

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, October 8, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

What can the Red Sox get if they trade Mookie Betts?

Alex Speier

Mookie Betts turned 27 on Monday, an age that often falls squarely within the realm of a player's peak. And in the case of Betts, that peak has few peers not just among the landscape of active big leaguers but in baseball history.

For all of the talk of Betts suffering through a down year in the first half of 2019, his year-end numbers — a .295/.391/.524 line with 29 homers and 74 extra-base hits along with 16 steals and elite defense in right — once again underscored that his baseline performance is that of one of the best hitters in the game. He is not merely good or very good but instead, after four straight All-Star seasons and likely four straight top-10 finishes in AL MVP voting, off to a career start that places him among inner-circle Hall of Famers.

Since his first full big league season in 2015, Betts has been worth 39.7 Wins Above Replacement in the calculations of Baseball-Reference.com, 10th best from ages 22 through 26 of any position player in baseball history, just ahead of players such as Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and Joe DiMaggio.

Of course, Betts benefits because his elite defense factors into the WAR calculation, while earlier generations did not get graded with Defensive Runs Saved or Ultimate Zone Rating or other advanced metrics.

Even so, looking only at the offensive impact (as measured by offensive WAR) by Betts, the five-year run he just concluded still places him squarely in Cooperstown-caliber company.

This just in: Betts is a franchise talent, thus making rather unenviable an incoming Red Sox GM's task of deciding whether to trade the superstar.

But that executive won't be the first to face such an uncomfortable crossroads.

There have been times when teams either traded or explored trading elite talents as those players, like Betts, moved within one year of free agency.

A look at some of those deals (and nondeals) offers some clues as to the potential landscape facing the Red Sox with Betts.

Ken Griffey Jr.

When the Mariners hired Pat Gillick after the 1999 season, the Hall of Fame executive faced a situation analogous to that confronting the Red Sox. An expected 1999 contender instead floundered in a third-place finish in the AL West, at a time when two superstars — Ken Griffey Jr. and Alex Rodriguez — were within a year of free agency.

Gillick thought there was no chance of re-signing Rodriguez before he hit free agency. Griffey, meanwhile, had turned down what would have been an eight-year, \$148 million offer from Seattle — but not because of a desire to maximize earnings in free agency following the 2000 season. Instead, as he readied for his age-30 season, Griffey wanted a chance to play closer to his Orlando-area home, particularly in spring training. He made a strong plea to be traded. Gillick resigned himself to doing so, while keeping Rodriguez in his final pre-free-agent season.

“[But] you’ve got an obligation to fans, an obligation to ownership, an obligation to the players on your team that you can’t pull away two talents,” said Gillick. “I think it would have been a bit much for people to stomach if we’d have dealt Rodriguez also.”

The Mariners were constrained in trying to deal Griffey, who had the right to veto any deal. He identified a select few clubs to which he’d accept a trade, and, over months, Gillick worked out a deal for a four-player package anchored by outfielder Mike Cameron and righthander Brett Tomko.

“I would say at the time we got probably 60 or 70 percent of what we thought we should have gotten for him, and probably we only got that much because we were dealing with Cincinnati and the press knew it, so there was a bit of leverage with Cincinnati,” recalled Gillick.

Cameron had been a late addition to the package sought by the Mariners, a replacement for Pokey Reese. Cameron ended up being a solid five-tool contributor for Seattle en route to an ALCS berth. The following year, the Mariners used savings from the departures of Griffey and, after 2000, Rodriguez to add Ichiro Suzuki as well as Bret Boone, both of whom emerged as MVP candidates for Seattle en route to a 116-win season and another ALCS berth in 2001. Seattle captured enough value to survive a grim two-year task.

“You can’t waste the money,” said Gillick. “I guess it worked out, with what the outcome was in 2000 and 2001. If we’d have fallen on our faces those two years, it probably would have been looked at from another angle. But since we did well, the public and the fans and the sports people were satisfied that we probably did the right thing in getting rid of Kenny.”

Manny Machado

After 2017, the Orioles were nearing an organizational pivot. Should they try to extend their competitive window or reload for the future? Baltimore knew Machado would leave in free agency, so it explored the potential return for the 25-year-old, but didn’t find the potential return enticing

“We didn’t receive significant offers that we liked,” said former Orioles GM Dan Duquette. “The market wasn’t that robust . . . Some of the changes in the Basic Agreement made younger player contracts more valuable to the clubs. I think that was reflected in the trade market when Manny was available.”

At one point, Duquette said, the Orioles nearly consummated a trade coming out of the winter meetings, but the other team pulled its offer, and Baltimore decided the return wasn’t sufficient to make an offseason deal. The Orioles tried to win with Machado one last time.

“There is still some value to trying to win, right? That is the idea of the game, believe it or not,” Duquette said with a laugh. “My argument was that, ‘OK, we’re going to trade Manny Machado and then look around for the next 30 years for this type of equivalent talent.’ That wasn’t real attractive.”

Ultimately, the Orioles went down the drain in 2018 and ended up trading Machado to the Dodgers at the July 31 deadline for five prospects, including outfielder Yusniel Diaz (Baseball America’s No. 37 prospect after 2018). Duquette believes that the modest offseason offers for Machado serves as a case study for the limited market for young superstars entering their walk years, particularly at a time when so many teams are either committed to long rebuilds or trying to stay under the luxury-tax threshold.

Paul Goldschmidt

A year ago, the Diamondbacks had a franchise player in Paul Goldschmidt, who had just one remaining year before reaching free agency. Arizona found a market of roughly four teams for the first baseman’s services, electing to deal him to St. Louis for two projected big league regulars — catcher Carson Kelly and pitcher Luke Weaver — along with a decent prospect with a limited ceiling (Andy Young), as well as a competitive balance draft pick. They secured multiple players ready to be solid big leaguers (even if not stars) while also deepening their prospect pool.

On one hand, Goldschmidt represented a relative bargain at \$14.5 million entering the final year of his deal. Moreover, at 31, he seemed open to a long-term deal with a team that traded for him.

