

## ***The Boston Red Sox Friday, July 5, 2019***

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

**One positive from this season — Red Sox tied for AL lead in comebacks**

Alex Speier

That the Red Sox are flailing to maintain in contention is, on one hand, a surprise. A team that steamrolled the league in 2018 has yet to achieve any kind of consistency. Surges prove transient, setbacks frequent, and victories at times difficult.

Yet somehow, through a highly uneven first half, the Red Sox have managed to keep their heads above water. The degree of difficulty has been absurdly high, with easy victories coming rarely, yet the victories continue to come, albeit in steady drips rather than torrents, thanks in no small part to a lineup that repeatedly refuses to wilt.

On Thursday, the Red Sox stared down an early 6-1 deficit in a bullpen game, the likelihood of a win seemingly bleak. Yet the team overcame it with a six-run sixth and then, after the Blue Jays tied the score, another run on a Marco Hernandez solo homer in the ninth to claim an 8-7 victory in the rubber match of a three-game set in Toronto.

Neither the series win against the 33-55 Blue Jays, nor the come-from-behind victory on Thursday, were glamorous. Yet the Red Sox are beyond the point of seeking style points. Their need for wins is desperate regardless of the form in which they come — and that desperation has indeed been evident in the most common form of Red Sox victory this year.

Thursday marked the 26th Red Sox comeback win of the year, tied with the Astros and Yankees for the most in the American League. Yet unlike Houston and New York, they are the majority (57 percent) of Red Sox wins.

The Red Sox have conjured many victories as if from thin air this year, many coming with a promise this one can be the turning point that sets in motion a consistent run. To date, those individual comebacks have yet to. Nonetheless, there is something to be said for the consistency with which the Red Sox have clawed for what they've gotten this year.

In a season that unquestionably represents something between a riddle and a disappointment, the Red Sox have not relented. They've taken an incredibly hard road through the first half without being demolished by the undertaking.

Glass half-full: The repeated comebacks have prevented the Red Sox from falling off a cliff, and suggest a lineup that is willing to sustain pressure on opposing pitching staffs for 27 outs, a hallmark of last year's team.

"We're not World Series champions for nothing. We know how to fight, we know how to come back, we know how to win games. It just shows you again what we can do," assistant hitting coach Andy Barkettt said. "It's not easy to win games in this division. We made it look easy last year at times, but as you know, it's not. Last year is not something that happens very often. It's a grind to win games in the big leagues. It's a lot. It takes every one here to do it every day.

"Yeah, we're grinding it out and winning games. Sometimes we're scuffling to do that late in games, and it's difficult to do that and takes a lot out of your club, but at the same time, we've got a lot of talent in this room that's used to playing in those circumstances."

Glass half-empty: The repeated need for comebacks suggests deficiencies early in the game. And while the team has managed to win plenty while running uphill, it's fair to question whether that formula — reliant on their excellence in what is arguably the most difficult responsibility in the game, pinch-hitting — is sustainable for the long haul.

“It means we need to do a better job of pitching and not giving up runs early,” starter Rick Porcello said. “We have such a talented offense that it's not a surprise that we've come back in that many games, but ideally, it's not a position we want to continue to be in. It means that our offense and our team [are] resilient, for sure, but we need to do a better job of putting ourselves in position early in games where we're not coming from behind.”

Much of the current Red Sox group is experienced in the dark art of winning with a high degree of difficulty. The 2017 team, for instance, managed to win the A.L. East thanks to its dominance in extra-innings and close games.

Has this season felt more like that campaign than the fantasy realm of the magic carpet ride to 119 wins in 2018?

“It feels like normal, honesty. Last year was such an incredible year. We played great baseball but at the same time, it seemed like everything really went our way,” said Porcello. “This year, it's more, this is baseball.”

Porcello suggested that this Red Sox team is “a better, more experienced” club than the one that survived the 2017 regular season before getting dismantled by the Astros. Yet the 2019 edition has yet to prove such a claim.

What it has proven, however, is a survival instinct at a time when the team's different parts have yet to fit neatly into a coherent picture. The 2019 Red Sox to date are a clearly flawed team with obvious shortcomings, particularly with their pitching staff.

But given those deficiencies, the team suggests that it's important to appreciate what it has done well while buying time, perhaps, for better days to come. Though the search for something better continues, the Red Sox take some solace they have not gotten completely lost in the first-half wilderness.

“It's just finding ways. That's what you've got to do. . . . We know we have to pitch better. That's obvious. But it really doesn't matter. We found a way to win today, it's two out of three, and now,” exhaled manager Alex Cora, “we move on.”

### **The Red Sox were built around their starting pitchers, but now they're a big problem**

Alex Speier

Yes, the bullpen has been short an arm, and yes, the black hole in the fifth starter spot often has crushed team momentum. But no pitching problem for the Red Sox has been more vexing than the utter mediocrity of a starting rotation that was expected to rank as one of the game's elite.

When the Red Sox made the four-year commitment to Nate Eovaldi in December, it was with a clear vision in mind. Some teams structure their staffs around bullpens. Not the Red Sox.

“We built this team from the first inning through the sixth, and then the last three,” said manager Alex Cora. “There are other teams that build from the ninth all the way through the first inning. For us to do the things we want to do, our starters have to give us quality starts and we go from there.”

That hasn't been happening. Quite the opposite. The Red Sox rotation this year entered Thursday's game against the Blue Jays with a 4.67 ERA, 18th in the big leagues. The team is 18th in quality starts with 33.

With roughly \$90 million invested this year in David Price, Chris Sale, Rick Porcello, Eovaldi, and Eduardo Rodriguez, this was not what the Red Sox expected. Even with Eovaldi making just four starts — and his replacements averaging roughly three innings and a 6.75 ERA in 16 starts — the rest of the rotation has been largely underwhelming.

“We built our ballclub for them to be our strong suit,” said president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. “I don’t think it’s been what we expected or hoped.”

David Price has been the team’s most consistent starter, forging a 6-2 record and 3.33 ERA in 15 starts — though, with some careful management of his workload, that has limited him to 78 innings. Chris Sale admitted to being lost in a first-half wilderness, going 3-8 with a 4.04 ERA. Eduardo Rodriguez has been typically inconsistent (8-4, 4.79), while Rick Porcello (5-7, 5.07) has navigated a dramatic rollercoaster.

The Red Sox expected more, and they need more. The lack of regular length from their starters in turn compromises the bullpen, both because of innings demands and because the relievers have spent much of the first half navigating a tightrope where one pitch is the difference between wins and losses.

Still, the Sox remain convinced that their talent surpasses the performance to date. The rotation has 9.6 strikeouts per nine innings, sixth in the big leagues — a number that usually correlates with dominance. And the team has a Fielding Independent Pitching mark (essentially, an expected ERA based on the outcome of each individual at-bat) of 4.01, fifth in the big leagues and adjacent to many of the best rotations in baseball.

So why is there a gap between the Red Sox’ actual ERA and its FIP? That question is one that team assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister has considered for much of the last month.

“There’s a definite opportunity to close the gap between, in a very simple way, where our FIP is at and where our ERA is,” said Bannister. “To me, the underperformance has come via sequencing. They’ve been giving up hits in the least opportune times.”

In other words: The Red Sox staff has the ability to strike out batters at an elite rate. But the team has been particularly vulnerable with runners in scoring position, the situations where a single hit costs the team one or two runs. With runners in scoring position, Sox opponents are hitting .278 (24th in the big leagues) with a .370 OBP (28th), and .476 slugging mark (24th).

“That’s where the conversation has taken place over the last month. Everybody is aware of it,” said Bannister. “FIP-wise, we’re one of the elite pitching staffs. Our ability to strike people out is right up there with Houston and other teams. This is not a lack of talent scenario. It’s making sure that the actual sequencing of events in the games are matching up to what we’re capable of. That’s part execution, part luck. But just making sure we put the probabilities in our favors in those situations.”

For all of the poor numbers from the rotation, the Red Sox remain convinced that they are not far from better performances. The team is focused on improving the execution of its pitchers with runners in scoring position, particularly with regards to pitch selection and, often, fastball location.

With a small increase, the team believes that the offseason expectation of a dominant rotation capable of carrying the club remains within reach. And if the Red Sox rotation gets on a roll, many of the shortcomings that have been magnified so far this year — especially in the bullpen — will appear less glaring.

“They’re a very talented group of pitchers. ... They’re the guys who are supposed to carry us, really. That’s why I think they’ve been fine. They’ve been OK. But I can’t say they’ve really carried us at any point,” said Dombrowski. “The bullpen keeps getting pointed to all the time, I think a lot of times unfairly. It’s just that collectively, in a lot of places, we haven’t done as well as we hoped.”

The Red Sox will address their fifth-starter shortcomings in some fashion, whether it's deploying an opener, or making a trade for a starter, or bolstering the bullpen so that at some point Eovaldi can get stretched back out for the rotation. But regardless of what happens with that final rotation spot, if the Red Sox do not get more from their front four, their ambitions of contention will sputter.

"It hasn't been the way we planned it. We expect those guys to go deep in the games. We haven't been consistent doing that," said Cora. "The stuff is there. It just hasn't happened. We live in an era where we're looking everywhere to fix it. We will fix it. They're going to dominate and they're going to carry us."

If they don't, then any hopes of building momentum in the second half will go the same way as the season to date.

### **In a pinch, Marco Hernandez delivers win for Red Sox**

Julian Benbow

For Marco Hernandez, every at-bat is a gift — even if that at-bat comes in the ninth inning of a tied game on the road as the Red Sox were trying to avoid dropping two of three to a Blue Jays team that came in sitting fourth in the division, 23.5 games behind the first-place New York Yankees for the second time in two weeks.

Playing for manager Alex Cora, stay-ready situations are nothing new to him.

"You never know with Alex," Hernandez said. "You've got to be ready."

Hernandez wasted no time.

He let an errant fastball from Jays reliever Ken Giles go by him. Then he saw one he liked. Giles tucked a 96.3 mile-per-hour fastball down and away and Hernandez sent it flying over the left-field fence.

In the dugout, there was never a question.

"I was actually in the tunnel area when he hit it and I heard everybody go crazy and I was like, 'Did he just do this again?' It's insane," said Michael Chavis.

