

## ***The Boston Red Sox Friday, November 15, 2019***

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

#### **Xander Bogaerts finishes fifth in American League MVP race**

Julian McWilliams

Xander Bogaerts finished fifth in American League MVP Award voting, the highest of his career. The Red Sox shortstop was 13th in 2013.

Bogaerts hit .309 with a career-high 33 homers and 117 RBIs.

Bogaerts tied Nomar Garciaparra for the most extra-base hits in a season by a Red Sox shortstop (85). Garciaparra did it in 1997 and 2002.

Bogaerts's 117 RBIs were the most in a season by a Red Sox shortstop since Garciaparra had 120 in 2002.

Bogaerts was just the third shortstop in MLB history with at least a .300 batting average, 85 extra-base hits, and 115-plus RBIs. The others are Alex Rodriguez, in 1996 with the Mariners and 2001 and 2002 with the Texas, and Garciaparra.

Bogaerts finished behind the Yankees' DJ LeMahieu, who pulled in 10 fourth-place votes to Bogaerts's six.

Mookie Betts was eighth, Rafael Devers 12th, and J.D. Martinez was tied for 21st in AL voting.

#### **MLB speaks with Alex Cora as it investigates Astros' sign-stealing**

Peter Abraham and Alex Speier

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Red Sox manager Alex Cora is one of the key figures into Major League Baseball's investigation of the Houston Astros, an appraisal that goes beyond charges of sign stealing in 2017.

Cora, who was bench coach of the Astros in 2017, has spoken to officials charged with determining to what degree Houston flouted rules against using cameras to pick up signs from opposing catchers.

MLB is also examining whether the Astros used electronic equipment to aid sign stealing in subsequent seasons and, if so, how sophisticated that equipment was. That includes postseason games.

Asked about the investigation Thursday, Cora told the Globe, "At this time MLB and the Astros are conducting an investigation. It would be irresponsible on my part to comment while it's going on."

MLB's fact-finding also will include an interview with Red Sox bullpen coach Craig Bjornson, who spent six seasons with the Astros before joining the Sox in 2018.

"We have been contacted by MLB and are fully cooperating with the league's investigation," Red Sox CEO Sam Kennedy said.

As first reported by The Athletic, the Astros allegedly used an outfield camera to pick up signs from the catcher. Watching from a monitor close to the dugout, an Astros player or staffer would make a loud noise to signal the hitter what was coming.

Opposing teams have long been suspicious of the Astros and took steps, particularly in the postseason, to use multiple signs that could not be decoded before the pitch was thrown.

“Beginning in the 2017 season, numerous clubs expressed general concerns that other clubs were stealing their signs,” MLB said in a statement. “As a result of those concerns, and after receiving extensive input from the general managers, we issued a revised policy on sign stealing prior to the 2019 season.

“We also put in place detailed protocols and procedures to provide comfort to clubs that other clubs were not using video during the game to decode and steal signs. After we review this new information we will determine any necessary next steps.”

New Mets manager Carlos Beltran, who played for the Astros in 2017 and is one of Cora’s closest friends, denied any involvement in the scheme.

Mets general manager Brodie Van Wagenen said, “At this point, I don’t see any reason why this is a Mets situation.”

Privately, Red Sox officials feel the same way, that MLB is looking more at the overarching behavior and practices of the Astros as an organization and is unlikely to levy any punishment on Cora.

In 2017, the Red Sox were caught using a Fitbit device to relay signals to the dugout and were fined. No individuals were sanctioned. MLB determined that the front office was not involved, sparing the Red Sox harsher penalties.

MLB has since indicated that penalties, up to the loss of draft picks, could be handed down to teams deemed in violation of the league’s policy involving the use of electronic equipment to steal signs.

### **Eduardo Rodriguez, sixth in AL Cy Young voting, didn’t reach his own lofty goal**

Alex Speier

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Eduardo Rodriguez received recognition for his breakout 2019 campaign with a sixth-place finish in American League Cy Young voting.

Rodriguez had a spectacular year as the anchor of the Red Sox staff, going 19-6 with a 3.81 ERA and setting career-highs in wins, innings (203⅓), and strikeouts (213) while averaging 9.4 strikeouts and 3.3 walks per nine innings. Perhaps most significantly, a pitcher who’d been limited to an average of 22 starts a year from 2016-18 finally remained healthy for a full season.

Rodriguez thus led the majors with 34 starts and positioned himself for the greatest mound success of his career as well as his sixth-place finish. Even so, the lefthander didn’t meet the lofty expectations with which the 26-year-old entered the year.

“He knew he was at the point where he could do this,” agent Scott Pucino of Octagon said at the GM Meetings. “His goal was actually to win the Cy Young. Although he placed, it’s his goal to win one and to win a world championship again. He worked really hard in the offseason and he’s doing the same this year.”

Rodriguez received three fourth-place votes and two fifth-place votes in AL Cy Young balloting, placing sixth behind second-time Cy Young winner Justin Verlander, Gerrit Cole of the Astros, Charlie Morton of the Rays, Shane Bieber of Cleveland, and Lance Lynn of the Rangers.

While Rodriguez did not win the award, he was the beneficiary of the wisdom of a trio of rotation mates who have either won or contended frequently for the award. Though Rodriguez (acquired from the Orioles in 2014) does not represent a pure homegrown development story, Pucino made clear that the lefthander

has benefited “a lot” from his five seasons with the Red Sox, and from being around Chris Sale, David Price, and Rick Porcello.

“When you pitch with pitchers like them, you’re working with other guys who have accomplished what you’re trying to accomplish. That leadership from them on down to him has been great,” said Pucino. “He’s always talked about pitching with those guys, what a joy it’s been and how much he’s learned from them. Hopefully he can teach others in the future.”

Rodriguez, who earned \$4.3 million in 2019, is arbitration-eligible for the third time this winter and remains under team control for two more years — a window that he’d certainly be open to extending, even if such a possibility seems unlikely for 2020 given the team’s stated desire to get under the luxury tax threshold.

“He has two more years left of arbitration. I think that when the Red Sox are ready, he would love to remain a Red Sox,” said Pucino. “They already won a world championship and have given him an opportunity that he really appreciates. When they’re ready to discuss that, he’s going to have open arms and listen to what they say — but I think they have to be ready to do that.”