Still, his market was limited by his position (first base) and post-prime age. One executive surmised that Betts, even with a projected salary through arbitration of more than \$27 million and a near-certain entry into free agency, might find interest level to be twice that of Goldschmidt's given his value in center or right, creating the possibility to exceed the package garnered by Arizona.

But by how much? That's hard to say, and even harder to say whether it will exceed the value of what Betts might do for the Sox in their hopes of competing in 2020. Precedent will matter less than actual trade offers.

"So much of what a player's market ends up being is dependent on the teams that are interested," said Red Sox assistant GM Brian O'Halloran.

"The past is certainly something we look at, but every market is different, and we also have to weigh the importance of winning in 2020 and how any particular trade might affect that."

*** *The Boston Herald***

A (not so) crazy plan to restructure Red Sox front office

Tom Keegan, *The Boston Herald*

Pare payroll. Remain a postseason contender. Restock the farm system.

Enrico Rastelli, history's most famous juggler, died in 1931, so he's not an option for executing the mission statement laid out by Red Sox owner John Henry, who has put CEO Sam Kennedy in charge of finding a replacement for Dave Dombrowski.

Finding someone who can pull off all three goals isn't an impossible mission, just an extremely difficult one. It's not as if it's never been done before. It's just usually doesn't work that way.

After sifting through the backgrounds of multiple baseball front-office veterans, I did find one man who has demonstrated success in all three areas.

For now, we'll give him an alias so as not to let your gut reaction to the name, be it positive or more likely negative, sway your opinion.

Call him Joe Shlabotnik and take an objective look at his qualifications for the job.

Sporting News named Shlabotnik its Major League Baseball Executive of the Year twice, 22 years apart, so experience clearly isn't an issue.

Shlabotnik has steered baseball operations for three different organizations, and in his first year at each stop, he trimmed payroll and the team increased its winning percentage.

In 1992, he slashed payroll 24 percent and the club's winning percentage spiked from .441 to .537.

He moved to another organization in 1995. In his initial season, he cut the payroll by 21 percent and the team's winning percentage vaulted from .469 to .597.

Shlabotnik took charge of his third club's front office in 2012. His uncanny beginner's luck struck again. He trimmed payroll by five percent and the winning percentage soared from .426 to .574.

So he has demonstrated an eye for talent, which has translated to the difficult juggling act of reducing payroll and increasing competitiveness.

Restocking the farm system? Shlabotnik has encountered mixed results in that area, earning raves at his first assignment, pans at his most recent one, somewhere in between with his second job.

Here's why that's not relevant in this case: The plan here calls for Shlabotnik to be hired as club president for three years, grooming the general manager charged with restocking the farm system, who will then ascend to club president as Shlabotnik heads off to retirement. The GM: Jared Porter, assistant GM with the Diamondbacks. He has gained a strong reputation for player development, and if paid right away like a GM in a deal sweetened by the built-in, delayed promotion, surely would be interested in returning to the Red Sox, where he worked from 2004-15 before leaving to join Theo Epstein in Chicago for two seasons.

Kennedy, sent to his room by Dombrowski after having ears and a voice in baseball decisions under Ben Cherington, will have a seat at the table again. Kennedy will have a friend in Porter in the room.

In Shlabotnik, who in his most recent job watched the team he inherited not only end a 14-year postseason drought but go to the playoffs three times in his five years at the helm, Kennedy will have someone who can bring a little creative tension to the front office, which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

A charmer? No. A great face for the organization? Not really. A hire that would trigger a wild celebration? No.

Kennedy and Porter can fulfill the need for charm and personality. Shlabotnik can handle the cold-blooded decisions necessary to put the Red Sox on the road to recovery from reckless spending and the torching of the farm system.

OK, enough stalling. I'm going to reveal Shlabotnik's real name, but first I'm going to duck. Let me know when it's safe for me to stand back up.

Hint No. 1: This would not be the first time he succeeded Dombrowski, having done so when he took his first GM job. Hint No. 2: Many of the players from the Red Sox World Series champions of 2004 and 2007 were brought into the organization under his watch.

His name is Dan Duquette and he's living in Cape Cod, awaiting his next opportunity.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox slashing 2020 payroll under \$208M would mean greater revenue sharing refund, including A's forfeited proceeds

Christopher Smith

Principal owner John Henry and team president Sam Kennedy said keeping the Red Sox's 2020 payroll under the \$208 million Competitive Balance Tax threshold is a goal but not a mandate.

The Red Sox not only would avoid a tax penalty if their 2020 payroll is under \$208 million.

The club — which anticipates it will increase ticket prices in 2020 — also would receive its full revenue sharing market disqualification refund in 2020. Its refund would increase because it would include the Oakland Athletics' forfeited proceeds. The 2020 season marks the first year the Athletics will be disqualified fully from receiving revenue sharing. The A's proceeds will be shared by revenue sharing payor clubs such as the Red Sox, Yankees, Cubs and Dodgers.

Kennedy has said there is a way for both J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts to be on Boston's 2020 roster if the payroll is below \$208 million.

“But obviously it will be difficult given the nature of the agreements and the contracts that we have in place,” Kennedy said at a Sept. 30 press conference at Fenway Park.

A review of MLB’s 2017-2021 Collective Bargaining Agreement shows multiple financial incentives for the Red Sox and other major-market MLB clubs to keep their payrolls below \$208 million. It could mean Boston parting ways with Martinez, one of the game’s top sluggers, or Betts, the 2018 AL MVP.

Betts is eligible for free agency after the 2020 season. He strongly has indicated he won’t sign a contract extension before hitting the market. Trading the superstar this offseason is a realistic possibility.

Betts will receive \$30 million or more in salary arbitration in 2020. Martinez, who is contracted to earn 23.75 million in 2020, has an opt-out clause that he can exercise when the World Series ends.

Financial incentives have motivated big-market clubs to remain under the CBT.

