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*** *The Boston Globe***

Alex Cora should be one of Chaim Bloom's best assets

Tara Sullivan

Alex Cora joked Monday that much of his offseason has been spent on a plane, commuting from his home in San Juan to Boston as the Red Sox continue to work their course correction. Of course, the manager has enjoyed spending more time with his family, but the early vacation was never what he had in mind, to be on the outside of the baseball playoffs looking in only one year after winning it all.

But that's the reason Cora needed to make this latest trip to Fenway Park, for the introduction of his new boss, chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, who replaces Dave Dombrowski in running the Red Sox baseball operations. And the day was all about Bloom, the 36-year-old former Tampa Bay executive whose tender age belies a long, deep baseball résumé and whose reputation for collaboration and forward thinking earned him this chance to take the reins of a franchise.

Yet as much as the powers that be — John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy — were inspired to voice their debt of gratitude to the four executives (Raquel Ferreira, Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott) who ran things during the hiring process, as much as they were delighted to tout Bloom as an asset to them and everyone else in the building, there is another holdover who is just as certainly set to be an asset to Bloom.

"A huge asset," Kennedy said. "First of all, Alex is a great guy and relationships are his priority. He brings an intellectual curiosity that I think is really important in today's game. He's always asking, 'How are we going to get better?'"

This offseason, Cora has been directing that question at himself, and he's not afraid to admit it. He knows his team was too inconsistent. He knows that responsibility is on him. He knows the emphasis right now is on getting starters Chris Sale, David Price, and Nathan Eovaldi healthy, so that issues that can be traced all the way back to spring training won't be repeated this year.

"A lot of people are doubting us, which is good," said Cora. "I think it's going to push us to be great. From my end, on a personal note, I'll use that to push me to be better. Last year, I wasn't good. Two years ago, I was great. We'll see what happens next year."

He is confident that he and Bloom can attack problems together. It's not to say the Sox are suddenly going to adopt the use of an opener the way the Rays did last year, or worse, that Cora will sit idly by as the front office handed him a lineup card.

It's more to say all conversations are welcome. And if Bloom is wise, he'll ensure that Cora's seat at the table is as prominent as it's always been. Dombrowski may have been the one to hire this manager, but Bloom should consider himself fortunate to inherit him.

Though an old sports adage might say that GMs aren't truly judged until they hire their own coach, that's generally reserved for teams that are in complete rebuild mode. The Sox were on top of the baseball world only a season ago. In Cora's view, that achievement wasn't just some fairy-dusted carpet ride, but the result of respect for tradition and the use of new-age insight, a combination he feels can only be enhanced by Bloom's arrival.

“I think there’s a feeling we were very old-school,” said Cora. “I don’t necessarily agree. I think we were very balanced, the way we saw it. We made decisions last year based on information.

“It’s not magic. I’m glad I’m able to say this now: It wasn’t a magic ride. It was information and collaboration, and that’s what we’re doing. Obviously with Chaim here, he’s going to bring some good ideas, we’re going to make adjustments, and we’re going to keep getting better.”

There’s a reason Bloom addressed the fans directly Monday, saying, “I know how passionate you are and I know how important this team is to you, and I don’t take that lightly. My teammates and I will work together and do everything we can to make you proud on and off the field.”

And there’s a reason he took time from his microphone to look directly in Cora’s direction, where the manager sat in the second row alongside team executives.

“Thank you, Alex Cora,” Bloom said, “for how you have welcomed me to the Red Sox. I have great respect for your talents as a manager and I’m looking forward to our relationship.”

Cora smiled, nodding his agreement. And then he listened, listened as the assembled media peppered Bloom with questions, listened as Bloom peppered his answers with the same core principles.

“There are a few words I used here 2½ years ago, three years ago, and they were, ‘Genuine, transparent, and be responsible,’ ” Cora said. “For him to use those words, I was pleased. It means that we’re on the right track.

“This organization is one of the best organizations in the world. A year ago, we were on top of the world. Right now we’re not, but we know what we can accomplish and I think moving forward the way we’re going to think, the way we’re going to do things, maybe it will be a little different than the last two years since I’ve been here. But I think it’s for the best for the organization.”

He heard Bloom. And as the two men go forward, Bloom should listen to Cora, too. They can be assets to each other.

Red Sox general manager Brian O’Halloran earned his admirers behind-the-scenes

Alex Speier

On Friday afternoon, members of the Red Sox baseball operations department assembled inside Fenway Park to discuss the new direction of the organization. With rumors spreading, the Red Sox wanted to be transparent and wanted their own employees to hear first-hand about the plans.

Yes, confirmed assistant general manager Brian O’Halloran — one of the four members of the department who’d taken a transitional leadership role — Chaim Bloom was coming on board from the Tampa Bay Rays, news that was greeted with enthusiasm but also some reserve.

“Everyone is anxious because they don’t know Chaim,” said assistant GM Zack Scott. “We told them, ‘He’s great. You’re going to love him.’ But there’s still tension in the room.”

It wouldn’t last. Scott and senior vice president Raquel Ferreira, who’d also been part of the four-person interim team, nudged O’Halloran. There was more to announce.

“We were like, ‘What the hell are you doing?’ ” recounted Scott.

O’Halloran didn’t want to say anything about himself, so Ferreira took the floor. Bloom was coming in as the chief baseball officer. O’Halloran, meanwhile, was being promoted to general manager.

The room exploded in applause.

“There was genuine emotion,” said vice president of pro scouting Gus Quattlebaum.

