

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, April 28, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox rally spoiled by Indians' walk-off HR in ninth

Julian McWilliams

Joy eluded the Red Sox once more. Their celebratory moment in the ninth quickly turned to gloom.

Such has been the season, right?

What looked like a Red Sox comeback win ended in a walkoff defeat Monday night.

Xander Bogaerts had tied the game, 5-5, on a two-out RBI double to right field off Indians closer Brad Hand in the ninth.

But in the bottom half, Carlos Santana led off by crushing a homer to left-center off Marcus Walden. Just like that, the Red Sox lost once more, 6-5. The Indians are having the summer the Red Sox have been waiting on from their club. The win placed the Indians in sole possession of first in the American League Central for the first time since April 20.

The Sox, meanwhile, have dropped to 17½ games behind the Yankees and eight games out of the second wild-card spot.

"It's tough, it's very tough," manager Alex Cora said. "We don't like losing."

Two swings here or there has been part of the tale that has summed up this season. It played out again throughout this one. The pitch by Walden was supposed to be a slider down and in, yet it hung on the outside part of the plate, enough for Santana to take it where it was pitched. Enough to make a postseason berth look more like a distant illusion for the Red Sox.

"I was kind of hoping it would hit the top of the wall the same way [Bogaerts's] did," Walden said, referring to Bogaerts's double. "That's a tough one. It was a big game for us to win."

Red Sox starter Eduardo Rodriguez issued a two-out walk to Santana in the first and the next hitter, Franmil Reyes, made Rodriguez and the Sox pay with a two-run homer. Like Walden, Rodriguez missed his spot. He wanted to get the ball up more. However, it caught the top-half of the strike zone and then the Reyes' barrel.

The Sox got one back in the second inning. J.D. Martinez singled off Indians starter Zach Plesac and Andrew Benintendi then doubled off the left-field wall, allowing Martinez to score all the way from first.

Yet after retiring Cleveland's Oscar Mercado on a groundout in the third, Rodriguez surrendered back-to-back singles, which set the stage for a three-run homer by Jose Ramirez. On a 2-2 count, Rodriguez tried to fool Ramirez on a curveball. He wanted to bounce it. But he left it up enough for Ramirez to park it in the left-field stands.

"As a pitcher if you miss, you're going to pay for it," Rodriguez said. "The last couple of games have been that way for the starters."

The Sox didn't go away, though. Martinez homered in the fourth. Later on, Mitch Moreland beat the shift with a single to left-center field. A wild pitch put Moreland at second, and Brock Holt doubled to score Moreland.

Rodriguez recovered from his early struggles, working three straight scoreless innings. The sixth inning was a big one for Rodriguez.

Jackie Bradley Jr. slipped in center on a routine fly ball, which put Tyler Naquin, at first. But Rodriguez got Francisco Lindor to line out and struck out Mercado. Santana's single up the middle put runners on first and second. After a brief mound visit by Red Sox pitching coach Dana LeVangie, Rodriguez struck out Reyes to end the frame and his night.

In the seventh, Bradley belted his 13th homer of the season, this one coming off Tyler Clippard, to make it a 5-4 game.

Darwinzon Hernandez took over for Rodriguez in the seventh and immediately allowed a Ramirez double. Roberto Perez's sacrifice advanced Ramirez to third. But Hernandez struck out Jason Kipnis on a 97-mile-per-hour heater and a groundout by Greg Allen to third baseman Rafael Devers end the inning. The Sox knocked on the door in the eighth but left runners on second and third.

In the ninth, the magic that has escaped the Red Sox' grip finally appeared again. Bogaerts' double that scored Mookie Betts to tie it off Hand made it seem this night would swing in the Red Sox' favor. It was short-lived, however. The comeback was just a tease. The intent didn't turn to execution for the Red Sox in this one.

"There's two ways we could do it," Martinez said. "We can hang our heads down and feel sorry for ourselves or we can just keep going out there every day."

The magic quickly evaporated as the Indians walked off with the joy the Red Sox have been searching for all season.

"It's tough, man," a dejected Bogaerts said. "I really don't know what to say."

Red Sox short-armed from start to ghastly finish

Peter Abraham

The calendar says the season has seven weeks remaining. But it's over for the Red Sox after Monday night's 6-5 loss to the Cleveland Indians. The only realistic goal remaining is to finish with a winning record, and even that seems unlikely given the state of the pitching staff.

It's not because Carlos Santana lined a hanging slider just over the wall in left center to give the Indians a walk-off victory. It's because of what led the Sox to that point.

With their bullpen depleted after a 10-inning loss on Sunday, manager Alex Cora was determined only to use Brandon Workman to protect a lead. So even though Workman was warming up when the Sox tied the game with two outs in the top of the ninth on Xander Bogaerts's RBI double, Marcus Walden stayed in for an extra inning.

Walden has pitched very well this season, but the Sox needed their best against the middle of Cleveland's lineup. As Workman watched from the bullpen, Walden left a slider up and Santana hit it 410 feet.

It's why the Indians have won nine of 11, and the Sox have lost three straight and 12 of 15.

"It cost us the game there. It's a decision that, it's a hard one because we were very limited," Cora said.

It has been that way since the season started. The decision not to replace Joe Kelly and Craig Kimbrel left the Sox with a bullpen that is essentially Workman, Walden, Matt Barnes, and a constant shuffle of borderline big leaguers.

It didn't work in April and it still doesn't work in August. It was never going to work. The Sox are 3-9 since the trade deadline passed without Dave Dombrowski at least trying to fix the bullpen. That's not a coincidence.

Even the little, potentially helpful moves are somehow too difficult.

The Sox needed an extra relief pitcher on Monday, but the four roster moves they made earlier in the day didn't produce one. They replaced injured Michael Chavis with infielder Marco Hernandez, and recalled rookie righthander Travis Lakins to replace Ryan Weber.

Ryan Brasier, who has pitched well since being demoted to Pawtucket last month, remained there.

A team with an unreliable rotation dropped its extra relief pitcher on Sunday to promote infielder Chris Owings from Triple A Pawtucket. Owings, who was released by Kansas City in June, promptly went 0 for 5 and struck out three times.

The Sox then used six relievers in the extra-inning loss against the Angels after Andrew Cashner started and only recorded five outs. Red Sox starters have an 8.10 earned-run average in the last 16 games and the decision was made to drop a reliever.

Cora remained relentlessly positive after his team's fifth walk-off loss of the season.

"I do feel this is one of the best games we've played in a while as far as being locked-in and grinding at-bats," he said. "[The Indians are] a good baseball [team] as everybody knows and we were in a hole and we kept fighting, fighting and fighting. We find a way to tie the game but then that happened.

"It really sucks, but we did a lot of good things today that we haven't done in a while."

Except beat a team with a winning record. They haven't done that since July 27.

One obvious move was made before the game when Cashner was demoted to the bullpen. It would have made more sense to release Cashner, who was non-competitive on Sunday.

But the Sox have such little pitching depth that they elected to keep him around.

The Sox also decided to give Rick Porcello another shot and start him against the Orioles on Friday at Fenway Park.

Chris Sale starts Tuesday night. The Sox haven't named a starter for Wednesday.

Can the Sox bounce back from this latest kick in the teeth?

"We're about to find out," Cora said. "Obviously you saw their faces, you saw their reactions. It's not easy. You fight, fight, fight, and one swing it's over."

The Red Sox have a day off on Thursday. If the Indians sweep, pitching coach Dana LeVangie could be the fall guy.

Pitching coaches are a convenient scapegoat when teams go bad. Juan Nieves was the pitching coach of the 2013 World Series champion Red Sox, then lost his job in May of 2015.

Carl Willis, who replaced Nieves, is now Cleveland's successful pitching coach after the Red Sox let him go and replaced him with, you guessed it, LeVangie.

The coaches take the blame when players fail to perform. It didn't help LeVangie that Eduardo Rodriguez, who has been reliable all season, allowed five runs in the first three innings on Monday.

The Sox came back from a 5-1 deficit. But then, they've had a lot of practice.

Red Sox send struggling Andrew Cashner to bullpen

Julian McWilliams

It was just a month ago that the Red Sox thought Andrew Cashner would be a No. 5 starter who could get them over the hump. Yet a month later, the Sox have relegated Cashner to the bullpen.

He lasted just 1½ innings and 13 batters Sunday against the Los Angeles Angels, and allowed three earned runs while walking five and hitting a batter. He is 1-4 with an 8.01 ERA in six starts with the Sox, has allowed seven homers, and opponents are hitting .339 against him.

"He understands," manager Alex Cora said. "He knows where we're at. He hasn't pitched the way he pitched the last five or six [starts] with the Baltimore Orioles. Velocity-wise, you saw it, he's 95-96 [miles per hour]. I told him, 'You still can contribute. You still can help us out.'"

Cora said Cashner most likely won't be used as a long reliever, and did hint he thinks Cashner's fastball could play a bit more in the bullpen. That could be a sign that he will use him in short roles instead.

Cashner's underperformance is a significant blow. The starters as a whole have struggled this season, and Cashner's demotion leaves the rotation in limbo. The upcoming day off Thursday will give the Sox some time to figure out where they will go from here, Cora said.

"Command was off and he wasn't pitching well," Cora said. "I think we can put him out there [in the bullpen] and use his stuff in different ways. He can be more aggressive with fastballs up in the zone or throw that changeup like he's doing it."

When asked if the Sox are considering using bullpen games for the fifth spot in the rotation, Cora said the team will take this a game at a time.

"We have to take it day by day. It's not that easy, bullpening just to bullpen. It's a great concept, it's a great word. At the same time, if we're limited it will be hard to bullpen. Let's see how it goes today and we'll go from there."

Chavis can't shoulder it

The Red Sox placed Michael Chavis on the injured list with a left shoulder sprain in his AC joint. The injury occurred last Tuesday when Chavis made a stellar, over-the-shoulder diving catch in a 6-2 loss to the Kansas City Royals.

"It sucks," Chavis said. "At least the way it happened, at least I made the catch. If I missed the catch, it would be worse. But it's never something that you're happy or excited about. The whole reason it's been delayed a few days was because I wanted to be out there and help the team."

Chavis said he really felt the pain when he finished his swing. Cora noted that he noticed Chavis taking some uncharacteristic cuts.

Since being called up in April, Chavis provided a significant boost to the lineup and infield in the absence of Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce. Chavis heads to the IL hitting .254 with 18 homers and 58 RBIs. In August, however, he is hitting just .156 with a homer and 12 strikeouts in 34 plate appearances.

Chavis said this could be a reset for him.

“When you get away from something, it allows you to clear your mind,” he said. “Obviously, I’m a positive person, and I’m just trying to find the positive in all of this. That’s one of the things I’m looking forward to.”

Additionally, righthanded reliever Ryan Weber was optioned to Triple A Pawtucket, with pitcher Travis Lakins and infielder Marco Hernandez recalled.

Cora wouldn’t give a timeline on when Chavis would be back, but said they are hoping it’s around the 10-day mark.

Loose threads

David Price, placed on the 10-day IL last week, played catch at Fenway on Monday. The team is still trying to decide what it will do when his spot comes around in the rotation Wednesday . . . Xander Bogaerts has been a force for the Red Sox all season and delivered the game-tying double in the ninth on Monday, but he’s hitting just .245 in August after a 2 for 5 night. “Sometimes he’s in between the fastball and offspeed pitches,” Cora said. “He’s still getting his hits. It’s one of those stretches everyone goes through in the big leagues” . . . The Indians, as other teams have done this season, reserved a spot in the press box for longtime Globe baseball writer Nick Cafardo, who died in February. Along with flowers, the Indians left a baseball autographed by manager Terry Francona. “Nick, you are missed,” wrote Francona, who knew Cafardo well from his eight-year tenure managing the Red Sox.

How much blame to assign Dave Dombrowski is tricky

Chad Finn

In a serendipitous twist of timing, at least for those of us who dabble in sarcasm and irony, the Red Sox schedule was released for the 2020 season Monday afternoon.

