

## ***The Boston Red Sox Monday, October 7, 2019***

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

#### **J.D. Martinez's decision on staying dictates Red Sox' path in offseason**

Peter Abraham

J.D. Martinez likes to order up a hearty cheeseburger before the Red Sox go out for batting practice and happily digs in, often while sitting at his locker.

I asked him one day if he had a favorite burger joint among the many that have sprung up in and around Boston the last few years.

Martinez laughed and said he never goes anywhere other than from his home to Fenway Park and back.

"I'm boring," he said.

It's true. Martinez spends more time at the ballpark than most players, arriving early to study scouting reports on opposing pitchers and take several rounds of batting practice.

It's a routine that made him one of the best hitters in baseball the last six seasons.

It also helps explain why Martinez won't be swayed by emotion if agent Scott Boras advises him to opt out of his contract. The Red Sox were his employers, not a place where he made a home.

Martinez has until five days after the World Series to decide whether to stay with the Sox or become a free agent. He has three seasons and \$62.5 million left on his deal with the Sox.

Ultimately it's a \$60 million decision, as Martinez would get a \$2.5 million bonus if he opts out. He also has an opt-out clause following the 2020 season if he stays.

Martinez has played for four teams in his nine seasons in the majors, three in the last three years. Once the Houston Astros released him in 2014, Martinez understood that loyalty in baseball was a fleeting concept.

He'll do what's right for his bottom line, as well he should. When the Red Sox signed Martinez before the 2018 season, they held up the deal for a week to negotiate the right to void his deal in case an old foot injury came back. They had the power then and he has it now.

Martinez's decision will determine how the Red Sox proceed with the rest of their offseason. He is due \$23.75 million in 2020 and if that money comes off the books, the Sox should be able to retain Mookie Betts for at least one more season.

If Martinez stays, there would seem to be little chance the Sox also could keep Betts and meet ownership's goal of getting under the \$208 million luxury-tax threshold.

Team president Sam Kennedy said last week that it's possible for the Sox to keep both Betts and Martinez. But that scenario would likely mean finding a taker for David Price's contract or tearing up other parts of the roster.

So Red Sox fans are left with an unusual dilemma: Do you actually root for a player who had a .985 OPS and 79 home runs over the last two seasons to skip town?

Boras and Martinez also have a tough call. Walking away from \$60 million only makes sense if you're absolutely convinced you can get more somewhere else.

Boras is a firm believer that a player can only determine his true worth in free agency. But coming up with a team that would give Martinez more than \$60 million isn't easy, especially in a market that has been cold toward aging position players the last two seasons.

Plus the Red Sox are likely to saddle Martinez with a qualifying offer, which adds the loss of a draft pick to his cost.

Cross off the 15 National League teams. Martinez started only 37 games in the outfield this season and looked like was playing on skates when he did go out there.

Martinez had some rough moments defensively, including a misplayed fly ball at Seattle on March 31 that led to five unearned runs scoring.

He graded out to minus-seven defensive runs saved in only 211 innings.

Arizona was comfortable with Martinez in the outfield for the 10 weeks he was there in 2017. But he's 32 now, making a long-term deal more of a risk.

Martinez can play outfield on occasion but he's a designated hitter at this stage of his career. He missed eight games this season because of four incidents of back spasms. Two of those were attributed to having played the outfield.

The American League has some options, but not as many as you think.

The Red Sox would be out. The Yankees have Giancarlo Stanton signed through 2027. Forget them.

Rebuilding teams like the Orioles, Royals, and Tigers aren't at a point where an expensive DH makes sense. The Rays spread their DH starts among 11 players this season.

The Indians have Franmil Reyes and Shohei Ohtani is in place with the Angels. The Twins hold a \$12 million option on Nelson Cruz and are likely to pick that up after his outstanding season. Oakland invested in Khris Davis in April. Houston is all set with its offense.

That leaves the Blue Jays, Mariners, Rangers, and White Sox. All four of those teams can afford Martinez and need him.

Martinez also would be a good influence in the clubhouse with those teams and in particular their young players. His devotion to hitting had a significant impact on the Red Sox.

Having Martinez on the roster is like adding a bilingual coach you can be sure the players will listen to. Boras can sell that to an owner if Martinez's statistics somehow aren't enough.

Texas has one more year (and \$21 million) tied up in Shin-Soo Choo. But adding Martinez as they move into a new ballpark would create a splash.

The Blue Jays, Mariners, and White Sox need something to become more relevant. Martinez adds instant credibility.

A Toronto lineup with Bo Bichette, Cavan Biggio, Lourdes Gurriel Jr., Vladimir Guerrero Jr., and Martinez is compelling.

The same would be true in Chicago with Tim Anderson, Eloy Jimenez, and Yoan Moncada. Assuming Jose Abreu returns as a free agent, that's a strong group.

The White Sox had a league-worst .641 OPS from the DH spot this season.

Designated hitters had a .199 batting average for Seattle and were particularly dreadful once Edwin Encarnacion was traded to the Yankees.

It's not a perfect list, but Martinez only needs one team to give him \$10 million or so more than he would have received from the Red Sox.

The White Sox, who have to do something to get out from under the shadow of the Cubs, are a good bet.

So say goodbye to Martinez. It was a good two seasons.

And J.D.? Tasty Burger is a minute away from the back door of the clubhouse. Try it next time you're in town.

### **Red Sox willing to take their time replacing Dave Dombrowski**

Peter Abraham

This coming week will mark a month since the Red Sox fired Dave Dombrowski as president of baseball operations, and it could well be another month before a replacement is in place.

It's evident the Sox are willing to take the time to make what they hope is the right choice and that they're comfortable with the interim leadership group that was put in place on Sept. 9.

All we know at this stage is that the Sox will hire from outside the organization and that they want a new leader with experience running a team.

Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman isn't under contract for 2020. There is no evidence that suggests he would leave Los Angeles given how he has helped set up the team for long-term success. But he has yet to agree to a new contract.

Team president Stan Kasten expects it to happen. But until Friedman signs a new deal, the Red Sox have to at least investigate the possibilities. He would be a perfect choice.

Rays senior vice president of baseball operations Chaim (pronounced HIGH-em) Bloom fits the Sox' criteria. He's a rung below Erik Neander in Tampa Bay's structure but has been influential in putting the roster together.

The Rays have won only six fewer regular-season games than the Red Sox over the last two years spending despite roughly \$333 million less on payroll.

Friedman left the Rays for the Dodgers and instilled financial discipline while remaining successful. Bloom could do the same for the Sox. The Dodgers combine enviable financial resources with creativity, something the Red Sox need to get back to.

"Look, we're fortunate. We have really smart people that can evaluate talent," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "We've kind of prided ourselves, this organization, for many years, on maybe finding the players that have fallen through the cracks a little bit.

"We've got a handful of them on the roster right now that are main pieces to what we're trying to accomplish. Ton of credit goes to the front office for recognizing that.

"It's easy to turn away on a guy, a young player that doesn't come out of the gate on fire but does some special things under the surface. And I think we've got a bunch of those guys who do that."

Bloom is from Philadelphia and has in-laws in the Boston area. That doesn't hurt.

Another executive sure to get a long look is Mets vice president and assistant general manager Allard Bard.

Baird was with the Red Sox from 2006-18 before going to the Mets. He was a key adviser to Theo Epstein and was GM of the Royals from 2000-06.

Baird has the experience John Henry and Tom Werner want and is familiar with the Sox. Friends say he would be interested in returning to Boston.

The same is true for Diamondbacks senior vice president and assistant GM Jared Porter.

Porter, a Minnesota native who was raised in Massachusetts, was with the Sox from 2004-15, primarily in scouting capacities. He joined the Cubs for parts of two seasons and has been with the Diamondbacks for three years.

Under GM Mike Hazen, Porter took a lead role in building up that organization. The Diamondbacks also got good talent back in their trades of star players Paul Goldschmidt and Zack Greinke.

As the Sox contemplate trading Mookie Betts or somehow finding a taker for David Price, Porter would arrive with a blueprint on how best to do that and get something worthwhile in return.

It's also possible the Sox could hire a president of baseball operations and a GM, which would complicate the process.

"We're studying different structures," team president Sam Kennedy said. "We could go in any number of directions . . . part of our job in ownership is to examine what fits best with us."

Related: [Sorting out the mixed signals coming from Fenway Park](#)

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Porcello entering a new world

Rick Porcello, who turns 31 in December, will enter free agency hoping that prospective employers will focus more at the entirety of his career and not his 5.52 earned run average this season.

Porcello has averaged 185 innings over 11 seasons and has been on the disabled list once in his career. That has value. Take away this season and his career ERA is 4.26.

For now, he waits to see what options are out there.

"This is all new to me," Porcello said on the final day of the season. "I'm not sure what to do."

Porcello purchased a home in Naples, Fla., a few years back to have a place to live in the offseason that was close to JetBlue Park. But he can't work out there anymore and instead plans to stay in New Jersey and work with a trainer there.

The one advantage Porcello could have will be the lack of reliable starters on the market. Outside of Gerrit Cole, there's Stephen Strasburg (if he opts out of his contract) followed by Madison Bumgarner, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Zack Wheeler, Jake Odorizzi, and Cole Hamels.

That the Red Sox almost certainly won't make Porcello a qualifying offer will help his marketability.

"No regrets," Porcello said. "I loved competing in Boston and for this team. We'll see what happens."

Some other observations on the Red Sox:

- Outfielder Jarren Duran hit .310 with an .842 OPS in his first eight games in the Arizona Fall League.

The 23-year-old, a seventh-round pick out of Long Beach State in 2018, ended last season in Double A Portland. He struggled there, posting a .634 OPS in 82 games, after tearing up the lower levels.

If Duran shows he can hit advanced pitching, he could give the Red Sox an outfield option at some point in 2020. That would make it easier to deal Andrew Benintendi, Mookie Betts or Jackie Bradley Jr. this winter.

- The Sox finished with 901 runs, fourth in the majors. Eight teams scored 845 or more runs. The Sox were the only ones not to make the postseason.
- Led by Rafael Devers (54) and Xander Bogaerts (52), the Sox led the majors with 345 doubles.
- Drew Pomeranz pitched two perfect innings for Milwaukee in its wild-card loss against Washington. He also batted in the seventh inning and struck out.

Pomeranz left the mound with a 3-1 lead. The Nationals then scored three in the eighth when Juan Soto cleared the bases off Josh Hader.

Pomeranz was on the World Series roster for the Red Sox last fall, replacing Brandon Workman, but never got in a game.

So unless Dodgers reliever Joe Kelly somehow does it, Pomeranz will be the only member of the 2018 Red Sox to get an at-bat in the postseason this year. Nobody could have expected that.

Pomeranz had a 1.88 ERA and 0.83 WHIP in 28 relief appearances this season and should do well in free agency. For his career, opposing hitters have a .596 OPS when Pomeranz is a reliever. It's .749 when he starts.

- The News-Press in Fort Myers reported that City of Palms Park could soon be torn down.

The Sox used the park for spring training from 1993-2011, playing games at the 8,000-seat stadium.

Lee County built the Sox a new complex and City of Palms has gone largely unused since, outside of occasional small college or amateur games. Upkeep of the stadium costs \$500,000 a year with revenues of only \$32,000.

Fort Myers wants to use the location as part of a redevelopment project to bring new housing and businesses to the area.

There was once talk of a third team joining the Red Sox and Twins in Fort Myers. But other Florida cities were willing to build new facilities.

- Former Red Sox coach Arnie Beyeler was let go by the Orioles. He was their first base coach and outfielder instructor this season.

ETC.

Job security slim for managers

Terry Francona, who has managed the Indians for seven years, has the longest run in the majors at his current job. The Angels, Cubs, Giants, Mets, Padres, Royals, and Pirates are all looking for new managers. That number could climb if the Phillies fire Gabe Kapler.

Only 11 teams have had their current manager in place for three or more seasons.

Craig Counsell, who became the Brewers' manager during the 2015 season, is the longest-tenured manager in the National League.

Kevin Cash has been with the Rays for five years. The other four managers in the American League East have a combined six seasons.

"Managers have no chance these days," said a former manager, who didn't want his name to be used. "The GMs have the ears of the owners and blame the managers for what goes wrong. It's a revolving door.

"Analytics guys project a certain number of wins and when the team finishes below that, the manager pays. But who says the projection was right?"

Joe Maddon is a one-man tornado of transactions. When he opted out of his deal with the Rays in 2014, the Cubs fired Rick Renteria after only one year on the job to hire Maddon.

When Maddon and the Cubs parted ways after this season, the Angels fired Brad Ausmus after only one season, and the expectation is they will hire Maddon.

Even managers of playoff teams know there's little security.

"I tell people, you're never guaranteed tomorrow in this business," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "You're never guaranteed in life. That's why you live for today. You worry about today because you can't control what's going to happen tomorrow.

"I don't sit and think about all that. I know all those guys [who were fired] and they're really good baseball men. But we all know there are 30 of these jobs in the world. And you'd better cherish each and every day of it because you're never guaranteed tomorrow in this business.

"It doesn't matter how good you've done or what you've done; you're always based on today. I do think how blessed I am to have this opportunity, but I don't feel like by any stretch that I can just sit there and lay down and this thing's going to continue to happen."

Follow the money

Bryce Harper, Manny Machado, Patrick Corbin, Nathan Eovaldi, Yusei Kikuchi, A.J. Pollock, Andrew McCutchen, and Craig Kimbrel signed free agent deals worth more than \$40 million. Only Corbin and Pollock made the playoffs.

The upper middle class of free agency proved much more fruitful for teams. Sixteen players signed for between \$20 million-\$39 million, and 10 of those players made the postseason.

The Yankees were particularly smart, landing Zack Britton, J.A. Happ, Adam Ottavino, and DJ LeMahieu for relatively modest deals and getting a combined 11.8 WAR.

The Braves also made a smart move with their one-year, \$23 million deal for third baseman Josh Donaldson after he played 52 games in 2018.

Donaldson had a .900 OPS over 155 games, drove in 94 runs, had 16 defensive runs saved, and provided leadership to a young team.

"He's meant the world to this club," Snitker said. "He solidified our team. He lengthened our lineup. He strengthened our club. And quite frankly, he's one of the best third basemen I've ever been around."