Hernandez's homer was the difference in the Red Sox's 8-7 win over the Jays at Rogers Centre. It was his second of the season and somehow even more dramatic than his game-tying homer in Baltimore in May.

Hernandez pumped his fist as he rounded second. He had no idea that the Sox dugout had just exploded.

"I didn't see nobody," Hernandez said. "I was running the bases. But everybody hugged me when I got into the dugout."

The Sox were able to pick up their 26th come-from-behind win of the season, tied for the most in the American League. They're now 13-11 in one-run games. Sox pinch hitters have been godsend this season, hitting .432 with three homers and 13 RBIs.

Cora's explanation came with a smirk.

"Just luck," he said.

Early last season, Cora was admittedly against pinch-hitting. The production this year — especially in clutch spots — has him coming around.

"That's a testament to who they are," Cora said. "Not everyone can play every day, but they know they've got to be ready to contribute."

Rafael Devers went 2 for 3 with a solo homer and two walks. J.D. Martinez went 3 for 4 with an RBI. Chavis went 1 for 4 with a three-run homer.

“It’s not one of those things where you’re like ‘Oh, it’s just another comeback.’ It’s incredible,” Chavis said. “We know at any time we can turn it around and come back so when it happens, it’s just a reminder we’re a good ball club. We are. At the end of the day, we’re a good ball club and we’re starting to bring it together.”

In order to do it, they had to dig themselves out of a ditch that only got bigger as the game stretched out.

In his first start since May — and also his first start since going on the injured list with a low back strain in June — Hector Velazquez gave up three runs on five hits and two walks in just 2½ innings.

After Devers continued his tear with a homer in the first, Velazquez surrendered the lead on a two-run single to Rowdy Tellez in the bottom of the inning.

The next frame, Velazquez left a sinker in the middle of the zone and Danny Jansen blasted it to center field for a solo shot that made it 3-1.

When Velazquez left the mound in the third, the Sox were down, but still in striking distance.

But things got bleak an inning later. Colten Brewer gave up a pair of homers — another solo blast by Jansen then a two-run shot by Freddy Galvis — that stretched the lead to 6-1.

“I mean, it didn’t look pretty the first three innings, four innings to be honest with you,” Cora said. “We started looking at how are we going to get through this where we were at pitching-wise, then all of a sudden we started pitching better, putting better at-bats.”

It left the Sox offense facing an uphill climb, but they responded by blowing up for six runs in the sixth.

Mookie Betts sparked the rally with a leadoff walk, then Devers followed up with a single to center that made it first-and-third with no outs.

With the table set, Xander Bogaerts stroked a ground ball to right for a single that scored Betts, pushed Devers to third, and trimmed the deficit to 6-2.

Martinez kept the line moving with a line drive to center that scored Devers to make it 6-3.

After pinch hitter Eduardo Nunez popped up for the first out of the inning, Christian Vazquez worked a walk that loaded the bases.

The next hitter, Jackie Bradley Jr. bounced a ground ball to short. The Jays got the out at second, but Bogaerts scored to close the gap to 6-4.

Then Chavis capped the rally when he barreled up a 2-and-2 slider from Jays reliever Tim Mayza and shipped it over the fence in left for a three-run homer that put the Sox over the top, 7-6.

“It’s not the first time we’ve done it,” Chavis said. “One of the fun things about this team is — I’ve said it through the full season, well, since I’ve been here — we can go out there and put up five or six at any time. The vibe in the dugout’s really comfortable in those times. It’s really easy to just give up and get lackadaisical but if you were in our dugout, you felt the vibe and how guys were talking, we never felt like we were out of it. We always know that at any time we can turn it around. It’s nice.”

Eric Sogard threatened to pull the rug out with a game-tying double in the eighth, but one last push was never in doubt.

“We found a way to win,” Cora said. “We won two out of three. That’s the most important thing. Regardless of how we did it, we did it.”

### **Andrew Benintendi gets day off to get refocused**

Julian Benbow

Andrew Benintendi was out of the lineup Thursday for the Red Sox’ series finale against the Blue Jays, but it was by no means a day off.

Benintendi showed up to Rogers Centre early to work out kinks with a swing that’s been inconsistent much of the season. He did some problem-solving in the cage with Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers in hopes of rediscovering the power that has been largely absent this season.

“We need him to feel hitter-ish again,” said Sox manager Alex Cora. before the Sox’ 8-7 win. “I think his swing is not where he wants to be. I don’t want to say he’s frustrated, but kind of like one of those where I feel like unplug him today, show up early, work with Timmy and hopefully he can see the results right away.”

While still productive, Benintendi’s numbers have ticked down this season. His slash line has dropped to .266/.347/.421 from .290/.366/.465 a year ago He’s hit just seven homers and driven in just 36 runs. His contact percentage is down to 75 percent. His line-drive rate is down to 23 percent.

“It’s one of those that the numbers, they’re close, but it doesn’t feel that way,” Cora said. “And he doesn’t feel great mechanically, so he’s working on a few things today in the cage here early and, like I said, hopefully, it works out.”

Benintendi’s power outage can be traced back to last year’s All-Star break. In the first half of the season, he hit .297 with 14 homers and 57 RBIs. In the second half, he hit .279 with two homers and 30 RBIs. But Cora said there’s no carryover.

“I don’t think so,” Cora said. “I think it’s more about this year. Even in spring training, he found his rhythm a little bit there, but he doesn’t feel as hitter-ish. His hands are not firing the way they usually do. If you look at videos of Andrew in college all the way to last year, it’s the same swing. Now it’s a lot of swing and misses, a lot of chasing pitches up in the zone. Early in the season, it was breaking balls down and in.”

Benintendi was still available to pinch hit, but the larger goal was getting back on track.

“So there’s a few things that they worked on today and it’s a matter of going out there — if it’s tonight, tonight,” Cora said. “But whatever it is, at least they’re on the same page as far as that and where to go and hopefully it works out.”

### **Hembree activated**

After joining the team in Toronto on Wednesday, righthander Heath Hembree was activated Thursday. His presence gives the Sox a much-missed arm out of the bullpen.

Hembree was 1-0 with a 2.51 ERA in 31 appearances before going on the disabled list June 14 with a right elbow extensor strain. Hembree made a rehab appearance for Triple A Pawtucket on Tuesday, striking out two in one inning.

Before he went down, Cora used Hembree in several different situations but largely in the seventh inning.

“It’s important for us,” Cora said. “He was throwing the ball well. He’s a guy that he can get lefties or righties out, he gets people to weak contact, he attacks the guys the right way, so it’s great to have him back.”

Sale on six-plus days

Even though Chris Sale's comfort level with Sandy Leon behind the plate is airtight, Cora made the decision to pair Sale with Christian Vazquez on Wednesday to add some pop to the lineup and give Sale some of the run support he's been lacking.

Sale gave up five runs in 5⅓ innings, including three home runs. All three homers (and six of his nine hits) came on Sale's fastball, a pitch he leaned on more heavily than he had in any other start this season.

Vazquez has caught Sale six times this season. In those starts, Sale has a 6.68 ERA and he's given up nine homers.

"We'll keep working the way we always do," Cora said. "I know Sandy has caught him most of the time, so whenever he pitches, we'll make a decision and we'll go with a catcher."

Sale won't pitch again until after the All-Star break. Extended rest is typically a plus, for any pitcher but Sale has pitched on at least six days' rest six times this season and he's 0-5 with an 8.48 ERA in those starts.

"He's going to start and we expect him to be great," Cora said.

"I know it hasn't happened yet, but this guy is one of the elite pitchers in the big leagues. We know it. We're looking at everything from usage to other stuff, but at the end, it really doesn't matter. When he's on, he's one of the best. So he'll pitch when we give him the ball."

Sox sign pick

The Red Sox signed 10th-round pick Stephen Scott on Thursday. The outfielder out of Vanderbilt will head to short-season Single A Lowell.

### **Jerry Remy doesn't hold back in new book**

Dan Shaughnessy

New England loves Jerry Remy. A local kid (Somerset, Mass.), Remy was an All-Star second baseman with the Red Sox. He was part of the 1978 one-game playoff and got a big hit off Hall of Famer Rich Gossage in the ninth inning of the Bucky Dent game. Retiring as a player in 1986, the Rem Dawg has been in our living rooms almost every night of the last 30 summers as part of NESN's broadcast team.

Nothing's been easy for Remy. Learning to get comfortable in the broadcast booth was difficult, but that was a cinch compared to a series of personal crises that have plagued his everyday life. Remy has been clinically depressed for decades, a condition first detected when he suffered panic attacks in the late 1990s. Meanwhile, a lifetime of smoking poisoned his body, and he's been battling cancer since 2008, suffering five relapses. Worst of all, in 2013 Remy's son, Jared, murdered Jennifer Martel, who was Jared's fiancée and the mother of their young daughter. Jared Remy will be in prison for the rest of his life.

Jerry Remy has put it all down in book form, producing "If These Walls Could Talk," a Triumph Books publication, scheduled for release Tuesday. Remy writes about his baseball and broadcasting careers — and his opinions on the Red Sox — before detailing his personal hardships and horrors in chapters at the back of the book entitled, "Depression," "Dealing With Cancer," and "Jared."

Compounding the ethos and emotion of this tome, the book is coauthored by the late Nick Cafardo, who was a dominant and loving baseball voice on these pages for more than 30 years. Nick died suddenly outside the Red Sox spring training clubhouse on Feb. 21, just days after completing the manuscript with Remy.

“The whole idea of the book was originally to talk about the Red Sox,” Remy said over the telephone early Thursday. “But I felt like if I do a book, I felt it was time to release some of the stuff I’ve been going through in my life. Obviously, I couldn’t do a book without dealing with my son, and I tried to do that the best I possibly could without getting too deep because if you get too deep it sounds like you’re making excuses. I think we handled that chapter fairly well.”

Remy dodged little in the “Jared” chapter, writing, “It’s the guilt that’s consuming. We will live with this tragedy for the rest of our lives . . . While Jared is our son, what he did was unforgivable.”

“We made some adjustments in that chapter after Nick passed where I felt I went in a little too deep on Jared,” recalled Remy. “Jared knows there’s a book coming out, but he hasn’t seen it yet. Our relationship is good, so he’s not going to have a problem with it. And if he does, too bad. It’s something that happened.