“You could feel it,” said Scott. “People were relieved and happy for him. Everyone respects the hell out of Brian.”

That respect has been hard-earned.

Tara Sullivan: Alex Cora should be one of Chaim Bloom’s best assets

O’Halloran, 48, spent years in Russia in the 1990s before getting an MBA from UCLA. As an unpaid Padres intern in early 2002, O’Halloran worked with Theo Epstein and Sam Kennedy. When he and his wife Jean moved back to Massachusetts in 2002, he wanted to continue his pursuit of a baseball job, but didn’t know whether he had a future in the game.

“I wasn’t certain that it would be, because there were other complicating factors, but I hoped it would be and I felt it would be,” said O’Halloran.

He reached out to Epstein, then assistant GM of the Red Sox. Epstein couldn’t offer a paid position or even an internship, as the baseball operations department literally didn’t have a desk available. The best he could offer was a unique arrangement.

The team had one BATS video system for charting games, located at the desk of then-intern Jed Hoyer. At a time when there was no Statcast or video service to chart pitches, Hoyer spent his days — typically starting around 9 a.m. and ending around 11 p.m. or midnight — logging pitch location and type.

The presence of a desktop computer, a TV and computer monitor, and a VHS player left Hoyer’s space so cramped that he had to prop his feet on the cubicle wall at a 90-degree angle; his legs wouldn’t fit beneath his desk. A time-share of this space was what the Sox could offer O’Halloran.

About 20-30 minutes before his nightly departure, Hoyer would call O’Halloran, who was essentially volunteering without an official role. O’Halloran would arrive at the office with a tuna sandwich and bag of Doritos and work, often alone, for several hours charting PawSox games.

“The graveyard shift,” said Hoyer. “I remember thinking, ‘This [expletive] is dedicated.’ ”

“He would sneak in under the dark of night to work,” said Ferreira. “For about a month, he would come in and I was like, ‘Who is this guy with the backpack?’ He looked like he was about 12 years old.”

While O’Halloran expressed a youthful exuberance — though it was hard to summon on some days while working as a substitute teacher, with his wife in grad school — he also recognized the uniqueness of his opportunity. An unpaid and unglamorous nighttime shift represented a crack in the door.

By the end of the year, when Epstein had been named GM, the Sox gave O’Halloran a job as a baseball operations assistant.

“He just kept showing up doing that until we had no choice but to start paying him something,” texted former Sox GM Ben Cherington.

For O’Halloran, his title didn’t matter. He wasn’t viewing the opportunity as a first step on a GM ladder. Employment in baseball, with the organization for which he’d rooted as a kid, meant everything.

“I have been in my dream job since 2002,” said O’Halloran. “Just working in baseball was my goal, being a part of something special, working with a great group of people.

“I’ve honestly never focused on any particular role, position, or title. I’ve just wanted to be a part of a group of people working together to achieve great things and win a championship.”

He’s done just that as a respected front office teammate for 17 years, with growing responsibilities in baseball operations.

His work ethic remains legendary. In 2014, ulcerative colitis required surgery to remove his colon. He worked from his hospital bed while recovering, and at one point left the hospital for a meeting with Cherington and team owners with an IV line in his arm.

“I felt Ben needed one of us there,” O’Halloran shrugged.

Much of his work has come in contract negotiations — an area in which his tenacity so impressed Dave Dombrowski that the former president of baseball operations started calling him “Bulldog” — and a mastery of baseball rules, particularly critical for an organization that frequently dances with luxury-tax concerns. But O’Halloran also has had a significant role in organizing the medical, sport science, and behavioral health departments.

Yet his impact has stretched beyond that. Front office members routinely rely on him for advice and perspective, grateful for his organizational perspective, insight, measured tone, and ability to avoid the emotional swings that typically accompany sports.

“His role is pretty profound,” said Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen. “People trust him for his opinion and advice on all things.”

He is described as meticulous, trustworthy, thoughtful, and selfless — characteristics that have endeared him not only to baseball operations leaders such as Epstein, Cherington, Hazen, and Dombrowski but also four Red Sox managers.

“He’s the only one I can recall from group I was around (including me) who was enthusiastically welcomed by every manager and clubhouse over the years (even Bobby V!),” texted Cherington.

Yet for most of his Red Sox career, O’Halloran has remained nearly invisible publicly.

(His Russian fluency arguably made him a person of greater interplanetary than earthbound renown: Epstein once took part in a call with an astronaut on the Space Station only on the condition that O’Halloran could communicate with members of the crew in Russian.)

His lack of interest in ever leaving the Red Sox has left him unmentioned at times of front office vacancies.

Kennedy, the team’s president/CEO, said O’Halloran lacks name recognition “because he’s the most selfless, humble person you’ll ever meet. He focuses exclusively on one thing: ‘How do I make the Red Sox better? I don’t care what it means for me.’ ”

Yet O’Halloran’s reputation in the industry is significant. Yankees assistant GM Jean Afterman compared O’Halloran’s ability to survive and remain valuable over numerous regime changes to that of Talleyrand, an 18th- and 19th-century French politician and diplomat. Agents rave about him despite an adversarial relationship.

After Dombrowski was fired in September and the Red Sox entrusted their baseball operations to the four-person team, O’Halloran’s ability to play a huge role in understated fashion made a considerable impression on his bosses.

“Even though the four of them were equals, he was the de facto leader,” said principal owner John Henry, who also owns the Globe. “He has such strong relationships.”

Bloom, meanwhile, knew O'Halloran as one of "the most respected and trustworthy executives in the game," and recognized that his new colleague's institutional trust and knowledge were tremendous assets for an organizational newcomer and reassurance for the group that he'll now guide.