Donaldson, who turns 34 in December, will go back into free agency with a chance to land a multiyear deal. The Braves would love to have him back.

#### Extra bases

For all its ingenuity in fielding contending teams, Oakland has not won a playoff series since 2006, when it swept the Twins in the Division Series then got swept by the Tigers in the ALCS. The A's have lost nine consecutive elimination games, a record. "It's frustrating. It's very sudden," manager Bob Melvin said after losing the wild-card game against the Rays. "Baseball, usually you have a series to kind of have a tomorrow and come back and win a game. And we've been really good this year about having a tough game and coming back and responding. There's no responding in a game like this. It's a little out of the norm for baseball. Both teams battled to get to this point and knew it would be one and out. They just played better than we did." . . . Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge on the mentality of the modern hitter: "I feel like there are so many shifts and so many different things going on in the game, why would I want to put the ball on the ground for the most part? Ninety-nine percent of the time it's on the ground, it's an out. I just feel like hitters have changed their mind-set. I'm going to try to do some damage. I'm going to get my A swing off as much as I can rather than take a B or C swing and put it on the ground and it's an out. I've got three strikes. Why not take three chances to get one out of the park? That kind of changed the game." . . . Nationals third baseman Anthony Rendon was asked about facing the Dodgers in the Division Series after losing against them in the same round in 2016. "That's in the past. It happens, it happens," he said. "You think about your girlfriend that broke up with you like 20 years ago? Probably not." . . . Braves lefthander Dallas Keuchel on the postseason: "When I got my first taste in '15 of the playoffs, it was like getting that most favorite toy on Christmas, like your most favorite toy ever. And once you play in the postseason, you don't want to miss out on it anymore." . . . The Orioles and former vice president of baseball operations Brady Anderson have parted ways. It was a rapid fall for Anderson, who gained considerable power within the organization in 2017-18. He had a role in player development, free agent negotiations, and even as an occasional hitting coach for players on the major league roster thanks to his connections with ownership. But that ended when the Orioles gave full control to general manager Mike Elias . . . Here's wishing a happy 60th birthday to Dennis "Oil Can" Boyd, one of the great characters in Red Sox history. He was 60-56 with a 4.15 ERA from 1982-89. His nickname went back to high school, drinking moonshine from old oil cans. The Can last pitched in 1995 for the independent Brockton Rox and still pops up from time to time at Fenway Park. Darren Oliver, who turns 49 Sunday, played for nine teams over 20 years in the majors, including 14 games for the Sox in 2002. Let's not forget Joel Hanrahan, who is 38. He was traded to the Sox in 2012, coming over from the Pirates with an infielder few took notice of. It was Brock Holt.

The Giants will move the bullpens at Oracle Park to center field and right-center field next season, which will change the dimensions of the outfield. The bullpens had been on the sidelines beyond the dugouts since the park opened in 2000.

#### **No word from Red Sox on Dana LeVangie**

Alex Speier

The Red Sox made one staffing decision early in the week in parting ways with assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett while committing to the return of hitting coach Tim Hyers. To this point, however, there's been no word about the status of members of the staff who work with the team's pitchers, including pitching coach Dana LeVangie.

Because such staffing decisions have not been announced, the team's internal discussions extend beyond the question of whether to bring back LeVangie as the pitching coach. After a season in which the Sox had a 4.70 ERA (19th in the majors), the team's baseball operations department — led by the four-person transition team of assistant GMs Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott and senior VP Raquel Ferreira, in concert with manager Alex Cora — is having a more broad-ranging conversation about the team's pitching infrastructure.

In many ways, the team is trying to determine the ideal structure to support a pitching staff, at a time when the volume of available statistical and biomechanical data is exploding. The initial conversation, then, is believed to center on efforts to identify the right coaching structure to support the team's pitchers before determining how or whether current members of the coaching staff — including LeVangie — fit into it.

LeVangie is one of the longest-tenured members of the organization, having spent 29 years with the Sox as a player, bullpen catcher, scout, and coach. He was the bullpen coach from 2013-17 before Cora promoted him to pitching coach for the 2018 season, with LeVangie receiving raves from members of the Sox pitching staff and Cora for his role in helping the team win a World Series.

### **After a lifetime in baseball, this 90-year-old Red Sox scout is hanging it up**

Alex Speier

Early on Thursday morning, Joe McDonald's disposition was as bright as the Florida weather.

"It's a beautiful morning down here in Florida," McDonald said from his Lakeland home. "The sun is shining, and I'm ready to go to the ballpark."

Yet for a 90-year-old Red Sox pro scout who has attended thousands of games over parts of eight decades — from working the turnstiles at Ebbets Field to sharing World Series titles with the Mets (1969) and Cardinals (1982) along with four with the Red Sox — this day was different.

McDonald was preparing to head to an instructional league game between young Tigers and Blue Jays prospects at Joker Marchant Stadium, a 10-minute drive from the home he shares with his wife of 38 years, Virginia. As he prepared to head to the park, he had mixed feelings.

"It's the last game I'm going to be attending," said McDonald. "I'm going to miss the game after 69-70 years of going to the ballpark."

"I can still go, and I will go to an occasional game. But it won't be a challenge. Every time I go to the game as a scout, I get the feeling that, 'Hey, I hope I see something today that will enlighten me and my organization and make a contribution.'

"Without that, it's going to be a little strange. More than a little."

It may be even stranger to those for whom McDonald represents an institution.

"He's a hero of mine," said Red Sox vice president of pro scouting Gus Quattlebaum. "I just think the fact that someone who is that accomplished and willing to grind it out in the Florida State League with tough conditions tells you how committed he is to the game."

"He's a living encyclopedia of stories of the game, from a very early time in the game's history through what's going on in the game today," said Red Sox coordinator of major league operations Alex Gimenez.

"He's a baseball icon," said Tigers director of international operations Tom Moore. "He has truly spent a lifetime in baseball, ever since he was a teenager all the way up through now, today."

### **Early lessons at Ebbets**

McDonald's baseball education started in the 1940s, when he worked at Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers, assisting ticket takers. He made 50 cents a game — 49 after handing over a penny for what a supervisor said were Social Security payments.

"A guy was going south with a lot of pennies," said McDonald. "I'm not an idiot. I was born and raised in Brooklyn. I knew the ropes. Pennies add up."

The true payoff was not in the daily take but in the opportunity to watch the games. At a time when there were no regular TV broadcasts of baseball games, McDonald had a rare chance to study the game. He watched closely, for instance, in the 1940s, when future Hall of Famer Joe “Ducky” Medwick went to the field for early batting practice, accompanied by a pitcher and an outfielder. Medwick had the outfielder camp out in left field and hit 15-20 balls at him, then repeat the cycle with the outfielder moving to center and right. This, McDonald realized as a teenager, was bat control.

Though his jobs with the Dodgers were largely menial, he got to meet and learn by watching players such as Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, Carl Furillo, and Duke Snider. He also closely observed visiting players and tried to pick up on the details of how stars from around the league attacked their craft.

“I didn’t know where I was going, but I was intrigued by their performance, and I still to this day utilize what I learned about playing our wonderful game,” said McDonald. “It was such an incredible lesson.”

It was one that he readily shared over his decades in the game, much to the amazement of colleagues, who would find themselves not just engaged in sophisticated talent evaluation with McDonald but also traveling in a time machine of sorts.

“We’d be in the organization-wide meetings,” recalled Diamondbacks assistant general manager Jared Porter, formerly the Red Sox pro scouting director. “Joe is using comps in front of the whole group like Warren Spahn and Stan Musial. We’d have to take a step back and be, like, ‘Wow.’”

“He’d take legendary, older players and actually be comping guys to them — not just saying it. I always found that fascinating. It was crazy.”

#### Procurer of information

McDonald’s front-office career started as a statistician with the expansion Mets in 1962, and he progressed as a head of scouting and player development while eventually serving as a GM with the Mets (1974-78), Cardinals (1982-85), and Tigers (1991-92).

He followed that 30-year executive career with nearly 30 more as a scouting fixture, including a run with the Red Sox that started in 2004. In 2012, the Professional Baseball Scouts Foundation recognized him with a Legends of Scouting Award.

His stories are not merely those of players on the field but also first-hand experiences of the personalities who shaped the game.

Did you hear about the day he hung out with Ted Williams in his Boston apartment? The occasions when he served as a driver for Ty Cobb? The bet McDonald once made with Eddie Mathews that he’d one day have to release Willie Mays from the Mets? (Mathews didn’t think McDonald would have the guts to do it. He was wrong.) The time he had Tom Seaver — in an era when weightlifting was considered a sin — detail his complete offseason training regimen with weights to share with other pitchers? (McDonald still keeps the typed routine, and will offer a copy to young pitchers from other teams whom he gets to know in the stands — if he likes the pitcher.)

“No one has better baseball stories than Joe McDonald,” said Quattlebaum. “You can bring up anyone and Joe will have a story for you.”

Those stories had more of a purpose than merely animating the game’s history. McDonald became, in Quattlebaum’s words, a “silent assassin,” a wolf in sheep’s clothing whose tales unlock information from players, coaches, scouts, and executives of other teams that informed his evaluations.

“This drove Dave Dombrowski crazy when he was with Detroit — Joe would be right in the middle of the clubhouse with the coaches getting info because everyone was so comfortable with him,” said

Quattlebaum. “He knew every manager. They’d see how passionate he is about it. Players would warm up to him, talk to him in the stands. He got a lot of info for us.”

Said Gimenez, “One time he called me and he was trying to work with something in Excel. This is the type of work, when you’re an assistant to the department, it’s the kind of work I can take care of on my own and take it off his plate.

“He insisted on not having me do it but on him learning. He wanted to learn how to use the program. Same thing with writing up reports. Anytime there was something I could easily do for him, he insisted on learning how to do it.

“He’s somebody who at the time was probably 86, 87 years old. He was like, ‘No, I don’t care. I’m going to learn this new thing, even if I only have to use it three more times in my career, I’m going to learn how to do it.’ ”

Standing ovation

That determination to learn Excel was part of a larger commitment to excel, and part of the reason McDonald is an icon among his peers. He was not content that he had cracked a code decades ago; instead, convinced that the codes were always changing, he embraced the new challenge that greeted him every day at the park.

Others noted that he treated his last game Thursday with the same professionalism that typified his decades in the game. (McDonald excused himself from a phone call roughly four hours before first pitch, noting he had to get to the field to watch batting practice and early fielding drills.) Still, in a largely empty ballpark, his colleagues felt the need to recognize a beloved figure.

On behalf of Quattlebaum and the Red Sox, Moore delivered an envelope to McDonald at the start of the game. The scout opened it to remove his prize: A pink slip. The last day.

As McDonald left the park, staffers (everyone at the park in Lakeland knew McDonald) and scouts stood to applaud.

“I’ve had a charmed life, to say the least,” said McDonald. “So many good things have happened. I’m so fortunate.”

### **What’s the contract status of every Red Sox player entering the offseason?**

Peter Abraham

As the Yankees and Rays represent the American League East in the postseason, the defending World Series champion Red Sox are left making plans for next season and searching for a new head of baseball operations.

Here’s a look at the state of the Red Sox roster headed into what should be an eventful offseason:

#### **UNDER CONTRACT**

These players are under guaranteed contract for at least one more season:

SS Xander Bogaerts — The 27-year-old starts a six-year, \$120 million extension next season. The Sox made some major contract mistakes in the last 11 months, but not this one.

RHP Nathan Eovaldi — He has three years and \$51 million left. Not bad for an oft-injured pitcher who’s 44-54 with a 4.30 ERA in 160 career starts.

2B Dustin Pedroia — There are two years and \$25 million left on his deal and every dime will count against the luxury tax threshold unless he retires and forfeits the money. There's little chance that will happen. Pedroia has appeared in nine games over the last two seasons and is unlikely to play again.

LHP David Price — Price has three seasons and \$96 million remaining. He has averaged only 119⅓ innings the last three seasons, albeit with a solid 3.75 ERA.

LHP Chris Sale — He starts a five-year, \$145 million deal next season. That Sale missed the last seven weeks of the season with a sore elbow makes that contract a huge concern.

C Christian Vazquez — He has two years and \$10.45 million remaining, with the Sox holding a \$7 million option for 2022.

#### UNDER CONTRACT WITH AN OPT-OUT

OF Rusney Castillo — He has \$13.5 million coming next season unless he opts out. You can bet he won't. Thanks to a since-closed loophole, Castillo's salary does not count against the luxury tax as he logs time in Triple A. But the Sox are still paying him.

DH-OF J.D. Martinez — The three-time All-Star has three years and \$62.5 million left on his contract but can opt out five days after the World Series. Every indication is he will.

#### ARBITRATION ELIGIBLE

These players are under team control but must be offered a contract by Dec. 2 or they become free agents. If necessary, their 2020 salary would be determined by arbitration:

RHP Matt Barnes — He's been a workhorse for four seasons (264 appearances, 262⅓ innings) and should land a \$2.5 million contract.

OF Andrew Benintendi — His first year of arbitration should result in a \$3.5 million salary.

OF Mookie Betts — A .917 OPS over the last four seasons will help land Betts close to \$30 million. But another team could pay it if the Sox elect to trade their best player.

OF Jackie Bradley Jr. — His salary will likely climb to \$10 million and the Sox could trade their center fielder to improve the rotation and trim payroll.

RHP Heath Hembree — He's been a lot better than you think (3.63 ERA over six seasons) and still inexpensive.

INF Marco Hernandez — Their next utilityman? Hernandez has played only 122 major league games, but all his injury-list time makes him arbitration eligible.

C Sandy Leon — His playing time plunged this season and he's due a raise on his \$2.47 million salary. The Sox can find a cheaper alternative and could cut him loose.

LHP Eduardo Rodriguez — He'll climb to approximately \$8 million after pitching a career-best 203⅓ innings and winning 19 games.

RHP Brandon Workman — His breakout season will result in a healthy raise from the \$1.15 million he made this year.

RHP Steven Wright — The knuckleballer has given the Sox only 84 innings over the last three seasons because of injuries and has been suspended for domestic violence and PED use. He's likely to be cut loose.