“I wanted to kind of get some of these things out to the public — especially the depression part of it. People get depressed all the time and they don’t know what to do about it. I just want to let ’em know that the same thing happened to me and we were able to do some things to take care of it. If it helps anybody in that way, I think it’s a good thing.

“It took us a long time to get the book completed because I was dealing with the cancer. We finally got it done, and then Nick passed away in spring training. We had completed the book, but it had to be gone through again. My wife, Phoebe, and I cleaned up the final chapters.”

Is Remy nervous about the book finally landing in stores?

“I’m not nervous, no,” he said. “It’s honest. It’s my life. I don’t think there’s anything to be nervous about. I really hope down deep, that the whole book, especially the parts that deal with depression, can help people. I had no reason before this to write a book. The stuff that I’ve been through, I think people would like to hear and say, ‘Someone that we see all the time has the same problems that we do.’ I felt like I had something to talk about besides being in the booth. I felt the [depression] part of the book was most important because it would have an impact on some people.”

When Remy’s cancer returned for the fifth time last year, he thought his broadcast career might be over.

“I thought NESN would have had enough of me being sick,” he recalled. “I thought I might have done my last game.”

Did he fear death?

“This was the closest that I felt I was going to die,” Remy acknowledged. “We were running out of options. They were talking about removing a lung. But we elected for a trial treatment that I’m in now, which has been fabulous, but I honestly thought that might have been it.”

“If These Walls Could Talk” features a foreword by Remy’s former broadcast partner Sean McDonough, an afterword by another favorite partner Don Orsillo, and a closing homage to Cafardo.

“It’s so sad to see that this book has come out without him here to enjoy it, but hopefully it serves as a tribute to him,” writes Remy.

Remy was not with the Red Sox in London or Toronto but has been watching daily.

Anything to say about the 2019 Red Sox?

“I still think they’ve got a chance for postseason play,” he said. “The first-place thing I’m not thinking about, but there’s still an option, and I honestly believe in my heart they are going to play better. They are too good not to. If they get the bullpen straight I think they’ll have a chance to get to the playoffs and do some damage in the playoffs.”

(Remy will be signing copies of his book at the Brookline Booksmith on Tuesday and at the Barnes & Noble in Framingham on Wednesday. Both signings are at 7 p.m. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to the ALS Foundation in Nick Cafardo's honor.)

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

### **Red Sox claw back for 8-7 victory over Blue Jays**

Michael Silverman

The Red Sox traveled 6,841 miles back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean to play two games in London and three more in Canada.

If two wins in five tries made all those time changes and passport stamps worth it, then the Red Sox certainly ended their long, strange international journey with a big Fourth of July bang on foreign territory. They clawed back, twice, in a topsy-turvy, poorly pitched 8-7 victory that allowed them to take this series against the improving Blue Jays.

"It didn't look pretty the first three innings, four innings to be honest with you," manager Alex Cora said. "We started looking at how are we going to get through this where we were at pitching-wise, then all of a sudden we started pitching better, putting better at-bats. At the end, it's winning series, regardless of how you do it. We did that."

Pinch-hitter Marco Hernandez' home run in the ninth inning put the Red Sox back up for good after Brandon Workman had allowed the Blue Jays to tie the game at 7 in the bottom of the eighth inning.

Hernandez had been told by Cora to be ready to hit if Michael Chavis — who hit a key, go-ahead three-run home run in the six-run sixth inning that erased a 6-1 deficit — made an out, or bunt for a sacrifice if Chavis had reached base.

Chavis struck out, so Hernandez dug in against closer Ken Giles.

"I tried to look for something that I could handle, something that I can put in play and tried to put a good swing on something up in the zone and I put a good swing on it and everybody saw the results," said Hernandez, who went opposite field and lined the ball over the left field wall.

Hernandez already has produced clutch hits against Baltimore and the White Sox in this short season of his since he returned from the injured list.

"His swing is so simple," Cora said. "He stays on pitches. when he's driving the ball the other way, it's a good sign. ... He kept it very simple there, got a fastball, and hit it over."

The victory sent the Red Sox into a domestic-based three-game series in Detroit before a needed All-Star break for most, not all, of the team.

The momentum shifts in the game were seismic. Fifth starter Hector Velazquez had let them down with a brief 2 1/3 innings, allowing three runs, followed by three more runs against his replacement, Colten Brewer.

Down 6-1 entering the sixth, the Red Sox offense went to work and finally got the Jays' Thomas Pannone out of the game.

Pannone entered two outs into the first inning and then shut down the offense, retiring 10 of the 11 batters he faced. But he walked Mookie Betts to open the sixth, which is when the floodgates opened as well.

Three straight singles, the first Rafael Devers (homer in the first), then RBI hits by Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez narrowed the lead to 6-3.

Tim Mayza replaced Pannone with two on and no outs but he was not the answer the Blue Jays were seeking. After a walk and then a fielder's choice RBI brought in the fourth run, Chavis hit a three-run bomb over the left field wall to give the Red Sox the lead back, 7-6.

Cora understands the pitching is a problem these days, but for one game, the offense kept those flaws to obvious rather than hurtful.

"It's just finding ways, that's what you've got to do," Cora said. "We've put ourselves in a bad spot early in the game. We kept battling. Offensively, it's getting there. You start looking at the numbers compared to last year. It's pretty similar. It's just a matter of when. Today, it seemed like we put up good at-bats when it mattered. Just keep building up. We know we have to pitch better. That's obvious. But it really doesn't matter. We found a way to win today, it's two out of three, and now we move on."

### **Andrew Benintendi's production way off**

Michael Silverman

Andrew Benintendi is not feeling real "hitter-ish" these days. Make that the first half of the season. Actually, start from the second half of last season.

Benintendi, who turns 25 on Saturday, finds himself stuck in an offensive plateau in his third full season in the major leagues. After a sizzling start to his 2018 season in which he hit .297 with a .517 slugging percentage, .897 OPS and 14 home runs, Benintendi fell off the pace after last year's All-Star break, hitting only .279, slugging .343 with a .727 OPS and just two homers.

The first half of this season Benintendi is hitting .266, slugging .421 with a .768 OPS, and seven homers. He has zero hits in his last 12 at-bats.

That next stage everybody expects gifted young hitters like Benintendi to take has yet to be taken.

And that was one reason why manager Alex Cora left Benintendi on the bench for all of Thursday night's 8-7 victory.

"Not really an off day, he got here early and worked with (hitting coach) Timmy (Hyers) on a few things — we need him to feel 'hitter-ish' again," said Cora. "I think his swing is not where he wants it to be. I don't want to say he's frustrated but kind of like one of those unplugging today. Show up early, work with Timmy and hopefully we can see the results right away. One of those that the numbers, they're close but it doesn't feel that way. And he doesn't feel great mechanically. He's working on a few things today in the cage and here early and hopefully it works out."

Cora does not believe his 2019 results are related to his second-half swoon a year ago.

"I don't think so, it's more about this year," the manager said. "His hands are not firing the way they usually do. You look at videos of Andrew in college all the way to last year, it's the same swing. There's a lot of swings and misses. A lot of chasing pitches up in the zone. Early in the season it was breaking balls down and in so there's a few things that worked on today and it's just a matter of going out there, if it's tonight, tonight or whenever it is, but they're on the same page as far as that and where to go and hopefully it works out."

Chavis comes through

Michael Chavis felt great about being able to come up big again for the team, as his sixth-inning three-run home run capped off a six-run Red Sox rally in the eventual 8-7 victory.

“It’s not one of those things like I’m the new guy doing it like, ‘Hey hopefully everybody likes me,’ but I like being in those positions,” Chavis said. “I’ve been in that position a lot throughout the minor leagues and with help from coaches and learning myself I just kind of learned how to make myself comfortable in that kind of position and enjoy it.”

Chavis has 15 homers this season, with seven extra-base hits over his last eight games. ...

The Red Sox have won their last six Independence Day games and are 96-67 all-time on July 4. In series finales this season, they are 18-10. ...

Hector Velazquez made his first start since May 18, and it was not good. He allowed three runs and one home run in just 2 1/3 innings. In his eight starts this season, he has a 6.95 ERA.

Hembree back

Heath Hembree returned to the roster after being sidelined since June 11 with a strained right elbow extensor. In his 31 appearances this season before getting hurt, Hembree allowed opponents a .189 batting average, with 35 strikeouts and 12 walks over 28 2/3 innings with a 2.51 ERA. He stranded 18 of his 23 inherited runners and held opponents to a .119 average (6-for-44) with runners in scoring position.

“It’s important for us — he’s thrown the ball well,” Cora said. “Obviously he hasn’t pitched in a while but he’s a guy that can get lefties and righties out, induce weak contact. He attacks guys the right way so it’s great to have him back.”

Backing Vazquez

Cora swatted away the theory that being paired with catcher Christian Vazquez was a factor in Chris Sale getting roughed up Wednesday.

“Obviously we gameplanned, we talked — that’s a team, the first two games, most of their hits were on breaking balls,” Cora said. “He’s got to go with what we think will work. Yesterday, three home runs were on fastballs. We threw a lot of them. I think we didn’t use the changeup that much, but it was just the way we gameplanned for them yesterday. It just didn’t work.”

Cora confirmed Sale will not necessarily be throwing to his more familiar catcher Sandy Leon the rest of the way.

“No, no, we’ll keep working the way we always do,” Cora said. “I know Sandy has caught him most of the time. Whenever he pitches, we’ll make a decision and we’ll go with a catcher.”

### **Ninth inning right place for Nathan Eovaldi**

Tom Keegan

Why will the Red Sox move Nathan Eovaldi to the bullpen when he returns from the injured list? Better question: What took them so long to reach that conclusion?

The Sox need to hit the reset button on their bullpen as desperately as baseball needs to pick up the pace.

For one thing, the Red Sox need to ditch the idea that pitcher-batter matchups are more important than defined reliever roles. That approach has been an unmitigated disaster this season.

They need Eovaldi closing games when he returns, which could come as soon as the first game after the All-Star break. He’s the hardest thrower and has the best pure stuff of anyone in the bullpen, but that only hints at why he makes the most sense.

Eovaldi's the best option because he hasn't failed at closing games and everyone else out there has. He brings no negative baggage to the mound. His most recent relief work of any kind made him a World Series hero. If he can thrive under that pressure, pitching the ninth inning on a regular basis shouldn't get to him.