The Red Sox — who have exceeded the base threshold 10 of 17 years under Henry’s ownership — stayed under in 2017. The Yankees and Dodgers stayed under in 2018. The Red Sox and Nationals were the only two clubs to exceed the CBT in 2018. As a result, Boston paid a tax penalty of \$11.951 million.

The Red Sox’s 2020 payroll already is at approximately \$218 million before any offseason transactions. Boston presumably will need to cut significantly more payroll than \$10 million to get under \$208 million because it still must spend money to fill in roster holes.

Chairman Tom Werner said the Red Sox will “hopefully supplement” their relief pitching. Boston also must add a starter with Rick Porcello likely headed out of Boston via free agency. Brock Holt, Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce are eligible for free agency. Boston needs to figure out its first base and second base situations.

“There’s a strategic argument as you look out for the next couple of years that getting under the CBT could help you because of the financial penalties but also the baseball penalties. Where you pick in the draft, and some other penalties that hurt you if you stay over one year, two years, three years in a row,” Kennedy said Sept. 30. “But there may be strategic reasons this offseason to be over that we might not be aware of yet.”

One strategic reason might end up being so the club can keep both Betts and Martinez. It remains to be seen how the Red Sox will approach this offseason. They know they need to get creative with their baseball decisions.

REVENUE SHARING MONEY, A’S MONEY

Teams with a revenue sharing market score of more than 100 are disqualified from receiving revenue sharing. The Yankees (235 market share score), Mets (235), Dodgers (178), Angels (178), White Sox (124), Cubs (124), Blue Jays (119), Nationals (113), Phillies (111), Athletics (108), Giants (108), Red Sox (101) and Rangers (101) all have market scores greater than 100.

All these teams, except for the Athletics, are disqualified from receiving revenue sharing, but they will receive a revenue sharing refund if “they pay more than they receive under the Revenue Sharing Plan,” as the CBA states.

The A’s were able to receive their full revenue share through 2016. But this CBA (2017-21) phases out the Athletics’ revenue sharing. Oakland was 25% disqualified in 2017, 50% disqualified in 2018 and 75% disqualified in 2019.

The A’s will be completely phased out in 2020. Meaning they will be disqualified from receiving revenue sharing next year and 2021. Revenue sharing payor clubs such as the Red Sox, Yankees, Cubs and Dodgers will receive the money, as mentioned above.

Per the CBA, "Revenue Sharing Payor Clubs shall receive a share of forfeited proceeds in proportion to their paid share of the Net Transfer Value for a given Revenue Sharing Year (referred to as the Club's 'Market Disqualification Refund')."

Boston or any big-market team that keeps its payroll under the Competitive Balance Tax threshold (\$208M for 2020), therefore, receives a larger market disqualification refund.

A revenue sharing payor club forfeits 25% of its market disqualification refund for exceeding the CBT two straight years, 50% for exceeding it three consecutive years and 75% for four consecutive years. Clubs that exceed the CBT threshold for five or more straight years forfeit the entire refund.

Teams contribute 48% of their local net revenues to the revenue sharing pool. A Fangraphs.com Jan. 9, 2019 article gives an example of the revenue sharing process, using a total local net revenue of \$3 billion, or an average of \$100 million per team. The Yankees' local net revenue is \$400 million in Fangraphs' example. So their 48% figure is \$192 million. They would pay \$144 million in that scenario with a 48% refund that equals \$48 million (48% of the \$100 million per team).

That \$48 million increases with a share of the Athletics' forfeited proceeds.

By qualifying for 100% of their market disqualification refund in 2020, the Red Sox also would receive 100% of their share of forfeited proceeds from the Athletics and other clubs with market scores of more than 100 that have low revenues.

Conversely, if the Red Sox exceed the \$208 million threshold in 2020, they would receive only 50% of their market disqualification refund, including the A's forfeited proceeds, because they would then have exceeded the CBT three straight years.

TAX PENALTY, DRAFT PICK PENALTY

As mentioned above, the Red Sox incurred a \$11.951 million tax penalty in 2018 for exceeding the Competitive Balance Tax threshold by more than \$40 million. The Red Sox's 2019 top draft pick also was moved back 10 spots.

So what kind of tax penalty would the Red Sox receive if they exceeded \$208 million?

The Red Sox — a third-time CBT Payor (see chart above) — would receive a \$2 million tax penalty if the payroll went to \$210 million in 2020. They would receive a \$10 million tax penalty for exceeding the CBT by \$20 million and a \$22.4 million tax penalty for a \$40 million overage.

The draft pick penalty is incurred only if a team exceeds the second surcharge rate, which is \$40 million over the base threshold.

A team's payroll could be \$39 million over the CBT in consecutive years but it wouldn't incur draft pick penalties in the current CBA.

If a team keeps its payroll under the CBT, it also would receive a higher compensation draft pick if one of its qualified free agents signs with another team. There are baseball advantages to staying under.

The Red Sox must weigh the advantages as one of their most crucial offseasons in recent history begins after the World Series.

Boston Red Sox's brilliant roster strategy worked wonders in 2018 but Patrick Corbin's implosion shows it's not foolproof

Chris Cotillo

Even though they're not playing this October, the Red Sox do deserve praise for some postseason happenings.

The Game 3 implosion by Nationals lefty Patrick Corbin over the weekend illustrates why the Sox used their "rovers" -- starters pitching in high-leverage relief situations -- in such a careful, calculated manner last October.

Corbin, who allowed six runs and recorded just two outs in the sixth inning against the Dodgers on Sunday, entered with Washington leading, 2-1. Manager Davey Martinez, who had already used ace Max Scherzer with a two-run lead in Game 2, did something Alex Cora never did a year ago. He asked one of his "rovers" -- who hadn't pitched out of the bullpen since 2012 -- to protect a one-run lead.

Looking back, it's clear the Sox weren't willing to use their starters late in one-run games. In the seven occasions in which they used "rovers," the Red Sox had a two-run lead three times, a three-run lead twice and a four-run lead on two occasions -- but never a single-run advantage.

