

## ***The Boston Red Sox Monday, October 28, 2019***

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

#### **Red Sox hope Chaim Bloom will make team an innovative, cutting-edge organization**

Alex Speier

The Red Sox pitching staff is coming off a tremendously disappointing season in which it forged a 4.70 ERA and endured the sort of inconsistency that made repeating as world champions almost impossible. Not only did the team's well-compensated rotation struggle, but its ability to plug rotation holes with solutions from inside the organization proved glaringly inadequate, as the Red Sox continued their years-long struggles to conjure homegrown starters.

Against that backdrop, the arrival of Chaim Bloom as chief baseball officer seems particularly timely. After all, when the Tampa Bay Rays helped reshape their sport's landscape in May 2018 with their commitment to introduce "The Opener" to Major League Baseball, Bloom was there.

Bloom — then the Rays' senior VP of baseball operations — was traveling with the team in Kansas City for the discussions that set in motion the commitment to a non-traditional strategy. Days later, Sergio Romo made back-to-back starts (recording three and then four outs) against the Angels, introducing a strategy that challenged baseball tradition while also helping the Rays to emerge as a surprise contender in 2018 and playoff team in 2019.

Yet while Bloom was the highest-ranking Rays official who took part in those on-site conversations in Kansas City, his strengths as an executive — the ones that drew the Red Sox to him to helm their baseball operations — may be better explained by the roles of other members of the organization in shaping the team's strategy.

Bloom was part of the conversations — yet so were VP of baseball operations James Click (who was also on the trip) and GM Erik Neander (who took part by phone). More significantly, the conversation was guided by members of the field staff, particularly Rays manager Kevin Cash and pitching coach Kyle Snyder.

The Red Sox clearly are hoping the 36-year-old Bloom will allow the Red Sox to become a more innovative, cutting-edge organization, one that moves beyond the constraints of traditional baseball ideas and methods in search of getting the greatest possible contributions from their players, while also identifying competitive edges.

Bloom grew up in and played a significant role in the development of a Rays organization that did just that — yet his impact wasn't felt so much in any single decision he made as in the development of a culture that allowed managers, coaches, executives, and players the freedom of creativity. Cash and Snyder could speak freely about the merits of an untested big league strategy and make the call about whether and how to use it.

"He's had his hands on everything," Snyder said. "[But] he develops a lot of trust, and I genuinely feel like he empowers everyone. That's not an easy thing to do."

The use of an opener represented the outgrowth of years of conversations that had been taking place inside the Rays organization as Bloom worked under and next to Andrew Friedman, Matt Silverman, and Neander.

The organization long had discussed the potential of bullpen games, maximizing matchups, limiting the exposure of a pitcher to a lineup for a third time, and helping to protect a young pitcher as he acclimated to the big leagues.

The opener was not merely a novel strategy, but a reflection of an organization — one that was and is determined to give opportunities to prospects, in contrast to a Red Sox organization that at times has been reluctant to give homegrown pitchers the latitude to struggle while transitioning to the big leagues.

“[The opener] just goes to the outside-the-box, front-line thinking,” said Snyder. “The conversations never stop as far as, ‘What can we do next from a team standpoint of innovation?’ He’s impacted our entire player development infrastructure. It’s not just pitching. He’s had his hands on just about everything that was done from a player development standpoint, and even more of an impact on the major league staff here the last few years.”

The Rays are an organization other teams examine for clues about best practices. From afar, the pitching infrastructure they’ve developed with Bloom’s input has been sufficiently impressive — dazzlingly so in 2019, when the Rays led the American League with a 3.65 ERA, more than a run better than the 4.70 mark of the Red Sox — that it has represented a constant area of study over the years for VP of pitcher development Brian Bannister.

Tampa Bay featured a holistic approach, finding players who had tremendous upside and then putting them in environments and situations to get the most out of their abilities. That requires understanding a player’s raw materials as identified by scouts and statistical data, recognizing how coaches/teachers and technology can help a player to leverage those abilities, and making determinations about how best to use a player to maximize their abilities.

“An expensive, elite starter can be closely replicated through an army of relievers with equivalent pitch quality for shorter bursts in a relay-race style, allowing a lower-payroll team to compete with big-market spending in a much more cost-effective manner,” Bannister noted. “It simply takes planning and time and a willingness to go against the grain.”

Success in such undertakings also requires tremendous communication. A great strategy developed in the front office carries no value if it fails to elicit buy-in from the players and coaches asked to implement it. Bloom’s history suggests that he has the ability to not only help foster ideas that can make a difference, but that he also recognizes the challenges of implementing them.

In 2013, when Gabe Kapler was an adviser to the Rays’ front office, he recalled a conversation with Bloom about helping players differentiate between traditional statistics — ones that weren’t necessarily valued by the organization — and new, less-familiar ones that more accurately captured what the organization valued.

“He asked me a very thoughtful question about the potential contradiction between trying to make sure players were concerned about the right statistics vs. having them become overly concerned about those new stats,” recalled Kapler. “He wondered if we were really minimizing the stress of players versus just shifting the cause of it.

“This was an example of his inquisitiveness and a unique focus for an executive. He cared about how players are motivated and discouraged and didn’t claim to know anything. He was looking to partner with me on discovering the answer.”

Bloom arrives Monday to join a Red Sox organization that faces challenging questions. The team features an enormously talented roster, but one that is destined to be reshaped, at a time when there are health and performance questions surrounding some of the team’s most decorated and expensive contributors (Chris Sale, David Price), as well as a minor league system that has been thinned by years of trades.

It’s a complex set of interrelated tasks that awaits. In Bloom, the Red Sox are adding a leader who is familiar with approaching relatively daunting tasks with a sense of possibility and opportunity.

“The conversation never stops about, ‘What can we do to give ourselves the next advantage?’ Now that will be working with a very different budget [with the Red Sox],” said Snyder. “There’s no question he’s going to do a good job building that farm system back up given the difference in philosophy between the previous GM and now. I think he’ll do a really good job initiating a change in culture.”

### **Welcome to Boston, Chaim Bloom. Here’s what you need to do.**

Peter Abraham

WASHINGTON — Welcome to Boston, Chaim Bloom, and congratulations on being named chief baseball officer of the Red Sox.

I’m writing this from the press box at Nationals Park before Game 4 of the World Series, which seems fitting because you’re about to take over a team where the only acceptable outcome to a season is playing on this stage.

It’s not fair and certainly not realistic, but that’s how it is. This is the golden age of Boston sports and every team is expected to be championship driven. Long-term plans are for other cities.

You’re here for a reason, and it’s because John Henry and Tom Werner thought Dave Dombrowski was leading them down the wrong path.

The Sox won the World Series with a bulldozer approach last season, outspending every team to build a near-perfect roster. Dombrowski lavished contracts on free agents and stripped away prospects to make big trades. His process, such as it was, produced 108 victories and a joyride through the playoffs.

The Red Sox have become the rich suburban parents of baseball. Sure, you can drive a Chevy to Market Basket and buy groceries to cook a perfectly good dinner. But it’s easier to take a Range Rover to Whole Foods and get something premade.

Your job is to add some ingenuity to the mix, to take the payroll from obscene to merely extravagant, and make the Red Sox a sustainable operation, not one with the dramatic peaks and valleys that have marked this decade. They Sox need to explore side roads from time to time, not the most direct (and expensive) ways to solve a problem.

As you contemplate what are now regrettable contracts for aging starters David Price and Chris Sale, the greatest concern is how the Sox discover and develop starting pitchers. It’s a problem because it so rarely happens.

The Sox have not drafted or signed an amateur pitcher who went on to a successful career in well more than a decade. You have to go back to Jon Lester, Clay Buchholz, and Justin Masterson to find a homegrown starter worth boasting about.

The Sox are not alone in this quandary to be sure. But for a team with their resources, it’s an issue that stands out. There have been a series of failed first-round picks and only rarely has a starter from deeper in the draft emerged to help the major league team even just a little.

You inherit a talented and dedicated staff of scouts, coaches, and executives. But all aspects of how the Sox search for, coach, and care for pitchers should be examined. Turn that into a more fruitful process and everything else falls into place.

Another pressing issue is finding a way forward — or an acceptable ending — for the Mookie Betts issue. You’re being handed a ticking time bomb here.

Betts, as you know, is one of the two or three best players in the game. He does everything well and with a smile. The fans here love him and he's a good teammate.

Betts will be a free agent after next season and isn't much interested in giving the Sox a hometown discount. He wants what he's worth.

Your job is to determine whether that's possible with the Sox.

Betts does not trust easily. Theo Epstein was the GM who drafted him and he's gone. Ben Cherington was the GM who developed him and he's gone. Dombrowski was the GM when he became an All-Star and now he's gone.

Chaim, you don't want to be the one who let him get away. There has to be a way to get this done. Betts is on a path to become the best player in Sox history short of Ted Williams.

Senior vice president of operations Raquel Ferreira will be your biggest asset here. She knows Betts and his family on a level far beyond baseball.

If there's not a deal to be made, the fans will understand if you lay out the reasons. But everything must be tried.

Another matter to clean up is the status of Dustin Pedroia. He's under contract for two more seasons and there appears to be little chance he can play again. It's time for closure for all involved.

It's a bit strange the Sox have already made a bunch of decisions in the weeks leading up to your arrival. But there's still plenty to be done and manager Alex Cora, for certain, will embrace the data-driven culture that worked so well for the Rays.

The Red Sox need to be refined, not rebuilt. The talent is in place to challenge for another championship next season and beyond. Your perspective and experience can make a good operation even better.

### **Is Chaim Bloom the next Theo Epstein?**

Dan Shaughnessy

WASHINGTON — History tells us that the Red Sox can't go wrong when they hire a young Jewish man from Yale to run the baseball operation.

Theo Epstein broke the mold 17 years ago when — just a few years out of Yale — he took over as the youngest general manager in baseball history. Theo won a World Series two years later. He was the first of a new generation of baseball executives — analytics-driven students of the game who did not play baseball at a high level. Baseball's annual Winter Meetings today are overrun with bright job seekers well-versed in the topics at MIT's Sloan Sports Analytics Conference. Everybody wants to be the next Theo Epstein.

Say hello to 36-year-old Chaim Bloom, new chief baseball officer of your Boston Red Sox.

Bloom takes over for Dave Dombrowski, who was fired in September, less than a year after winning the World Series. Dombrowski took over for Ben Cherington, who was knifed in the back less than two years after winning the 2013 World Series. Cherington succeeded Epstein, who ignited this whole geek craze back in 2002 when he was named general manager of the Red Sox at the age of 28.

Reached via text from the World Series last night, Theo had nothing but good things to say about Bloom, who is destined to be compared with Epstein in the days, months, and years to come.

“Chaim is really sharp and has a deserved reputation in the game,” Epstein stated. “He is a great guy to boot. I'm excited for him and the Red Sox.”