Given his elbow history — two Tommy John surgeries, plus two procedures to clean up elbow chips — it's understandable the Red Sox want to proceed with caution. So don't pitch him on back-to-back days. When in need of a closer a day after he worked the ninth, use either Brandon Workman or Matt Barnes. Since Barnes has pitched pretty well when rested and horribly on the back end of back-to-back days, don't ever use him on consecutive days.

Working around those stipulations for Eovaldi and Barnes isn't ideal, but it's doable, especially since the plan calls for expanding the pitching staff to 13 arms once Eovaldi joins the bullpen.

As recently as a couple of weeks ago, president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said the club was not thinking about using Eovaldi as a reliever upon his return. It seemed like such a strange stance, so I wondered if maybe relieving would put him at greater risk of re-injury than starting. A couple of days before the Red Sox announced Eovaldi would move to the bullpen upon his return, I made an appointment for a telephone interview with Glenn Fleisig, director of research for the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, Ala., for an answer to the reliever-vs.-starter question as it relates to elbow stress.

As it turned out, Dombrowski said the reason for changing his opinion had to do with Eovaldi getting on board with the idea. That makes sense. A pitcher has a better chance of succeeding if he's on board with how he's being used.

Even though injury risk didn't appear to enter into the decision on the best way to use Eovaldi, Fleisig's research still is worth sharing. Fleisig would not speculate on Eovaldi or any other individual pitcher, but shared his general findings on the topic.

"The forces are the same and the chances of re-injury are the same, so I feel comfortable saying that moving a major league pitcher from starter to reliever would not increase or decrease his chance of blowing out again," Fleisig said.

Interestingly, Fleisig also has run studies in the biomechanics laboratory in Birmingham on the relative injury risks of various pitches.

"Our studies have shown that whether you're a Little Leaguer or a major leaguer, fastballs, sliders and curveballs put similar stress on the elbow," he said. "The changeup is less stress at any level."

That exposes as myth the notion that breaking balls are the root of all arm ails.

Again speaking in general terms and not about any one pitcher, Fleisig said research shows that "max-effort pitchers," the ones who throw every fastball and breaking ball at top speed, tend not to fare as well injury-wise as pitchers who vary speeds.

"A lot of organizations, if they have a guy they feel is a max-effort guy, they put him in the bullpen, thinking, 'Well, you can't pitch seven innings like that, but you can pitch one inning like that.' ... We found that the difference in the torque or the stress on the elbow from pitch to pitch, it really made a big difference whether you're a max-effort guy," Fleisig said.

It seems to me, Eovaldi falls into the category of max-effort pitcher.

On his road to recovery from having loose bodies removed from his elbow, Eovaldi developed biceps tendinitis.

"Biceps tendinitis is pretty common, really, a minor injury that with rest and rehab pitchers should be able to come back from fine," Fleisig said, again not speaking specifically about Eovaldi. "If you pitch through

it before you recover that probably increases your chances of serious injury. So it's not a major long-term concern, but it's important in the short term that it needs to be resolved before returning to play."

Robbing Eovaldi from the rotation to electrify the bullpen means the Red Sox have to continue to live with bad results from the fifth starter. But the fifth starter can't save a rotation anyway. That will have to come from the other end of the rotation, where Chris Sale (3-8, 4.04 ERA) has pitched much better than his record shows, but needs to pitch a great deal better in the second half than the first for the Red Sox to make the playoffs. Also, Rick Porcello (5-7, 5.07) has as many losses as he had all last season and 12 fewer victories.

Eovaldi shapes up as the team's fifth-best starter and potentially the best closer candidate, which makes the move to the 'pen an easy call as well as the last chance to revive the bullpen from within the organization.

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

### **Marco Hernandez's go-ahead Red Sox homer was set up by a strikeout; 'Did he just do this again?'**

Christopher Smith

Marco Hernandez pinch hit for Sandy Leon and bashed the go-ahead home run in the ninth inning against Blue Jays closer Ken Giles on Thursday. His solo homer led the Red Sox to an 8-7 win over Toronto at Rogers Centre.

The home run was set up by a strikeout.

"He (manager Alex Cora) told me, 'If Chavis make an out, you're going to hit. If not, Leon's gonna bunt,'" Hernandez said.

Michael Chavis, who hit a three-run homer during the sixth inning, struck out swinging on a 97.9 mph fastball from Giles.

That created an opportunity for Hernandez to hit. He belted a 96.3 mph fastball from Giles 348 feet into the left field stands.

"I tried to look for something that I could handle," Hernandez said. "Something that I could put in play. Try to put a good swing on something up in the zone."

Boston Red Sox's Hernandez hadn't played in a major league game since May 3, 2017. The Red Sox utility man underwent three shoulder surgeries the past two years.

Both of Hernandez's homers this season have been game-changers. He blasted the game-tying homer against Orioles' Mychal Givens in the ninth inning June 16 at Camden Yards.

"I was actually in the tunnel area when he did it," Chavis said. "I heard everybody go crazy and I was like, 'Did he just do this again?' It's insane. Just getting a pinch hit single or a walk is difficult as it is. You sit on the bench for eight innings, it's definitely not easy to do."

The 26-year-old utility infielder returned this season after undergoing three shoulder surgeries that kept him sidelined since May 26, 2017.

"I mean, you don't know with Alex, so you've gotta be ready the whole game, even when you don't start the game," Hernandez said. "I try to stay ready, especially after the sixth or seventh inning. Stay rested, stay loose. And try to stay ready if I've got to pinch hit or running for somebody else."

## **Michael Chavis told Boston Red Sox's Alex Cora, others during slump 'stick with me'; 'I was just hoping I was given a chance'**

Christopher Smith

"Stick with me."

That's what Michael Chavis told manager Alex Cora in the midst of his lengthy slump. Chavis batted .205 with a .281 on-base percentage, .328 slugging percentage and 49 strikeouts in 32 games (135 plate appearances) from May 5-June 10.

He never doubted whether he belonged in the big leagues.

"If anything, the bigger concern was I hope I just get the opportunity to get out of it," Chavis said. "Because I knew I was capable of hitting up here. I knew I belonged up here. I was just hoping I was given a chance and it didn't get to the point where I needed to get sent down (to Triple-A Pawtucket) and they needed to bring somebody else up. I was just hoping I'd get the opportunity to get out of it and show that I can overcome it."

Chavis belted a crucial three-run homer in the Red Sox's 8-7 victory over the Blue Jays here at Rogers Centre on Thursday.

Chavis' 391-foot home run to left field turned Boston's 6-4 deficit into a 7-6 lead in the sixth inning.

After two straight swings-and-misses on sliders, Chavis crushed a third straight slider from Blue Jays reliever Tim Mayza into the left field stands. It capped a six-run, sixth-inning rally for the Red Sox. The homer marked Chavis' 15th this season.

Chavis entered Thursday batting .301 with a .333 on-base percentage, .506 slugging percentage, .839 OPS, four homers, five doubles and 14 RBIs in 19 games (87 plate appearances) since June 11.

The 23-year-old rookie, who plays first, second and third, said he's "incredibly thankful" to Cora and the organization for giving him the opportunity to break out of the slump in the majors, not the minors.

"I told him to stick with me," Chavis said. "I said that to a couple guys just because I knew I could do it. Losing some ballgames, there were a lot of situations where I felt like I could have done something to change the course of the game. And that's upsetting. But I think just being open and having that conversation, that dialogue was kind of what helped me."

Who else did he tell "stick with me"? Not just a couple people, actually ...

"Probably everybody, honestly," Chavis said. "Like everybody I talked to because I knew I could do it. It's one of those things where I kept getting kicked in the face and I knew I could do it. It was just one of those things, I was like, 'Just stick with me. I know I'm horrible. It's tough to watch right now.' But I knew I was going to get through it."

Chavis is an extremely positive person with a strong faith in God.

"The first time I slumped was the GCL (Gulf Coast League) as soon as I signed," Chavis said. "It was kind of a learning experience. I think my personality and how I am in general just helps with that. It's a little bit easier to handle the negativity and the slumps and stuff like that. But I think one of the things that really helps is at the end of the day I know what I'm capable of doing. I know I belong. I think that really helps put it into perspective."

Pitchers began to adjust to Chavis. He needed to adjust to them.

"How I'm being attacked, it's kind of the cat-and-mouse game where I'm trying to counteract what he's trying to do and he's trying to counteract what I'm trying to do," Chavis said. "It was hard for me to understand or think about what they were trying to do because I didn't know how I was being perceived. I wasn't sure if I was being treated like the three hole hitter who bangs, or if I was going to be treated as the guy who's hitting eighth who's just a rookie who needs to earn some respect."

Chavis posted a .354/.466/.771/1.236 line with six homers, two doubles and 13 RBIs in his first 14 major league games before pitchers began to adjust.

"I knew I wasn't expecting to hit .380 for my entire career," Chavis said. "I knew at some point there was going to be some failure. I didn't really know how it was going to come. It's not one of those things where every day I'm like, 'Man, I hope it doesn't happen.' But you know it's going to happen at some point. Baseball sucks that way. You can feel on top of the world and then the next day you're just trying to figure out what happened."

Chavis said communication with the coaching staff was very important.

"I'm pretty open about everything, especially about how I'm feeling, what I'm feeling in my swing, what I'm seeing with pitches and everything like that," Chavis said. "So I was just vocal about what I was feeling and they were vocal about what they were seeing. And it kind of just came together."

### **Hernandez hits go-ahead home run in 9th to lead Red Sox over Blue Jays; Chavis, Devers also homer**

Christopher Smith

Both of Marco Hernandez's home runs this season have been game-changers.

Pinch hitting for Sandy Leon, the Red Sox utility player bashed the go-ahead home run in the ninth inning against Blue Jays closer Ken Giles here Thursday. His solo homer led the Red Sox to an 8-7 win over Toronto at Rogers Centre. Boston won the three-game series 2-1.

Hernandez also belted the game-tying homer against Orioles' Mychal Givens in the ninth inning June 16 before the Red Sox won in 10 innings.

The Boston bullpen suffered its 17th blown save. Brandon Workman entered in the eighth with the Red Sox leading 7-6. Danny Jansen doubled with one out, then Eric Sogard delivered an RBI double with two outs to tied it 7-7.

But Hernandez's homer and Workman's scoreless ninth made the blown save harmless.