#### Slow down on Pedroia

Despite promising signs in his recovery from a joint preservation procedure on his left knee in August, Dustin Pedroia isn’t taking his potential return to baseball for granted following a succession of major surgeries and setbacks that have limited him to nine big league games over the last two years. In a podcast with Rob Bradford of WEEI.com, Pedroia said that he has surprised his doctors with the state of his recovery. Even so, Pedroia remains focused primarily on assuring the quality of his life moving forward, a consideration that will trump the baseball calendar in guiding his rehab process.

“Everybody is excited and whatnot. But I’m like, ‘We’ll see. There’s a long way to go,’ ” Pedroia said. “Obviously, I’m going to need to get a knee replacement and all that, but [the surgeon] was very surprised with how everything’s responded. That set off in my mind [that] the ultimate goal is to finish what I started. We’ll see.”

#### Minor details

In Tokyo, Red Sox prospect Tanner Houck allowed two runs on two hits and two walks while striking out five in five innings on Wednesday for Team USA in their 2-1 loss to Australia in the Premier12 tournament. Another Red Sox prospect, righthander Noah Song, delivered a perfect inning with a strikeout. Song — the Naval Academy graduate whom the Red Sox selected in the fourth round this year, and who is currently slated to report to aviation school in December — featured a fastball that one scout clocked as high as 100 m.p.h. . . . The Red Sox have released seven minor leaguers. Most notable among them was 25-year-old righthander Jake Cosart, a 2014 third-round pick. Cosart — who features a fastball that regularly registered in the mid- and upper-90s, posted a 1.72 ERA in 31½ innings in Lowell, High A Salem, and Double A Portland in 2019, though as has been the case for much of his career, he struggled with his control, walking 17 batters. The team also released outfielders Jordan Wren and Fabian Andrade, righthanders Hildemaro Requena and Devon Fisher, lefty Angel Padron, infielder Jonathan Ortega, and catcher Alberto Schmidt . . .

#### Falvey weighs in

Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey declined to comment on a Minneapolis Star Tribune report that he passed on a chance to interview with the Red Sox for the role that ultimately went to Chaim Bloom. But the Lynn native — who received a contract extension from the Twins that will run through 2024 — made clear that he is immensely happy in his current role, and wants to continue to build on the successes he’s experienced (two playoff berths, including an AL Central crown in 2019) over three years in Minnesota.

“I have always been very appreciative of every job that I’ve had in baseball,” said Falvey. “When I got a chance to go to Minnesota, the Pohlada family took a chance on me. They didn’t have to. They could have hired anybody else and they hired me. Since that day, I have felt incredibly supported. Deep down, when

you have that support and you make that level of commitment to an organization and its ownership, that's really important to me."

Advance work

The GM Meetings typically feature few transactions. More often, they serve to lay groundwork for follow-up discussions with teams about trades and agents about their clients who are on the open market. In 2016, for instance, it was on the way out of the GM Meetings at the Omni Scottsdale Resort — the same venue where this year's meetings are taking place — that the Red Sox and Brewers found common ground on the beginning of a framework that led to the (ill-fated) Tyler Thornburg trade.

When the contingent of Red Sox front office members heads back to Boston on Thursday, the team likely will do so without any changes to its major league roster — but with a greater sense of the industry landscape, helping to inform a roster reshaping that is still to come.

"Starting these conversations with every club in some kind of a formal manner I think gives you a basis to go forward and just figure out what those options might be," said Bloom. "This week was really the start of laying out what those might be, even if it's preliminary."

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

### **Dodgers' Andrew Friedman can relate to Red Sox boss Chaim Bloom's new world**

Steve Hewitt

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — When Andrew Friedman left Tampa Bay after the 2014 season to become the Los Angeles Dodgers' president of baseball operations, one challenge stuck out to him above the rest.

"You have to learn the CBT, which I knew nothing about," Friedman said, referencing the competitive balance threshold that limits what teams can spend.

He didn't really need to after spending more than a decade with the Rays, who annually have one of baseball's lowest payrolls. Tampa's 2014 payroll totaled about \$77 million, well below that season's \$189 million tax threshold. Going from there to the Dodgers, who are regularly one of the league's highest spenders, was a different beast.

"I challenged myself," Friedman said.

It's a challenge that new Red Sox baseball chief officer Chaim Bloom is experiencing firsthand right now. Like Friedman, who he worked with for nearly a decade, he's tasked with going small market to big market, small payroll to big payroll. And that means entering a whole new world with the CBT.

"It's not something that we had to spend much time on with the Rays, except as far as it came up in talks with other clubs when it was important to them, so I certainly have some things to learn on that front," Bloom said. "I've already started that process."

In Bloom's case, it's even more complicated. Not only does he have to learn what's mostly been a foreign idea to him, but also apply it quickly. The Red Sox are aiming to get under the 2020 CBT of \$208 million, which means they would need to shed around \$30 million of payroll, all while staying competitive. That's a hard ask of an experienced GM, let alone a rookie.

In Friedman, Bloom has something of a blueprint to follow. Though the Dodgers exceeded the CBT in Friedman's first three seasons as the boss, he lowered payroll by about 20% for 2018 as they went on to win the National League pennant.

Bloom has kept a watchful eye from afar as Friedman has navigated the waters he's about to enter. The two are still close, and the former has certainly called on the latter for some guidance throughout this process.

"I've certainly picked his brain about this situation, but that's nothing new," Bloom said. "He is one of the greatest mentors I've had in this game and I have a great deal of appreciation for how he's looked out for me over the years and all the things I've learned from him. Even after he left the Rays, the process continued, so I think this is just an extension of it."

When Friedman thinks about Bloom, he's reminded a bit of himself. He's served as a sounding board to Bloom throughout the years as he's interviewed for several No. 1 front office jobs, and this year was no exception.

If anyone knows what Bloom is going through right now, it's Friedman.

"The analogy I give is it's kind of like you take your own personal snow globe and shake it up, and then you hope that everything falls back into place," Friedman said. "I think Chaim is very similar to me in this respect. So much of the satisfaction that I derive from this job is the people that I work with, and when you leave the comforts of that and go to another organization, early on that part is difficult in that you are meeting new people and for those relationships and that trust to be built, that takes time. It's an organic process, and that is probably the most difficult aspect of making the transition.