Perfect. The day after Andrew Cashner (who has been so abysmal since coming over from the Orioles in June that the 2003 Jeff Suppan trade suddenly looks like a savvy pickup) and these underachieving Red Sox convince the majority of us that this post-World Series season will end before October, we’re already being pointed toward next year.

For the record, they open March 26 against the Blue Jays. Hopefully, Chris Sale, David Price, and whoever else make up this pitching staff will have faced live batters by that point.

I imagine even the scattered optimists among us are having a hard time rationalizing that this edition of the Red Sox will find itself. Six American League teams have a better record, and the Sox went into Monday six games back of Oakland in the wild-card race . . . and Oakland was 1½ games back of Tampa Bay for the second wild-card spot.

The Red Sox began a three-game series Monday against Terry Francona’s Indians, who surged over the weekend to tie the Twins in the AL Central. This doesn’t feel like a series that will change the Red Sox’ fortunes. It feels like one that will further confirm them, probably in an ugly fashion.

They’re running out of chances and they’re running out of games, so it’s impossible not to look at that brand-new 2020 schedule and wonder what will be different then. Beyond inevitable changes to the roster, some off-field personnel will be changed, too. Some will deserve it. Others will be scapegoats for the underachievement.

I suspect president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski will be the highest-profile personnel change.

It seems to me that Red Sox fans would be fine with this. I don't think it is that simple.

I'm not arguing that he deserves to stay, because this season has been a mess a dozen different ways, and most of them lead back to decisions he made. I still cannot believe Sale got \$145 million after basically being a sore-shouldered question mark for the last four months of the 2018 season. And that's just one of the bewildering decisions.

I've often thought Dombrowski's struggles to build a bullpen wherever he's been have been mostly bad luck. This year, it was bad decision-making, a bad philosophy, and neglect.

The Red Sox actually have had pretty good luck; just imagine if Brandon Workman hadn't turned into 1999 Derek Lowe all of a sudden.

It's easy to forget now, in the midst of whatever you want to call this massive hangover of a season, but it's not that Dombrowski has done a lot right here since coming aboard in August 2015 after the Tigers let him go. He has done most things right, at least before this season. Not all. But most.

He arrived with a reputation for gutting farm systems, but he traded the right guys here, for the most part. He kept Rafael Devers and Andrew Benintendi. He resisted dealing the likes of Xander Bogaerts for Cole Hamels, a very hot trade rumor at one point.

There are deals that could look more regrettable in the future, and the Tyler Thornburg trade was a flop, but, in general, Dombrowski has made wise enough personnel decisions that the '18 Red Sox had a very real argument as the best team in franchise history, and one with a young core.

Dombrowski has been a general manager or a de facto one with a fancier title since 1988, when he took over the Montreal Expos as a 31-year-old. Because he's been doing this so long — he left the Expos to build the expansion Marlins at the end of the 1991 season, won a title there and rebuilt the foundation of a future champion before going to the Tigers in '02, where he stayed through most of the '15 season — you can find just about anything you're looking for on his résumé to fit the argument you're trying to make.

High-profile free agent signings? He made a ton of those, from Moises Alou, Kevin Brown, and Bobby Bonilla with the Marlins to Victor Martinez, Prince Fielder, and Ivan Rodriguez with the Tigers.

Memorable trades? He got Max Scherzer and Miguel Cabrera in Detroit, but traded young Randy Johnson with the Expos.

Smart draft picks? He took Josh Beckett, Adrian Gonzalez, and Charles Johnson with the Marlins, then Justin Verlander, Andrew Miller, and Curtis Granderson with the Tigers. The Expos developed Cliff Floyd, Marquis Grissom, Larry Walker, and others on his watch.

And when Dombrowski had to gut the '97 champion Marlins, he got A.J. Burnett and Derrek Lee back in trades, and also swapped three prospects for Yankees prospect Mike Lowell.

The notion that he might not be the right person to lead a rebuild for the Red Sox really isn't a fair one based on at least part of his history. He has drafted well, and been able to identify worthwhile young keepers to acquire in deals for veterans. He wasn't around for that second Marlins championship, but he laid the groundwork for it with smart trades under lousy circumstances.

Yes, he does have a knack for overpaying for talent. He's that guy in your fantasy baseball league who isn't going to be outbid for the superstar he wants, even if prices get crazy.

Forget the Sale deal, or the \$68 million given to Nathan Eovaldi, or the \$217 million for Price, or anything else that makes you wish for a rebate right about now. There's a deal that's even scarier out there that is Dombrowski's doing.

Cabrera is 36 years old. He has eight home runs this season in 421 plate appearances. And he has at least four years and \$124 million left on his deal with the Tigers. Yikes.

Dombrowski's approach also tends to leave his rosters short on the back end. This Red Sox roster feels like it has six All-Stars and another six guys that don't belong in the majors.

We should also reiterate that bullpen failings on his watch are real, even if he's unlucky. The Red Sox really didn't have much of a bullpen last year when they won, which is why the starters had to bail them out in the postseason.

But it's also worth remembering — and the reminder seems necessary — that Dombrowski has fulfilled every aspect of being a general manager well at some point in his long and successful career. He has built good teams with money, sure, but that's not the only way he's done it, and if the Red Sox do decide that rebuilding the farm system is the highest priority, I believe Dombrowski would be better at it than conventional wisdom suggests.

Maybe Dombrowski isn't the right guy to be running the Red Sox when that new schedule begins. I'm just not convinced he's the wrong one.

Red Sox place Michael Chavis on IL with shoulder sprain

Julian McWilliams

The season keeps getting worse for the Red Sox. Ahead of their pivotal three-game series against the Cleveland Indians Monday, the team announced Michael Chavis is headed to the injured list with an AC joint sprain in his left shoulder.

Since being called up in April, Chavis provided a significant boost to the Sox' lineup and infield in the absence of Mitch Moreland for some time and Steve Pearce. Chavis heads to the IL hitting .254 with 18 homers while also driving in 58. In the month of August, however, Chavis was hitting just .156 with a homer and 12 strikeouts in 34 plate appearances.

Additionally, righthanded reliever Ryan Weber was optioned to Triple-A Pawtucket. Pitcher Travis Larkins and infielder Marco Hernandez were recalled.

Red Sox release their 2020 schedule

Julian McWilliams

The Red Sox released their 2020 schedule and the first sigh of relief for fans is the club will avoid a season-opening 11-day West Coast road trip.

The Sox started the 2019 season with trips to Seattle, Oakland, and Arizona, playing 11 games in as many days, winning only three.

The Sox will open the 2020 season on the road again, but it will come within their division against the Toronto Blue Jays (March 26-29) and Baltimore Orioles (March 30-April 1). The Red Sox' home opener will be April 2 against the Chicago White Sox. Tampa Bay comes in next before the Red Sox head west and play the Mariners and A's.

The Sox' interleague schedule include home-and-home series against the Atlanta Braves and Cincinnati Reds. They will also host the Milwaukee Brewers and St. Louis Cardinals, while playing at the Chicago Cubs and Pittsburgh Pirates. The Sox' trip to visit the Cubs will be its first to Wrigley Field since 2012.

The schedule also includes a one-game stop in Williamsport, Pa., on Aug. 23 to play the Orioles in the Little League Classic.

The Red Sox will host the Yankees June 12-14, July 30-Aug. 2, and Aug. 31-Sept. 2. The team will travel to Yankee Stadium May 8-10, July 24-26, and Sept. 8-10.

The Sox' longest homestand stretches 10 games between May 19-28, with series against Tampa Bay, Houston, and Kansas City. The longest road trip is also 10 games, from Aug. 20-30, with games at Baltimore, the White Sox, and Detroit. The Sox will finish the season at home against Toronto and Baltimore.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox rally to tie, but lose on walkoff in ninth

Michael Silverman

The 2019 Red Sox keep waiting to go on a run.

They're getting good at the waiting part.

Despite a valiant ninth-inning rally when they tied the game, the Red Sox still opened their three-game road trip Monday night against a team that is actually on a run — the Indians — with a 6-5 loss.

Carlos Santana, the first batter in the bottom of a freshly knotted ninth inning, greeted reliever Marcus Walden with a line drive home run to lift the Indians to victory.

Trailing 5-4 entering the ninth, Xander Bogaerts doubled in Mookie Betts (walk) to tie the game against Cleveland's talented closer Brad Hand.

Hopes were lifted, but only briefly.

"It's tough, did a good job getting back in that game," said J.D. Martinez, who homered in the fourth. "Battled back off of Hand, who is having a great year. Obviously that sucks. You feel for Walden, you know he doesn't want to do that and isn't trying to do that. Just hung a pitch and Santana put a good swing on it, really."

Bogaerts looked and sounded sad.

"In that moment you try to help your team and in the end it wasn't enough," said Bogaerts. "If it went over maybe we'd still be playing. It was joyful for a quick five minutes."

Starter Eduardo Rodriguez gave up five runs in the first three of his six innings.

With two outs in the first, Rodriguez let up on the pressure and paid for it. After walking Carlos Santana, he gave up a two-run blast to trade deadline pick-up Franmil Reyes to put the Indians on top, 2-0.

The Red Sox got one run back in the top of the second after Martinez led off with a single and then scored on Andrew Benintendi's double to left.

Rodriguez managed a five-batter shutdown inning in the second inning, but the third was a different story.

Santana and Reyes each singled with one out before Jose Ramirez golfed a three-run home run up and over the left-field wall to expand the Indians lead to 5-1.

“There were two at-bats there against Santana that kind changed his day, we had two outs, 0-2 count, he walks, next hitter hits a homer, he had him 0-2 again, he walks, he gets a hit, next guy gets on base, he made a bad pitch to Ramirez,” said manager Alex Cora. “We’ve been talking about limiting the damage, way you limit damage is avoid the walks especially when you’re way ahead in the count. In those two at-bats he didn’t put him away and it cost us five runs.”

The Red Sox chipped away at the lead in the fourth, which began with Martinez’ 28th home run of the season. Two outs later, Mitch Moreland singled and after advancing to second on a Zach Plesac wild pitch, scored on Brock Holt’s double to bring the Red Sox to within two of the Indians, 5-3.

The Red Sox brought the score to 5-4 in the seventh inning, when leadoff batter Jackie Bradley Jr. flicked an opposite-field fly ball home run.

Cora said he thought the Red Sox played a good game.

“It felt good all around, obviously it’s not cool that we lost, we need to win games, there’s no moral victories in the big leagues but as far as what I saw throughout the game, it was pretty good,” said Cora. “Overall, honestly — I hate losing, I don’t like losing, I know where we’re at — but there were some positives today.”

Alex Cora declares there’s plenty of life left in 2019 Red Sox

Michael Silverman

Channeling the character from “Monty Python and the Holy Grail” who insisted he was “not dead yet,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Monday that his team, 10 games behind in the AL wild card race (and 16 games behind the Yankees in the AL East), still has more than a pulse.

They’ve still got a shot at reaching the wild card.

“We know what we have to do the rest of the season — we can do it, we can do it but it starts here in Cleveland,” Cora said before Monday’s opener of a three-game series. “It seems like they turned the season around when they went to Boston, so why not turn our season around here in Cleveland. It starts with us.”

Cora referenced the Indians’ late May visit to Fenway Park, where they took 2-of-3 games and then began a mid-season run — 17-9 in June, 18-6 in July — that brought them back into contention with the Twins for the AL Central Division title.

Another team, one far less heralded than the Indians, seems to have inspired Cora: the New York Mets.

“You look around the league and what’s happening, at CitiField, you win 14 out of 15, it happens,” Cora said. “Like I told you guys before, good teams go through stretches of losing eight, nine, 10 in a row and there are some bad teams, they win 13 in a row, 14 in a row. I’m not saying the Mets are a bad team but you understand my point. We haven’t had that run the whole season.”

Cora said the players share his faith.

“We do believe we can do it, we do believe we can have a run but we have to do it in a different way,” Cora said. “It just so happens that the schedule plays into our favor now and we can be creative with the rotation.”

