

The Boston Red Sox ***Wednesday, November 6, 2019***

*** *The Boston Globe***

Sam Kennedy says J.D. Martinez's decision does not change payroll goals for Red Sox

Alex Speier

At the conclusion of the season, Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy acknowledged that the team has a goal to get its payroll under the luxury-tax threshold of \$208 million for the 2020 season, making it "difficult" to retain both J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts, though he did note that there was a way to move forward with both stars.

On Monday, Martinez decided not to opt out of the remaining three years and \$62.5 million of his contract, a deal that will count for \$23.75 million against the luxury-tax threshold in 2020. Given that both Martinez and Betts now remain under team control for next year, has anything changed since Kennedy first discussed the difficulty of retaining both?

"No," Kennedy said by phone. "Nothing has changed."

Kennedy and other Red Sox officials have also noted that having Martinez back represents a strength for the team.

The 32-year-old hit .304/.383/.557 with 36 homers and drove in 105 runs in 2019, and in two seasons in Boston, he has hit .317/.392/.593 with 79 homers. In that time, he ranks in the top five in the majors in homers, average, and slugging, and in the top 10 in on-base percentage.

The Sox view him as an asset in a lineup that led the way to a championship in 2018 and remained elite in 2019. Kennedy also made clear that the Red Sox will keep an open mind about payroll for the 2020 season.

As he said the day after the season and has since repeated, the effort to get under the tax threshold is a desire but not an absolute commitment, a stance that theoretically gives the team the latitude to enter the year with both Betts (expected to be in the range of \$28 million-\$30 million) and Martinez.

"We've communicated with J.D. that we're ecstatic that he's decided to stay here with the Red Sox," Kennedy said. "We talked about the desire, the goal of working towards [getting under the tax], but it's certainly not a hard-and-fast mandate.

"[New chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom] and the team will continue to think through different strategies for the near term and the long term. It's good to have that [opt-out] issue behind us, and now we move on."

Red Sox should find a way to keep Mookie Betts for 2020

Chad Finn

This is how messed up the Red Sox are right now, the most blatant reminder yet of the daunting task facing new baseball boss Chaim Bloom as he tries to restore this roster to contender status while pruning payroll.

J.D. Martinez decided not to opt out of his contract Monday, the deadline for him to do so. Instead, the 32-year-old designated hitter will remain with the Red Sox, with three years and \$62.5 million remaining on the deal he signed before the 2018 season.

We will do this dance again next year, when another opt out kicks in. But for this year, the Red Sox retain a model professional at his craft who has averaged roughly 40 homers and 120 runs batted in and posted a .317/.392/.593 slash line during his two seasons with the franchise.

Martinez choosing to remain with the Red Sox should be great news.

Yet, because of financial circumstances, we're not sure if it's even good news . . . and we're pretty sure it's not.

If you've been paying attention — and hopefully making clear to the Red Sox how ridiculous all of this is — you know what I'm getting at. The mildly surprising return of Martinez (and his \$23.75 million salary in 2020) makes management's acknowledged quest to get payroll below \$208 million and reset the luxury tax penalties even more of a challenge.

His decision to come back makes it all the more likely that Mookie Betts will be traded.

One great player's decision to stay means an even better one may go. This isn't how this is supposed to work for the Boston Red Sox.

Here's what should happen for the Red Sox in 2020: Martinez should team up with Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, and Betts — who were fourth, fifth, and tied for seventh in offensive WAR in the American League last season — to form the most menacing core of any lineup in baseball.

Bloom, who drew rave reviews for his ability to identify unheralded talent during his time with the Rays, should be looking to piece together at least two spots in the rotation, a couple of gigs in the bullpen, and perhaps the first and second base positions with low-cost capable or promising players.

He'll do some of this even without moving on from a high-priced star, and I'm looking forward to seeing what he comes up with on the bargain end of things. I suspect he'll find a new fan favorite or two that we've barely heard of, like Kevin Millar/Mark Bellhorn/Bill Mueller back in Theo Epstein's heyday.