The Sox can't say anything official just yet. MLB rules stipulate that you can not make any big announcements on game days during the World Series. That's why you saw Joe Maddon formally announced as new manager of the Angels during the off day Thursday. There is no World Series game scheduled for Monday, which means that is the day the Sox will likely unveil their new baseball boss.

Bloom graduated from Yale with a degree in classics in 2004 and was hired as an intern with the Rays by Andrew Friedman, who today is president of baseball operations of the Dodgers. According to our Alex Speier, Bloom with the Rays "became steeped in the organizational culture, which emphasized creativity, thorough processes, extensive quality control and feedback, and cross-departmental collaboration." Bloom rose to vice president of baseball operations and this year guided a team that finished 12 games ahead of the Red Sox with only one-third of the payroll.

Mike DeBartolo, assistant GM of the NL champion Nationals, came into baseball with as background similar to Bloom's and had this to say about Bloom before Friday's Game 3.

"I've gone back and forth with him on some things and he is a really bright guy," said DeBartolo, a Bedford native with an MBA from Columbia, who stalked the Winter Meetings to get his first job. "He's well respected, super smart, and really personable. All my interactions with him have been great. He's really down to earth for somebody who's so smart."

DeBartolo's boss, Nationals GM Mike Rizzo, echoed the sentiment.

"I've only dealt with him a few times, but he's very intelligent," said Rizzo, an old-school GM who was a scout with the Red Sox under Dan Duquette. "I've had good conversations with him."

Former Mets general manager Jim Duquette (Dan's cousin) is another old-schooler who became familiar with Bloom when Bloom interviewed for the Met's GM opening last year.

"What he and [Rays GM Erik] Neander have done with one of the smallest payrolls is amazing," said Duquette. "They're creative. They're not afraid to think beyond outside the box. I think that's why they've been so successful. He's analytically driven. What's good news for the Red Sox is that he's been able to have an unbelievable amount of success with so little revenue. Now he's got money.

"Some guys with money, they spend like drunken sailors when they get money and they make a lot of mistakes. But [Bloom] will still show discipline, which is hard to do when you have that kind of dough.

"I think it's an unbelievably good hire. He went through the interview process last year with the Mets and I thought he probably should have gotten the job. I think that probably helped prepare him for whatever was going to come forward. It's a little bit of a surprise because [the Red Sox] were so quiet doing it. But if they were going to pick somebody out there and they couldn't get [Braves GM Alex] Anthopoulos or [Cleveland president Chris] Antonetti, like this is the next bright young guy."

At the end of our conversation, Duquette made a not-so-veiled reference to the deposed Dombrowski, who came off as increasingly arrogant and isolated during his tenure in Boston.

"[Bloom] is very realistic about his own self and he's a collaborate guy, which I think the [Red Sox] organization wants," said Duquette. "He's a good baseball guy. He's very humble. He will get along very well with everyone — almost the opposite of what was just there."

Chaim Bloom. Young, smart, works well with others. Hopefully a latter-day Theo Epstein.

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

**Red Sox to hire Rays SVP Chaim Bloom as new head of baseball operations**

Jason Mastrodonato

Theo Epstein, Ben Cherington, Dave Dombrowski and now Chaim Bloom.

The Red Sox will hire Bloom, the 36-year-old senior vice president of baseball operations with the Tampa Bay Rays, as their next head of baseball operations. The news was first reported by the New York Post on Friday evening.

The Red Sox had not announced it officially as of Friday evening and league rules restrict teams from breaking news during the World Series, but an industry source indicated an announcement could occur as soon as this weekend.

Bloom will become the Sox' fourth hire to lead the baseball operations department since John Henry and his ownership group purchased the team in 2002. He replaces Dombrowski, the big-spending veteran executive who was fired in August.

The runner-up to become the New York Mets general manager last year, Bloom has been part of a Rays organization that's achieved remarkable success given its financial limitations.

Despite having an MLB-low payroll of \$60 million this year, the Rays won 96 games and took the Astros to the brink of elimination in the American League Division Series before losing in Game 5.

The Rays have never had a payroll higher than \$76 million but continue to set the bar for efficiency, having won 90 games or more in seven of the last 12 years, making the playoffs five times in that span.

Bloom will enter the Red Sox organization at the start of what Henry called a "challenging offseason," one in which the Sox want to get under the luxury tax threshold of \$208 million. With their current salary obligations, they'll have to cut about \$30 million from the roster ahead of 2020, while also needing to fill holes in the rotation, bullpen, first base and second base.

Mookie Betts is a year from free agency and clearly isn't taking a hometown discount, J.D. Martinez can opt out of his remaining contract this winter and the Red Sox owe almost half their payroll to a starting rotation that had its three highest-paid pitchers spend significant time on the injured list in 2019.

But Bloom is no stranger to dealing with tight conditions, having been a part of an organization that's traded stars such as Evan Longoria and Chris Archer to shed money while acquiring some talented players (Tyler Glasnow and Austin Meadows included) in return and keeping the Rays competitive throughout.

He was a Yale University graduate in 2004 and interned with the Padres before starting his career as an intern with the Rays. He's been there the last 15 years.

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

### **Report: Red Sox will hire Chaim Bloom as general manager**

Bill Koch

Chaim Bloom will be named the next top Red Sox baseball executive.

The New York Post reported late Friday that Boston will hire Tampa Bay's vice president of baseball operations to replace Dave Dombrowski. The 36-year-old Bloom served directly under Rays senior vice president of baseball operations and general manager Erik Neander. MLB.com reported Bloom was the lone external candidate interviewed by the Red Sox.

With the exception of Dombrowski, Bloom fits the mold of previous top Boston baseball executives under principal owner John Henry. Theo Epstein became the youngest general manager in the game's history when he was hired in November 2002 at just 28. Ben Cherington and Jed Hoyer were each in their 30s when they held the title at various times during the 2000s and 2010s.

Bloom helped build and develop a pair of 90-game winners over the past two seasons with Tampa Bay. The Rays opened 2019 with the lowest payroll in baseball and still reached the playoffs thanks to 96 victories – an average of \$626,000 spent per win. The Red Sox staggered in defense of their latest World Series title, missing out on October despite the game's highest payroll – they spent \$2.81 million per win.

Tampa Bay counts just four players under long-term contract entering the 2020 season, and three of them – pitcher Blake Snell, infielder Brandon Lowe and outfielder Kevin Kiermaier – had several arbitration years discarded by the club in exchange for extended deals. The Rays also made a series of bargain signings and successful trades that yielded an effective roster. Tampa Bay was 8-1 at Fenway Park in 2019, the first visiting team since the Orioles in 1966 to win as many as eight games in the Back Bay.

Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira have presided over day-to-day operations with the Red Sox since Dombrowski's firing in early September. Their personnel moves have included releasing Steven Wright and outrighting Gorkys Hernandez and Josh Smith to Triple-A Pawtucket. Hernandez and Smith both elected free agency instead of accepting their respective assignments.

Bloom's immediate decisions will be far more consequential to Boston's future, be it long-term or immediate. The Red Sox owe a projected \$48.2 million to Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Eduardo Rodriguez in arbitration, and both Betts and Bradley will be free agents following the 2020 season. Boston also houses a farm system ranked in baseball's bottom third, a stark contrast to a robust Rays system that sits at No. 2 per MLB.com.

Tampa Bay's signings during Bloom's tenure include pitchers Jose Alvarado, Yonny Chirinos and Diego Castillo for a combined \$124,000 in international bonus money. Infielder Michael Brosseau and relief pitcher Andrew Kittredge were undrafted free agents from Oakland University (Mich.) and Washington, respectively. Travis d'Arnaud, Oliver Drake, Joey Wendle and Chaz Roe had all either been designated for assignment or were on minor league rosters with their previous organizations when acquired by the Rays.

Tampa Bay has shown a willingness to pay premium price for young, controllable talent. Infielder Wander Franco is the current No. 1 prospect in baseball and was signed for \$3.825 million from the Dominican Republic. Two-way player Brendan McKay – a left-handed pitcher and first baseman – was given a bonus of just over \$7 million after being drafted fourth overall out of Louisville in 2017.

Dombrowski had one year remaining on his contract and was pushing for an extension when Boston opted to change course. The roster he assembled to win a team-record 108 games in 2018 fell apart the following season, with top starting pitchers Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi all spending extended periods on the injured list. Those three players were signed by Dombrowski to contracts totaling \$430 million, and all three could carry significant questions about their health into the 2020 season.

Bloom's opportunity to take over his own baseball operation nearly came after the 2018 season. He was a finalist for the Mets general manager job that ultimately went to former agent Brodie Van Wagenen. Bloom was left to return to a Tampa Bay organization where he started as an intern in 2005.

Like Epstein, Bloom is a Yale graduate – he earned a bachelor's degree in classics in 2004. His last promotion to his current position with the Rays came in 2016. Bloom was among the stable of Tampa Bay executives working under Andrew Friedman, the Dodgers president of baseball operations who was believed to be Boston's dream target.

More to come.....

## \* **MassLive.com**

### **Chaim Bloom's 'challenging offseason' as Boston Red Sox's new boss begins with decisions about J.D. Martinez, Mookie Betts**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox principal owner John Henry admitted Sept. 27 that whoever he hired as head of baseball operations would face a "challenging offseason."

Henry finalized a contract with Chaim Bloom, a 36-year-old Yale graduate, Friday. The Red Sox will introduce Bloom at a news conference at Fenway Park at 1:30 p.m. Monday.

This offseason should be one of the most challenging in the organization's recent history. It will begin with Bloom deciding whether to re-sign J.D. Martinez if the slugger opts out of his contract's remaining three years, \$62.5 million. Martinez has five days following the conclusion of the World Series to inform the Red Sox about his decision.

Ownership's goal is to keep the 2020 payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold. That said, the 2020 payroll already is approximately \$218 million before any offseason transactions.

Bloom likely must decide between keeping Martinez or 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts, who is eligible for free agency after the 2020 season and has expressed no interest in signing a contract extension. Betts has strongly indicated he intends to test free agency.

President Sam Kennedy said Sept. 30 it is possible to keep the payroll under \$208 million and still have both Betts and Martinez on the 2020 roster.

"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.

Betts likely will receive \$30 million, or maybe even more, in salary arbitration for 2020.

"We'll have some conversations with him going forward," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said Sept. 27. "But obviously there will be a point where hopefully we can make a deal. Or we'll decide at that point what is Plan B or Plan C? But we haven't gotten to that point. And we're very open to continuing the discussions with him."

Bloom should set a hard deadline this offseason for completing a contract extension, then explore Betts' trade market if the two sides fail to negotiate a deal. Maybe Boston could secure a couple pitching prospects in return as they look to rebuild the farm system.

Bloom also must decide if he'd rather keep Martinez or Betts.

