

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, October 1, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

There's no hesitation in Red Sox' interim leadership group

Peter Abraham

Raquel Ferreira, Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott have been dubbed the "Gang of Four" since they started collectively running baseball operations for the Red Sox after Dave Dombrowski's dismissal.

The original Gang of Four were Communist Party officials in China who rose to power in the late 1960s before being found guilty of treason and sent to prison. Baseball can be a tough business, but the cultural revolution taking place within the Sox organization won't result in jail time.

It would more accurate to call them the "Super Friends" given the diverse set of skills being melded together.

Ferreira has been with the Sox since 1999, longer than all but a handful of people in the organization. She oversees day-to-day operations and along the way has gained the trust of many players. If there's any chance for Mookie Betts to find common ground with the Sox and agree to an extension, Ferreira will have played a huge role.

O'Halloran started with the Sox in 2002 and is the in-house expert on finance, contract language, MLB rules, and roster management.

Romero jokes that he's the newcomer of the bunch, joining the Sox in 2006. He has a scouting background that goes back to his father, Ed, playing for the Sox.

Scott, part of the staff since 2004, oversees analytics and systems. He's been instrumental in the team adding staff in those departments.

"It's very complementary skills and experiences," said O'Halloran, who goes by "BOH" around the ballpark. "I've worked with all these guys so long. Working together is the easy part."

Ferreira said she wouldn't apply for the top job but believes her accomplishments speak for themselves. The same is true for O'Halloran, Romero, and Scott.

"They know what aspirations we have," Scott said.

If the external search proved fruitless — any interested executive will have to carefully consider working for owners who fired Dombrowski less than a year after winning the World Series — any of the four could handle the job well.

But, for now, they are collectively running the Sox while team president Sam Kennedy vets candidates to present to John Henry and Tom Werner.

When Theo Epstein temporarily jumped ship in 2005, Ben Cherington and Jed Hoyer took over for six weeks. So the Sox have tried leadership by committee before.

But this time around is different. The Sox are coming off a disappointing third-place finish, ownership is intent on slashing payroll and J.D. Martinez can opt out of his contract five days after the World Series.

There's a lot going on. But what looks potentially awkward from the outside has so far worked smoothly.

"It does happen fast. There's an initial shock and you're like, 'Oh really?'" But you get so used to it," Ferreira said. "As everybody always says: You're hired to be fired. That's baseball, especially when you have a high-profile job."

The Super Friends aren't waiting. They restructured the scouting department last week, including naming a new amateur scouting director. They're also working on a plan for 2020 and preparing for other player moves.

"They're taking action," Kennedy said. "They're not waiting for a general manager or president of baseball ops."

Said Romero: "Ownership has entrusted us to make these decisions and make the best decisions for the baseball operations department going forward."

There are group text messages, in-person meetings, phone calls, and popping into each other's offices.

"We try to get everybody together for everything but that's not always possible," O'Halloran said.

Scott is looking at it as a player would and controlling what he can control.

"We're trying to do the best job. What we don't want to do is put the new person in a tough situation," he said.

The Sox held an end-of-the-season news conference Monday, Kennedy taking questions alone before Romero and O'Halloran joined manager Alex Cora.

There was consideration to add chairs on the small riser for Ferreira and Scott.

"That would be a circus not knowing who would answer what question," Scott said. "We didn't need that."

Scott and Ferreira actually took more questions off to the side later on than were asked in the more formal session.

"I think I'm sweating," Ferreira joked. "I'm not used to this."

The Super Friends could be at this for a while. Kennedy said several times that the Sox are in the early stages of their search with a rough deadline of having somebody in place for the general managers meetings that start Nov. 11 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

At some point everybody will go back to their area of responsibility and carry out the plans of the new person. If the Super Friends are anxious about what happens next, they hide it well.

"I think what we've all tried to do is put the Red Sox first," O'Halloran said. "Let's make the best decisions for the Boston Red Sox and trust that it will work out and the new person coming in will be thankful that we made these decisions."

For Red Sox, starting pitchers are at the heart of this season's failure and next season's outlook

Alex Speier

An offseason of change for the Red Sox officially got underway Monday morning, when team CEO/president Sam Kennedy held a season-ending news conference, followed by another led by assistant

GMs Brian O'Halloran and Eddie Romero (two of the organization's four transitional leaders), alongside manager Alex Cora.

Much of the focus of the roughly hourlong availability revolved around the Red Sox' spending plans and how those might affect the organization's ability to retain Mookie Betts and/or J.D. Martinez.

Yet there was scant dialogue about the primary issue that undid the just-completed 2019 season, and the one that may have greater sway over the team's 2020 fortunes than any other.

"It's pretty simple," one Red Sox executive recently said in contemplating whether the disappointment of this year might be repeated next year. "If those three guys are healthy and good, we can be really good. And if they're not, then we probably won't be."

Those three guys — Chris Sale (6-11, 4.40 ERA in 25 starts), David Price (7-5, 4.28 ERA in 22 starts), and Nate Eovaldi (2-1, 5.99 ERA in 12 starts) — were neither particularly healthy nor performing at anything resembling their peak levels in the 2019 season.

The impact of their performance struggles and injuries, meanwhile, was magnified by a jarring lack of depth, the insult on top of injury that rendered success almost impossible.

Of course, part of the reason for the lack of depth relates to the sizable contract commitments — the trio will count for roughly \$73 million against next year's luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million — that limit the financial flexibility not only to retain stars such as Martinez and Betts, but also to build rotation depth.

The consequences of the frequent short outings by fill-ins created a strain that extended beyond the rotation.

"We, as an organization, should have given Alex and the pitching staff more depth. We should have addressed that, whether it was before the season or during the season," said Romero.

"There's an amount of tax that it puts on your bullpen. It stresses them out. They were great early on, but fatigue is a real thing and it affects performance."

Some of the ugly details on the rotation: The Red Sox rotation had a 4.95 ERA, 20th in baseball and considerably worse than that of any playoff team. (The Yankees had the worst rotation ERA of any postseason team at 4.51.)

Meanwhile, the fact that Sale (elbow), Price (elbow, wrist), and Eovaldi (bone chips, biceps tendinitis) all had injuries casts a bit of a cloud over the team's prospects. Some of the injuries — Eovaldi's bone chips, the cyst on Price's wrist likely fall into the category of one-time-only concerns. But others — the elbow and biceps injuries — will loom.

Meanwhile, all three of those anticipated rotation anchors will be in their 30s next year, with Eovaldi entering his age-30 season in 2020, Sale moving into his age-31 campaign, and Price pitching at 34. The clock moves forward.

"It comes with the territory of pitchers aging," assistant GM Zack Scott said of concern about injuries.

"We're always concerned about [depth in case of injuries]. But all of those guys are going to be ready for spring training. There's no concern. It's not like we know, 'This guy is going to be out all year.'"

Indeed, all of the Sox decision-makers have been consistent that the team anticipates the arrival of Sale, Price, and Eovaldi as healthy pitchers for the start of spring training.

Despite their struggles this year, that still-talented trio could join 2019 breakout starter Eduardo Rodriguez to form a formidable rotation that ranks as one of the best in the American League.

“The players we signed under [Dave Dombrowski’s] leadership are great players,” said O’Halloran, when asked about the impact of last winter’s signings of Sale and Eovaldi on the team’s future payroll. “We’re glad to have Chris Sale on our team in 2020 and beyond. The same for Nate Eovaldi.”

“We expect [Price] to be a horse, and we expect him to be healthy,” Romero added. “He’s feeling better already. He’s going to be a stalwart in the rotation.”

That may prove accurate — but after 2019, the admitted failure to create starting depth cannot be repeated moving forward, particularly given the demographics of the rotation.

“We always try to build around [depth],” said Scott. “As pitchers age, pitcher injuries tend to be a compounding issue. They’re not just one-offs.”

But how can the team create depth?

The team’s starting pitching prospect pool is getting deeper but likely doesn’t offer immediate answers.

Bryan Mata, a 20-year-old righthander who finished the year in Double A, looms as a potential depth option, but not before late 2020 or even 2021. Righthander Tanner Houck, 23, is working as a starter in the Arizona Fall League, though most evaluators believe his greatest impact will be as a reliever, the role in which he finished the year in Triple A Pawtucket.

The Red Sox need a fifth starter and upgraded depth behind it.

They’ll sit out of the Gerrit Cole sweepstakes. Maybe they can make a run at Rich Hill or Rick Porcello on short-term deals, though the Sox face payroll considerations that might keep them out of those markets.

The international professional market has yielded some excellent finds for relatively modest investments in recent years, such as Miles Mikolas and Merrill Kelly.

The minor league free agent pool tends to feature pitchers who are ideally employed as little more than an in-case-of-emergency-break-glass spot starter. And even then, with established starters who are guaranteed four spots, the Sox typically struggle to persuade the best non-roster targets to sign with them.

All of that suggests that the Sox need to be innovative while looking for the sort of low-cost rotation additions that they’ve struggled to find in recent years.

The idea of trading established standouts might not be merely a payroll concern — there’s a rotation deficiency that the team might need to address by dealing established talent.

“We’ll obviously look to be creative in the trade market, look at free agents out there,” said Romero. “There’s no reason not to explore every avenue to seek upgrades.”

In fact, based on the evidence of a lost season that required a front-office postmortem on Sept. 30, there is every reason to explore those avenues.

If Red Sox trade Mookie Betts, it’s tantamount to malpractice

Chad Finn

In theory and early production, this was intended to be a state-of-the-Red Sox, look-back, look-ahead sort of piece.

You know, an attempt at context after a relentlessly frustrating lost season followed the most spectacular season in franchise history.

It might still be that. Stay tuned.

But I can't help it. First, I've got to spill a few more words ranting about the flat-out nutso possibility (likelihood?) they will trade Mookie Betts this offseason.

One hundred years after the franchise sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees, they seem hell-bent on making their dumbest personnel decision since.

It's tough to get any group of people to agree on anything these days, but I assume Betts – a 26-year-old, home-grown, five-tool superstar who does everything right and might be the best player in the game if not for legend-in-real-time Mike Trout – has something like a 99.9 percent approval rating.

And yet the Red Sox, out of a desire — not a need, not a mandate, a desire — to cut payroll and get below the competitive balance tax, are at the very least floating trial balloons on trading arguably the most well-rounded position player we've ever seen in a Red Sox uniform.

And they're doing this less than a year after committing \$213 million to Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi, a pair of pitchers, one of whom has never been especially good. Guess bollixing the Jon Lester negotiations five years ago didn't disprove their theory about the risks of paying pitchers in their 30s after all. They didn't pay Lester, but they've paid others after losing him, and it's now haunting them to the point it may cost them a genuinely great player in his prime.

It shouldn't, and you should be enraged about this, to the point that the backlash they receive makes the response to the firing of Don Orsillo seem quaint. It's nuts that the Red Sox, who by the way announced a modest increase in ticket prices Monday, are acting like some mid-market team with this. They aren't the Brewers or the Twins (because if they were, for one thing, they'd be in the playoffs right now). They can afford Betts and take their lumps with the luxury tax a little longer. You don't give up this player to save money.

Imagine how amused we'd be if the Yankees were pushing this on their fanbase with, oh, Aaron Judge, who isn't the player Betts is?

Yet one of the revelations that came from Sunday's last day of school at Fenway is that it seems a foregone conclusion within the locker room that Betts is going to be traded.

"I think everyone knows we don't think they're going to be able to afford Mookie," J.D. Martinez, one of the best free-agent signings in franchise history who sounds like a goner himself, told NBC Sports Boston. "It's one of those things. It's kind of hard to have three guys making \$30 million on your team. He deserves it. He's earned it."

The Red Sox should not be allowed to rationalize this. They don't need to save money to lock up Rafael Devers — he's not a free agent until 2024. They do need quality in the farm system, but trading Betts for prospects while he's a year from free agency isn't the way to do it. The Red Sox still have a fairly affordable lineup, with Devers, Andrew Benintendi and Michael Chavis still on their first deals and cornerstone Xander Bogaerts a relative bargain at a \$20 million per year average. Where are these prospects going to play? And don't tell me they should acquire young pitching for Betts. Even the best prospect arms are volatile. They shouldn't expect a big haul overall, either, because of Betts's desire to get to free agency. Do you know who Yusniel Diaz, Rylan Bannon, Dean Kremer, Zach Pop, Breyvic Valera are? Don't blame you if you don't, unless you're a farm director or a prospect whiz for Baseball America. They're the five players the Orioles got for free-agent-to-be Manny Machado in July 2018 from the Dodgers.