## 0-3 YEARS OF SERVICE TIME

These players are under team control and not yet arbitration eligible. They are guaranteed at least the major league minimum unless released:

RHP Colten Brewer — The only newcomer to the 40-man roster when the season started, Brewer wasn't as good as the Sox boasted he would be. But he was good enough to merit another chance.

RHP Ryan Brasier — After out-of-nowhere success in 2018, Brasier fell off dramatically. But his velocity is still there.

C Juan Centeno — He's a candidate to be dropped if the Sox add another catcher.

INF Michael Chavis — Lots of power, too many strikeouts, not sure what position he should play. That's a fairly typical player these days.

3B Rafael Devers — Huge breakout season (.311/.361/.555, 90 extra-base hits, 115 RBIs) makes him a good candidate for an extension.

LHP Darwinzon Hernandez — The 22-year-old should play a prominent role in the bullpen next season.

OF Gorkys Hernandez — The veteran was dreadful in September and is likely to be cut loose.

LHP Brian Johnson — He took a step back after a successful '18. But his versatility is worth a roster spot.

RHP Trevor Kelley — The former 36th-round pick made it to the majors against long odds and was hit hard. His sidearm offerings did not play in the majors.

RHP Travis Lakins — He made his major league debut on April 23 and handled his numerous call-ups well.

UTIL Tzu-Wei Lin — Injuries derailed his season, but his defensive versatility remains valuable.

LHP Bobby Poyner — A lights-out September (7 $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, one hit, nine strikeouts) should get him more chances.

INF Chris Owings — A .180 batting average in 461 major league at-bats the last two seasons suggests he won't be on the roster much longer.

RHP Denyi Reyes — The 22-year-old was the only player on the 40-man roster not to get called up in September.

RHP Mike Shawaryn — He was rushed to the majors and it showed. He needs time but is already 25.

RHP Josh Smith — The 32-year-old journeyman struggled in 18 appearances. He's a prime candidate to be released.

LHP Josh Taylor — That the Sox got a lefty who throws 95 in return for Deven Marrero was quite a steal. Taylor has a bright future.

1B-OF Sam Travis — Sox missed their chance to trade him two years ago. He has a .288 OBP in 111 major league games.

RHP Hector Velazquez — The Mexican League product, so effective in 2018, was almost a non-factor.

RHP Marcus Walden — The effective and inexpensive middle reliever should be part of the mix in '20.

RHP Ryan Weber — The Sox were his fourth team in five seasons. He'll probably be looking for a fifth after posting a 5.09 ERA.

#### FREE AGENTS

These players will be free to sign with any team, including the Red Sox, after the World Series:

RHP Andrew Cashner — He was a bust as a starter after being obtained from Baltimore, but his fastball played up as a reliever. The Sox are unlikely to want him back.

RHP Jhoulys Chacin — He was Milwaukee's Opening Day starter and ended up with a 6.01 ERA. Chacin will be fortunate to get a major league contract.

UTIL Brock Holt — Other teams could see Holt being more valuable than the Sox will in free agency. But he has close ties to Boston.

1B Mitch Moreland — For \$18.5 million over three seasons, the Sox got a solid .782 OPS and 4.1 WAR from Moreland. But he's 34 and injuries have been an issue. The Sox can go younger and cheaper at first base.

1B-DH Steve Pearce — It was only one year and \$6.25 million, but the Sox should have been more prudent about bringing back Pearce. Injuries limited him to 29 games and retirement looms.

RHP Pick Porcello — His five years with the Sox worked out well. A lower-cost reunion should not be out of the question.

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

#### **2019 Red Sox report card: Grades match disappointing season**

Jason Mastrodonato

When a \$240-million team wins 84 games, there aren't going to be a lot of good grades.

Take out your pencils for the final Red Sox report card of the season:

Dave Dombrowski, F

There was no pitching depth, the top three starters got hurt (and the Sox knew about their injury risks ahead of time), there was no positional depth and the manager was forced to use fringe big leaguers like Chris Owings and Brian Johnson way more than any contending team should. Signing Chris Sale to a long-term extension could end up being a franchise-sinking move. Xander Bogaerts is locked up, which is the only good move Dombrowski had all year. The credit for that goes to Bogaerts (for taking a team-friendly deal) and Raquel Ferreira (for finalizing it).

Alex Cora, C

Why isn't Cora getting an F too? See above. It's not the manager's fault that he was short on right-handed bats, or that the bullpen lost its two most potent arms and didn't replace either one. Cora can take plenty of blame for the starting pitcher fiasco, for overusing Matt Barnes early in the year and for starting the season with Andrew Benintendi in the leadoff spot. On the flip side, Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, Eduardo Rodriguez and Christian Vazquez all had career years under his watch. Always stubborn, Cora isn't going to change going into 2020. But he will need to do better at getting more out of his star pitchers and keeping the team hungry for 162 games.

#### INFIELDERS

Christian Vazquez, A

His previous career high in home runs was five but he hit 23 of them this year while batting .276 with an OPS near .800. His defense often took a back seat and for a while he struggled blocking pitches in the dirt, but still allowed only 36 stolen bases all year, fourth-least among qualified catchers.

Sandy Leon, C

He finished with an OPS around .550, still under his career .615 mark, and caught only 21 percent of attempted base stealers. The Sox love his calming presence behind the plate, but had nothing to show for it this time. Making \$2.5 million in arbitration in 2019, Leon is a candidate to be non-tendered and the Sox could look to find a more productive bat behind the plate while getting Vazquez more time at other positions.

Mitch Moreland, C

How can Moreland get a worse grade this year than he did last year after posting a higher OPS and hitting more home runs? Well, he only played in 91 games. Eight of his 19 homers were in the first month of the season and five were in September, when the Sox were no longer playing meaningful games. He hit .182 with two outs and runners in scoring position. He's just too inconsistent and injury prone at this point in his career. The Sox would be wise to look elsewhere at first base entering 2020.

Michael Chavis, B

Chavis gets a B because he almost single-handedly carried the Red Sox in the first two months and did so while playing a position (second base) that he never played in the minors. Chavis was surprisingly nimble at the position, albeit while making some noticeable mistakes that showed his experience level. And while his bat cooled off after the strong debut and injuries shortened his season, it's clear that Chavis has what it takes to hang around as a productive big leaguer.

Brock Holt, A

In his final season under contract with the Red Sox, Holt got himself into trouble in April when he tried playing through a scratched cornea, suffered when he was playing with his son. The Sox missed him badly in the early months, but he returned with renewed focus, hitting .313 with an .804 OPS the rest of the way. He continues to be as good as anybody on defense at second base. And as the Sox look to the future with no clear starter at the position, they'll have to consider Holt, the team's Roberto Clemente Award nominee for his efforts in the community, on a short-term deal to plug the gap.

Xander Bogaerts, A+

You can't have a much better season than the one Bogaerts submitted in 2019. He put it all together in a complete year in which he hit .309 with a .384 on-base percentage while slugging 52 doubles and 33 homers. He scored 110 runs, drove in 117 and played in 155 games, rarely getting a day off during a time in baseball when players have never received more rest.

Rafael Devers, A

It started shaky, with an error on Opening Day and eight total in his first 27 games, but Devers quickly found his rhythm at third base and made just 14 errors the rest of the way. Meanwhile, he was becoming the most feared left-handed hitter in the American League. He finished with a .311 average, 54 doubles, 32 homers and a league-leading 359 total bases. The 22-year-old played in 156 games and, by doing it all before turning 23, had arguably the best season by an American League hitter under 23 since Alex Rodriguez in 1996. Where can he improve? Devers ran the bases wildly and without caution, running into a team-leading eight outs.

## OUTFIELDERS

Andrew Benintendi, C

It's hard not to be disappointed. With a sweet swing often compared to Ken Griffey Jr. when he was first entering the league, Benintendi had the mold of a five-tool player who could take over the game on a daily basis. Four years into his career, he's yet to put it all together. His defense looked sloppy in left field and

his bat didn't do enough to make up the difference. He hit 40 doubles but just 13 homers with a .266 average and struck out 140 times. The Red Sox will likely be too focused on shedding salary to consider trading the cost-effective Benintendi, who will be arbitration eligible for the first time and is due a nice raise in 2020, but they should take a good look at moving him if they can find a talented young pitcher in return.

Jackie Bradley Jr., C

The story of the most inconsistent baseball player in Boston continued in 2019, as Bradley hit .315 in June, but under .200 in three of the six months, and under .250 in the other two. He somewhat quietly finished the year with 21 home runs, but did so with a .225 average while striking out 155 times. Still a force in center field, Bradley is entering his final year of team control and is due a raise from his \$8.5 million salary in 2019. If the Sox don't find a great trade for one of their other outfielders, they could be forced to move Bradley, who turns 30 in April and is represented by Scott Boras.

Mookie Betts, A-

Only two numbers went up from 2018 to 2019: walks and runs. One year after winning the American League MVP award in large part due to his aggressive nature at the plate, Betts became a more patient hitter in 2019. And while he scored a league-high 135 runs, which he says is the primary job of a leadoff hitter, Betts saw his home runs drop from 32 to 29, his average from .346 to .295 and his OPS from 1.078 to .915. He'll still likely win another Gold Glove in right fielder and finish in the top-five in MVP voting.

J.D. Martinez, A-

The designated hitter saw a similar drop in his home run totals, which fell from 43 to 36 and his average from .330 to .304. While MLB saw the most 30-homer players in history (58), not everyone was loving the new baseballs. Of the 27 players who hit 30 homers in 2018, only eight of them had more home runs in 2019.

Incomplete: Eduardo Nunez, Steve Pearce, Marco Hernandez, Sam Travis, Blake Swihart, Goryks Hernandez, Tzu-Wei Lin, Dustin Pedroia and Juan Centeno.

## PITCHERS

Chris Sale, D

There are only two reasons keeping Sale from getting a failing grade: one, he doesn't need Tommy John surgery and should recover from a platelet-rich plasma injection in time for a normal spring training, and two, he led the team with 218 strikeouts in just 25 starts. But Sale will be most remembered for being the single biggest reason the 2019 Red Sox were a disappointment. They went just 10-15 in his starts. His 4.40 ERA was almost a full run higher than ever before in his career. His velocity was a concern all year and he's locked up to a contract that will pay him nearly \$30 million a year for the next five seasons.

David Price, C-

Price gets a bit more credit for holding the Sox afloat through the first six weeks. He took a 2.70 ERA into mid-June, but elbow concerns and a cyst on his wrist, an injury often related to carpal tunnel, ended his season abruptly. After posting a 3.19 ERA with the Rays, Price has a 3.84 ERA in four seasons in Boston.

Eduardo Rodriguez, A-

If only Rodriguez could've finished strong, the Sox would've had another 20-game winner on their hands. Still, it was an impressive season from the 26-year-old, who said from the beginning his only goal was to pitch 200 innings and make 33 starts. He did both of those while becoming the Sox' most reliable pitcher in the second half. Two bad starts in the end ruined his once-sparkling ERA, which finished at 3.81.

Rick Porcello, D

Even in the worst season of his career, Porcello won 14 games and made 32 starts for a thin Red Sox team that needed every one of them. It took six months for the Sox to get Porcello back on track, and now they must wonder if they saw enough in the final few starts to make the soon-to-be free agent a small-money one-year offer.

Nathan Eovaldi, F

The organization can take some of the blame for this one. It was Dombrowski who decided to rush Eovaldi back from elbow surgery and biceps tendinitis, asking him to return as a closer just before the trade deadline (for leverage, perhaps?). It looked clear Eovaldi wasn't ready from the beginning. Cora roped him back and forth between short and long relief, then put him in the rotation on three days rest. Nothing worked, and Eovaldi will need every day of this offseason to rediscover his playoff form.

Brandon Workman, A+

We can get hung up over the 45 walks and wonder if Workman's success is sustainable (will players learn how to lay off his curveball and force him to throw fastballs for strikes?). Or we can admire a season that ended with a 1.88 ERA and 104 strikeouts while Workman became the fifth pitcher in 20 years, and first since Andrew Miller, to record double-digit wins (10) and saves (16). The Sox have found their closer.

Matt Barnes, B

Barnes started the year hotter than any reliever in the majors, striking out nearly half the batters he faced in the opening month as the Red Sox used him against the heart of the order whenever they had a lead. But Barnes couldn't sustain the workload, something Cora regrets asking out of him, and the season fell flat. He still finished with a 3.78 ERA and 110 strikeouts in 64- $\frac{1}{3}$  innings.

Marcus Walden and Josh Taylor, A

What pleasant surprises on a team that badly needed some. Short on depth in relief, the Sox found Walden throwing a wipeout slider with a mid-90s heater early in the year and watched him carry the bullpen for a good month and a half until he finally tired out. Taylor came up at the end of May and took over, finishing with a 3.04 ERA.

Incomplete: Heath Hembree, Ryan Weber, Tyler Thornburg, Josh Smith, Josh Taylor, Brian Johnson, Mike Shawaryn, Travis Lakins, Steven Wright, Darwinzon Hernandez, Bobby Poyner, Erasmo Ramirez and Trevor Kelly.

### **Red Sox executive Raquel Ferreira: 'Every day you feel the challenges'**

Jason Mastrodonato

Red Sox senior vice president Raquel Ferreira, who became the highest ranking woman in baseball when she was promoted following Dave Dombrowski's departure in August, has three pieces of advice to young women who want to follow in her footsteps.

"Don't do it," she said last week. "No, just kidding. I always say three things."

Before taking her advice, consider her remarkable credentials.

A 1992 graduate of the University of Rhode Island with a bachelor's in communications, Ferreira was hired by the Sox in 1999 as an administrative assistant, but quickly worked her way up.

By 2002 she was already the team's director of minor league administration. And by 2008 she was the director of all minor league operations.

In 2015, Ferreira became a vice president on the masthead, and in 2016 she was promoted to the head of major league and minor league operations.

Now, she's one of the four people in the room when the Red Sox make their most important decisions.

"Be yourself," Ferreira said. "Don't pretend to be somebody you're not because this game will expose you very quickly. Don't come in saying you know how to operate a radar gun if you don't, or you know how to write a scouting report."