Cashner to bullpen

The Red Sox made an irreproachable decision by removing Andrew Cashner from the rotation and placing him in the bullpen.

To be charitable, Cashner has flopped since arriving in a mid-July trade that was designed to bolster the fifth spot in the Red Sox rotation. The spot remained wobbly, with Cashner posting an 8.01 ERA after six starts in which opposing batters were hitting .339 against him.

“It was an easy conversation — he understands why and he understands what he can do,” Cora said. “For me, it was just a regular conversation.”

Regular is another way of saying understandable.

“His command was off, he wasn’t pitching good,” Cora said. “I think we can put him out there, use his stuff in a different way, let him be more aggressive in the zone with fastballs up in the zone or throw that changeup the way he was doing it. I do feel his fastball is going to play a little more higher coming out of the bullpen, that’s why.”

Cashner, who started Sunday’s loss to the Angels at Fenway, will be available beginning Tuesday. He will not be used as a long reliever.

“We’ll see with the matchups — we like the fastball, we like the four-seamer, he has the changeup,” Cora said. “I think this guy with his fastball, probably his fastball is going to be a tick up in the bullpen so we can maximize that fastball up in the zone and use it in certain matchups.”

Chavis to IL

The Red Sox placed rookie Michael Chavis on the injured list with an AC joint sprain in his left shoulder. The injury occurred when Chavis made a diving catch in the outfield during the recent Royals series at Fenway.

“It sucks,” Chavis said. “At least the way it happened, at least I made the catch. If I missed the catch it would be worse. This is never something that you’re happy or excited about. The whole reason it’s been delayed for a few days is I wanted to play through it and be out there and help the team. But it was kind of in a position where it wasn’t benefiting me, wasn’t really benefiting the team, so it was probably the smarter thing to do.”

Chavis scuffled in the four games against the Angels after the Kansas City visit, going 0-for-12. Perhaps the down time will help come out of his offensive doldrums.

“Yeah, definitely — it’s kind of the funny thing, when you get away from something, it gives you a chance to maybe clear your mind to re-set a little bit,” Chavis said. “I’m a positive person, so trying to find the positive through all of this, that’s one of the things I’m looking forward to.”

Cora said the plan is to allow Chavis to rest for five or six days, and then ramp up so that he will hopefully miss the minimum 10 days.

“Give the kid credit,” Cora said. “He tried to play through it and it’s just one of those that we have to manage now and that’s why we put him on the IL.”

The Sox called up Marco Hernandez to take Chavis’ spot. They also optioned right-hander Ryan Weber to Pawtucket and called up right-hander Travis Lakins.

In the 6-5 loss, Eduardo Rodriguez pitched his 19th consecutive start of at least five innings. That streak matches Lance Lynn for longest in the AL this year. . . . The walk-off home run allowed by Marcus Walden snapped a streak of 30 batters faced without allowing a hit.

J.D. Martinez has reached base safely in 21 consecutive games, the second-longest active streak in the majors.

Xander Bogaerts' double in the ninth was his 40th of the season, tops in the majors. He's just the 15th player in Red Sox history to have two or more seasons of 40-plus doubles.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Slumping Red Sox, surging Indians heading in opposite directions

Bill Koch

The last Red Sox trip to Progressive Field came the night after clinching a third straight American League East title.

Booze-soaked Boston players filed out of the visiting clubhouse at Yankee Stadium and boarded a charter flight for a meaningless series with the Indians. Tzu-Wei Lin, Brandon Phillips and Blake Swihart started the first of three games here. Bobby Poyner, Drew Pomeranz and Robby Scott each pitched out of the bullpen.

The result? A Boston victory, of course, and one in which several of the since-departed gentlemen mentioned above made key contributions. That was the way of the 2018 Red Sox. The ridiculous became the expected in the best manner possible.

Monday night was the latest reminder of how the other half lives. When you've lost 11 out of 14, it's your pitcher who throws a hanging slider in the bottom of the ninth inning. When you've won 42 out of 59, it's your hitter who sends a walkoff home run deep into the summer night.

This was the collision point between two teams traveling diametrically opposed paths. Marcus Walden and Boston slipped further from the October stage they dominated just 10 short months ago. Carlos Santana and Cleveland continued their surge toward a possible fourth straight A.L. Central crown.

"It's tough, man," Xander Bogaerts lamented in a hushed tone. "We don't know what to say."

John Sacramone, the devious New York-based consigliere of Sopranos fame, once observed that certain things have a momentum. His statement was made in a brilliant work of fiction on HBO, but it very much applied to real life on this night in front of 24,770 fans. Everyone in attendance could plainly see how and why we arrived at a 6-5 Indians win.

"This is a team," Eduardo Rodriguez said. "We win and we lose, and we do it together all the time."

Indeed they do. That certain invincibility surrounding the Red Sox of a year ago has vanished. Like sand that is held too tightly or too loosely, it has slipped from their grasp.

"We could hang our heads down and feel sorry for ourselves," J.D. Martinez said. "Or we can keep going out there every day and keep battling, having fun and enjoying it."

There haven't been any outward signs of quitting. Boston's players don't appear to have tuned out manager Alex Cora and his staff. To suggest something to the contrary would be reckless and uninformed.

What's happening now feels like an accumulation of nicks and small cuts. The Red Sox are watching their season slowly bleed away and look powerless to tie the tourniquet. Their starting pitching has been unable to string together enough quality outings to turn the tide, with Rodriguez surrendering five earned runs to Cleveland before being spared a defeat.

Boston's taxed bullpen felt the fatigue of the previous afternoon, as Andrew Cashner finished just 1 2/3 innings of what could very well be his last start with the club. The trade deadline acquisition from Baltimore has been demoted to the relief corps, and their 8 1/3 innings of two-run ball yielded a sour loss to the Angels. Cora could have been more aggressive with more rested options behind Walden – using Brandon Workman in the ninth, perhaps – but likely had nobody left at his disposal beyond that.

“We did a lot of good things today that we hadn't done in a while,” Cora said.

The manager isn't technically wrong. Erasing a 5-1 deficit showed mental toughness, particularly by dealing Brad Hand just a third blown save in the top of the ninth. There isn't an honest Red Sox fan left in New England who didn't beg for a pitcher of his caliber prior to July 31, and he was the one giving in to Bogaerts on the tying RBI double.

The shortstop dropped his voice nearly to a whisper at certain points during his postgame remarks. You sensed how much these last two weeks have gnawed at Bogaerts, one of the clubhouse's emerging leaders. His two hits improved Bogaerts to 8-for-45 over his last 11 games – if that's not a sign of pressing from a player who cares so deeply, it has simply never occurred. And if his mood reflects that of his peers, Boston has reached a rather dark place indeed.

“There was one mistake there at the end,” Martinez said. And at this time a year ago, it was almost always the other team making it.

Indians 6, Red Sox 5: Carlos Santana walkoff homer wins it for Cleveland

Bill Koch

There was one point in this campaign not too long ago when the Red Sox looked capable of chasing down Cleveland in the wildcard race.

Boston trailed the Indians by only four games as the sun set on July 27. The Red Sox were a season-best 12 games over .500 and in position to sweep the Yankees in a four-game weekend series. Cleveland was entering its second full month trailing Minnesota in the American League Central.

But Monday night at Progressive Field brought with it a new reality. Boston fell for the 12th time in its last 15 games and has lost contact with Tampa Bay and Oakland in its attempt to reach October. The Indians have overtaken the Twins and remained one of the hottest teams in the game courtesy of a walkoff 6-5 victory.

The Red Sox scored the go-ahead run in each of the last two innings, but not even some rare late-game heroics could turn the tide in what has been a fruitless stretch of baseball. Carlos Santana was the man who made the key swing instead, crushing a solo home run to left-center field against reliever Marcus Walden to lead off the bottom of the ninth. That answered a two-out RBI double by Xander Bogaerts in the top half of the inning, one that dealt Brad Hand a second straight blown save.

“It was joyful for a quick five minutes,” Bogaerts said. “It's rough, man — especially knowing how important every game is from now forward.”

Mookie Betts drew a one-out walk in the ninth and Bogaerts sent a two-out drive off the wall in right-center to erase a 5-4 deficit. Boston had virtually no time to enjoy the moment as Santana took a hanging slider from Walden and smacked it over the wall to the opposite field. The Red Sox were left sifting through the ashes of a third straight defeat.

“Today was a big game for us to win,” Walden said. “We gave ourselves a chance, tied it up — tough one to lose.”

Brandon Workman was warming in the Boston bullpen as Walden came back out for the ninth. Red Sox relievers were taxed for 8 1/3 innings of work the previous day in a 10-inning loss to the Angels, and Boston manager Alex Cora knew his options were limited. He elected to stick with Walden after the right-hander induced a 6-4-3 double play to escape the bottom of the eighth. "We were very limited," Cora said. "(Workman) was going to come in with the lead. There were a lot of guys down."

The Indians did the bulk of their scoring early, as starter Eduardo Rodriguez allowed a season-high 10 hits and was forced to grind through six strenuous innings. Cleveland held a 5-1 lead after three innings and was able to hold off Boston from there despite an abbreviated start from Zach Plesac and a couple of shaky moments from the bullpen. Franmil Reyes cracked a two-run homer to right-center in the first and Jose Ramirez drilled a three-run homer to deep left in the third.

"Baseball is like that," Rodriguez said. "As a pitcher, if you miss, you're going to pay for it."

Andrew Benintendi peppered the wall in left with an RBI double to put the Red Sox on the board in the second and J.D. Martinez slugged a solo home run to left to lead off the fourth. Brock Holt made it a two-run game when he slashed a two-out double to the gap in left-center, trimming the margin to 5-3.

Boston came one run closer in the seventh thanks to one swing. Jackie Bradley Jr. sent a towering drive down the line in left that kept carrying through the perfect summer night sky. The ball settled just over the railing for a solo home run.

The lead was there for the taking as Boston hit in the eighth. Darwinzon Hernandez stranded a potential insurance run at third base in the bottom of the seventh and the Red Sox put two men in scoring position when Benintendi grounded a one-out single through the middle and Sam Travis snapped a pinch-hit double to the corner in left. Holt could only manage a liner to first base in his left-left matchup with veteran Oliver Perez, ending the threat.

"I know everybody in this room cares a lot," Bogaerts said. "It's really frustrating and annoying when the results aren't what you want them to be."

Red Sox pitcher David Price (left wrist) playing catch again

Bill Koch

David Price played catch at Fenway Park on Monday.

Price stayed behind while the rest of his Red Sox teammates made the trip to Cleveland for a three-game series at Progressive Field. The left-hander made 50 tosses on flat ground as he continues to recover from a left wrist injury.

"Let's see how he reacts tomorrow," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We'll keep building from there."

Price was placed on the 10-day injured list after receiving a cortisone shot last week to treat a cyst. He addressed the media over the weekend and reported steady improvement in the days following the injection into his triangular fibrocartilage complex, which is located on the outside of the wrist.

"It's getting better day by day," Price said Saturday. "It feels better today as well. Just getting the range of motion back and the strength in my fingers is the biggest thing."

Brian Johnson took Price's place in the rotation Friday night. Boston has yet to announce a starter for Wednesday.

Wrigley Field visit highlights Red Sox 2020 schedule

Bill Koch

The Red Sox will begin their 2020 season on March 26 at Toronto.

It marks the earliest Opening Day for the club since its two-game series with Oakland in Japan in 2008. Boston and the Athletics squared off on March 25 at the Tokyo Dome, with the Red Sox celebrating their second of four World Series titles this century.

Boston's home opener next season falls April 2 against the White Sox. The Red Sox play just 13 of their first 33 games at home, going on three two-city road trips through March and April. Boston plays 12 of 15 and 17 of 26 at home into the All-Star break, which will be held at Dodger Stadium between July 13-16

The Red Sox visit the Cubs to headline their interleague schedule, making their first trip to Wrigley Field since 2012. Boston also makes trips to Atlanta, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. The Red Sox will host Milwaukee, the Braves, St. Louis and the Reds in four series against National League opponents.

