Northeastern University instead of signing with the Red Sox. This comes after the team came to terms with 13th-rounder Blake Lobier, a high school pitcher who reeled in a \$500,000 signing bonus. That agreement severely limited the amount left available to allocate toward the local product.

Keane, who grew up a Yankees fan, was reportedly seeking a signing bonus in the neighborhood of \$1 million. Teams have until July 12 to lock up draft picks.

### **The Tyler Thornburg era with Red Sox comes to an end**

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox made it official Wednesday: Tyler Thornburg's time with the team has come to an end.

The Sox announced that Thornburg has been released, this after the reliever refused a minor-league assignment Tuesday.

Thornburg's \$1.75 million salary for the 2019 season will continue to count for luxury tax purposes.

Other than a brief run just prior to last year's non-waiver trade deadline Thornburg never flashed the effectiveness that the Red Sox were banking on when trading for him Dec. 6, 2016. In that deal with Milwaukee Dave Dombrowski sent Travis Shaw, Mauricio Dubon (who was recently promoted to the big leagues for the first time) and three other minor leaguers for the reliever.

Thornburg, who missed the entire 2017 season after undergoing Thoracic Outlet Syndrome surgery, pitched in a total of 41 games for the Red Sox, including 16 this season. He gave up 16 runs in 18 2/3 innings in 2019, having also recently struggled mightily while on a rehab assignment in the minors.

The Red Sox went into 2019 with optimism that Thornburg would be able to pitch in high-leverage situations, identifying the righty along with Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Steven Wright during the offseason as the likely key contributors for late-inning relief work.

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

### **All-Stars Shane Greene, Will Smith, Kirby Yates weigh in on Red Sox trade rumors**

John Tomase

The move of Nathan Eovaldi to the bullpen has lessened the immediate need for a closer, but a lot can change between now and July 31, and if the Red Sox decide to dive into the deep end of the bullpen market, three prime options participated in Tuesday's All-Star Game.

Detroit's Shane Greene, San Francisco's Will Smith, and San Diego's Kirby Yates would represent significant upgrades for a Red Sox bullpen that has struggled to finish off games all season. The Red Sox have allowed 43 runs in the ninth, fifth-most in baseball, trailing only non-contenders like the Orioles, Mets, and Marlins, and their 18 blown saves lead the American League.

All three are having outstanding seasons. The right-handed Greene is 0-2 with a 1.09 ERA and 22 saves. The 30-year-old is making \$4 million and has one more year of team control. The left-handed Smith, who turned 30 on Wednesday, is 1-0 with a 1.98 ERA and 23 saves. He will be a free agent in October. Yates has been the best of the bunch, with 30 saves and a 1.15 ERA while averaging nearly 14 strikeouts per nine innings. He's making \$3.06 million and won't be a free agent for another year.

All three pitchers are aware they've been linked to the Red Sox.

"I have Twitter, so I see the same articles everyone else sees," Greene said. "I can't control that. Right now I'm wearing a Tigers uniform, and until I'm not, that's what I'll do."

Said Smith: "The whole trade thing, I've been through it already enough, it doesn't really affect me. If it happens, it happens. I love to do what I do. Going to the ballpark every day is fun for me. You play to be the best. I just try not to wrap myself up in that, because there's absolutely nothing I can do about it."

And Yates: "I'm a Padre. I love where I'm at. I don't have any control. I'll deal with that if it happens."

The three were more interesting on a different subject: the toughest innings to pitch as a reliever. And their answers shed some light, potentially, on why the committee approach of the Red Sox hasn't worked.

"People think I'm crazy for saying this, but I think the toughest job in the bullpen is throwing the seventh and eighth inning," Yates said. "Going out there and getting three outs in the ninth, I get it that the last three outs of the game can be hard. I'm not saying it's easy, but the seventh and eighth inning, you usually get the middle of the lineup, and if you're an eighth inning guy, chances are you're warming up in the seventh inning if guys get on base. You get hot more often, and your situation is not consistent."

"I know if I have a lead in the ninth inning, I'm going in the ballgame. It's not really like that in the seventh or the eighth. You pitch in tie games, sometimes you pitch down one, so sometimes those roles are really hard."

The Red Sox, of course, have effectively turned every inning after the sixth into just such a challenge, adding at least 33 percent more uncertainty to the equation on a nightly basis.

