

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, October 31, 2019

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox hire Dave Bush as new pitching coach

Steve Hewitt & Jason Mastrodonato

Dave Bush has been hired as the Red Sox' new pitching coach, a source confirmed to the Herald on Wednesday night.

Multiple reports Wednesday indicated that the Sox made Bush their pitching coach. The Boston Globe first reported earlier this week that Bush had become a frontrunner for the position.

Bush will replace Dana LeVangie, who served as the Red Sox' pitching coach the last two seasons before being reassigned as a pro scout for the organization earlier this month.

Bush, who turns 40 in November, joined the Red Sox as a pitching development analyst in 2016. He was promoted as the organization's minor league pitching coordinator in 2019.

A former MLB pitcher who played nine seasons, including stints with the Blue Jays, Brewers and Rangers, Bush has a heavy background in analytics and data-driven information. He has worked closely with pitching staffs and coaches in the Sox' minor-league system, responsible for helping them process his research and data to make them better.

Bush has completely embraced the analytics movement in baseball, and that's likely a big reason the Red Sox wanted to give him a bigger role. In a 2017 interview with the Herald, Bush explained his stance with analytics in that he simply wants them to be used to aid a pitcher's performance, not define it.

"The game hasn't moved off the field," Bush said in 2017. "It's just that we have more information at our fingertips and we can make more precise adjustments.

"A lot of people fear that players will become robots. I don't want that to happen. The goal with analytics and pitch data is not to script development or script what happens in games. It's to try to help the player do what he can do even better.

"What I try to remind people is that, you're still pitching, you're still the one in charge. We're just trying to help."

Bush is the second known addition to Alex Cora's staff this offseason after Peter Fatse was hired as an assistant hitting coach. It's possible the Red Sox hire an assistant pitching coach to Bush after Brian Bannister was reassigned as the team's vice president of pitching development earlier this month.

*** *MassLive.com***

Red Sox free agents: Rick Porcello, Brock Holt, Mitch Moreland among players now on open market

Chris Cotillo

The conclusion of the World Series means the beginning of MLB free agency, and the Red Sox have a handful of players who will officially hit the open market Thursday. After a five-day quiet period during which Boston has exclusive negotiating rights, the players will be able to sign with any team.

Here's a look at the 10 (11 if J.D. Martinez opts out) players who ended the season with the Red Sox and are now free agents. Of the 10 players, only Martinez is a candidate to receive a qualifying offer (if he opts out).

CONTRACTS EXPIRED:

UTIL Brock Holt (.270, 23 HR, 203 RBI in 7 seasons)

Holt hits free agency after seven solid seasons with the Red Sox. He has expressed a desire to re-sign and is a fit for the roster but could get more money to go elsewhere. A multi-year deal is likely.

RHP Rick Porcello (73-55, 4.43 ERA in 5 seasons)

Porcello came to the end of his four-year, \$82.5 million deal with the worst season of his career. He has expressed interest in coming back but would have to do so on a discount. The 2016 A.L. Cy Young winner is a fan favorite who may resume his career on a prove-it deal elsewhere. He's not a candidate for a qualifying offer.

1B Mitch Moreland (.247, 56 HR, 205 RBI in 3 seasons)

Moreland was a serviceable first base option for three years but no longer is a fit for the roster. The expectation is he'll sign elsewhere though the Sox do value his clubhouse presence.

1B Steve Pearce (.240, 8 HR, 35 RBI in 2 seasons)

Pearce barely played in 2019 after being crowned World Series MVP last October. At 36, he looks likely to retire.

RHP Andrew Cashner (2-5, 6.20 ERA in 1 season)

Cashner was a disaster after coming over in a July trade. He's unlikely to come back.

RHP Jhoulys Chacin (0-2, 7.36 ERA in 1 season)

Chacin will likely get a minor-league deal from some team in free agency. That theoretically could be the Red Sox, who saw some flashes in September. But probably not.

CAN OPT OUT:

DH J.D. Martinez (.317, 79 HR, 235 RBI in 2 seasons)

Martinez must decide within five days if he wants to opt out of his deal or return for \$23.75 million in 2020. His impending decision is one of the most important of the entire winter for the Sox.