Boston closes a four-game series with Baltimore by participating in the 2020 Little League Classic at Bowman Field in Williamsport, Pa. The Red Sox face the Orioles in three games at Camden Yards before making the three-hour drive to Bowman Field, which series as the home of Philadelphia's Class A affiliate. That game will be carried nationally by ESPN on August 23.

Andrew Cashner demoted to Red Sox bullpen

Bill Koch

The lone Red Sox addition prior to the July 31 trade deadline has been demoted to the bullpen.

Boston right-hander Andrew Cashner has been dropped from the starting rotation after his latest ineffective outing. Cashner recorded just five outs in Sunday's 5-4, 10-inning loss to the Angels, forcing the bullpen to cover the final 8 1/3 frames.

"It was an easy conversation," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "He understands why and he understands what he can do. For me it was just a regular conversation."

The Red Sox have managed just one win in Cashner's six starts since his trade from Baltimore for two minor leaguers. He's allowed 41 hits and seven home runs in 30 1/3 innings, pitching to a bloated earned-run average of 8.01. Cashner threw just 24 of his 51 pitches for strikes in his last outing against Los Angeles, matching his season high with five walks.

"He said it – command was off," Cora said. "He wasn't pitching good. I think we'll put him out there and use his stuff in a different way."

Cashner will be used in short relief, with Boston hopeful he can harness a fastball-changeup mix. He topped out at 96.2 mph on Sunday and threw 24 fastballs. Cashner drew a combined three called strikes on his cut-fastball, slider and two-seam fastball.

"His fastball is probably going to be able to tick up in the bullpen," Cora said. "We can maximize that fastball up in the zone and use him in certain matchups."

Chris Sale starts for Boston on Tuesday, but the Red Sox have yet to announce their pitcher for Wednesday afternoon's series finale at Progressive Field. The club enjoys a scheduled off day on Thursday and Rick Porcello will start Friday's series opener against the Orioles at Fenway Park.

"We do believe that we can make a run, but we have to do it in a different way," Cora said. "It just happens that the schedule plays into our favor now and we can be creative with the rotation."

Red Sox place rookie infielder Michael Chavis (left shoulder) on the 10-day injured list

Bill Koch

What should have been one of the highlights of his rookie season has led to a first injured list stint in the big leagues for Michael Chavis.

The Red Sox infielder suffered a sprained AC joint in his left shoulder and was placed on the 10-day IL prior to Monday's series opener. Chavis will be shut down for most of the week and could pick up a bat again Saturday or Sunday when Boston returns home from this brief three-game road trip.

"The whole reason it's been a few days is because I wanted to play through it and be out there and help the team," Chavis said. "I was kind of in a position where it wasn't benefiting me and it wasn't benefiting the team. This was probably the smartest thing to do.

Chavis was playing second base Tuesday night when Hunter Dozier hit a flare to shallow center field. Jackie Bradley Jr. was on the way in when Chavis sprinted back and made the grab on the backhand, rolling forward toward Bradley's feet. Kansas City notched a 6-2 win and the Red Sox suffered what turned out to be a second loss from that night a few days later.

"I think it just makes sense for him to get healthy and get his swing back and go from there," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "Give the kid credit – he tried to play through it. It's one of those that we have to manage now."

Chavis was 0-for-12 with a lone walk and six strikeouts over his last four games, all coming since that Tuesday against the Royals. He had multi-hit games in five of his previous 11 prior to going 1-for-4 against Kansas City. Cora noticed an odd swing from Chavis in Sunday's 5-4, 10-inning loss to the Angels and ultimately pulled him in the eighth inning.

"Yesterday he swung once in his third at-bat and I was like, 'That doesn't look right,'" Cora said. "Hopefully when he comes back he's ready to go again."

"If I can manage the pain that's fine, but if it's changing my swing or changing how I'm going about fielding a ground ball that's when it becomes a problem," Chavis said. "Then you create bad mechanics, bad habits and stuff like that. That's not a door I wanted to open at all."

The recent cold snap aside, it's been a strong debut season for Chavis. He was recalled from Triple-A Pawtucket on April 19 and has remained with Boston ever since, leading American League rookies in RBI and multi-hit games. Chavis has totaled 18 home runs and 58 RBI through 95 games, the most by a Red Sox rookie in each category since Ellis Burks collected 20 home runs and 59 RBI in 1987.

"In regards to treatment there's not really a whole lot you can do to it," Chavis said. "But we are doing some kind of mobility and stability stuff to try to strengthen it and speed it up a little bit as much as possible."

Chavis will also use his time out of the lineup to examine video and possibly make an adjustment or two on his swing. His strikeout rate sits at 33.2%, which is the highest among batting qualifiers in the big leagues. Chavis has racked up 127 strikeouts in his 382 plate appearances, which ranks 10th in the big leagues.

"When you get away from something it kind of gives you a chance to maybe clear your mind and reset a little bit," Chavis said. "I'm a positive person, so trying to find the positive through all this – that's one of the things I'm looking forward to."

Boston recalled infielder Marco Hernandez from the PawSox to replace Chavis on the 25-man roster. The Red Sox also recalled right-hander Travis Lakins and swapped out right-hander Ryan Weber, who took the loss against Los Angeles on Sunday.

*** *MassLive.com***

Xander Bogaerts' magical moment disappears in minutes as Red Sox suffer crushing loss to Indians

Chris Cotillo

Think back. How many times have the Red Sox had a magical moment this season?

Mitch Moreland's pinch-hit, game-winning homer to beat the Mariners in the second game of the season probably counts. So does Jackie Bradley Jr's game-saving catch at Camden Yards in early May. Besides that? A lot of blah, even for a team that has six (largely forgettable) walk-off wins.

Xander Bogaerts looked like he had made some magic with a two-out, game-tying double off Indians All-Star closer Brad Hand in the ninth inning Monday night. That moment turned out to be fleeting, as Carlos Santana walked off the Red Sox with an opposite-field home run five pitches into the bottom of the ninth.

"In that moment, you try to help your team. In the end, it wasn't enough," a dejected Bogaerts said after the game. "If it went over, maybe we'd still be playing. It was joyful for a quick five minutes."

For those "five minutes," these Red Sox looked exactly like who we thought they'd be. A team that doesn't give up, even after being down 5-1 early. A team that could score off anyone at anytime, especially in clutch situations.

But the ninth inning was a sobering reminder of who the Sox really are. A team that was so short on relievers after a disastrous start from Andrew Cashner-- who has since been demoted to the bullpen-- that they had to ride or die with the few guys they had available. A team that has caught virtually zero breaks all year, as seen by the three balls caught by Indians right-fielder Tyler Naquin up against the wall Monday night.

And most importantly, a team that is holding onto their playoff hopes with dear life.

"It's rough," Bogaerts said, "especially knowing how important every game is from now forward."

The loss was the third straight for the Red Sox and their 12th in 15 games. The Red Sox will wake up Tuesday morning 8 1/2 games out of a playoff spot with 41 games to play.

There is no such thing as a moral victory at this point.

"It's tough," manager Alex Cora said. "I feel this is one of the best games we've played in a while as far as being locked in and grinding at-bats. That's a good baseball team, everybody knows. We were in a hole and we kept fighting, fighting, fighting. We found a way to tie the game but then that happened."

Santana's homer was one of the most crushing moments in a season filled with disappointment for the Red Sox. They can only hope at this point that it'll be one that galvanizes a scuffling group.

"We don't like losing," Cora said. "It's a tough situation we're in right now."

Boston Red Sox crushed by Carlos Santana walk-off homer in 6-5 loss to Indians

Chris Cotillo

Magical moments have been hard to come by for the Red Sox all season. The one they got Monday night ended up being enjoyable for less than 10 minutes.

Moments after Xander Bogaerts hit a game-tying RBI double off Indians closer Brad Hand with two outs in the ninth, Indians first baseman Carlos Santana hit a walk-off home run off Marcus Walden to give Cleveland a 6-5 win. The Red Sox, who came back from an early 5-1 deficit to tie the game late, suffered their third straight loss and their 12th in 15 games.

Santana's homer put an end to a frustrating evening for the Sox, who narrowly missed home runs on a series of fly balls that were caught at the warning track and were never able to break through for the lead. The Sox hit 10 balls harder than 100 mph but fell victim to hard luck in most of those cases, with five going for singles and two others resulting in outs.

The top of the first inning was a good indicator of how the rest of the night would go. Two deep flies to the warning track in right and an a 113-mph line drive to second base resulted in three quick outs.

Starter Eduardo Rodriguez put the Sox in a hole early, struggling once again with the keeping the ball in the ballpark. Franmil Reyes' two-run shot in the first and Jose Ramirez's three-run blast in the third sandwiched an Andrew Benintendi RBI double, giving Cleveland a 5-1 lead in the third.

Rodriguez posted his third consecutive uneven start, allowing five runs on 10 hits while striking out five in six innings. He allowed a homer for the 10th time in his last 13 starts.

Boston chipped away over the next six innings, as J.D. Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr. each hit solo homers and Brock Holt hit an RBI double to cut the deficit to one run. After Mookie Betts walked to lead off the ninth and Hand got two quick outs, Bogaerts drove a first-pitch fastball deep to right, plating Betts and putting the go-ahead run in scoring position.

Benintendi flew out to deep right to end the threat and the game remained tied.

With the bullpen short on arms after pitching 7 2/3 innings Sunday, Walden came back for a second inning of work after getting the final two outs of the eighth. Five pitches into his battle with Santana, the slugger drove a slider to left-center field to give Cleveland its sixth walk-off win of the season.

The Sox fell to 62-59 on the season. They'll be back at it tomorrow night with lefty Chris Sale starting opposite Indians righty Mike Clevinger.

Michael Chavis placed on injured list; Boston Red Sox call up Marco Hernandez, Travis Lakins

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox placed infielder Michael Chavis on the 10-day injured list with an AC joint sprain in his left shoulder, the team announced Monday.

Chavis isn't expected to miss much time with the shoulder injury.

Boston also optioned pitcher Ryan Weber to Pawtucket while calling up right-hander Travis Lakins and infielder Marco Hernandez.

Chavis played all four games against the Angels over the weekend, going 0-for-12 with a walk. The rookie has hit just .221 with three homers and a .649 OPS since the All-Star break and had fallen into a second base platoon with Brock Holt in recent weeks.

With Chavis out, the Sox will employ Holt, Hernandez and recently recalled infielder Chris Owings at second base. Holt and Owings have the ability to play other positions as well.

Chavis has hit .254/.322/.444 with 18 homers and 58 RBIs since debuting on April 20. His timetable for a return is not yet known.

Weber took the loss in Sunday's game and owns a 4.35 ERA in 11 big-league appearances this year. Hernandez has hit .333/.362/.500 with two homers in 29 games and Lakins has posted a 5.79 ERA in 9 1/3 big-league innings.

Chavis injury: Red Sox rookie hurt shoulder on diving catch, likely won't miss more than 10 days

Chris Cotillo

The injury that landed Red Sox infielder Michael Chavis on the injured list Monday is actually one that happened a few days ago.

Chavis landed on his left shoulder making a spectacular catch on a Hunter Dozier pop up in the eighth inning of Boston's loss to the Royals on Tuesday. He tried playing through pain for the last few days but found that it was restricting his swing and was ultimately placed on the IL with an AC joint sprain Monday.

"He has been fighting it and you can see his swing," manager Alex Cora said. "He mentioned it to (trainer) Brad (Pearson) and I think it just makes sense for him to get healthy and get his swing back."

Chavis said his shoulder affected how he has finished his swing over the last few days. He is 0-for-13 since making the catch.

"If I could manage the pain, it's fine, but if it's changing my swing or changing how I go about fielding a ground ball, that's when it becomes a problem," he said. "Then you create bad habits and bad mechanics and that's not a door I wanted to open at all."