O'Halloran's elevation represents stability — and a sense that hard work in service of the Red Sox eventually will gain its due, and that members of the front office will have a trusted leader while getting to know a new one.

"We say leaders are born and not made; he was born to be a leader, whether or not he put himself in the front for that [GM] position or not," said Ferreira. "I can't imagine the Red Sox without him and I wouldn't want to. We would be far less of an organization if he wasn't around."

Chaim Bloom faces similar challenges as Theo Epstein, and one big dilemma

Chad Finn

When 28-year-old Theo Epstein was named the general manager of the Red Sox in November 2002, the mission statement was slightly but irrefutably different than what it is for 36-year-old Chaim Bloom, who was named the Red Sox' chief baseball officer Monday.

Then, the goal was to win a championship, singular, to end the drought and the curse, to exorcise all ghosts, to alter Red Sox history for the better after so many agonizing autumns.

After one more agonizing autumn — perhaps the most agonizing of all — in October 2003, that goal was accomplished the following fall, and in the most satisfying, affirming, see-following-this-stupid-team-so-passionately-was-worth-it way imaginable.

All the disappointment was worth it to get to the 2004 payoff, and it changed everything for the better.

It was coincidental, but it did not go unnoticed that when the Red Sox introduced the impressive Bloom — a Yaleite with an analytical baseball mind like Epstein, but also an executive lauded for his interpersonal skills — the press conference came on the day after the 15th anniversary of the 2004 World Series victory, and on the precise anniversaries of the 2007 and 2018 World Series clinchers.

It was a reminder of how many good times Red Sox fans have had in the last 15 years, yet also a reminder that change happens rapidly when they don't contend. Three Red Sox general managers or baseball operations bosses have won World Series titles this century (Epstein 2004, '07. Ben Cherington '13; Dave Dombrowski last year). Only Epstein retained the job for a long stretch.

It should not go unnoticed that one of Bloom's primary roster-building tasks is rather similar to what Epstein faced when he took over officially in 2003: adding quality depth at a relatively low cost to the roster. Epstein's predecessor, Dan Duquette, acquired all the right stars — Pedro Martinez, Manny Ramirez, Johnny Damon — but faltered time and again in building a complete team.

He made one historic veteran-for-prospects trade, getting Derek Lowe and Jason Varitek for flammable relief pitcher Heathcliff Slocumb in July 1997. But for the most part he plugged the roster with sore-armed veterans, former Rated Rookies who peaked in Triple A, and fading, egotistical quasi-stars.

Epstein remedied this immediately, bringing in the likes of Bill Mueller, Mike Timlin, Kevin Millar, Todd Walker, and a Twins discard by the name of David Americo Ortiz in his first offseason. Some of them became the heartbeat of a clubhouse that completely changed the franchise's culture, and in 2004, its course.

A similar task awaits Bloom now, though the scenario is not an exact replica of what Epstein faced entering '03. These Red Sox he inherits are star-laden, though perhaps not as much as they will be should J.D

Martinez opt out of his deal and Chris Sale and David Price fail to return to previous form. (We'll get to Mr. Betts in a moment.)

But what they really need in the wake of Dombrowski's spend-spend-spend approach is to find some diamonds in the rough to accentuate what they already have.

Bloom seems extraordinarily equipped to do this. With the Rays, who had a \$57 million payroll in 2019 (or roughly \$3 million more than what the Red Sox paid Price, Nate Eovaldi, and Steve Pearce), general manager Erik Neander, Bloom, and the other collaborators in the Rays' front office consistently found undervalued talent.

Do you know what these names – Willy Adames, Avisail Garcia, Ji-Man Choi, Brandon Lowe, Travis D'Arnaud, and Yandy Diaz – all had in common? Well, right, they were all 2019 Rays. Good job, Sherlock. They also all had more home runs than Andrew Benintendi last season.

And then there's the knack for finding pitching. After watching the Red Sox parade a bunch of Quadruple A pitchers through the clubhouse last year — I'd swear half of them were named Josh — it will be satisfying when they unearth the kind of finds the Rays always seem to come up with, such as Nick Anderson and his 41 strikeouts in 21.1 innings. We'll take three of those, please.

Of course, Epstein never faced the dilemma Bloom must deal with immediately: Decide what to do with his best all-around player, someone who does everything well and right, someone who is 27 years old, has already won a Most Valuable Player award, and is so consistently excellent that some in the fanbase have started taking him for granted.

You know the deal: Mookie Betts has one year remaining on his contract. He wants to get the most money for his services, which means he's probably headed to free agency. The Red Sox have signaled intentions to cut roughly 15 percent of the payroll to get below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold.

This does not seem to indicate that Betts will be a Red Sox lifer like he should. It's possible he could be traded this offseason. That would be devastating in a lot of ways. With one year left on his deal, it's hard to figure how they'd ever get anything close to an equal return.

Here's hoping the Red Sox recognize that they have the resources, talent and brainpower to be much more like the rich-in-everything Dodgers than the discount Rays. With the proper alterations and good health, they should be a really good team in 2020. I deeply hope Mookie Betts is part of it.

But if he's not, I trust the new boss to get the highest possible return for him. I just hope we never have to find out what that is.

*** *MassLive.com***

Why Boston Red Sox hired Chaim Bloom to rebuild collaborative culture within front office

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Though "collaboration" was the buzzword of the day among the four men addressing the media at Monday's press conference to introduce Chaim Bloom as the new chief baseball officer of the Red Sox, it wasn't the most important word uttered. That word was "autocrat" -- used by principal owner John Henry to explain exactly what the Red Sox didn't want in their new top executive.