But if the Red Sox are indeed hell-bent on resetting the luxury tax penalties — a perfectly reasonable practice so long as it doesn't cost you a 27-year-old five-tool outfielder who does everything right — Bloom would be wise to find a way to move on from at least part of the \$292 million (at a minimum) they have left to pay David Price, Chris Sale, and Nathan Eovaldi. Actually, that wouldn't be wise. It would be more like a miracle. Let's see how good you are, kid.

Betts should be the tipping point when he comes to the quest to reset. If that means trading him to do so, you simply do not do it this year. You wait to see how his contract situation — he's a free agent after this season — plays out. Trading him for "prospects" with a year left on his deal and a stated goal of hitting the free agent market is not going to bring a major haul, though it might get a couple of intriguing pieces for when the Pawtucket Red Sox move to Worcester in 2021.

These prospects — and the name Baseball America junkies keep throwing at me is Cristian Pache, a 20-year-old Braves phenom who hit 12 homers with an .802 OPS across two levels last season — will never be what Betts is now. You can argue no player to emerge from the Red Sox farm system in the draft era has been the complete player that Betts is, which is a heck of a statement considering home-grown legends Jim Rice, Carlton Fisk, and Wade Boggs are in the Hall of Fame and Dwight Evans ought to be soon.

It's become trendy to suggest trading Betts is akin to the Nationals letting Bryce Harper walk, then going on to win the World Series. There are some parallels, if you see Devers as Juan Soto and Bogaerts as Anthony Rendon. And the Nats did labor through the start of the season in a way similar to the Red Sox before getting their act together, something their AL counterpart never did.

But there are a couple of huge differences. The Nats have Stephen Strasburg and Max Scherzer fronting their rotation, and they used the Harper savings to drop six years and \$140 million on Patrick Corbin. You know what the Red Sox would do with their Betts savings? Save it.

Also: Betts isn't Harper. He's far superior. Harper has had one season with more WAR than 4.6. Betts has never had less than 5.9 WAR in his five full seasons. One is close to Mike Trout, the other closer to Tim Salmon.

The Red Sox theoretically could trade Martinez, though he'll have teams on his no-trade list that make that difficult. We shouldn't settle for this as an alternative, anyway. The Red Sox should enter next season with Martinez and Betts and Devers and Bogaerts. With that quartet, a few savvy moves from the new guy in charge, and some change of fortune with the staff's most accomplished and expensive pitchers, the Red Sox might just prove that the uninspiring 2019 season was an aberration.

Trading Betts in part because Martinez stayed would be one lousy and backward way to let us know things will be better in '20.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox still control Mookie Betts situation, regardless of popular narrative

Bill Speros

The Red Sox were close.

Damn close.

Some media told us the departure of J.D. Martinez was a certainty.

Martinez, the Red Sox DH, was set to take his mighty right-handed bat to New York, Anaheim, Chicago or elsewhere in the American League after opting out of his deal with Boston.

The Red Sox Front Office Hydra and new Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom were about to see \$62.5 million disappear from the team's payroll over the next three seasons.

Instead, Martinez took the easy money.

Martinez has an opt-out after next season, during which he'll make \$23.75 million.

For now, Martinez isn't going anywhere.

Unless he's traded.

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy was reportedly "ecstatic" over Martinez's decision and told the media that getting the team's payroll under the \$208 million luxury tax next season is not a "hard-and-fast mandate."

That's Red Sox speak for: "We haven't given up yet on Mookie Betts."

It's Kennedy's job to run the business side of things on Jersey Street. He needs to keep stuffing bigger and bigger arses into the 1934-caloric-intake-based seats at Fenway Park and ensuring those patrons empty their wallets and zap their debit cards early and often on gameday. Kennedy is undoubtedly pleased that a star player who is very popular with the fan base isn't going anywhere.

The dreaded “luxury tax” looms over Fenway Park, so says the narrative. Henry has implemented an austerity program either by will or choice — depending on how much you want to believe a billionaire, whose \$90 million boat would extend from second base to the Red Sox bullpen, can be told what to do.