“I always tell people to be accountable because everybody makes mistakes. That makes you human. Owning up to them earns you respect, whether you’re male or female.

“And the third one is I always say is dress for the job you want, not the job you have. My parents always taught me to come in to work and be professional, from the time you walk out of the house. What you wear, what you dress, I come every day like I’m coming to work, not that I’m going to a barbeque or a club. You have to have that professional mindset all the time. And as a woman it’s even harder, because you’re judged very harshly.”

As Red Sox general managers have come and gone, Ferreira has been one of the steady forces to survive and thrive under new leadership each time.

Of the four acting general managers – Ferreira, Brian O’Halloran, Eddie Romero and Zack Scott – she’s been there the longest.

She was with the Sox when O’Halloran and Scott were hired as interns in 2002 and 2004, respectively. And she interviewed Romero when he was hired in 2006.

When the Sox plan important offseason decisions, the four of them sit down in a room and talk. It’s that simple. There’s no vote, Ferreira said. They know how to communicate.

“We’ve all known what’s going to work and what’s not with this organization, so it’s been unanimous all along,” she said.

She’s only the third female to be elevated to the position of vice president in a baseball operations department, joining Kim Ng, who now works for MLB after working for the Yankees and Dodgers, and the Yankees’ Jean Afterman.

“Every day you feel the challenges,” she said. “You look around and you’re constantly the only female in the room. But I’m used to it. Let’s hope the landscape changes one day now.”

While the Red Sox plan to look outside the organization for their next leader, the ownership group of John Henry, Tom Werner and Mike Gordon told the acting GMs to make “whatever decisions you feel are best.”

“They really mean it when they say that,” Ferreira said. “They said, ‘you guys do what you think is best for this organization because you know it better than anybody else that would be coming in right now.’ So they entrusted us to do this and we have.”

Whether she’s promoted again or not, she’s made herself invaluable to the Red Sox over the years.

She currently oversees the operations of the major league clubhouse, daily operations for all six minor league affiliates and handles all minor league issues including contracts, transactions, payroll and insurance.

But she seems to have taken a particularly prominent role in her duties leading the club’s player immigration program.

Shortstop Xander Bogaerts, who was signed out of Aruba when he was just a teenager, said after he signed a contract extension in March that it wouldn’t have happened without Ferreira’s guidance.

Where the Red Sox go next is yet to be determined. But Ferreira is clearly leading them into the future with fearless tact, experience and an open mind.

“You always learn more from people who are different than you rather than those who are the same,” she said. “Baseball has a lot of white males in the game, let’s face it. So when we bring candidates in, one thing

we do really well is our entire department meets with everybody. Whether it's an intern, major league scout, whatever, because we all believe you have to completely buy into the process. We spend more time with each other than our own families and we know what it takes to be successful. So anytime we interview somebody, it's collectively.

“There's also a difference between diversity and inclusion. So you can have diverse candidates but if you include them, that's something different. That's what the Red Sox have done with me.”

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

### **Radical strategy may be just what Sox need**

Bill Koch

A creative approach will be required for the Red Sox to still contend in 2020 while shedding payroll.

This is just one person's opinion.

Yes, it might be a bit radical. I expect your emails and Twitter responses to reflect as much.

A creative approach, however, will be required for the Red Sox to still contend in 2020 while shedding payroll. What's laid out below allows Boston to keep Mookie Betts, afford J.D. Martinez if he declines to opt out of his contract and protect the majority of its somewhat thin prospect base.

Those should be the priorities in order for the next top Red Sox baseball executive. Charting a firm course of action with both Betts and Martinez — whether they're here or not — will allow other roster moves to fall into place. Losing both could lessen the bitterness if the words “bridge year” happen to escape your lips.

So let's dive right in, and we'll start with a high fastball under the hands. Coming in under the first threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax (\$208 million) promises to be a bumpy ride.

■ Trade David Price, Rafael Devers and Gilberto Jimenez to the Dodgers for SP Dustin May, 3B Justin Turner, INF Gavin Lux and OF Alex Verdugo

Blasphemy, right? You can't possibly trade Devers after one of the best seasons in baseball history by a player yet to celebrate his 23rd birthday. Even discussing such a thing would be ludicrous.

But truly reloading the system won't be done by offering Betts, who is effectively an expensive one-year rental for rival clubs. Devers doesn't hit free agency until the mid-2020s — his performance and contract situation make him Boston's most valuable asset heading into the offseason.

Third base also happens to be one of few areas where the Red Sox enjoy some organizational depth. Michael Chavis and Bobby Dalbec both consider it their natural position. Chavis showed some encouraging signs during his 95 games as a rookie, while Dalbec possesses arguably the top power bat among Boston's minor leaguers.

This also reflects the weight of the Price contract, and parting with the likes of Devers could be the cost of clearing it. Price is simply not worth \$31 million in average annual value over the next three years. But a splash move could be on the radar if Los Angeles makes it 31 years without a World Series title, and Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman helped draft and develop Price with the Rays in the late 2000s.

Price did pitch to a 3.16 ERA through his first 17 starts this season and would join a Dodgers rotation that currently includes Clayton Kershaw, Walker Buehler, Julio Urias and Kenta Maeda for 2020. That

foursome doesn't exactly scream championship lock. Rich Hill is in his late 30s and hits free agency along with Hyun-Jin Ryu, who is coming off a career year and will be 33 on Opening Day.

Taking back Turner's \$16 million for 2020 gives Los Angeles some immediate financial relief. May would come into Boston's rotation as a promising right-hander, while Lux, one of the top prospects in baseball, could solve the long-term Red Sox problems at second base. Verdugo serves as low-cost insurance with considerable upside should Betts ultimately leave town prior to 2021.

■ Trade Jackie Bradley Jr., C.J. Chatham and cash to the Indians for OF Oscar Mercado and RP James Karinchak

Triggering Corey Kluber's team option for 2020 (\$13 million) signals Cleveland is still looking to extend its current window. The Indians have just \$71 million in payroll committed prior to arbitration, and its lone significant award will be to shortstop Francisco Lindor.

Which means Cleveland can afford Bradley as a one-year rental, and they actually need an outfielder of his quality. The Indians were 23rd out of 30 teams in WAR among their center fielders, and Tyler Naquin is likely to miss most of 2020 with a knee injury. Jordan Luplow and Franmil Reyes will require some help, and Bradley represents an upgrade over Greg Allen.

Bradley figures to make around \$10 million in 2020, far less than the pre-arbitration minimum due to Mercado — that figure could be offset a bit by sending cash in the deal. Karinchak is an intriguing Bryant University product who struck out 74 of the 125 batters he faced across three minor league levels this season.

■ Convince Dustin Pedroia to retire.

The next surgery Pedroia has will be total left knee replacement. That's the current state of his health — he did all but say the word "retirement" when he stepped away from the Red Sox midway through the 2019 season. Pedroia spent the final months at his Arizona home with his family while contemplating his future.

Pedroia has sacrificed his body for Boston's franchise, and he could offer the club one final gift by clearing the \$13.75 million owed to him over each of the next two seasons. The Red Sox — without running afoul of any baseball rules, of course — should explore compensating Pedroia over a longer period of time through some sort of personal-services contract.

This is the final backfiring agreement offered by former general manager Ben Cherington that remains on the club's books. Pablo Sandoval and Hanley Ramirez are finally off Boston's payroll, and Rusney Castillo will spend the last season of his seven-year deal off the 40-man roster and in the minor leagues.

■ Sign Rick Porcello and Mitch Moreland.

Clubhouse presence can't be ignored when attempting to reshape the roster with young players. Porcello and Moreland are both terrific leaders and could be bargains worth retaining after struggling through 2019.

It's doubtful Porcello would take a similar course of action to someone like Dallas Keuchel last offseason and make an exorbitant demand. Moreland remains the ideal platoon candidate at first base in a lineup that has other right-handed options there in Chavis, Dalbec and — if he returns — Sam Travis. Strike a pair of incentive-laden one-year deals, possibly include club options for 2021 and bring them back to keep seats warm for Tanner Houck in the rotation and Dalbec or top prospect Triston Casas at first base.

■ Sign Tyler Flowers (if Atlanta declines his club option for 2020)

Christian Vazquez shouldn't be asked to play 138 games again next season, and building in a day off through the rotation would be prudent. Flowers offers the best of both worlds — an offensive upgrade over Sandy Leon and considerable personal history catching Chris Sale.

Flowers and Sale were teammates with the White Sox, combining on 552 innings. Hitters staggered to a .616 OPS and a 5.41 strikeout-to-walk ratio against them. Every attempt must be made to maximize Sale's five-year extension while also taking care of Vazquez, who looked like a franchise cornerstone in 2019.

Boston has no catchers of note in its pipeline. MLB.com and SoxProspects.com don't list a player at the position among their respective top 30s.

Okay, deep breath now. Stop cursing (especially the first move — I don't like it much either). Let's take a peek at the 25-man roster and the salary situation as it stands after that series of suggestions. We'll use a nice round figure of \$600,000 for all players who have yet to reach arbitration. Then add in:

Catchers — Vazquez (\$4.517M), Flowers (FA)

Infielders — Turner (\$16M), Bogaerts (\$20M), Lux (\$600K), Moreland (FA), Dalbec (\$600K), Chavis (\$600K)

Outfielders — Benintendi (arbitration), Mercado (\$600K), Betts (arbitration), Verdugo (\$600K), Martinez (\$22M)

Starting pitchers — Sale (\$25.6M), Eovaldi (\$17M), Rodriguez (arbitration), Porcello (FA), May (\$600K)

Relief pitchers — Workman (arbitration), Barnes (arbitration), D. Hernandez (\$600K), Taylor (\$600K), Walden (\$600K), Karinchak (\$600K), Lakins (\$600K)

Non-tenders — Leon, Wright, Hembree, G. Hernandez, Centeno, Smith, Weber

Declined option — Cashner

Departed free agents — Pearce, Holt, Owings

That adds up to \$111.72 million in salaries committed for 2020. Benintendi, Betts, Rodriguez, Workman and Barnes are all in line for arbitration raises — they combined to make \$27.77 million in 2019. So that's a minimum of \$139.49 million committed.

Bradley took home \$3.6 million in his first year of arbitration — pencil in Benintendi for something similar, so a raise of about \$3 million. Betts is likely to command a raise into the \$30 million range — add \$10 million more for him. Double the salaries of Rodriguez, Workman and Barnes just for kicks — that's an additional \$7.05 million.

Those raises total \$20.05 million — the mythical Red Sox payroll now sits at \$159.53 million, which leaves slightly less than \$50.4 million under the first CBT threshold to sign Porcello, Moreland and Flowers. They counted for a combined \$31.125 million in 2019, and Porcello is likely to absorb a significant pay cut. Slicing his salary of \$20.625 million in half while enticing Moreland and Flowers with raises of \$1 million counts for a total of \$22.81 million.

That would leave Boston at \$182.35 million in mythical payroll for 2020, which is \$25.65 million shy of the magic number. The Red Sox would have a bit of a cushion to promote players from their minor league system, pay out any incentive bonuses achieved by members of their 25-man roster and add payroll at the trade deadline if they're contending. Boston could also explore a bit further in free agency, retain another character free agent like Brock Holt or have some wiggle room in terms of eating salary in a trade.

Keeping Betts and Martinez on the roster also bakes in more than \$50 million available in 2021 if they leave in free agency and opt out, respectively. The Red Sox would be able to hit the market in a position of strength, be it adding salary through trades or bidding on other free agents. Some of their own prospects —

Houck, Jarren Duran and Bryan Mata among them — could also be on the fringes of arrival by that point, further strengthening the club's base of young talent.

But all of that is just one person's opinion. I'm sure you'll have yours. And the one that really matters belongs to the next occupant of Boston's corner office.

### **For What It's Worth: Red Sox spent too much for this**

Bill Reynolds

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH:

The Red Sox spent too much money to be this bad.

That's the takeaway here.

For they are not some cash-strapped franchise in a game that's all about money. They are not some struggling franchise in a beaten-up city where too few go the games and too few seem to care.

They are the Red Sox, a storied franchise with the highest payroll in the game, and there should be some answers here from someone, for a failure of this magnitude — missing the playoffs — needs to be examined, and not put away in some closet somewhere while everyone roots for the Patriots.

Shouldn't there be something more?

For the Sox spent too much money to be this bad.

- Memo from the "Too Little, Too Late" department: Did you see where Kyrie Irving said he wasn't enough of a leader last season?
- Talk about insight.
- The Yankees have won the American League East for the first time since 2012. Think about that for a second.
- There's no truth to the rumor that half of southeastern Connecticut spent the summer in South County.
- QUIZ OF THE WEEK: I am a former Olympian who was drafted in the seventh round of the 1977 NBA Draft. Who am I? (Answer near the bottom of the column.)
- LINE OF THE WEEK II comes from Patriots coach Bill Belichick when he was asked how much analytics influence his decisions: "Less than zero. It's not really my thing."
- LINE OF THE WEEK III comes from President Trump in a tweet to Democrats: "Get a better candidate this time. You'll need it!"
- LINE OF THE WEEK IV comes from the ex-Patriot Antonio Brown: "I'm still the best. Why stop now?"
- Sounds like the perfect teammate to me, Bunky.
- Joe Mazzulla, the former Johnston High School star, is an assistant with the Celtics.
- Talk about a real basketball success story.
- Grinnell, a Division III school, lost its first three football games by a combined score of 114-3.