Rick Porcello's two eighth-inning appearances (ALDS Game 1, ALCS Game 2) came with Boston leading by two runs. Nathan Eovaldi's three appearances as a rover (not counting his six innings in the marathon World Series Game 4) each came with Boston leading by at least two. Chris Sale's two dramatic bullpen outings (ALDS Game 4, World Series Game 5) came when the Sox were leading by three and four runs, respectively.

This year's Nationals are similar to last year's Sox in that their bullpen is the clear weak spot of a talented roster. With that in mind, Martinez has used two of his top starters in close NLDS games and another (Stephen Strasburg) out of the bullpen in the NL Wild Card game.

But Martinez hasn't been as careful as Cora with his aces, and it cost him. While Scherzer pitched a scoreless eighth in a Game 2 win, Corbin's struggles allowed Los Angeles to take a 2-1 series lead with a 10-4 victory Sunday before Washington forced a Game 5 with a win Monday.

The Red Sox' rationale for not using their starters in one-run situation is obvious in retrospect. In an era where there are more home runs than ever, one swing could have wreaked havoc on the bullpen plan and caused Cora to go to one of his top relievers a day earlier than he had planned.

Boston's "rovers" combined for seven scoreless innings, playing an important role in a bullpen that significantly outperformed expectations for an entire month. Mixed with extremely strong performances from Joe Kelly, Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier, the "rovers" formed an important part of a dynamite relief group when it mattered most.

Cora said before the end of the season that he was curious to see if any teams copied his strategy. He predicted the Astros and Rays as the two most likely postseason teams to try it.

"Just looking at the pitching staffs, I don't know," he said. "Probably going into last year, everybody thought we were the team that had no chance of doing it because of who we had on the team."

Who the Red Sox had and how Cora used them turned out to be a perfect recipe in a magical October. As Corbin's outing showed, maybe threading that needle was even harder than we thought it was back then.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Get the Rays out of Tampa Bay

Chris Mason

Around the Horn is a weekly column from Chris Mason, where the Eagle-Tribune beat writer offers nine thoughts from the Red Sox clubhouse and around Major League Baseball.

This week's installment focuses on the divisional round series and the start of Boston's offseason.

1. Move the Rays away

If you're into swaths of empty seats, the Rays have just the ballpark for you.

Tampa Bay put their season on the line at Tropicana Field yesterday. Cy Young candidate Charlie Morton was on the hill, opposite Zack Greinke, one of the most dominant pitchers of this era. It should have been electric.

Instead, there were rows of empty seats at first pitch and sections at the top of the stadium were tarped off — for an elimination game.

The "baseball is dying" narrative is overblown, but the optics at the Trop were absolutely awful.

2. No excuses

Yes, it was 1:05 on a Monday afternoon, but consider the fact that the Red Sox drew over 16,000 fans for a meaningless suspended game that lasted 10 minutes in August. That was also a weekday afternoon.

Plus, Florida resident might as well be in the thesaurus alongside retiree.

The Rays averaged 14,552 fans per game this year, last in the American League. A playoff team, they didn't hit the 10,000 mark at home 19 times this year. Tropicana Field is an eye sore.

It's time to get the Rays to a market that actually appreciates them.

3. Coaching changes?

Thus far, the only change made to Alex Cora's coaching staff is the departure of assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett.

There has to be more coming, right?

The offense wasn't Boston's problem this season, it was the pitching. Across the board, just about everybody not named Eduardo Rodriguez or Brandon Workman underachieved.

Will Dana LeVangie be the fall guy for that?

4. Bet he'll stay with Sox

Either way, look for LeVangie to stay with the organization.

Though he's only 50 years old, LeVangie has been working in the organization since 1997. He started as a bullpen catcher, worked as a scout, and was bullpen coach before pitching coach.

If they decide to reassign him, perhaps he resumes the old post in the bullpen.

5. Silence from Sale and Price

Despite multiple media requests, David Price and Chris Sale elected not to speak during the last weekend of the season.

"Obviously we would like players to talk to you guys," Cora said at the year-end presser. "But we've been very consistent with the message. Sometimes as players, it's like OK, the message was already out there. We wish they would talk to you guys. Of course.

"But at the same time it gets to the point with them where they're so frustrated with what's going on. Obviously they've got their schedule and have been going back and forth with a lot of stuff that we have to respect that, too."

Fans are certainly frustrated, too, and deserved to hear from the two injured pitchers as they head into uncertain offseasons.

6. Starters still matter

A truth has been revealed early in the postseason: Though we're in an age of bullpening and short starts, thoroughbreds like Justin Verlander, Gerrit Cole, Charlie Morton are still worth their weight — and then some.

7. Lucky No. 17

With the non-playoff team draft slots finalized, the Red Sox will have the 17th overall selection in next season's amateur draft.

This is only the fifth time the Sox have picked this high in the John Henry era. There were some hits (Andrew Benintendi) misses (Trey Ball), and in-betweens (David Murphy). We still don't know what Jay Groome will be.

As for the 17th pick itself, there have been plenty of players who never cracked the majors, but it's also Roy Halladay's draft slot.

8. Let the kids play

Rising superstar Ronald Acuna Jr. drew criticism for flipping his bat in Game 1 of the NLDS from media and players alike.

"I wanted him to respect the game and respect me as a player," Cardinals reliever Carlos Martinez, who gave up the bomb, said.

Who really cares?

Acuna's act pumped the Atlanta bench up, and you're lying if you don't think you'd be amped to hit a playoff homer. Any real cause for criticism came earlier in the game when Acuna loafed out of the box and turned a double into a single.

9. Bogey gets nominated

Xander Bogaerts was announced as Boston's nominee for the 2019 Hank Aaron Award, given to the most outstanding offensive player in each league.

Getting the nod over last year's winner J.D. Martinez and reigning MVP Mookie Betts is a testament to the dominant year Bogaerts put together at the plate.

*** *RedSox.com***

How likely is Betts' return to Boston?

Ian Browne

Do you really think they are thinking about trading Mookie?