"I'd agree with Kirby on that," Smith said. "The seventh or eighth, you might need to only get one out, but there could be runners on second and third, a lot more crazy things can happen. The ninth inning you know the three guys you're facing more often than not. You know when you're throwing. You get to warm up however you want, clean inning, nobody on. It's not that it's easier, but it's more calming for me: 'All right, we've got a three-run lead, I have to get three outs without giving up more than two runs.' The keep it simple, stupid, approach."

Red Sox relievers haven't been afforded that luxury, and the result has been a physically and mentally taxing season.

Greene's former teammates in Detroit include David Price and J.D. Martinez. Greene noted that he has discussed with friends on the Red Sox what it would be like to pitch in Boston.

"I'm sure we've talked about it or whatever, but I'm a baseball player, I don't make those decisions," he said.

That said, Greene wouldn't mind some Fenway Park redemption, since he made his big league debut there in 2014 with the Yankees and "it didn't go very well."

Tyler Thornburg era comes to a merciful end

Greene walked three batters and allowed three runs while retiring one batter in New York's 14-5 victory that April.

"What I remember the most is sitting in the dugout trying to figure out what had just happened," he said. "But the feeling I had when I ran out of the gate for the first time is something I'll never forget."

He'd love the chance to pitch in the postseason, which he has yet to do. While he reiterated his commitment to the Tigers, he also acknowledged the allure of the postseason.

"It would mean the world," he said. "Who doesn't want to be the last guy standing? If I get an opportunity to do that, it'd be a dream come true."

### **Blue Jays' Marcus Stroman details bromance with Red Sox P David Price**

John Tomase

Marcus Stroman was David Price's teammate for only 86 days, but those two-plus months were enough to leave a lasting impression.

Stroman and Price joined forces at the 2015 trade deadline when Toronto acquired the latter from Detroit in one of Dave Dombrowski's final moves as Tigers GM. They then helped the Jays reach the ALCS, where they lost to the eventual champion Royals in six games.

Four years later, Stroman lights up at the mention of Price's name, crediting the Red Sox left-hander for boosting his career.

"I love that man," Stroman said before the All-Star Game. "Everything about him. He just taught me that the game is much deeper than the game. He taught me about life, how he handles his family, his relationships, his people. He's just an unbelievable human being, which you don't find all the time. I can't say a bad word about Price."

"I can call him right now, he'd answer on the first ring. He's told me that whatever I need, he's a true friend of mine and I'm looking forward to having him in my life for the rest of my future."

The two have a bit of yin and yang to them. Price is 6-foot-5 and a former No. 1 overall pick out of powerhouse Vanderbilt in his home state of Tennessee. The 5-foot-7 Stroman hails from Long Island and was drafted at the end of the first round out of Duke.

Both have made their names in the American League East, and Stroman figures to be one of the most coveted starters on the market, with his hometown Yankees contenders to land the first-time All-Star, who is 5-9 with a 3.18 ERA. Stroman shrugs off the potential pressure of New York — "I'm scared of nobody," he said — and detailed what he learned from watching Price.

"Just how much of a workhorse you have to be," he said. "You have to be that guy to go out there and throw 200 innings, 33, 34, 35 starts, and be able to grind through whatever you're going through, when you have little aches and pains. You have to be that horse and that guy people look to to be the stopper."

Stroman's got a history with more than Price. He has jawed with the Red Sox this year, especially manager Alex Cora, but he believes the respect goes both ways between player, opponent, and even Red Sox fans. He said that he and Cora shared "a huge dap" at the All-Star Game to prove there are no hard feelings.

"It's just the Red Sox man," he said. "It's almost like you can get that playoff atmosphere even in the regular season, especially in Boston. It's a Monday, Tuesday night, everyone's yelling at you. The profanity they're

yelling at you, I love it. It's hostile. It's fun. It makes the game really fun. They bring you up when you see the Red Sox as my opponent, it's like all right, I need to lock it in today.

"I know (the fans) respect me, and I know the Red Sox respect me as well. I'm cool with a lot of those guys. That's what people don't understand. In between those lines it's different, I'm a different person out there, I go to a dark place. It's like that killer mentality. Once I step back across that line, I'm not that guy. But I love playing against Boston."

He particularly loves the opportunity to see Price.