- This from the Pew Research Center, via the New York Post: More than a quarter of American adults haven't read even a quarter of a book in the past year.
- And this from the great Bob Ryan in The Boston Globe: 50 years ago, all the players in the NBA were Americans. Last year, there were 108 international players, representing 45 countries, or possessions. Ryan should know. He's been covering the league for 50 years now.
- Which means he's seen a lot of turnovers, if you think about it.
- The Red Sox's ERA is all you really have to know about their season.
- The best novel I read this past summer was "Chances Are" by Richard Russo.
- Zion Williamson might just be the most touted NBA rookie since LeBron.
- Three Red Sox players — David Price, Chris Sale, Mookie Betts — will probably account for nearly \$90 million next season.
- Even the Independent Man is jealous.
- Is this a great country, or what, Bunky?
- The New York Post calls Aaron Judge the biggest name in baseball.
- The Patriots seem like a movie that keeps playing over and over again, as if the offseason is like some long intermission.
- And you know that the Red Sox would have thrown the proverbial white towel on the field back there in early August if they could.
- Speaking of movies, these summer ones are real forgettable, unless you're not old enough to drive yet.
- QUIZ ANSWER: Caitlyn (formerly Bruce) Jenner.
- Just when you think you've got it all figured out, along comes a new generation of kids and you have to start all over again.
- Someday, Bunky, you'll be trying to tell your kids how good Tom Brady was, and they'll roll their eyes.
- A new heartthrob in New York? Giants' rookie quarterback Daniel Jones became only the second player since 1970 to throw for two TDs and run for two more in his starting debut.
- Do you think he even knows who Joe Namath was?
- Or Frank Gifford for that matter?
- There's no truth to the rumor that we should have locked the gates after the last Connecticut license plate left South County.

**\* *MassLive.com***

**C.J. Chatham, Boston Red Sox 2020 second base candidate, has .364 OBP, 4 doubles in Arizona Fall League**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox shortstop prospect C.J. Chatham has received worked at second base in the Arizona Fall League. He started there Saturday and went 3-for-5 with a double, RBI and two runs to help lead Peoria over Salt Lake 9-7.

Chatham, who batted cleanup, is 12-for-40 (.300) with a .364 on-base percentage, .400 slugging percentage, .764 OPS, four doubles, six RBIs, 11 runs and three stolen bases in 10 Arizona Fall League games.

With Dustin Pedroia's status unknown heading into 2020, Chatham is a second base candidate for the Red Sox. Boston will add him to the 40-man roster in November to protect him from Rule 5 Draft eligibility.

Chatham, Marco Hernandez and Michael Chavis all are candidates to play second for the 2020 Red Sox. Chavis also could start at first base.

Boston could re-sign Brock Holt but that has looked less likely as ownership tries to slash payroll for 2020.

The Red Sox drafted the 24-year-old Chatham with their second-round pick in 2016. He played only shortstop in his professional career until the 2019 season. He started 12 games at second base late in the year for Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket.

The 6-foot-4 right-handed hitter finished strong at Pawtucket with a .302/.330/.430/.760 line, two homers, five doubles and 10 RBIs in 20 games.

### **Travis Lakins should compete Boston Red Sox bullpen spot in 2020 after strong finish; 'My confidence is at an all-time high'**

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox demoted reliever Travis Lakins immediately after his disastrous May 28 outing vs. the Indians at Fenway Park.

Manager Alex Cora brought in Lakins after Ryan Brasier had allowed two homers to erase a 5-2 lead.

Lakins hit Mike Freeman, walked both Francisco Lindor and Carlos Santana, then allowed a two-run double to Jordan Luplow. Boston lost 7-5.

Lakins looked like he didn't belong in the big leagues. He had to remind himself he did.

"I think what changed for me was a little bit of a mindset change," Lakins said. "I just started telling myself, 'Listen, you're here for a reason and just show them why you got called up.' And just stay true to myself. And I think that's been a big thing for me."

Lakins — who spent 2019 back and forth from Triple-A Pawtucket to Boston — posted a 2.76 ERA in his final 12 outings (16 ⅓ innings) for the Red Sox. He served as the opener in three games during September.

"I just told myself, 'Listen, it's going to happen.' I mean, the best get hit. But the best overcome all that stuff," Lakins said. "So I just gained a lot of confidence. I got hit around in Triple A pretty good. And I just told myself it's gonna happen."

Lakins is ready to compete for a spot in the 2020 Red Sox bullpen.

"My confidence is at an all-time high," Lakins said. "I'm going to go into this offseason and prepare like I've never prepared before. And I'm going to try to break camp next year and not get sent back to Triple A."

It certainly was a learning year for Lakins, who had pretty much everything go right for him in 2018 when the organization converted him from a starter to a reliever. He posted a 1.21 ERA (37.1 innings, five earned runs) in 30 relief outings between Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket in '18.

But he struggled with his command this year.

"I think my last month in Triple A was really good," he said. "I gave up a couple runs in one outing but I think that might have been it. The command of my fastball has gotten better throughout the whole year."

Lakins did improve his command as the season progressed. He posted a 2.70 ERA (10 innings, three earned runs) in seven outings for Pawtucket during August before returning to Boston as a September call-up.

"At the beginning of the year, I was a little wild," he said. "I was even wild up here. My cutter command got better. And then I started not only throwing my curveball for strikes but knowing where I could throw it. I could bounce it 0-2. I could bounce it 1-2. And then my changeup that I've just started throwing here in the last month or so, I think has been really good. I only throw it very, very, very rarely."

But he said the changeup still gives the hitter a fourth pitch to think about.

"I hadn't had a changeup my whole pro ball career," Lakins said. "I was just messing with grips when I was doing the three-inning stints last year as a starter. I found a grip that I really liked. I just kind of took it into the bullpen (this year) and started throwing it. I really just wanted to focus on three pitches. Just dominating three pitches. But in my throwing program, I still would throw my changeup."

He finally decided it would be wise to throw the changeup during games.

"I think it's a really good pitch for me," he said. "I threw it in a bullpen (session) here the last stint I was up before I got sent back down. Ever since then, we've just gone with it."

### **Mookie Betts' businesslike approach not frustrating Boston Red Sox executives; clock ticking on extension for reigning AL MVP**

Chris Cotillo

If the decision-makers on Jersey Street are at all frustrated by Mookie Betts' hardline approach to extension talks with the Red Sox, they're not showing it.

Betts was a popular topic of discussion during the team's postmortem media briefings last weekend and will be the Sox' most oft-discussed player this winter. Why? The reigning American League MVP is one year away from free agency and has repeatedly stated his intention to test the free agent market without signing an early extension with the Sox.

Betts' adance about hitting free agency might be frustrating to fans who have seen players like Xander Bogaerts, Chris Sale and Dustin Pedroia profess their love for Boston and then sign team-friendly extensions in recent years. The chance of locking up Betts on a deal that's even a tick below market value is subzero, and the Red Sox are cognizant of that.

But the Sox are not yet at the point where they are publicly expressing any frustrations with Betts' approach to talks in an effort to move the needle. In fact, the team's top executives all praised the 27-year-old for exercising his rights as a star player.

"I don't think it's unique at all," said assistant GM Eddie Romero, one of four executives running the baseball operations department on an interim basis. "I think he's doing what's in the best interest of Mookie and I think that's what athletes should do. Every situation of these is case-by-case. Mookie has been the one who has sacrificed his body and has put in the work. He has the right to decide what he wants to do."

Romero, like team president/CEO Sam Kennedy and chairman Tom Werner, said he believes Betts loves playing for the Red Sox. Kennedy and Werner recently engaged in talks with Betts' representatives at VC Sports Group and did not come away from that meeting with any concerns about Betts souring on the idea of playing in Boston in the future.

"I think he loves the Boston Red Sox," Werner said.

Kennedy, who is in charge of hiring the baseball operations head who will ultimately decide Betts' future with the Sox, believes Betts' businesslike approach is a result of the player's confidence in himself.

"I think that speaks to Mookie's confidence and how special a player he is," Kennedy said. "He really does love it here. He has told me he loves it here, told (senior VP) Raquel Ferreira he loves it here. Told (manager Alex Cora) he loves it here. You can see the joy and energy and enthusiasm in which he approaches playing baseball at Fenway Park. Our fans love him. I think what Mookie has done is just make it clear that his representatives will handle the business side of things. He'll just keep doing his thing."

With the clock ticking and Betts not backing down, the Sox have not yet called his bluff and softened their stance on a future partnership. Kennedy and Werner both gushed over the idea of Betts spending the rest of his career in a Sox uniform using the same rhetoric they used in spring training.

But the reality is that as the sides get closer to the end of next season, a longterm union with Betts gets less likely. The Sox might not eventually be able to offer Betts the largest deal out there and have to be worried that he'll be wooed to another city with some impressive free agent presentation.

That worry may lead to trade discussions, potentially as early as this November. If J.D. Martinez opts into his contract and remains with Boston, the chance of a Betts trade increases significantly.

"Obviously, there will be a point where we can make a deal," Werner said. "Or we'll decide at that point, what is Plan B or Plan C. We haven't gotten to that point. We're very open to continuing discussions with him."

In the short-term, Romero and the other three members of the "Gang of Four" must gauge if the regime change from Dave Dombrowski will have any impact on Betts' future. All indications are that it won't. Ditto for the ticking clock and an uptick in trade rumors over the last month.

Betts drew his line in the sand before the season and hasn't moved off it since. The Red Sox, at least publicly, haven't either.

"Obviously, like we've said all along, we'd love for Mookie to be here," Romero said. "We'll continue to put our best foot forward with Mookie. I respect his decision (to hit free agency). He's earned it."

### **Alex Cora keeps defending Boston Red Sox's spring training plan, says some top MLB starters had 'tapered' workloads; is he right?**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox manager Alex Cora continues to defend the Red Sox's 2019 spring training plan.

Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and David Price all had minimal workloads during Grapefruit League action, then all three spent significant time on the injured list. Eovaldi missed 78 games on the IL, Sale 39 games and Price 22 games.

Price would have missed more time in September but expanded rosters made it unnecessary to place him on the injured list again.

Sale, Eovaldi and Price each made just two starts during spring training. Sale threw 9 innings, Eovaldi only 7 innings and Price just  $6\frac{2}{3}$  innings.

Rick Porcello made three starts (12 innings). Eduardo Rodriguez — who enjoyed his best season as a major leaguer — hurled 15 innings (five outings, four starts).

“Our plan was the right one,” Cora said Monday at Fenway Park. “What those guys did in (the postseason last) October was very unique. Was very special. We did what we thought they needed going into the season. I hate comparing us to other organizations. But if you look around and some of the guys that had great seasons, they tapered their use in spring training. That’s the nature of the sport. There’s a lot of information that goes more than pitches and innings or bullpens and all that we use to make decisions. We thought it was the right plan. We felt very strongly about it. We did the same in (’18). We were just short by two or three innings compared to this year. So we’ll do the same thing.

“We’ve got certain situations that came up through the season with Nate and Chris and David. So (head trainer) Brad (Pearson) and the medical staff will put a plan together. And we’ll use it the way we think it’s going to work next year.”

Were the workloads of some of MLB’s top pitchers tapered during spring training? Were their workloads even comparable to Sale, Price and Eovaldi’s workloads?

No, not exactly.

Twenty major league starters posted an ERA under 3.50 this season.

Nineteen of the 20 starters pitched during spring training. Braves’ Mike Soroka (2.68 ERA) missed spring training because of a shoulder injury.

Sixteen of the 19 starters pitched 10 or more innings this spring. Thirteen of the 19 starters pitched 15 or more innings during spring training. Six of the starters pitched more than 20 innings.

Eighteen of the 19 starters pitched during spring training 2018. Half the starters saw their workloads increase from 2018 to ’19.

But some of the decreased and increased workloads were extremely minimal. For example, Dodgers’ Hyun-Jin Ryu recorded just one fewer out during spring training 2019 than he did in 2018. Nationals’ Max Scherzer recorded just two more outs in 2019 than during spring training 2018.

Cora and the Red Sox can continue to defend the plan if they want, but the team should rethink workloads for spring training 2020. Spring training is about building strength for the regular season. Strength usually decreases during the regular season.

TWENTY STARTERS WITH ERA UNDER 3.50:

Mike Soroka, Braves: (no spring training stats for 2019)

Hyun-Jin Ryu, Dodgers: five starts (15.0 innings) in 2019;

~ Ryu’s workload decreased from  $15\frac{1}{3}$  innings in 2018.

Jacob deGrom, Mets: five starts (15.0 innings);

~ deGrom’s workload increased from  $7\frac{2}{3}$  innings in 2018.

Gerrit Cole, Astros: five starts (16.0 innings).

~ Cole's workload decreased from 21 innings in 2018.

Justin Verlander, Astros: five starts (17  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings).

~ Verlander's workload decreased from 22 innings in 2018.

Jack Flaherty, Cardinals: 5 games, 3 starts (17 innings)

~ Flaherty's workload increased from 15  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings.

Sonny Gray, Reds: three starts (10 innings)

~ Gray's workload decreased from 13  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings in 2018.

Max Scherzer, Nationals: six starts (26  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings)

~ Scherzer's workload increased from 26 innings in 2018.

Zack Greinke, Dbacks/Astros: three starts (9  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings)

~ Greinke's workload increased from 8  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings in 2018.

Clayton Kershaw, Dodgers: six starts (21  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings)

~ Kershaw's innings decreased from 24 innings in 2018.

Charlie Morton, Rays: four starts (10  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings)

~ Morton's workload decreased from 18  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings in 2018.

Marcus Stroman, Jays/Mets: four starts (12  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings)

~ Stroman's workload increased from 7  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings from 2018.

Patrick Corbin, Nationals: six starts (24 innings)

~ Corbin's workload increased from 11 in 2018.

Walker Buehler, Dodgers: one start (2  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings)

~ Buehler's workload decreased from 4 innings in 2018.

Shane Bieber, Indians: six starts (24 innings)

--- no ST in 2018

Stephen Strasburg, Nationals: five starts (21  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings)

~ Strasburg's workload increased from 15  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings from 2018 +

Dakota Hudson, Cardinals: six outings, four starts (21  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings)

~ Hudson's increased from 9  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings in 2018.

Luis Castillo, Reds: four outings, two starts (8  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings)

~ Castillo's decreased from 13 ⅓ innings in 2018.

Lucas Giolito, White Sox: five outings, four starts (18 ⅓ innings)

~ Giolito's workload increased from 17 ⅓ innings in 2018.

Kyle Hendricks, Cubs: five starts (16 ⅓ innings)

~ Hendrick's workload decreased from 19 innings in 2018.

## **\* *WEEI.com***

### **The Sunday Baseball Column: How should we view J.D. Martinez?**

Rob Bradford

What Scott Boras said about his client shouldn't have surprised anyone.