Martinez is 32 and has suffered back issues the past few years. Betts is 27, has no significant injury history, has established himself as a perennial MVP candidate and is a finalist for his fifth straight Gold Glove.

Betts obviously is the better player. But it comes down to more than who's better.

Martinez has remained one of baseball's elite hitters in his two years in Boston. He has belted 79 homers and posted a .985 OPS despite back issues. And he'll cost less than Betts.

A lot less.

Martinez likely will opt out of his contract's remaining three years, \$62.5 million to try to earn more money. He presumably will sign for around \$100-120 million. Betts, meanwhile, likely is holding out for a contract somewhere between Bryce Harper's 13 years, \$330 million and Mike Trout's 12 years, \$430 million.

Do the Red Sox want the better player or the slugger who potentially could cost \$200-300 million less?

Most longterm contracts don't age well. We've seen it over and over again.

Bloom also must add a fifth starter with Rick Porcello headed to free agency as well as a reliever.

"We're going to hopefully supplement our relief pitching," Werner said.

Will he replace first basemen Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce as well as super utility man Brock Holt with internal or external candidates?

Dustin Pedroia has appeared in nine games the past two years after major knee surgery. Bloom must figure out who will start at second base as he cannot rely on Pedroia to return.

The new boss must replace Martinez if the slugger leaves via free agency or Betts if he trades the superstar.

All these potential additions must be made while trying to stay under the \$208 million tax threshold.

Henry is entrusting this challenging offseason to Bloom who cut payroll, operated on a low budget and traded top talent as Tampa's vice president of baseball operations from November 2016-2019.

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

### **Bloom to head Red Sox's front office (source)**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- The Red Sox will unveil their new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom in a press conference at Fenway Park on Monday at 1:30 p.m. ET.

On Thursday, MLB.com's Mark Feinsand reported that Bloom had emerged as the front-runner to be Boston's next leader of baseball operations.

Bloom and the Red Sox reached an agreement on a contract on Friday. MLB Network insider Joel Sherman was first to report Boston's hiring of Bloom.

The club hasn't announced the hiring of Bloom yet, but it did send out an advisory for the Monday afternoon press conference.

Brian O'Halloran, one of the three assistant general managers currently in Boston's front office, will be named GM of the club under Bloom, a source told Feinsand, who added that Eddie Romero and Zack Scott will retain their assistant GM titles, while Raquel Ferreira will continue in her role as senior VP of Major League and Minor League operations.

The 36-year-old Bloom -- the lone external candidate interviewed by the Red Sox during their search, a source told Feinsand -- is a significant get for Boston, which been looking for a creative and dynamic mind to build a championship-caliber team while also cutting some payroll and rebuilding its farm system.

In discussing the state of the club in a news briefing on Sept. 27, Red Sox owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner expressed admiration for clubs like the Rays and Athletics, who were able to make it to the

postseason this year with payrolls that were a fraction of the roughly \$240 million that Boston spent during a disappointing 2019 season (84-78 record, no playoffs).

It isn't that the Red Sox want to suddenly operate like a small-market team. But Henry made it clear that he wants the club to get below the first luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million for the 2020 season.

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy recently acknowledged there is a way the club could keep star players J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts in '20, but it would be "difficult" to have a roster with both. Martinez has until five days after the World Series to opt out of his contract. Betts is eligible for free agency following the '20 season.

In other words, Bloom is going to have some big decisions to make.

Romero, Scott, O'Halloran and Ferreira had been running the front office since Dombrowski's departure. While the Red Sox have praised that quartet numerous times, Henry made it clear that the next leader of the front office should be someone who has experience leading a baseball operations department.

In recent weeks, several perceived candidates had come off the board. Mike Hazen, a long-time executive for the Red Sox, signed an extension with the D-backs. Theo Epstein said late in the regular season that he had a busy offseason ahead for the Cubs and added there was nothing to the story that he would entertain a reunion with the Red Sox. Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman had a contract that was set to expire, but he is staying with Los Angeles.

In Bloom, the Red Sox benefit by getting someone who worked under Friedman for years with the Rays.

Bloom has been running Tampa Bay's front office alongside general manager Erik Neander. With the Red Sox, he will be the lead decision-maker on all personnel moves.

Bloom has an analytics background and was a voice in Tampa Bay's revolutionary move to go with openers. Bloom is also known to be strong in helping to construct a farm system.

Promoted to VP of baseball operations by the Rays in 2016, Bloom had been with the club since '05, when he was hired as an intern.

Working for the Red Sox will allow Bloom to re-establish his East Coast roots. Bloom is a native of Philadelphia and a graduate of Yale University. His wife Aliza hails from Lexington, Mass.

Bloom interviewed for the Mets' general manager opening last winter prior to New York's hiring of Brodie Van Wagenen, and he has also interviewed with the Twins and Phillies in recent years.

Under Dombrowski, who was dismissed on Sept. 8, the Red Sox won three consecutive American League East titles, including the World Series championship season in 2018.

Henry said recently that Dombrowski's vision of the team going forward differed from that of ownership, and the owner could sense a disconnect almost immediately following the World Series clincher last year in Los Angeles.

Bloom will get to discuss his vision on Monday when he speaks to the media. An eager Red Sox Nation will be listening closely.

**\* *WEET.com***

**The Sunday Baseball Column: The story of how Brian O'Halloran became the Red Sox' new GM**

Rob Bradford

It was Halloween night, 2002. A group of Red Sox interns that included current Arizona Diamondbacks assistant general manager Amiel Sawdaye and Adam Grossman, the Red Sox' modern-day Chief Marketing Officer, had sauntered back to the Fenway Park offices in between a full day of work and a night of holiday celebration. It was around 11 p.m.

"The cubicles were really high so you couldn't see who were in them," remembered Sawdaye. "But we kind of heard some typing."

It was worth a look. What they found was an image that has helped define Brian O'Halloran to this day.

O'Halloran, a 32-year-old who was rolling his occupational dice as an unpaid assistant, was sitting at a desk sifting through VHS images in order to log a game from the Red Sox' Triple-A team in Pawtucket. But that was only half the story. The man who wasn't allowed to work during the day due to a lack of cubicles was conducting his task while dressed in his Halloween costume.

The guy whose baseball career ended with one year of junior varsity ball at Weymouth South High, held degrees from Colby College in political science and Russian studies and once found himself as the last American to leave the country of Georgia during one of its civil wars had left an impression among the cramped quarters at Fenway Park. It is one that ultimately led him to the position he will officially be awarded with Monday -- general manager of the Red Sox.

"That moment spoke to his work ethic," Sawdaye said. "It speaks to who he is."

"People who have been around him know from a management perspective he leads by example with an indefatigable work ethic. He has a really strong presence in the offense, just keeping everyone together. He's just very grounded. There aren't a lot of ups downs with BOH. He has a really good way about him to defuse the situation. He's a really good listener, also. It's what makes him a strong candidate for that job and really any job in baseball, for that matter."

While most of the focus at Monday afternoon's press conference will understandably be on new Chief of Baseball Operations Chaim Bloom, the story of how O'Halloran landed as a GM should absolutely be highlighted.

- First position out of college was in the Georgia capital of Tbilisi where he was awarded a fellowship to study ethnic conflict.
- First paid job out of college was working for an international logistics company, which sent him to Russia for three years. (He speaks both Russian and Georgian fluently.)
- Came home and sent letters and emails to anyone associated with baseball, ultimately landing in the Pawtucket Red Sox' group sales department for a summer while helping out at Woolf Associates law firm.
- Enrolled at UCLA in order to attain his MBA.
- Hired as a baseball operations intern by the San Diego Padres.
- Moved back to Boston so his wife could pursue her master's degree in language and literacy at Harvard.
- Was allowed to volunteer in Red Sox offices at nights and on weekends.
- Was hired in Jan. 2003 as Theo Epstein's administrative assistant.
- Spends 16 years with the organization in a variety of roles, most recently serving as an assistant GM while focusing heavily on contract issues.

- 2019: Becomes Red Sox GM.

O'Halloran's nose-to-the-grindstone and unassuming persona often times left him out of the conversations for the kind of position he has finally found himself in. But those who have witnessed him since that Halloween night nearly 17 years ago -- whether in the midst of contract negotiations or letting his oft-hidden competitive nature emerge on the basketball court ("He'll dive for everything, skin up his knee, cut his face and just keep going. Obviously he's very driven both athletically and in the office, you just don't see that side of him," Sawdaye said) -- isn't surprised this is the latest chapter of a pretty remarkable story.

"He's been involved in almost every department," Sawdaye pointed out. "He's as strong as a candidate out there for any job. He's so prepared."

#### THE J.D. MARTINEZ CONUNDRUM

Bloom's strategy heading into his first offseason with the Red Sox will be largely pushed by J.D. Martinez's decision to either stay with the Red Sox or opt-out of a contract that is currently guaranteeing him \$62.5 million over the next three seasons.

In baseball circles, the conversation has surfaced plenty of debate.

The consensus continues to be that the most logical suitor for Martinez would be the White Sox, with the Rangers another American League possibility. It's still difficult for many to envision a National League team jump into the fray considering the 32-year-old's defensive limitations. But there are two factors which should potentially be dug into a bit more:

1. If Martinez opts out of his deal the Red Sox will undoubtedly extend him a qualifying offer, meaning any team that signs the designated hitter/outfielder would have to surrender a draft pick. As we have seen plenty of times in the past that would be just another deterrent for teams potentially already sheepish about investing heavily in a player with the age and skill-set of the slugger. (Since 2012 80 players have received qualifying offers with just six accepting the one-year deal.)

2. Martinez's agent Scott Boras is going to control this offseason. What this means is that there will be less room for interpretation when it comes to which free agent might go where. The three biggest free agents starting next month -- Anthony Rendon, Stephen Strasburg and Gerrit Cole -- all are represented by Boras, as are Nick Castellanos, Dallas Keuchel, Mike Moustakas and Hyun-jin Ryu. There is some thought that if Martinez does hit free agency Boras will prioritize getting the righty hitter's new deal done on the earlier side.

#### JON LESTER HAS SOME THOUGHTS

Prior to participating the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions golf event this week, Lester weighed in on how he viewed the game, particularly when it came to watching the difference in the baseball from the regular season to watch we're watching in the postseason.

"I think we need to figure out a constant with that," said the former Red Sox pitcher. "I think that will benefit everybody. I think you're seeing even hitters in the postseason right now hitting balls that they hit during the season that were home runs and now they're putting their arms in the air saying, 'What's going on?'"

Looking at the numbers thus far in these playoffs it's hard to argue with Lester's analysis. In a year that blew away the record for most homers hit during the regular season, the postseason total will end up shy of both 2011, 2015 and 2017. To give an idea of the difference, in both 2011 and 2015 the MLB home run total was under 5,000 for the regular season. This past regular season, conversely, ended up with 6,776 homers.

As for Lester, he is entering an interesting season in his career. First off, his personal catcher and good friend David Ross is now his boss.