Answering a question about what made Bloom so attractive to the Red Sox, Henry said he didn't want to contrast Bloom and former president baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. He then, at least indirectly, did exactly that.

“I would just say we were extremely desirous of bringing in someone who would augment and add as opposed to someone who would have been an autocrat, for instance, or a one-man show,” Henry said.

Henry’s quote said a lot about both Bloom and Dombrowski, contrasting what the owner disliked about the organization’s past and hoped for in regards to its future. Instead of going into detail about the disagreements that led to Dombrowski’s future, he indirectly confirmed what many had assumed for months: Dombrowski’s all-powerful style of leadership and small inner circle was not the structure ownership envisioned for a successful future.

By hiring Bloom away from the Rays, the Red Sox added to an already talented group of front office executives by adding one of the game’s brightest young minds. Those already with the organization will have more of a say than they did working for Dombrowski, who largely consulted with advisers he hired (Tony La Russa and Frank Wren).

After firing Dombrowski early on the morning of Sept. 9, the Red Sox embarked on an organization-wide self reflection of their strengths and weaknesses. That review led to increased confidence in the interim leadership group, consisting of assistant GMs O’Halloran, Eddie Romero and Zack Scott and senior vice president Raquel Ferreira, as well as the confirmation that an outside voice at the helm would be useful.

That voice will belong to Bloom, who rose to become one of the game’s top executives by age 36 without ever being the No. 1 in a baseball operations department. That he was able to do so by working so closely and successfully alongside Rays general manager Erik Neander must have been attractive to the Sox.

“I’m most excited to partner with Chaim because he prioritizes people and relationships above all else,” said team president and CEO Sam Kennedy.

As Bloom begins his tenure as the team’s CBO, it’s clear that one of his top priorities is building a team-first culture within the front office. The idea of running the show appeals to him but not because he’ll be the one taking the credit for Boston’s successes.

“The best part of this opportunity is the chance to lift up your whole staff and to put them in a position to succeed,” he said. “I had a lot of good experiences with that with my former club and that was the most satisfying part of the job to me. By empowering people, and also challenging them productively and asking them good questions, you might be able to make them a little bit better. They’re going to make you better. That’s a big part of what appeals to this type of leadership to me.”

Bloom’s job will be to get the most out of O’Halloran and his other top assistants, assuming they stay in the organization. It’ll be to get the most out of his players and manager Alex Cora, who will be allowed to be himself in his third year as manager.

Asked if he envisioned a scenario in which the front office wrote out the lineup card for Cora, Bloom explained why he didn’t.

“That is not collaborative,” he said. “In a lot of really good organizations, including the one I just came from, there are a lot of conversations and collaboration. Nothing is handed down. Things are talked through, ideas are bounced off and it’s all with the idea of getting better.”

As the Red Sox enter one of their most important winters in recent memory, they’ll benefit from having a front office full of experienced assistants under the helm of a new, creative leader who will rely heavily upon those who know more about the organization than himself. Boston’s betting that mix of old and new will help vault the team back into contention after a disappointing 2019 season.

“The backbone of our department will always be our people -- our staff and our players,” Bloom said. “How we collaborate and how open and honestly we communicate will determine how much we will accomplish.”

Could Boston Red Sox use openers under Chaim Bloom? 'I don't necessarily think it would be anything new to think about that'

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- In his role as the Rays' senior vice president of baseball operations, new Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom helped Tampa Bay introduce the idea of "the opener" to the rest of baseball. As he takes over in Boston, Bloom isn't ruling out the idea of using the unorthodox pitching structure -- in which relievers start games for short stints -- with his new team.

The Red Sox, who have starters Chris Sale, David Price, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez under contract for at least the next two years, have a ton of money invested in their rotation. But injuries to Sale and Price forced them to use openers a few times throughout the last month of the season.

"This is something that, as we talk and work together, we're going to figure out the best way to think about things," Bloom said. "Our last homestand with the Rays, we played the Red Sox and there were a lot of bullpen games and a lot of pitchers being used on both sides. There's a lot of different ways that this team had been doing it. I don't necessarily think it would be anything new to think about that. But it's really just going to come out of our collective discussions."

Concerns about the health of Sale, Price and Eovaldi and the potential departure of starter Rick Porcello will likely force the Red Sox into adding starting depth this winter. Another way the team could supplement its pitching core would be to use relievers in unorthodox roles like they did with Josh Taylor, Bobby Poyner and Travis Lakins in the last month of the season.

"It was always about trying to figure out how to take the strengths of the players on your roster and win as many baseball games as you could," Bloom said. "Nothing more, nothing less. I think in this game now, the more that this game evolves, teams are being open to a larger menu of options of how to do that. There is not necessarily any one right way. It's really about going into it with a mindset of using everybody's strengths whichever way is going to give you the best chance to win."

Boston Red Sox hire Chaim Bloom: Is new 'chief baseball officer' title meaningful?

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Chaim Bloom brought a new title with him to Boston, becoming the first "chief baseball officer" in Red Sox history. But the departure from the team's previous top baseball operations titles -- general manager and president of baseball operations -- isn't all too meaningful.

Bloom will effectively serve as the president of baseball operations, having final decision power as Boston's lead front office member. Brian O'Halloran, who was promoted to general manager, will serve as Bloom's clear No. 2 in the new organizational structure.