RELEASED:

RHP Steven Wright (24-16, 3.86 ERA in 7 seasons)

Wright missed most of the last two years due to injuries and suspensions and was released earlier in the month. He also recently underwent Tommy John surgery.

ELECTED FREE AGENCY (declined Triple-A assignment):

OF Gorkys Hernandez (.143, 0 HR, 2 RBI in 1 season)

A depth outfielder, Hernandez played some in September but did nothing to impress.

INF Chris Owings (.156, 1 HR, 5 RBI in 1 season)

Owings tore up Triple-A but failed to hit major league pitching.

RHP Josh Smith (0-3, 5.81 ERA in 1 season)

Smith pitched way more than the Sox would have liked in 2019.

J.D. Martinez's opt-out decision looms for Boston Red Sox as World Series ends

Chris Cotillo

J.D. Martinez is officially on the clock.

The conclusion of the World Series means Martinez now has five days to let the Red Sox know if he's opting out of his contract and hitting free agency or returning in 2020. The deadline for his decision is Monday.

Martinez signed a five-year, \$110 million contract before last season that included opt-out clauses after each of its final three seasons (2019, 2020 and 2021). His decision now is pretty straightforward: He can either a) opt into a \$23.75 million salary for next season with another opt-out possibility at the end of the year or b) forego the remaining three years and \$62.5 million on his deal to test free agency.

Here's how Martinez and the Red Sox will approach both of those scenarios:

IF HE OPTS IN:

If Martinez decides to opt in, he'll remain on the roster and be owed \$23.75 million in 2020. That effectively becomes a one-year deal due to the next opt-out opportunity, which comes at the end of 2020.

Assuming the Red Sox don't try to trade Martinez, he'll remain in the middle of the lineup as a designated hitter/outfielder and one of the best hitters in baseball. But his decision to stay would have major ramifications on the rest of the roster.

Due to complicated collective bargaining rules, Martinez's \$23.75 million salary counts as \$16 million toward the competitive balance tax and would take up a significant portion (7.7%) of the \$208 million threshold the Red Sox are trying to stay under this winter. It would bring the Sox up to nearly \$128 million in guaranteed contracts and keep their estimated CBT payroll around \$220 million for 2020 -- more than \$10 million over their goal -- when taking into account guaranteed contracts, arbitration estimates, pre-arbitration settlements and other expenses.

For a team that has needs (back of the rotation, bullpen, infield), getting under the \$208 million mark will be tough without trading reigning A.L. MVP Mookie Betts and his \$27.7 million projected salary. Team president Sam Kennedy said as much in September, telling reporters there was a way to keep both Martinez and Betts on the roster but cautioning it "will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place."

Bottom line? Martinez opting in drastically reduces the chances Betts remains with the Red Sox in 2020. New chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom would have to get creative to avoid that scenario, either by trading Martinez, moving big salaries elsewhere or reworking the back end of the roster in an unforeseen way.

IF HE OPTS OUT:

If Martinez opts out, he'll immediately hit free agency. The Red Sox will owe him a \$2.5 million buyout, which is a very nice parting gift.

The Red Sox would then issue Martinez the qualifying offer -- a one-year, \$17.8 million offer that ensures draft pick compensation if he signs elsewhere -- before 5 p.m. Monday. Martinez would obviously decline that (he would have just turned down \$23.75 million), allowing the Sox to recoup a fourth-round pick in next year's draft if he signs with another team.

The Sox would be hit with a \$6 million on the CBT threshold for Martinez if he opts out, saving themselves \$10 million against the \$208 million number. That would likely be enough to allow them to hold onto Betts, if they so choose.

Martinez would hit free agency as early as Thursday and be able to sign anywhere. The White Sox, Yankees and Rangers are among the clubs believed to be fits for the 32-year-old and the Red Sox could look to re-sign him on a restructured deal as well.

Martinez's departure would obviously leave the Red Sox with a hole at DH.

SO WHAT WILL HE DO?

With most end-of-season opt-outs, people usually have a sense of how the player is leaning. This is not one of those cases.