I know this has been talked about a lot, but I still don't see trading Mookie Betts with a year left on his contract unless you completely commit to taking a step back as a team in 2020. I don't see the Sox getting close to equal value for Betts with just a year left on his contract. If the Sox fail to meet expectations in the first four months of the '20 season, perhaps Betts will be traded at that point if they can secure more value than the draft pick they would get should Mookie leave as a free agent.

How can a team this wealthy justify letting extraordinary talent slip away?

Every team has a spending limit. You have even seen this with the Yankees and Dodgers in recent years, and they play in bigger markets than Boston. The reason it could happen is because there was mismanagement with the roster, and too much money was invested in the starting rotation.

Since it seems the only way to keep Mookie and J.D. Martinez is to free up salary in the rotation, could you envision them moving Chris Sale or David Price, and taking a huge hit on the return in order to move salary? Seems unless Mookie commits long term, even that would be foolish.

Sure, it could happen. The Red Sox will look for creative solutions to keep as many of their best players as possible. But J.D. Martinez could take his situation out of their hands by exercising his opt-out clause. If that winds up being the case, I don't see the Sox as strong suitors to keep him given what the price will be.

What is the right side of the infield going to look like next year? Is it between Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec and Marco Hernandez to fight it out or will they bring in someone else, assuming no Dustin Pedroia miracle?

Look for Michael Chavis to be a factor at both first and second base. It wouldn't shock me if Mitch Moreland is re-signed to a one-year deal to give them a left-handed bat as part of the equation at first. Dalbec will definitely get a chance to earn a roster spot in Spring Training. Obviously we don't know if Brock Holt is coming back. Marco Hernandez will definitely be in the mix for playing time at second.

How likely is it that Andrew Benintendi makes a leap forward next season?

I think there's a really good chance that Andrew Benintendi leaps forward -- right back to where he was in 2018. Benintendi did himself a disservice by trying to bulk up last offseason so he could hit more home runs. The Red Sox are at their best when Benintendi is an athlete, and I expect he will get back to that in 2020. Benintendi is 25 years old, so there's no reason to think his career going to start taking a downturn. I think he learned from his mistakes in '19.

Do you think a .220 hitting CF survives MLB without hitting 40 HR and knocking in 100 runs per year? JBJ lifetime stats suggest he is an expensive, late inning, defensive replacement? Thoughts?

My top thought is that the Red Sox won the World Series in convincing fashion with Jackie Bradley Jr. hitting .234 in 2018. His OPS was actually lower that year than it was this season. Bradley is an elite defender and you can get by with him in the lineup when the rest of the order is producing. Also, it isn't as if Bradley doesn't do anything offensively. He is always good for at least one hot streak a year, and did hit 21 homers this season.

With the future of Betts and JBJ unclear and the improvement of Rafael Devers at the hot corner, is there any chance Dalbec will be used in left field?

The only way Bobby Dalbec plays left on a full-time basis is if Bradley or Betts is traded, in which case Benintendi could move to center field. If those players stay, I suppose Dalbec could be an option if left against lefties, much like Martinez was the last two seasons.

What's the prognosis for Sale? Elbows are fixable but take time. A shoulder worries me, because that is not fixable for a pitcher.

The Red Sox are taking a conservative path for Chris Sale to make sure he is healthy. He will soon visit with Dr. James Andrews to determine if the PRP shot he had in August had the desired effect. If so, Sale will do some throwing and see how his elbow feels. While the left shoulder bothered Sale in 2018, that was not said to be a problem this past year.

Odds that the Sox sign Brock Holt?

I think it depends on if some team on the open market can blow Holt away with an offer. If not, I expect he will be back in Boston. It is no secret how much Holt loves the Boston community, and also no secret how much manager Alex Cora values Holt's versatility.

Is Steve Pearce retiring?

Steve Pearce mentioned during the final weekend of the season that he is contemplating retirement. However, he hasn't made a decision yet. Players often feel a lot of emotions at the end of a frustrating year. I'm sure Pearce will have a better idea of where he is at in the coming weeks. Either way, it is certain he's played his last game with the Red Sox.

With right-handed hitters Chavis and Dalbec pushing for playing time at first base, there is no role for Pearce in Boston. He is a free agent. Pearce will hold a special place in Red Sox lore for his performance in the 2018 World Series.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Here's why key to entire Red Sox offseason rests with... David Price?

John Tomase

The pivotal figure of the Red Sox offseason isn't Mookie Betts. It isn't J.D. Martinez. It isn't even the next GM, who for now remains a magical unicorn.

It's David Price.

It has always been David Price, hasn't it? The \$217 million left-hander has never quite fit here, and yet he was indispensable to 2018's title march — they legitimately do not win it all without him.

But as a beloved broadcaster with whom Price shares an inextricable linkage likes to say, "That's history, pal." And so it is that we're focused solely on the future.

Said future appears dim. The Red Sox have tied up too much money in question marks and lack the means to retain their best players without blowing out their payroll.

With owner John Henry all but demanding a drop below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold — the subsequent "it's a goal, not a mandate" walk-backs are called damage control — it's a distinct possibility that Martinez and Betts could depart this winter and still not leave the resources to address holes at first, second, right, DH, backup catcher, bullpen, and in the rotation.

If that's the case, then prepare for three more seasons like 2019, except without a deep offense to rescue the beleaguered starting staff.

Unless . . .

There's one way out of this mess that increases the likelihood of Betts or Martinez remaining in a Red Sox uniform, but it feels incredibly remote.

It involves finding a taker for the final three years and as much as the \$96 million remaining on Price's contract that team can be convinced to eat.

Removing Price from the equation would accomplish multiple goals. For one, it would break up the triumvirate of uncertainty atop the rotation, leaving just left-hander Chris Sale (elbow, maybe shoulder) and right-hander Nathan Eovaldi (elbow) as high-priced injury risks who are signed through at least 2022.

For another, it would save at least \$10 million annually towards the luxury tax, since it's hard to imagine the Red Sox accepting any less without deciding to just roll the dice on Price being healthy and productive.

And for a third, it would help alter the makeup of a dreary clubhouse that is transitioning to more upbeat, positive leaders like shortstop Xander Bogaerts.