"Talking to Chaim so far, there's a lot of talent in place in the front office and he's really enjoyed getting to know them and they've made it really comfortable for him. I think we had more change I think as those things were happening, and so we were kind of doing things on the fly. He's kind of being rolled into what he describes as a really highly functioning front office."

Friedman said he got to a point in his Rays tenure that he was "almost on autopilot." He was ready for a different challenge and in his words, "rewiring how my brain worked." He described the process as exhilarating.

Bloom has certainly had that allure, too, and the resounding conclusion among the rest of the league at this week's GM Meetings is that he's ready for it.

The process has begun. Learning the CBT is just one item on a lengthy offseason to-do list that began in earnest this week in Arizona. Bloom said he had no problem getting to bed after some long and busy days this week, but he wouldn't have it another way.

"It's been really invigorating," Bloom said. "That said, there was never a moment with the Rays when I felt like I was in a rut. I felt challenged every day by what we were trying to accomplish down there with the wonderful teammates that I had. There was never a dull moment there, but still, jumping in here, you experience a lot of new things in thinking about the situation that are really exhilarating."

### **MLB should come down hard on Astros for illegal sign stealing**

Jason Mastrodonato

It doesn't appear likely that the Red Sox will suffer penalties from MLB's investigation into the 2017 Astros and their over-the-top efforts to illegally use technology to steal signs.

According to multiple industry sources, the Red Sox are offering their full cooperation to MLB in an attempt to uncover the details of the story, which was reported by The Athletic, and MLB plans on taking its time to conduct a thorough process before any penalties are handed out.

That process began on Wednesday, when manager Alex Cora was contacted and interviewed.

This hardly means anything for the Red Sox, since the current, more drastic rules on sign-stealing weren't put into place until 2019 and the franchise itself doesn't deserve punishment for whatever Cora (then the Astros bench coach) and bullpen coach Craig Bjornson (then the Astros bullpen coach) did to help the 'Stros cheat in 2017.

But there's a bigger problem here, one that's consistent with the slow decline in interest from young folks across the country: the game is too slow, and the integrity of it is being attacked by both inside and outside forces.

We just got through a full season of watching home runs go up 21% thanks to new baseballs (made under MLB's watch after they purchased Rawlings) that had a 3% decrease in drag.

If the league artificially inflated home runs less than 15 years after instituting steroid testing to restore faith in the game, that's strike one.

We know there's a widespread issue with domestic violence-related problems, which we were reminded of as former violators of the league's DV policy, Aroldis Chapman and Roberto Osuna, took turns blowing the lead for the Yankees and Astros in the American League Championship Series. After the series, the Astros' Brandon Taubman was engaging in targeted harassment of a woman wearing a bracelet to support DV victims. He's since been fired but the questions remain over whether or not the league takes DV issues seriously, which we'll call strike two.

Strike three is what's becoming a difficult-to-believe product on the field where loud banging noises and frequent whistling are now seen as blatant sign stealing.

The Athletic's detailed report of an astonishingly simple way to illegally use technology to steal signs — the Astros had a camera set up in center field, fed the real-time video to team officials near the dugout, then banged on a trash can when off-speed pitches were coming (there are countless videos of the crimes available to the public on YouTube) — will be difficult to shake the next time we're watching games, either live or on TV.

The more the pitchers step off the mound to talk to the catcher about the signs, the longer it takes to get some action.

By the time we get to see the ball in play, we're left wondering what the heck we're even watching.

The current penalties for sign stealing clearly aren't working and teams are going to keep searching for the most efficient ways to do this.

The last time we had a sign-stealing scandal like this was in 2018, when the Astros were not punished by MLB for having an employee video taping the game near the Red Sox dugout.

There was another in 2017, when the Red Sox and Yankees accused each other of doing it illegally (the Red Sox with Apple Watches and the Yankees with an illegal feed of the YES Network's video during the game).

The Sox were issued an undisclosed fine that was donated to hurricane victims in Florida, and the Yankees were issued a lesser fine.

The commissioner's office concluded that it happened "without the knowledge of ownership or front office personnel," while commissioner Rob Manfred said, "I have received absolute assurances from the Red Sox that there will be no future violations of this type."

Manfred also said all 30 clubs were notified that future violations will be subject to more serious sanctions, including the loss of draft picks.

But as technology changes, it's becoming more difficult to police such violations.

Unless there are serious penalties imposed from the latest scandal, it's hard to imagine a game that's totally cleaned up in the 2020 season.

The Astros keep cheating and they keep winning. What's going to stop them? And why shouldn't other teams try to do the same thing?

For the Red Sox, this shouldn't mean much.

Maybe Cora will be fined. Perhaps he'll even get suspended a game or two.

But the sign-stealing game will continue. Not the way it always has been, but in new ways we don't yet know about, all the while fans are left to wonder just how authentic the game they're watching actually is.

## **\* *MassLive.com***

**Boston Red Sox's Xander Bogaerts finishes fifth for AL MVP, Mookie Betts takes eighth, Rafael Devers 12<sup>th</sup>**

Christopher Smith

Xander Bogaerts finished fifth for the 2019 American League MVP.

Mookie Betts finished eighth after winning the award in 2018. Rafael Devers received enough votes for 12th.

Mike Trout became the sixth three-time AL MVP, joining Jimmie Foxx, Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle and Alex Rodriguez. The Angels superstar also won in 2014 and '16.

Trout edged out Houston's Alex Bregman, finishing with 17 first-place votes and 13 second-place votes. Bregman received 13 first-place votes and 17 second-place votes.

Bogaerts posted career highs in homers (33), doubles (52), RBIs (117), on-base percentage (.384), slugging percentage (.555) and OPS (.939). One writer gave him a third-place vote and six writers gave him a fourth-place vote.

Trout led the league in on-base percentage (.438), slugging percentage (.645), OPS (1.083) and OPS+ (185).

J.D. Martinez received one 10th-place vote.