Chavis' three-run homer caps 6-run sixth

Michael Chavis' 391-foot, 97.3 mph home run to left field turned Boston's 6-4 deficit into a 7-6 lead.

After two straight swings-and-misses on sliders, Chavis crushed another slider from Blue Jays reliever Tim Mayza into the left field stands. It capped a six-run, sixth-inning rally for the Red Sox. It marked Chavis' 15th home run of his rookie season.

J.D. Martinez went 3-for-4 with an RBI and Rafael Devers went 2-for-3 with two walks and solo home run. Devers' blast was his 15th this season as well.

Devers connected for a 360-foot homer in the first inning to put the Red Sox ahead 1-0.

Velazquez struggles

Hector Velazquez started for Boston and lasted only 2 1/3 innings. He gave up three runs, all earned, five hits (one homer) and two walks while striking out one.

Velazquez isn't ideal for the fifth spot in the starting rotation. He has a 2.72 ERA in 57 relief outings (86 innings) compared to a 5.04 ERA in 18 starts (64 1/3 innings). But the Red Sox have few options with Nathan Eovaldi (he'll return as the closer) and Brian Johnson on the injured list.

Jansen with 4 homers vs. Red Sox

Blue Jays catcher Danny Jansen has 11 career home runs. Four of those came in the past three days against the Red Sox. He belted two homers Thursday to help put Toronto ahead 6-1 after four innings.

**Alex Cora: Boston Red Sox starting rotation 'hasn't been the way we planned it. We expect these guys to go deep into games'**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox relievers have blown 17 saves in 34 opportunities. The struggling bullpen has been the major storyline during the first half.

But the starting rotation also hasn't performed.

"It hasn't been the way we planned it," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We expect these guys to go deep into the games. And we haven't been consistent doing that. We can talk about the bullpen and the blown saves and all that. But I think as a whole, as a pitching staff, we haven't been consistent."

The Red Sox rank 18th in the majors in both starter ERA (4.67) and starter innings (447.1). Their starters also rank 16th in WHIP (1.30) and batting average against (.255).

Cora pointed out his team was built around its starting pitching.

"For us to do the things that we want to do, our starters have to give us quality starts and then we go from there," Cora said.

Chris Sale failed to make the All-Star Game for the first time since his rookie year in 2011. He will instead head into the All-Star break with a 7.02 ERA (16 2/3 innings, 13 earned runs) in his final three starts of the first half. He has a 4.04 ERA in 18 starts.

"We expect him to be great," Cora said. "I know it hasn't happened yet. But this guy is one of the elite pitchers in the big leagues. And we know it. We're looking at everything from usage to other stuff."

David Price has the lowest ERA (3.33) among Red Sox starters. Everyone else has an ERA above 4.00. Rick Porcello's ERA stands at 5.07 and Eduardo Rodriguez has a 4.79 mark.

"The stuff is there," Cora said. "It just hasn't happened. We're looking everywhere. We're looking everywhere to fix it. We will fix it and they're going to dominate and they're going to carry us. We know that."

**Andrew Benintendi not in Boston Red Sox lineup to work on swing; 'Hopefully he can see the results right away,' Alex Cora says**

Christopher Smith

Andrew Benintendi is not in the Red Sox lineup for the series finale at Rogers Centre on Thursday.

"Not really an off day," manager Alex Cora explained.

Benintendi arrived at the ballpark early to work with hitting coach Tim Hyers.

“His swing is not where he wants it to be,” Cora said. “I wouldn’t say he’s frustrated. But it’s kind of one of those where I feel like, unplug him today. Show up early, work with Timmy and hopefully he can see the results right away. The numbers, they’re close. But it doesn’t feel that way. And he doesn’t feel great mechanically.”

Benintendi is batting .266 with a .347 on-base percentage, .421 slugging percentage, .768 OPS, seven homers, 20 doubles, three triple and 36 RBIs in 74 games. His on-base percentage is down 19 points from last year, his slugging percentage 44 points and his OPS 62 points

“He doesn’t feel as hitter-ish,” Cora said. “His hands are not firing the way they usually do. If you look at videos from Andrew in college, all the way to last year, it’s the same swing. There’s a lot of swing-and-misses (this year). A lot of chasing pitches up in the zone. Early in the season was breaking balls down and in.”

June was Benintendi’s best month this season. He posted a .312/.354/.473/.827 line in 21 games. But he’s 0-for-12 with four strikeouts in his past three games.

He already has 81 strikeouts in 74 games. He struck out 106 times in 148 games last year.

### **Boston Red Sox activate Heath Hembree, option Trevor Kelley to AAA**

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox activated reliever Heath Hembree from the injured list and optioned righty Trevor Kelley to Pawtucket on Thursday.

Hembree had been on the IL since June 14 with an extensor strain in his right elbow. The righty felt forearm tightness while warming up to come into Boston’s June 13 game against Texas and has been sidelined since.

Hembree has been one of Boston’s best relievers for a good chunk of the season, posting a 0.52 ERA while striking out 25 batters in 17 1/3 innings between since April 25. For the season, he owns a 2.51 ERA and 11.0 K/9 in 31 appearances.

Kelley made one appearance since being called up Monday, allowing three runs on two hits and recording a strikeout in the ninth inning of Tuesday’s win. The righty will return to Pawtucket, where he has posted a 0.96 ERA in 37 2/3 innings this year.

Hembree joins Matt Barnes, Brandon Workman, Ryan Brasier, Marcus Walden, Colten Brewer, Steven Wright and Josh Taylor in Boston’s bullpen. The Red Sox will get another reinforcement right after the All-Star break, when Nathan Eovaldi is activated and begins his stint as a reliever.

## **\* *The New Hampshire Union Leader***

### **Chris Sale's woes causing anxiety**

Mike Shalin

AMONG the myriad problems that has dropped the Red Sox into the world of mediocrity — 11 games out of first place through Wednesday — none is any bigger than what has happened to Chris Sale.

The bullpen, minus a closer, has been a mess. Mookie Betts is 80 or so points behind last year. Andrew Benintendi isn't hitting. The Dustin Pedroia situation left them without a starting second baseman (even though Brock Holt has been great).

Injuries — and the Yankees would laugh at this premise — to Nathan Eovaldi, Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce have been costly.

The list of problems is lengthy.

But in so many ways, Sale being 3-8 with a 4.04 ERA at the All-Star break has to be the most troubling for a team that gave the skinny left-hander \$145 million a year before the money HAD to be spent.

Remember, owner John Henry publicly announced he didn't want another Bruce Hurst on his hands. For those of you too young to remember a Boston world without weekly duck boat parades, the Red Sox in 1988 gambled on not signing Hurst in his option year and it blew up in their faces.

This time, they decided to shell out the dough for Sale, one of the very best pitchers in baseball. Putting the Betts and J.D. Martinez situations to the back burner, they gave the big bucks to Sale.

Then they babied him and the other starters after the long 2018 run. Sale came out of the gate looking like "Garage Sale" and contributed to the team's rotten start. Then he turned it around, and announcer Dave O'Brien was touting him as an All-Star, even with only a few wins. Now, Sale is back looking for answers.

"I'm 3-8. That's absolutely embarrassing," Sale said after yielding three homers in his third straight poor start against the lowly Blue Jays on Wednesday night. "That's not what I need to be and that's not who I need to be for this team. On a team like this, they need me to be better. And I haven't been there for them."

Now, Sale returns from the break — a rest he'll have after starting the last three All-Star Games and making seven straight All-Star teams — trying to reverse his history.

You see, and we've mentioned this here before, Sale came into this season 77-33 through July, but just 26-29 in August through the end of the season.

Said Sale: "I stand before you as frustrated as I've ever been."

Sale threw to Christian Vazquez Wednesday. Not Sandy Leon, his apparent personal catcher. That triggered a Twitter war over the move — and Sale then raised his ERA throwing to Vazquez to 6.68. It is 2.96 with Leon behind the plate.

Now, great pitchers have had their catchers in the past. Greg Maddux had Eddie Perez. Going way back, Steve Carlton had Tim McCarver. It's nothing new, but Alex Cora had to explain the obvious before Wednesday's start: Vazquez is on fire with the bat.

"What he's doing (offensively)," Cora said. "I know the guy on the mound. He's good. And he can do it. Sometimes we don't score a lot of runs for Chris. Hopefully we prevent them and we score."

"He's been one of the best catchers in the big leagues. I think I saw today, he's No. 1 in WAR (among catchers). So that was the reason. Good game-planning, go for it. He's pitched to Christian before. He's been good with him, too. He's swinging the bat too good right now for us to sit him."

Cora was right.

But this is 2019, not 2018.

Vazquez has been worthy of an All-Star nod and is one of the AL players who barely missed out (Rafael Devers should be going, Betts should NOT). This was a no-brainer for the skipper. It didn't work out and

that's on Sale, who, by the way, had gotten hammered in his previous two starts WITH Leon behind the plate.

Sale has made 18 starts, allowing 16 homers in 127 innings. Last year, he was 12-4, yielding 11 homers in 158 innings. In the last five seasons, he has never lost more than 11 games.

Is he hurt? Is he complacent after getting the big money? Is it just a bad year, something that happens to even the best of them? There isn't one answer. All we know is that Chris Sale hits the All-Star break 3-8 with a 4.04 ERA — and has allowed 13 earned runs in 14 2/3 innings over his last three starts.

And he might just be another example/reason why we haven't had a repeat champion in Major League Baseball since 2000.

Up and down

Craig Kimbrel and Joe Kelly, the two relievers allowed to walk away after last season's championship, were both on display for their new teams Wednesday night.

With mixed results.

Kimbrel, who struggled in last year's postseason and then foolishly sought a six-year/\$100 million deal, blew a game for the Cubs in his third time out, taking the loss while blowing the save. He has allowed five earned runs in 2 2/3 innings over three outings.

Kelly, a disaster out of the gate for the Dodgers after signing his big deal, worked a perfect 10th inning — 11 pitches, 10 strikes, one strikeout — and got the win as Cody Bellinger gave the Dodgers their record fifth straight walkoff win with a homer in the bottom of the inning.

Kelly lowered his ERA to 5.76. He improved to 2-1 with a 2.35 ERA in his last 15 outings, 2-0 with a 1.08 in his last seven, coinciding with his bobblehead night at Dodger Stadium.