So the question is if it can be done. Price has three strikes against him. We've already mentioned the money. Even if the Red Sox ate \$20 million a year (which would remain on their books), they'd still need to convince someone that Price is worth \$12 million annually, and given his injury history and clubhouse concerns, that would be a tough sell. It might even require the inclusion of a prospect to sweeten the pot.

He just had surgery to remove a cyst from his wrist. That injury limited him to 107.1 innings and further clouds the 34-year-old's future, especially considering that his 2017 season was also cut short, to just 11 starts, by injury.

Add his very public spats with Hall of Famer Dennis Eckersley, which Price pointlessly reignited this summer when he very easily could've turned the other cheek, and the left-hander has developed a reputation outside of Boston not for being a great teammate — as we were all told when he signed here — but a toxic figure. Two executives recently admitted they'd hesitate to add Price to their clubhouses even if they could guarantee he'd be healthy.

Four years into his Red Sox career, Price feels like someone who, on his best days, merely tolerates being here. Even after winning the World Series as last year's de facto postseason MVP, he arrived in spring training with a chip on his shoulder to accompany all the cards he finally held.

He has never said he wants out, but it's hard to imagine he'd object if the Red Sox managed to find him a new home.

That's an incredibly tall order, but freeing themselves from Price feels like the first step towards smashing their roster logjam and beginning a painful but necessary rebuild.

*** *The Athletic***

Jason Varitek looks like manager material. So when might he take a leap into that chair?

Jen McCaffrey

Jason Varitek walked across the field at Fenway Park in late September, deep in conversation with journeyman catcher Juan Centeno. The 29-year-old Centeno had bounced around six major league organizations, tallying just over 100 games in seven seasons. He'd been called up to Boston from Triple-A Pawtucket when rosters expanded at the beginning of the month.

None of this mattered to Varitek, who saw an opportunity to teach Centeno — despite the fact that the journeyman was neither an everyday major leaguer nor a hotshot catching prospect rising through the system.

“He’s passionate about teaching the younger guys the right way to go about things because he was a perfectionist himself,” said former pitcher Tim Wakefield, who played alongside Varitek for 15 seasons in Boston. “It’s been pretty amazing to watch his evolution. I always knew he’d stay in the game in some aspect.”

Now could the next step for Varitek be a manager’s job?

Since joining the Red Sox in a special assistant role shortly after announcing his retirement from playing in 2012, Varitek’s job has morphed from one conducted largely behind the scenes to something much more on the front lines.

Varitek, along with former teammates Pedro Martinez and David Ortiz, each hold special assistant titles with the Red Sox, the former two aiding in baseball operations while Ortiz’s role is technically with the larger Fenway Sports Group.

But while Martinez and Ortiz are around the field occasionally helping pitchers and hitters, respectively, Varitek became a near-daily presence with the club once Dana LeVangie took over as pitching coach ahead of the 2018 season. Though there was no official announcement or job title change, Varitek slid into a role as catching coordinator alongside Chad Epperson, who’s held that position with the organization since 2010, mostly helping with the minor league affiliates. LeVangie previously worked as the club’s bullpen coach and catching coordinator.

“When I was offered this position (as pitching coach) that was one of the things (I asked), ‘Can you be around more often?’” LeVangie said of Varitek. “So he’s a really good sounding board in a lot of different ways and what my job title is, it’s helped a lot.”

LeVangie served as the bullpen catcher for the first eight years of Varitek’s career in Boston, forging a relationship that’s lasted more than two decades. Now that they’re both on the coaching side, there’s no shortage of learning.

“He has a very good way of communicating in a positive way, but he’s willing to have those tough conversations in an open way,” LeVangie said. “I think his calmness overall is what makes it so special. Basically the same way he was as a catcher, never showed any anxiety or panic in any situation.”

Varitek’s increasing presence around the team and eagerness to develop as a coach begs the question, even if he’s not terribly excited to answer it: Is he positioning himself to become a manager?

“I thought we were talking about catching?” he said with a laugh. “All I can say is, I’m here in this role and will do everything I can to help this team be better. As far as a future (manager), I have no idea.”

It certainly wasn’t the first time the idea has been raised. Varitek’s ability to command the field as a player often led to queries about his interest in managing down the road. And though he interviewed for Seattle’s managerial opening in 2015, whether or not he will actively pursue vacancies this offseason is a question he’s still not ready to answer.

Being around the team on a more consistent basis in a coaching capacity, however, has opened his eyes to what managing might entail. That’s especially true watching his former teammate Alex Cora handle the job.

“When you’re playing, you don’t really know what constitutes being a manager besides he writes the lineup and he tells you what to do,” Varitek said.

“The care and investment they have in their players and their teams and the amount of research and time they spend and the hours and all that. They spend a lot of time. I knew coaching staffs spent a lot of time and I knew players, what they did, but that’s been more eye-opening.”

The game has changed significantly in the short time since his playing career ended, but even still Varitek isn’t overwhelmed by the information age. He rather enjoys it and draws parallels to managing a pitching staff.

“Having always had to deal with some sort of information, whether it’s a book full of stuff or a page full of stuff, you have to decipher and be able to absorb what you’re capable of,” he said. “So I think along those lines that’s not overwhelming to me because it’s been an innate part of my entire career. And that once again relies on communication.”

Those who know him well see the potential Varitek possesses as a managerial candidate. And while he has a young family in the Boston area, the question seems to be not if he’ll become a manager, but when.

“I think those qualities allow him to do any position in the game of baseball,” LeVangie said. “It’s how much he’s willing to commit to it, is the biggest thing. I think we’ve seen him around a lot more this year, so I think he sees his time coming at some point, in whatever role it might be.”

As he continues to learn the intricacies and nuances of the coaching world, managing opportunities await. Regardless of what the future holds, though, the respect for Varitek runs deep.

“His opinion carries a lot of clout because of his career, but also as a person,” Wakefield said. “He has that way about him, where when he speaks, he demands attention and he’s brilliant too. Just in the discussion of how the game was when he started and how it’s evolved now with more analytics, he’s on top of it and he knows what’s going on and he’s a great resource not only for catchers, but pitchers to learn how does this all work.”