Martinez said at the All-Star break that he'd love to spend the rest of his career in Boston but refused to tip his hand when asked about the decision after the conclusion of the regular season. What it will ultimately come down to is if his agent, Scott Boras, believes teams will offer more than the three years and \$62.5 million remaining on the deal with the Red Sox.

That remains to be seen. At this stage of his career, Martinez is viewed almost exclusively as a designated hitter and will have a limited market. Certain teams, however, could pay up for one of the elite hitters in all of baseball.

Whatever his decision ends up being, the world will know by the end of Monday. That will set the wheels in motion for what will surely be a busy offseason for the Red Sox.

Boston Red Sox hire Dave Bush as pitching coach; 40-year-old has been in organization since 2016

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox are hiring Dave Bush as their new pitching coach, a source confirmed Wednesday night. Alex Speier of the Boston Globe and Barstool's Jared Carrabis both reported the hire as likely.

Bush will replace Dana LeVangie, who was reassigned to a pro scouting role earlier this month. The Red Sox are also likely to hire an assistant pitching coach, a source said, though the identify of that coach is not yet known.

Bush, who turns 40 in November, pitched in parts of nine major league seasons before joining the Red Sox as a pitching development analyst in 2016. He was promoted to the role of minor league pitching performance coordinator in January and, according to a release, used "objective information and technology to lead pitch development and optimization, pitch usage and strategy, and mechanics" in collaboration with the team's research department.

Bush worked with pitchers throughout Boston's minor league system last season while also spending some time with the major league team. His familiarity with pitchers from all levels of the organization likely made him attractive to the Sox, who hoped to build a more cohesive culture by installing organization-wide pitching philosophies as they reshaped the department in the wake of the reassignments of LeVangie and assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister.

Rick Porcello, Dana LeVangie

Why'd the Red Sox make a change at pitching coach?

The Sox reassigned pitching coach Dana LeVangie on Tuesday.

The Sox cast a wide net in their search for LeVangie's replacement, interviewing five candidates, including ex-Reds manager Bryan Price. Boston likely considered college pitching coaches in its search and could add someone from outside the organization for the assistant job.

Bush is the second addition to manager Alex Cora's coaching staff this fall, joining new assistant hitting coach Peter Fatse. Bench coach Ron Roenicke, first base coach Tom Goodwin, third base coach Carlos Febles, hitting coach Tim Hyers, bullpen coach Craig Bjornson and major league coach Ramon Vazquez are all expected to return.

*** [WEEI.com](http://www.WEEI.com)**

Odds makers optimistic about Red Sox chances in 2020

Rob Bradford

An uncertain top of the rotation. The potential of not having J.D. Martinez. A contract year for Mookie Betts. A perceived lack of organizational depth. All concerns that most would surface when trying to get a read on the Red Sox' chances in 2020.

Evidently, some odds makers aren't all that worried.

According to Betonline.ag the Red Sox have the fourth-best chance of all big-league teams to win the World Series, sitting with 12-to-1 odds to win next year's World Series.

The Astros are the favorites at 5-to-1, with the Nationals and Yankees each coming in at 8-to-1. The Red Sox are even with the Dodgers -- a team many identified as the best in baseball for much of the 2019 season.

The Brewers and Mets are directly behind Boston and Los Angeles at 14-to-1. The Orioles are the biggest long-shots at 250-to-1.

Here is the complete list:

Odds to win the 2020 World Series

Houston Astros	5/1
New York Yankees	8/1
Washington Nationals	8/1
Boston Red Sox	12/1
Los Angeles Dodgers	12/1
Milwaukee Brewers	14/1
New York Mets	14/1
Atlanta Braves	16/1
Cleveland Indians	16/1
Minnesota Twins	16/1
Chicago Cubs	20/1
Tampa Bay Rays	20/1
Colorado Rockies	25/1
Philadelphia Phillies	25/1
St Louis Cardinals	25/1
Cincinnati Reds	33/1

Los Angeles Angels	33/1
Oakland Athletics	33/1
San Francisco Giants	33/1
San Diego Padres	40/1
Arizona Diamondbacks	50/1
Chicago White Sox	50/1
Kansas City Royals	50/1
Seattle Mariners	50/1
Texas Rangers	50/1
Miami Marlins	100/1
Pittsburgh Pirates	100/1
Toronto Blue Jays	100/1
Detroit Tigers	150/1
Baltimore Orioles	250/1

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

J.D. Martinez is officially on the clock, and here's where he could end up if he opts out

John Tomase

Let the J.D. Martinez countdown begin.