"If he pitched against me, I might root for him," Stroman said. "That's how much I love him. He deserves everything, every good thing coming for him. When he was a Blue Jay, that guy was on the top step every single inning when I was coming out, hyping me up, chatting me up, telling me I'm the man, fist-pumping me, and he told me to always remain myself — no matter what anyone says, he says, 'Stro, you always stay true to yourself.' Love that dude."

### **Astros All-Star Gerrit Cole isn't counting out Red Sox: 'They're dangerous, man'**

John Tomase

One year after laying waste to baseball, are the Red Sox lying in wait? One of their chief rivals for American League supremacy isn't taking anything for granted.

Speaking at the All-Star Game, Astros right-hander Gerrit Cole said what a lot of teams are undoubtedly thinking after the Sox ripped off five wins in their last six games before the break: Sleep on them at your own peril.

"They're dangerous, man. They're dangerous," Cole said. "They have a really great starting rotation with big names, guys who pitch well in big games. They have big-time hitters, not only the most talented hitters, but some of the most clutch hitters. They play cohesively as a unit. They seem to bring guys up that have success in the moment like (Michael) Chavis and (Rafael) Devers. They just arrive and they're stars. One of my favorites, the Brock Star, going back to my Double-A Altoona days with Mr. Holt. We had some good times. They're dangerous."

The Red Sox spent most of the first half trying to accelerate out of deep gravel, but they entered the break a season-high eight games over .500. If the playoffs started today, they wouldn't be partaking, but they only trail the wild card-leading Rays by 2.5 games and the Indians by two games. They're also a half-game back of the A's.

The Red Sox and Astros have ended each other's seasons the last two years, so Cole is taking nothing for granted, especially after the Red Sox handled the Astros in five games during last year's ALCS, even though Houston's 57 wins are tied with the Yankees for tops in the American League.

"We got beat," he said. "It still obviously evokes some emotion right now. I don't like losing. It fuels you every year that you don't win, to come back and get in the weight room and get prepared. It's always on your mind that that's where we got stopped last year. We're going to try not to be stopped again this year."

And if the Red Sox are standing in their way again?

"They're a seasoned team," Cole said. "They know how to win, and boy, if they got hot at the right time, they're going to give a lot of people some fits."

**\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

**Red Sox Second Half Primer: Players, developments, games, call-ups & trades to watch for**

Sean McAdam

There are still (at least) 72 games remaining in the 2019 Red Sox season, with some significant ground to make up in the standings.

Some areas — pitching, most obviously — need improvement. Others — offense, for one — seem largely set for now.

A lot can still happen in the final two and a half-months remaining. Here's a look at what lies ahead on a number of fronts:

#### THREE MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS:

**Chris Sale:** Sale was dominant at times in the first half (17-strikeout game vs. Colorado), but not nearly as consistent as the Sox needed him to be. If Sale can't regain his status as a true No. 1 starter, it's hard to imagine the Red Sox getting to the postseason.

**Mookie Betts:** Consider Betts to be the position player version of Sale — a highly important player who didn't play to his capability in the first half. In the final week of the first half, Betts began driving the ball more regularly and having an impact early in the game. If that continues, the Red Sox will be a force.

**Matt Barnes:** Barnes had a brutal month of June (9.69 ERA), but it's easy to forget how good Barnes was in April (2.25 ERA) and May (1.86). It's likely that his slump in June was the result of over-use. Barnes remains the Red Sox' most important reliever, capable of shutting down opponents' most dangerous hitters. If he gets some help (from Nathan Eovaldi or a July trade acquisition), he could be invaluable.

#### THREE DEVELOPMENTS TO WATCH

**Eovaldi to the bullpen:** A great deal of uncertainty exists here. Can Eovaldi make the transition to a relief role? How will he be used? Will he eventually go back into the rotation? Does he remain healthy? Stay tuned.

**The infield will get more crowded:** Mitch Moreland may not be too far away as he comes back from a right quad strain, which has sidelined him for more than a month. When Moreland returns, does he get the majority of at-bats at first? Does he platoon with Michael Chavis? Does Chavis play more second with Moreland? Is there room to retain Marco Hernandez? And that's all before Steve Pearce — due back in August from a knee injury — returns.