"We've tried to keep up with the changing nature of the nature of baseball operations departments," said team president/CEO Sam Kennedy. "That was part of our examination of the landscape. At the end of the day, we valued the collaboration and the brainpower and the institutional knowledge that our team of existing baseball operations folks have here at the Red Sox. The title and Brian's new title seem to be a good fit as we all go forward together."

Bloom will effectively have the same role as Dave Dombrowski (president of baseball operations) and Ben Cherington (GM) with a brand new title. The title of "chief baseball officer" has been used by other teams on at least two occasions before: by the Diamondbacks with Tony La Russa in 2014 and by the Twins with current CBO Derek Falvey.

In Tampa Bay, Bloom -- as senior VP of baseball operations -- was technically the No. 2 behind general manager Erik Neander. Bloom had significant say in the team's daily operations since his last promotion in Nov. 2016.

In Boston, the expectation is that Bloom's partnership with O'Halloran will be similar to how he worked with Neander. This time, however, Bloom is the clear No. 1, effectively taking over Dombrowski's spot.

"The title is the only difference," Kennedy said. "At the end of the day, the baseball operations department has one leader and now it's our chief baseball officer, Chaim Bloom. The structure that we came up with is consistent with some other teams around the league. It seems to have worked very well. Chaim and Erik had this structure in Tampa and it seemed to work well for them."

More moves could be coming to the second layer of Boston's front office, with one of the top assistants who wasn't promoted (Eddie Romero, Zack Scott or Raquel Ferreira) potentially leaving the organization after interviewing for a job elsewhere. The Sox have not yet determined any changes in roles or titles for those below O'Halloran.

"The difference is in the structure, having one top executive and then the structure of how that person wants either a GM or 2-3 assistant GMs," Kennedy said. "We're still working through that with (the interim replacements) and the rest of the department."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Chaim Bloom's Rays pioneered the opener — could it be a regular sight for Red Sox in 2020?

John Tomase

Baseball purists shudder at the mere mention of the "The Opener," the concept of using a reliever for an inning or two before handing the ball off to the rest of the bullpen. It was pioneered by the Tampa Bay Rays during the tenure of new Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, and to great success.

Of the 14 pitchers to make a start for the Rays last year, 11 of them also pitched in relief. All-Star Charlie Morton, defending Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell, and breakout candidate Tyler Glasnow were the only Rays used exclusively as starters.

The results have produced some statistical oddities. Former Red Sox farmhand Jalen Beeks pitched over 100 innings despite making only three starts last year, right-hander Ryan Yarbrough has more wins (27) than starts (20) over the last two seasons, and right-hander Ryan Stanek accounted for only two decisions despite making 27 starts in 2019. But there's no arguing the bottom line, with Tampa cracking 90 wins in each of the last two seasons.

With Bloom taking over in Boston, a natural question is if we should expect to see more openers. He's not going there, yet, though he may not have a choice.

"We said it with the Rays, and I and a number of other people are on record about that," he said. "It was always about just trying to figure out how you could take the strengths of the players on your roster and go win as many baseball games as you could. Nothing more, nothing less. In this game now, the more this game evolves, teams are being open to a larger menu of options of how to do that. But there's not necessarily any one right way. It's really just about going into it with a mindset of using everyone's strengths whichever way is going to give you the best chance to win."

The Red Sox belatedly joined the opener bandwagon last season out of necessity. By September, injuries had shelved David Price and Chris Sale and limited Nathan Eovaldi. The only healthy starters on the roster were Eduardo Rodriguez and Rick Porcello, necessitating September starts from the likes of Jhoulys Chacin, Travis Lakins, and Bobby Poyner.

In a perfect world, Sale, Price, and Eovaldi will each make 30-plus starts in 2020, but that's a big ask, given the various injuries they battled in 2019. Which means we might be looking another season of openers as the Red Sox piece together a rotation.

The concept has merit, especially if your staff is deep enough to pull it off, which Boston's decidedly was not last year. Let a reliever trained to deliver 1-2-3 innings handle the top of the order before yielding to a more traditional starter or long reliever for multiple frames. This increases the likelihood that if the pitcher after the opener turns over the lineup a dreaded third time, he'll be seeing the bottom of the order and not the top.

The approach turned the game on its head — Tampa's Sergio Romo memorably followed 588 straight relief appearances with starts on consecutive days in 2018 — but it also maximized Tampa's chances to win, especially when Snell and Glasnow landed on the IL last season.

The Red Sox could find themselves with more openers in 2020 if the rotation can't stay healthy.

"I don't know yet," Bloom said. "This is something as we talk and work together, we're going to figure out the best way to think about things. Certainly, when we played our last homestand with the Rays, we played the Red Sox and there were a lot of bullpen games and a lot of pitchers being used on both sides. There were a lot of different ways that this team had been doing it. I don't necessarily think it would be anything new to think about that. But it's really just going to come out of our collective discussions."

In Chaim Bloom hire, Red Sox ownership returns to its original vision

Darren Hartwell

Dave Dombrowski helped build one of the greatest teams in major league history, period.

He also represented an aberration of sorts for a Boston Red Sox ownership group that returned to course Monday while announcing the hire of Chaim Bloom as its chief baseball officer.

"I think (Bloom) is closer to the executive they were trying to develop in Ben Cherington, and what they had with Theo (Epstein)," former New York Mets general manager Jim Duquette told NBC Sports Boston.

"This is what I believe the Red Sox had in mind basically when this new ownership took over."

To Duquette's point: Principal owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner have hired four heads of baseball operations since purchasing the team in 2001. Three were Ivy-educated (Epstein and Bloom attended Yale; Cherington attended Amherst College before going on to Harvard Business School) and well shy of 40.