With the World Series officially over, the Red Sox DH now has five days to decide if he'll opt out of the final three years of his contract and become a free agent.

Because the Red Sox have no plans at the moment to offer him anything more than the \$62.5 million remaining on his deal, he's expected to opt-out and see what the market might bear.

The question he and agent Scott Boras must ask, though, is what kind of interest he'll realistically generate. Luckily for them, we're here to help!

Thanks to Martinez's unique set of skills (and weaknesses), narrowing the field is easier than you might think.

For one, let's just throw out the entire National League. Martinez can play the outfield in a pinch, but it's hard to imagine anyone committing three or four years of big money for him to play there every day at age 32, with some back troubles in 2019.

That leaves the American League. He's as good a DH as the game has seen since David Ortiz, and even in an era when teams seem disinclined to devote major resources to the position, Martinez's impact on an offense means he'll have suitors. It just probably won't be as many as he deserves.

Playing the process-of-elimination game in the AL doesn't leave too many teams standing.

First off, there's money. Martinez's contractual demands -- three years and \$75 million feels like the floor -- should take half of the league out of contention.

That means the Rays, Indians, Tigers, Royals, and A's. I'd add the Orioles to the list, because what's the point? And if the Red Sox are intent on cutting costs to drop below \$208 million, then we should put them here, too, as ludicrous as that sounds.

Next up: teams with DHs. The Twins just picked up Nelson Cruz's option, so they're out. Same goes for the Angels (Shohei Otani) and Astros (Yordan Alvarez). Unless the Rangers can find a taker for Shin-Soo Choo's \$21 million salary, then they lack an opening, too.

I'd argue that the Yankees should be on this list, thanks to uncertainty over Giancarlo Stanton's ability to stay healthy, as well as no shortage of internal candidates to share at-bats: Gary Sanchez, Mike Tauchman, etc. . . . The Yankees so desperately need starting pitching, it's hard to imagine they'd make Martinez a priority, but the Red Sox are nonetheless uneasy that New York could end up being stealth bidders to create a monster offense.

So who's left? The Blue Jays, White Sox, and Mariners.

The Blue Jays intend to spend this offseason, but after trading ace Marcus Stroman to the Mets, they're desperate for pitching. They can't be entirely discounted, though, because their young core of children of former big leaguers -- Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette, Cavan Biggio -- could use not just a mentor, but an alpha in the middle of the lineup to let them develop without carrying the load.

Martinez would be that guy, but the Jays won't win anything without more pitching. That's where their resources will likely be directed.

The Mariners have signed massive free-agent deals before, be it Adrian Beltre or Robinson Cano. They also reportedly tried to acquire Martinez from the Tigers in 2016, so there's a history of interest. But it's hard to see how Martinez, who turned 32 in August, fits the long-term plans of a team that just won 68 games and isn't close to contention.

That leaves one team, and it's the most intriguing of the bunch: the White Sox.

Like the Jays, Chicago boasts a promising young core built around AL batting champ Tim Anderson, former Red Sox farmhand Yoan Moncada, and slugging outfielder Eloy Jimenez. Martinez could fill the mentor/alpha role described above.

Like the Mariners, the White Sox have shown an occasional willingness to spend in free agency. Just last year, they made a legitimate run at Manny Machado before he signed a 10-year, \$300 million deal with the Padres.

The White Sox are close, thanks to one of baseball's best farm systems. Martinez's arrival would dovetail nicely with the integration of top prospects like outfielder Luis Robert and second baseman (and Dustin Pedroia clone) Nick Madrigal.