Cora said Chavis will be completely shut down for five or six days before resuming baseball activities. The expectation is that the rookie will return around the time his 10-day required stint ends.

Both Cora and Chavis believe the time off will be a good chance for Chavis to reset after a tough stretch at the plate. The 24-year-old is hitting just .221 with three homers and a .649 OPS since the All-Star break.

"It's kind of a funny thing, when you get away from something, it gives you a chance to clear your mind and reset a little bit," Chavis said. "Obviously, I'm trying to find a positive through all this."

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Last year seems an eternity ago for Red Sox

Tom Caron

Steve Pearce was in Boston over the weekend, catching up with friends and teammates. Pearce, the 2018 World Series MVP, is still a long way from returning from a partially torn posterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

His presence was a stark reminder of how much has changed at Fenway Park over the past year. Pearce was acquired on June 29, 2018, to help the Red Sox get more production against left-handed pitching. He did exactly that. By this time last year he had played 24 games with the Sox, hitting .314 with six home runs. He finished 2018 hitting .304, dominating left-handers, then led the team to its fourth championship in 15 years.

This year he's only played in 29 games with the Red Sox, spending most of the year fighting off injuries. He's hitting just .180 with one home run.

And his team, running away with the AL East at this point last year, began the week 16 games behind the Yankees.

When the Sox re-signed Pearce to a one-year, \$6.5 million contract during the offseason, it seemed like a home run for Dave Dombrowski, the president of baseball operations. Pearce was a World Series hero coming back on a short-term deal.

Now it seems Dombrowski would have been better served using that money to shore up the pitching staff. The team's offense has been fine without Pearce while the pitching has been in a funk all season.

That was on display again over the weekend, when Red Sox starters gave up seven first-inning runs over three games. Andrew Cashner only gave up one run in Sunday's extra-inning loss to the Angels, but turned in one of his worst performances ever – walking five of the 13 batters he faced and hitting another.

This has become the Bizarro World Red Sox season, the exact opposite of 2018. Last year any move Manager Alex Cora made was perfect. This year, not so much.

On Sunday, Cora inserted newly called up infielder Chris Owings into the lead-off spot. He went 0 for 5 with three strikeouts.

Cora pinch ran Mookie Betts in the eighth inning. He was caught stealing.

The manager left Matt Barnes out for a second inning. Barnes gave up the game-tying homer to lead off that second inning.

Players seem to be trying to do too much to make things happen. In that same game, Rafael Devers was thrown out trying to steal third with one out in the first inning. Christian Vazquez tried to bunt Betts to second in the eighth but popped out instead.

“We made some decisions we don't usually make,” Cora said. “We did some stuff we shouldn't do.”

By then, Pearce was already back in Fort Myers, Florida, to resume his rehab. It would be easy for him to pack it in – he's still unable to run – and chalk up 2019 as a lost season. To his credit, he hasn't.

“I've just been exercising and trying to stay in shape,” Pearce said. “Really just trying to build the muscles up around it. It's very tough. My boys are out here grinding every day and you want to be with them. That's what's motivating me to get back.”

Pearce is facing long odds in his quest to get back from the early-season injuries, just like his team is facing long odds in trying to come back from their early season struggles.

Last October, Pearce was an improbable star in a magic ride. Ten months later that ride seems like a long, long time ago.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Alex Cora pulls Andrew Cashner from the rotation

Chris Mason

Around the Horn is a weekly column from Chris Mason, where the Eagle-Tribune beat writer offers nine thoughts from the Red Sox clubhouse.

This week's installment focuses on a make-or-break series with the Indians and another one-stepforward-one-step-back weekend.

1. Cashner sent to the 'pen

Dave Dombrowski absolutely nailed the Nate Eovaldi trade last July, but this year's rotational upgrade has been anything but.

Andrew Cashner couldn't get out of the second inning on Sunday — he walked five Angels — and fell to 1-4 with an 8.01 ERA since joining the Red Sox.

With a schedule that's beginning to lighten up with off days, Cora decided he'd seen enough from Cashner. He plucked the veteran from the starting rotation.

"Cashner is going to be in the bullpen, starting (Tuesday)," Cora told reporters in Cleveland. "I talked to him today. He understands. He knows where we're at, and with the off-days and everything that is going on and he hasn't pitched the way he pitched the last five or six with Baltimore. We're going to put him in the bullpen and velocity-wise, you saw it, 95, 96 (mph), so I told him, 'Hey man, you still can contribute. You can still help us out.' He told me he'll be ready.

"It's what's best to make a run. We do believe we can do it, we do believe we can have a run but we have to do it in a different way. It just so happens that the schedule plays into our favor now and we can be creative with the rotation."

2. Rick gets rocked

Rick Porcello is also still struggling to find any rhythm. He's given up 42 earned runs in his last 10 starts, opponents are hitting .304 against him over that span, and his ERA sits at 5.67 for the season.

"I don't think there's any doubt over the course of my career I've been battle tested with some tough stretches," Porcello said. "To me this is no different, this is lasting a lot longer than I'd like, but the fight and confidence I have is not going to go away regardless of what happens. I believe in myself I believe in our team. Going out there every fifth day to try to prove that. Get knocked down a bunch. Last year was a dream season. This year getting punched in the face every fifth day."

3. But AC sticks with Rick

Still, Cora won't be giving Porcello the Cashner treatment just yet.

"No, no," Cora said. "I do feel that although the results are not there, and obviously you see the whole season and the numbers and all that, he's made some strides actually the last two games and a half as far as the direction and the stuff, he gave up that home run the other day but we do feel that we'll be fine with him. We can't put everybody in the bullpen, so we'll stay where we are."

4. Real test for Sale

Chris Sale is one Sox starter that actually looked sharp in the last turn.

He dazzled against the Angels, throwing eight innings of two-hit ball and striking out 13, but now the real challenge looms. Can Sale replicate that success tonight against an Indians team the Sox are chasing in the standings?

"You never want to say you figured it out, but it's a step in the right direction," Sale said. "I hope to be able to keep doing what I'm doing, because obviously we've got an uphill battle, but we still think we've got a shot, and we're all still fighting in here.

5. Nate hasn't been the answer

Exactly one month ago, Dombrowski said, "We won't need our 'pen as much. We are going to add Nathan Eovaldi. For some reason, people seem to, not, like, grasp on to that. He's a big addition for us coming."

Billed as a bullpen savior, Eovaldi hasn't been yet.

The flamethrower allowed runs in five of his first nine appearances, and Alex Cora has yet to really task him with high-leverage situations.

6. Exceptional run for Taylor

One reliever that has been terrific is Josh Taylor.

The lefty came into Monday night's game with a 1.83 ERA since July 1, striking out 25 batters in 19 1/3 innings. He's not quite Ryan Brasier of 2018, but Taylor's out-of-nowhere emergence has him in that same conversation.

7. Schedule's out!

Boston's 2020 schedule was released on Monday afternoon, and they'll begin the season March 26 in Toronto, while the home opener will be April 2 against the White Sox.

Other highlights include a trip to Wrigley Field, Boston's third ever, and they'll play the Orioles in the Little League Classic at Bowman Field in Williamsport, PA, on August 23.

8. Chavis to the IL

Michael Chavis hit the injured list for the first time as a big leaguer thanks to a sprained AC joint in his left shoulder.

The rookie is trying to take it in stride, hoping to use the time on the shelf to refresh.

"It's kind of the funny thing," he told reporters in Cleveland. "When you get away from something, it gives you a chance to maybe clear your mind to reset a little bit. I'm a positive person, so trying to find the positive through all of this, that's one of the things I'm looking forward to."

9. Blake Swihart DFA'd

The Diamondbacks parted ways with Blake Swihart yesterday, designating the former Red Sox catcher for assignment.

Swihart struggled to stay healthy in Arizona, an oblique injury landed him on the 60-day IL, and he hit just .136 in 31 games for fellow old friend Torey Lovullo.

*** *RedSox.com***

After comeback, walk-off loss 'tough to swallow'

Ian Browne

Xander Bogaerts came up with the big swing for the Red Sox when they needed it most, clubbing an RBI double with two outs in the ninth to tie it up against the Indians on Monday night at Progressive Field.

But it turns out that the biggest swing for the reeling defending World Series champions was that of momentum, which careened horribly off track in the bottom of the ninth inning when Carlos Santana led off the inning with a walk-off homer against Marcus Walden that handed Boston a 6-5 loss.

Keep in mind that this was a game the Sox trailed by four runs after three innings, only to come roaring all the way back.

If the big knock by Bogaerts off the wall in right against Indians closer Brad Hand had led the way to a victory, it could have been just what manager Alex Cora's team needed.

Instead, they were handed a gut-punch of a loss that made them 3-12 since July 28.

And this is why Bogaerts, the would-be hero, looked and sounded devastated after the game.

"In that moment you try to help your team and in the end it wasn't enough," said Bogaerts. "If it went over [the wall], maybe we'd still be playing. It was joyful for a quick five minutes."

There has been precious little joy for the Red Sox over the last two weeks, as their worst stretch of the season has them pinned 8 1/2 games back for the second Wild Card spot behind the Rays.

It is the first time since June 14 the Sox (62-59) have been as few as three games above .500. This, for a team that ran roughshod through the competition a year ago, going 108-54 during the season and 11-3 in the postseason.

As Bogaerts' glassy eyes demonstrated, one of the biggest challenges the Red Sox face with 41 games left in the season is not letting each loss demoralize them as they try to go on that prolonged run of wins that has been so elusive.

"It's rough, man, especially knowing how important every game is from now forward," said Bogaerts. "Obviously I think that inning, from scoring in the ninth, they might've been a bit down. But Santana picked up his closer big time. That's how this game goes sometimes."

Bogaerts was then asked again about the jarring turn of events late in the game.

"It's tough, man. I don't know what to say," said Bogaerts.

At times this season, Cora has been understandably tough on his team in postgame media sessions, particularly when it comes to the shaky starting rotation, the inconsistent bullpen and the offense's struggles at times in key situations.

But after Monday's loss, Cora seemed to be trying to keep his team's spirits up by what he said.

"Honestly, it's tough because I do feel this is one of the best games we've played in a while as far as being locked in, grinding out at-bats," Cora said. "That's a good baseball team over there, as everybody knows. We were in a hole. We kept fighting, fighting, fighting. We found a way to tie the game but then that happens."

After the equalizer by Bogaerts, the shortstop then stole third, and a base hit from Andrew Benintendi would have put the Sox in front for the first time all night. But Benintendi flew out to deep right to end the top of the frame.

With Cora's bullpen drained due to the recent lack of innings from the starting rotation, he had little choice but to send Walden back out for the ninth rather than bring in closer Brandon Workman in a tie game.

Walden's fifth pitch of the ninth was a slider that found too much plate, and Santana ripped it to give the Indians the type of joyous victory celebration the Red Sox so often experienced last season.

"It's tough to swallow," said Walden.

How do the Red Sox regroup from here? The red-hot J.D. Martinez, who started the charge back from the four-run deficit with a solo shot in the fourth, tried to explain.

“You know, I think we just kind of continue to have fun,” said Martinez. “Continue to try to keep the clubhouse loose. There’s two ways we could do it. We could hang our heads down and feel sorry for ourselves or we can just keep going out there every day and battling and having fun and enjoying it.”

Given their current state of affairs, can the Red Sox swiftly turn the page on such a gut-wrenching defeat?

“We’re about to find out tomorrow,” said Cora. “But obviously you saw their faces, you saw the reaction. It’s not easy. You fight, fight, fight and one swing and it’s over. I don’t know. We’re about to see tomorrow.”

Red Sox place Chavis on IL with shoulder injury

Ian Browne

Who would have thought that Michael Chavis making his best catch of the season would turn into a bittersweet moment for the rookie infielder?

The tumbling grab in short center field came with Chavis playing second base to rob Hunter Dozier of a hit in a 6-2 loss to the Royals on Aug. 6.