**Boston Red Sox's Chaim Bloom held in high regard by Theo Epstein, other GMs: 'It's frightening to think what he might accomplish'**

Chris Cotillo

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- For at least a few seconds during this week's GM Meetings at the Omni Scottsdale Resort, the past and future of the Red Sox seemed to come together. Shortly before new Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom addressed the media Wednesday afternoon, he was greeted by former Sox general manager Theo Epstein in front of a group of reporters.

The comparisons between Bloom and Epstein started the second Bloom was announced as the successor to ousted president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski in late October. Both Yale graduates and former

baseball operations interns received praise for their analytical backgrounds and critical thinking skills before before being tasked with running one of the game's premier franchises at a young age.

As it turns out, Bloom and Epstein have a bit of a relationship, as many of baseball's top executives do. Though they're not especially close, they both belong to the small fraternity of front office types and have respect for each other.

"He can hang in late at night and is a pretty funny guy, fun to be around," Epstein said this week. "Deceivably so, sometimes. He's great, and I think he'll be a good fit for the Red Sox."

Before joining the Red Sox in 2001, Epstein worked as an intern for the Orioles while completing his studies at Yale. Bloom joined the Rays as an intern in 2005, spending 15 seasons in a variety of roles before leaving for the Red Sox last month.

"It's great," Epstein said. "You love to see guys, as I did, start as an intern or as (Sox general manager) Brian O'Halloran did. That means a lot. (Bloom) has earned his ascent every step of the way. It's nice to see him in a good spot. He's someone who has been interviewing for No. 1 jobs for 4-5 years now, so it's nice to see him get one, and get a great one."

Bloom is well-respected around the league as a bright, methodical, fearless dealmaker who is creative and innovative in how he goes about his business. One rival executive expects Bloom's legacy to rival Epstein's when his tenure in Boston is complete.

"It's frightening to think what he might be able to accomplish," said Mariners GM Jerry Dipoto, who worked for the Red Sox as a scout from 2003-2005. "I was there with them 20 years ago when Theo got there, and we accomplished pretty awesome things and they went onto even greater heights after I was gone. That's what possible. I suspect they'll head back to that direction again."

Bloom and Rays general manager Erik Neander found success with significant payroll constraints in Tampa Bay, reaching the postseason five times since 2008 despite never having a payroll exceed \$80 million. Even with a significant payroll cut coming for the Red Sox in 2020, Bloom will still have almost three times as much to spend even if Boston gets just under the \$208 competitive balance tax threshold in 2020.

"You go to the Red Sox, and you have the kind of resources that are available, either technological or financial, and you've learned to do in the Rays world," Dipoto said. "He's not going to be short on understanding the technology. He's not going to be short on understanding how to make a difference. My guess is, if you give him the ability to be able to do things that are far beyond the financial reach of a team like the Rays, that's a dangerous combo."

Bloom is already drawing comparisons to Andrew Friedman, who led the Rays for eight seasons before becoming the Dodgers president of baseball operations in Oct. 2014. In five seasons in Los Angeles, Friedman has led the Dodgers to five consecutive division titles and two World Series.

"I think it's fun to see what really baseball smart people do when given opportunity," said Dipoto, who has swung nine trades with the Rays since taking over the Mariners in Sept. 2015. "I hold the guys Tampa in an incredibly high esteem. They're as good of a front office group as there is in baseball. There are a lot of really smart groups in the league, but they are at the pinnacle, in my opinion. I think he's a big part of that."

Epstein, who knows the challenges of Boston better than just about anyone, also looks forward to seeing what Bloom can do in a big market.

"There's only 30 of these jobs but certainly he's been qualified for a while and has been interviewing for No. 1 jobs for a number of years now," he said. "It's a good fit. Things work out the way they're supposed to on both ends. I think it'll be a good match."

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### Boras downplays idea of Sox cutting payroll

Holding his annual media gathering at the GM Meetings, superagent Scott Boras said he had not received direct word from Red Sox owners John Henry or Tom Werner that Boston was trying to cut payroll this winter.

"I've spoken to them and still until they tell me that, I would not in any way think anything other than that they're always winning owners who try to win again and again and again," he said.

But Henry, who is usually candid in his meetings with the media, said at the end of the season that Boston was trying to get under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold before Opening Day. Though team president and CEO Sam Kennedy and other team decision-makers have backtracked by calling it a "goal" and not a "mandate," it's clear that slashing payroll to avoid CBT penalties is at the top of Boston's list of priorities before Opening Day.

Boras, who railed against baseball's current system of "rewarding" tanking and non-competitive motives throughout his speech, said any owner who is planning on slashing payroll should tell his fans directly.

"I think that if your goal is 'threshold,' then I believe you have to say -- if that is a principal priority, rather than winning -- it's something you need to say to your fans," he said. "It's something you need to tell them. Our goal is to operate to limits. For no circumstance does winning get in the way of that priority. And you know what? I've yet to hear an owner say that to his fan base."

### 10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. Steven Wright underwent his Tommy John surgery and recently had his stitches removed. He'll be looking for a new team after 7+ years with the Red Sox.
2. Boras' annual media availability at the GM Meetings is a spectacle, to say the least. Four rows of reporters with team-specific questions that mostly get answered with puns. What a time.
3. Bloom's general strategy is still letting O'Halloran answer questions on organizational specifics, which is impressive in its own way. Bloom, as smart he appears to be, doesn't want to say anything about topics about which he's not totally familiar. Can't not respect that.
4. Until Chris Sale starts throwing and gets through that without issue, we can pump the brakes on thinking he's fully okay. Still some major obstacles to overcome there.
5. Dustin Pedroia has done enough for the Red Sox that we don't need "just retire" tweets every time he talks about coming back.
6. The Red Sox are still almost certain to add a second base option before spring training. Bloom has familiarity with Asdrubal Cabrera, Logan Forsythe, Adeiny Hechavarria and Eric Sogard, who are all free agents.
7. Every team should have spring training in Arizona.
8. Bloom is making a point to get in contact with a number of his players in the early stages of his tenure. The team was likely to meet with lefty Josh Taylor before they departed Arizona.
9. The GM Meetings actually provided some resolutions on top free agents. Jake Odorizzi (Twins) and Jose Abreu (White Sox) accepted their qualifying offers while Will Smith signed a three-year deal with the Twins instead of returning to San Francisco.