The other was Dombrowski.

Again: The results paid off with Dombrowski. The combined disaster of the 2014 and 2015 campaigns led Henry and Co. to cut bait with Cherington and enter "win now" mode by hiring Dombrowski, who lived up to his billing by gutting the farm system Cherington cultivated to produce a winner in 2018.

But Dombrowski was a mercenary, and with the transaction of a World Series title complete, the Red Sox seemed eager to turn the page Monday.

"I would just say we were extremely desirous of bringing in someone who would augment and add as opposed to just bringing in someone who might have been an autocrat, for instance, a one-man show," Henry said at Monday's press conference.

That's a pretty clear distinction between what the Red Sox had in Dombrowski and what the Red Sox are getting in Bloom, whom Duquette describes as a collaborative leader who's simply "an easy guy to talk to."

Personal traits notwithstanding, the Boston brass also is counting on Bloom to rebuild its barren farm system and attempt to recreate the model of sustainable success that Epstein established almost two decades ago.

"What is the fabric of your organization? What are you trying to build?" Duquette said. "I think that's what the Red Sox are trying to accomplish: win, but also develop and establish a core group."

Bloom is well-suited for that task coming from the Tampa Bay Rays, where he helped build a solid foundation with a (very) limited budget as vice president of baseball operations.

Not that it's an easy task. The 36-year-old has several looming problems to address, most notably whether to trade superstar outfielder Mookie Betts before he becomes an unrestricted free agent after next season and whether to re-sign slugger J.D. Martinez, especially if he opts out of his current contract.

Oh, and he'll face a bit more scrutiny in Boston than he did in Tampa.

"This fan base knows the 25th through the 40th man on the roster. They know what he looks like," Duquette added. "Chaim's dinner reservations? They're going to change for him."

Bloom clearly is what the Red Sox envision in their head of baseball operations, though. So, he should feel pretty comfortable making those reservations.

*** *The Athletic***

Chaim Bloom's to-do list: New Red Sox boss has significant work ahead

Jen McCaffrey

Now that the Red Sox have chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom in place, the real work is about to begin.

The Red Sox are entering one of their more crucial offseasons in recent memory, with hefty decisions to make that will have an impact for years to come.

Some of the foundation for this offseason's changes had already been laid out before Bloom arrived thanks to the group that ran baseball operations on an interim basis over the past month — Raquel Ferreira, Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero and Zack Scott.

"John Henry, Tom Werner and I met with the group of four shortly after Dave (Dombrowski)'s departure and John made it incredibly clear that the four of them were to act as the general manager of the department and make decisions," team president Sam Kennedy said. "We do not want to wait. We don't want to fall behind with the 2020 offseason planning."

Bloom's experience and insights will undoubtedly shape the Red Sox' moves going forward, but his colleagues have likely created a rough draft of an offseason plan for the club.

What might that rough draft look like?

NEEDS

Resolve the Martinez situation

There's not much the Red Sox can do aside from plan for both scenarios. J.D. Martinez and his agent, Scott Boras, have five days following the conclusion of the World Series to give the Red Sox an answer as to whether the designated hitter will opt out of the remainder of his contract. In other words, there will be an

answer sometime over the next week. While the Red Sox have spoken with Boras over the past month, they don't know which way Martinez is leaning. It's likely Martinez has already made his decision to stay or go, but it's also not certain if Boras will inform the Red Sox right away.

If Martinez opts in, he'll be owed \$23.75 million in 2020. Four other Red Sox players are owed at least \$20 million in 2020: David Price (\$32 million), Chris Sale (\$30 million), Xander Bogaerts (\$20 million), and Mookie Betts, who is expected to earn at least \$25 million in arbitration.

If Martinez opts out, the Red Sox will have to find a new designated hitter, and it'll be somewhere between hard and impossible to match Martinez's production after he averaged .317 with a .958 OPS and 40 home runs over the last two seasons. On the flip side, if they can find a cheaper DH, the Red Sox could use that to further sweeten an extension offer to Betts.

Find a fifth starter

Rick Porcello hits free agency, leaving an opening in the rotation. The Red Sox could re-sign Porcello on a shorter, much cheaper deal than his previous four-year, \$82.5 million contract. There are also several free-agent starters on the market. Some, like Gerritt Cole, are surely out of the price range, but there are still intriguing options the Red Sox could pursue that seemingly fall within their budget.

In Tampa Bay, Bloom and his colleagues were adept at pulling off smart trades while keeping their farm system intact, so it's possible the Red Sox solve a handful of their offseason issues via the trade market.

Add to the bullpen

Just as there are needs in the rotation, the Red Sox should add at least one bullpen arm. The trade market could go in any number of directions, depending on what the Red Sox want to give up. If they opt to add to the bullpen via free agency, they could pursue a more traditional closer or a setup man with closing experience.

A new pitching coach

The Red Sox have reportedly already added a new assistant hitting coach in Massachusetts native Peter Fatse.

On Monday, the Boston Globe reported the Red Sox are also close to naming minor-league pitching performance coordinator Dave Bush as their pitching coach.

WANTS

Reduce payroll

Bringing down the payroll has been declared an overall goal by ownership rather than a strict mandate. Hiring Bloom, who helped run a team that made the postseason on a \$60 million budget, could go a long way toward achieving that end, whether it's called a goal or a mandate. At the same time, the Red Sox want to remain competitive, so drastically slashing payroll doesn't seem likely, either. Again, Martinez's decision will be a big factor in which direction the Red Sox proceed with their payroll. A trade of any other key player, like Betts or Jackie Bradley Jr., would also free up salary space — but also add to the to-do list.