Six days later, lingering soreness from the grab forced Chavis to the 10-day injured list. The official injury is a sprained AC joint in his left shoulder.

After a day off on Wednesday, Chavis started all four games against the Angels at Fenway over the weekend. But when manager Alex Cora saw Chavis failing to finish his swing properly on Sunday, it was clear a move had to be made.

“It sucks,” said Chavis. “At least the way it happened, at least I made the catch. If I missed the catch it would be worse. This is never something that you’re happy or excited about. The whole reason it’s been delayed for a few days is I wanted to play through it and be out there and help the team. But it was kind of in a position where it wasn’t benefiting me, wasn’t really benefiting the team, so it was probably the smarter thing to do.”

To replace Chavis on the roster, the Red Sox recalled infielder Marco Hernandez from Triple-A Pawtucket. The club also optioned righty reliever Ryan Weber to Pawtucket while recalling righty reliever Travis Lakins.

With Chavis out of the mix, Mitch Moreland and Sam Travis will hold down first base. Brock Holt, Hernandez and Chris Owings will get playing time at second.

It has been a tough August so far for Chavis, with the right-handed hitter slashing .156/.206/.250 with one homer and two RBIs. It’s possible the time off will give him a chance to re-set.

“Yeah, definitely,” Chavis said. “It’s kind of the funny thing. When you get away from something, it gives you a chance to maybe clear your mind to reset a little bit. I’m a positive person, so trying to find the positive through all of this, that’s one of the things I’m looking forward to.”

Though the timetable for his return will be symptom-based, the Red Sox are hoping Chavis won’t need longer than the 10 days.

“We’ll see,” said Cora. “He’s not going to swing, he’s not going to do anything for probably five or six days. That’s something we have to do and we’ll have a better idea, probably, after he rests the five or six days and [we’ll] go from there.”

In his first Major League season, Chavis has a line of .254/.322/.444 with 18 homers and 58 RBIs in 95 games.

Struggling Cashner moves to bullpen role

Ian Browne

The Red Sox are at a place in the standings they can no longer give struggling performers time to figure things out.

And that's what led to Monday's announcement by manager Alex Cora that righty starter Andrew Cashner has been moved to the bullpen.

When the Red Sox acquired Cashner on July 13, the hope was that he would stabilize the fifth spot in the rotation, which had been a revolving door all season.

Instead, Cashner has struggled mightily for the Red Sox, going 1-4 with an 8.01 ERA in six starts. In 17 starts for Baltimore before the trade, Cashner was 9-3 with a 3.83 ERA.

"Cashner is going to be in the bullpen, starting [Tuesday]," said Cora. "I talked to him today. He understands. He knows where we're at, and with the off-days and everything that is going on. And he hasn't pitched the way he pitched the last five or six with Baltimore."

After a grueling stretch of 34 games in 34 days, the Red Sox have a day off on Thursday, followed by two next week. This gives Cora the flexibility he didn't have before to do some maneuvering with his struggling rotation. He has yet to name a starter for Wednesday's finale against the Indians.

With David Price on the injured list, the only three pitchers definitely in the rotation are Eduardo Rodriguez, Chris Sale and Rick Porcello.

Was there any thought to pulling Porcello (10-9, 5.67 ERA) from the rotation?

"No, no," said Cora. "I do feel that although the results are not there and obviously you see the whole season and the numbers and all that, he's made some strides actually the last two games and a half as far as the [stride] direction and the stuff [he was working on]. He gave up that home run the other day but we do feel that we'll be fine with him. We can't put everybody in the bullpen, so we'll stay where we are."

As for Cashner's move to the bullpen, Cora hopes it pays dividends.

"Velocity-wise, you saw it, 95, 96, so I told him, 'Hey man, you still can contribute. You can still help us out.' He told me he'll be ready for tomorrow," said Cora. "The off-days are the off-days and we're going to build it up around that. We need to win ballgames so we'll try to structure it the best way we think we're gonna win ballgames."

Still, he believes

Entering action on Monday, the Red Sox trailed the Rays by 7 1/2 games for the second Wild Card spot and were also six behind the Athletics. Though the math isn't pretty for Boston, Cora still believes the defending World Series champions can play their way to October.

"We do believe we can do it," said Cora. "We do believe we can have a run, but we have to do it in a different way. It just so happens that the schedule plays into our favor now and we can be creative with the rotation."

Cora was asked if the players also believe.

“Talking to them yesterday on the plane, yeah. We keep talking, we keep going over stuff,” Cora said. “You look around the league and what’s happening, at Citi Field [with the Mets], you win 14 out of 15, it happens. Like I told you guys before, good teams go through stretches of losing eight, nine, 10 in a row and there are some bad teams, they win 13 in a row, 14 in a row.

“I’m not saying the Mets are a bad team but you understand my point. We haven’t had that run the whole season. We know what we have to do the rest of the season. We can do it, but it starts here in Cleveland. It seems like they turned the season around when they went to Boston, so why not turn our season around here in Cleveland? It starts with us.”

*** *WEEI.com***

This is reality of the not-quite-good-enough Red Sox

Rob Bradford

They are too talented to fail. Look at what this group did just a few months ago. A run is around the corner.

Waiting ... waiting ... waiting.

It was easy to keep defaulting to what the collection of 2019 Red Sox had done, turning our backs on what they were doing. The idea that they could roll out of bed on Opening Day and win 95 games was still hovering. They just needed a tweak here or a push there. John Henry spoke for the masses when gauging his team's lot in life back in late June, telling WEEI.com, "If we play up to our capabilities we will easily make the playoffs. That's how I see it."

It was hard to argue considering how many names on the current roster helped secure that World Series trophy. But now it's a time for debate.

The here and now of these Red Sox players aren't as talented as anyone. They are close. They always had the potential to be. But they aren't. That was put on display once again in the Sox' 6-5 walk-off loss to the Indians Monday night. (For a complete recap, [click here](#).)

"It's tough, man," Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts told reporters. "I don't know what to say."

If there was ever a window into the Sox' season it was this one.

For a good five minutes or so it looked like that worm had finally turned thanks to Bogaerts' game-tying double with two outs in the ninth inning. Then, one out and one commercial break later, Carlos Santana takes Marcus Walden deep and the Red Sox found themselves nine games back (in the loss column) of Tampa Bay in the Wild Card standings.

This is after a flurry of to-the-wall fly outs. This is after they fought back from a four-run deficit. This was after seemingly riding out Cleveland's surge with clutch outs from both Darwinzon Hernandez and Walden (who hadn't given up a hit in his last 8 2/3 innings before the decisive homer). No matter. Close, but ...

The pain in this group is obvious. Andrew Cashner's "we will get them next time" postgame presser the other day was not representative of the clubhouse. They wanted to prove bringing back the same team was the right approach. It's been an internal rallying cry throughout. But now it is a hard blueprint to defend.

They are 23-37 against teams over .500, living life just three games above the break-even point themselves.

We can now sing Bill Belichick's tune from the mountain tops: It is what it is.

"I wish I knew," said Bogaerts when asked by reporters how the Red Sox eliminate the bad and focus on whatever good is left lingering. "Try not to think about it as much. I know everyone in this room cares a lot. It's really frustrating and annoying when the results aren't the way you want them to be. Yeah, that's it."

After Eduardo Rodriguez dug the Red Sox an early hole by surrendering a pair of home runs, the Red Sox were able to crawl within one thanks in large part to homers from J.D. Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr. The Sox dropped to 32-19 when managing two or more homers.

Michael Chavis heads to injured list with shoulder injury

Rob Bradford

Everyone knew some moves were coming, but one of them came as somewhat of a surprise.

The Red Sox announced Monday that Michael Chavis was headed to the 10-day injured list with an AC joint sprain in his left shoulder. Taking his place on the 25-man roster will be Marco Hernandez. The Sox also recalled pitcher Travis Lakins, sending Ryan Weber back down to Triple-A Pawtucket.

The shoulder injury might explain some of Chavis' recent struggles, with the infielder going hitless in his last four games (0-for-12) with six strikeouts. His batting average has dropped to .254.

Hernandez, whose most recent stint with the Red Sox came while replacing David Price on the roster when the pitcher was on paternity leave, was hitting .285 for Triple-A Pawtucket after totaling a .333 clip during his major league stint (22-for-66).

Lakins last pitched Aug. 9 for the PawSox, throwing two scoreless innings.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Emotional 9th inning vs Indians leaves Red Sox teetering on verge of total demoralization

John Tomase

It's getting a little late in the season for moral victories, but the timing is feeling just about right for hopelessly demoralizing losses.

Monday night at Progressive Field had some elements of the former but ultimately felt exclusively like the latter after the Indians erased a Red Sox comeback from 5-1 down with one swing of Carlos Santana's bat for the walk-off 6-5 victory.

In losing for the 12th time in 15 games, the Red Sox found a different kind of low. This one wasn't about being outclassed from the first pitch or overmatched in the bullpen. It was an honest-to-goodness rally that left potential heroes like Xander Bogaerts barely able to break a whisper when it went for naught.

Bogaerts' two-out double off the outstretched glove of right fielder Tyler Naquin had tied it with the Red Sox down to their last out in the ninth. But reliever Marcus Walden, who hadn't allowed a hit since late July, hung a slider and Santana blasted it out the other way to left-center leading off the bottom of the frame.

The momentum from the top of the ninth hadn't even dried when the Indians painted right over it.

"It was joyful for a quick five minutes," Bogaerts said.

What a killer. Trailing 5-1 in the third, the Red Sox chipped away. They rallied on solo homers from J.D. Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr., an RBI double from Brock Holt, and then Bogaerts' shot to right that eluded the stab of Naquin, who had earlier robbed Martinez of extra bases with a leaping catch at the fence.

"It's just the kind of night it was," Walden said. "Bogey's hit the top of the wall and theirs didn't."

Human nature being what it is, the Red Sox could be forgiven for just accepting that this isn't their season. They've fallen so far out of the playoff race, citing the standings feels needlessly cruel. (But for those who must know: they trail the Twins by 10.5 games, the Rays by eight games, and the first runner-up A's by 6.5).

Their deficit is entering insurmountable territory, which might explain the feeling of despair in the postgame clubhouse. Bogaerts wore the loss particularly hard, which makes sense, because he has played as hard as anyone this year.

"It's rough, man, especially knowing how important every game is from now forward," Bogaerts said. "Obviously I think that inning, from scoring in the ninth, they might've been a bit down. But Santana picked up his closer big time. That's how this game goes sometimes.

"It's tough, man. I don't know what to say."

He was asked specifically about finding a way not to become demoralized.

"I wish I knew," he said. "Try not to think about it as much. I know everyone in this room cares a lot. It's really frustrating and annoying when the results aren't the way you want them to be."

Manager Alex Cora tried to find the silver lining.

"Honestly, it's tough because I do feel this is one of the best games we've played in a while as far as being locked in, grinding at-bats," he said. "That's a good baseball team over there, everybody knows, we were in a hole, we kept fighting, fighting, fighting, we found a way to tie the game but then that happens. Waldy has been outstanding for us for a while, it just happened he hung a breaking ball there, but it's one of those that hey, it really sucks but at the same time, we did a lot of good things today that we haven't done in a while, so that's a positive."

A year after watching everything go right en route to a dominant World Series season, the Red Sox just don't have it. While Cora needs to believe Monday's loss provided hope for better days, his players feel more resigned to their fate.

At some point, the losses simply become too much to take.

Alex Cora plans to get creative with Red Sox rotation -- good luck with that

John Tomase

Alex Cora keeps dropping hints that the Red Sox rotation is about to undergo changes. He suggests that five off days between now and Sept. 2 -- plus a continuation vs. the Royals that will start in the 10th inning -- could generate opportunities to be creative.

I'm all for creativity, but you can't swipe festering fish heads from the cat and turn them into a sublime bouillabaisse. Garbage in, garbage out.

Cora would seem to have the same problem with his rotation. How many ways can a manager rearrange the players most responsible for the Red Sox falling out of playoff contention without yielding the exact same results?