Trading Betts is bad idea. Trading him at a discount would be malpractice, especially since the Red Sox with him should be a postseason contender next year.

Consider this the promised synopsis of this season: It was over with the eight-game losing streak from July 28-Aug. 4, but it never really began, did it? The pitching was never right, though the bullpen got sorted out as the season went on. The Red Sox actually had some incredible breakthroughs — Bogaerts hit 33 homers with a .939 OPS, Rafael Devers had 90 extra base hits in his age-22 season, Eduardo Rodriguez had a shot at 20 wins on the final day of the season — while Betts and Martinez again delivered exceptional seasons.

And yet they lost 24 more games than they did a year ago. Some of it was bad luck. Some of it was overconfidence. Most of it was that extremely well-paid pitchers performed like they were auditioning for the 1998 Tampa Bay Devil Rays.

Those pitchers, save for Rick Porcello, are certain to be back next season, and aiming to rediscover the success that made them filthy rich in the first place. Hey, it is possible. We haven't seen the last of them, but hopefully we've seen the worst of them.

We better not have seen the last of Betts. But if we did, what a final scene. In an utterly meaningless game Sunday, he played like a playoff berth was at stake, scoring from first after Orioles right fielder Steve Wilkerson non-chalantly threw the ball in as Betts rounded third.

It was a brilliant play, one meshing smarts and talent, one that reminded us how much he cares even when there are no stakes beyond that day's outcome.

If that's his last scene with the Red Sox, it was perfect. There's also no acceptable reason that it should be. If you want the Red Sox to get this right again soon — and that should be the mission the way the roster is constructed — don't help them justify trading Mookie. That's the kind of wrong that haunts.

Red Sox say it will be difficult to keep both Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez

Julian McWilliams

The Red Sox' season officially ended Sunday with a Mookie Betts head-first slide into home plate, followed by an emotional Betts pounding his chest in celebratory fashion. The Sox escaped with a 5-4 walkoff win over the Baltimore Orioles, capping a season in which they missed the playoffs for the first time since 2015.

On Monday, the Sox quickly turned the page, hosting their end-of-year media availability session. President/CEO Sam Kennedy, followed by manager Alex Cora and assistant general managers Eddie Romero and Brian O'Halloran, met with reporters to address a plethora of topics. Betts, and his future with the club, was at the center of it.

Kennedy made it clear that the Sox consider Betts a once-in-a-lifetime talent, but said it will be hard for both him and J.D. Martinez to be in Boston uniforms next season.

Betts made \$20 million this season and is certainly due for a bump in his final year of arbitration. If Martinez decides to opt in to his \$23.75 million option, the Sox might have a decision to make.

"There's a way," Kennedy acknowledged. "But obviously it will be difficult, given the nature and the agreements of the contracts that we have.

"Look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan that we're building right now. We've had some time in September to focus on the offseason, given where we were in the standings. It's going to be a challenging offseason but we're ready to attack it head-on."

Former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski made some moves last offseason that has the Sox' hands tied. They signed Nathan Eovaldi (who has had two Tommy John surgeries in his career) to a four-year, \$68 million deal. They then signed Chris Sale to a five-year, \$145 million extension, and he finished the season on the injured list.

The Sox and Betts's representatives have had talks regarding an extension, but Betts and his group have declined the offers. Instead, Betts has elected to bet on himself and finish out the rest of his arbitration years before hitting free agency at the end of 2020.

"It's not frustrating," Kennedy said. "I think it speaks to Mookie's confidence and how special of a player he is. He loves it here. He's told me he loves it here."

Do they trade Betts or Martinez? Or both?

It would be tough with Betts because he is a franchise player. In what many critics called a down season, Betts hit .295 with 29 homers, a .391 on-base percentage, and a .915 OPS. He led the league in runs with 135. He also led all outfielders with an ultimate zone rating of 13.0, according to Fangraphs.

"We'll continue to talk," Kennedy said. "But Mookie's an MVP and has been an incredible member of the Red Sox and represents what you want in a baseball operations organization."

Goal, not a mandate

Red Sox principal owner John Henry said Friday he wants to stay below the \$208 million competitive balance tax next season. But Kennedy clarified that Monday.

"John made it clear that there is a goal to try and get under the CBT in 2020, but he also said that that is a goal but not a mandate," said Kennedy. "I spent some time over the weekend talking as a group with the baseball operations transition team about some scenarios where you could see the possibility if there are strategic decisions that would cause us to go over."

When asked if the team would be willing to go over the CBT for Betts, Kennedy didn't offer much comment other than the Sox would see how the offseason developed. The payroll in 2019 was approximately \$240 million.

No interviews yet

It appears the search for a new general manager will be a long process. Ownership said the new GM most likely will come from outside the organization. But as of Monday, they had not contacted any organizations to speak to candidates. The Sox compiled a list of candidates, and each of them is employed by another team.

"We haven't had any interviews, formal or even informal conversations with candidates who are not in major league baseball," Kennedy said. "But I want to be clear that we are not ruling anything out at this stage."

'Modest increase'

Kennedy said ticket prices will change at Fenway Park next season.

"We've taken a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last four-five years," Kennedy said. "I would anticipate another modest increase."

Coaching changes?

Cora's job is safe for 2020. His staff, however, will learn its fate this week.

"We're going to meet as a group in the upcoming days," Cora said. "Obviously, in every organization there are changes. I don't know what kind of changes we're going to make. We'll address the situation and make decisions accordingly."

The biggest question mark probably is pitching coach Dana LeVangie. If the Sox decide to part ways with him, it will come just before his 30th year in the organization. They also could reassign him if they do in fact want a new voice as pitching coach.

The Sox pitching staff had a 4.70 ERA this year, but they dealt with a ton of injuries, too.

Slowly with Sale

Sale hasn't seen Dr. James Andrews since receiving a platelet-rich plasma injection in his left elbow on Aug. 19. Sale originally was supposed to visit him six weeks after the injection, and Monday was that six-week marker.

Once the Sox fell out of contention, the medical staff decided to slow down Sale's rehab process given there would no games in October to shoot for. The next visit with Andrews should be later this month.

"We're taking it step by step with Chris," O'Halloran said.

Sale has not tried throwing since he was shut down. The start of his offseason program will be contingent on the next exam.

David Price, meanwhile, should have a regular offseason after having a cyst removed from his wrist.

Winter plans

Infielder Marco Hernandez will play in the Dominican Winter League with the Tigres Del Licey club, Romero said. Hernandez finished with a .250 average this season, but he struggled in September, hitting just .169 with 23 strikeouts in 60 plate appearances. Cora and Romero want to get him as many at-bats as possible heading into next season. He also will see time in the outfield during winter ball as the Sox attempt to turn him into a utility player.

Michael Chavis, on the other hand, appears as if he will be shut down. He was supposed to play his winter ball in Puerto Rico but suffered an oblique strain in early September that kept him out for the season.

"For now, the plan is to hold off," Romero said. "It's a possibility, but we want to make sure he's 100 percent."

Tzu-Wei Lin is healthy and will play in the Asian Games.

Honor for Workman

Brandon Workman was named American League Reliever of the Month for September after making 12 appearances, giving up no earned runs, and logging 18 strikeouts. He allowed just three hits in that span.

Workman finished the season with a 1.88 ERA in 71½ innings and gave up just one homer the entire year.

Red Sox have 'very targeted and strategic plan,' says CEO Sam Kennedy

Julian McWilliams

During the Red Sox' end-of-season media availability Monday, team president/CEO Sam Kennedy said that whomever they decide to hire as general manager will report to directly to team owners John Henry and Tom Werner.

While ownership noted Friday that they intend on getting below the competitive balance tax, Kennedy clarified Monday that it's a goal, not a mandate.

When asked if the Red Sox could bring back both J.D. Martinez, who has an opt-out clause, and Mookie Betts, who will be entering his free agent year in 2020, Kennedy said, "There's a way, but it will be difficult, given the nature of the agreements and the contracts we have in place."

"Look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan we're building right now. It is going to be a challenging offseason, but we're ready to attack it head-on."

Kennedy also said ticket prices will go up modestly.

Manager Alex Cora said the team will have discussions concerning his coaching staff and who may or may not be returning.

Assistant general manager Brian O'Halloran said Chris Sale (elbow) hasn't been back to see Dr. James Andrews, and has yet to throw a baseball since seeing him in mid-August, but the team expects the lefthander to make a full recovery. Sale went on the injured list with elbow inflammation Aug. 14.

David Price, who recently had a cyst removed from his wrist, is expected to be ready for spring training, too.

*** *The Boston Herald***

What a Fenway Park outing will cost a family of 4

Joe Dwinell

Catching a game at Fenway Park can cost a family of four the equivalent of a car payment, or a monthly heating bill, and it's about to go up. The Red Sox said fans should expect a "modest" hike in ticket prices next year. That means you better bring a fat wallet to the game.

For fan-boy families, here's what taking the kids out to the ballgame can add up to:

TICKETS: \$45-\$600 depending on where you sit, with the lowest prices for standing room only. Family Fee: \$230

PARKING: The closer to Fenway, the higher the price. Family Fee: \$60

FOOD: The kids will want hot dogs and mom and dad lobster rolls. Family Fee: \$54

DRINKS: Beer for the adults and soda for the kids. Family Fee: \$30

BASEBALL HAT: The kids, or mom and dad, will want an official hat. Family Fee: \$29.99 per hat

TEAM JERSEY: This is a big-ticket item that junior will really beg for. Family Fee: \$124.99 per jersey

BABY ONESIE: For the toddler left at home, you'll need to buy something. Family Fee: \$29.99 per onesie

PAJAMA PANTS: For the tween, Red Sox pajama pants make for a calm ride home. Family Fee: \$21.99 per pair

Total bill for family of four: \$600

Red Sox to hike ticket prices, cut payroll

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox could present the uninspiring combination of lowering payroll while increasing ticket prices in 2020, team president Sam Kennedy said Monday.

A day after the \$240 million team finished with just 84 wins, Kennedy said “it’s a goal, not a mandate” to get the payroll under \$208 million for 2020.

But he also said he expects ticket prices to rise for the fifth consecutive year.

“We’ve had a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last five years,” he said. “Low single digits and cost-of-living inflationary increases. We haven’t made a decision for 2020, but I would anticipate another modest increase.”

The Red Sox froze ticket prices ahead of the 2012, 2013 and 2015 seasons.

Over the last four years, ticket prices have gone up 1.4%, 2.9%, 2.5% and 2.5%, respectively. In that time, the payroll has been around \$204 million, \$192 million, \$239 million and \$240 million, respectively.

Kennedy said the team still plans to invest heavily in the team and that cutting payroll in 2020 is likely only temporary.

“We’ve proven you can have the highest payroll in baseball and win a World Series and you can have the highest payroll and win 84 games and finish out of postseason competition,” Kennedy said. “There is a correlation to spending and winning, clearly. Since 2002 we’ve invested more into player payroll than any other team than the New York Yankees, I believe. And we have the highest winning percentage in that same period other than the New York Yankees.”

Despite increasing ticket prices overall, the Red Sox will continue having a student ticket initiative, which provides an allotment of \$9 tickets to students for each game.

“Could we have an open house day, where we put aside 10,000 to 15,000 tickets just for kids on an ongoing basis free of charge? The obvious answer is yes,” Kennedy told the Herald last month.

“There’s a market for that,” he added. “We need to challenge ourselves to see if that could be a possibility. We’ve talked about that. On lower-demand games you might have an opportunity to do that. It really is an investment in the future.”

Red Sox search for Dave Dombrowski replacement in early stages

Steve Hewitt

Red Sox CEO Sam Kennedy said Monday he will be in charge of the team’s search for its next president of baseball operations. Though the team decided to fire Dave Dombrowski on Sept. 8, Kennedy said they still are in the early days of the process.