The Red Sox bullpen, which will apparently have Eovaldi at the back end when the righty returns, got Heath Hembree back for the series finale at Toronto.

Hembree was one of the guys having a good year when he went down.

Special salute

We usually use this space during the week for Red Sox and Boston notes, but we have to give a shoutout to Patrick Corbin. After the death of good friend Tyler Skaggs, Corbin, No. 46 for the Nationals, asked for and was granted permission to wear Skaggs' No. 45 for his Tuesday night start — a day after Skaggs passed away in Texas.

Corbin worked seven innings — even with a 90-minute rain delay in the middle — and left with a 2-1 lead after yielding seven hits, striking out seven and not walking anyone.

“Yeah, it's been hard,” Corbin said. “I've just been thinking of Tyler, his wife Carli, his family. You can't believe he's gone.”

Finally, apologies for an omission (of sorts) in Wednesday's column. Letting you know in advance of the piece I could be forgetting a death of a player, a reader pointed out I overlooked Donnie Moore, who shot his wife and then killed himself, ending the depression that followed what happened to him against the Red Sox in the '86 ALCS. And, yes, he was another member of the Angels to meet a tragic end.

But his career was over — the names I brought up were active when they died.

**\* *The Pawtucket Times***

## **PawSox arms could potentially solve Boston bullpen issues**

Brendan McGair

If you take John Henry's comments to heart – the ones the Red Sox owner made earlier this week to WEEL.com concerning the desire to not blow out the budget – it sure sounds like Boston is planning to stay pat at the July 31 trade deadline, which is now t-minus four weeks and counting.

Instead of crying poverty for a club that owns the game's highest payroll – anyone up to organizing a bake sale? How about a car wash? – let's attempt to read into Henry's declaration and apply it to the PawSox in reference to the internal maneuvering that's taken place over the past few days.

Specifically, let's dive into the decision to call up submarine-throwing Trevor Kelley and move promising rookie left-hander Darwinzon Hernandez to the bullpen.

On Kelley, why wouldn't the Red Sox take a flyer on a pitcher who's posted a sub-1.00 ERA at the Triple-A level? The International League All-Star put himself on the map and was richly rewarded.

Plus, let's also take into account that there are still plenty of shopping days left before July 31. Better for Dave Dombrowski to see if Kelley can emerge as this year's answer to Ryan Brasier – the Sox sure like unearth those hidden gems, particularly of the bullpen variety – before the Red Sox president of baseball operations goes to Henry with his hands in the begging position.

Granted, Kelley did not help his cause in his Red Sox debut in Toronto on Monday night, allowing three runs in the ninth inning. Maybe Boston will give the Barrington native another chance or he'll be deemed the corresponding move when Heath Hembree is activated from the injured list.

Regardless, Kelley figures to get another crack with the parent club.

Sizing up Hernandez, he could prove to be the hard-throwing solution from the left side that Boston's bullpen could desperately use. The 22-year-old has mainly been a starter throughout his pro career and still holds the potential to end up as a rotation mainstay – providing he learns some control.

In terms of this year's playoff push and Henry's publicized desire to not absorb more salary that in turn makes the luxury tax threshold next to impossible for the Red Sox to avoid, taking a flyer on Kelley and making Hernandez a reliever are the type of cost-effective moves that should keep the pitchers in the PawSox clubhouse on their toes.

Then again, just about every Pawtucket pitcher has been fair game since the start of the season. When Kelley was called up, he became the ninth different PawSox pitcher to be promoted to Boston this season.

“Overall, I think this year more than anything is showing that the Red Sox aren't afraid to ask for arms,” said PawSox pitching coach Kevin Walker. “We've had a lot of guys go up there and it's been great.

“A lot of these guys see the big picture. They watch Red Sox games when we're not playing and they keep an eye on what's going on. They all know. If you're performing well at a certain time and you're on the radar ... I think that's the carrot for all these guys. You don't want to get stagnant down here,” Walker added. “At any time, the Red Sox could have an extra-inning game, or an injury could happen, and they're on the radar to get called up. That carrot of knowing you're one phone call away keeps these guys focused.”

Consistency in the bullpen has been a thorn in Boston's side for much of the season. If there is a silver lining to all the late-game meltdowns and blown saves, it's that the opportunity for Pawtucket pitchers to go up and see if they can right the ship has been extended to so many.

We hear all the time that Pawtucket's main job is to have replacement players ready for Boston. We've also read that Henry is hesitant to add players with hefty price tags attached to their name.

If you're a PawSox pitcher, you can't help but smile. More than any time in recent history, the dependency on the Triple-A pitching pool has never been greater.

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

### **Late fireworks give Sox the win on the 4th**

Keegan Matheson

It took a couple of hours for the offense to wake up on Thursday night in Toronto, but a massive sixth inning and a clutch pinch-hit home run by Marco Hernandez propelled the Red Sox to an 8-7 win at Rogers Centre.

Boston entered the sixth inning trailing, 6-1, after a short outing from starter Hector Velázquez. The bats didn't seem to have much momentum, but they finally started to string some hits together against Thomas Pannone, who followed an opener in the first inning. A Mookie Betts walk and three straight singles got the ball rolling, but it was Michael Chavis who delivered the big blow.

Chavis dug in after the Red Sox had pulled within two and quickly found himself in a 2-2 count. Lefty Tim Mayza tried to pound him inside with a slider, but it caught the edge of the plate, and Chavis turned on the pitch to launch it 391 feet to left field for a go-ahead three-run shot.

"I fell behind 2-0 and I definitely overswung on the 2-0 pitch," Chavis said. "It was a ball. Then the 2-1, a slider. I just swung over it and I told myself, 'With a man on third base, a single scores him, and you're down by one.'"

Searching for a single, he found something better.

The home run, Chavis' 15th of the season, came one day after he ripped two doubles against the Blue Jays and showed just how potent this offense can be at any moment, whether it's the top half of the order (with three American League All-Stars) or the No. 8 hitter.

"We can go out there and put up five or six at any time," Chavis said. "We put up six tonight in that sixth inning. The vibe in the dugout is really comfortable in those times. You know we're down, and it's really easy just to give up or be lackadaisical and let the game go on, but if you were in our dugout, by the vibe and how guys are talking, we never thought we were out of it."

After the Blue Jays fought back to tie the score at 7, manager Alex Cora gave Hernandez the nod in place of Sandy Leon against closer Ken Giles and it worked to perfection, as Hernandez connected on a Giles fastball that snuck over the wall in left. It only traveled 348 feet, but Hernandez hit it to the right spot to give his team the win.

"His swing is so simple," Cora said. "He stays on pitches. When he's driving the ball the other way, it's a good sign. He did it in Baltimore, and he did it at home. That's a good pitch right there from Kenny and he put a good swing on it. He's a strong kid, big and strong."

These big moments are becoming expected out of Hernandez, who doubled in his other two pinch-hit appearances this season.

"He's special. Every time we're down, we should be like, 'Marco, go hit,'" Chavis said with a laugh.

But there will still be plenty of focus on the reason the Red Sox found themselves needing all the heroics, starting with the 2 1/3 innings they got from Velazquez.

The right-hander allowed three runs on five hits with two walks and just one strikeout, which left a heavy load for the bullpen to carry. Boston is still searching for a fifth starter to slot in more permanently behind Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello and Eduardo Rodriguez, and Velazquez didn't provide any answers with Thursday's showing.

### **Hembree returns to Boston's bullpen**

Keegan Matheson

The Red Sox activated reliever Heath Hembree from the 10-day injured list prior to Thursday's series finale at Rogers Centre in Toronto, bringing one of their hottest bullpen arms back into the fold.

Prior to hitting the IL, Hembree was riding a streak in which 17 of his 18 appearances were scoreless. His 2.51 ERA will be welcomed back into Boston's bullpen with open arms, as the team has turned to creative options, including Nathan Eovaldi returning in a relief role, as they look to spark a stretch run.

"It's important for us. He was throwing the ball well," manager Alex Cora said. "Obviously, he hasn't pitched in a while, but he's a guy who can get righties, lefties out, get people to make weak contact. He attacks guys the right way, so it's great to have him back."

Hembree last pitched for the Red Sox on June 10 and made one relief appearance, on July 2, for Triple-A Pawtucket, striking out two over one clean inning.

One noticeable change that Hembree has made in 2019 is his pitch mix. He's thrown his four-seam fastball 71.3 percent of the time, according to Statcast, which is a jump from 55.1 percent in 2018. Hitters have struggled with that pitch, posting just a .122 batting average against it.

Break for Benintendi

Andrew Benintendi was held out of the lineup on Thursday after going 0-for-12 over his last three games.

Benintendi had multiple hits in five of eight games leading into this mini-skid, so this could be more of a preventative measure. The left fielder, who turns 25 on Saturday, got to the ballpark early on Thursday to put in some extra cage work in hopes of getting back in a groove.

"The numbers, they're close, but it doesn't feel that way," Cora said. "He doesn't feel great mechanically, so he just worked on a few things today in the cage when he was here early and, hopefully it works out."

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Comeback win can't hide problems that remain for the Red Sox**

Sean McAdam

Given the way their season has gone and where they are in the standings, the Red Sox are in no position to throw any wins back. They'll take whatever victories come their way, regardless of how ugly, or how poor the opposition.

And make no mistake, their 8-7 win over the Toronto Blue Jays at Rogers Centre Thursday night was hardly a masterpiece.

It featured a start from Hector Velazquez that lasted just 2.1 innings. And though it ultimately turned out OK, it also included the team's 18th blown save of the season.

Inadequate starting pitching depth and poor relief pitching. If you had to highlight the biggest factors that have relegated the Sox to third place in the division, and currently — as they like to say in the NHL — outside the playoff structure, those would be the top two.

Since the beginning, both elements have been issues for the Sox since the first week of the season.

Miraculously, the Sox are 8-8 in games started by anyone other than the Big 5 (Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, Eduardo Rodriguez and Nathan Eovaldi) — and never mind the fact that that quintet hasn't come close to pitching to their own capabilities. That's a discussion for another day.

But Hector Velazquez, Ryan Smith, Ryan Weber, Darwinzon Hernandez and Brian Johnson have been, almost without exception, horrid. The only reason the Sox have won half of those games is the same reason they won Thursday — they have the ability to beat up the other team's poor starting pitching.