I seriously have zero idea what Cora is even getting at. Right now his two most reliable starters aren't even that reliable, but at least Chris Sale and Eduardo Rodriguez give him a chance.

The former is having a solid year if you judge pitchers on hypotheticals like FIP, but a trash year if you're more inclined to favor results, which include a 6-11 record and 4.41 ERA. The latter is 13-5 with a 4.17 ERA and has probably been the team's most consistent pitcher all season.

After that, there's not a lot to work with. Left-hander David Price is on the IL with a wrist cyst that required a cortisone injection. His return remains a mystery. Cora won't commit to replacement Brian Johnson starting Wednesday on regular rest.

That leaves right-hander Rick Porcello, who owns the worst ERA (5.67) of any of the 71 qualified starters in baseball, and Andrew Cashner, who ranks seventh on the same ignominious list (4.83), thanks to an 8.01 ERA with the Red Sox. Cashner arrived from Baltimore with a solid 3.83 ERA that would rank 33rd between Madison Bumgarner and Noah Syndergaard now.

At least it would if he could get anyone out. His regression has been demoralizingly swift.

Things have gotten so bad that in the last few days, Cora has declined to commit to Porcello, Cashner, or Johnson as members of the rotation.

"We'll address it tomorrow and see where we'll go," Cora said after Sunday's 5-4 loss to the Angels. "We're not in a good spot, so we'll sit down tomorrow and see how we map it out -- about where we're going with the rotation. Pitching plans. We'll sit down tomorrow. As a group we'll talk about the off-days and all that stuff. We'll sit down tomorrow the whole staff and see where it takes us."

The looming off days mean Cora could employ a four-man rotation for the rest of the month, especially if he turns over the completion of the suspended game vs. the Royals to his bullpen. It's not even clear whom those four guys would be, beyond Sale and E-Rod, though.

Price? Depends on how quickly he returns. Porcello? In a different year, with a different contract, he'd be DFA'd. Cashner? He's imploding.

Cora sounds disinclined to feature an opener -- his bullpen is over-taxed and under-staffed as it is -- so one possibility would be piggy-backing Porcello and Cashner on the same day and asking each to go three innings. Until Price returns, that still leaves someone like Johnson or Hector Velazquez or Ryan Weber taking a turn, and those are the pitchers who barely provided three innings a start after Nathan Eovaldi underwent surgery in April.

Oh, and then there's the possibility of shutting down Price and/or Sale so they're fresh for 2020. The Red Sox literally lack the pitching to make this happen, unless they want to field a Triple-A staff in September.

"I'm not planning on doing that," Cora said of shutting down his aces. "That's something that if it comes up, we'll address it."

The question is how. The Red Sox haven't had enough starting pitching all season, and no amount of creativity can fix that.

*** *The Athletic***

The 5 percent approach: How the Red Sox can catch basically every break and still make the playoffs

Chad Jennings

Let's start with the numbers. The Red Sox began Monday four games above .500 with 42 games to play. They're impossibly buried in the American League East and 7 1/2 games out of the wild card. There are two teams ahead of them for the final playoff spot. The number-crunchers at FiveThirtyEight.com say they have a 5 percent chance of making the playoffs.

We want to find that 5 percent.

"We have a real shot," manager Alex Cora said Sunday. "It's not a fake one."

Fair enough. We've written this team's obituary enough times. Today, we'll try something different. Not a glass-half-full approach. No, this is a glass-totally-full approach.

What will it take, realistically, for this team to make up ground and sneak into the playoffs? Let's set the baseline at 92 wins, one fewer than the number FanGraphs projects for the Rays and two more than for the Athletics. The Red Sox getting in starts with the Rays and A's falling short.

So, the Rays stumble, the A's can't make up ground, and the Red Sox surge. Without resorting to simulation absurdity like Carson Smith as a bullpen savior, let's look for realistic ways this team could win 30 times in the next seven weeks.

It starts with correcting the team's greatest drag up to this point: the under-performing rotation.

The most obvious way to improve the win-loss record is to win more of Chris Sale's starts. Going 9-15 with their ace on the mound has been a crippling blow, but Sale did have his most encouraging start of the year last week against the Angels.

There's time for Sale to make at least eight more starts. With off days, the Red Sox could probably push it to nine, maybe even 10, but let's start with eight so he's available for a wild-card game. Pitching every five days the rest of the way leaves Sale lined up for eight starts against the toughest opponents left on the schedule: the Indians, Phillies (twice), Yankees, Twins, Rockies (in Colorado), Rays and Rangers.

Sale's best eight-start stretch of the season was May 3 to June 10, when he pitched to a 1.99 ERA. Opponents hit just .153 with 88 strikeouts in 206 plate appearances. Three of those eight starts came against the Astros and Yankees, and a fourth came against Rangers, who were five games over .500. Even if we push that best stretch to nine starts, it would mean adding either seven innings, two earned runs against the Rays or six innings, two earned, 10 strikeouts against the Orioles. Either way, it's a legitimately good stretch beyond just those eight in a row.

The Red Sox have averaged more than six runs per game since the All-Star break, and six runs would have been enough to win every single one of those eight or nine Sale outings earlier this season.

Allowing for one offensive dud or bullpen implosions, let's give the Red Sox seven wins in Sale's final eight or nine outings. Such an expectation doesn't demand that he be perfect. It only requires him to be a much improved — but not quite unprecedented — version of himself.

Since our glass is all-the-way full, we'll also give David Price some benefit of the doubt and assume the cyst in his wrist caused his recent downturn. We'll assume he heals in time to make another six starts, maybe seven, with the same 2.71 ERA he had from April 14 to July 14. That was a span of 15 starts in which he allowed more than three earned runs only once. With this offense, we'll say he can help the Red Sox win five more times. His best seven-start stretch of the season, the Red Sox won six, so five should be perfectly doable.

Eduardo Rodriguez also gets the benefit of the doubt. Thanks to great run support and an improved ability to pitch deep into games, Rodriguez has yet to go 10 starts without the Red Sox winning at least seven. He had one 10-start stretch when they won nine, and in another they won eight. Let's say the Red Sox push Rodriguez to make nine more starts, maybe 10. They'll need to win eight of them.

That level of optimism leaves Rodriguez, Sale and Price responsible for roughly 24 more starts with the Red Sox winning 20. That gets the team to 82 wins. To reach our magic number of 92, they'd need to win 10 of the other 18 games, a .555 winning percentage that's basically exactly what they did in the month of June (they were actually better than that in May and July).

And the Red Sox are getting a head start because, in this scenario, they'll find a way to win last week's postponed game against the Royals. The makeup date is Thursday, Aug. 22, when the Red Sox will have had two days off in the previous week. The Royals will have just played six in a row and traveled into Boston after a night game in Baltimore knowing they have to get right back on a plane to Cleveland. Who would want to be the Royals in that scenario? One way or another, the Red Sox win that game. So, they need to win just nine of the remaining 17.

To fill those other starts, we're going to give Cora some options. Thanks to six off days in the next three weeks — the makeup game counts as an offday for the rotation — the Red Sox can get creative with their starting pitchers, and upcoming September call-ups will provide additional depth so Cora can have a short leash.

With that in mind, we're going to make a modest suggestion: Build up Nathan Eovaldi. He's twice thrown two innings and roughly 40 pitches. Find a way to give him 50 to 55 pitches the next time. A pretty standard spring training increase would leave him available for 65 to 70 pitches the time after that, and by the end of the month, he could be basically a full-go for a starter's workload.

That means, by September, Eovaldi could step into Andrew Cashner's vacated rotation spot (he was just demoted to the bullpen) or even serve as an alternative to Rick Porcello (who has the highest ERA of all pitchers with enough innings to quality). Eovaldi's career ERA, strikeout rate and opponents' OPS suggest historically that he's been at his best in the final month of the year. The Red Sox have to try to take advantage of that.

Meanwhile, every Porcello start the rest of the way gets the Cashner treatment. Cora pulled Cashner after 51 pitches and 1 2/3 innings on Sunday. The Red Sox were down 3-0, but the game was not totally lost, and the bullpen held down the fort. The aggressive pitching change at least gave them a chance.

Marcus Walden has returned to form lately, Josh Taylor has shown he can go multiple innings, so can Brian Johnson, and the Red Sox can shuttle fresh arms up and down from Triple A as needed (as they did Monday, swapping Ryan Weber for Travis Lakins).

How many wins can they get that way? Well, even with Porcello pitching to a 5.67 ERA, the Red Sox are 14-10 in his starts, and they've won five of his past seven. If they can win six of his last nine, they would need to win only three of their remaining eight games. Again, that's doable if the bullpen doesn't fall apart.

Using Eovaldi for multiple innings — either as a starter or a piggyback long man — takes one arm out of Cora's late-inning playbook. Using Brandon Workman as a fairly traditional closer, which has more or less been his role the past month, leaves the ninth inning in relatively good hands (none of his blown saves have been in the ninth, and the numbers say he's been one of the game's better relievers this season).

That leaves the rest of the bullpen to handle roughly two or three innings most nights. The offense is potent enough that some of those innings will be in blowout situations anyone could handle, but let's examine how good these Red Sox relievers have been at their very best this season.

To match the amount of time left on the schedule, here's a full month-and-a-half stretch for most of the key relievers, plus a particularly good month for two potential September call-ups.

Darwinzon Hernandez hasn't pitched in a big-league relief role for a full month and a half, so his listed stats are simply the dominant three and a half weeks before he got knocked around Saturday. If that bad

inning was just a blip, then there's little reason to think Hernandez can't get right back to being a force out of the pen.

If Heath Hembree can get off the injured list to do the same, while Walden, Workman, Taylor and Matt Barnes can bring back their peak stretches — not out of the question considering Walden's had just one bad outing in a month, Taylor's been excellent in August, and Barnes just finished a scoreless July — then the Red Sox might have some options for those middle and late innings.

Add Brasier and Brewer as September call-ups, knowing their best months were pretty effective, and Cora could have as many as eight legitimate options to protect late leads. Guys like Hector Velazquez, Bobby Poyner and Trevor Kelley could return to mop-up innings and keep the go-to guys fresh.

Is that enough relief pitching to preserve those Sale, Price and Rodriguez wins while also winning nine of the other 17 games down the stretch? Hard to say for certain, but it seems doable, especially if the offense is at its best.

The lineup is the least of the Red Sox worries — they're second in the majors in runs, first in hits and fourth in OPS — but they've shown enough inconsistency to cause some concern.

It would be fun to suggest that Michael Chavis simply return the .981 OPS he posted in late April and early May, but now he's hurt, and we'll acknowledge that the league has adjusted. Chavis would be unlikely to repeat that hot start, anyway.

Instead, the Red Sox offense can break out of an August slump by simply getting its best guys going again.

Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers have struggled in August, and Mookie Betts has been unable to maintain his ridiculously hot month of July. To really maximize their potential, the Red Sox are going to need those three to join the surging J.D. Martinez and Andrew Benintendi to make this offense the best in baseball again. If that doesn't work in the next three weeks, the Red Sox could try Bobby Dalbec.

The highly touted Triple-A slugger will be Rule 5-eligible this offseason, which means he's inevitably going to be added to the 40-man roster anyway. Why not get the kid's feet wet and see what happens? At the very least, he could be a big right-handed bat off the bench, and he just might do what Chavis did back in April and hit his way into a more prominent role.

It's not strictly necessary — the Red Sox can be and have been an excellent offensive team without him — but they need to capitalize on every opportunity. It won't take a perfect month and a half to get them into the playoff picture, but it will take something close to it. They've dug a hole deep enough that it requires some imagination to find a way out.

*** *The Cleveland Plain Dealer***

Carlos Santana delivers another dramatic home run as Indians get 6-5 walk-off win against Boston

Joe Noga

Carlos Santana rescued the Cleveland Indians with a late-inning home run for the second consecutive game Monday night, blasting a solo shot off Boston's Marcus Walden in the ninth inning for a 6-5 Tribe walk-off victory at Progressive Field.