Kennedy said the team has compiled a list of potential candidates, but as of Monday morning had not sought permission from other teams to speak to any of them.

Kennedy said they’re keeping an open mind with not only who they pursue but how the final structure of the baseball operations department will shake out.

“Baseball has changed dramatically, as you guys know better than anybody, over the last five years, even,” Kennedy said. “It’s just a huge job and there’s so many aspects of running a baseball operations department. We’re studying different structures within different organizations.”

Kennedy said the next head of baseball ops likely would report to John Henry and Tom Werner.

Same plan?

Manager Alex Cora continued to maintain the Red Sox' plan to ease their starting pitchers into spring training after heavy usage in last year's playoffs was the right one, even though they got off to a poor start and ultimately never recovered. He said they had a similar plan in 2017, and going into spring training in 2020 it doesn't sound like it will be much different.

"We'll do the same thing," Cora said. "Obviously we've got a month, but then we've got certain situations that came up through the season with (Nathan Eovaldi) and Chris (Sale) and David (Price), so (head trainer Brad Pearson) and the medical staff will put a plan together and we'll use it the way we feel is going to work next year."

Coaching staff plans

Cora said no decisions have been made on changes within the coaching staff, but he will meet with them over the coming days.

"Obviously like in every other organization there's always changes and we're talking from scouting all the way to the manager," Cora said. "I don't know what kind of changes we're going to make, I think the whole group is coming and we're talking way down there all the way to the top. We'll address the situation and make decisions accordingly."

Slow on Sale

The Red Sox are taking it slow with Sale as he continues to recover from left elbow inflammation that cost him the last six weeks of the season. He has not yet made a return visit to Dr. James Andrews, but assistant GM Brian O'Halloran said that will come at some point, and he has not begun throwing.

"We're taking that a little bit slower than we initially anticipated just to be certain once he was totally shut down, we took a close look at his schedule and our medical staff recommended that we take it slowly just to give it as much time as possible to heal before we start throwing," O'Halloran said. ...

There was talk that Michael Chavis would play winter ball in Puerto Rico, but the Sox opted to keep him out as they try to get him healthy for 2020. Chavis missed the majority of the last two months of the season with shoulder and oblique injuries.

Red Sox payroll mess not all Dave Dombrowski's fault

Jason Mastrodonato

After spending \$240 million on a team that won 84 games, the Red Sox need to do some soul searching.

But here's the thing: The bag of bruised apples John Henry purchased in 2019 wasn't all Dave Dombrowski's fault.

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy and the four-person team of stand-in general managers participated in year-end press conferences Monday and made it clear they all were complicit in the decision-making that has put the team's payroll in a pickle.

When Dombrowski was hired in 2015, he made it very clear he wanted (and was given) total authority in baseball operations. Kennedy would run the business side and Dombrowski the baseball side.

But Monday, Kennedy said he had a seat at the table for baseball decisions during Dombrowski's reign as president of baseball operations.

“I’m glad you asked that, because there’s definitely misperception that Dave and I didn’t work closely together or get along, I even read,” Kennedy said. “We worked very closely together and he would come to me, John and Tom (Werner) with his player personnel recommendations and the thinking around different player moves.”

Henry said last Friday he didn’t agree with Dombrowski philosophically on the way the team spent money in 2019 (but signed the checks anyway).

It’s hard to make that claim when Henry’s right-hand man, Kennedy, was present for the decisions, too.

“I had the good fortune of being a part of those discussions from Game 1,” Kennedy said. “He did make it very clear that when he arrived, he would make the day-to-day player personnel decisions, which he did. Did a great job. But I want to make it very, very clear that decisions involving certain amounts of financial commitments or long-term decisions that face the franchise, John, Tom and I worked together to give Dave feedback and authorization and approval on player personnel moves.

“I look at it as we were a good team and collaborated very well together as we attacked those decisions as an organization.”

Very well until the end, that is.

Dombrowski took the fall and the Sox rightfully recognized they need to start looking to the future. They probably did it a year too late.

And now the team finds itself in a sticky situation with its payroll. The Sox are losing around \$50 million in expiring contracts, but gaining roughly just as much in salary raises via contract extensions and arbitration increases.

So they will have to clear about \$30 million if they want to get under the \$208 million luxury tax threshold, which will reset the team’s penalties and allow them to ramp back up the payroll in 2021 and 2022, just like they did in 2018 and 2019 after resetting in 2017.

Just don’t think it’s all Dombrowski’s fault they ended up in this mess.

“The players we signed under Dave’s leadership are great players, very talented players,” said Brian O’Halloran, one of the acting GMs. “We’re glad to have Chris Sale, for example, on our team in 2020 and beyond. The same for Nate Eovaldi.”

It sure doesn’t seem like it.

Unless they trade Mookie Betts, who should make around \$30 million in his final year of arbitration before free agency, the Sox will face something of a nightmare scenario as they try to find a willing trade partner for high-priced talents like Sale, Eovaldi, David Price or J.D. Martinez, who seems likely to opt into his \$24 million salary in 2020.

Was it a mistake to sign Eovaldi or extend Sale last year?

“Certainly making those commitments does make getting under the CBT threshold in 2020 more challenging,” O’Halloran said. “Going back to what John and Tom and Sam said, that is a goal, not a mandate (to get under \$208 million). There are scenarios where we end up under, and scenarios where we don’t. The goal is to build a championship-caliber team, and those guys are going to help us to do that.”

Whoever is being interviewed to be the next leader of the front office better bring a notebook full of creative ideas.

One thing is for sure: That person won’t be making these decisions alone.

Kennedy appears ready to take on an advanced role in the front office.

“I think the best structure for a sports organization is to ensure that the president and CEO has a seat at the table, has a voice in baseball operations or hockey operations or football operations, and can work collaboratively with the general manager or president of baseball ops,” Kennedy said. “That’s the way it’s worked here since 2002.”

He said it’s not appropriate for him to make player evaluation decisions, but wants to be involved when financial commitments are being made.

Just like he was involved last year.

The mess in which the Red Sox now find themselves was brought to you by Dombrowski, but the entire front office was complicit.

Soon we’ll find out: Do they have a good plan to get out of it?

Red Sox payroll: Goal, ‘not a mandate’ to get under \$208 million

Steve Hewitt

Red Sox ownership revealed last Friday it’s the club’s goal to shed payroll and get under the competitive balance threshold that kicks in at \$208 million in 2020, but they’re still willing to go over it if need be.

John Henry noted last week there have been many years the Sox’ payroll has gone above the CBT — to which the team would face luxury tax and draft compensation penalties — and though it’s their stated goal to get under the threshold next season, there are circumstances that exist in which they could surpass it again. Speaking with reporters Monday at the team’s end-of-season press availability, Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy clarified that.

“The CBT is always a guidepost in our budgeting as we build our financial plans for the following season,” Kennedy said. “We use CBT as one guidepost. It’s something we consider. John and Tom (Werner) have shown a willingness I believe in the last 17 years, we’ve been over that CBT threshold 10 times and we will continue to demonstrate a willingness to go over.

“That said, John made it clear that there is a goal to try to get under the CBT in 2020. But he also said, and Tom followed up and clarified, that that is a goal but not a mandate.”

The Red Sox, whose payroll was around \$240 million in 2019, face a difficult task in getting below the CBT next season. They have significant money coming off the books as some players depart for free agency, but Xander Bogaerts and Chris Sale are due raises with contract extensions that begin next season. There also are heavy raises in arbitration-eligible salaries due for some players, including Mookie Betts, who should make around \$30 million next season.

J.D. Martinez also is unlikely to opt out of his contract that would pay him over \$23 million next season, and the club is continuing to pursue a long-term extension with Betts.

The futures of those two ultimately are what will dictate the club’s plans. Kennedy said Martinez has five days following the World Series to make a decision, and the Sox obviously would love him back. The same goes for Betts, who Kennedy recognized as a unique talent. But he also acknowledged the difficulty of keeping both while also getting under their \$208 million goal.

“There is a way,” Kennedy said. “But obviously, it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place. So, look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan that we’re building

right now. Some of the dates related to contract decisions come right after the World Series, so we've had some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings. ...

"So, it is going to be a challenging offseason, but we're ready to tackle it head-on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there not just for next year but for 2021, 2022.

"It's a difficult challenge to get to that stated goal, but that's also why it's not a mandate."

Red Sox expect to increase ticket prices in 2020

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox could present the uninspiring combination of lowering payroll while increasing ticket prices in 2020, team president Sam Kennedy said on Monday.

A day after the \$240-million team finished with just 84 wins, Kennedy said "it's a goal, not a mandate" to get the payroll under \$208 million for 2020.

But he also said he expects ticket prices to rise for the fifth consecutive year.

"We've had a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last five years," he said. "Low single digits and cost of living inflationary increases. We haven't made a decision for 2020 but I would anticipate another modest increase."

The Red Sox froze ticket prices ahead of the 2012, 2013 and 2015 seasons.

Over the last four years, ticket prices have gone up 1.4 percent, 2.9 percent, 2.5 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively. In that time, the payroll has been around \$204 million, \$192 million, \$239 million and \$240 million, respectively.

Kennedy said the team still plans to invest heavily in the team and that cutting payroll in 2020 is likely only temporary.

"We've proven you can have the highest payroll in baseball and win a World Series and you can have the highest payroll and win 84 games and finish out of postseason competition," Kennedy said. "There is a correlation to spending and winning, clearly. Since 2002 we've invested more into player payroll than any other team than the New York Yankees, I believe. And we have the highest winning percentage in that same period other than the New York Yankees."

Despite increasing ticket prices overall, the Red Sox will continue having a student ticket initiative, which provides an allotment of \$9 tickets to students for each game.

"Could we have an open house day, where we put aside 10,000 to 15,000 tickets just for kids on an ongoing basis free of charge? The obvious answer is yes," Kennedy told the Herald last month. "There's a market for that. We need to challenge ourselves to see if that could be a possibility. We've talked about that. On lower demand games you might have an opportunity to do that. It really is an investment in the future."

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy: 'We're starting on next year right now'

Bill Koch

Monday represented an unwelcome head start on the offseason for the Red Sox front office.

The final game of 2019 had finished less than 24 hours prior to several members of Boston's brass meeting with the assembled media. President and CEO Sam Kennedy, manager Alex Cora and the foursome currently presiding over day-to-day baseball operations all shared their thoughts on how to proceed into the 2020 season.

First, the obvious – nobody associated with the Red Sox is pleased. Not even a 5-4 walkoff victory against the Orioles could smooth over what was a disappointing 84-78 campaign. Boston faces uncertainty at every turn after firing president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and stating a desire to slip under the first threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax.

“We’re looking forward to 2020,” Kennedy said. “We’re starting on next year right now.”

Replacing Dombrowski with either a president of baseball operations or a general manager is atop Boston's to-do list. Kennedy is presiding over the search and said he had compiled a preliminary list of candidates. Principal owner John Henry and club chairman Tom Werner said Friday the Red Sox were seeking candidates with previous general manager experience and would be focusing on someone from outside the organization.

“Ultimately John, Tom and I are engaged in a search and will work together on it in the upcoming days and weeks ahead,” Kennedy said. “Where we are is early days. We’ve had an opportunity to do a lot of due diligence.”

The person ultimately hired by Boston could face a difficult series of roster decisions. Henry and Werner want the Red Sox payroll below \$208 million next season, allowing the club to avoid further financial penalties under the CBT. Boston smashed through the third threshold of the CBT while winning the World Series in 2018, paying almost \$12 million in fines and forfeiting 10 spots of draft position prior to making its first selection.

“We could be under,” Kennedy said. “There are lots of decisions, as you guys know, facing the Red Sox this offseason. It is a goal, but it is not a hard and fast mandate.”

Boston has already committed more than \$133 million to seven players, a number that would be cut by \$22 million should J.D. Martinez opt out of the final three years of his five-year contract. That also doesn't include salaries owed to arbitration-eligible players, and it's there where we find Mookie Betts entering his final season before free agency. Betts is likely to command a one-year deal approaching \$30 million before hitting the open market after 2020.

“He's just such a quality guy and we're so appreciative of everything he's done and, hopefully, will continue to do as we go forward,” Kennedy said. “We'll see what this offseason brings and we'll see what next year brings.”