"I think we'll be fine with the relationships," said the lefty. "We'll be fine. You just have to find the place and the time and I think the communication will be good for everyone involved."

Lester is also going into the last guaranteed year of his contract with his AAV jumping from \$15 million in 2020 to \$25 million in 2021 if the Cubs pick up his option. The option will, however, vest if the soon-to-be 36-year-old pitches 200 innings in the coming year, a total he hasn't reached since 2016. Lester finished this past year with an ERA of over 4.00 (4.46) for the first time since 2012.

#### INSIDE THE MIND OF CHAIM BLOOM

Talking to people throughout baseball the consensus is that one of Bloom's strengths is his willingness to listen while not giving off a my-way-or-the-highway mentality. Perhaps an example of that could be found when the then-Rays exec appeared on the Executive Access podcast with MLB.com's Mark Feinsand.

"You hope there would be times you disagree," Bloom said. "I think that's what you want in a healthy organization. You want to have disagreement. I think it's no different when we might have a disagreement within our staff, or one staff member to another. If you have people who have the right intentions and the right goals in mind you can discuss those disagreements with each other and push each other. At the end of the day we have to make a decision but that doesn't mean those disagreements aren't productive and hopefully, something good comes out of them."

This quote regarding uncovering the kind of advantages Tampa Bay seemingly routinely discovered was also telling.

"I think right now in this game you have 30 organizations searching for that next advantage and they are doing that at a more rapid pace than they ever have," he noted. "What once might have been the domain of a few small-market teams or some more innovative larger market clubs is now a 30-team race. We're always challenging each other and pushing each other and pushing our staff to say, 'What is going to be next? What is the game going to look like in five years, 10 years? What does that mean for us and how are we going to continue to find those advantages that set us apart?'"

#### REMEMBER WHEN CHRIS SALE ALMOST BECAME A NATIONAL?

For a few minutes during those Winter Meetings leading into the 2017 season it looked like Sale was headed to Washington. The Nationals had offered the White Sox a package of pitchers Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez along with outfielder Victor Robles in exchange for the lefty pitcher. At the time the trio of players was Washington's top three prospects. The deal-breaker for Chicago ultimately was Washington's unwillingness to part with shortstop Trea Turner.

We know what happened, with the Red Sox swooping in and getting Sale with a four-player package that was highlighted by Yoan Moncada and Michael Kopech. (Dave Dombrowski smartly rebuffed White Sox GM Rick Hahn's attempt at including Rafael Devers.)

The Nationals ultimately used Giolito and Lopez to get outfielder Adam Eaton, avoiding having to include a rising star in Robles.

While it is understood that Sale helped win the Red Sox a World Series and the Nationals have landed in this year's Fall Classic, let's do this: Just for fun, ranking the 2019 value each player mentioned had to their team:

1. Devers
2. Moncada

2. Giolito
3. Turner
4. Robles
5. Eaton
6. Sale
7. Lopez
8. Kopech

Discuss ...

#### SOME OTHER THOUGHTS ...

- While many will remember the morning this column is being published as the one-year anniversary of the conclusion of the Red Sox' 18-inning loss to the Dodgers I will forever classify Oct. 27 for something else: When the Dodger Stadium press box served an unfathomable 800 Dodger Dogs to media members.

- When it comes to the Astros and the case of Brandon Taubman's stupidity, one thing that Houston and Jeff Luhnow can't wash away is this: Their true, down-to-the-soul feelings were cemented with the attempted takedown of Sports Illustrated writer Stephanie Apstein's credibility. Luhnow admitted many people reviewed that statement put out following Apstein's story documenting Taubman's vile behavior, including Luhnow himself. To repeat: Luhnow is admitting signing off on something that we now know he simply wanted to be true. Major League Baseball will come out with a ruling on the situation after the World Series, but there is absolutely no doubt a significant message should be sent the way of Luhnow, whose warped priorities have truly been exposed.

- This is a rule for 2020: "All pitchers must face at least three batters or end a half-inning, unless injured." This is the reality of the 2019 postseason: There have been 58 instances this postseason where a pitcher has been on the mound to face fewer than three batters.

- When comparing Terry Francona, John Farrell and Joe Maddon on the Bradfo Sho podcast it was interesting to hear Ross describe how Francona handled things with the Red Sox. "The thing that stood out for me with Tito is that he seemed to be everybody's friend. He was a guy who was easy to talk to. He communicated well. Him and Bobby Cox were the only two managers I've ever played for who were out on the bench early, sitting hanging out, talking to the players. Just one of the boys. ... Just being able to go into his office and it was very simple. He said, 'We don't have a whole lot of signs here Rossy. Behind the plate get an out. If I tell you to throw through we're going to eat it. We don't bunt here. We play our nine guys against their nine guys. You're going to feel right at home here in two days.' Just the simplicity of that and just how comforting he made me feel right off the bat. ... He's one of the guys when he talked to you. He doesn't beat around the bush and is pretty straightforward."

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

**Five pressing issues Chaim Bloom will need to address on Day 1 as Red Sox boss**

John Tomase

Now that Chaim Bloom is headed to Boston, the real fun begins.

Hiring a decision-maker was the first priority of the Red Sox offseason, but in a way, it was the easiest item on the to-do list, since even if the Red Sox remained within the organization, they were assured of making a strong hire. Outside of Bobby Valentine, John Henry and Co. have proven over the past 20 years that they don't screw up their management choices.

With a source confirming that Bloom is headed to Boston as director of baseball operations -- as first reported by the New York Post's Joel Sherman -- the ex-Rays exec must get quickly up to speed on the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of his new organization.

He'll have help, with MLB.com's Mark Feinsand reporting that the Gang of Four (Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira) will remain in Boston and assistant GM O'Halloran will be promoted to general manager.

That said, there's no time to waste, so let's lay out some of Bloom's most pressing issues.

### 1. TRADING MOOKIE BETTS

There's really nowhere else to start, right? As we laid out earlier, Bloom (alongside Tampa GM Erik Neander) was aggressive about dealing veterans for youth out of necessity in Tampa. The closest they came to dealing a player the caliber of Betts is when they sent franchise cornerstone Evan Longoria to the Giants in December of 2017. The return has thus far proven underwhelming, though the deal did allow the Rays to get out from under roughly \$60 million of the final \$86 million on Longoria's deal, money they used to build back-to-back 90-game winners.

Where could Mookie Betts end up in 2020?

Betts will be a free agent next fall, so he's not locked in like Longoria was. There aren't a lot of comps to suggest what Boston might receive in return, but contenders like the Braves and Phillies should be among Bloom's first calls.

One aspect of this deal to watch will be whether Bloom seeks straight prospects in return -- as he generally did in Tampa -- or proven big leaguers. Speaking of which . . .

### 2. REPLENISH THE FARM SYSTEM

Be prepared to see a slew of veteran-for-prospect trades this winter, because the Red Sox desperately need to infuse one of the game's thinnest minor league systems with youth. The good news is whatever internal evaluations Bloom made of opposing organizations in Tampa can come with him to Boston.

The Rays were particularly adept at identifying talent in seemingly minor deals, whether it was landing corner infielder Yandy Diaz from the Indians to help facilitate a three-way trade involving sluggers Carlos Santana and Edwin Encarnacion, adding reliever Ryan Yarbrough (27 wins in 2 years) in a package for Drew Smyly, or snagging hard-throwing reliever Emilio Pagan in another three-way deal with the Rangers and A's. Oh, and while the Red Sox don't regret a thing about the deal that brought them Nathan Eovaldi in 2018, the Rays have been happy with left-hander Jalen Beeks.

So where might the Red Sox stop chopping . . .

### 3. MOVE JACKIE BRADLEY JR., AMONG OTHERS

The Gold Glove center fielder (he's a finalist again this year) has had a tumultuous Red Sox career, earning ALCS MVP honors in 2018, but struggling to deliver anything remotely resembling offensive consistency.

Now that he's due more than \$10 million in his final year of arbitration eligibility, he's no longer cost-effective. He will almost certainly be dealt this winter, presumably for prospects.

Another name to watch is catcher Christian Vazquez. He's coming off a career year and due more than \$10 million over the next two years, but the advanced analytics aren't as kind to him as numbers like his 23 homers, and catcher is a position the Rays often viewed as pretty fungible -- they've employed five different primary starters in the last six years.

Put another way: everyone is on the table.

#### 4. JETTISON A STARTER

In David Price, Chris Sale, and Eovaldi, the Red Sox feature a trio of contractual albatrosses who are due \$79 million in each of the next three seasons. For the Red Sox to regain control of their payroll, at least one of them has to go -- Price seems like the best bet -- but good luck making that happen. All three are injury risks, and moving on from any one of them would represent the definition of selling low, before we even take into account how much money the Red Sox would have to eat.

Doesn't matter. Financial flexibility depends on it.

#### 5. EVALUATE SYSTEMS

This should probably be No. 1 on the list, because long-term, it's the reason Bloom is here. Tampa was renowned as one of the most forward-thinking organizations in the game, but the Red Sox had lagged under Dombrowski, focusing their attention on maximizing the big league roster at the expense of the farm system, not to mention the next generation of data integration and evaluative tools that could not only improve the lineup, but help identify trade targets. So that's the list, but it's by no means comprehensive. The real work starts. . . now.

### **What can Chaim Bloom do as Red Sox GM? Breaking down his trades with Rays**

John Tomase

Chaim Bloom isn't afraid to make trades. In Tampa, they're crucial to the franchise's survival.

While the Rays' draft-and-develop model has rightly received plaudits for delivering homegrown stars like Evan Longoria, David Price, and Blake Snell, the downside to producing such productive players is that eventually they'll need to be paid. And that job usually falls to someone other than the cash-strapped Rays.

How Tampa responds, however, has helped sustain its run of success as much as any draft pick. And now that the Red Sox have hired Bloom as their next head of baseball operations, it's worth diving into his trading record to see how he might simultaneously cut costs and keep Boston competitive during this looming Armageddon of an offseason.

J.D. Martinez is likely to depart in free agency, and everyone from defending MVP Mookie Betts to Gold Glove center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. will be on the market, so what Bloom receives in return will help chart a course through the rough waters ahead.

An examination of Tampa's deals since Bloom became senior vice president of baseball operations in November of 2016, working alongside GM Erik Neander, shows an executive unafraid to part ways with star players in exchange for high-ceilinged prospects, rather than established big leaguers.

#### TOMASE: Why Bloom emerged as Sox front-runner

But at the same time, the Rays made a series of moves on the periphery to bolster their roster that proved equally impactful, creating a conveyor belt that targeted short-term fixes who could then be flipped for short-term replacements. The constant roster churn requires supreme confidence in your ability to scout opposing organizations, as well as a strong stomach, because it means never accepting the status quo — a lesson the Red Sox wish they had learned before re-signing most of their 2018 roster — but it can yield big results.