All-Star closer Brad Hand (6-3, 2.74) got the win after suffering his second blown save in as many chances when he walked Mookie Betts and gave up a two-out RBI double to Xander Bogaerts that just cleared a leaping Tyler Naquin in the top of the inning. It was Hand's fourth blown save in 33 chances.

Santana, who bailed out Hand with a grand slam in the 10th inning Sunday in Minnesota, delivered his second walk-off hit of the season and first since a homer April 5 against Toronto's Joe Biagini. It's the Tribe's sixth walk-off win of the year.

"It's exciting, I'm excited," Santana said. "We're fighting for the division and every game is really important for the team."

Manager Terry Francona said the Indians have come to rely on Santana's bat in clutch situations all year.

"He has come up so big for us and has been so consistent," Francona said. "Right when you get punched in the stomach he takes a swing like that. I mean, that was a gorgeous swing. I know the last two days, but he's been doing it all year."

Cleveland won for the third time in four meetings with Boston and improved to 16-9 against American League East Division teams. The Indians moved into sole possession of first place in the AL Central for the first time since April 20. They lead idle Minnesota by a half-game.

After back-to-back singles by Santana and Franmil Reyes in the third, Jose Ramirez launched a 2-2 curveball from Red Sox starter Eduardo Rodriguez 425 feet to the home run porch in left. Ramirez's 17th home run snapped an 0-for-11 skid and gave the Indians a 5-1 advantage.

Ramirez added a leadoff double in the seventh and has 11 extra-base hits in August and 28 since the start of July, breaking a tie with Boston's Rafael Devers for the most in baseball. The Indians are 37-5 when he drives in at least one run.

Rookie right-hander Zach Plesac struck out a pair of Boston hitters and walked a pair allowing three runs and seven hits in five innings. He threw 24 pitches in the fourth inning and worked into deep counts throughout the night. Francona said early on, it seemed like the Red Sox barreled up everything Plesac was throwing.

"It was the first time we've seen him kinda run away from his fastball," Francona said. "That's not him, and he knew it, too. It's not fair to think that a kid with that amount of (service) time is going to be perfect every time out, but he still competed."

Hunter Wood relieved Plesac after the rookie tossed 78 pitches through the fifth. Wood exited the game with two out in the sixth with a bruised right calf after he was hit by a smash up the middle by Mitch Moreland. Tyler Clippard entered and struck out Brock Holt to avoid damage.

Plesac helped himself with a nice defensive play in the fourth after serving up a solo home run to J.D. Martinez and walking Andrew Benintendi. Catcher Christian Vazquez sent a one-hopper back to the mound and Plesac set his feet before starting a double play by throwing to Francisco Lindor at second, who then relayed to Santana for the second out.

But Moreland singled and moved to second on a wild pitch before scoring on Holt's two-out RBI double that trimmed Cleveland's lead to 5-3. Jackie Bradley Jr.'s leadoff solo homer in the seventh off Clippard pulled the Red Sox within one run.

Reyes put the Indians in front 2-0 in the first with a two-run blast to center, his 28th and first since joining the Tribe from San Diego Aug. 1. It was just his fourth home run of the year off a left-handed pitcher.

Boston answered with a run in the second when Benintendi doubled off the wall in left and the ricochet bounced over Greg Allen's head, allowing Martinez to score all the way from first.

Allen redeemed himself in the fifth when Xander Bogaerts lined a Plesac pitch off the wall and tried to stretch the hit into a double. Allen fielded the ball on one hop and threw a strike to Jason Kipnis at second to get Bogaerts. Plesac then retired Martinez on a grounder to second that ended the inning.

Indians manager Terry Francona (617-472) tied Hall of Famer Tris Speaker for No. 3 on the Indians' all-time managerial wins list. Only Mike Hargrove (721) and Lou Boudreau (728) have more victories in franchise history.

Next

The series continues Tuesday as right-hander Mike Clevinger (7-2, 3.02) takes the mound against Red Sox lefty Chris Sale (6-11, 4.41). First pitch is scheduled for 7:10 p.m. and the game will be broadcast on SportsTime Ohio, WTAM 1100 AM and WMMS 100.7 FM.

Clevinger has won six consecutive decisions over seven starts dating back to July 3. He is 0-1 with a 8.03 ERA in four starts against the Red Sox. Sale enters the game with 206 strikeouts and has eclipsed the 200-punchout mark in seven straight seasons. He is 5-8 with a 4.80 ERA in 30 career appearances against Cleveland.

*** *The Akron Beacon Journal***

Indians 6, Red Sox 5: Carlos Santana's walk-off home run saves Brad Hand

Ryan Lewis

Two consecutive games. Two consecutive blown saves by Brad Hand. Two consecutive rescue home runs by Carlos Santana.

The Indians led most of the night before Hand blew a save in the top of the ninth. In the bottom of the ninth, Santana drilled a solo home run to left-center field to give the Indians a walk-off 6-5 win over the Boston Red Sox on Monday night.

And with the Minnesota Twins being off Monday night, the walk-off home run put the Indians (72-47) alone in first place in the American League Central race.

Prior to Santana's home run, the Indians built a 5-1 lead with home runs from Franmil Reyes and Jose Ramirez.

Reyes struck first and finally got himself on the board with the Indians. Reyes stepped to the plate in the first inning with Santana (walk) on first base and Red Sox starting pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez on the mound. He also stepped to the plate 4-for-36 as a member of the Indians with zero home runs in what had been an ice-cold start.

Rodriguez tried an 0-1 fastball at the top of the zone, and Reyes finally unleashed that sleeping power with a two-run home run to right-center field, his first homer with the Indians.

Two innings later, it was Ramirez's turn. With one out, Santana and Reyes both singled, which brought up Ramirez. Rodriguez threw a 2-2 curveball that was below the zone, but it ended up as a "home run pitch" — Ramirez's favorite term — as he launched it to the Home Run Porch for a three-run shot that put the Indians ahead 5-1. It was Ramirez's 17th home run this season.

The Red Sox (62-59) slowly chipped away against Indians starting pitcher Zach Plesac, who danced into and around trouble for much of his five innings. With the Indians still holding a 5-1 lead, J.D. Martinez opened the fourth inning with a home run and Brock Holt later doubled in a run.

In the fifth, left fielder Greg Allen might have saved a run with a terrific throw, one that in the end might have also saved the game. Rafael Devers walked and Xander Bogaerts followed by lining a ball off the left-field wall. Allen played it off the wall, fired to Jason Kipnis and nailed Bogaerts at second base. Instead of

having two runners in scoring position with one out, Plesac was able to work out of the inning by getting Martinez to ground out and escape with the Indians holding a 5-3 lead.

That two-run lead was cut in half on Jackie Bradley Jr.'s solo home run over the 19-foot wall in left field in the top of the seventh inning off Tyler Clippard.

The Red Sox threatened in the eighth, but again, the Indians escaped. With a runner on and two outs, Sam Travis doubled off Indians reliever Oliver Perez to put the potential tying and go-ahead runs in scoring position. In the biggest at-bat of the night, Holt lined out to Santana at first base to end the inning.

The Red Sox finally were able to close the gap in the ninth against Hand, who walked Mookie Betts with one out before striking out Devers. But Bogaerts came through for the Red Sox, ripping a ball to right field that Tyler Naquin couldn't haul in to score Betts and tie it 5-5.

Only a few moments later, Santana rendered it all moot with his walk-off shot into the Cleveland night.

*** *Associated Press***

Indians top BoSox 6-5 on Santana walk-off, 1st in AL Central

The comeback's complete. Four months later, the Indians are again atop the AL Central.

Carlos Santana homered leading off the ninth inning as Cleveland continued its stunning climb with a 6-5 win over the fast-fading Boston Red Sox on Monday night, moving the Indians into sole possession of first place for the first time since April 19.

After the Red Sox tied it in the top of the inning off closer Brad Hand, Santana, who hit a grand slam in the 10th to beat Minnesota on Sunday, connected on a 2-2 pitch from Marcus Walden (7-2). Santana's shot barely cleared the wall in left to give the Indians their biggest win in a season that seemingly grows more special every day.

"Right when you get punched in the stomach he takes a swing like that," Francona said of Santana, who connected for his 200th homer with Cleveland. "That was a gorgeous swing. I know the last two days, but he's been doing it all year."

Santana, who has had a storybook return to Cleveland after playing in Philadelphia last season, circled the bases and was mobbed at home by his overjoyed teammates, who trailed the idle Minnesota Twins by 11 1/2 games but have gone an MLB-best 43-17 since June 4.

"Nobody threw in the towel," said Hand, who blew his second save in two days but got bailed out again by Santana. "Nobody gave up and we all battled together."

Jose Ramirez hit a three-run homer and Franmil Reyes had a two-run shot as the Indians moved 25 games over .500 with their sixth walk-off win.

It's been an uphill battle for months, but the Indians are finally in front -- and hope to stay there.

"Playing these type of high-energy atmosphere games, it's amazing," said Indians rookie starter Zach Plesac. "I feel the chemistry we have is special. Everyone feels it. It's been so much fun, this whole ride, this whole year coming back and battling up to first place. We have something great going."

Down 5-1 after three innings, the Red Sox chipped away and finally tied it in the ninth on a two-out double by Xander Bogaerts off Hand (6-3). The left-hander gave up a one-out walk and struck out Rafael Devers before Bogaerts doubled off the right-field wall.

"It was joyful for a quick five minutes," Bogaerts said. "It's rough."

An All-Star, Hand has not had his usual command in his last few outings.

"I just can't make the big pitch to get out of it," Hand said. "I had a chance yesterday to get out of some stuff -- two outs, runner on first today, but I just can't make that pitch to get the job done right now."

J.D. Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr. homered, but Boston lost for the 12th time in 15 games.

The defending World Series champions are quickly vanishing from the playoff picture as well. They came in trailing the New York Yankees by 16 games in the AL East and 7 1/2 back in the wild-card race.

"It's not easy. You fight, fight, fight and in one swing, it's over," Red Sox manager Joey Cora said.

FIRST SHOT

The Indians were without slugger Yasiel Puig, who pulled the appeal of his three-game suspension for his involvement in the July 30 brawl with Pittsburgh while he was with Cincinnati.

So Reyes took Puig's cleanup spot and promptly hit a two-run homer -- his first with the Indians.

After Santana drew a two-out walk, Reyes, who came in batting just .111 (4 of 36) since coming to Cleveland from San Diego, drove an 0-1 pitch into the bullpen in right-center.

ELITE COMPANY

Santana is the first Cleveland player to hit a game-winning homer in the ninth or later in consecutive games since Hall of Famer Jim Thome and Albert Belle each did it in 1995.

HARD WOOD

Indians reliever Hunter Wood was replaced in the sixth after taking a comebacker off his right calf. It was his birthday.

"He's going to be OK," said Francona, who tied Tris Speaker for third on the Indians' career wins list with 617. "It hit him in the calf and he got tight real quick. I'm actually glad we took him out because by the time he got to the dugout he was pretty sore."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LHP David Price, out with a cyst in his left wrist, played catch at Fenway Park on Monday. The five-time All-Star had a cortisone injection last week after being placed on the injured list.

Indians: Two-time Cy Young winner Corey Kluber will start for Double-A Akron on Tuesday as he nears his return from a broken right arm. Kluber, who pitched three innings last week at Triple-A Columbus, is scheduled to throw roughly 65 pitches. He's been out since May 1, when he was nailed by a line drive in Miami.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Chris Sale (6-11, 4.41 ERA) will start needing five strikeouts to reach 2,000 in his career. According to information provided by the Red Sox, Sale could reach the milestone faster than any pitcher. He's thrown 1,623 innings. Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez reached 2,000 strikeouts in 1,711 1/3 innings.

Indians: RHP Mike Clevinger (7-2, 3.02 ERA) has won six consecutive decisions. He's 3-0 with a 0.92 ERA -- baseball's second lowest -- at home.