Trading Betts to recoup some of his value could be an option for whoever Boston hires to fill its opening. Kennedy didn't rule out the possibility of retaining Betts and Martinez but did concede “it will be difficult.” The Red Sox also figure to owe considerable arbitration settlements to Jackie Bradley Jr., Eduardo Rodriguez, Brandon Workman and Andrew Benintendi among others.

“We've had some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings,” Kennedy said. “It is going to be a challenging offseason, but we're ready to attack it head on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there.”

Assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran and Zack Scott and senior vice president Raquel Ferreira report directly to Kennedy and have started the legwork on Boston's future plans. Kennedy anticipates a partnership with the next general manager or president of baseball operations – the Red Sox are exploring the merits of making hires in one or both positions as they look to restructure their front office. Kennedy anticipates working in tandem with the next hire and reporting alongside the chosen candidate to Henry and Werner.

“Ultimately, player recommendations and player evaluations will rise to the level of ownership,” Kennedy said. “I have a seat at that ownership table, but I would anticipate a direct line of report to John and Tom to continue given that there’s such a huge financial impact. The magnitude of those decisions get up to the ownership level.”

Kennedy downplayed any suggestion of a growing rift with Dombrowski prior to his dismissal in early September. Henry cooled on the thought of extending Dombrowski’s contract after watching several of his most expensive signings – Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce among them – suffer through disappointing seasons in 2019. Sale enters his five-year extension on the back of an elbow injury while Eovaldi and Pearce combined to appear in just 52 games.

“There’s definitely a misperception that Dave and I didn’t work closely together or get along,” Kennedy said. “We worked very closely together. He would come to me and to John and to Tom with his player personnel recommendations and the thinking around different player moves. I had the good fortune of being a part of those discussions from Day One.

“(Dombrowski) did make it very clear when he arrived that he would make the day-to-day player personnel decisions, which he did – he did a great job. I want to make it very clear that decisions involving certain amounts of financial commitments or long-term decisions that faced the franchise – John, Tom and I worked together to give Dave feedback and authorization and approval on player personnel moves.”

Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland and Brock Holt headline the free agents who could ultimately move on from Boston. Martinez will make his decision to stay or go within five days of the conclusion of the World Series. The Red Sox have no timeline to make what is an important hire, with several of their candidates possibly still active with their respective organizations.

“We’re engaged,” Kennedy said. “It’s still early days, but the search is underway.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox’s payroll cut doesn’t preclude extensions; Rafael Devers, Eduardo Rodriguez are candidates for long-term deals

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox’ goal to cut payroll this winter will not preclude the team from pursuing extensions with young stars, assistant/interim general manager Eddie Romero said Monday.

Though Boston aims to get under \$208 million in payroll to reset their standing in regards to the luxury tax threshold in 2020, the team is still open to discussing long-term deals with breakout stars like Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez. Rodriguez is under control for two more seasons and Devers for four; any extension would count against the CBT threshold based on average annual value over the life of the deal.

“It’s a goal, not a mandate,” Romero said. “We’ll keep that in mind. We’ll also make recommendations based on what’s best for the next couple years with the organization. We want to focus long-term on that. If it makes sense, we’ll make that recommendation. Those are some heavy discussions we need to have.”

WEEI’s Rob Bradford reported over the weekend that the Sox plan to offer Devers an extension and that Rodriguez is open to negotiating a long-term deal. The team also is hoping to sign reigning A.L. MVP to an extension before he hits free agency next winter.

“Those are issues we’re going to discuss with (manager) Alex (Cora) in the upcoming weeks and see what we can do,” Romero said. “If it makes sense, those are all things we have to consider.”

Devers (.311, 32 HR, 115 RBIs in 156 games) will likely receive MVP votes and Rodriguez (19-6, 3.81 ERA in 34 starts) will likely see his name in the final tally for the A.L. Cy Young award. Their accomplishments were bright spots in a lost season for the Sox.

"Raffy's year was sensational," Romero said. "Not only what he did on the offensive side, but defensively he made such an improvement. We knew he was gonna hit and hit for some power but what he did defensively this year is a tip of the cap to what he did this offseason conditioning-wise.

"Rodriguez just missed 20 wins and was the one horse in the rotation that was very consistent."

Chris Sale injury: Boston Red Sox 'expect him to be healthy coming into spring training, along with the rest of the rotation'

Christopher Smith

Chris Sale's follow-up visit with Dr. James Andrews has not been scheduled yet.

"He's recovering well," Red Sox co-acting GM Brian O'Halloran said. "We're going to take everything step-by-step with Chris and he has certain checkpoints to meet as we go through the offseason. But as this point, we expect him to be healthy coming into spring training, along with the rest of the rotation we have under control."

Sale (elbow inflammation) initially visited Dr. Andrews on Aug. 19, and he underwent a PRP injection. Dr. Andrews recommended at least a six-week shutdown. Today (Sept. 30) marks exactly six weeks.

"We're taking it step-by-step with Chris. And he will see him at some point but it has not happened to date," O'Halloran said.

Sale hasn't thrown a baseball yet.

"There was a range on when that could begin and we're taking that a little bit slower than we initially anticipated just to be certain," O'Halloran said. "Once he was totally shut down, we took a close look at his schedule and our medical staff recommended that we take it slowly just to give him as much time as possible to heal before he started throwing. But that will happen sometime in the near future."

Boston Red Sox GM search: Sam Kennedy promises open-minded approach as team begins process of replacing Dave Dombrowski

Chris Cotillo

As the Red Sox look for their new head of baseball operations, their current decision-makers are staying very open-minded about the process.

Team president and CEO Sam Kennedy, who is leading the search on a day-to-day basis, said Monday the team is open to a variety of titles and structures as they look to replace Dave Dombrowski. The Sox could have a president of baseball operations and a general manager. They might have multiple general managers. Pretty much everything is on the table at this early stage of the process.

"We're studying different structures within different organizations," Kennedy said. "We're studying different people."

Since firing Dombrowski on Sept. 9, Kennedy and team owners John Henry and Tom Werner have compiled a list of potential candidates to head the baseball operations department. The team has not asked any other clubs for permission to interview rival executives and as of Monday morning, has not completed any interviews, formal or informal.

“We’ve had an opportunity to do a lot of due diligence,” Kennedy said. “We made the decision to move away from Dave early, as you know, which we thought was the right thing for Dave once we made that decision but also the right thing for the Red Sox. It gives us an opportunity to get a head start on the thinking and the research that we wanted to conduct.”

Henry said Friday that Dombrowski’s replacement was likely to be an external candidate, adding that it’s difficult to poach a head executive away from another team for the same job in a different organization. Kennedy echoed that sentiment and said the Red Sox are unlikely to consider any candidates who are not currently employed by another team.

“Typically what you see in baseball is a No. 2 from another organization coming in or a No. 2 from your own organization coming in,” he said.

The next baseball operations head will likely report directly to Henry and Werner while working closely with Kennedy on decisions that impact the club’s financial standing. Kennedy expects to continue to have a seat at the table when it comes to baseball operations but doesn’t anticipate having the ultimate say on baseball decisions.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate for a president or CEO to make player personnel evaluations or judgements,” he said. “I have a very important voice in baseball operations because I’m accountable for the operations of the club. And there’s a lot of financial decision that go into the construction and operation of a baseball department. We work very closely together.”

In the coming days and weeks, the Sox will finalize their list of potential candidates and begin asking other clubs for permission to speak with their executives. It’s unclear when interviews will start and there is currently no timetable for a hire.

Boston Red Sox ‘anticipate’ ticket prices will increase in 2020 despite goal to reduce payroll, missing postseason

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox missed the postseason this year for the first time since 2015. They finished with just 84 wins and 19 games behind the first-place Yankees.

The Red Sox’s goal, although not a mandate, is to keep their payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Threshold in 2020. That would mean cutting payroll as the 2020 payroll already is approximately \$218 million.

But the Red Sox likely will increase ticket prices.

“We’ve taken a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last four or five years,” Red Sox president Sam Kennedy said. “Low, single digits or cost-of-living inflationary increases. We haven’t made a decision this year for 2020. But I would anticipate another modest increase.”

Ticket prices increase by an average of 2.5% both in 2018 and 2019. They increased an average of 2.9% in 2017, 1.4% in 2016, 0% in 2015 and 4.8% in 2014.

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

Boston Red Sox: ‘challenging, difficult’ to have J.D. Martinez, Mookie Betts both on 2020 roster and keep payroll under \$208M

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox's goal, although not a mandate, is to keep their payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Threshold in 2020.

The 2020 payroll already is near \$218 million before any offseason transactions.

Would it, therefore, be possible to keep the payroll under \$208 million if Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez both are on the 2020 roster?

"Yes, there is a way," Red Sox president Sam Kennedy said. "There is a way but obviously it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place. Look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan that we're building right now. Some of the dates related to contract decisions come right after the World Series. So we've had some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings. So it is going to be a challenging offseason. But we're ready to attack it head on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there not just for next year but 2021, 2022."

Brian O'Halloran, one of the Red Sox's four acting GMs, deals with payroll and contracts.

Asked the same question as Kennedy, he replied, "Challenging is the word I would say."

Betts is a free agent after 2020 and has strongly indicated he plans to become a free agent instead of signing a contract extension. The Red Sox trading Betts this offseason is a realistic possibility.

Martinez has an opt-out clause. The Red Sox are unsure whether he plans to elect for free agency. Kennedy wouldn't answer whether the Red Sox plan to try to re-sign Martinez if he does opt out.

"I wouldn't want to comment about what we would or wouldn't do with respect to opt-outs and or anything like that just given the truth is we don't know at this point," Kennedy said.

The Red Sox didn't replace David Ortiz in 2017 in order to stay under the CBT. The offense suffered because of it.

"You want J.D. Martinez in the middle of your lineup," Kennedy said. "He's a World champ and was a key part of last year's success. So we'll see where it goes in the future. But we haven't engaged on any specific discussions. And we know there's a timetable on it; five days after the World Series. So he'll let us know of his decision."

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Red Sox await one decision before dominoes fall

Tom Caron

The baseball season in Boston went out with a bang over the weekend, with midsummer weather and a walk-off win. It was a fitting end to "Fan Appreciation Weekend," with Mookie Betts sliding into home plate after a mad dash around from first base on Rafael Devers' single in the bottom of the ninth.

Betts and others began the day taking selfies with fans on the Fenway Park warning track. Earlier in the weekend they were out at various gates greeting fans entering the ballpark.

That's how it goes in baseball. You spend the final weekend of the season getting ready for meaningful games in October or signing autographs at Gate D, thanking fans for supporting the team through a disappointing season.

Moments after sliding into home, Betts addressed the remaining fans at Fenway. "Thank you guys for being here all year," said Betts. "We'll go get them in 2020."

The crowd roared its approval, because many of us were unsure if Betts would be back in 2020. We still are. Over the weekend team ownership talked about getting under baseball's Competitive Balance Tax for next season. That would mean a significant reduction in payroll and a significant challenge in bringing both Betts and J.D. Martinez (who can opt out of his contract) back next year.

"It will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place," Red Sox President/CEO Sam Kennedy said during the team's postseason media briefing Monday.

Kennedy was quick to stress that the Red Sox are not fully committed to lowering the payroll. That will be determined by numerous factors, including whether Martinez opts out of his contract to test the free-agent waters.

"If there are strategic decisions that cause us to go over, then that could be a possibility," said Kennedy. "We could be under. There are lots of decisions facing the Red Sox this offseason. It's a goal but not a hard-and-fast mandate."

Those decisions, at least at the start of the offseason, will be made by the "Gang of Four" currently running baseball operations. Assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Senior VP of Major and Minor League Operations Raquel Ferreira have worked together for more than a decade. All four said their close relationships have allowed them to head into this offseason with confidence, even though they are unsure who the new chief executive of the department will be.

The Red Sox won't be able to make any significant moves until they know the status of J.D. Martinez for the 2020 season. AP Photo/Chris Carlson

Adding to that confidence is that this group has been through tough times in the past, including three last-place finishes in four seasons from 2012-15. The exception in that stretch was 2013, when the Sox won the World Series. It's a reminder that a team can turn things around quickly.