Create a Betts plan

The Red Sox have already offered an extension to Betts and he's turned it down. With one year until he hits free agency, it's looking more and more likely Betts wants to test the open market. Betts still could end up back in Boston after hitting free agency. After all, if he wants to set a new mark for free agents and Boston offers the highest bid, wouldn't Betts take it?

Those kinds of massive contracts might not seem to be in Bloom's executive DNA — though, to be fair, he never had the money to offer them before. There's the possibility of trading Betts to free up some payroll, but the return would have to be significant. If Martinez opts out, it's less likely the Red Sox will pursue a Betts trade this winter since replacing Martinez's and Betts' bats while still remaining competitive would a tall task. If Martinez remains in Boston, a Betts trade could be easier to stomach if the return is right.

Bloom does have experience in working relatively big trades, like sending Chris Archer to Pittsburgh in exchange for prospects Tyler Glasnow, Austin Meadows and Shane Baz.

Bloom smartly talked around any specifics regarding Betts and Martinez at his introductory press conference. But he'll soon have to start implementing his plan.

Ranking the 10 greatest Red Sox teams that never won the World Series

Steve Buckley

There was a time, and it wasn't that long ago, when the history of the Red Sox was a scrapbook weighted down with near-misses, what-might-have-beens, classic falls and ... and you get the idea.

But then came 2004, followed by 2007, followed by 2013, followed by 2018. The Red Sox have won more championships this century than any team in baseball, and because of that the new-look Red Sox scrapbook is heavy on the rolling rallies, who-coulda-thunk-its, classic comebacks and ... and you get the idea.

Red Sox fans no longer spend much time wringing their hands over otherwise fine teams that, in the end, didn't deliver the goods. Why should they? Those four 21st century World Series banners hanging at Fenway Park have airbrushed the past, creating a sort of amnesty for teams from yesteryear that were reduced to waiting until next year.

Or to put it another way, does anybody remember that Grady Little couldn't remember the telephone number to the visiting bullpen at Yankee Stadium as Pedro Martinez was melting in Game 7 of the 2003 ALCS?

OK, so people do remember. They just don't take it personally anymore.

Rather than agonize anew over those editions of the Red Sox that broke your heart, let's break out the bubbly and celebrate their would-be greatness. Why not? When you get right down to it, these teams could play.

Here, then, is a rundown of ... well, let's just call them THE 10 GREATEST TEAMS IN RED SOX HISTORY THAT DID NOT WIN THE WORLD SERIES. (If this were a podcast I'd have Peggy Lee singing "Is That All There Is?" in the background.)

1. 1946

104-50, AL pennant, lost World Series to Cardinals in seven games

The last edition of the Red Sox to win 100 games until 2018, these post-war Sox were led by a quartet that would come to be known as The Teammates: Ted Williams, Bobby Doerr, Dom DiMaggio, Johnny Pesky. All four were returning to the bigs after missing time due to military service, with Williams leading the AL in on-base percentage and slugging percentage (among other categories) en route to winning his first MVP Award. Pesky hit .335, Doerr drove in 116 runs, and DiMaggio, known as the Little Professor, hit .316. Veteran first baseman Rudy York, obtained from Detroit over the winter, delivered 119 ribbies. The Sox also had great starting pitching, led by right-handers Boo Ferriss (25-6) and Tex Hughson (20-11). Alas, the Red Sox lost Game 7 at Sportsman's Park on Enos Slaughter's "Mad Dash" from first to home on Harry Walker's hit-and-run single in the eighth. Yes, this is the "Pesky Held the Ball" play, which remained attached to the little shortstop's resume until the 2004 Red Sox settled all family business by winning the World Series in St. Louis.

2. 1949

96-58, second place, AL

Needing only one victory to clinch the pennant when they traveled to Yankee Stadium for a season-ending two-game set, the Sox lost both of them. Instead, it was the Yankees, under first-year manager Casey

Stengel, who won the pennant and then toppled the Brooklyn Dodgers in the Series. Williams submitted one of his finest seasons, hitting .343 with 43 homers and 159 RBI for his second MVP award. Teammate Junior Stephens' 159 RBI tied Williams for the AL lead, and lefty Mel Parnell won a career-high 25 games and posted a 2.77 ERA. Such was their popularity that the '49 Sox drew 1,596,650 fans at Fenway, the most in franchise history until the 1967 Impossible Dreamers came along.

3. 1978

99-64, 2nd in AL East, lost to Yankees in one-game playoff

Many accounts of this season are limited to three talking points: 1) The Sox had a 14-game lead over the fourth-place Yankees as late as July 19; 2) they Yanks moved into a first-place tie by sweeping a four-game September series at Fenway in what came to be known as the Boston Massacre; and 3) Bucky Dent's three-run homer off Mike Torrez in the playoff game made for a long, cold, lonely winter in Boston. But while it was small solace after the season was over, the Sox did win eight straight games to force the playoff game. The '78 Red Sox featured four Hall of Famers in Carl Yastrzemski, Carlton Fisk, Dennis Eckersley and MVP Jim Rice, whose 406 total bases were the most by a player in one season since the Cardinals' Stan Musial in 1948. This was a great Red Sox team. The Yankees were greater.