"When you go back and look at the last three years, this is one of the greatest hitters in Major League Baseball," the agent said on the "Big-Time Baseball" podcast when talking about J.D. Martinez. "This is a person who is a foundational leader of a team, this is a person who plays 40-50 games in the outfield. None of those categories have anything to do with being a DH.

"There are only three or four players in the game that have had a 1.000 OPS over the last three years and they not only hit for power but for average, they're on base, they are literally a core... that is the vision of J.D. Martinez that I believe all teams have. I know my clients Jackie Bradley (Jr.) or Xander Bogaerts... have been dramatically benefitted by what J.D. Martinez does and what information he provides and the intensity he brings to the players... You just have difficulty in the game finding people that you know are one of the top five hitters in the game so I don't think teams would in any way view J.D. Martinez as a DH."

Get the picture? Call Martinez anything you want, but don't you suggest to Boras he is a designated hitter. Because if you did classify the righty hitter as just a DH than that would make the idea of the \$62.5 million committed to the 32-year-old by the Red Sox a fairly reasonable rate.

But Boras believes teams should view Martinez as something more. Now comes the interesting part: Can he make the rest of baseball commit to the same vision?

The guess here is that Martinez will be opting out of his deal about a month from now. You look at the kind of fit the White Sox represent, along with some other potential American League possibilities (Texas and Toronto, who will head into the offseason with just more than \$50 million committed). And while his outfield metrics have slid slightly we shouldn't forget that it was a National League team (Arizona) which represented the Red Sox' chief competitors for the slugger's services just two years ago.

There is no doubt the kind of difference-maker Martinez has been in his two years with the Red Sox, compiling more total bases than anybody in baseball over the past pair of seasons while managing the fourth-best overall OPS (.985), only trailing Mike Trout, Christian Yelich and Mookie Betts.

The Red Sox have been 13-15 in games he hasn't participated in, going 142-78 when Martinez claims at least one hit and 53-18 on occasions he homers one or more times. Then there is the mentoring Boras mentions that have undeniably helped mold what was perhaps the best group of 1-4 hitters in any Red Sox' lineup.

But we know the payroll predicament the Red Sox find themselves in. So, the question for this team has to be how big a piece of the pie do they want to commit to Martinez?

There are counters to Boras' arguments, of course. Martinez is absolutely trending toward becoming more of a traditional designated hitter, manning the spot in 107 games in 2019 compared to 93 in 2018. Part of that was the team's quest to protect his balky back, which should represent somewhat of a red flag for teams hoping to run him out as an outfielder more than the 38 games he managed in '19.

So if that is the position Martinez will be prioritizing how important is it to the Red Sox to continue to maintain that David Ortiz-like presence?

Edwin Encarnacion may be a free agent (the Yankees have a \$20 million option for 2020) and while representing an older, slightly less-productive option than Martinez, maybe he would all that the Red Sox needed, and as a cheaper price. While the Sox were desperate to have someone like Martinez serve as a springboard for the other hitters in the batting order, perhaps the likes of Betts, Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers have matured to the point where someone like Encarnacion in the mix would be enough.

Considering Encarnacion had put the Red Sox on his list of preferred landing spot when heading into free agency after the 2016 season (and he has 20 homers in 66 games at Fenway Park) it is certainly a palatable Plan B. The same can be said for exploring the services of Nelson Cruz, although the guess would be that Minnesota is going to pick up the 40-year-old's \$12 million option for '20.

All in all, there is something about having Martinez around which gives just as much hope to these Red Sox as finding another starting pitcher. He remains the right guy at the right time, no matter what position is next to his name. Unfortunately for the Red Sox, it seems as though his agent and just enough teams in baseball realize the same thing.

#### WHAT TO MAKE OF ANDREW BENINTENDI

Some of what we saw with Benintendi in 2019 was a product of injuries. He revealed on the last day of the regular season that the injury sustained when fouling a ball off his foot in mid-April never felt quite right, with a calf ailment hampering a good chunk of his second half. But there was also the mechanics of his swing that were off from the get-go, necessitating the abandoning of his leg kick in July. (It was an adjustment that led to better production and is a switch he planned on cementing into his swing this offseason.)

But there was a lesson learned by Benintendi that didn't help matters in 2019. He lost some of his athleticism.

The outfielder came into the season heavier than in years past, in part, he explained to WEEI.com, to keep up with the rest of baseball when it came to hitting the ball out of the park. After hitting 20 in his first full season, his number dropped to 16 in 2018. But the strategy didn't translate in the manner Benintendi had hoped.

Not only did the left fielder end up with just 13 homers, but the kind of explosiveness that allowed Alex Cora to entertain the idea of putting Benintendi at the top of the order dwindled. According to StatCast, a sprint speed that was rated 75th overall in MLB when he first came up was now slotted in at 289th in all of baseball. Some of the results might be attributed to the aforementioned injuries, but there will undoubtedly be different priorities for Benintendi heading into 2020.

"I want to get lighter and more athletic this offseason," he explained.

#### WHAT TONY LA RUSSA WAS WRITING DOWN

La Russa turned 75 years old last week. He doesn't plan on slowing down.

"As long as someone will have me I will be in baseball," he said too WEEI.com. "That's all I've ever known."

It appears La Russa will be returning to the Red Sox, having left a positive impression on all corners of the organization after his initial introduction by Dombrowski. Part of the reason for the Hall of Famer's popularity is day-in, day-out due diligence he continues to offer.

La Russa has never been hard to find, sitting in the first row of the GM box at Fenway Park for seemingly every home game while making just about every road trip. And during each and every one of these games the former manager can be seen head down, furiously jotting down notes throughout the entire game. There is seemingly very little small talk. So, what is he doing?

"I learned a long time ago a unique system to keep score," he explained. "I do that for every batter."

The routine isn't just about the normal method of scoring. It has a twist. La Russa adds plus and minus signs with every action, trying to highlight the mental and physical actions while adding up the plusses and minuses for each player. at the end of every game. (Video coordinator Billy Broadbent has made up a specially spaced scorecard for LaRussa.) And yes, he keeps each and every one of the sheets in a binder for short- and long-term review.

#### HOW MUCH DID THE 2013 DRAFT HURT?

The Red Sox top two picks in the '13 draft have most likely seen their time come and go with the organization. The Red Sox top pick that year Trey Ball and the pitcher they took in the second round Teddy Stankiewicz are both becoming free agents this offseason, not having got a taste of the big leagues in six years of pro ball.

The reality of Ball, the pitcher-turned-position player, should sting. He was the seventh overall pick, never getting above Double-A while not playing a single inning in 2019 due to leg injuries. While the entire 2013 first round was one of the thinnest in recent memory there is no doubt the former lefty pitcher who signed directly out of high school will go down as the second-biggest miss (after No. 1 overall selection Mark Appel).

Taken after Ball were Hunter Dozier (Royals) and Austin Meadows (Pirates), both of whom have developed into above-average major leaguers. Others selected in the first round after the Red Sox spot who you might have heard of are Dominic Smith (Mets), Hunter Renfroe (Padres), Tim Anderson (White Sox), Marco Gonzales (Mariners), Aaron Judge (Yankees), Sean Manaea (A's).

Stankiewicz came closer to the bigs than Ball, pitching for Triple-A Pawtucket with some success. But the righty never separated himself enough to be considered a piece of the big league's team's future. (About half of that 2013 second-round have made it to the majors but none of the selections have emerged into difference-makers.)

Looking back at that Red Sox' draft one might suggest this was partially the impetus for what they are dealing with now. The Sox had just five players from the 2013 get a taste of the major leagues, with infielder Carlos Asuaje seeing some time as a utility infielder with the Padres in 2017 and '18. The others? Mauricio Dubon might be getting a chance with the Giants. Pitchers Kyle Martin and Gabe Speier have seen a combined 11 big league games. And catcher Matt Thaiss, who the Sox drafted in the 32nd round, made his big league debut in 2019 with the Angels, who took him in the first round three years after he decided to head to college.

But the reality is that few teams found their foundation built that year.

Of the postseason clubs, not a lot found their difference-maker in that draft. Their best picks? The Rays, Ryne Stanek. The Astros, Tyler White. The A's, Chad Pinder. The Twins, Kohl Stewart. The Brewers, Devin Williams. The Nationals, Austin Both.

The Dodgers and Yankees probably win the contest with Cody Bellinger and Judge, respectively, but after those two neither club had much to show for their efforts that year. The Cardinals drafted Luke Voit but gave up on him and didn't have much of anything else in that draft.

## REMEMBERING WHY YOU WANT JOE KELLY TO PITCH IN OCTOBER

Kelly's first year with the Dodgers hasn't been smooth-sailing but we may be on the verge of another reminder why Los Angeles committed to three years for the reliever. The former Red Sox is a really, really good postseason pitcher, as was evident once again in 2019 National League Division Series debut when he struck out two in an inning.

In 22 relief appearances in the playoffs, Kelly has totaled a 1.03 ERA, striking out 24 while walking just four.

The first-ever inductee into the Bradfo Sho podcast Hall of Fame doesn't think it's a coincidence.

"It's about understanding the basic instincts of the brain," said Kelly, a psychology major at the University of California-Riverside. "I wouldn't say it necessarily helps me when I'm going through it. I don't sit there on the mound thinking, 'What did I learn in that Psych 128 class. I'm feeling anxious out here. I'm feeling anxiety.' It's not like I'm going back and trying to remember the coping mechanisms of how to deal with this situation. But I think learning about that before going into those situations, subconsciously helps me out a lot. But it's not I'm thinking, 'I know what to do with this. Let me check my notes and see if there are any lectures I can pull up.'

"I think just understanding from emotions to how people think how different personalities fit how people see the world. I think that has helped me try and understand people and myself, as well, on a deeper level besides baseball. It's good to know which players you see or have on your team who understands it more, or who has knowledge when situations come up how to handle them. You can handle situations and still not be good. Your mechanics can be off. I'm not an expert, but there are little things to help here and there."

## A GREAT BASEBALL DEBATE

During the end of the 2017 season a scout surfaced the question: If you could take one player of a group consisting of Alex Bregman, Dansby Swanson and Benintendi who would it be.

While the top of the preference order has become much more defined thanks to Bregman's MVP existence, at the time it led to a pretty good conversation. Now comes along another one.

Which player -- of a group that is currently 22 years old or younger -- would you take: Juan Soto, Ronald Acuna Jr., Gleyber Torres, Rafael Devers?

## SOME OTHER THOUGHTS ...

- Of the many interesting insights given by Mookie Betts regarding his approach to the business of baseball, this quote from our conversation in Texas should be remembered: "I was able to implement (his agents') point of view with our point of view and it all kind of came together perfectly. They could say this is a great offer we think you should take it. But that's not what we do. We've been talking about this since the beginning of the year." To me, this means they have had a number in mind for some time. They did when the Red Sox met the \$20 million a year number last offseason, and the same approach is in play this time around. That's why the Red Sox have to give their best bid and not revert back to the start-low strategies used pre-Dombrowski.

- Much like Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr.'s future with the Red Sox seems somewhat in doubt. And also like his fellow outfielder it doesn't appear as though he will be shying away from the business of baseball. This was the center fielder's comment on the Bradfo Sho when asked if he was looking forward to hitting free agency after the 2020 season: "Absolutely. 100 percent. Back in the day, it seemed like everyone was excited to

test free agency. Obviously with the way things have been going lately some people might not be as excited. I feel like if you have trust in yourself, trust in your ability you should be and I'm still excited about the opportunity to go to free agency."

- The Red Sox didn't have any interest in pursuing last year's top free agent from Japan pitcher Yusei Kikuchi. Considering the season turned in by the lefty (6-11, 5.46 ERA) for the Mariners it was probably a wise move. With their sights set on Nathan Eovaldi to fill out their rotation, the Sox didn't see a player like Kikuchi as a need. This offseason it would be a different story. But unlike recent years there doesn't really seem to be a whole of lot of Japanese pitchers to pick from. For that, you can partially blame the upcoming Olympics. While there are some interesting candidates the belief is that many of the top players in Japan don't want to lose the opportunity to represent their country in the Summer Games which will be held in Tokyo in 2020.

- Joe Girardi has been excellent on the broadcast during the Astros and Rays series, but you can't but help but think how each and every bit of analysis is subtly shaping his candidacy for managerial openings. Probably not much, but it definitely adds an interesting layer to every word. For instance, Girardi strongly stated that he would have Willy Adames attempt to steal second with a full count on Yandy Diaz, nobody out and the Rays trailing by a run. Adames did steal, with Diaz swinging at a potential Ball Four leading to Martin Maldonado easily throwing out the baserunner for a pivotal double play. Girardi's reasoning was strong, but the immediate awkwardness of having to soak in his ill-advised strategy was noticeable. In the end, TV gigs usually help make managers, and this ultimately will aid the former Yankees skipper.

- It's understandable why Mark Loretta is a candidate for the Cubs managing job. He was one of the most intelligent players to come through Boston during my time covering the team and has a demeanor and personality that allows for easy interaction throughout the clubhouse. But what I will really remember from that 2006 stint with the Red Sox is Manny Ramirez asking him if he picked up his gift basket at the All-Star Game following Manny's decision not to attend. Also of note: Loretta told the Red Sox he would come back on a one-year, \$1 million contract despite getting multi-year offers elsewhere following his All-Star season. The Red Sox, however, already had plans to transition to a rookie named Dustin Pedroia.

- We all know players can make some money with postseason performances, but usually, it takes more than one for any kind of significant alteration in the financial evaluations. Drew Pomeranz, however, might have made at least a little more coin with his two perfect innings for the Brewers in their Wild Card loss to the Nationals. The lefty flashed a 97 mph fastball while getting out both righties and lefties. It was exactly what he had been doing since joining the Milwaukee bullpen, where the former Red Sox struck out 45 in 26 1/3 innings while totaling a 2.39 ERA. He represents exactly the type of relief pitcher teams will be craving in 2020 when pitchers are required to face at least three batters (or end the half-inning). Simply being named to the World Series roster in 2018 also didn't hurt Pomeranz's cause when the Giants were asking around, with the Red Sox letting it be known his velocity had crept up to the mid-90's in workouts.

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

### **MLB Notebook: Market forces likely to mean J.D. Martinez stays put; MLB, union play blame game**

Sean McAdam

In a more normalized free-agent market, J.D. Martinez would already have one foot out the door, ready to cash in — again.