Velazquez has made half of those 16 starts and sports a 6.95 ERA. Only once — a five-inning effort against Seattle back in May in which he allowed just two runs — has he pitched anywhere near competently.

Most of the others have looked a lot like the one he turned in Thursday night, typified by the twin problems of not shutting down the opposition (three runs on five hits and two walks) while also failing to go anywhere near the middle of the game.

Thus, the Sox were forced to use five relievers to cover the 20 outs that Velazquez didn't. That sort of bullpen workload can impact a team for several days to come.

The Sox are fortunate that just three more games remain before the All-Star break, when their relievers can get some time off. It helps, too, that none of the high-leverage options had pitched at all in the previous three days.

But the Sox won't always be so fortunate when it comes to timing and the schedule.

And even in victory, the bullpen didn't inspire much confidence. Yes, Ryan Brasier turned in a 1-2-3 inning and rookie lefty Josh Taylor continues to show promise, giving the Sox a scoreless inning.

But Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman — two of the team's three most important late-inning options — combined to walk three, give up a run, two hits and throw two wild pitches. Barnes walked the second hitter he faced, then wild pitched him to second and then to third before digging out of his own mess with a strikeout of Rowdy Tellez in the seventh.

Workman, meanwhile, gave up two doubles in the span of three at-bats, and with them, the one-run lead they had been entrusted to protect in the eighth. That resulted in the Boston bullpen's 18th blown save of the season.

With Hembree available — activated off the IL earlier in the day — Alex Cora sent Workman out for a second inning of work after the Sox had reclaimed the lead in the top of the ninth. Workman issued back-to-back walks with one out, putting the tying run in scoring position and the winning run on first before getting out of jam with a flyout and a weak groundout.

So the Sox got a win on a night when their starter got just seven outs and their two best relievers combined to retire just nine of the 14 hitters they faced over the final three innings.

That might work against the Blue Jays. But if the Red Sox have any designs on a second-half run, it's a safe bet that such tightrope walking will not always have such a happy ending against more formidable opponents.

## **BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 8, Blue Jays 7 – Sox hold off Jays in a wild one**

Sean McAdam

Hernandez plays the hero: When Alex Cora sent Marco Hernandez to the plate in the ninth inning, with the bases empty and one out in a tie game, it seemed an act of desperation. In having Hernandez hit for catcher Sandy Leon, the Sox were forfeiting their DH spot, since Christian Vazquez, who served as the DH, would have to switch to behind the plate in the bottom of the ninth — and beyond if the game went extra innings. But a few pitches later, the move looked like a stroke of genius when Hernandez swung at a fastball low and away from Toronto closer Ken Giles and drove it just over the fence in left, giving the Red Sox a one-run lead that went on to protect. For Hernandez, it was his third pinch-hit appearance this season — in those three at-bats, he has two doubles and a homer. And Thursday night marked his second ninth-inning homer in a big spot for the Sox. Last month, he hit a game-tying homer in the top of the ninth to tie a game in Baltimore and force extra innings. The Sox went on to win that one, too. “I’m not playing very much right now,” said Hernandez, “but I try to stay positive and try to stay ready the whole game.”

Spot starter problems continue: Hector Velazquez failed again filling a spot in the rotation, lasting just 2.1 innings while allowing three runs on five hits and two walks. In eight starts this season, Velazquez has a bloated 6.95 ERA and has pitched into the fourth inning only twice in those eight outings. No one is expecting Velazquez to contend for the Cy Young as a depth starter, but far more often than not, he’s not giving the Red Sox a chance to win the games he starts. That the Sox are somehow 5-3 in those eight outings would seem impossible and is a testament to their offense — which managed eight runs Thursday night. It remains an open question as to whether Velazquez should be on the big league staff at all; what seems not up for debate is the fact that he should certainly not be given any more chance to start.

Sox have come through in a pinch: The pinch-hit homer by Hernandez continued a season that has seen the Sox get big contributions off the bench in such situations. The pinch-hit was the 20th for the Sox this season in 46 at-bats, good for a .435 average. Nine of those 20 pinch-hits have gone for extra bases. Meanwhile, Sox pinch-hitters have been adept at putting the ball in play, striking out in only five of those 54 plate appearances. Some of it can be attributed to a relatively small sample size; some can, frankly, be considered somewhat lucky. But Cora deserved some credit there in picking the right spot and sending up the right hitter to come through. And credit to Hernandez, who isn’t some veteran player accustomed to coming off the bench in a big spot.

### TURNING POINT

Given the back-and-forth nature of this one, you could focus on the last out — a chopper off the bat of Vladimir Guerrero Jr., to the left of the mound, which was fielded expertly by Rafael Devers, who made a strong, quick throw to first to nab Guerrero by a step and finish off the ballgame.

### TWO UP

J.D. Martinez: Shifted to left field for the night, Martinez smacked singles in each of his first three plate appearances before finally being retired on his fourth trip.

Rafael Devers: The third baseman continued to wield the hottest bat on the team, homering in the first, singling in the sixth and walking two other times.

### ONE DOWN

Sandy Leon: Leon, returning to the starting lineup for the first time since last Wednesday, showed some rust and went 0-for-3 at the plate.

### QUOTE OF NOTE

“It’s just luck. Tim (Hyers) and Andy (Barkett) do an outstanding job keeping those guys ready, looking for matchups. At the end, (the hitters) are the ones that produce.” Alex Cora on the team’s success pinch-hitting.

#### STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The pinch-hit homer from Hernandez was the fourth for the team this season.

Devers extended his hitting streak to eight games.

Michael Chavis needed 66 games to hit his first 15 homers, the quickest pace for a Red Sox player since Sam Horn did it in 60 games.

The Sox improved to 19-6 at Rogers Centre since the start of 2017.

#### UP NEXT

The Red Sox move on to Detroit for their final series of the first half. LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (8-4, 4.79) vs. TBA at 7:10 p.m.

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

#### **The Red Sox need starting pitching help, but what options are there on the trade market?**

Jen McCaffrey

Until last weekend, the prevailing notion was Nathan Eovaldi’s return to the Red Sox rotation would solidify a staff that’s been forced to find replacements for his slot since mid-April.

But the Red Sox pulled an about-face on Tuesday when they said bringing back Eovaldi sooner as a reliever would be more beneficial to the team. He could return as soon as the first series after the All-Star break, which happens to be a World Series rematch against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Fenway.

But while the bullpen has struggled for much of the season, plugging one hole there leaves another in the rotation exposed. And that was more evident than ever on Thursday night.

Hector Velazquez lasted just 2 1/3 innings, allowing three runs on five hits before the Red Sox battled back from a 6-1 deficit to beat the Blue Jays 8-7.

When asked prior to Thursday’s start whether Velazquez would remain in the fifth starter role, manager Alex Cora did not offer a great vote of confidence.

“I think that decision, we’ll make it over the break, see where we’re going to go,” he said. “We do feel Hector is throwing the ball well, he did (last month) in Minnesota, and his last one, too, his velocity is up. And he’s done it before. We’ll talk about it in the upcoming days.”

That wasn’t the case on Thursday night, and the fifth starter role has offered a potpourri of performances.

Since June 1, the Red Sox have used four different pitchers to make five starts in that slot: Brian Johnson (twice), Darwinson Hernandez, Ryan Weber and Velazquez. Josh Smith also started one game when a doubleheader necessitated an extra starter.

“We can go different routes — openers, or somebody else,” Cora added about the fifth starter. “We’ll sit down, see where the schedule takes us and make decisions based on that.”

Johnson had allowed one run in each of his two June starts before being sidelined with what was reported by the Boston Globe as an intestinal issue.

But even when Johnson returns, it begs the question: If the Red Sox are moving Eovaldi to the bullpen for the remainder of the season, should they shift their focus ahead of the trade deadline toward reinforcing the rotation?

The thought process is two-fold. Clearly, there's an immediate need for a more reliable fifth starter. But beyond that, there's likely to be a future need as well. President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski did not rule out the possibility that Eovaldi could return to the rotation later this season but made clear the expectation that Eovaldi will be a part of the rotation in 2020.

"Right now we're looking at him as part of our bullpen for the rest of the year," Dombrowski said.

With Eovaldi, Chris Sale, David Price and Eduardo Rodriguez under contract for the next several seasons, the Red Sox rotation could have a one rotation spot open entering 2020, if the club does not re-sign impending free agent Rick Porcello.

After the win on Thursday night, the Red Sox were 2 1/2 games back in the wild-card race.

Perhaps the Red Sox look for a short-term option to fill the void. A rental starter, who one becomes a free agent this winter, would undoubtedly cost less prospect-wise for the Red Sox who already feature a thin farm system.

On the rental side, Cincinnati Reds right-hander Tanner Roark could be an option. The Reds acquired the 32-year-old from the Nationals last winter in exchange for reliever Tanner Rainey. Roark is on a one-year, \$10 million deal and can hit free agency this winter. While the Reds are last in the National League Central, they're just 3 1/2 games out of first place in the uber-competitive division. In other words, they're still in it and don't necessarily need to trade Roark unless they get an offer too enticing to turn down.

In 17 starts, Roark has posted a 3.51 ERA and a career-best 9.0 K/9.

The Mets will likely be finding a suitor for soon-to-be free agent Zack Wheeler this summer, but the asking price might be too high for Boston. The 29-year-old has posted a 4.42 ERA through 18 starts along with a 9.7 K/9. The Athletic's Mets beat writer, Tim Britton, suggested the Red Sox as a home for Wheeler, but offered an asking price of surging outfield prospect Jarren Duran and right-hander Denyi Reyes.

If the Red Sox want to bolster the rotation for the future, they might look toward Detroit left-hander Matthew Boyd. The 28-year-old doesn't hit free agency until 2022 but is having a career-best year with a 3.72 ERA and 11.4 K/9 through 17 starts. He has cooled off a bit in the month of June after posting a 2.85 ERA through the first two months of the season.

The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal noted that the Red Sox had scouts at Boyd's start last week.

Another interesting note on Boyd is he was part of the prospect haul Detroit received from Toronto in 2015 in exchange for David Price. That was one of the final moves Dombrowski made as general manager of the Tigers before leaving for his current job with the Red Sox. Dombrowski, of course, signed Price as a free agent that winter.