10. The MLB investigation into the Astros' sign-stealing and the involvement of Red Sox employees -- including manager Alex Cora -- is suddenly a major story to watch this winter.

**Red Sox manager Alex Cora on reported involvement in Astros cheating scandal: 'I have talked to MLB and I'll leave it at that'**

Nick O'Malley

Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora was identified as one of the individuals involved in the Houston Astros sign-stealing scandal that has consumed MLB headlines over the past week.

Cora, who served as the Astros bench coach during the 2017 championship season that's come under scrutiny, was given a chance to respond to the allegations during an appearance on WEEI's Dale & Keefe show. Cora did not confirm or deny the allegations.

"I appreciate the question," Cora said via WEEI.com. "... I have talked to MLB and I'll leave it at that."

The Astros have been accused of using video feeds at their home park to steal signs from opposing catchers. Former Houston pitcher Mike Fiers told The Athletic that members of the Astros would watch a video feed just outside the dugout and make a loud noise if they saw a breaking pitch or changeup was coming.

**Boston Red Sox 'fully cooperating' with MLB investigation into Astros' sign-stealing, Alex Cora's involvement**

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox have been "contacted by Major League Baseball and are fully cooperating with their investigation" into the Astros' alleged electronic sign-stealing in 2017, team president and CEO Sam Kennedy confirmed in an email Friday morning.

The league is looking into Houston's practices after a Tuesday report from The Athletic cited four sources -- including former Astros pitcher Mike Fiers -- who alleged Houston used a center-field camera to steal signs from opposing catchers in 2017. The Athletic later reported that the league planned to interview Red Sox manager Alex Cora, who was Houston's bench coach in 2017, as part of the investigation.

ESPN's Jeff Passan reported Wednesday that the league had contacted members of the Red Sox organization, including Cora and bullpen coach Craig Bjornson, who was also on Houston's staff in 2017. The league office appears to be in the early stages of a widespread investigation into the matter.

Reached Wednesday, Cora said: "Given there is an MLB investigation into the 2017 Astros, it is best for me not to comment." Appearing on WEEI's Dale & Keefe, Cora confirmed he had spoken with Major League Baseball but declined further comment.

According to reports, Major League Baseball is expected to interview a wide range of subjects, including Astros manager A.J. Hinch, Mets manager Carlos Beltran (who played for Houston in 2017) and former Astros assistant general manager Brandon Taubman.

**\* *ESPN.com***

**Sources: MLB contacts Astros, Red Sox as sign-stealing investigation expands**

Jeff Passan

Major League Baseball's investigation into illegal sign stealing is expected to expand beyond the 2017 Houston Astros and look into whether other teams, including the 2019 Astros, used technology to aid hitters, sources familiar with the situation told ESPN.

The fallout from former Astros pitcher Mike Fiers telling The Athletic that the 2017 Astros used a center-field camera feed in a monitor near the dugout to steal and relay signs has rocked the sport and brought into question the methods used by people involved in at least the past three World Series, sources said.

The initial stages of the investigation already have begun, sources said, with league personnel contacting people from both the Astros and Boston Red Sox organizations Wednesday. The league is attempting to cull tangible evidence from the widespread paranoia of front offices and teams around the game about others cheating and has indicated it will consider levying long suspensions against interviewees who are found to have lied, sources said.

While there is considerable crossover between the 2017 and 2019 Astros teams, multiple witnesses who were not with the 2017 team are expected to be interviewed, sources said.

Among those the league plans to interview in its investigation are Astros manager AJ Hinch, Red Sox manager Alex Cora and New York Mets manager Carlos Beltran, sources said. The three were part of the 2017 Astros championship team -- Hinch the manager, Cora the bench coach and Beltran a player. Their involvement in the investigation was first reported by The Athletic.

MLB, sources told ESPN, spoke Wednesday with former Astros bullpen coach Craig Bjornson, who joined the Red Sox with Cora in 2018, the year they won a World Series. MLB also intends to interview former Astros assistant general manager Brandon Taubman, though he has retained a lawyer through whom he is communicating, sources said.

As baseball's general managers meetings neared their Thursday conclusion in Scottsdale, Arizona, the league was grappling with the scope of the investigation and how wide-ranging it could become, sources said.

MLB's department of investigations has begun gathering a wide-ranging list of potential interviewees and is expected to talk with players as well as managers, coaches and other team personnel, sources said.

Any conversations with players would need approval from the Major League Baseball Players Association. When the league investigated the Red Sox in 2017 for the illegal use of an Apple Watch, the union participated in interviews with the players.

The penalties for illegal activity are determined by commissioner Rob Manfred, though if the league can prove wrongdoing, the severity could be unlike anything seen in the sport's recent history, sources said.

The heaviest penalty assessed to a team during Manfred's tenure was a \$2 million fine and the forfeiture of two top draft picks by the St. Louis Cardinals in January 2017 for a scheme in which they stole scouting information from the Astros' computerized database. The Cardinals' scouting director, Chris Correa, was banned for life from the sport and went to prison.

Former Atlanta Braves general manager John Coppolella was banned 10 months later for lying about the team's circumvention of international signing rules. The Red Sox in 2016 were barred from signing international players for a year after running afoul of signing-bonus statutes.

Before the 2019 season, MLB instituted new rules to clamp down on illegal sign stealing. Unsanctioned cameras between the foul poles were outlawed, an eight-second delay on in-house camera feeds was mandated, and an official sat in replay rooms off the dugout to monitor teams to try to prevent cheating.

The allegations against the Astros are the first to include on-the-record comments outlining a purported scheme. "That's not playing the game the right way," Fiers told The Athletic.

Fiers described a scenario in which the Astros received the feed near the dugout, decoded the sign flashed by the catcher and, if the sign was for an off-speed pitch, hit a trash can to signal to the hitter that it wasn't a fastball.

Though the theft of signs is an avowed part of baseball, the game's unwritten rules long have limited it to players at second base picking the sign and signaling hitters through slight, prescribed movements. The use of technology is widely considered beyond the pale and has left the sport facing questions that, if evidence corroborates Fiers' accusations and exposes wrongdoing beyond that, could strike at the heart of the sport's integrity.