First the Red Sox must figure out who's coming back and who's not. And that process begins with a decision out of their control. Martinez has until early November to inform the team if he's going to call Fenway his home next season. Then, and only then, can the real reconstruction of the Red Sox begin.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Extension talks with Rafael Devers 'on the agenda' for Red Sox this offseason

Chris Mason

Getting under the luxury tax in 2020 may be a short-term goal, but the Red Sox front office is keeping the long game in mind — even if they add a little payroll to do so.

Though Rafael Devers is due less than \$1 million next season — he's still under team control in pre-arbitration — the front office is planning to approach him about a contract extension this winter.

"That's one of the many things on the agenda," Eddie Romero, one of the acting GMs, told the Eagle-Tribune. "I think Raffy had an unbelievable year offensively and really defensively, too. The step up that he made, the improvement is a credit to him and our coaching staff that worked with him.

"I think all these situations are things that we as the management team right now, we have to consider," Romero continued. "One of our goals is to get creative and try to find avenues to improve the team in the

short term, but also thinking long term to maintain success here. I think we want Raffy to be a big part of that. So that's definitely one of the things we have to discuss."

An agreement would certainly add to the 2020 payroll, but could pay dividends down the road; Devers is a budding triple crown threat.

Early extensions are becoming increasingly common across Major League Baseball, as they can be a win-win for both sides. The player sacrifices arbitration and a year or two of free agency, and in return are given life-altering money and security.

Last spring, the Astros agreed to a five-year, \$100 million extension with MVP candidate Alex Bregman, who forfeited his first two years as a free agent.

"I don't know if that singular case, the Bregman case, is the best comp. It could be, but we haven't had those discussions yet," Romero said. "Once we start digging in on that, which is the next couple weeks, that's when we'll start getting to see what comparable contracts would look like."

Romero knows Devers better than most. He scouted the third baseman as a 16-year-old in the Dominican Republic. The talent was always there, but his off-the-field makeup is something that drew the Red Sox to him, too.

"It's amazing," Romero said. "Obviously, there have been physical changes, but as a person he's still the same kid. That's one of the most refreshing and endearing things to Raffy. He always worked hard.

"One of the things that Alex (Cora) always points out about Raffy is whether he goes 6 for 6 or 0 for 6, if we're shaking hands at the end of the game he's happy," Romero added. "That means a lot. He said from an early age, 'I want to be with the Red Sox.' Now to see what he's doing here, incredibly proud."

He's an excellent ballplayer, but Devers' rise also serves as a reminder. There's a real reward for being thorough from the earliest stages of scouting to the hot corner on a Major League diamond.

"It's the nature of scouting, you fail so much," Romero said. "When you have the opportunity, not only how he's grown professionally but also personally, man. He's just such a good kid and he's got a family of his own now.

"When you still get to be involved with that and you see that kind of growth, it is crazy. Because we're always really ticked off about who we missed and who we whiffed on and who we allowed to sign elsewhere for short money. Whatever the case may be. So when you do hit on one, it's also relieving."

*** *RedSox.com***

Sale expected to be healthy by Spring Training

Ian Browne

The best way for the Red Sox to get back to the playoffs next season is for ace Chris Sale to be healthy again. And at this point, the club expects he will be.

Sale was shut down for the season on Aug. 17 due to inflammation in his left elbow. During a visit with Dr. James Andrews a couple of days later, Sale received a PRP shot to promote healing in his elbow.

"He's recovering well," said assistant general manager Brian O'Halloran. "We're going to take everything step by step with Chris and his checkpoints as we go through the offseason, but we, at this point expect him to be healthy coming into Spring Training along with the rest of the rotation that we have under control."

That includes lefty David Price, who pitched just two innings after Aug. 4 due to a left wrist injury that required surgery last week.

“The surgery went well and we fully expect David to be ready to go,” said O’Halloran. “Normal offseason once he recovers from the surgery and ready to go in Spring Training.”

As for Sale, there are still a couple of key checkpoints. He will soon have a follow-up with Dr. Andrews. And after that, the hope is that Sale can resume throwing, which will give the Sox a better idea of how healthy he is.

On Aug. 19, the Sox sent out a press release that stated Sale would have a shutdown period of roughly six weeks before resuming throwing and visiting with Andrews. Monday was the six-week anniversary of that.

“Sometimes schedules change and we’re taking it step by step with Chris and he will see him at some point but it hasn’t happened to date,” said O’Halloran.

As for the throwing program, and why that has taken longer than expected?

“There was a range of when that could begin and we’re taking that a little bit slower than we initially anticipated,” O’Halloran said. “Our medical staff recommended that we take it slowly just to give it as much time as possible to heal before we start throwing, but that will happen sometime in the near future.”

Sox in ‘early days’ of GM search

Red Sox president/CEO Sam Kennedy said Monday the club had not requested permission to other organizations yet to interview potential candidates to replace president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

Kennedy is leading the day-to-day aspect of the search, but he said that owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner will play a big role in determining the club’s next leader of baseball ops.

One reason the Red Sox can be deliberate is because of the trust they have in the four executives (Eddie Romero, O’Halloran, Raquel Ferreira and Zack Scott) running the department in the interim.

“Ultimately, John, Tom and I are engaged in a search and we’ll work together on it in the coming days and weeks ahead and where we are is early days,” said Kennedy. “We’ve had an opportunity to do a lot of due diligence. We’re engaged. It’s still early days but the search is underway.”

Kennedy said the Sox are open minded about how the department will be structured, and whether it might include a president of baseball operations and a GM.

Coaching changes?

Red Sox manager Alex Cora was non-committal when asked if there would be any changes to his coaching staff. Typically, a team that doesn’t make any changes confirms that immediately after the season ends. So it seems likely there will be at least some turnover.

“I’ve been talking to them over the weekend and we’re going to meet as a group in the upcoming days,” Cora said. “Obviously like in every other organization there’s always changes and we’re talking from scouting all the way to the manager. I don’t know what kind of changes we’re going to make, I think the whole group is coming and we’re talking way down there all the way to the top. We’ll address the situation and make decisions accordingly.”

One situation to keep an eye on is if Cora’s older brother Joey becomes available. Joey Cora has been the third base coach for the Pirates the last three seasons, but Pittsburgh parted ways with manager Clint Hurdle over the weekend.

Decisions on other core players

Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez aren't the only Sox players who face uncertain futures. Three core players from recent years -- Rick Porcello, Mitch Moreland and Brock Holt -- are all eligible for free agency.

"Well those guys were obviously huge keys for us in their careers with us," said Romero. "Guys like Rick and Mitch, those are foundation pieces in the locker room and we're so thankful for what they've done for us. I think those decisions are ones that we have to consider and those are the ones that we're going to be meeting on in the next few days. We haven't discussed those as of yet but we'll get to that in short order."

Following Sundays' game, Holt passed out a collection of his bats to fans who were outside the players' parking lot.

Betts, J.D. with Sox in '20 possible, but 'difficult'

Ian Browne

As the Red Sox head into an offseason of uncertainty, it is fair to wonder if it's realistic to expect star players Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez to both return in 2020.

"There's a way that it could happen, but it will be difficult," Red Sox president/CEO Sam Kennedy said of having both players on the roster next season.

Here is why.

Owner John Henry is on record as saying he'd like to get the team's payroll below the first luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million for 2020. The Sox had a payroll of roughly \$240 million in '19 (the highest in MLB for the second straight season) while finishing a disappointing 84-78.

It is ultimately up to Martinez if he'd like to return. He holds an opt-out that he can exercise within five days after the World Series that would make him a free agent.

As for Betts, 2020 will be his walk year, and he's stated numerous times he expects to ride it out until free agency rather than sign an extension with the Red Sox before then. That type of uncertainty could compel the club to trade their best all-around player rather than lose him in exchange for draft compensation.

"Obviously it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place," Kennedy said about the possibility of bringing both lineup cornerstones back. "So, look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan that we're building right now. Some of the dates related to contract decisions come right after the World Series, so we've had some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings."

Adding to the uncertainty regarding Betts and Martinez is that the Red Sox haven't named a successor for president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. Kennedy said the search is underway for Dombrowski's successor, noting that the process is in the early stages.

"So, it is going to be a challenging offseason, but we're ready to tackle it head-on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there not just for next year but for 2021 and 2022," said Kennedy.

It is particularly jarring for Red Sox fans to envision a Boston team without Betts next season. He has essentially been the face of the franchise since David Ortiz retired following the '16 season and is probably one of the top five all-around players in the game.

Betts has been property of the Red Sox since he was taken as a skinny infielder without much power in the fifth round of the 2011 Draft. He is now an elite right fielder who can dominate the game in every way offensively.

“It’s been amazing,” Betts said Sunday of his run with the Red Sox. “I can’t thank the fans and teammates and front office enough for everything. I’m still here. It’s not like I’m gone until whatever. I’m not going to focus on that now.”

After agreeing with the club on a one-year, \$20 million contract last season, Betts is due for another bump in his final year of arbitration eligibility.

Once he becomes a free agent, the 26-year-old Betts could look to the contracts signed by Bryce Harper (13 years, \$330 million with the Phillies) and Manny Machado (10 years, \$300 million with the Padres) last offseason as a starting point for a long-term deal. The 10-year, \$360 million extension Mike Trout received from the Angels in March, bringing his total deal to 12 years, \$426.5 million over 2019-30, may also be used as a model.

Martinez has three years and \$62.5 million remaining on his deal, and he would receive a \$2.5 million buyout if he opts out this offseason. Martinez also can opt out a year from now, but he wouldn't receive a buyout.

Opting out would carry some level of risk for the 32-year-old, given how the free-agent market has played out in recent years for veteran sluggers in their 30s.

But Martinez also has to consider the fact that the final two years of his deal could turn into mutual options if he spends a certain amount of time on the injured list with a Lisfranc injury or another right foot ailment, per the terms of the deal he signed in the 2017-18 offseason. In his first two seasons with the Red Sox, Martinez has dealt with occasional back spasms, but hasn't dealt with any issues with his feet.

Like Betts, Martinez sometimes spoke in a reflective tone during his media availability after the regular-season finale, but he isn't ruling out a return to Boston.

“It's been great,” said Martinez. “Came and won a World Series. That was the goal. It's been awesome.”

The Red Sox will now wait for the offseason to evolve, acknowledging they'll have to get more creative to be championship-caliber with a payroll that is all but certain to decrease.

“Yeah, I mean it’s a challenge. It’s a challenge every year,” said Red Sox assistant general manager Brian O’Halloran. “There are 29 other teams that are trying to win a championship as well. The two players you mentioned are incredible players that we hope are on the 2020 team and beyond.

“But there are always challenges with building a championship team, which we aspire to do every year, and doing that efficiently, so we’ll be as creative as we possibly can in finding ways to do that, as John and [chairman] Tom [Werner] and Sam have noted, it’s a goal [to get the payroll below the luxury-tax threshold], not a mandate. So, in an ideal world, it would be great to reset at some point and there are reasons Sam went into for that.

“But ultimately, our goal is to build a championship-caliber team and we’ll do whatever we have to do to do that.”

*** *WEEI.com***

Sam Kennedy explains Red Sox' approach for 2020

Rob Bradford

Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy has found himself in the thick of a very complicated offseason even with the season coming to an end just a day ago.

Monday Kennedy met with the media to discuss a wide range of issues facing the Red Sox, including a search for the new leader of baseball operations, the team's goal to reduce its payroll below \$208 million and the future of Mookie Betts.

Perhaps the most notable proclamation from Kennedy was that the organization does believe there is a path to keep both Betts -- who is in line to make around \$30 million for 2020 -- and J.D. Martinez. Martinez has an opt-out, but if he doesn't take it his contract will pay him \$23.75 million for next season.

"Yes, there's a way. There is a way. But obviously, it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place," Kennedy explained regarding keeping both on the books for 2020. "So, look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan that we're building right now. Some of the dates related to contract decisions come right after the World Series, so we've had some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings. So, it is going to be a challenging offseason, but we're ready to tackle it head-on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there not just for next year but for 2021, 2022. ... It's a difficult challenge to get to that stated goal, but that's also why it's not a mandate."