Martinez signed with Boston in early 2018. His five-year, \$110 million contract was a steal back then. The deal is front-loaded — to satisfy Martinez and Scott Boras — and has built in protections on the back end — to satisfy the Red Sox — in case Martinez misses significant time with injury in 2021 and 2022.

It is remarkable how things have reversed themselves concerning the Red Sox in just 19 months.

Spend. Win a World Series. Spend. Finish 19 games out. Fire the boss. Blow up the roster. Rebuild.

Not necessarily in that order.

Martinez, 32, has averaged .317 and 40 homers in two seasons in Boston.

But this decision was a merely a prelim to this winter’s Big Verdict on Jersey Way.

The Red Sox Universe continues to revolve around the fate of Betts.

The party line is that the Red Sox have to trade either Martinez or Betts — if not both — in order to reach that magical \$208 million number and begin the dreaded “bridge year” in earnest.

Some media have begun to dutifully propagate about the team being “forced” to deal Betts, especially in the wake of Martinez’s non-move move.

Here’s the dirty little secret that bears repeating here: The Red Sox will not be “forced” to do anything.

The Red Sox can “choose” to trade Betts. The Red Sox can “choose” to take him to arbitration. Been there. Done that. The Red Sox can “choose” to offer Betts a deal that matches whatever the best players in the game are getting and make that offer very public to buffer the 50-year PR calamity that will follow Betts’ departure.

We have no idea what sort of deal would keep Betts in Boston, nor does anyone besides Mr. and Mrs. Betts. Nor does anyone (outside the Betts camp) know whether or not he’d take a market deal now to stay in Boston rather than wait a year to become a free agent.

But the Red Sox had better damn well find out.

The Red Sox have far more control in this situation than they would like fans to believe because they write the checks.

Life works that way, kids.

Meanwhile, the rose is already off the Bloom. The new boss appears to be a bystander in all this. It was Kennedy and not Bloom who spoke to the company newsletter Monday.

Given Bloom’s pedigree, he was presumably brought to Boston to build a contender on the cheap like he had done in Tampa Bay. Martinez crashed that plan in less than two weeks.

“Our priority is going to be sustainability and competitiveness over the long-term. And that can take many forms,” Bloom said last week.

That’s Red Sox speak for: “I’d sure love to trade Mookie Betts.”

There's wistful gossip of an "Adrian Gonzalez-Carl Crawford" like deal that would deliver an organ-transplant shakeup to roster and payroll.

Even the pinkest of Pink Hats has to realize that Xander Bogaerts, Martinez and Betts will not all remain on this team's roster beyond 2020.

Sometimes being a "small market" team isn't all it's cracked up to be.

*** *MassLive.com***

PawSox will continue decades-long tradition of sending two kids to World Series when team moves to Worcester

Michael Bonner

A pair of children in Worcester, Massachusetts, will attend Major League Baseball's World Series in 2021 and beyond as a result of a gesture made by an American League umpire nearly 70 years ago.

The Pawtucket Red Sox have sent two children to the World Series for the last 30 years in collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club of Pawtucket. The organization told MassLive on Tuesday it will continue the tradition both in Worcester and Pawtucket once the team moves in 2021.

"It's something that we absolutely want to continue to provide both in Pawtucket and Worcester," Head of Community and Player Relations Joe Bradlee said. "How exactly the program takes shape in Worcester is still to be determined but it's something we definitely want to continue."

The roots of the World Series tickets are buried deeper than minor league baseball.

Hank Soar, a former Boys and Girls Club member in the 1920s, is likely known more for his accolades in professional football - he caught the game-winning touchdown in the 1938 NFL championship game against Green Bay - than baseball. But his ascension to a major league umpire in 1950 is the tradition's genesis.

As an American League umpire, Soar had access to World Series tickets. He passed them along to the Boys and Girls Club.

"The club meant everything to him. The programs and baseball, that was his life, so it meant a lot that the tradition is carried on here and that the PawSox were able to do this," said Jim Hoyt, Soar's son-in-law and the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Pawtucket.