Like the Yankees, Chicago should probably be focusing its resources on pitching, but that's going to be a competitive market. The Martinez Sweepstakes, by contrast, could end up being a much quieter affair, which makes the White Sox, at least from this standpoint, the best fit to land him in free agency.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Chaim Bloom already has plenty on his plate

Sean McAdam

As you might expect for someone recently hired to run a multi-billion dollar business, Chaim Bloom has his work cut out for him.

He's got to learn about our traffic patterns, the fact that the winters here aren't quite as mild as they are in St. Petersburg, and a host of other items.

And then there's the work in restoring some glory to the Red Sox.

We're here to help with that. Here are five tasks for him to tackle.

1. See the J.D. Martinez saga to its conclusion.

By early next week, Martinez must inform the Red Sox whether he's opting out of his current contract. Despite a less than robust free-agent market the last two offseasons, all signs point to an exit.

Should that happen, he's as good as gone. The Red Sox have made no overtures toward Martinez toward sweetening the deal and convincing him to stay. They could have offered to extend his deal by a year, but haven't done so. So if they haven't done it by now, why would they start next week, effectively bidding against themselves.

All signs point to the Sox giving him a qualifying offer, which, of course, Martinez will reject, giving the Sox an extra pick in next June's draft.

So where does that leave the Sox at DH next year? Do the Sox show interest in Edwin Encarnacion if the Yankees don't exercise his \$20 million option? Or does Bloom believe in spreading out the DH at-bats?

2. Finish putting together the coaching staff.

Officially, the Red Sox have three vacancies — pitching coach, assistant pitching coach and assistant hitting coach. Unofficially, they're down to just one: assistant pitching coach. Though not publicly announced, Dave Bush is on board as pitching coach and Pete Fatse is the new assistant hitting coach.

The Sox are said to be open to finding their assistant pitching coach in unorthodox places — including the college ranks, as one example.

With the spate of managerial openings — four jobs are still not filled — there figures to be plenty of movement and competition in the coaching ranks, so it would behoove the Sox to get their staff in place. Also, it's not out of the realm of possibility that the club could lose a coach from the existing staff to a newly-hired manager elsewhere.

3. Determine the health of the starting rotation.

Some of this, obviously, won't be confirmed until spring training. But Bloom needs to know, to the extent that he can, what's to be expected from Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi in 2020.

Sale is set to (finally) have his follow-up visit with Dr. James Andrews to determine the strength and condition of his elbow. Price had a relatively minor procedure performed on his left wrist in the final week of the season, but also had an IL stint with forearm soreness earlier in the year. And Eovaldi underwent surgery for third time in the last three seasons.

For better or worse, the current Red Sox roster is built around veteran starting pitchers. But as last year demonstrated, those pitchers can't contribute when they're not healthy. The more clarity Bloom can achieve, the easier it is for him to move forward on the rest of his offseason roster-building.

4. Assess the Mookie Betts Situation.

Betts isn't eligible for free agency until a year from now, but the clock is already ticking.

Bloom should meet with Betts and his agent and make the Red Sox' last, best offer now. No posturing, no procrastinating. The Red Sox keep saying they want Betts to finish his career in a Red Sox uniform, so put everyone to work on the best offer the Sox could present.

If Betts indicates that isn't enough — or signals that he doesn't want to remain in Boston regardless of what's offered — it's on to Step Two: trade him now or wait until the deadline next July 31.

There's a case to be made for the latter. The return, believe or not, won't be much different, if at all. Rental deals are made with a focus on the postseason. The reason the Dodgers wanted Manny Machado in 2018 had nothing to do with April, May, June and July and everything to do with October.

The same will be the case with Betts. The Sox can get four months out of Betts in 2020 and see if someone — say, the Dodgers, who have won seven straight division titles but zero World Series — gets desperate next July.

5. Begin putting feelers out on high-salaried players.

The Sox need to cut payroll and even losing Martinez alone isn't going to get them under the \$208 million threshold. There's more pruning to do.

Assuming ownership is willing, start by kicking around the idea of trading either Price or Eovaldi while agreeing to take back some of their remaining money. If the Sox assumed half of Price's remaining \$96 million, making his deal worth three years and \$48 million, there would be some interested suitors. And the payroll would still be saving approximately \$16 million in 2020.