For three straight seasons, Martinez has hit .300 or better with 35 or more homers and knocked in 100 or more runs. Since the start of 2017, Martinez leads the majors in homers and is second in the game in RBI.

For players with at least 500 plate appearances in that span, he's second in both OPS and slugging percentage, with only Mike Trout posting higher rates.

When it comes to run producers and consistency, Martinez is on a very short list and is, at-worst, the third-best in that category.

Unfortunately for Martinez, the game has changed. Or more to the point, the business of the game has changed. Since Martinez is 32 years old, the market for him will not accurately reflect that value.

For the past few winters, baseball has not had much to offer 30-something sluggers. Nelson Cruz, who, granted, is seven years older than Martinez, nonetheless hit 37 homers last year in cavernous Safeco Field, while slugging .509. Know what happened to him last winter? He took a \$2 million pay cut for a one-year deal with the Twins.

Again, seven years is a considerable gap. But still, here was a right-handed power hitter/mostly DH who saw his salary reduced.

The big deals are going to athletic types in the prime of their careers. Manny Machado got \$300 million over 10 years and Bryce Harper got \$330 million over 13 seasons. But they were in their mid-20s and could still contribute defensively.

Heck, go back two years to when Martinez was just 30. He had to wait until late February for a five-year, \$110 million deal. And that was essentially the same deal the Sox had offered back in December. Martinez and his agent Scott Boras waited and waited all offseason hoping another bidder would emerge. None did. In the end, the only alternative Martinez had would have to go back to the Arizona Diamondbacks on a short-term deal.

The deal has worked fabulously for the Red Sox. By any definition, Martinez has already outperformed the deal.

In the next few weeks, Martinez will have a decision to make. As part of the contract, the Red Sox included opt-outs in the deal after this season and also after next. Martinez has until five days after the conclusion of the World Series to inform the Sox if he's opting out.

If he opts out, it's as though he's a free agent. The Red Sox could still re-sign him, but that would require them to offer another year or two, or to boost his salary.

Especially given their desire to reduce payroll in order to get under the first competitive balance tax (CBT) of 2008, it's virtually impossible to conceive that the Red Sox would be open to meeting his request for a raise and/or longer term. If he opts out of his deal, he's as good as gone.

But I don't think that will happen in the first place. Here's why:

Martinez has three years and \$62.5 million coming to him on his existing deal with the Red Sox. Again, he would have to have faith that he could either get some team to give him a fourth year at, at least, the same salary (four years and a minimum of \$83.3 million), or give him a three-year deal in excess of \$62.5 million. Neither scenario is likely.

Even if another team is willing to offer a slight increase in total value — call it three years, \$66 million — would it really be worth it for Martinez to go elsewhere for a few million dollars spread over three years? Martinez enjoys hitting in Fenway, in a lineup that features plenty of protection and support. Mookie Betts may only be under control for another season, but Xander Bogaerts is headed for at least six more years and Rafael Devers is here for a minimum of four more. Those two alone represent a strong surrounding cast. Martinez is not a good outfielder. He can maintain that the defense metrics don't accurately reflect his play as a defender, but most teams — even if they have a different set of metrics than those publicly available — are likely to see the same thing. Martinez won't butcher routine fly balls, but he has to be considered a liability. In 2018, he was a minus-5 in 57 games in the outfield; in 2019, that number grew to minus-7 in 38 games. That's one more negative for National League teams, who, of course, would have no choice but to

deploy him in the outfield for all but a handful of games every year. Given the additional emphasis teams are placing on defense, that's not very likely at all.

If Martinez has to market himself as a DH, that limits him to AL teams only, many of which no longer see the wisdom of paying huge money for someone who doesn't contribute in the field. Even those who have the resources to spend that much money on a single DH may want to spend that money elsewhere and use the DH to rotate through various positional players. Those that might be willing to spend (the Yankees, Astros to name two) have several veterans on their roster who could get the DH at-bats. Tampa Bay could use Martinez, but won't pay anywhere near the going rate. The Angels? They have both Shohei Ohtani and Albert Pujols. One team that could make some sense would be Texas, which is moving into a new ballpark and presumably will want to make a big splash. But even there, the Rangers would be better off pursuing more starting pitching over a slugger — even one as consistently good as Martinez. Put another way, if Martinez couldn't attract a longer, more lucrative contract offer when he was two years younger, given the trends in the game, why would he better that now?

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MLB attendance fell for a fourth straight year in 2019, an alarming indicator at a time when the economy is generally good and the sport — again, speaking generally — is the most affordable of the Big Four in North America.

That development is troubling enough, but worse is the reaction from both the commissioner's office and the Major League Players Association.

The MLBPA concluded that the reason attendance was down was because too many teams aren't trying to win — “tanking” in the modern-day parlance — with union chief Tony Clark telling *The Athletic* that recent announcements by the Red Sox, Astros and Rockies, suggesting they would limit offseason spending after going all-in in 2019, was further proof of an industry not doing enough to compete, noting that these “blanket proclamations send precisely the wrong message to fans.”

Responding from MLB's vantage point, deputy commissioner Dan Halem insisted that offseason spending is an overrated concept. “Our fans,” noted Halem, “want our clubs to compete for the postseason, not for the highest payroll.”

There's lots to unpack here. Clark is within his right to express concern about the reluctance of some teams to spend to improve the on-field product. But baseball is in a tough spot when even successful teams which made the postseason (Tampa Bay and Oakland, for two) were in the bottom handful of teams in attendance.

As for Halem, he's correct in observing that big payrolls don't guarantee success (hello Red Sox and Cubs).

But while owners and the union go back-and-forth in playing the blame game, neither is willing to take any action on far bigger issues — namely the quality of games, almost all of which take way too much time to compete and too many of which feature an insufficient amount of action.

Until baseball solves those issues, salaries and spending will be secondary in importance.

The very fact that these public exchanges focus on the economics of the game and not the quality of the actual product tell us two things. First, neither side realizes the big problem. Second, we're almost inexorably moving toward some sort of interruption after the 2021 season, which will prove to be even more harmful to the game's well-being and bottom-line.

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

**State of the Red Sox minor league system: Assessing the strength of the pipeline**

Chad Jennings

On the day Red Sox ownership announced its desire to cut payroll below the luxury tax threshold, chairman Tom Werner also mentioned the only tried-and-true way of maintaining big league success without big-time spending.

“We need to have more depth in our minor league system,” Werner said, “and more people coming up through the system that can be everyday baseball players.”

That’s the trick, isn’t it?

Despite a farm system that was thinned during the Dave Dombrowski era, the Red Sox might not be far away from providing that sort of cheap, homegrown impact. Dombrowski’s many trades did rob the team of valuable depth, especially in the rotation, but it seems to have cost relatively few everyday standouts (Yoan Moncada is a notable exception). Dombrowski’s restraint in the past year gave the farm a chance to grow, and it did.

Despite having no first-round draft pick this season, and despite Michael Chavis losing his prospect status, the Red Sox minor league system moved up from 30th to 22nd in Baseball America’s midseason rankings. First baseman Triston Casas, third baseman Bobby Dalbec and starting pitcher Bryan Mata each moved into Baseball America’s Top 100 prospects. Their system is not revered, but it’s no longer dismissed.

“It’s back on the rise,” Baseball America wrote.

Whoever takes over baseball operations, it seems, will have a mandate to continue those improvements and reap meaningful rewards. This is the state of the minor league system he or she will be inheriting.

Starting pitching

In recent years, the Red Sox have had little trouble developing impact position players, and they’ve had some success with high-powered relievers, but the rotation has been a player development wasteland. Eduardo Rodriguez was acquired from Baltimore and partially developed by the Red Sox, but he was not a homegrown success story like Mookie Betts or Rafael Devers. Draft picks Michael Kopech, Shaun Anderson and Logan Allen have reached the major leagues as starters, but only after being traded elsewhere. The Red Sox need that trend to end.

Next in line: Tanner Houck

Not necessarily the top pitching prospect in the system, but probably the one closest to a big league impact. The Red Sox used Houck out of the Triple-A bullpen late this season, getting him comfortable just in case Alex Cora needed him in that role down the stretch, but he’s since been assigned to the Arizona Fall League to build more innings as a starter. The 2017 first-round pick will be in the Triple-A rotation next year after pitching to a 3.24 ERA this season, mostly as a reliever.

Names to know: Bryan Mata, Jay Groome, Thad Ward

Mata already has reached Double-A as a 20-year-old, and Groome, a 21-year-old former first-rounder, returned from Tommy John surgery with a fastball in the mid-90s and a changeup that, according to vice president of player development Ben Crockett, looks even better than it did before the injury. Ward was a fifth-round pick in 2018. Despite a college career spent mostly in the bullpen, the Red Sox deployed him as a starter and he was named the system’s Minor League Pitcher of the Year after posting a 2.78 ERA across both Single-A levels.

On the radar: Noah Song

One of the most fascinating players in the minor league system, Song was a fourth-round pick out of the Naval Academy, and his 1.06 ERA reflects how he dominated the New York-Penn League. But his military commitment leaves his long-term future in doubt. High-end talent with highly unusual circumstances.

Unusual fascination: Kyle Hart

At some point, minor league results begin to matter, and the results are in Hart's favor. He's not overpowering, and as a 19th-round pick, he's never generated much prospect hype, but he pitched to a 3.63 ERA in Double-A and Triple-A this season. The lefty will be Rule 5 eligible if the Red Sox leave him off the 40-man roster. After seeing 36th rounder Trevor Kelley pitch his way to the big leagues this season, it's hard to dismiss Hart's chances. "He's really precise with his work and his competitiveness and execution," Crockett said. "And he's also got a really nice pitch mix. He's got different pitches he can throw in different locations. He's somebody that, you can't discredit the numbers that he's put up and the way he's performed."

Relief pitching

Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman were minor league starters who wound up carving big league roles out in the bullpen, and that's not unusual. It's possible that the next impact, homegrown reliever is currently a starter.

Next in line: Darwinzon Hernandez

Hernandez may no longer qualify as a prospect after 29 big-league appearances, but he's still just 22 and has barely scratched the surface of what he might be able to accomplish. Hernandez was long ago labeled as a long-term relief candidate, and he was finally moved out of the rotation this season. With little Triple-A experience, he became a high-powered late-inning option in the second half and seems to have a bullpen job locked up for next year. Same for Josh Taylor, the lefty acquired in last year's Deven Marrero trade.

Names to know: Travis Lakins, Mike Shawaryn

These were the up-the-down relievers who didn't quite settle in the way Hernandez and Taylor did. But this pair seemed to stay ahead of Bobby Poyner and Trevor Kelley for big-league opportunities. They're also notable for carrying some measure of prospect stock into this season, and for showing flashes of big-league ability (Shawaryn was particularly good when he first arrived, Lakins was especially good at the end). If the Red Sox are going to try to trim payroll, it might make sense to avoid the minor arbitration raises that went to guys like Tyler Thornburg and Steven Wright and instead find one or two shuttle relievers who can actually stick around.

On the radar: Jhonathan Diaz, Yoan Aybar

The Red Sox put these two lefties on the radar by sending them to the Arizona Fall League in the same offseason when they become Rule 5 eligible. Crockett said the Fall League is not a final testing ground to decide whether to protect them, but rather a chance to build on interesting seasons. Diaz had a particularly good second half as a Class-A starter, and hard-throwing Aybar got to High A in just his second season as a pitcher (he was a teenaged outfielder the previous four years as a professional).

Unusual fascination: Durbin Feltman

The fascination itself isn't unusual — Feltman was a third-round pick and remains a legitimate prospect — but the attention he received in spring training was not typical. With only 22 professional games on his resume, Feltman spent spring training as a major league curiosity, with some wondering if he could make the Opening Day roster despite not being invited to big league camp. Instead, Feltman spent the year in Double-A, where he had a 5.26 ERA with 31 walks in 51 1/3 innings. "I think it was something where, he was a better pitcher at the end of the year," Crockett said. "There's always going to be attention for everybody in different ways and expectations, whether it's media or family or friends or (the player

himself), but I think those are things that the players have to learn to deal with. I think it's something he did a good job adjusting to during the course of the year."

#### Corner infield

With Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce each hitting the open market, there might be an opportunity for a young player to get a shot at first base next season. Third base, obviously, is occupied by Rafael Devers.

Next in line: Bobby Dalbec

Arguably, this should be Michael Chavis, who could slide to first base if the Red Sox sign a more experienced second baseman, but it's Dalbec who seems as intriguing as any on-the-verge prospect in the Red Sox system. It was telling in September when the Red Sox declined to give him a call-up, but did have him hang around the team for a homestand. They were clearly getting his feet wet for a reason. Dalbec has earned solid reviews for his play at third base, but he's seen more time at first lately, and he hit 27 homers last year — seven of them during a 30-game stint in Triple A. Might not be handed the first-base job, but could certainly fight for it.

Names to know: Sam Travis, Josh Ockimey

These two get lumped together because they share some limitations. Both seem best suited as platoon bats, with Travis having handled big league lefties for a brief period this season, and Ockimey having hit 25 homers with 82 walks in Triple A (almost all of his damage came against right-handers). Travis basically disappeared late in the year, and Ockimey struck out enough to bat just .204. Neither seems particularly ideal, but each could have some value under the right circumstances.

On the radar: Triston Casas

Not ready for the big leagues, but very much on the radar. At 19, Casas hit 20 home runs and became the biggest name in the entire minor league system. "The consistency of his routine and preparation were pretty impressive," Crockett said. "You just don't often see that kind of attention to detail from a young player, and the deliberate, purposeful way he went through his preparation and his routine at the full-season level was pretty impressive. In the long term, in addition to the success he had on the field, I think that's something that's going to help him stabilize the consistency of performance."

Unusual fascination: The lack of catchers

Could have listed some of the lower-level third basemen who haven't put up great numbers, but remain interesting prospects. Instead, we'll use this space to point out the Red Sox still lack a standout catching prospect, especially in the upper levels for immediate depth. Kole Cottam, the fourth-round pick in 2018, is one of many from that draft class who had an encouraging first full season, but he's not exactly knocking on the door. Next year could be another season of Oscar Hernandez or Juan Centeno serving as the only real depth behind Christian Vazquez and whoever's second string.