4. 1986

95-66, first place in AL East, lost World Series to Mets in seven games

Let the record show that Red Sox fans had made their peace with Bill Buckner long before the Sox beat the Cardinals in the 2004 World Series for Boston's first championship in 86 years. What can't be debated, however, is that in the immediate aftermath of the '86 World Series Buckner's Game 6 error at Shea Stadium was seen as yet another sign that something was always going to go wrong, horribly wrong, for this franchise. On the plus side, Roger Clemens submitted one of the greatest seasons in franchise history (24-4, 2.48) to win Cy Young and MVP honors, and Wade Boggs won the third of his five batting titles. Boston's comeback against the Angels in Game 5 of the ALCS was epic, though overshadowed by the Mets' comeback in Game 6 of the World Series.

5. 1975

95-65, first place in AL East, lost World Series to Reds in seven games

From the breakout seasons of rookies Fred Lynn and Jim Rice to the many twists and turns of Cuban sensation Luis Tiant, this was one of the most fun teams in Red Sox history. Fisk's 12th-inning home run off the left-field foul pole to win Game 6 of the World Series remains one of the great moments in the game's history, accented by an awesome television shot of Pudge using body English to will the ball fair as he moved up the first-base line. But manager Darrell Johnson's decision to pinch-hit Cecil Cooper for Jim Willoughby with two out and nobody on in the eighth inning of Game 7, the score tied 3-3, placed rookie Jim Burton on the mound in the ninth. Joe Morgan's broken-bat single to center brought home the go-ahead run and the Sox went down in order in the ninth, Yastrzemski flying to center to end it. But we'll always have the home run by Pudge, even if modern-day Red Sox marketing pinheads felt the need to come up with the awful, clanky-sounding "Fisk Foul Pole." Nobody, nobody, not even legendary play-by-play man Joe Castiglione, calls it that.

6. 1948

96-59, second place in AL, lost to Indians in one-game playoff

Joe McCarthy, who earned his Hall of Fame stripes while managing the Yankees, will forever be second-guessed for his decision to start journeyman Denny Galehouse in the one-game playoff. Everyone assumed the start would go to Parnell (15-8, 3.14), a rookie who'd be pitching on three days rest, not uncommon in those days, or maybe Ellis Kinder (10-7, 3.74) on four days rest. He chose Galehouse, a 36-year-old righthander who was 8-8 with a 4.00 ERA and had only pitched twice since Sept. 11 and not well on either occasion. He was lit up by the Indians and the Sox lost — not just the pennant but a chance to set up a streetcar World Series with the NL champion Boston Braves.

7. 1977

97-64, second place, AL East

This is the greatest team in Red Sox history that nobody ever talks about. Though the Sox went 22-9 in September/October to remain close to the Yankees, they never recovered from a seven-game losing streak in August that cost them their grip on first place. But what a powerhouse: Four players — Yastrzemski, Fisk, Rice, Butch Hobson — drove in 100 runs, and a large, gregarious fellow from Mississippi named George “The Boomer” Scott had 95 ribbies. What the Red Sox did not have was a deep pitching staff — Luis Tiant’s 12 wins were tops among the starters. Closer Bill Campbell won 13 games and registered 31 saves, and rookie Bob Stanley won eight games as a swingman. The highlight of the season took place on June 17, when Rick Burleson, Lynn, Fisk and Scott hit first-inning home runs off the Yanks’ Catfish Hunter. The next afternoon, during a nationally televised game, Billy Martin and Reggie Jackson had to be separated in the third-base dugout after the Yankee manager removed the right fielder — while the Red Sox were at bat — for what he deemed a lack of hustle. The Sox swept the three-game series. The following weekend the two teams met in the Bronx, and the Yankees swept the three-game series.

8. 1967

92-70, AL pennant, lost World Series to Cardinals in seven games

Every Baby Boomer’s favorite team, the Impossible Dream Red Sox overcame 100-to-1 odds to win the club’s first pennant in 21 years. They had the MVP (Yaz), Cy Young Award winner (Jim Lonborg), Manager of the Year (Dick Williams) and Executive of the Year (Dick O’Connell). What they didn’t have was Bob Gibson, who bested Lonborg in Game 7. Timing was everything for the ’67 Sox, as the defending champion Orioles were in the first of two subpar seasons before winning three straight pennants and the Tigers’ Denny McLain was a year away from becoming the last player to win 30 games in a season.

9. 2003

95-67, second place in AL East, lost ALCS to Yankees in seven games

Manager Grady Little’s decision to leave a tiring Pedro Martinez on the mound in Game 7 at Yankee Stadium remains one of the biggest gaffes in team history, with or without the cleansing that came in 2004. And yet so much of what happened in ’03 set the stage for what was to come — it inspired GM Theo Epstein to go out and get starter Curt Schilling and closer Keith Foulke and to bring in Terry Francona as manager. And it was with the 2003 Red Sox that a largely unknown Minnesota Twins castoff who’d been signed during the offseason — his name was David Ortiz — introduced himself to Boston by hitting 31 home runs.

10. 1904 (Boston Americans)

95-59, AL pennant

The only reason they make this list is because the defending World Series champions never had a chance to make it two in a row. John McGraw, manager of the New York Giants, and the team’s owner, John Brush, refused to have their National League pennant winners play the AL champs. It was because of this slight that arrangements were made to make the “World’s Series” an annual event.

Honorable Mention — 1948 Boston Braves (91-62, NL pennant, lost World Series to Cleveland Indians in six games) — OK, so this is supposed to be a Red Sox story but let it never be forgotten that the ’48 Braves were the last Boston baseball team to make it to the World Series until the ’67 Sox came along and dreamed their Impossible Dream.