Rosenthal also mentioned that the Boyd start Red Sox scouts attended was against the Texas Rangers and Mike Minor. The lefty has been having a terrific season with a 2.54 ERA through 18 starts and doesn't become a free agent until after the 2020 season.

Meanwhile, several teams out of contention will have starters on the market. Colorado's Jon Gray doesn't hit free agency until after 2021 and has posted a 3.84 ERA in 18 games, 17 starts, with a 9.7 K/9.

"I know there are some clubs that are out of it, but there are also some clubs in the wild-card chase, so they're not necessarily eager to make moves," Dombrowski said. "I will say, we still have to look at who we'll be willing to give up and what we'll be willing to do, too, over the time period."

## **\* *The Toronto Sun***

Jansen provides July 4 fireworks, but Jays fall short against Red Sox

Lance Hornby

You can kick around the Blue Jays as most teams have this year, but you won't shake Danny Jansen.

The catcher whom manager Charlie Montoyo says is the first one to pick up teammates after a loss is doing his best work in a midsummer stretch, hitting at a .424 clip in the past nine games, with six homers and three doubles.

A reward, Montoyo figures, for all the positives Jansen has tried to spread through the clubhouse as Toronto sits 22 games below .500.

"I have so much respect for this kid," Montoyo said. "Because the whole time (when) he's struggling, we win a game, he's the happiest guy, giving high fives and stuff.

"Not everybody's like that. In baseball, there is selfish people — 'great, we win, but I'm just hitting .180, whatever' — They're not happy. But he keeps working on his defence and game planning."

Jansen hit a couple of more homers Thursday night in an 8-7 loss to the Boston Red Sox, moving to 34 plate appearances without a strikeout, the longest streak in the majors.

His eighth-inning double set up the tying run before pinch hitter Marco Hernandez went deep off closer Ken Giles in the ninth. This time it was the rest of the Jays assuring Jansen post-game he had done just about everything possible to earn what would have been the first back-to-back home series wins for Toronto this season.

"It's just how I was built," said Jansen, who comes from the same Elmhurst, Ill., the same zip code as Maple Leafs goaltender Garret Sparks. "I take a lot of pride in that and don't care if I go 0-for-4 with four Ks. If we win it doesn't matter.

"Contributing is a lot better, but unfortunately we didn't get one tonight."

He became the fourth catcher in team history to hit homers in three straight games — impressive company joining Ernie Whitt, Russell Martin and J.P. Arencibia. All of Jansen's swats travelled 400 feet or more.

"I can't sit here and tell you he was going to hit bombs like that," said Montoyo, who a couple of weeks ago was defending Jansen's average sub-.200 average, pointing out how hard he was making contact.

"He's locked in right now, he's fun to watch. Even the outs he makes, he's just missing."

Jansen said in the recent series at Boston he began examining why he was so late with his swing and changed mentality with his stance.

"Reacting instead of waiting to see what was coming," he said of the switch. "I just feel like I'm ready to fire at any time."

Danny Jansen #9 of the Toronto Blue Jays hits his second home run of the game in the fourth inning during a MLB game against the Boston Red Sox at Rogers Centre on July 4, 2019 in Toronto. (Photo by Vaughn Ridley/Getty Images)

It began as a July 4 fireworks show for the Jays on Thursday and ended with a Boston tee-off party. The two Jansen pokes and another by Freddy Galvis helped give the Jays a 6-1 lead after five innings, but they caught the fury of the Sox bats in the sixth. The bullpen, which had featured in five victories in the past seven outings at Rogers Centre, could not keep pace with the torrid offence, the second-most home runs in the league in their own park this year, behind only the Yankees, while reaching five-plus runs in an eight-game streak.

Montoyo tried to duplicate Wednesday's success on the mound, when he surprised the Sox with reliever David Phelps pitching the first inning, a juggling act brought on by ace Marcus Stroman's mystery pectoral injury. That gave the green Jacob Waguespack a break from facing the top of the potent Boston order right away. But though Phelps had made quick work of the Sox, Thursday didn't go as smoothly. Rafael Devers blasted a solo homer off opener Derek Law and, after another single, scheduled starter Thomas Pannone came on.

Pannone won a lefty-lefty match-up with .300-hitter Brock Holt and was able to hold the fort until the sixth. The opener strategy has taken some getting used to for Jansen, who also takes pride in his plotting defence.

"You prepare the opener (Phelps and Law) for the first four guys pretty much and then talk to the guy coming in. The opener has four guys max and he's going to go with everything he has, you're not trying to pitch around guys, you go right after them. It's a little different, but I'm used to it."

Brandon Drury had a busy night at third base —, filling in for the resting Vladimir Guerrero Jr. — starting the evening singling and doubling in the No. 9 spot. Guerrero came in as a pinch hitter with two gone in the ninth after Cavan Biggio and Justin Smoak walked and almost beat out an infield chopper to short that would've put Jansen at the plate again.

Pannone's sixth-inning roll through the top of the Boston order didn't go well with a string of singles cashing two runs and requiring lefty Tim Mayza to make his staff-leading 40th appearance. Mayza walked the bases loaded and, though Galvis cut off a sharp ball by Jackie Bradley Jr. to hold Boston to one run, Michael Chavis punched a 2-2 delivery to give the Sox the 7-6 lead.

Toronto didn't threaten much after the Galvis homer, with a Mookie Betts leaping catch at the fence robbing lead-off man Eric Sogard of extra bases in the Jays half of the sixth. Biggio got around to third base in the seventh, but Tellez was fanned by Matt Barnes.

Not to be out-done by Mookie, Lourdes Gurriel Jr. showed he's just as handy with his glove as he is at the plate, making a diving catch on Betts.

Toronto completes a pre-all-star break homestand this weekend against the Baltimore Orioles. Boston had dropped four of its past five, but since 2014 have not lost in six games on American Independence Day.

## **\* *Associated Press***

Hernandez hits tiebreaking HR, Red Sox beat Jays 8-7

The first pinch-hit home run of Marco Hernandez's career gave the Boston Red Sox another winning getaway day.

Hernandez hit a tiebreaking home run in the ninth inning and Boston beat the Toronto Blue Jays 8-7 on Thursday night. The Red Sox have won 13 times in 16 games when they're on the move afterward.

Batting for Sandy Leon, Hernandez connected off Blue Jays closer Ken Giles (1-2), his second homer of the season.

"I tried to look for something that I could handle, something that I could put in play," Hernandez said. "I put a good swing on it and everybody saw the results."

The left-handed hitting Hernandez lined a 1-0 pitch over the wall in left and into the Toronto bullpen.

"When he's driving the ball the other way, it's a good sign," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Giles was pitching for the third straight game, the first time he's done that this year. Giles missed 10 games last month because of a sore elbow.

"He just gave up a home run," Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo said. "Other than that, he was good."

Michael Chavis hit a three-run homer and Rafael Devers added a solo shot as the Red Sox extended their streak of games with at least one home run to eight. Boston won its sixth straight on the Fourth of July.

J.D. Martinez had three hits and Devers reached base four times as the Red Sox took two of three from the Blue Jays and improved to 5-2 north of the border this season.

"We found a way to win and we won two out of three," Cora said. "That's the most important thing, regardless of how we did it."

Brandon Workman (8-1) pitched the final two innings for the the win despite giving up the tying run in the eighth.

Danny Jansen homered twice for the Blue Jays, the first multihomer game of his career, and Freddy Galvis added a two-run shot. Even so, Toronto failed to win consecutive home series for the first time this season.

The Blue Jays led 6-1 through four innings but Boston reclaimed the lead with a six-run sixth.

"We never felt like we were out of it," Chavis said

Blue Jays left-hander Thomas Pannone was replaced after four straight Red Sox batters reached to begin the inning. Left-hander Tim Mayza came on and retired pinch-hitter Eduardo Nunez, but Christian Vazquez walked and Jackie Bradley Jr. drove in a run with a fielder's choice. Chavis followed with a go-ahead drive to left, his 15th.

"The ball was flying today," Cora said. "That was London-esque."

Boston allowed 29 runs over two games against the Yankees in London last weekend, while scoring 17 of its own.

Toronto tied it on Eric Sogard's two-out RBI double off Workman in the eighth, but Giles couldn't keep it tied in the ninth.

For the second straight game, the Blue Jays needed to promote a pitcher from Triple-A to fill a vacant starter's spot. Right-hander Marcus Stroman, who left Saturday's against Kansas City after four innings because of a strained left pectoral muscle, was scratched Thursday.

Pannone was promoted and came on in relief of opener Derek Law, who allowed one run and two hits in two-thirds of an inning. Pannone allowed four runs and four hits in 4 1/3 innings.

Devers homered off Law in the first, his third of the series and 15th of the season, but Rowdy Tellez answered with a two-run single in the bottom half.

Jansen hit a leadoff homer in the third, then went deep again to begin the fourth. He has homered in three straight games and has six homers in his past seven. The home runs were his seventh and eighth.

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: Boston activated RHP Heath Hembree (right elbow) off the injured list and optioned RHP Trevor Kelley to Triple-A Pawtucket.

Blue Jays: Manager Charlie Montoyo said Stroman remains day to day, but did not say whether the first-time All-Star will pitch again before the break. ... OF Teoscar Hernandez returned to the lineup after missing the previous two games because of a sore right shoulder. ... OF Dalton Pompey (concussion) started in center field and went 2 for 3 with an RBI for the Gulf Coast League Blue Jays on Thursday, his first rehab game. Pompey was injured during spring training when he bumped his head on a bat wedged into his locker.

## LONG BALLS

All eight of Jansen's home runs this season have travelled 400 feet or more.

## RUN WITH IT

Toronto has scored six or more runs in eight straight games, the second-longest streak in team history. The Blue Jays did it in 11 consecutive games in April, 2000.

## ROSTER REPORT

Blue Jays: RHP Jacob Waguespack, who earned his first career win Wednesday, was optioned to Triple-A to make room for Pannone.

## UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (8-4, 4.79) starts the opener of a three-game series at Detroit. LHP Gregory Soto (0-2, 8.44) is expected to start for the Tigers.

Blue Jays: RHP Aaron Sanchez (3-11, 6.31) seeks to end a streak of 10 straight losing decisions as the Blue Jays begin a three-game series against Baltimore. RHP Dylan Bundy (3-10, 4.91) starts for the Orioles.