*** *The Athletic***

Now the offseason begins: A guidepost for Red Sox decisions this winter

Chad Jennings

Baseball's postseason moves a lot slower when your team's not in it, but the World Series ended last night, and now it's time for the Red Sox get to work. Owner John Henry has called this a "challenging" offseason even before hiring Chaim Bloom as the new chief baseball officer. Mookie Betts is entering his final year of team control, J.D. Martinez could opt out of his contract, and the team would like to trim payroll below the luxury tax threshold.

There's a lot to do. For the past month, the Red Sox had little choice but to sit back and watch. For the next several weeks, they'll have plenty to keep them busy.

Here are some of the important dates to know.

One day after World Series: Eligible players file for free agency

This is mostly bookkeeping. We already know Rick Porcello, Brock Holt, Mitch Moreland, Steve Pearce, Andrew Cashner and Jhoulys Chacín will become free agents. Minor league call-ups Josh Smith, Gorkys Hernández and Chris Owings have already elected free agency after being outrighted from the roster.

Teams have five days of exclusive negotiating rights with their own free agents, but that might not mean much for the Red Sox. Porcello and Holt are the strongest candidates to re-sign, but it makes sense for both to explore the open market. Porcello is a buy-low candidate for the open fifth starter spot. Holt is a wildly popular utility man coming off a career year, but he might have priced himself out of the Red Sox plans, especially given their desire to cut payroll.

Five days after World Series: Deadline for contract options

By that date, Martinez has to decide whether to opt out of the final three years of his contract. It seems roughly 50-50 whether he'll stay or go, but the consensus opinion seems to be he'll go. Two sides to consider:

1. Martinez is due to make \$23.75 million next season, which seems about right for arguably the game's best designated hitter. Plus, he would have the right to opt out again after each of the next two seasons, a perk that doesn't come with most contracts.
2. Martinez is represented by notoriously aggressive agent Scott Boras, has expressed a willingness to move on, seems to bristle at the designated hitter label and generally projects a sense of confidence that his offensive skill set should be in high demand.

There's a case to be made for staying or going, but the bet is he'll go.

Also five days after World Series: Deadline to make qualifying offers

If Martinez does opt out, the Red Sox will most certainly extend a qualifying offer, which will just as certainly be rejected. That means Martinez will hit the open market attached to draft pick compensation, which has significantly diminished the value of some free agents in the past (another factor to consider when deciding whether to opt out).

Beyond Martinez, the Red Sox don't have any particularly strong qualifying offer candidates. This year's qualifying offer is just under \$18 million for one year, which is surely too much for Holt and Moreland. There is some case to be made for giving Porcello a qualifying offer — it would be roughly a \$3 million pay cut from last season, and the Red Sox would get a bounce-back candidate without a long-term commitment — but Porcello's career-worst season likely does not warrant such a high salary.

Six days after World Series: Free agency begins

The exclusive negotiating window closes and teams are free to engage all free agents. Gerrit Cole and Anthony Rendon are this year's headliners, with Madison Bumgarner, Aroldis Chapman and potentially Martinez and Stephen Strasburg among the other huge names. The Red Sox desire to trim payroll might keep them out of that highest market.

Instead, the Red Sox could go shopping for a bargain fifth starter, a viable late-inning reliever, a low-cost slugger for first base and, perhaps, someone to compete for regular at-bats at second. Exactly how deep into the bargain bin the Red Sox have to go could depend on whether Martinez opts out, whether they're able to trade away some higher salaries and whether ownership decides to splurge beyond the luxury tax threshold.

Nov. 3: Gold Glove winners announced

Notable for the Red Sox because of Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Andrew Benintendi and Christian Vázquez, each of whom was named a finalist at their respective positions. Betts has won three straight Gold Gloves, Bradley won his first last season and Benintendi and Vazquez are in the mix for their first. Four days later, the Silver Slugger winners will be announced. Betts and Xander Bogaerts should be among the Red Sox best candidates; Rafael Devers would be as well if he weren't playing the same position as Alex Bregman.