**Trading off free agents-to-be:** This wouldn't necessarily involve a sell-off for the Sox, but it could create some payroll relief if they found a taker for, say, Eduardo Nunez.

#### MOST IMPORTANT STRETCH IN SCHEDULE

**July 22-Aug.4:** For a period of two weeks, the Red Sox will play only the Rays and Yankees for 14 straight games, meeting both AL East rivals in home-and-home series. First, three in Tampa, then four at home with the Yankees, then three at home with the Rays, then four (including a makeup game) in New York.

By the end, the trade deadline will have come and gone, and the Red Sox will have a much better idea of where they stand in regards to their postseason chances. As a matter of fact, how well the Sox do in the first half of that stretch may determine how aggressive the team is at the deadline.

#### THREE BIGGEST SERIES AFTER THE NY/TB GAUNTLET

Note that, by pure happenstance, all three of these series will be on the road. Given how well the Sox played away from Fenway, maybe that's not such a bad thing.

Aug. 12-14, @ CLEVELAND: The Indians figure to be in the wild-card hunt, and if you're ready to concede that the Rays will be one of the wild-card participants, that makes any series with another contender critical. These three games with the Tribe and Terry Francona could be huge.

Sept. 20-23, @ TAMPA BAY: If the division is out of reach, the Red Sox might still be in position to compete for home-field advantage in the wild-card game. These four games with the Rays at Tropicana Field could well determine who plays at home and who has to travel for the win-or-go-home game.

Sept. 24-26, @ TEXAS: The Rangers are surprise players in the wild-card race and this series comes immediately after the Sox' four-game set in Tampa.

### THREE POTENTIAL DEADLINE TARGETS OTHER THAN ZACH WHEELER

Ken Giles, Toronto: Giles isn't doing much good for the Blue Jays, who are just now embarking on their rebuild. Never mind the talk teams won't trade within their division. Last year alone, J.A. Happ and Nathan Eovaldi were dealt to other teams in the East.

Will Smith, San Francisco: It seems a given that the Giants will move some bullpen parts, and the Sox inquired last year about Smith, though talks never progressed very far. As an added bonus, he'd give the Sox a lefty weapon in relief. As an added bonus, he's inexpensive when it comes to salary (\$4.23 million).

Andrew Cashner, Baltimore: Like the Giants and Jays, the Orioles have nothing to play for and will sell-off everything not nailed down. Cashner wouldn't be a bad fifth starter pick-up (3.83 ERA). He's said he might retire if he's traded, but it's hard to imagine he'd walk away from the \$3 million or so he's got coming and a chance to pitch in the postseason for the first time in his career.

### THREE CALL-UPS WHO COULD CONTRIBUTE

Darwinzon Hernandez: A couple of weeks ago, the Red Sox shifted Hernandez from the bullpen to the rotation with a clear eye toward having him help out the big league team in the second half. If he can harness his control (he's currently averaging a walk per inning at Triple-A), he could be an intriguing weapon.

Tanner Houck: Houck is still at Double-A Portland, but he, too, was recently shifted to a relief role, another telltale sign the Sox might be willing to fast-track him for some a second-half look-see in the Boston bullpen.

Jarren Duran: It's doubtful that the Sox would want to get him onto the 40-man roster this year, especially since this is his first full pro season. But Duran has blazing speed and could be a useful addition for September when teams generally like to have pinch-runners as part of their expanded major league rosters.

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

### **Disastrous Tyler Thornburg era illustrates Dave Dombrowski's inability to build a bullpen**

Steve Buckley

The Red Sox' stunning news regarding the fate of relief pitcher Tyler Thornburg — that he's been fired — brings to mind one of my favorite laments by a coach, delivered by former Houston Rockets coach Del Harris.

bThe 1982-83 Rockets opened the season with 10 straight losses en route to a 14-68 record, and at some point along the way Harris offered this assessment of his roster: "All of our players belong in the NBA. I'm just not sure they all belong on the same team."

It's a reliable go-to of mine whenever the daggers of discontent are aimed at one player, as is happening with Thornburg.

Or to put it better, the decision to trade for Thornburg in the first place.

For while it's true that Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski's acquisition of Thornburg from the Milwaukee Brewers on December 6, 2016, can now officially go into the books as one of the biggest misses in recent Red Sox history, that's not why this year's Sox are nine games behind the Yankees in the American League East.