Let's start with the two major deals on Bloom's watch: Evan Longoria and Chris Archer.

The first came on Dec. 17, 2017, when the Rays shipped their All-Star third baseman and franchise cornerstone to the Giants for three prospects, plus outfielder Denard Span.

Longoria had just started a six-year, \$100 million extension that was supposed to keep him in Tampa for the rest of his career. Rays fans panned the deal for both the lackluster return and the fact that Tampa was kicking in \$14.5 million towards the \$80-plus million remaining on his contract.

The centerpiece was infielder Christian Arroyo, San Francisco's top prospect and a consensus top-100 pick. He has not produced in Tampa, hitting just .243 in a mere 103 at-bats. He looks like a non-factor.

Neither of the two pitching prospects Tampa acquired has reached the big leagues, but it's worth noting that Longoria's downward trajectory, which began in about 2014, has continued apace in San Francisco, where he has posted a .727 OPS in two seasons. The return may not have been encouraging, but the roughly \$70 million in savings helped Tampa build a roster that won 90 games in 2018 and then 96 this year. Still, as the Red Sox consider what they might get for Betts, it had better be better than this.

What's a Sox nightmare? Yanks adding J.D.

Far more encouraging is what the Rays did with Archer. Another player seemingly in decline, he still had one more year on his contract, with two manageable options, when the Rays dealt him at the 2018 trade deadline to Pittsburgh.

In return, they received a pair of one-time top prospects who had fizzled — right-hander Tyler Glasnow and outfielder Austin Meadows — as well as right-handed prospect Shane Baz.

Talk about a home run. Glasnow transformed himself from a pitcher who walked the park in Pittsburgh (5.8/9 IP) to a frontline starter in Tampa. He went 6-1 with a 1.78 ERA in a season truncated by injury before returning for the postseason. He walked only 14 batters in 60.2 innings while striking out 76 with an upper-90s fastball and hammer curve, embracing the analytical and biomechanical data the Rays provided him as he learned to think less and trust his stuff.

Meadows, meanwhile, rose through the ranks as a consensus top-50 prospect, but he struggled in his first exposure to Triple A in 2016 and then was even worse in 2017. The Pirates quit on him, and he rewarded the Rays by blasting 33 home runs and making the All-Star team.

There's more. Baz, whom many considered the best player in the deal, just posted a 2.99 ERA at Single-A and is considered a top prospect at age 20. That's the kind of return that would ease the sting of losing even someone as talented as Betts.

Five potential landing spots for Mookie Betts

The small deals have been just as important, though. The Rays turned left-hander Drew Smyly, whom they had acquired for Price in 2014, into outfielder Mallex Smith and right-hander Ryan Yarbrough. Both were major contributors in 2018, with Smith recording 40 steals and a league-leading 10 triples, and Yarbrough won 16 games while helping Tampa pioneer the opener concept.

The Rays also turned infielder Brad Miller into slugging first baseman Ji-Man Choi, swapped eventual playoff hero Nathan Eovaldi to the Red Sox for hard-throwing left-hander Jalen Beeks, recognized a logjam in the Cardinals' outfield that brought them sparkplug Tommy Pham, signed right-hander Charlie Morton to a smart short-term deal, bought lefty-masher Yandy Diaz from the Indians, and struck gold with hard-throwing reliever Emilio Pagan as part of a three-team trade.

There were misses along the way — they didn't get much for All-Star Jake Odorizzi from the Twins, for instance — but the sheer volume of moves is not only dizzying, but Exhibit A in the case Bloom can make as a far more nimble and creative executive than Dave Dombrowski, the man he will end up replacing.

In Boston, Bloom will have the resources to keep some of his better players, but based on his track record, he might not want to.

**Ex-Red Sox GM Theo Epstein, other MLB execs are high on Chaim Bloom**

Darren Hartwell

Chaim Bloom has a lot of work to do as the new general manager of the Boston Red Sox.

But the man who used to hold Bloom's job believes he's up to the task.

Theo Epstein, who won two World Series titles as Red Sox GM from 2002 to 2011, gave Bloom his stamp of approval after Boston chose the former Tampa Bay Rays executive as its next GM.

"Chaim is really sharp and has a deserved reputation in the game," Epstein told The Boston Globe's Dan Shaughnessy on Friday. "He is a great guy to boot. I'm excited for him and the Red Sox."

Five issues Bloom will need to address immediately in Boston

Epstein and Bloom were never colleagues, but the two share a similar career path. Both graduated from Yale, preach the importance of analytics and took prominent MLB jobs at a young age: Bloom was named the Rays' vice president of baseball operations at age 31, while Epstein took the Sox GM job at 28.

Other MLB execs also speak highly of Bloom, particularly about his character. Washington Nationals assistant GM Mike DeBartolo described Bloom to Shaughnessy as "well respected, super smart, and really personable" and "really down to earth for somebody who's so smart."

Former New York Mets general manager Jim Duquette, meanwhile, labeled Bloom an "unbelievable hire" who he believes will fit in Boston better than recently-fired president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

"(Bloom) is very realistic about his own self and he's a collaborate guy, which I think the (Red Sox) organization wants," Duquette told Shaughnessy. "He's a good baseball guy. He's very humble. He will get along very well with everyone -- almost the opposite of what was just there."

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

### **MLB Notebook: Looking for some answers from new Red Sox executive Chaim Bloom**

Sean McAdam

On Monday afternoon, the Red Sox will introduce Chaim Bloom, their new chief baseball officer, to the media and, by extension, Red Sox fans across the region.

There will be the usual pictures taken and hands shook — all the pageantry that usually accompanies these sorts of coronations.

But there will also be questions — lots of them — to be asked. Some will be rather straight forward and easily answerable; others will be tougher and Bloom may not want to — or be able to — address them.

Looking ahead, here are 20 of them:

You've interviewed for a handful of other recent GM openings (Mets, Giants and others). What did you learn from those experiences and what — other than being offered the job — was different about this one? With the Rays, you presided over the smallest payroll in the game; in Boston, you're inheriting a team which had the largest this past season. How different will it be operating with a budget that, even with expected cutbacks, will be almost three times bigger than you're accustomed?

How do you intend to balance remaining competitive with rebuilding the farm system with an eye toward long-term contention?

The last two people to hold the job you accepted were fired less than two years after winning a championship. Did that give you pause at all?

To what extent do you expect Red Sox ownership to be involved in the decision-making process when it comes to personnel decisions?

The Rays have been seen as one of the most innovative organizations in the game, while the Red Sox, despite winning a title just last year, are thought to have fallen behind when it comes to analytics and creative thinking. Is that accurate and if so, what do you intend to do about it?

Having spent most of your career in the American League East, you've seen plenty of the Red Sox over the last 15 seasons. Is that an advantage as you step into this position? And how do you maximize that advantage?

Before you were hired, the Red Sox made a number of internal promotions with their scouting staff. Are you comfortable inheriting staff members and not having more say in the makeup of such an important area of your staff?

How do you view the relationship between the top baseball executive and his manager? Some organizations now "suggest" lineups and batting orders — will you do that here?

Mookie Betts, a franchise player, is a year away from free agency. What will your approach be toward him this winter?

You helped introduce the notion of the "opener" in Tampa Bay; in your new job, your roster includes four starting pitchers who are owed almost \$90 million in 2020 alone. Can veteran starters — especially when they take up approximately 40 percent of your projected payroll — still be counted on in the modern game?

Speaking of starting pitching, the Rays were strong in developing young arms while the Red Sox haven't done so in better than a decade. What's the secret sauce the Red Sox have been missing?

How will you view the role of your new GM Brian O'Halloran? What will his responsibilities be? For that matter, how do you envision working with Eddie Romero and Zack Scott?

Will you be bringing anyone from the Tampa Bay front office here? Are there limitations about how many former colleagues you can hire from the Rays?

Fan support in Tampa Bay is almost negligible; the Red Sox, by contrast, drew just shy of three million fans last season. Have you thought about how different your day-to-day experience will be here?

J.D. Martinez has the ability to opt-out of his contract later this week. Would you prefer him to stay, or would you rather have additional payroll flexibility? And would you be willing to sweeten his present deal to entice him to remain?

As someone coming in from the outside, what is the state of the Red Sox minor league system and their international operations? How can they be improved?

Is it getting harder to find market inefficiencies and be innovative when most teams have access to the same data? And if so, how can you take advantage of the resources here to establish a competitive advantage over other organizations?

The current roster features a number of talented players (Rafael Devers, Andrew Benintendi among them) with 0-3 years of major league service time. Will you be prioritizing contract extensions for any of them this winter?

Given the authority to do so, will you ban the playing of "Sweet Caroline" at Fenway?

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Bill James, the godfather of the analytics movement who turned the game on its head with his inventive analysis, resigned from his position as a consultant with the Red Sox this past week.

James revolutionized baseball when he began publishing his annual Baseball Abstract in the 1980s and helped foster the use of data in evaluating players. He was one of the first significant hires by John Henry in his first year of ownership.

In time, his work became so influential that nearly every team began adapting it — or using it as a template for their own analytics. Today, there isn't a team in the game that doesn't employ a small army of analysts, each, in some form or fashion, building upon his original work.

The Red Sox, as an example, employ about 10 full-time data analysts in the analytic department.

That's had the effect of marginalizing James himself, who admitted that he didn't have a lot of input into the team's decisions in recent years. "I've fallen out of step with the organization," James wrote on his website this week. "Honestly, I should have left a couple of years ago."

James didn't help himself with his sometimes strange interactions on social media, including one a year ago in which he suggested that all players were easily replaceable, a remark which resulted in blowback from MLB and MLB Players Association and caused the Red Sox to distance themselves from him.

Regardless, it's impossible to overstate his contributions to the modern game. Given his level of influence, he would be worthy of consideration as a pioneer for the Hall of Fame since few impacted baseball more over the last few decades.

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Five days after the completion of the World Series — which could be as early as Sunday after the Astros tied the Series 2-2 — J.D. Martinez must tell the Red Sox whether he intends to opt out of his contract and pursue free agency.

Martinez has three years and \$62.5 million remaining on his deal. The calculus will revolve around whether he thinks he can do better elsewhere. I remain skeptical, given Martinez's age (32), the state of the free-agent market the last two offseasons and the fact that he remains essentially a DH.

But Martinez is not the only big-name player facing this decision. There are a half-dozen or so others.

A look at the players and the likelihood of them opting out:

#### 1. Aroldis Chapman

Chapman has two years and \$30 million remaining with the Yankees. He remains — even with some diminished velocity — one of the game's top closers. Undoubtedly, he sees the Craig Kimbrel situation from this past season as a cautionary tale. Kimbrel, just three months younger than Chapman, went into last offseason with expectations of a nine-figure deal. Instead, last summer, Kimbrel got three years and \$45 million from the Chicago Cubs — after waiting half a season.