Nov. 6-8: General Managers' meetings

Typically, the GM Meetings are quiet and don't generate much news, especially compared to the sometimes frantic Winter Meetings. For the Red Sox, though, the GM meetings stand out as the opening event of Bloom's tenure.

At his first press conference, Bloom could dodge specifics by explaining he was not yet up to speed on the details of the team. By the time he lands in Arizona for the GM Meetings, though, he will have had two weeks to get caught up. It's probably too early to expect much action, but it might be an opportunity for a bit of clarity about the direction of the roster with a new guy at the helm.

Nov. 11-14: BBWAA awards week

The Red Sox really don't have a strong candidate for any of the major awards. Michael Chavis looked like a Rookie of the Year candidate for a while, but he fell off the map. Bogaerts, Betts and Devers are down-ballot MVP candidates, but they won't really compete with Bregman and Mike Trout for the award. It will be interesting, though, to see how high those three finish.

Nov. 20: Rule 5 protection

Last winter, the Red Sox protected five minor-leaguers from the Rule 5 draft, and four of them (Chavis, Josh Taylor, Darwinson Hernández and Travis Lakins) played in the big leagues. A similar-sized group could be protected this winter, with the potential for a similar influx of talent next season. There are two particularly strong candidates:

1. Corner infielder Bobby Dalbec, who hit 27 home runs this season and could be in the mix for the first base job in the near future.
2. Middle infielder C.J. Chatham, a sound shortstop who's routinely hit for average and this year added versatility at second base.

Outfielder Marcus Wilson, who was acquired in the Blake Swihart trade, has also made a strong case for protection after a terrific second half. Lower-level relievers Yoan Aybar, Jhonathan Diaz and Eduard Bazarzo could also be candidates if the Red Sox believe they've advanced enough to compete for big-league jobs. There's also Triple-A starter Kyle Hart to consider. He's never generated much prospect buzz, but he's routinely put up good numbers.

Notably, none of the team's top pitching prospects (Tanner Houck, Jay Groome, Bryan Mata and Thad Ward) need Rule 5 protection. Neither do Triston Casas and Jarren Duran, their 2018 draft standouts.

Dec. 2: Non-tender deadline

The Red Sox already have released knuckleballer Steven Wright, giving them a head start on their non-tender decisions. Typically, arbitration-eligible players are the ones most at risk of being non-tendered, and the Red Sox have nine arbitration-eligible players.

Seven mostly certainly will receive contract offers: Betts, Bradley, Benintendi, Eduardo Rodríguez, Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes and Marco Hernández. Bradley is expected to earn roughly \$11 million in his final year of arbitration, but a source has said non-tendering him is not a strong consideration. Even at that price, he's considered valuable on a one-year deal.

Two non-tender candidates:

1. Sandy León — The all-glove backup catcher could get close to \$3 million in arbitration. It's not a huge raise from what he made this season, but León has been far below league average at the plate and the Red Sox could easily find a cheaper defensive option to backup Vázquez.
2. Heath Hembree — Routinely rated above replacement level, Hembree has been a solid middle reliever for four years, and with a projected \$1.6 million price tag, he won't be overly expensive. But the Red Sox now have a relatively long list of bullpen options, and they made a mistake by tendering Tyler Thornburg a \$1.75 million contract last season. They could non-tender Hembree just to save some money.

The guess here is León is non-tendered, but Hembree is brought back.

Dec. 9-12: Winter Meetings

There's no rule that says teams have to make trades and sign free agents during the Winter Meetings, but the timing (late enough for negotiations to have played out) and the setting (every major decision-maker in one place) makes the Winter Meetings a breeding ground for deals. They should have a better sense of which players can be traded, how much they can bring in return and what it will cost to fill various holes through free agency. For a team expecting an active winter, the Winter Meetings could be massive.

Dec. 12: Rule 5 draft

On the last day of the Winter Meetings is the annual Rule 5 draft, which always seems to generate more attention than impact. Teams often leave a few defensively vulnerable sluggers, light-hitting utility infielders and all-glove catchers available. The Red Sox could be in the market for all of the above. It doesn't mean they'll actually find someone they like, but it could be chance to get a low-risk look at a role player in spring training.