Thornburg, who for all we know injured himself picking up the phone when the Brewers called with the news he'd been traded to Boston, will likely, eventually, wind up with another team. Like every other member of the Sox' pitching staff, he belongs in the big leagues. They just don't belong on the same team. The Baltimore Orioles, maybe, but certainly not the 2019 Red Sox.

If the Sox were playing anywhere near as well as they were at this time last year, that would make Friday's series opener against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Fenway Park a thrilling World Series rematch. Instead, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts is already lining up his postseason pitching rotation while Dombrowski is burning up the phone lines in an attempt to find someone, anyone, starter, reliever, who can get big-league outs.

Thornburg is merely a symbol of all that's gone wrong. It's not that the Red Sox are bad, because they're not. What they are is badly-assembled, at least insofar as the pitching goes. Dombrowski has a reputation for often missing the bullpen aisle when making offseason forays to Wegmans, and, well, here we are: The Sox opened the season without a traditional closer, the hope being that a confederacy of relievers would get the job done. They have not.

Nor, it should be noted, have the starters. David Price, Chris Sale and Rick Porcello were supposed to form one of the best threesomes in the business, except that only Price (7-2, 3.24 ERA in 16 starts) has been good for business. Sale is 3-8 with a 4.04 ERA in 18 starts and was so down on himself following his last outing — five runs in 5 2/3 innings against Toronto, with three of the nine hits he allowed leaving the yard — that to rip him was a waste of time. When a guy says of his performance, "That's absolutely embarrassing," and, "I'm standing before you as frustrated as I've ever been," not much more need be said. ("I'm standing before you," is something I've heard people say, heads bowed, to Daenerys Targaryen in "Game of Thrones." I've never heard a professional athlete speak those words to a collection of sportswriters.)

As for Porcello, he's turned into a modern-day Bret Saberhagen, who in his early years with the Kansas City Royals was known for being a very good pitcher — every other year. Alas, every other year for Porcello was last year.

The fans loved those 2018 Red Sox. Dombrowski loved them a little too much. He brought back practically the entire team, including his two clever midseason pick-ups, first baseman Steve Pearce and pitcher Nathan Eovaldi, who turned out to be World Series stars and were rewarded with right-place-at-the-right-time contracts.

And yet Dombrowski did nothing about the bullpen. OK, he did do two things: 1) he obtained righthander Colten Brewer from the San Diego Padres for minor-league infielder Esteban Quiroz, and 2) he let all offseason phone calls from closer Craig Kimbrel go directly to voicemail. And, really, no problem with that: Kimbrel put up great numbers during the regular season but was so shaky in the postseason that he was denied the honor of chloroforming the Dodgers in the ninth inning of Game 5 of the World Series. That assignment instead went to Chris Sale, who struck out the side along with providing Sox fans the added amusement of seeing the dastardly Manny Machado take a classic fall on the swing that ended the Fall Classic.

If not Kimbrel, the Red Sox needed someone who does what Kimbrel does for a living, which is close out ballgames.

Last fall, the Red Sox began their postseason with a 5-4 victory over the Yankees in the Division Series. Sale pitched well, but the bullpen was, guess what, shaky. After the game, reliever Matt Barnes, whose relief work included a wild pitch that sent Andrew McCutchen to third (he would score on a force play), was asked if the Red Sox can win the World Series playing games like this throughout October.

Barnes' response was quick, bold, confident: "Yes," he said, for all to hear.

Good for him. That's the kind of pluck you want from your relievers. But he was closer to the truth than anybody could have known at the time. Turns out Cora used two bullpens in the postseason, one of them consisting of bought-and-paid-for relievers, the other consisting of starting pitchers who were willing to make in-game appearances whenever and however needed. In Game 1 of the Division Series it was Porcello, working two-thirds of an inning. Before it was over Price, Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez and, to pull down the shades, Sale would all work in relief. It was as though Cora didn't see "starters" or "relievers." He saw only "pitchers," and he used them as needed.

It was a winning strategy. Was Barnes right after all? "Yes."

But then Dombrowski did a lot of goofy stuff. He gave Sale a five-year, \$145 million contract extension, a strange move considering the lefty's durability the past two seasons. Pearce and Eovaldi got hot new deals. Kimbrel got a cold shoulder. Save for bringing in Colten Brewer — and apologies for the use of the word "save" to begin this sentence — he did nothing about the bullpen.