Based on that, Chapman might be able to wrangle another year at the same \$15 million AAV. Or the Yankees could give him that in the next week or so to prevent him from opting out in the first place.

#### 2. Stephen Strasburg

Timing is everything in (potential) free agency. Strasburg has shown himself to a postseason monster this fall with the Nationals, going 4-0 with a 1.93 ERA in five starts. He has four years and \$100 million remaining, so that may be tough to top. But this postseason has served to heighten the importance of

starting pitching, and it doesn't hurt that, as a San Diego native, both the Padres and the nearby Los Angeles Angels will be in the market for starting pitching.

### 3. Elvis Andrus

Andrus has been a major disappointment for the Rangers offensively (OPS last two seasons: .675 in 2018; .707 in 2019), so he'll almost certainly remain in Arlington and be happy with the three years and \$43 million he has remaining.

### 4. Kenley Jansen

Jansen's effectiveness has dipped the last two seasons and it's impossible to believe that he could somehow top the \$38 million over the next two seasons the Dodgers owe him.

### 5. Yu Darvish

After missing most of 2018, Darvish bounced back in 2019 and went 6-8 with a 3.98 ERA in 31 starts for the Cubs. That mediocre season, coupled with his age (33) and the four years and \$81 million left might be enough to dissuade him from opting out.

### 6. Jason Heyward.

Heyward bounced back, at least a little, in 2019, improving his homer total from eight to 21. But at 30, there's no way he bests the four years and \$86 he has coming from the Cubs.

## **Chaim Bloom officially hired, current executives to remain with Sox**

Sean McAdam

In addition to officially hiring Chaim Bloom to run their Baseball Operations department — the deal was made official late Friday afternoon, with Bloom given the title of chief baseball officer — the Red Sox have also managed to retain the remainder of their baseball ops staff.

Under the new restructuring, Brian O'Halloran, who has been with the Red Sox since 2002 and was last offseason promoted to assistant GM, will now work as the team's general manager, reporting directly to Bloom. The arrangement is similar to the one the Sox had in 2016, when Dave Dombrowski was the team's president of baseball operations and longtime front office assistant Mike Hazen was elevated to GM.

O'Halloran handled a multitude of duties in recent years, including salary arbitration, working on a variety of smaller transactions and contractual negotiations. He, along with fellow assistant GMs Eddie Romero and Zack Scott and senior vice president of major and minor league operations Raquel Ferreira, have been running the team since Sept. 9, when Dombrowski was summarily dismissed, just 11 months after winning a World Series for the franchise.

Under Dombrowski, the consensus was, O'Halloran, Romero and Scott were all under-utilized, as Dombrowski chose to rely more on Frank Wren and Tony La Russa — two longtime acquaintances — to serve as his inner circle of trust. Bloom is likely to welcome more input from his staff and involve them more thoroughly in all aspects of the department.

"I don't know him personally," said one veteran talent evaluator with a National League club, "but from talking to people who do, I've heard three things about him: creative, forward-thinking and collaborative."

Undoubtedly, those qualities led the Red Sox to show interest in Bloom in the first place. Though the organization was said to have sounded out the interest of some bigger names through back channels, a baseball source confirmed that Bloom was the only one interviewed.

As a demonstration of that willingness to incorporate ideas from others, Bloom, in addition to promoting O'Halloran, will inherit and retain to other assistant general managers.

Scott's background is in analytics, and Bloom is expected to be more receptive to his input than was Dombrowski, who, though not averse to data, took a more traditional approach to player evaluation, relying more on scouting for player evaluation.

Romero, who is known to have aspirations to become a GM, will remain as well, likely to continue to oversee the team's international development and other scouting areas.

It's expected that Ferreira will also remain in his current role.

MLB.com was the first to report O'Halloran's promotion to GM.

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

**At this point, expectations for Chaim Bloom's first Red Sox team shouldn't be too high**

Steve Buckley

Talk about Back to the Future: With their decision to bring in Tampa Bay Rays whiz kid Chaim Bloom to run baseball operations, the Red Sox are signaling their interest in returning to the 21st century.

Hey, it was swell, that little visit the Sox made to the 20th century these past few seasons. They even won a World Series, right? Whatever thoughts you may have about the tenure of old-timey president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, the man used a little of this, a little of that, and, presto, rings for everyone!

The Red Sox needed to get back to the cool kids analytics table, however, and that's why there will be a fancy Fenway Park press conference Monday afternoon. Welcome to Boston, Chaim Bloom.

But while the long-term future of the franchise appears to be in good hands — assuming Bloom doesn't get a sudden, unexpected push off a ledge, as happened to Dombrowski and his predecessor, Ben Cherington — it's the short-term future that may require Red Sox fans to dig into the attic and find something they haven't had to use in a while. It's called patience.

Can Bloom clean up the mess that was the 2019 Red Sox and produce a World Series contender for 2020? That's an interesting question, and I believe the correct answer is a two-parter:

1. No, he can't.
2. Common sense tells me he does not have a mandate from ownership to win the World Series right now, as in 2020, as in sorry for the bad pun but John Henry and Tom Werner aren't counting on Chaim Bloom to have 2020 vision.

The instant conundrum facing Bloom once he gets past Monday's meet-and-greet, and it's the conundrum that generates the most buzz, is how to keep Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez on the roster while addressing Henry's sort-of mandate to keep next year's payroll under the \$208 million competitive balance threshold. But — and this is where I play the part of Jor-El, screaming and hollering that Krypton is about to explode — the Red Sox have a starting pitching problem that might not be solvable in 2020.

Yes, it's possible that lefties Chris Sale and David Price, who both had health issues in the second half of 2019, can regain their form and be big-time pitchers again in 2020. It's also possible that right-hander Nathan Eovaldi, whose own health issues all but derailed his 2019 season, can be a front-line starter in 2020. And maybe right-hander Rick Porcello, whose 2019 season was a disaster, signs some kind of team-

friendly deal for 2020 and does something along the lines of what he did in 2018 (17-7, 4.28 ERA) or, better yet, what he did in 2016 (22-4, 3.15, Cy Young Award).

But all of that isn't going to happen in 2020, is it? Have you taken a look at the stud pitchers on the teams that went deep in the playoffs this year? That's what it takes to win the World Series, and it's what the Red Sox had in 2018. We can agree that everything went right for the 2018 Red Sox, but even so they went into the season with an intact pitching staff that was expected to produce, and did.

Chaim Bloom isn't coming to Boston to build a team. He's coming to Boston to build an organization, which means having a farm system whose players routinely get the glossy, front-page treatment in those "Top Prospects" editions of Baseball America.

The tricky part is going to be convincing an anxious fan base that the Red Sox are going to be fun and exciting in 2020 while not necessarily being looked upon as the team to beat. And that's become a tough sell with all of Boston's big-league sports franchises, and for obvious reasons. All four teams have been championship-caliber for most of this century — yes, that would be "always" for the Patriots — and because of that there now is an annual expectation that the hits'll keep on coming.

What made the 2019 Red Sox so enormously disappointing as they brought needless swaggerer to spring training and then couldn't back it up. They wanted to keep replaying the 2018 World Series, and, worse yet, they concocted a scheme to hold back on their starting pitchers during Grapefruit League games because ... well, just because. The Sox were 6-13 by April 17 and didn't spend a single day in first place all season, and an eight-game losing streak that began in late July effectively killed their chances of grabbing a wild-card berth.

Put another way, after Opening Day there was nothing, nothing, to embrace about the 2019 Red Sox.

You may not want to hear this, Red Sox fans, but you may need to adjust your set for 2020. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. The Red Sox won two World Series championships in the first decade of the 21st century, and two more in the second decade. Now we're on to the third decade, as Bill Belichick would say, and Chaim Bloom has a lot of work to do.

### **'His intensity doesn't stop': A view from Tampa of new Red Sox boss Chaim Bloom**

Jen McCaffrey

The Red Sox will introduce Chaim Bloom, the former Tampa Bay Rays vice president of baseball operations, as their new chief baseball officer on Monday.

We asked The Athletic's Rays writer, Josh Tolentino, some questions about what to expect from Bloom as he takes over in Boston.

What is Bloom like as a leader? Was he around a lot? Did he have a heavy presence in the clubhouse or is he more behind the scenes?

JT: One of the biggest aspects many people around the organization enjoy the most about the Rays' front office is how accessible everyone is and the friendly atmosphere the group creates. Bloom played a key role in creating that. He was a frequent visitor at batting practice and always showed his face inside the clubhouse before and after games at Tropicana Field. There were several times during the season when Bloom could be found strolling the clubhouse after a big win or even a late-night loss, beer in hand, and chatting with players about what had just happened.

Bloom's presence extended beyond the big-league club, too. He visited every minor-league team over the course of the season, checking in with top prospects along with all of the coaching staffs and scouts. During his midseason visit with Double-A Montgomery, he sat down with The Athletic to talk about prized two-way player Brendan McKay, who made his MLB debut just a few weeks later. The focal point of the

conversation was obviously McKay, but there were several times when Bloom wandered off topic onto other prospects. He recalled each player's background with immense detail and walked me through the course of their development throughout the system. It's that type of dedication that makes Bloom stand out and what helped him earn the trust of many people around the organization.

The Red Sox are focused on strengthening their farm system. Bloom has been credited for helping create The Rays Way, a blueprint for the club's player development system. Is there anything more you can tell us about that?

JT: There's a lot of accountability when it comes to players believing in "The Rays Way." Since the club is limited with its resources and has the lowest payroll in baseball, the Rays must be creative and find unique advantages. They make full use of not just the 25-man roster, but the entire 40-man on a daily basis, and all of the players involved know they could rack up frequent-flyer miles between Tampa and Triple-A Durham really quick.

Near the end of August when the Rays were in Houston, Bloom approached rookie infielder Mike Brosseau at his locker before the series opener. It was a private conversation, but you could see from Bloom's body language he was really trying to get a message across to the rookie, who up to that point of the season was tearing it up. Brosseau was hitting .282 with six home runs and 35 hits over 42 games. He was doing everything right to stay with the team, however, that didn't guarantee the right-handed-hitting Brosseau a spot on the roster. And with the Astros stacking right-handed pitchers across the board, we found out later that day Brosseau was optioned to Durham in a matchup-based decision. When Brosseau re-joined the team as part of September call-ups, he praised the front office's decision making, insisting he is just part of the buy-in process. It's moments like this that show the Rays really try to get the greatest possible contributions out of their players, even when a situation might not appeal in the player's favor.

"I've never seen anything like it," veteran Charlie Morton said late in the season. "The buy-in here and the belief in the front office with what (GM) Erik (Neander) and Chaim have helped built, I haven't seen anything like it. There are guys around this room who weren't here at maybe the beginning of the year, and now they're playing a big role. There are guys who aren't in this room anymore that helped get us to this point. And guys aren't complaining about their roles. They know why they're here. I think that's what stands out most is the buy-in."