What aspiring MLB managers can learn from those who made it to October

Peter Gammons

We began October with 10 managers in the autumn light, and the scrutiny that comes with it.

At the same time, there were seven other managerial positions open, and an eighth could soon open up in Philadelphia.

Those hoping for one of the vacancies — which could make up as much as 27 percent of all major-league managing jobs — can learn from those in the postseason.

“If you want to manage a team that has enough talent to play in October and go deep into October, from the day pitchers and catchers report until the final day your team plays, you’d better not manage not to lose rather than win,” soon to be Hall of Famer Jim Leyland once said. “And it’s even more important in October.” Indeed, as Bobby Cox reminded us, “The whole country’s watching — while you cannot be worried about who’s watching, only what’s right for your team.”

On the first day of the month, when the Nationals’ superkid Juan Soto hit what turned into a three-run, game-winning hit off Josh Hader, Brewers manager Craig Counsell — who the previous month was hailed as a Manager of the Year contender for his team’s 20-7 September charge past the Cubs — stepped into the spotlight, and was questioned for using Hader for one inning. “That’s the way we hope to have it play out,” Counsell explained.

Yet in the darkness on the outskirts of New York, there was the Mariano Rivera, 2001 argument. Joe Torre used him for the eighth and ninth in Game 7 in Phoenix. They lost, one of five blown saves in his Hall of Fame postseason career.

In real time, this is what actually happened in 2001. Mark Grace singled. Damian Miller tried to sacrifice; Rivera slipped as he fielded it and threw the ball away. First and second, none out. Jay Bell bunted back to Rivera, who fired to third, and Scott Brosius had plenty of time to throw back across to first for the 1-5-3 double play, only to hold the ball instead. Tony Womack pulled a ball down the right-field line, double, tie game. Rivera hit Counsell with a pitch. Rivera then broke Gonzalez's bat with a cutter, but because the infield was playing in, the ball landed on the dirt and rolled into the outfield to score the winning run.

One ball hit decently. Two runs. He also threw 48 pitches over three innings in the seventh game of the 2003 ALCS.

“Sometimes things happen that cannot be scripted and just happen, because that's baseball,” said Counsell three days after being eliminated. “I don't like what happened, but we did what we agreed on, what we believed was the way to win.” Hit batsman. Crazy bounce on Soto's single. While Stephen Strasburg and Max Scherzer were piggybacking to pitch the Nationals back into a 1-1 series tie in Los Angeles on Friday, Counsell was in Fort Myers, Fla., with family, watching his son play in a tournament.

Obviously there have always been managerial faux pas that have drawn fans' ire, since long before the age of internet trials. Ron Washington took heat in the sixth game of the 2011 World Series for not putting a defender in for Nelson Cruz in right field before then-Cardinal David Freese hit his unforgettable rocket over Cruz's glove, one strike away from what would have been the Rangers' first (and only) world championship. Angels manager Gene Mauch was heavily criticized for leaving Luis Sánchez in to face Milwaukee's Cecil Cooper in the fifth (and final) game of the 1982 ALCS instead of going with Andy Hassler. But I had listened to Mauch play out the entire game's possibilities that morning, and understood why he came to that moment and decided on Sánchez.

In 1962, bottom of the ninth, Game 7 in Candlestick Park, two out, 1-0 Yankees, runners at second and third after a Willie Mays double. Yankees manager Ralph Houk left Ralph Terry, who two years earlier gave up the Bill Mazerowski homer, in to pitch to Willie McCovey, future Hall of Famer. McCovey crushed a towering fly ball down the right-field line that was just foul. Then Big Mac hit a pea right at second baseman Bobby Richardson. Marshall Bridges, the Yankee closer, a left-hander who held opposing lefties to a .169 average that season, watched from the bullpen.

Game over, Series over, that's baseball.

In 2014, Ned Yost was the focus of criticism during the Madison Bumgarner World Series, which ended with the tying run on third base in the bottom of the ninth inning of Game 7. The next year, the Royals won and regenerated a beloved franchise in a small market. Yost will forever be remembered in Kansas City the way the late Dick Howser is remembered.

If Ralph Houk had the analytics Dave Roberts has, maybe he'd have used Bridges — or his version of Adam Kolarek, whom Roberts used strategically in the first two NLDS games. Houk actually was a pioneer in bullpen use, going back to catching Joe Page and utilizing Luis Arroyo on the great 1961 team, and kept a notebook in pencil on every reliever's appearance, including the number of times that pitcher warmed up. But what he and Branch Rickey wrote in pencil came long before Bill James changed the baseball world.

Gut was then, and remains still, part of managing.

Do teams looking for new managers look for defining characteristics in the postseason managers? “Every job is different, has different requirements,” says Buck Showalter. “The Kansas City job is different from the Mets job. The San Diego job is different from Anaheim or San Francisco.”

Then, is there a necessary resume?

When Brian Cashman was doing his job search after the 2017 season, Showalter was still in Baltimore, and when it was mentioned to him that Aaron Boone could get the job without prior experience, Showalter

replied, “from my vantage point with the Orioles, I hope Brian doesn’t hire Boone.” Cashman, of course, did. The results have been two 100-win seasons — granted a hearty payroll, but also a major league-leading number of injuries — and two playoffs. Showalter knew that Aaron’s grandfather Ray Boone was an All-Star player, great scout, tough man, and that Aaron grew up in his father’s managerial office. That Aaron watched and learned from different roles long before his big 2003 ALCS home run. That he had media experience for a big market at ESPN. And that he never made excuses when he blew out his knee playing hoops in that offseason, accepting the loss of salary.

That leads to Chris Antonetti’s view. “You hire a person to be your leader not because of his resume, but who and what he is,” says Antonetti. “The title ‘manager’ really isn’t what you’re hiring. It’s the leader for the entire organization. One doesn’t lead because someone says you’re the manager. The jobs are all different in different markets and in different situations. Experience obviously is preferable, because experience helps prepare one for situations.