Hank Soar, a former professional football player and American League umpire, began the tradition of sending children from the Boys and Girls Club to the World Series.

The annual pilgrimage from Pawtucket to the World Series continued beyond Soar with sponsorship from the city and eventually in 1989, the PawSox took ownership.

"They've just been incredible supporters of the club over the years," Hoyt said. "This is only one piece of the total support, but we're really excited that it will continue because the impact it has."

In Pawtucket, participants in the RBI Baseball Program at the Boys and Girls Club are eligible.

Every game played equates to an entry for a child, Hoyt said. At the end of the season 10 names are drawn. Those 10 children then go to McCoy Stadium where two are selected to attend the World Series.

“I think the most rewarding part for me is usually been the send-off when you get to see their reactions to holding the actual tickets,” Bradlee said.

The Pawtucket Red Sox sent a pair of children for the World Series for the 30th consecutive season, but the tradition dates back even further.

Bradley said the PawSox haven’t decided a method or organization to work with in Worcester.

Regardless, this part won’t change: The Pawtucket Red Sox provide the tickets, airfare, hotel and \$500 in spending money. Each child can take a chaperone, usually a parent.

“It’s awesome for the kids. We’re talking about young boys and girls that for many, it might be the first time they’ve been on a plane,” Hoyt said. “For many, it might be the first time they’ve been to a major league baseball game.”

Hoyt experienced the trip firsthand in 1988, when the Boys and Girls Club chaperoned the experience. They landed in Los Angeles for Game 1 of the World Series between the Oakland Athletics and LA Dodgers. Hoyt and children from the Boys and Girls Club, including an 8-year-old, who would become a Pawtucket school teacher, witnessed Kurt Gibson’s famed pinch-hit home run off Dennis Eckersley.

“That memory is as vivid today as it was when it happened,” Hoyt said. “It’s those kinds of memories that you take with you for a lifetime.”

The next season, the PawSox inherited the custom. They’ve sent children like Carlos Tobon, now a Rhode Island State Representative, to Toronto in 1995. One of the more momentous trips didn’t include airfare but a trip to Fenway Park in 2004 to catch a glimpse of the Red Sox ending an 86-year World Series drought.

This year’s attendees, Cory Almeida, 12 of Seekonk, Rhode Island, and Braedon Daley, 11 of Pawtucket, traveled to Washington D.C. to watch the Washington Nationals host the Houston Astros while also touring the nation’s capital.

Soon similar moments will be shared by children in Worcester.

*** *WEEI.com***

What Red Sox free agents can expect to reel in

Rob Bradford

One of the annual traditions in Major League Baseball's offseason is MLB Trade Rumors coming out with its annual projections for free-agent signings.

Tim Dierkes and his group have been remarkably on point over the years in their estimations, making the recently-released 14th version of the predictions a must-read.

With J.D. Martinez deciding to opt-in to his current contract, there are only two Red Sox who cracked the Top 50 free agents.

Rick Porcello, No. 31: Projection of one-year contract with the Giants for \$11 million.

MLBTR cites the possibility of Porcello shunning two-year offers in order to re-establish his value in a pitcher-friendly park, allowing to re-enter the market heading into his age 32-year-old season.

Brock Holt, No. 41: Projection of two-year contract with the Diamondbacks for \$8 million.

The 31-year-old's versatility is highlighted by MLBTR, acknowledging that a return to the Red Sox will be made difficult by the team's budgetary restrictions. Arizona is highlighted in large part because of the amount of former Red Sox decision-makers in the organization.

Other Red Sox free agents not listed include Jhoulys Chacin, Andrew Cashner, and Mitch Moreland. The only player in the Top 50 MLBTR predicts will land with the Red Sox is reliever Pedro Strop (No. 49) with a one-year, \$5 million contract.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Why it makes more sense for Red Sox to keep J.D. Martinez than Mookie Betts

John Tomase

Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez complement each other as well as any two players in baseball. Since the start of 2018, no one has scored more runs than Betts (264) or driven in more than Martinez (235). That's no coincidence.