The Rays' use of the opener changed the game. What can you tell us about that and how heavily do you think Bloom was involved in developing it?

JT: No one front office executive will take credit for the opener strategy, but Bloom obviously played an important role. He was actually the highest team official on the road with the club in Kansas City back in 2018 when the Rays first implemented the idea, and reliever Sergio Romo recorded back-to-back starts during the following series against the Angels. While the Red Sox seem poised to carry a full shelf of starters into 2020, it wouldn't be that shocking if Bloom brought the opener with him to Boston on a case-by-case basis.

The opener wasn't just a strategy but also a reflection of an entire organization trying to stay ahead of its peers. The Rays led the American League in ERA (3.65) this season, and Tampa Bay's bullpen boasted an MLB-best ERA of 3.66. Bloom was considered one of the most forward-thinking minds in baseball without the GM title. Now, he gets the opportunity to run the show in Boston, where he'll be backed behind a lot more resources and look to continue implementing his innovative approach.

In Boston, Bloom will have Brian O'Halloran as his GM. How did you view his relationship with his boss in Tampa, Erik Neander, and the rest of the baseball operations staff there? How heavily was he involved in trades and signings?

JT: Neander and Bloom literally started at the bottom of the organization together, both beginning as interns for the Rays and then climbing up the baseball ops ladder over the past 15 years. Their time together created a special, selfless bond that translated to a successful on-field product. Similar to his comfort level

around the players, Bloom's relationships extended beyond Neander as well. President Matt Silverman, Neander and Bloom all carried a mutual respect for each other, and it was rare for a single executive to take full credit for any single decision, whether it be a trade, offseason signing, etc. It has always been a group effort with the Rays, and Bloom played a key part in maintaining that dynamic with his selfless approach to all baseball decisions.

When the team acquired reliever Nick Anderson at the trade deadline, Anderson was always the main target in the deal, but Bloom also finessed his way, per Neander, to locate additional talent and acquire starter/bulk guy Trevor Richards as well. Both players are under team control for the next five years, which gives the Rays a lot of financial flexibility and the ability to maximize each contract. Bloom always tries to find the best talent in potential deals, and his intensity doesn't stop after they've already secured their guy. Why stop when you can acquire more?

### **Arizona Fall League report: Red Sox prospects impress in the desert**

Jen McCaffrey

In news that saddened prospect-watchers everywhere, the Arizona Fall League finished up its regular season Friday. The six-team league plays a 28-game schedule featuring top prospects from across baseball, and eight of Boston's top minor leaguers suited up for the Peoria Javelinas (which is apparently is a type of a wild boar).

Red Sox director of player development Ben Crockett felt good about the performance of the Red Sox contingent.

"I think as a whole the group performed pretty well," Crockett said. "Tanner Houck was really effective as a starter. He really made some good progress. I thought from an experience standpoint for (Brian) Mata and (Yoan) Aybar being 20 and 21 years old at that level to show really good stuff I thought was a positive for both guys. Then offensively, the trio of (Marcus) Wilson, (Jarren) Duran and (CJ) Chatham all did a pretty good job. Those three guys held their own and got regular playing time and played multiple positions and got some pretty good exposure at that level."

Here's how each of the Red Sox prospects fared over the last two months in Arizona with some more insight from Crockett:

RHP Tanner Houck  
MLB.com Red Sox No. 5 prospect

3-2, 6 GS, 2.70 ERA, 1.33 WHIP, 23 1/3 IP, 2 HR, 12 BB, 26 K

Houck split time between Portland and Pawtucket in 2019 and posted a 4.01 ERA over 33 games, 17 starts, in 107 2/3 innings. He walked 46 and struck out 107. Houck had a strong fall after a full year pitching at the higher levels of the minors. He allowed one earned run or fewer in five of his six starts for Peoria.

Crockett: "For him, it's the ability to use his fastball in all parts of the zone. He's very comfortable in some areas where it's really effective, and the more variation where he can execute his fastball consistently against both left-handed hitters and right-handed hitters is key. I think the continued development of his changeup is something he's worked really hard on this year. He threw a fair amount in Arizona. So those are probably the keys. Slider is a weapon for him that he can throw anytime and did a good job of that in Arizona and could be something that ultimately gets even more usage as he continues to move up."

OF Jarren Duran  
MLB.com Red Sox No. 4 prospect

22 games: 22-for-84 (.262), 5 doubles, 2 triples, 1 homer, 8 RBI, 8 BB, 18 K, 5-for-7 SB

Duran hit .303 with a .775 OPS in 132 games for High-A Salem and Double-A Portland this year. He hit 24 doubles, eight triples and five homers while going 46-for-59 in stolen base attempts. Duran started off the AFL season strong, hitting .348 through the first three weeks of games, but cooled off over the last two weeks. He played in the AFL's All-Star game in early October.

SS CJ Chatham  
MLB.com Red Sox No. 9 prospect

16 games: 15-for-64 (.234), 5 doubles, 9 RBI, 4 BB, 16 K, 3-for-3 SB

Chatham hit .298 with a .741 OPS over 110 games this year between Portland and Pawtucket. He hit 31 doubles, a triple and five homers. He didn't have quite the same success this fall, but also has never played this many games in his career.

RHP Bryan Mata  
MLB.com Red Sox No. 3 prospect

0-0, 5.79 ERA, 1.50 WHIP, 7 relief appearances, 9 1/3 IP, 9 BB, 9 K

Mata split time this year between High-A Salem and Double-A Portland, posting a 3.43 ERA over 21 starts and 105 innings. Mata struck out 111 and walked 42 while holding batters to a .237 average. For Peoria, he strictly came out of the bullpen and posted scoreless outings in four of his seven appearances. In the other three, he was tagged for six runs. The bullpen time for Mata was partially a result of the number of innings he threw during the regular season, but also a way for the team to ease him into bullpen usage, should that need arise at the major-league level.

Crockett: "Definitely the innings total was a major driver of (Mata's time in the bullpen). We felt getting the exposure to that level was going to be impactful for his development, but from an innings standpoint he was finishing the year at a pretty good place, so we wanted to try to cut down the innings a little bit. Then we do feel like the opportunity to pitch out of the pen, even though it's a little more controlled in the Fall League than it might be somewhere else, that that is a benefit for guys to have that exposure in the case you get called up for the first time and you're not starting the game. You're a guy that's called up and is a reserve spot or coming out of the pen to provide length, at least you've been through the process, warming up in the bullpen during the game. You've kind of done it before."

OF Marcus Wilson  
MLB.com Red Sox No. 17 prospect

8 games: 10-for-30 (.333), 1 double, 1 homer, 8 RBI, 13 BB, 7 K, 2-for-3 SB

The Red Sox received Wilson in the Blake Swihart trade, and he finished the year in Double-A Portland. In 119 games, he posted a .269 average and .850 OPS with 28 doubles, two triples and 18 homers. Wilson's AFL time was cut short because of hamstring tightness, Crockett said, and Wilson only appeared in two games in October.

2B Brett Netzer  
6 games: 4-for-20 (.200), 1 double, 1 RBI, 2 BB, 10 K, 0-for-1 SB

Netzer hit .247 with a .676 OPS in 130 for Portland this season with 24 doubles, a triple and eight homers. Three of Netzer's four hits this fall came in one game. He also saw time at third base in addition to his traditional third-base spot. Netzer had joined the Red Sox fall instructional league shortly after the end of the minor-league season then was sent to the AFL to fill Wilson's roster spot while the outfielder dealt with the hamstring issues.

LHP Jhonathan Diaz  
0-0, 7 relief appearances, 2.89 ERA, 1.39 WHIP, 9 1/3 IP, 5 BB, 15 K

Diaz posted solid numbers for Salem this season with a 3.86 ERA over 27 starts and 128 1/3 innings. He struck out 118 and walked 54, holding opponents to a .249 average. This fall he appeared strictly out of the bullpen and allowed three earned runs over 9 1/3 innings while striking out 15 batters.

Crockett: “He did a good job of getting a bunch of swing and miss(es) with his slider, I think that’s the pitch that’s really the key to his success and I think it was good exposure. His second half in Salem was so much better than his first half and really was the driver for us ultimately sending him to Arizona to continue to pitch. I think he did a really nice job.”

LHP Yoan Aybar  
MLB.com Red Sox No. 29 prospect

0-1, 6.75 ERA, 1.38 WHIP, 7 relief appearances, 8 IP, 4 HR, 6 BB, 9 K

Aybar split time between Single-A Greenville and High-A Salem this year, posting a 4.61 ERA over 44 relief appearances in 56 2/3 innings. He held batters to a .176 average but walked 41 while striking out 70. He pitched well this fall, allowing two earned runs over his first six outings, but was pummeled for four runs on two homers in his last appearance Oct. 20.

Four Sox prospects now will join Team USA for the Premier12 tournament that takes place Nov. 2-17, beginning in Mexico. Chatham and Houck will join infielder Bobby Dalbec and 2019 fourth-rounder right-hander Noah Song in the tournament, which has implications for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Song is the Sox prospect who graduated from the Naval Academy in June. As of now, Crockett said Song is still expected to begin flight school after the tournament, in early December.

Dalbec is one of Boston’s top position player prospects and joined the team in big-league spring training this year.

The four players representing the Red Sox are the most of any team on the Team USA roster.

### **How will Chaim Bloom’s history with the ‘opener’ affect Red Sox pitching plans?**

Chad Jennings

Bobby Poyner started a game for the Red Sox this season. So did Josh Taylor. Travis Lakins started three of them, stepping into a modified version of a role he’d largely abandoned since Double-A.

The “opener” was not part of the Red Sox plan this year, but it became a piece of their reality. The team’s established, expensive five-man rotation largely crumbled due to injuries and poor performance. Traditional spot starters were the next line of defense, but they were mostly awful. The only replacement starters who had an ERA below 5.00 were Poyner, Taylor and Lakins – the three true relief pitchers who allowed zero earned runs as openers. Their combined rotation workload through five starts? Just 8 2/3 innings. The Red Sox, largely in freefall by the time they resorted to the opener, lost all five of those games.

Now comes word that the team’s top choice for the next head of baseball operations is Chaim Bloom, one of the top decision-makers from a Rays organization that pioneered the opener strategy in recent years.

Given the Red Sox rotation problems in 2019, and their lack of a fifth starter heading into the offseason, it’s worth wondering whether hiring Bloom could push the team more deeply into the opener mindset. Or, at the very least, might Bloom’s history and familiarity with the concept give the Red Sox a different avenue when it comes to rotation depth, strategy and development?

“This is not something that we had just come up with, or necessarily that we came up with at all,” Bloom told Tablet magazine early last season. “This is something that I think was part of baseball conversations certainly for as long as I’ve been in the game... The trick is implementing the idea and communicating it and getting buy-in and getting everybody on board.”