#### Middle infield

Another system weakness that's showing signs of improvement (though it's still hardly a strength). The Red Sox took middle infielders with their first two picks in this year's draft, but they've obviously a long way from showing enough to be big league options. Instead, the Red Sox will hope to get depth and maybe a little bit of impact from what they have in-house.

Next in line: C.J. Chatham

Second-round pick dealt with injury issues early in his career, but he's been healthy the past two seasons and likely played his way to a 40-man roster spot this winter. He's a strong defensive shortstop who's consistently hit for average with some doubles power, and this year the Red Sox began using him at second base in obvious preparation for a potential utility role down the road. He's been playing a lot of second in the Arizona Fall League recently. Could be immediate depth next season.

Names to know: Michael Chavis, Marco Hernandez

Again, not exactly prospects, but they certainly fit the mold of homegrown players who could play a more important role next season. Both Chavis and Hernandez got off to terrific starts this season, Chavis looking like an early Rookie of the Year candidate while Hernandez returned from years of shoulder issues to have an .858 OPS in part-time duty through early August. Now the question is, can they sustain that production enough to actually fill the gap at second base? The team's internal metrics were surprisingly bullish on Chavis as a defender.

On the radar: Cameron Cannon, Matthew Lugo, Antoni Flores

None put up particularly good numbers this season, but all three regularly appear among the top 15 or so prospects in the system. They're all raw to some degree, though Cannon was a college player and already has some experience moving around the infield. If one of them can clear enough hurdles to become a major leaguer, it'll help.

Unusual fascination: Ryan Fitzgerald

It's OK to have a soft spot for undrafted guys signed out of independent ball, but that's especially true when they hit a little bit in Single A and get rewarded as the Red Sox minor league defensive player of the year. The Red Sox are sufficiently intrigued by Fitzgerald that they're giving him reps in the outfield during instructional league. If he keeps putting up numbers in Double A, it'll be time to think of him as a legitimate candidate for a utility job down the road.

Outfield

For good reason, there's much attention on the homegrown Killer Bs outfield of Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Andrew Benintendi. That group has served the Sox well, and there's still confidence that Benintendi can become even better. But there's little guarantee all three will be back next season, and the system has been without any viable alternatives. That might change next season.

Next in line: Marcus Wilson

He's not the top outfield prospect — more on that in a bit — but Wilson does seem well-positioned for a 40-man spot and a Triple-A job next season. Acquired in the Blake Swihart trade, Wilson got off to a rough start with Double-A Portland, was sent back down to High-A, then returned to Double-A with an .811 OPS in the second half. Now he's in the Fall League where he's continued to hit. "He did a great job building that momentum," Crockett said. "Building some more confidence and kind of comfort and understanding with the organization and what our expectations were. He embraced them and ran away with them."

Name to know: Jarren Duran

The question is, how quickly can he rise through the system. In his first full season, he's already reached Double A, a tremendous showing by a seventh-round pick who's become the top outfield prospect in the system. Double A was a challenge, but he seemed to find his footing. "Maybe he tried to do a little too much early on and tried to elevate his game in Double A," Crockett said. "And I think that learning opportunity presented itself for him to understand that he could be himself and have success at that level and continue, kind of, small adjustments instead of big ones."

On the radar: Gilberto Jimenez, Nick Decker

Jimenez and Decker wound up in the outfield together at short-season Lowell and stand out as two of the better low-level prospects in the system. They should be ready for their full-season debuts in 2020. A lot of talent, but also quite a long way to go.

Unusual fascination: Tzu-Wei Lin

There are some other low-level outfielders who could be mentioned here, but they're years away from the big league radar. So this is as good a place as any to mention Lin, the glove-first utility man who burned his final option this season. He'll likely have to make the team out of spring training or be exposed to waivers (which might not be a problem). He's basically a known quantity who can play either shortstop or center field and has proven capable of fill-in work at the major league level. He's a popular guy around the team, but his .665 OPS in Triple-A this season didn't do him any favors.

## **\* *The New York Times***

### **The Twist in a Yankees-Astros A.L.C.S. Rematch? Houston Is Even Better This Time**

Tyler Kepner

The favorites are wasting no time, eager to get on with it already.

All season, the Houston Astros and the Yankees have seemed destined to clash in the American League Championship Series. Now they are at the doorstep.

On Monday afternoon, the Astros will have a chance to finish a sweep of the Tampa Bay Rays in their division series. That night, the Yankees could do the same to the Minnesota Twins. It would set up a rematch of a rousing A.L.C.S. from two years ago, when the Astros edged the Yankees in seven games on the way to their first World Series title.

These Astros are even better.

In 2017, they did not have the ace Gerrit Cole, who overpowered the Rays in a 3-1 victory in Game 2 on Saturday. Cole fanned 15 across seven and two-thirds innings, allowing four hits and a walk, following Justin Verlander's one-hit, seven-inning effort in Game 1. Neither ace allowed a run.

In the first 10 games of the major league playoffs, through Saturday, 12 of the 20 starting pitchers had failed to last more than five innings. The Astros' manager, A.J. Hinch, has a different reality.

"We've got some pretty big boys that can pitch," Hinch said. "Philosophically, whether it's about the new-age opener or pulling guys the third time through, most of the people that support that haven't had Verlander or Cole on their team."

In Game 3 at Tampa Bay, the Astros will face their old teammate Charlie Morton, who closed out Game 7 of the 2017 World Series. Morton would seem to give the Rays an edge, but the Astros will counter with Zack Greinke, a likely Hall of Famer who just had one of his best seasons.

"We've got Greinke, so we've got three aces," said the Astros' shortstop, Carlos Correa. "Every time they're on the mound, they're special."

Collecting aces hardly guarantees a championship. Two recent teams that tried it — the 2011 Philadelphia Phillies (Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee, Cole Hamels and Roy Oswalt) and the 2014 Detroit Tigers (Verlander, Max Scherzer, David Price and Rick Porcello) — did not escape the first round.

But there is always a chance that Verlander, Cole and Greinke could be like the 1963 Los Angeles Dodgers of Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale and Johnny Podres, who swept the Yankees in the World Series. Jeff Luhnow, the Astros' general manager, said he believed this team was his best.

"For me, I think so," Luhnow said. "We definitely had concerns about our bullpen toward the end of '17. Bullpens get challenged in October, but I think this version of our bullpen is the best that we've had since I've been here, and the starting pitching is the best it's been, and the lineup is the best it's been."

The Astros became the first team ever whose hitters had the fewest strikeouts in the majors and whose pitchers had the most. Cole finished the season with a record streak of nine starts with at least 10 strikeouts, helping him amass 326 whiffs in all.

On Saturday, he threw a career-high 118 pitches, and the Rays rarely even had a chance. Cole induced 33 swings and misses, the most in a postseason game this decade. He artfully mixed his pitches: Five of his strikeouts came on fastballs, five on curveballs and five on sliders.

“He’s unbelievable,” said third baseman Alex Bregman, who homered off Blake Snell for the Astros’ first run. “Seriously, he’s got the best stuff in baseball. He’s a bulldog on the mound.”

Cole was still throwing 100 miles an hour in the eighth inning, and struggled to explain how he did it.

“I’ve been doing it since I was 17,” he said. “It’s a blessing. I don’t know, I just do it. I mean, I did it all night. It’s just my fastball. I just throw it and it comes out.”

Cole is peaking at the perfect time — not just for the Astros, but also for his value in free agency. The last pitcher with more strikeouts in a postseason game was Kevin Brown, also in a division series in Houston, in 1998. Brown fanned 16 for the San Diego Padres, led his team to the World Series, became a free agent and got the first \$100 million contract in major league history from the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Cole’s agent, Scott Boras, negotiated that deal for Brown. He will seek a bonanza for Cole this winter, and the Yankees will surely be interested. They drafted Cole in the first round in 2008, before he enrolled at U.C.L.A. Cole became the first overall pick by Pittsburgh in 2011, and has become a superstar in Houston.

“The talent was always there, and he’s in an environment with other players around him of his caliber, and I think that maybe has something to do with it,” Luhnaw said, mentioning the presence of Verlander and the pitching coach Brent Strom. “Our entire approach is about simplifying and letting him be the best version of himself by throwing what works for him.”

No team is flawless; the Astros’ bullpen has wobbled in this series, and while it performed better than the Yankees’ bullpen this season, it is not as imposing. Both teams have deep and powerful lineups, and the Astros’ hitters not only had the majors’ fewest strikeouts, but also the most walks.

It is the rematch both teams have been waiting for, even if they cannot speak about it openly just yet. Hinch, at least, took a peek ahead late Saturday night.

“This is the most talented team that we’ve had, but this team hasn’t won the World Series yet,” he said. “So we need to win this series on Monday, as quickly as possible, and get these guys some rest.”

They will need it against the Yankees, who would be wise to hurry up and beat the Twins, too.

### **For Rocco Baldelli, Managing the Twins Is a Team Effort**

Pat Borzi

Derek Shelton knows midges. Twelve years ago, Shelton, now the Minnesota Twins’ bench coach, stood in Cleveland’s home dugout as the Indians’ hitting coach when the winged insects swarmed in off Lake Erie, disrupting Game 2 of an American League division series. Yankees reliever Joba Chamberlain couldn’t handle the infestation, and the Yankees lost the game and ultimately the series.

“It’s crazy,” Shelton said, smiling at the memory. “You never know what’s going to happen in Northeast Ohio with the bugs.”

Shelton said this a few days ago in the Twins clubhouse at Target Field, not far from the office he shares with Rocco Baldelli, the rookie Twins manager. That's right — shares. That unusual arrangement illustrates the unique leadership model employed by A.L. Central Division champions, who face the Yankees in an A.L. division series starting Friday night. Whether insect infestation or any other type of unexpected October madness occurs, Shelton and Baldelli will tackle it collectively.

At the top of the organization, Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey and General Manager Thad Levine share responsibilities, with Falvey maintaining final say. The Twins' clubhouse, with Baldelli and Shelton, operates the same way.

"It's really helpful to have someone who I believe in through and through, and trust deeply, and I can rely on in every way," Baldelli said.

At 38, Baldelli is the youngest manager in the majors, and he had never managed at any level before the Twins hired him last fall. So he wanted Shelton — a holdover from the staff of the former manager Paul Molitor and a good friend of Baldelli's for almost a decade — as close as the office refrigerator. The manager's office dressing room features two large lockers, and Shelton, who is 11 years older than Baldelli, took one.

Practicality drove the proximity, as well. When the Twins expanded their coaching staff by two in the off-season, the coaches' room could not hold everyone comfortably.

Shelton insists that the office is Baldelli's, and that they share only the dressing room. On one level, he's right: Baldelli redecorated the space with personal touches like a framed photo of his dog, Bowie, a Beauceron. But in others, the two are indistinguishable. Players know talking to one means talking to both.

"At some level, a lot of first or relatively younger managers will lean on a bench coach," said Jason Castro, the Twins' veteran catcher. "But I think Rocco and Sheltie have done a really nice job collaborating, sharing that space and welcoming each other's input. You can't really ask for two better guys leading the way."

Certainly, the collaboration worked. Even with 18 players on the injured list at various times, the Twins won 101 games in the regular season, one short of the franchise mark, while hitting a major league-record 307 home runs. Baldelli and Shelton huddled in the office before and after games, often with Falvey and Levine.

"Rocco is ultimately responsible for what happens in the game, but he's going to lean on Sheltie for ideas and thoughts to manage the group in here," Falvey said. "We told them that was the vision for it, the way we operated upstairs. Ultimately, he believed Rocco wanted that too."

But it wasn't always a given that Shelton and Baldelli would end up in the same dugout this year. Shelton, a stocky former catcher, joined the Twins last year as bench coach. When Falvey made the surprising move to fire Molitor, a Hall of Fame player and the 2017 A.L. manager of the year, Shelton — a former minor league prospect for the Yankees and a minor-league manager in the 1990s — interviewed for the job, as did Baldelli.

The two knew each other well. Shelton had been Baldelli's hitting coach with the Tampa Bay Rays in 2010. Baldelli joined the Rays' front office after retiring in 2011, and they coached on the same Rays staff in 2015 and 2016.

Falvey and Levine gave the manager job to Baldelli but asked Shelton to remain as bench coach, promising a collaboration similar to their own. Shelton, who also interviewed for the manager's job in Texas, said he returned for one reason: Baldelli.

"I only would have stayed if he got this job," Shelton said. Seeing the Falvey-Levine collaboration firsthand, he said, eased his mind.

A few days later, Baldelli and Shelton met at a Kahwa Coffee shop in downtown St. Petersburg, Fla., near Shelton's home — the same shop where they commiserated in September 2016 when Tampa Bay fired Shelton as hitting coach. After that meeting last fall, they spoke frequently by phone, often multiple times per day.

"I don't think we ever really divided up anything," Shelton said. "I think the one thing we did do was make sure we were going to collaborate, we were going to talk, we were going to walk through everything we did.

"There are times we don't agree, and ultimately, as it should be, his say is the final say. But if I feel very strongly on something and I push him on, then he's going to really think about it and respect it, and ask me why I think that."

Baldelli said he had no clue how to run his first spring training, a complicated process involving almost 60 players across multiple fields. Shelton did it for Molitor and again for Baldelli. "He did it tremendously, in a way that made sense to everyone," Baldelli said. "It was a really impressive job."

Shelton is a constant presence in the clubhouse, talking to players, handling day-to-day details. In the dugout, Shelton offers multiple scenarios for Baldelli to consider.

"Early on he looked at me with a couple of them and went, 'Are you crazy?'" Shelton said. "I said: 'I don't want to do it. I'm just laying them out for you.' So now he knows. I never want us to be in a situation where one of us is blind to something that could have happened."

In a Sept. 5 game at Boston, Baldelli hesitated to use the utility man Willians Astudillo to pinch-hit for second baseman Jonathan Schoop because he had never seen Astudillo play at second. Shelton had, and vouched for him. Astudillo stroked a tiebreaking single in the 2-1 victory.

"I appreciate the latitude he gives me to say things to him that a lot of people wouldn't say to him, because he trusts me," Shelton said.