But now the Red Sox face a stomach-churning dilemma: choosing between them.

Martinez's decision not to opt out of the remaining three years on his contract means that not only will he return in 2020, but the Red Sox will have \$23.75 million less to spend on Betts, were they feeling inclined to keep him.

With ownership declaring it hopes to see the payroll drop below \$208 million for luxury-tax purposes, it's hard to envision a scenario where both Martinez and Betts open the season on the roster. And so the next three months will be spent trying to find a new home for one of them.

It's a choice that feels like a loss no matter what the Red Sox choose, but if they can only keep one, it should be Martinez.

It sounds crazy, because Betts is clearly the better all-around player and he's in his prime. What big-market team trades a 27-year-old barely a year removed from winning the MVP?

Should Sox follow this model for a Betts trade?

But the Red Sox need to start thinking long-term after three years of loading for bear. Bad contracts to David Price, Chris Sale, and Nathan Eovaldi will almost certainly hamstring the franchise for the next three years at \$79 million per. That's no way to sustain success, and I don't begrudge John Henry for setting limits.

While it's tempting to say that Betts is paying the price for those horrible decisions, it also ignores the truth: 10-year, \$300 million contracts aren't good business. I wouldn't pay that to anyone. Even Betts.

Angels superstar Mike Trout will probably claim his third MVP next week after another absurd season that saw him blast a career-high 45 homers. That makes his 12-year, \$428 million extension money well spent, right? Well, foot surgery ended his season in September. Maybe it's nothing, but he has missed at least 20 games each of the past three seasons. The Angels need no reminder of what his 30s might look like, because all they've gotten out of Albert Pujols's 10-year deal (signed at age 32, to be fair) since 2012 is one All-Star berth. Trout's on another level athletically, but that's part of the problem -- he plays like a freight train. If he wears down, it won't be reflected in his paycheck.

The same goes for Bryce Harper, who delivered solid overall numbers in the first year of his 13-year, \$330 million megadeal with the Phillies, but was sitting at home when his former team, the Nationals, won it all. Last winter's other \$300 million man, Manny Machado, hit .256 with a .796 OPS in San Diego, which is a big bag of meh.

Betts is better than everyone on this list except Trout, but he's also smaller than them at 5-9, 180. As great as he is now, signing him into his late 30s for more than \$30 million annually is the definition of risky. What if he loses a step in the outfield, or the lightning in his wrists suffers a voltage drop? When the Red Sox signed Dustin Pedroia to an eight-year deal in July of 2013, they couldn't have imagined that he had just made his final All-Star team, or that he'd appear in more than 135 games just once before a degenerative knee condition effectively ended his career.

Maybe Betts is Manny Ramirez or Alex Rodriguez, two stars who delivered on massive deals. Then again, both of them were busted multiple times for using performance-enhancing drugs, and baseball's crackdown on those has led to a reevaluation of aging curves, which are steeper in their 30s than they used to be.

Martinez, meanwhile, represents cost certainty. He's signed for three more years, but can opt out of either of the next two. He plays a far less demanding position and style than Betts, and it's much easier to envision him delivering value commensurate with the \$62.5 million remaining on his deal. He has averaged .317-40-118 in his first two seasons with the Red Sox, and he continues a trend that has existed since the heyday of David Ortiz, giving Boston far and away the best DH production in baseball. Paying him \$23 million a year to mash while other teams split their DH slot among aging one-dimensional sluggers or glorified bench rotations feels like exploiting a market inefficiency.

I would argue that Martinez's presence is more important to the lineup than Betts', and I suspect Betts would agree. It's easier to be a table-setter than a table, to steal an old line from Pedroia, and Martinez is the latter, taking the heat off everyone else. Even in an era defined by analytics, the mental strain that Martinez eases by being The Guy means more than numbers can convey.