"I'm not aware of that camera," Beltran, who was hired by the Mets less than two weeks ago, told the New York Post in a text message Wednesday. "We were studying the opposite team every day."

During the 2019 American League Championship Series, after the New York Yankees called the league to report whistling from the Astros' dugout during Game 1, Hinch denied any wrongdoing.

Asked about the Astros on Wednesday, Dodgers president Andrew Friedman, whose team lost to Houston over seven games in the 2017 World Series and to Boston in five in 2018, declined to talk about specific allegations, fearing they would sound like "sour grapes."

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

**Alex Cora to D&K on alleged involvement in Astros sign-stealing investigation: 'I have talked to MLB'**

Lucy Burdge

Current Red Sox manager Alex Cora is reportedly being investigated in the Astros sign-stealing scheme involving cameras, electronic transmissions and trash cans at Minute Maid Park during the 2017 season, which included the World Series.

According to the report by The Athletic's Evan Drellich and Ken Rosenthal, Cora "played a key role in devising the sign-stealing system the team used that season," along with new Mets manager Carlos Beltran and Astros manager A.J. Hinch.

Cora was the Astros bench coach at the time, while Beltran was the designated hitter.

When asked about his involvement in the investigation on Dale & Keefe Thursday morning, Cora declined to comment in-depth.

"I appreciate the question," Cora said. "... I have talked to MLB and I'll leave it at that."

Former Astros pitcher Mike Fiers was among four people associated with the 2017 team to expose the system to The Athletic. The other three sources remained anonymous.

According to the report, the scheme involved a camera in center field relaying signs from opposing players to a TV in the Astros dugout. Astros players and employees would then bang code on trash cans for hitters to hear in order to relay what pitch to expect.

## **\* *NBC Sports Boston***

**There's only one way Astros sign-stealing story blows back on Red Sox, and we're not there yet**

John Tomase

Let's say for the sake of argument that Alex Cora played the role of lead drummer when the 2017 Astros were stealing signs like a merry band of trash-can pounding subway buskers.

So what?

That's an institutional crime and Houston should pay the price, not a former bench coach. Think of it like Deflategate. The Patriots deserved their punishment, but taking Tom Brady within a whisker of the Supreme Court was overkill.

Here's where things get dicey. What if Cora imported some of Houston's less savory tactics to Boston, a team that has already been censured by MLB — under former manager John Farrell, to be fair — for using Apple watches to help steal signs in 2017?

Because Cora and bullpen coach Craig Bjornson were both members of that compromised Astros staff, and because the arms race to gain even a tiny edge can very easily blur the line between gamesmanship and fraud, the only way this story truly becomes relevant to the Red Sox is if an MLB investigation reveals that Boston has enacted some of Houston's worst practices over the last two seasons.

There's no evidence that the Red Sox have deployed technology with similar nefariousness, and the numbers under Cora don't reveal any wild home-road splits. Since 2013, for instance, the Red Sox have outperformed their road OPS at Fenway Park by anywhere from 3.34 percent (2014) to 17.65 percent (2015). Cora's two Red Sox clubs fall in the middle of that range — 9.66 percent in 2018 and 7.33 percent last year.

In conversations with multiple executives at this week's GM meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz., one theme emerged consistently — the Astros don't consider their actions cheating, because they believe they live in a world where Everybody is Doing It, and if they happen to be better at finding those edges at the margins, that's not their problem. Don't hate 'em 'cuz you ain't 'em, so to speak.

This issue has burst into the public eye because The Athletic has broken a series of stories about the Astros stealing signs. Former Astros reporter Evan Drellich and national writer Ken Rosenthal first reported that the Astros stole signs in 2017 by positioning a center field camera on the opposing catcher, connecting it to a monitor outside the dugout, and banging on a trash can in real time to warn the hitter when a breaking ball was coming.

The Athletic followed up on Wednesday night with a report that Cora and Mets manager Carlos Beltran — Houston's DH in 2017 — will also be summoned as part of MLB's investigation. ESPN added that the league has already spoken to Bjornson, who served as Houston's bullpen coach in 2017.

While the involvement of Cora and Bjornson makes this tangentially a Red Sox story, for the time being it's just an Astros story. That will change if MLB determines the ex-Astros didn't want to fall behind their former team in the information race after they arrived in Boston, but so far there's no indication that they're under suspicion.

Making all of this murkier is Cora's well-earned reputation for sign stealing and pitch tipping. He was considered one of the best in the game at these very particular skills as a player, and he hasn't lost his touch as a manager. Of course, there's a big difference between noting glove placement on a fastball and cracking opposing signals on a high def monitor over the toilet next to the dugout.

So let the Astros take the heat on this one, at least for now. If something changes, we can reconvene.

**\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

**Astros' past sign-stealing may ensnare Alex Cora**

Sean McAdam

Major League Baseball has launched an investigation into allegations that the Houston Astros used electronic surveillance to steal signs from opposing teams during the 2017 season and Red Sox manager Alex Cora may find himself in the middle of the mess.

Cora served as the Astros bench coach in 2017, leaving the organization immediately after the World Series to become manager of the Red Sox.

The Athletic reported that the Astros used cameras in center field at

Minute Maid Park to zoom in on catchers' signals. Those images were then visible on a video monitor stationed in the runway near the home dugout. Staff members would then bang on a trash can to signal to Houston hitters whether the next pitch was a fastball or an off-speed pitch.

The site said MLB is investigating three current MLB managers — Houston's A.J. Hinch, newly-named New York Mets manager Carlos Beltran and Cora. Beltran, a close friend of Cora's, served as the Astros' DH in 2017, the final year of his playing career.

The story noted that Cora "played a key role in devising the sign-stealing system."

During his playing career and in retirement, Cora has long had the reputation throughout the game as an expert sign-stealer, though he's never previously been accused of using electronics to gain an advantage. Stealing signs is a long-standing, legal and acceptable practice so long as technology is not utilized.

Cora appeared on WEEI Thursday morning and was asked about his involvement.

"I appreciate the question," Cora told the Dale and Keefe show. "I have talked to MLB and I'll leave it at that."

The Red Sox acknowledged that they've been in contact with the league.

"We have been contacted by MLB and are fully cooperating with the league's investigation," said Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy.