In terms of the revelation by principal owner John Henry that the Red Sox were targeting getting under the first Competitive Balance Threshold level (\$208 million), Kennedy attempted to use Monday's press conference to clarify the organization's stance on the matter.

"The CBT is always a guidepost in our budgeting as we build our financial plans for the following season, we use CBT as one guidepost," he said. "It's something we consider. John and Tom (Werner) have shown a willingness I believe in the last 17 years, we've been over that CBT threshold 10 times and we will continue to demonstrate a willingness to go over. That said, John made it clear that there is a goal to try to get under the CBT in 2020. But he also said, and Tom followed up and clarified, that that is a goal but not a mandate. In fact, we spent time over the weekend as a group talking with the baseball ops transition team about different scenarios where you could see the possibility if there are strategic decisions that cause us to go over, that that could be a possibility. We could be under. There are lots of decisions facing the Red Sox this offseason. It's a goal but not a hard and fast mandate."

Here are some other topics touched on by Kennedy ...

HOW THE ORGANIZATION VIEWS THE HEAD OF BASEBALL OPERATIONS POSITION

"I think the best structure for a sports organization is to ensure that the president and CEO has a seat at the table, has a voice in baseball operations or hockey operations or football operations, and can work collaboratively with the general manager or president of baseball ops, that's the way it's worked here since 2002. Theo (Epstein) and Larry (Lucchino) worked closely together. Ben and Larry worked closely together. Dave and I worked closely together. I don't think it's appropriate for a president or CEO to make player personnel or evaluation or judgments. I have a very important voice in baseball operations because I'm accountable for the operations of the club and there's a lot of financial decisions that go into the construction and operation of a baseball department. We work very, very closely together. I'm a member of the ownership group so John, Tom and I ultimately empower the general manager to make those decisions. I see my role continuing as it has been over the last four years.

"They'll likely report to ownership, to John and Tom so I see it as a partnership so we'll see how that plays out in terms of the structure. We're going into this with a very open mind in terms of how the role may be defined and what the ultimate final structure may be. Baseball has changed dramatically, as you guys know better than anybody, over the last five years, even. It's just a huge job and there are so many aspects of running a baseball operations department. We're studying different structures within different organizations. We're looking at different people, but ultimately player recommendations and player

evaluations will rise to the level of ownership. I have a seat at that ownership table, but I would anticipate a direct line of report to John and Tom to continue given that there's such a huge financial impact and the magnitude of those decisions get up to the ownership level. John and Tom have been here for 18 years and we see our role collectively as providing the resources necessary to the baseball department and the other areas of the organization to operate effectively."

WHAT THE NEW HIRE'S TITLE MIGHT BE

"We could go in any number of directions. Teams have had, I believe in the past, multiple general managers, along with a president of baseball operations. There's a chief baseball officer role out there in the big leagues today. Part of our job in ownership is to examine what fits best with us. The good news for Boston Red Sox fans is given Eddie (Romero) and Raquel (Ferreira) and Zack (Scott) and BOH (Brian O'Halloran) and their experience and their talents, which are many, we have the luxury of time to examine what will work best for us and be most strategic as we go forward."

TICKET PRICES WILL GO UP

"We've had a pretty consistent approach to ticket-pricing the last five years. Low single digits and cost of living inflationary increases. We haven't made a decision for 2020 but I would anticipate another modest increase."

THE UNCERTAINTY OF BETTS

"We'll have to see what the future brings. I don't mean to be vague or evasive, but the truth is I don't know where things are going to end up with Mookie."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

\$208 million payroll is 'a goal, not a mandate' for Red Sox in 2020

John Tomase

Takeaways from the season wrap-up at Fenway Park on Monday that included CEO Sam Kennedy, manager Alex Cora, and the Gang of Four running baseball operations . . .

— There was a fair amount of backtracking from John Henry's contention last week that the Red Sox would like to get under the \$208 million luxury tax threshold and reset the team's penalty schedule. Kennedy and assistant GMs Eddie Romero and Brian O'Halloran each sounded the same theme.

"It's a goal, not a mandate," Kennedy said.

That said, with big-market powerhouses like the Dodgers and Yankees managing to find their way under the threshold in recent seasons — the Red Sox dropped below it themselves as recently as 2017 — the Red Sox see no reason why they can't get creative with their payroll and do the same.

— One player who wouldn't appear to fit under that plan is defending MVP Mookie Betts, who ended up putting together a pretty decent follow-up campaign, all things considered. Kennedy acknowledged the challenges of keeping him long-term, but made it clear the team will try.

The same goes for slugging DH J.D. Martinez. Kennedy was asked if there's a way to keep both of them and remain under \$208 million.

"Yes, there's a way," he said. "There's a way. But obviously, it will be difficult."

— Cora has not made any decisions on his coaching staff yet, but after winning only 84 games, sounded like someone preparing to move in a different direction.

"I don't know what kind of changes we're going to make," he said, adding that all of the coaches will be in town for meetings before any decisions are made.

— Left-hander Chris Sale still isn't throwing, on advice of the medical staff, as the Red Sox take his recovery slowly. Originally scheduled for a six-week followup with Dr. James Andrews, the two sides haven't yet scheduled that visit.

"At this point we expect him to be healthy coming into spring training along with the rest of the rotation that we have under control," O'Halloran said.

As for neither Sale nor fellow left-hander David Price making themselves available to reporters over the final month of the season despite interest in their respective rehabs, Cora said he would've preferred that they talk.

But he also recognizes that "it gets to the point with them where they're so frustrated with what's going on."

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Sam Kennedy warns that retaining both Betts and Martinez 'will be difficult'

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox' search for a new top baseball executive is in its early stages. No interviews have been conducted, and, in fact, no candidates have been contacted.

But on Monday, the day after the Red Sox finished the 2019 season with a mere 84 wins and a third-place finish, there came a tough realization.

Some difficult decisions lie ahead and some may need to be made even before the new executive is hired.

Two such calls involve the future of J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts.

Martinez has an opt-out in his current contract which he must act upon five days after the World Series. Betts, meanwhile, remains under the Red Sox' control for one more season.

But against the backdrop of ownership's recent admission that the "goal" is to be under the first competitive balance tax threshold (CBT) of \$208 million in 2020, it simply may not be feasible to retain both.

"Yes, there's a way (to bring back both)," Kennedy said in meeting with reporters Monday morning. "But obviously, it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contract that we have in place."

There are differences between the two. Martinez could opt-out, thus relieving the Sox of \$63.75 million in salary obligations while correspondingly leaving a significant hole in the middle of their lineup. Meanwhile, Betts remains under control for another year. The Sox could either keep him for 2020 and try to re-sign him when he hits the open market, or, so as to not be left with only a draft pick to show for his departure, deal him this winter.

Indeed, counting Martinez's scheduled salary of \$23.75 million, estimated cost of some 40-man roster players and benefits, the Red Sox are already committed to about \$151 million for 2020.

That doesn't include what Betts will earn in his final year of salary arbitration (estimated at close to \$30 million), or other sizable leaps for other arbitration-eligible players such as Jackie Bradley Jr., Eduardo Rodriguez, Andrew Benintendi, Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes.

Those deals will take the Red Sox well over \$200 million — and represent only about half of the team's projected 25-man roster, making for a tight financial squeeze.

“We have a very targeted and strategic plan that we're building right now,” said Kennedy. “Some of the dates related to contract decisions come right after the World Series, so we've had some time in September to focus on the off-season given where we were in the standings. So, it's going to be a challenging offseason, but we're ready to tackle it head-on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there — not just for next year, but also 2021 and 2022.

“It's a difficult decision to get that stated goal (of being under the CBT), but that's also why it's not a mandate.”

One path for the Sox to create some fiscal breathing room would be to move some of the existing contracts. For instance, if the Sox were willing to take back some of the money due to, say, either David Price (three years, \$99 million remaining) or Nathan Eovaldi (three years, \$51 million remaining), they could create additional payroll space.

“There's been a lot of creative ideas bandied about,” said Kennedy, while making it clear he wasn't referring to Price and/or Eovaldi specifically. “We'll continue to have those discussions as we get into the offseason. There's no lack of creativity within that baseball operations group and there's an enthusiasm and energy to attack the offseason.”

Either way, the Red Sox will be put in the uncomfortable position of trying to convince fans that the produce on the field will be better — even if the price tag is smaller.

“We've proved that you can have the highest payroll in baseball and win the World Series,” noted Kennedy. “And you can have the highest payroll in baseball and win 84 games and finish out of postseason competition. There is a correlation between spending and winning — clearly.

“However, we've also had success in years where we've come under the CBT and we've had success going over. At the end of the day it's about the players that you put out there. It's about health, it's about great management and leadership from the staff. We have some real talent in the clubhouse as we turn the page to 2020. We also have a very creative Baseball Operations department. So we're very confident about what lies ahead, but we do have some challenging and difficult decisions.”

Red Sox Notebook: Team says Sale on track; ticket prices going up and more

Sean McAdam

Red Sox pitcher Chris Sale visited with specialist Dr. James Andrews on August 19, with plans to see him again some six weeks later.

As it happens, today was the exact six-week anniversary of that visit. That follow-up visit hasn't happened yet, and Sale remains in “no throw” mode on orders from Dr. Andrews, after complaining of elbow discomfort and being shut down for the remainder of the season after Aug. 13.

Nevertheless, the Red Sox expressed optimism about Sale's condition and his readiness for next season.

“He's recovering well,” said assistant GM Brian O'Halloran said. “We're going to take everything step-by-step with Chris and he has certain checkpoints to meet as we go through the offseason. But as this point, we expect him to be healthy coming into spring training, along with the rest of the rotation we have under control.

“There was a range on when that could begin and we’re taking that a little bit slower than we initially anticipated just to be certain. Once he was totally shut down, we took a close look at his schedule and our medical staff recommended that we take it slowly just to give him as much time as possible to heal before he started throwing. But that will happen sometime in the near future.”

Sale was expected to meet with reporters this past weekend, but failed to do so. The same was said of David Price, who last week underwent a procedure in Boston to remove a cyst he had developed in his left wrist, but Price, too, failed to answer questions.

The team has said for a number of days that it will announce the status of the coaching staff, but has yet to do so.

It’s widely assumed that hitting coach Tim Hyers, assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett are regarded as safe, along with pitching coach Dana LeVangie. But other changes could take place, which Alex Cora almost seemed to suggest were coming.

“We’re going to meet as a group in the upcoming days,” Cora said. “Obviously, in every other organization, there’s always changes — and we’re talking about from scouting all the way through the manager. I don’t know what kind of changes we’re going to make or if the whole group is coming (back). We’ll address the situation and make decisions accordingly.”

Despite falling way short of expectations and while vowing to reduce spending, the Red Sox anticipate a “modest” increase in ticket prices for 2020.

“We’ve taken a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last four or five years,” said team president Sam Kennedy Monday, “with low, single-digit or cost-of-living inflationary increases. We haven’t made a decision this year for 2020. But I would anticipate another modest increase.”

The team boosted the cost of tickets 2.5 percent in each of the last two off-seasons.

Settle in – finding the Red Sox’ new baseball executive will likely take a while

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox aren’t yet sure whether their next hire will be a president of baseball operations or a general manager. Or, eventually, both.

Nor have they interviewed anyone for the position, or for that matter, asked for permission to interview potential candidates under contract elsewhere.

But that’s coming.

Monday, however, served as a reminder that the process could take a while.

Team president and CEO Sam Kennedy will conduct the search, which will entail compiling a list of potential candidates, seeking permission from their current employers and ultimately, recommending his choice for the position to ownership.

“Where we are is (in the) early days,” said Kennedy. “We’ve had an opportunity to do a lot of due diligence. (Dismissing Dave Dombrowski when we did) gave us an opportunity to get a head start on the thinking and research that we wanted to conduct and helped us established clear-cut roles and responsibilities for the current leaders of the Baseball Ops team.

“We’re engaged in this, but the search is underway.”

Because the Red Sox have publicly stated that their clear preference is to hire someone who has run a Baseball Operations department before,

the process will almost certainly involve getting permission to interview general managers or presidents of baseball operations.