There's an obvious counterargument to all of this: keep them both. The Red Sox aren't poor, and Henry's desire to cut payroll is based on the artificial barriers created by the luxury tax. Outside of some minor draft order penalties, all that going over costs anyone is money, and Henry can afford it -- another \$240 million payroll in 2020 might cost the Red Sox \$20 million in tax payments, for instance. That's easy to dismiss when it's someone else's money and that someone else is a billionaire.

My counterargument to that counterargument would be that Henry has never been shy about spending, and if he looks at this past season's underachieving roster and sees more problems on the horizon because of bad investments, I can't blame him. After all, it's not like he hired Chaim Bloom from small-market Tampa to make it rain.

The next great Red Sox team won't be bloated like this one. Betts isn't part of that problem, but give him \$350 million and he could be. Better to pay Martinez a more reasonable sum and trust that the team's considerable resources can be spread around to make up the difference.

*** *The Athletic***

Knowing what we know now, what will the Red Sox 25-man roster look like this season?

Chad Jennings

It was always hard to tell with J.D. Martinez. His contract seemed to fit his market value, but he was represented by aggressive agent Scott Boras and once told the Boston Globe, "I don't mind moving around," suggesting he was open to finding another team this offseason. Certainly, there was the posture of a player willing to opt out, despite a contract that seemed well suited for him to stick around.

In the end, Martinez decided to stay. He'll play at least one more year at \$23.75 million then consider the opt-out possibility again next fall. It was the first big decision of the Red Sox offseason, and it's given the roster a starting point.

With inevitable arbitration raises, their current payroll projects to be well above the luxury tax threshold. They have particularly glaring holes at fifth starter and on the right side of the infield. They're a talented team as currently constituted, but perhaps not a championship team without making a few bold moves.

Based on the guys currently in place – only players currently on the roster and in the farm system – this is vaguely what the 2020 Opening Day roster looks like. The Red Sox will start from here, then begin shifting and remodeling, perhaps to trim payroll, perhaps to make one more run at a title, and perhaps to do both.

Lineup

1. Mookie Betts RF
2. Rafael Devers 3B
3. Xander Bogaerts SS
4. J.D. Martinez DH
5. Andrew Benintendi LF
6. Christian Vazquez C
7. Bobby Dalbec 1B
8. Jackie Bradley Jr. CF
9. Michael Chavis 2B

Point of weakness – The biggest reach here is the inclusion of Dalbec as the everyday first baseman. The young slugger hit 27 home runs in the minor leagues last season, but he has only 30 games of Triple-A experience and makes more sense as a mid-season call-up rather than an Opening Day solution. For now, he's the most interesting internal candidate (unless it's the guy currently listed at second base). It makes sense that the Red Sox eventually will add veterans to at least compete for at-bats at first base and second base.

Worth considering – The Red Sox have some options with Chavis. They could start him at first base, start him at second base, or they could treat him as a bench/depth player (there's also some vague possibility they could try him in the outfield) The team was relatively pleased with Chavis's defensive metrics at second last season, but he's still not ideal at the position. Although he eventually struggled, his tremendous first month was a taste of his potential impact. Chavis is still cheap and offers versatility with offensive potential. He surely factors into the equation somewhere, it's just a matter of where.

Changes on the way? – If the Red Sox are serious about getting below the luxury tax threshold, they'll have to consider trading either Bradley Jr., Martinez or Betts. Trading Bradley could save a little more than \$10 million, which isn't enough to get below the luxury tax threshold. But he's also the easiest to lose because Betts can play center field. Trading Martinez would save \$23.75 million, and trading Betts could save upward of \$30 million. Losing one of those two would be the easiest way to significantly shed payroll, but those moves would also have the most significant impact on the current team.

Rotation

1. Chris Sale
2. Eduardo Rodriguez
3. David Price
4. Nathan Eovaldi

5. Brian Johnson

Point of weakness: If the Red Sox had to round out their rotation right now, the fifth starter would be ... who? We're picking Johnson, but mostly because he's out of options and has filled this role in the past. Hector Velazquez made eight starts last year, but he was pretty awful in that role. Tanner Houck is the most advanced of the Red Sox high-end pitching prospects, but he worked mostly as a reliever in Triple-A last season before becoming a starter again in the Arizona Fall League. Ideally, he'll be ready to step in at some point next season, but it's hard to peg him as a big league starter right now.