In 2017, with John Farrell in his final season as manager of the club, the Red Sox were found to have used Apple watches to relay signs from their clubhouse to the dugout. Farrell insisted he was unaware of the scheme. After the New York Yankees complained to MLB, the Red Sox were fined an undisclosed amount and commissioner Rob Manfred said future violations by any team would be dealt with more severely.

It's unknown whether Cora, now in the employ of another team, could be suspended for his previous actions with another organization.

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

**This electronic sign-stealing foolishness is a headache the baseball world doesn't need**

Steve Buckley

Can something be high-tech, sophisticated and cutting-edge — and yet be cheap, tawdry and bush-league at the same time?

Answer: Welcome to Major League Baseball's sign-stealing scandal! According to The Athletic's sources it involves not just the 2017 World Series champion Houston Astros but also current Red Sox manager

Alex Cora, who was the Stros' bench coach at the time. And let's not forget newly-installed Mets manager Carlos Beltran, who closed out his brilliant playing career with the '17 Astros. If you count current Astros manager A.J. Hinch, it appears MLB will be asking all three skippers what they knew and when did they know it.

At first glance it's whiz-bang, 21st century, we're-smarter-than-you stuff, this business of the Astros allegedly playing Candid Camera with opposing pitchers, but then you get to the part where sneaky staff members are down in a hallway, banging on trash barrels as a means to tell their batters what's coming.

That, right there, is Major League Baseball's latest answer to improving the game: Team personnel banging on trash barrels. It's hard to unthink the visual: The hidden camera in center field zeros in on the catcher as he is dropping signs, whereupon the video feed instantaneously appears on a wall monitor in the hallway behind the dugout, whereupon players and assorted other personnel unscramble the signs, whereupon someone bangs on a trash barrel ... whereupon the guy at bat gets to say to himself, "Ooooooh, breaking pitch."

Can we take a break from extolling the collective smarts of the people who are running Major League Baseball? It's all Yale this and Stanford that, all smart kids in jeans and backpacks, all exit velocity, spray charts and spin rates, and at the end of the day we end up with the rhythmic bang-bang-bang of fungo bats, mixing spoons, whatever, being applied to trash barrels.

You say, hey, those Harvard/Stanford types are in the front office and this a street thing, the guys down on the field, the guys in uniform. But how about we tear up that argument and blame the baseball industry for this? If today's front office is as sophisticated and cutting-age as we keep hearing, then today's front office knows about these things.

Now ... want to know how cutting age this latest cheating scandal is? It's so cutting edge that the old New York Giants were doing it during that magical late summer/early autumn of 1951 when they roared back from a 13-game deficit on Aug. 11 to snatch the NL pennant on Bobby Thomson's playoff homer off the Brooklyn Dodgers' Ralph Branca. The only difference, according to Joshua Prager's "The Echoing Green," is that the Giants used a telescope-and-buzzer system. Nearly 70 years later the Astros went with the trash barrel system.

Whether or not Thomson knew what was coming when he hit his "Shot Heard 'Round the World" — there's a debate there — it is still considered one of the greatest moments in the game's history. In that spirit, nothing is ever going to change the mood down Houston way: The Astros won the World Series in 2017 and that's that. And if you haven't heard it already, here it is again: When it comes to stealing catcher signs, everybody does it. Right?

But there are a couple of problems with that, beginning with the fact that using your wits to steal signs and using hidden electronics are two different things. To that end MLB commissioner Rob Manfred is already on record as saying, in so many words, it'll be No Mr. Nice Guy next time a team is caught using electronic gadgetry — and trash barrels — to steal signs. Remember the Red Sox and the Apple Watch caper of 2017? The John Farrell-managed Red Sox were caught and fined, with Manfred adding this little warning at the end of his tsk-tsking: "... all 30 Clubs have been notified that future violations of this type will be subject to more serious sanctions, including the possible loss of draft picks."

Translation: It may not help Cora that he no longer works for the Houston Astros. He could face a suspension or fine if it turns out he played a role in this.

But the larger issue here is the baseball industry and its seeming obtuseness as pertains to the issue of making its product more entertaining and compelling — not just for younger viewers but for decades-long fans as well.

You've heard the old chestnut, "Everyone complains about the weather but nobody does anything about it." Substitute "baseball" for "weather" and we're on to something. Yes, baseball has added the automatic

intentional walk, cut down on mound visits and is reducing changes of pitchers. Yes, baseball has come up with an array of shiny new statistical and analytical methods to evaluate talent, and surprise, surprise I'm mostly OK with that: Wins Above Replacement, for example, makes it possible for pitchers and hitters to be judged in the same beauty pageant.

But the problem with electronic sign stealing is that it doesn't show baseball people at their best. It shows them at their worst — lacking in creativity and unwilling to use their God-given savvy to simply out-think and outwit the players in the other dugout, not just out-hit and outpitch them.

So let's bring this back to Alex Cora. From the very moment he first put on a Red Sox uniform in 2005 — he was morphing into a utility infielder by then — it was immediately clear he was one of the smart ones, that he had a feel for the game that just oozed from him.

He had been hanging around ballparks since he was a little kid growing up in Puerto Rico, first as a tag-along as his late father did play-by-play for winter league games and then as a clubhouse rat once his big brother Joey started playing pro ball.

When Cora arrived at the University of Miami he was a scared kid who had trouble with English. He conquered his fears. He learned the language. When the Hurricanes suffered a crushing, walk-off loss to LSU in the championship game of the 1996 College World Series, it was Cora who delivered the postgame remarks to his teammates.

When Dustin Pedroia struggled as a Red Sox rookie and people were clamoring to send down the kid and play the veteran, it was the veteran, Cora, who calmly agreed with manager Terry Francona's decision that the kid stays in the picture.

That's the Alex Cora who used his eyes, his ears, his instincts — his smarts — to map put a path to being a big-league manager.

And now we read about stealing signs by banging sticks against trash barrels.

If MLB's investigation backs this up, then those who are guilty — Hinch? Cora? Beltran? — need to be fined, possibly suspended.

Not so much for the infraction but for the stupidity.