Of the organization's three top choices in a preliminary list, only one — Andrew Friedman of the Los Angeles Dodgers — is working without a contract for 2020 in place. Houston's Jeff Luhnow and the Chicago Cubs' Theo Epstein also at the top of the list, though both have multiple years committed on their current deals, making the hiring of either problematic.

But no matter whom the Sox seek to lure away, there will be issues. As Kennedy noted — and ownership observed last Friday — in the last decade or so, only two top baseball executives have gone directly from one team to another. Epstein famously left the Sox for the Cubs in 2011 and Friedman moved from the Tampa Bay Rays to the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 2014 season.

Of the three top candidates, two have teams just now beginning the postseason. Undoubtedly, there will be other candidates who are also employed by playoff teams, slowing the search further.

Kennedy said the Sox would “prefer” to have somebody in place when the GM Meetings begin in Scottsdale, Az., on Nov. 10. But he added that was far imperative.

No matter who is hired — or what title that person is given — the expectation is that he will work in conjunction with ownership, the support staff of the Baseball Operations department, and not incidentally, Kennedy himself.

“I think the best structure for a sports organization is to ensure that the president and CEO has a seat at the table,” said Kennedy, “and has a voice in baseball operations ... and can work collaboratively with the general manager or president of baseball operations. That's the way it's worked here since 2002. Theo and Larry (Lucchino) worked closely together; Ben (Cherington) and Larry worked together; Dave and I worked closely together.

“I don't think it's appropriate for a president and CEO to make player personnel evaluations or judgments. I have a very important voice in baseball operations because I'm accountable for the operations of the club and there's a lot of financial decisions that go into the construction and operation of a baseball department.”

In the meantime, the Sox have their Gang of Four — Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira — running things on a daily basis. Of that quartet, three date their association with the club back to 2002 while Romero joined in 2006.

“Given Eddie and Raquel, and Zack and BOH and their experience and talents, which are many,” said Kennedy, “we have the luxury of time to examine what will work best for us and be most strategic as we go forward.”

*** *The Athletic***

Red Sox fans should get used to unusual feeling of diminished expectations for a while

Steve Buckley

Meet the new marketing campaign of the Red Sox: “It's going to be a challenging offseason.”

OK, so it hasn't been focus-group tested. It doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, either. And it'll be, well, a challenge to make all the words fit on a bumper sticker or across the top of those glossy season-ticket renewal pamphlets that'll be arriving in the mail soon.

Did we mention that Red Sox fans can expect a “modest” increase in ticket prices for 2020? We’ll get to that in a moment.

First, there’s the new marketing campaign, this business about how it’s going to be a challenging offseason. Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy served as the leadoff hitter at the team’s obligatory we’re-not-going-to-the-playoffs-so-let’s-talk-about-that breakup news conference Monday, and it was Sudden Sam who delivered those words in response to a query as to whether it’s possible the team will be able to hold on to marquee attractions Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez while professing to have an interest in shedding payroll.

“Yes, there is a way, but obviously it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place,” Kennedy said. “Look, we have a very targeted and strategic plan that we’re building right now. Some of the dates related to contract decisions come right after the World Series, so we’ve had some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings.”

Kennedy spoke of the “misalignment of interests” between “short-term and long-term decisions” as motivation for the Sox wanting to slash the payroll.

“Our job is to balance those two things. So it’s difficult,” he said. “It’s a difficult challenge to get to that stated goal, but that’s also why it’s not a mandate.”

And then came the marketing campaign: “It’s going to be a challenging offseason, but we’re ready to attack it head-on and do everything we can to put a competitive team out there, not just for next year, but for 2021 and 2022.”

Kennedy does earn points for candor. And bonus points for the bit about having “some time in September to focus on the offseason given where we were in the standings,” as though there’s a silver lining to the team’s players falling flat on their well-fed faces and failing to make the playoffs.

Like the sub-three-hour game and Mike Trout being recognized in public, candor in baseball is rare. You’ll recall that Dave Dombrowski, Boston’s deposed president of baseball operations, seemed to take delight in not answering the most basic questions about what was going on with the club. That Kennedy is able to open the door a crack and offer some starter-kit insights into what’s happening deep inside Fenway Park is itself a reason for fans to continue investing in the Red Sox. Perhaps Kennedy’s local roots — raised in Brookline, as was his old runnin’ buddy Theo Epstein, etc. — liberates him from the bad habit of lading out nonsense and expecting to get away with it.

But for Kennedy to choose phrases that float somewhere between cautionary and somber — “it will be difficult,” “short-term and long-term decisions,” “it’s going to be a challenging offseason” — marks one of the few times this century that Boston sports fans have been given an oh-so-polite lecture in the fine art of measured expectations. The Boston pro sports market leads the league in championships this century — a combined 12 of them by the Patriots (six), Red Sox (four), Bruins (one) and Celtics (one) — and with all that has come an alarming increase in swagger. Naturally, then, most sports fans in the rest of North America (except Canada’s eastern provinces!) hate Boston, and most Boston sports fans love that Boston is hated. Boston fans say, “They hate us cuz’ they ain’t us,” other people hate that, and away we go.

Now you have Kennedy saying, “It’s going to be a challenging offseason.”

You’re entitled, encouraged even, to find a transcript of Kennedy’s remarks and interpret them however you wish. Also speaking yesterday were Red Sox manager Alex Cora and front-office execs Eddie Romero and Brian O’Halloran. Read what you wish into what Cora, Romero and O’Halloran had to say as well.

My interpretation — that is, of what Kennedy said — is there might be another season or two of 80-something wins before there’s another World Series parade. If you’re a Sox fan poised to buy tickets for 2020, you don’t know if Mookie Betts will be in the lineup on Opening Day. You don’t know if J.D.

Martinez will be in the lineup on Opening Day. You don't know if Chris Sale and David Price will be healthy, other than management "expects" them to be healthy.

What you do know is you'll pay a little more to step into America's Most Beloved Ballpark (a made-up designation from the playbook of the great Larry Lucchino during his days as CEO) in 2020.

"We've taken a pretty consistent approach to ticket pricing the last four or five years, (including) low, single-digits or cost-of-living inflationary increases," Kennedy said. "We haven't made a decision this year for 2020. But I would anticipate another modest increase."

The Sox could have made a bold No Ticket Increase statement and earned some good pub, but ... OK. The mere staging of a big-league ballgame is hugely expensive, so let them have their modest increase. That wasn't the news Monday.

The news is that the Red Sox are hungry again, and that's not a bad thing.

A 10-step plan to make the Red Sox contenders in 2020

Chad Jennings

For an hour on Monday, the Red Sox top brass met with reporters and said very little that wasn't already known. They're in the early stages of looking for a new head of baseball operations. They would like to trim payroll. They hope to contend next season. And, no, they don't know whether their designated hitter is going to opt out or whether their right fielder has a long-term future with the franchise.

You know, the stuff they've been talking about for almost a month now.

The hot stove won't really kick into gear until the end of the playoffs, but as we enter a quiet period before the chaos, we'll offer a modest blueprint for the Red Sox offseason: 10 steps that could help the Red Sox meet their financial goals while giving them a chance to compete in 2020 and beyond.

1. Keep Mookie Betts (until the trade deadline)

Think of Aroldis Chapman four years ago. The Reds wanted to get something before he became a free agent, so they traded him to the Yankees in the offseason and got a package of four flawed prospects, none of whom has made an impact. Then the Reds watched the Yankees flip Chapman at the trade deadline seven months later and get Gleyber Torres, taking full advantage of the Cubs' certainty that they were one big splash away from a championship. (The Yankees wound up re-signing Chapman the following winter.)

If Betts can't lead the Red Sox to another title, the next-best thing would be shipping him to an aggressive contender that's willing to pay a king's ransom. Betts' salary and determination to become a free agent should limit his trade value this winter, but come late July, a team that tastes a ring might be more willing to pay up to have him for three crucial months.

Added bonus: If everything else falls into place, the Red Sox can always keep him and make another run themselves.

2. Stick with the plan to cut payroll

Getting below the luxury-tax threshold is a goal, not a mandate. That was one of the main talking points Monday from team president Sam Kennedy, manager Alex Cora and the four vice presidents currently running baseball operations. Behind-the-scenes conversations suggest it's more than a talking point; it's a reality. Ownership really is willing to go back over if it feels it's necessary to contend in 2020.

But the pursuit itself is worthwhile. Because of the escalating penalties that come with repeat violations, the Yankees, Dodgers and, yes, the Red Sox have made sure to get below the threshold at least once in recent

years. For the Red Sox, it's especially important because of Betts. Want to be in the best position to make him a long-term offer when he inevitably hits the open market before 2021? It certainly will help to owe a 20 percent luxury tax instead of a 50 percent luxury tax.

Getting payroll below \$208 million might prove impossible – more on that in a bit – but it's the right idea. It's a goal, not a mandate.

3. If J.D. Martinez opts out, let him go

For the time being, a true Red Sox blueprint is almost impossible because of Martinez. Whether he opts in or out changes the landscape in a big, big way. If he opts in, that might be the end of the \$208 million goal. As Kennedy said of getting payroll that low with both Betts and Martinez: "Obviously, it will be difficult."

But if Martinez opts out, it will become a little easier, and that just might be the opening the Red Sox need. Their offense is not where it was in 2017 when the David Ortiz void was insurmountable. That team had only three players with at least 300 at-bats and an OPS+ of at least 100 (which is league average). Missing a standout designated hitter was hardly its only offensive problem.

This year's Red Sox had eight players with at least 300 at-bats and a 100 OPS+. (They nearly had nine such players; Michael Chavis had a 96.) A deeper lineup might let the Red Sox save some money at designated hitter, a role that should be one of the cheapest and easiest to fill.

4. Non-tender Steven Wright, Heath Hembree and Sandy León

This means tendering contract offers to the other arbitration-eligible players: Jackie Bradley Jr., Andrew Benintendi, Eduardo Rodriguez, Matt Barnes, Brandon Workman and Marco Hernández. It means giving particularly big raises to Bradley, Benintendi and Rodriguez.

As for the non-tenders, injuries and suspensions make the Wright decision fairly straightforward. Hembree is much less cut-and-dry. He might be worth the roughly \$2 million he's likely to earn through arbitration, but the Red Sox have Ryan Brasier and Marcus Walden as cheaper alternatives, and with Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor pitching their way into big-league roles, Hembree seems expendable. It's another way to save a little money.

As for León, he made just under \$2.5 million through arbitration this year. For that money, the Red Sox could have signed either Martín Maldonado or James McCann. For \$1 million less, they could have signed Matt Wieters. Now that Christian Vázquez looks more like a true everyday guy, it's just not worth giving León even a small arbitration raise.

5. Trade Jackie Bradley Jr.

After making \$8.55 million this season, Bradley's salary is likely to jump above \$10 million in his final round of arbitration. Thanks to his defense, he's been at least a 2.0 WAR player, as measured by Baseball Reference, each of the past five years, and he hit 21 homers this year.

The suggestion of trading him isn't made lightly. Bradley's valuable. If he weren't, there would be little sense in putting him on the market. But if the Red Sox have to find ways to save money, moving Bradley might accomplish that goal while adding either young talent for the minor-league system or a cheaper arm to round out the rotation.

One further outside-the-box alternative: Trade Benintendi. Again, a valuable player, but one that's still fairly cheap and controllable. He's coming off a down year, but maybe swap him for a starting pitcher in a similar spot?

6. Eat salary until David Price or Nathan Eovaldi becomes tradeable

File this under “easier said than done.” Kennedy acknowledged yesterday that the Red Sox have begun looking into ideas like this. He did not specifically mention Price or Eovaldi, but he did say the team has “started those discussions” about possibly eating some salary to move larger contracts. “There’s been a lot of creative ideas bandied about,” he said.

Price and Eovaldi each have three years left on their deals. Price is making \$32 million per year – imagine that emoji with the wide eyes right here – while Eovaldi is making \$17 million per year. Same idea applies to Chris Sale, but trading him now would mean selling extremely low on his remaining six years.

Question is, how much would the Red Sox have to pay down on the Price and Eovaldi contracts to facilitate a trade? Is there a “bandied about” idea that gets even more creative by attaching one of them to a guy like Benintendi? What about attaching them to prospects? Trading them might prove impossible, in which case the Red Sox will have to simply hope for the best, but it’s worth turning over many rocks to see if anyone’s interested.