Worth considering: Could the Red Sox round out the rotation with an opener? This would have been a worthwhile question even before the Red Sox hired a guy who helped pioneer the opener strategy. Now, it's certainly worth wondering if the Red Sox could open the season with four true starters, then mix and match the fifth spot (something like Travis Lakins for an inning or two, followed by Johnson for four or five). It worked for new CBO Chaim Bloom in Tampa Bay.

Changes on the way? It's a pretty big assumption that each of the top four Red Sox starters will be viable throughout next season. Three of the four had significant health issues last year, and only two made more than three starts beyond August 1. So, beyond the need for a fifth starter, there are other concerns. Even if the Red Sox try an opener, they'll surely want to improve their rotation depth, which was exposed last season. There's also the possibility of trading an existing starter to dump payroll, though such a trade would surely require absorbing significant salary.

Bullpen

- Brandon Workman
- Matt Barnes
- Darwinzon Hernandez
- Marcus Walden
- Josh Taylor
- Heath Hembree
- Ryan Brasier / Travis Lakins / Josh Osich
- Colten Brewer / Hector Velazquez / Mike Shawaryn

Point of weakness: Workman emerged as one of the better relievers in the American League last season, and he took over a fairly traditional closer role late in the year, but it's still worth wondering if the Red Sox need someone else in the ninth inning (or at least a third late-inning option alongside Workman and Barnes). Can they afford such a reliever? Could they trade for one? Is it necessary given Workman's emergence? The Red Sox have a good number of bullpen options, but they might not have enough bullpen impact.

Worth considering: While the Red Sox faced plenty of bullpen questions last season, their bullpen depth actually proved to be pretty good. They had only two real impact relievers in the late innings, but they had several guys step up at different times to fill the middle innings. That depth is still in place, with Hernandez in particular looking more and more like an impact guy for those late innings. The Red Sox would surely benefit from another good reliever, but they technically have enough to fill an eight-man bullpen as it is.

Changes on the way? Although he always seems to be left out of the conversation, Hembree actually has been pretty good for the Red Sox. He's consistently been worth a half win or so – not bad for a middle reliever – and he's had well over 10 strikeouts per nine innings the past three years. He's surely worth his

projected \$1.6 million arbitration salary. The Red Sox could non-tender him to save a few bucks in an area where they have some depth, but for now it makes sense to keep him in the projected bullpen.

Bench

- Sandy Leon C

- Marco Hernandez INF

- Sam Travis / Tzu-Wei Lin UT

Point of weakness – It's worth remembering Leon did not make the Opening Day roster last season. He was brought back only after Blake Swihart struggled, and FanGraphs and Baseball-Reference agreed that he performed below replacement level. Now, he's expected to earn nearly \$3 million through arbitration. That seems a high price for a team looking to cut costs. Leon stands out as a non-tender candidate, which would leave the Red Sox without a strong option for backup catcher. The farm system doesn't really have anyone knocking on the door.

Worth considering – For a while last season, Hernandez looked like a guy competing for everyday at-bats in 2020, but he faded significantly. Now it's hard to think of him as anything more than a bench candidate, or a platoon option at best. Of the current bench players, Hernandez might have the best blend of versatility and offensive ability, but that's not saying much. Travis and Lin will be out of options, so they're in all-or-nothing territory. Maybe there's room for one of them? Maybe not if the Red Sox carry only a three-man bench.

Changes on the way? – Right now, the Red Sox don't have a backup outfielder. It was mostly Martinez and Brock Holt who did that job last year (and they weren't needed very often). Travis and Lin have outfield experience, but they're not ideal. Travis doesn't have the glove for it, and Lin doesn't have the bat. Outfield prospect Marcus Wilson may very well be added to the 40-man, but he's never played above Double-A. The existing Red Sox bench is thin. The team will surely want to improve its immediate depth in the infield, the outfield and behind the plate.