To that end, it’s worth remembering the Red Sox current situation. They still have starters Chris Sale, David Price, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez under contract next season. Fifth starter Rick Porcello is heading for free agency, and payroll concerns could impact the ability to replace him. The next most experienced starters on the roster are Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez, who have been mostly long relievers. Mike Shawaryn, Marcus Walden and Ryan Weber started in the minors but have worked primarily out of the bullpen in the big leagues. The Red Sox also have upper-level rotation prospects Tanner Houck and Bryan Mata who have dabbled in relief work.

It’s a situation potentially well suited to traditional rotation building with an openness to outside-the-box thinking.

During Bloom’s 15 years in the Rays front office, the team earned a reputation for its successful development of starting pitchers. Even as they pioneered the opener strategy in recent years, they did not ignore the value of traditional starters. Of their six playoff games this year, the Rays used a true opener in only one. In the rest, they used fairly traditional starters.

After signing veteran Charlie Morton last winter, the Rays used him strictly as a traditional starting pitcher this season. Two years ago, they traded for Tyler Glasnow, who’d been both a starter and a reliever in Pittsburgh, and used him as a traditional starter as well. When they had Eovaldi in 2018, they waited for him to rehab from Tommy John surgery, then used him, too, as a traditional starting pitcher.

The Rays have done the same with their top pitching prospects. Blake Snell was considered an elite pitcher in the minor leagues, and he has been a traditional starter ever since he arrived in the big leagues (his workload was limited only by an injury this season). Brandon McKay was considered a top 100 prospect heading into this season, and he made his big league debut mid-summer as a traditional starting pitcher. Another top 100 prospect, Brent Honeywell, was being groomed as a traditional starter in Triple-A before needing Tommy John surgery in spring training.

But the opener strategy has been a significant part of the Rays strategy for rounding out their rotation.

Less-touted pitching prospects like Ryan Yarbrough, Yonny Chirinos and former Red Sox pitcher Jalen Beeks have fallen into a middle ground, each pitching more than 100 innings in a season while being used sometimes as traditional starters and other times as a bulk relievers. Yarbrough, Chirinos and Austin Pruitt each rank top five in innings pitched for the Rays the past three years, but none ranks top five in games started. Yarbrough and Pruitt don’t even rank top 10 in games started. Ryne Stanek, on the other hand, was used strictly as a reliever from the moment he got to Triple-A, but he now has the second-most Rays starts since 2017. None of his starts has lasted more than two innings, and he ranks 12th in innings pitched during that same timeframe. His career ERA as a starter is 2.71. As a reliever, it’s 4.93. The workload in each role has been nearly identical, but Stanek was more effective when pitching the first inning or two.

If Bloom does end up running the Red Sox baseball operations, he would not have to veer too far from his previous rotation strategy, nor would he have to push the Red Sox much beyond their current setup.

There’s little about the Rays history to suggest Bloom would see Sale, Price, Eovaldi and Rodriguez as anything other than traditional starting pitchers. Whether he could find a trade partner to jettison one of those contracts is a separate issue. Assuming those four stick around, the Rays’ handling of Morton, Glasnow, Eovaldi and Snell suggests the Red Sox top four starting pitchers would remain just that: starting pitchers.

Where Bloom’s familiarity with the opener concept could come in handy is at the back of the rotation, in the handling the Red Sox depth, and in the development of minor league pitchers. Consider:

- With the Red Sox, Bloom could see his total payroll expand to nearly four times what it was in Tampa, but the Red Sox owners' desire to get below the luxury tax might create some familiar spending limits. The opener could be a way to round out next year's rotation using in-house options. For example: Lakins in the first inning or two, then Johnson for the next four or five. Something like that would loosely match the Rays approach.

- If the Red Sox fill the rotation with a more traditional fifth starter, the opener could become a go-to Plan B, rather than the last resort it was in 2019. Rather than suffer a series of underwhelming spot starters, the Red Sox could plug inevitable rotation holes by using openers when necessary.

- Red Sox player development has begun the process of getting top pitching prospects ready for bullpen work. Houck pitched as a reliever in Triple-A this season, and Mata has been working as a reliever in the Arizona Fall League. That familiarity could open the door to breaking into the big leagues as bulk relievers, letting an opener ease the burden by facing the top of an opposing lineup before the kids take it from there. But, again, the Rays' handling of top prospects does not rule out the possibility of inserting guys like Houck and Mata straight into the rotation when the time is right.

Of course, all of this is speculative. Bloom has not yet been hired, and he certainly hasn't begun setting strategy or making decisions. We don't know exactly how much money Red Sox ownership is willing to spend, or whether there's a trade market for guys like Price and Eovaldi. The offseason has the potential for drastic change no matter who's in charge.

But Bloom's 15 years experience with the Rays does not mean he's against traditional starting pitchers, and the fact the Red Sox opened last season with a traditional five-man rotation does not mean they're unfamiliar with or unprepared for the possibility of an opener. It's possible to think both inside the box and outside the box, and that combination might be exactly what the Red Sox need, and what they've been preparing for.

## **\* *The New York Post***

### **Red Sox put Chaim Bloom in charge of baseball operations**

Joel Sherman

The Mets will not only have to see Joe Girardi 19 games a year as Phillies manager, but also will now witness how the runner-up for their GM job handles a big-market team.

Rays VP of baseball operations Chaim Bloom finalized a contract Friday with the Red Sox to be their chief of baseball operations. How much did Boston want him? Bloom was the only person interviewed for the job, though president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski was fired on Sept. 8.

Brodie Van Wagenen beat out Bloom to succeed Sandy Alderson last offseason.

By interviewing with the Mets and now agreeing with the Red Sox, Bloom has shown he wants to run his own baseball operations and do so for an organization that greatly outspends Tampa Bay. And while Bloom will be compared to Van Wagenen/Mets, he could provide a greater bane to the Rays and Yankees.

Tampa Bay has been run as a tightly knit collective with GM Erik Neander and Bloom as the top baseball operations officers. That group has been widely hailed for keeping the Rays regularly competitive and innovative on a shoestring. The Rays finished ahead of the Red Sox in 2011, '15 and '19, and Boston's top baseball official either quit or was fired afterward each time.

Meanwhile, the Yankees long have admired the work of the Rays front office. Even while Boston was winning the World Series in 2018, the Yankees thought the Red Sox had done much to damage their near-

term future to do so by trading prospects and swelling long-term payroll. Bloom theoretically will apply small-market ingenuity and the Rays' forward thinking with the Red Sox's payroll might.

### **The moves Chaim Bloom should consider to navigate difficult Red Sox road**

Joel Sherman

WASHINGTON — The Red Sox are holding a press conference to formally announce Chaim Bloom as the head of their baseball operations on Monday, exactly a year to the day they clinched the 2018 World Series.

The symbolism is rich, though the payroll is about to be poorer — a major reason Bloom was hired. Bloom, as the Rays' VP of baseball operations, helped Tampa Bay do more with among the majors' least resources.

Boston owner John Henry said late last month that for 2020, “we need to be under the [luxury tax threshold] and that was something we've known for more than a year now.” The 2020 threshold is \$208 million. Eventually, Red Sox officials said sinking under the threshold was a desire, not a mandate. But I will assume that first statement reflects their true aims.

The Red Sox have led the majors in payroll each of the last two seasons, climbing well above the tax threshold, which was way more tolerable winning the title in 2018 than missing the playoffs in 2019. Bloom's first project will be juggling austerity with 2020 contention with better setting up the future of a team that drained its farm system to try to win. Some thoughts on how I think Bloom will navigate this difficult road:

1. J.D. Martinez will probably opt out of the three years, \$62.75 million left on his deal and Boston will let him go. This will help greatly to drop under \$208 million, yet hurt the lineup. The sense will be that an analytic executive such as Bloom would prefer not to have the DH filled by a single, inflexible player. But the Rays, within their limits, tried to sign Nelson Cruz last offseason. Martinez was \$22 million annually toward the tax, Cruz was \$14 million and I would suspect Bloom feels Boston could add a bat (Edwin Encarnacion? Hunter Pence?) for even less than that.

2. The Red Sox will listen on Mookie Betts, but hold him until July and either keep him and go for it or trade him before he enters free agency. Betts is due \$30 million-ish for 2020. Combine that with one year of control and the Red Sox cannot expect a return commensurate to Betts' greatness. Plus, they probably receive in July about what they would get now — think the Orioles dealing Manny Machado in July 2018 amid his walk year as somewhat of a comp.

3. Bloom will try creativity to escape long money on a starter. Chris Sale's five-year, \$145 million extension does not even begin until 2020. That plus worry about his elbow make him close to untradeable. Nathan Eovaldi (three years, \$68 million left) and David Price (three years, \$96 million) also are injury concerns, but with less worry and less money due.

So, for example, could Boston trade Price to Texas for Shin-Soo Choo (\$21 million for 2020) and Rowned Odor (three years, \$36 million left)? Boston would save \$4 million toward the 2020 tax, get a one-year DH stopgap for Martinez in Choo and take on a distressed contract in Odor to balance some of the money and he can play second. Price, if healthy, fits with Lance Lynn and Mike Minor to provide a strong rotation top three to open a new stadium in Texas.

Would the Red Sox take on one year left of Yoenis Cespedes (to DH), Jed Lowrie (second base) and Wilson Ramos (backup catcher/DH) at \$49.25 million to get out from three years of Eovaldi? DH at-bats and the Green Monster actually might motivate a walk-year Cespedes to waive his no-trade clause, but would he pass a trade physical? Does adding Jeury's Familia (two years, \$22 million) get Jackie Bradley (one year, \$11 million) as part of a bigger deal? Eovaldi could step in when Zack Wheeler likely leaves in free agency, though I suspect Rick Porcello, now a Red Sox free agent, would entice the Mets with his durability and Jersey roots.

The fewest steals were attempted per game than any time since 1964. Essentially that was about teams not wanting to risk outs when homers were so voluminous, making even a runner on first base basically a runner in scoring position.

But during the postseason teams sure seem to have lowered the risk. The success rate was 73.3 percent during the regular season, which actually was the highest since 2012. For the playoffs, it was 86.7 (33 of 38) through World Series Game 4. The emphasis on pitch framing, in particular, has left catchers worse positioned to throw out runners as they often set up lower and accentuate catching the ball in such a way as to give the perception (illusion?) to the ump of strikes.

The Nationals, in particular, have been vulnerable this postseason with opponents successful on 14 of 15 attempts, and on seven of the successes Washington's catcher did not even make a throw to the bag and on two others there have been throwing errors. Now, in Kurt Suzuki, the Nats have a catcher particularly susceptible to thefts, which is exacerbated when he is matched up with starter Anibal Sanchez.

But if you are looking at why teams have lowered their tolerance for trying to steal and even why they don't obsess on stopping running games, there is this: The Astros and Nationals had combined to permit 20 steals this October. But in an age of so many strikeouts, just three of those who stole scored.