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

### **After Reports of Astros' Cheating, M.L.B. Is Left to Restore Trust**

Tyler Kepner

A.J. Hinch was defiant before Game 4 of the American League Championship Series at Yankee Stadium last month. Hinch, the manager of the Houston Astros, denied reports that his team had been relaying catchers' signs by whistling from the bench during the series opener in Houston. He was especially upset that the reports were based on anonymous sources.

"I suggest they put their name by it if they're so passionate about it," Hinch said, and it was a good point: Going on the record always lends more credibility to a story. The Astros are learning this now, because Mike Fiers — knowingly or not — has heeded Hinch's advice.

Fiers put his name behind his comments in *The Athletic* this week, saying that the Astros electronically (and illicitly) stole signs in 2017, when he was a member of the team. Their method: monitoring the catcher's signals from a video feed piped into an area just off the entrance to the dugout, and then banging a trash can to alert the hitter. High-tech meets rudimentary.

The Astros won the World Series that year, knocking out the Boston Red Sox, the Yankees and the Los Angeles Dodgers while winning eight of their nine postseason home games on the way to their title.

Fiers led the team in innings pitched that season, but the Astros left him off the roster in October. The next spring, with the Detroit Tigers, Fiers acknowledged that it stung to watch his teammates win without the chance to help.

“Of course,” he said. “I busted my butt all year. I didn’t end the year as well as I could have, and I guess it was just the timing of it. I wasn’t pitching as well in September, so they kept me off the roster. It stinks, but that organization is going to do what they feel is right.”

Fiers, who now pitches for the Oakland Athletics, has gone 27-12 with a no-hitter in two years since leaving the Astros. But the last time he faced them, on Sept. 9, he gave up nine runs, including five homers, and got just three outs. The game was at Houston’s Minute Maid Park, where Fiers said the 2017 sign-stealing had occurred.

Guessing Fiers’ motivation is speculative, of course, but by going on the record with his accusations, he broke a code of silence among players — and when that happens, it usually leads to change.

Baseball people have always been reluctant to speak directly about cheating, using the rationale of mutually assured destruction: If I tell on you, you’ll tell on me.

Think of George Steinbrenner calling the Yankees’ dugout in 1987, demanding that Manager Lou Piniella ask the umpires to check the Angels’ Don Sutton, whom he suspected of doctoring the ball. Piniella refused, because he did not want the umpires checking his own pitcher, Tommy John. That logic is why pitchers can still find forbidden ways to get at least a tackier grip on the ball; as long as it is done discreetly, the practice is so widespread that teams have tacitly condoned it.

That is also a reason steroid use went unchecked for as long as it did: Nobody wanted to call out a rival and risk that a teammate could be busted. Until Ken Caminiti’s admission in *Sports Illustrated* in 2002 (after he had retired) baseball could easily deny the scope of the problem. But once Caminiti said he had been juicing when he won a Most Valuable Player Award, a testing plan was finally phased in for the next year.

To its credit, baseball is already trying to police electronic chicanery. After the issue flared in the 2018 postseason — when the Astros directed a team employee to use a cellphone camera to survey the home dugouts in Cleveland and Boston — the league banned non-broadcast cameras between the foul poles and put all television monitors on an eight-second delay — except those used by the team replay assistants, who are monitored by a security official.

“If you can do it using your eye balls it’s ok,” Nationals reliever Sean Doolittle wrote on Twitter on Thursday. “If you’re using technology it’s cheating.”

Even so, teams take no chances. Before the World Series games in Houston last month, the Washington Nationals gave each of their pitchers a card with five sets of signs they could switch to at any time. They also consulted with Tony Sipp, a reliever they released in August who had played with the Astros the last few years.

The Nationals won all four games in Houston to clinch their first championship. In the 2017 World Series, however, the Dodgers lost two of their three games in Houston.

“Our advance team that was on Houston talked about it,” Andrew Friedman, the Dodgers’ president of baseball operations, said at the general managers’ meetings in Arizona this week. “There was just a lot of speculation at the time about it. And I think we were way better combating that stuff in subsequent years than we were that year.”

Friedman did not blame the Dodgers' loss on any trickery by the Astros. But the Astros have developed a widespread reputation for pushing any boundary to win, and the drumbeat of stories with that backdrop has clouded their success.

After Jeff Luhnow left the St. Louis Cardinals to become the Astros' general manager in December 2011, a Cardinals employee, Chris Correa, illegally hacked into the Astros' database. Correa, who received a prison sentence and a lifetime ban from baseball, has claimed he was only acting defensively, to see if the Astros had stolen from the Cardinals.

Luhnow mastered the art of the teardown in Houston, weathering a few losing seasons to gain an advantage in a system that rewards the worst teams with more money to spend on amateur talent. The Astros made shrewd draft choices and trades, including a controversial one for closer Roberto Osuna in 2018, while he was serving a suspension for domestic violence.

The circumstances of that deal were put back under the spotlight last month when Brandon Taubman, then the Astros' assistant general manager, boasted about it profanely to a group of female reporters after his team had clinched the A.L. pennant. The team first tried to discredit the report of Taubman's outburst, which was quickly confirmed by several witnesses. Taubman was fired, but a league investigation continues.

Boston Manager Alex Cora and Mets Manager Carlos Beltran were both with the Astros in 2017 — Cora as the bench coach, Beltran as a player — and M.L.B. will question both about what they may have known about the sign stealing. Denials aside, it seems logical that if a non-hitter like Fiers knew about the system, everyone else would, too.

“Everybody is trying to find an edge, but we all have to follow the rules,” Luhnow told reporters at the G.M. meetings after The Athletic's report was published. “And the rules are set by Major League Baseball. We all agree to follow them. And if you don't, there are ramifications to that. We want to follow the rules. And we want to compete.”

There is competing and there is cheating, and if Major League Baseball finds more people like Fiers to corroborate the 2017 story — and any possible violations since then — it will be emboldened to demand fines, suspensions and forfeiture of draft picks.

If nothing else, baseball must somehow reassure fans and players that one of its most successful teams is not a persistent cheater, too. That may not be an easy sell.

“This Astros thing is bad!!!” the veteran Kevin Gausman, who pitched for Atlanta and Cincinnati last season, wrote Thursday on Twitter. “Guys lost jobs, got sent down, missed service time bc of how they were hit in HOU. Does anyone really think they only did this in 17?”

Gausman added a postscript: “#getreal.”