On Wednesday, after Thornburg asked for his release, Dombrowski obliged him. Bothered by a hip injury this season, Thornburg had been rehabbing at Triple-A Pawtucket. In 18 2/3 innings with the big club, his ERA was 7.71. In the 25 games he was able to pitch last year he posted a 5.63 ERA. In 2017 he underwent surgery to take care of thoracic outlet syndrome and missed the entire season. The key player the Sox gave up in the trade, third baseman Travis Shaw, is struggling this season but for the previous two seasons was a bopper in the Milwaukee lineup. The other, Mauricio Dubon, was just called up by the Brewers for his MLB debut this week.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel has pronounced the trade "one of the biggest coups in Brewers franchise history."

In Boston, it's merely another example, ho-hum, of Dave Dombrowski's confusion as to why there's a little area out there beyond the right-field fence where some of his players sit during the game.

### **Lots of red and blue: Why are the Red Sox wearing their alternate jerseys more often?**

Jen McCaffrey

Rojo?

Azul?

It's a simple question, using the Spanish words for red and blue, from clubhouse manager Tommy McLaughlin to pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez that determines which jersey the Red Sox will wear that day.

It might seem like there's been a haphazard approach to the uniform colors the Red Sox have worn lately. Once a sartorially traditionalist franchise that was a late entry into Major League Baseball's alternate-jersey universe, the Sox have ditched the predictable patterns of their jersey colors.

Not long ago fans could head to Fenway Park and expect to see their crisp white-on-white look every day except Friday. Same would go on the road, when the Sox would wear their gray-on-gray outfits each day but Friday, when they would opt for the alternate blue jerseys.

Now the red and blue alternate jerseys are poised to appear on any day of the week, and it's largely according to the whim of that day's starting pitcher.

Rodriguez is the hurler who cares most about the uniform selection. And whenever Rodriguez starts on the road, he almost always requests the blue alternate jersey.

"For me, it's more that it feels good," he said, noting the fabric of the other uniforms feels heavier to him. "It's not the color; I just feel comfortable with it, so that's why I like the blue one."

Alternate jerseys have been around for decades. But it wasn't until 2003 — a year after John Henry bought the Red Sox from the Yawkey Trust for about \$700 million — that Boston decided to add multiple options into the clubhouse closet.

For the first 101 years of Red Sox baseball, their standard uniforms were white at home and gray on the road. There were variations over the years, of course, to the lettering, the piping, the addition of different-colored socks and stirrups, hat variations and logo changes.

But then the 2003 season brought big changes to the Red Sox. Theo Epstein became the general manager, there were seats atop the Green Monster, and the fans sitting up there sometimes looked down and saw an entirely new jersey color on the home team: red.

"I remember at the time the explanation or pitch was 'We're the Red Sox — we're going to push red. Red jerseys, red socks,'" said Paul Lukas, who tracks uniform patterns at Uni Watch. "I remember some player seeing the red jersey and saying, 'My God, we'll be visible from space.'"

The red tops — with "Red Sox" emblazoned on the front, worn with white pants — were used sparingly, and their introduction was hardly at the forefront of the news. They had been in the pipeline since shortly after Henry took over.

"It's quite a long process, actually," said Troup Parkinson, the Red Sox executive vice president of partnerships. "You have to get league approval, you have to work with the designers. You have to work with them on lead times and production to get them to retail. Any time you're adding to your jersey mix or changing anything, it's kind of like a year and a half to two years, truly."

So what compelled the new ownership group to introduce the alternate jersey? According to SportsLogos.net, which chronicles team uniform histories, there were 21 other teams — including the Florida Marlins, which Henry owned before buying the Red Sox — already wearing alternates regularly. They were also, as a result, selling those jerseys to fans.

"There's not a lot of a story behind that," Parkinson said of adding the alternate jersey in 2003. "I think we just thought it'd be nice. Red is obviously one of our primary colors. If you remember, that was when teams started to explore having alternate uniforms, alternate jerseys. I think we wanted to get in the mix, and red seemed like an obvious one."