“For instance,” says Antonetti, “lightening things up, humor is a good thing. But a manager is together with his players for 230 days in a year, and humor only goes so far. Authenticity, empathy, humility are all very important.”

There are few better examples of the right hiring at the right point in a team’s history than the 2013 hiring of Terry Francona by the Indians. No one in Cleveland has to be reminded of the Edgar Renteria single in 1997; 1948, when the Tribe had a 24-year old rookie shortstop named Ray Boone, remains the last time they won it all.

The Indians were up 3-1 in the 2007 ALCS against Boston, and ran out of gas against the eventual world champions. From 2009-2012 they went 65-97, 69-93, 80-82, 68-94. Francona’s 2011 Red Sox suffered a September collapse, Francona was let go as Theo Epstein headed for Chicago, and after a year with ESPN, Tito was hired by Mark Shapiro and the Indians.

Without further introduction, this is how that hiring worked:

MOST SUCCESSFUL TEAMS, 2013-2019

Team	Record	Win %
Dodgers	671-464	.591
Indians	638-494	.564
Cardinals	635-499	.560
Yankees	634-500	.559
Nationals	632-502	.557
Red Sox	624-510	.550
Cubs	610-524	.538
Astros	602-532	.531
Athletics	590-544	.520
Pirates	584-548	.516

As Leyland could have won in 1992, Francona could have won in 2016. Instead, the Cubs ended their post-1908 drought in what was an unforgettable World Series.

But it goes further. “Tito is the leader of this organization, without a doubt in anyone’s mind,” says Antonetti. “He cares about players. He is authentic. He is empathetic. He is humble. He has a great sense of humor. He demonstrates that a leader can be humble yet have confidence in himself at the same time.”

Francona played. He managed a weak team in Philadelphia. He advised in Oakland and Cleveland.

Antonetti, Epstein, Counsell, Don Mattingly, Showalter — and dozens more viewing from different vistas — understand that “experience” can be a number of different experiences. For Showalter, experience means being able to teach young players that the speed of the game in the major leagues is very different

from the speed of the game in the minors. He has strong feelings about the worth of spring training, and the on-field fundamental work necessary.

Look at Alex Cora. He was a player who saw everything. Winter ball manager and general manager for years. WBC manager and general manager. Bench coach for the 2017 champion Astros, learning from A.J. Hinch. By the way, Hinch, a Stanford psychology major, was a minor league and scouting director as well as a manager ...

Then run down the rest of this October's managers:

- Bob Melvin was the bench coach on the '01 Diamondbacks, managed in Seattle, Arizona, Oakland, caught 627 games in 10 major league seasons, managed 2,396 regular-season games and carries unmeasurable respect among players and peers.
- Brian Snitker has spent his life in the Braves organization, a disciple of Bobby Cox, from whom he learned trust and empathy for players.
- Dave Roberts made himself a valued career as a player, then worked as a coach, in a front office, broadcasting, teaching, all with enormous authenticity.
- Andrew Friedman once said “Rocco Baldelli is one of the few people who could do anything in baseball.” Player, robbed of his career by a rare illness. Minor league instructor. Scout and evaluator. Coach. Exceptionally smart, perfectly synced with Thad Levine and Derek Falvey (who played with Baldelli's brother at Trinity) and blessed with people skills that allow him to connect with anyone and everyone. Interestingly, a number of managers and general managers asserted that scouting gives potential managers a valuable different perspective in preparing for the job.
- Davey Martinez spent years preparing as Joe Maddon's Harry Truman.
- Kevin Cash was one of those players who most everyone thought would manage, was an advance scout, had so impressed Francona that when Tito got the Cleveland managerial job his first hire was Cash as bullpen coach, was runner-up in his first managerial interview (with Texas) and weeks later got the Tampa job when Maddon left, and is intellectually flexible and creative.
- Mike Shildt never played professional baseball. In Charlotte, he ran a baseball program, coached young players, and when some — like UNC-Charlotte coach Rob Woodard and Daniel Bard — couldn't get to practice, he'd drive them himself. “He had,” says Woodard, “a profound impact on a lot of us.” He managed through the minors, and has built a storage building of trust.

So there is no formula for the major leagues, or the requisites for each open job. The Padres may have \$430 million invested in three veteran players, but they have a very talented organization with a half-dozen pitchers ready to pitch in the big leagues. Kansas City is a development job, but with a general manager in Dayton Moore who gets it. The Mets require someone ready to deal with New York, the pressure to win and, in Jeff Wilpon, an owner whose heavy involvement creates another kind of pressure. San Francisco will be a very good job because of the club's present and future revenues, and a strong, understanding baseball operations group led by Farhan Zaidi.

The Angels clearly want Maddon, who has won a World Series, was the bench coach for the 2002 world champions, and whose teaching experience goes back to running 14 instructional leagues. The Cubs could go any direction; Joe Girardi has the experience and the analytical skills to be part of their organizational integration. The Pirates require energy, but most of all the ideas and synchronization required to step up to the bridge and turn the ship around and up the right river, again.

There are fascinating names that have surfaced other than the obvious, Maddon. Mike Matheny was a success for a time in St. Louis. Walt Weiss could be a success again if given the opportunity. David Ross.

Brad Ausmus. Girardi. Joe Espada. Sam Fuld. George Lombard. Ron Wotus. Jason Varitek. Tim Bogar. One player said, "Leyland could come back and still be great." Derek Shelton. Mike Bordick.

If you're an aspiring manager, you always deal with pressure. And if you guide a team into October baseball, you then hope you're Ralph Houk watching Willie McCovey against Ralph Terry, with your left-handed reliever looking on. And not Craig Counsell, watching Josh Hader — against whom left-handed batters in 66 plate appearances struck out 34 times with a .143 batting average — surrender a three-run single to a 20-year-old left-handed batter.

Watching that hit, I flashed back to a 31-year-old question: What was Dennis Eckersley's Win Probability with two outs and two strikes in the bottom of the ninth inning against Kirk Gibson?