7. Hand Michael Chavis a job on the right side of the infield

Boston’s internal metrics were surprisingly bullish on Chavis as a second baseman. He moves well for a big guy, so there’s some validity to him as a second-base option. He could also play first base, considering that is wide open.

Whatever the position, Chavis is the best bet for cheap offense from an internal position player. He was occasionally exposed this season, but a commitment to player development is going to require riding those ups and downs. Marco Hernández might be able to play a complementary role, but Chavis has to get a long look. Ownership has said it wants to develop more everyday players, and that will have to start with giving a developed player an opportunity.

8. Put the pro scouts to work

For the Yankees, it was Gio Urshela and Mike Tauchman. The Rays had Ji-Man Choi, and the Twins had C.J. Cron. Matt Joyce and Brian McCann were playing important roles for the Braves, Howie Kendrick was again vital to the Nationals and the Dodgers had David Freese off the bench (having previously seen Justin Turner and then Chris Taylor emerge from obscurity to become everyday guys). Call it luck if you’d like, but playoff teams routinely get important production from under-the-radar signings who provide production at a minimal cost. The Red Sox are going to have to follow suit.

Having Chavis flexible on the right side of the infield, with the designated hitter role perhaps wide open, the Red Sox can keep tabs on free agents like Brian Dozier, Neil Walker, Eric Thames, Justin Smoak, Lonnie Chisenhall — the list goes on, and we’ll defer to a scouting department that’s already found cheap pitching help from Brasier and Walden the past two years. The Red Sox might very well need that on the position side this time. Depending on the way things play out with money and personnel, perhaps they can make a run at a guy like Mike Moustakas or Corey Dickerson for more offense, but it seems safe to assume they won’t play at the top of the free-agent market. That likely applies to late-inning relievers as well and in the rotation. Unless you count a former Cy Young winner.

9. Re-sign Rick Porcello to a one-year deal

This idea comes with a caveat: If the Red Sox can trade either Bradley or Benintendi for a starting pitcher, it might solve the same problem. But this team is going to need some innings. Lack of rotation depth really hurt it this year, so it’s hard to justify going through the upcoming winter without adding a starter who can give the Red Sox innings. And given that need, it’s hard to find a better buy-low bounce-back candidate than Porcello.

The alternatives are guys like Tanner Roark, Ivan Nova and Michael Wacha. The key to Porcello is he’s averaged 185 innings in his career, and as recently as last season, he was still a good middle-of-the-rotation guy. Not the Cy Young winner he was in 2016, but he had a 4.28 ERA with a 1.17 WHIP and a really good

postseason. Plus, he's a known commodity as a clubhouse leader, and he likes Boston enough that he just might take a discount to stick around. That's a set of circumstances that could fit Boston's needs, especially if it was able to trade Price to shake up the clubhouse dynamic a bit. Then bringing back Porcello wouldn't feel like running the same guys out there again.

10. Hold on to Tanner Houck and Bryan Mata

As the Red Sox weigh which prospects to keep and which to dangle in trade talks, these two stand out as young pitchers who fit a specific need: potential big-league starters who could be ready by the end of 2020.

In Houck's case, he could be a big-league starter before the first day of summer. He pitched well as a Triple-A reliever this season, but the Red Sox sent him to the Arizona Fall League to get more reps out of the rotation, and he has the system's best combination of upside and experience. He could be a big-league option soon, with potential for real impact and staying power.

Mata is younger and farther away, but he made 11 Double-A starts this season, which means he could be in Triple A by early summer. He's also arguably the top pitching prospect in the system. When guys graduate into the upper levels, as Houck and Mata have done, their trade value tends to spike. But the Red Sox have long needed a homegrown starter, and these two could fill that void in the relatively near future.

Raquel Ferreira hates the spotlight. But she's finally venturing forward as she assumes bigger role with Red Sox

Jen McCaffrey

Raquel Ferreira stood in the corner against a wall perpendicular to the press conference table where Red Sox manager Alex Cora and assistant general managers Eddie Romero and Brian O'Halloran sat answering questions to wrap up the season.

The cameras and questions peppered the trio at the front of the room, but she was out of the spotlight, just where she likes it.

The main session ended and Ferreira jokingly tried to sneak out the back door as she saw a line of reporters waiting to talk to her.

As the Red Sox senior vice president of major and minor league operations, Ferreira has played an integral role in the day to day operations of the club for the last 21 seasons. Until now, it's been mostly behind the scenes.

That changed on Sept. 8 when the Red Sox fired Dave Dombrowski in the middle of a game against the Yankees at Fenway. The team asked Ferreira to jointly lead a transition team with Romero, O'Halloran and fellow assistant general manager Zack Scott.

"We met after Dave got let go on Sunday and John Henry called us into his suite and told us," Ferreira recalled.

Her initial reaction?

"Um, me?" Ferreira said.

"They were like, 'The four of you are going to do this.' (They) have all the confidence in the world in us and have entrusted us to run baseball operations as normal.

"My natural thought was if anybody is going to take over, it'd be the three assistant GMs. So yeah, it was a little bit of a surprise but I was very honored to be a part of it, to be included."

Ferreira is just one of three female senior vice presidents in baseball. Jean Afterman is senior vice president and assistant general manager for the Yankees and Kim Ng is SVP of baseball operations for Major League Baseball and the commissioner's office.

Ferreira has developed a close relationship with Afterman, despite the long-standing rivalry between their employers.

"She's been such a great sounding board and resource," Ferreira said. "When I first got promoted in 2014 to vice president, she was one of the first people that emailed me and she said, 'Welcome to the brotherhood,' and she meant it. So now we always joke around we're going to have t-shirts made that say, 'Welcome to the brotherhood, now accepting applications.'"

Ferreira was channeling her inner Afterman on Monday doing rounds with the media in order to be more front-facing with the Red Sox. Her humility means she hates attention, but she realizes it's important to encourage more young women that they can join baseball front offices and she needs to use her platform to show them it is possible.

Last month, Afterman and Ferreira were on a panel together at Saberseminar, an annual baseball analytics conference held at Boston University. They discussed their career paths and working in the industry among other things.

"I've always been hesitant to do (interviews) because I didn't want people to view me in a certain way, trying to put myself out there," Ferreira said. "But she's encouraged me to do things like (Saberseminar). And she's like, 'If we want to get more women in sports these are exactly the things we need to do.'"

Though she's taking on a more prominent and visible role with the Red Sox as the club searches for its next lead executive, she's not sure she'd want a job as the lone decision-maker.

"I am honored that I have a seat at the table," Ferreira said. "I am never going to lobby or promote, 'Hey this person should be me.' I leave it up to them. I've been here for 21 years, they know what I can and can't do. I know my own strengths and weaknesses so it's up to them."

Ferreira is glad, though, there are more opportunities for women in baseball operations.

"I also think the landscape is changed and I think the people that are hiring have changed," she said. "So when you start from the ground up, like I did, it takes a long time for it to happen but I think the landscape is changing where you have people in the front office now that look at people differently, or you hope they do. You're not looked at as a woman in baseball, you're looked at for your abilities and what you can contribute. So hopefully that will continue to change."

Red Sox owners have said they plan to take their time searching for the baseball operations boss. Part of the reason they feel comfortable in a thorough process despite big decisions looming is because of the core four currently overseeing things. O'Halloran handles all player contracts and financial analysis while Romero's background is in scouting and player development. Scott leads the organization's analytics department and Ferreira has the player relations aspect of the equation. It's possible the club will hire someone from the outside to oversee it all or perhaps one of the four will be promoted to the lead role.

"I've always preferred to be in the background because I know my strengths and weaknesses," she said. "I think it takes a group of people to do this job. I think that's why the four of us have done it so well so far because you need people that have different skill sets that everybody brings something different to the table. Men and women think differently. I think the most amount of brainpower and different viewpoints you have make an organization stronger. I think that's why the four of us have worked so well so far is because we all bring something different to the table and respect each others opinion."

*** *The New York Times***

MLB playoffs on tap after season of extraordinary numbers

Tyler Kepner

It was a regular season of extremes for Major League Baseball, in the standings and on the stat sheets. For the first time, four teams reached 100 victories. But for only the second time, four teams had 100 losses.

The Houston Astros earned home-field advantage throughout the postseason after posting the majors' best record: 107-55. The Los Angeles Dodgers (106), the New York Yankees (103) and the Minnesota Twins (101) also exceeded the 100-win mark.

The Astros have come full circle: After stumbling to at least 100 losses each season from 2011 to 2013, they now have a streak of three seasons with at least 100 wins. Perhaps inspired by that example, the Detroit Tigers (114 losses), the Baltimore Orioles (108), the Miami Marlins (105) and the Kansas City Royals (103) have all embarked on long rebuilding projects. Only one other season (2002) included four teams with 100 defeats.

Four playoff teams from last season failed to make it back to October: the Chicago Cubs, the Cleveland Indians, the Colorado Rockies and the Red Sox, who won the 2018 World Series but fell to 84-78. The Red Sox had the majors' highest payroll this season but now intend to cut more than \$30 million to reset their luxury-tax penalties. They are also seeking a new general manager after firing Dave Dombrowski, their president of baseball operations, early this month.

The Red Sox' struggle extended baseball's record streak of seasons without a repeat champion. The 1998-2000 Yankees remain the last repeat World Series winners; the San Francisco Giants won three championships this decade, but none consecutively.

"To win the World Series, it takes a lot out of you, it does," said Bruce Bochy, the retiring manager of the Giants, before playing the Red Sox this month. "Of course, there's a lot of things that go with that — the celebrating, and I think the stress it can put on some pitchers, even the players, mentally and physically. And so you see this a lot."

The Yankees, who won the American League East for the first time since 2012, are not used to waiting so long without at least appearing in the World Series; they have not been there since winning it in 2009. The franchise has endured longer droughts between pennants, but for numerologists, this could be the Yankees' first calendar decade without a World Series appearance since the 1910s.

To avoid that fate, the Yankees must first beat the Twins in a division series matchup between the two teams that hit the most home runs in major league history (307 for the Twins, 306 for the Yankees). The Astros will face the winner of Wednesday's wild-card game in Oakland between the Athletics and the Tampa Bay Rays.

In the National League, the Dodgers will try to become the first team since the 1923 Yankees to return to the World Series after losing two in a row. The Dodgers' division series opponent will be the Washington Nationals or the Milwaukee Brewers, who meet in Washington on Tuesday in the NL wild-card game. The St. Louis Cardinals — who clinched the NL Central title on Sunday — will face the Atlanta Braves in the other NL division series.

The Dodgers set their franchise record for victories by beating the Giants on Sunday, and believe they are poised for their first championship since 1988. That is the longest drought of any team in the field that has won a title, though three teams — Milwaukee, Tampa Bay and Washington — are seeking their first.

"I think our depth is as good as it's ever been," the infielder and outfielder Chris Taylor said this month. "Top to bottom, this is probably the strongest team that we've had, and I think our pitching is stronger as well — arguably the best starting rotation we've ever had."

While the Dodgers have good reason to trust in Walker Buehler, Clayton Kershaw and Hyun-Jin Ryu, no team boasts a better big three than the Astros, with Justin Verlander, Gerrit Cole and Zack Greinke, who combined to go 59-16 this season.

Verlander and Cole were the first teammates to each record 300 strikeouts since Randy Johnson and Curt Schilling did it for Arizona in 2002. Cole, who earned his 20th victory on Sunday, finished with 326 strikeouts, the most by an AL pitcher since Nolan Ryan in 1977. Strikeouts have risen across the league each season since 2008, with an increase of more than 1,300 this year, to 42,823.

Hitters also obliterated the home run record, bashing 6,776 homers — 671 more than the previous record set in 2017. The New York Mets' Pete Alonso hit the most this season with 53, setting a major league record for rookies. The Mets were one of 15 teams that either set or tied their single-season record for home runs.

For all the gaudy numbers, though, there was also this: zero. That is the number of intentional walks issued by the Astros, while every other team allowed at least 10. Intentional walks have been officially tracked since 1955, and the Astros' staff became the first to go a full season without one.