In 2009, a second alternate jersey, navy blue, was added. It would be worn strictly as a road alternate. The idea came from a throwback uniform day the Red Sox had in San Diego in 2007 when they wore gray road jerseys with blue lettering from the early 1980s. At that point, the regular road jerseys had red lettering.

"We wore our old road grays, and I think everybody sort of liked them and felt like we could tweak the existing ones and go more in that direction," Parkinson said.

The Red Sox had already been wearing blue dugout jackets and batting practice jerseys on the road, so the switch to a more blue decor seemed like a natural fit. To start the 2009 season, the team introduced a regular road jersey of gray with blue lettering with the blue alternate jersey mixed in.

The Sox then fell into a pattern of wearing the alternate jerseys on Fridays. “We thought, ‘OK, that’d be a great Friday night uniform,’” Parkinson said. But in the past two seasons, that trend has come undone.

Last year, the Red Sox wore the red and the blue tops 14 times each during the regular season (and in six of their 14 postseason games). This year, they’ve worn the red 12 times already and the blue 10 times. There was even a stretch from June 7-9 when the Sox wore the red jerseys on three consecutive days.

That projects, over the course of the season, to the Sox wearing an alternate jersey in almost a quarter of their games.

“It became: You know what? It should really be up to the players — and a lot of cases for us, it’s up to the starting pitcher,” Parkinson said.

McLaughlin generally checks daily with the starter for his jersey preference. Typically it’s an ambivalent response, so he’ll make the decision — unless Rodriguez is the starter.

“I know Eddie Rodriguez loves to wear the alternate jerseys, so whenever he pitches, it’s pretty much guaranteed that he’s going to wear that,” McLaughlin said.

“Other guys don’t really care, to be honest with you. Whatever the normal routine would be. So if it’s a Friday, we’ll wear red.”

Rodriguez has worn blue in five of his nine road starts this season, but the other starters are less particular.

“I don’t have any preference,” Rick Porcello said. “I like our home whites, and I like the road blues. Those are my two favorites. But if I’m wearing the ‘Boston Red Sox’ on the front of my jersey, I’m pretty happy and grateful for it either way.”

It’s not always as easy as the starter choosing since the home team usually has the benefit of picking a jersey color first. The visiting team must complement that with a selection that doesn’t match or clash, and the league provides a chart governing color combinations.

“It’s the obvious. Purple and black or red and orange. They don’t want that confusion,” McLaughlin said.

But that can lead to Rodriguez not getting his preferred jersey choice at times. Take June 14 in Baltimore. It was a Friday and Rodriguez was on the mound — two reasons to expect the Red Sox in blue jerseys. But the Orioles were in black jerseys, forcing the Red Sox to don their gray shirts.

Perhaps the biggest sign the Red Sox have shed any lingering uniform traditionalism came during last year’s World Series against the Dodgers, when the Sox donned their alternate jerseys for the first time on baseball’s biggest stage.

“That World Series, that’s two very tradition-minded franchises that play in the game’s older ballparks and have very classic-looking uniform sets,” Lukas said. “The classic, traditional thing to do would be the white versus gray, and the Sox went away from that.”

The Sox wore their blue jerseys for the first time in Game 3, when, on a Friday, they suffered an epic 18-inning loss. Rodriguez then laughed in the face of superstition and asked to wear the blue jerseys the following night.

“If it’s the World Series, I have to be as comfortable as I can. And in the blues ones, I feel comfortable,” Rodriguez said.

The Sox won that night and then went on to wear the blue jerseys again in Game 5, when they clinched the title.

That likely also clinched a belief among the Sox that they can wear any jersey on virtually any night. Tradition be damned.

Of course, comparatively speaking, the Red Sox still aren't among the MLB teams that push the boundaries of uniform trends. The Arizona Diamondbacks, for example, have eight uniform combinations, which gets quite confusing for players.

"The Marlins at one point were the same way," McLaughlin said. "When they built the new stadium they had mannequins, and they'd dress the mannequins in that day's uniform because they had different-color sleeves under it and different kinds of hats."

The Yankees and the Tigers are the only teams in baseball with just one road and one home jersey. The Dodgers only wear white and gray but have two gray road uniforms: one with "Dodgers" on the front and the other with "Los Angeles."

"Most (teams) have one or two or three (alternates)," said Lukas, who called the Red Sox "normal" in the current MLB world.

"That's pretty much right in the mainstream."