

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, November 19, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Ranking the top prospects in the Red Sox farm system

Alex Speier

The perception remains unaltered, perhaps even unalterable. The Red Sox farm system, after producing a steady flow of everyday players and stars and massive trade chips, has dried out. The Sox are light on elite prospects, having fallen behind most other organizations in that department.

Unquestionably, there is skepticism about the star power in the Red Sox system. At the same time, there's unquestionably development taking place within it, as most of the team's best prospects got better in 2019.

Each of the players who were at the top of the team's prospect rankings last year — Bobby Dalbec, Michael Chavis, Darwinzon Hernandez, Jay Groome, Triston Casas, and Bryan Mata — did something in 2019 to suggest progress.

Chavis and Hernandez showed difference-making abilities in the big leagues, with Hernandez showing back-end bullpen potential and Chavis proving a power threat who adapted on the fly at a new position (second base) to make an impact. Dalbec, who finished the year in Triple A, is relatively close to joining them.

Mata likewise may be in the big leagues in 2020 after a breakthrough season as a starter. Groome, after missing all of 2018 while recovering from Tommy John surgery, made it back to the mound by the end of 2019 and gave glimpses of why he is considered a rare talent.

Casas performed at a level rare for a player of his age and experience, vaulting him not just to top-prospect standing in the Red Sox organization but also garnering national recognition — a top-100 prospect, if not yet a top-50.

Those players were headliners in a year of progress in the Red Sox system.

Here's a look at the top 10 prospects in the Red Sox system, as I outlined them in my rankings for Baseball America:

1. Triston Casas, 1B (age 19 in 2019)
.256/.350/.480 with 20 HR in Single A/High A

The 2018 first-round pick joined Xander Bogaerts as the only Red Sox teenagers to hit 20 or more homers at any level in the last 50 years. Casas is towering (6 feet 4 inches) with long limbs that generate enormous power, yet he's attuned to the challenges created by his size, resulting in a willingness to spread out his stance and/or choke up while trying to use the whole field. Yet instead of spraying the ball, he shows the ability to drill liners into the seats from line to line, creating the potential for a middle-of-the-order hitter with advanced pitch recognition and plate discipline. Add in excellent defense at first base and Casas represented a fairly obvious call as the top Red Sox prospect.

2. Bobby Dalbec, 3B/1B (age 24)
.239/.356/.460 with 27 HR in Double A/Triple A

Dalbec backed up his 2018 32-homer campaign with further evidence that his power plays — a notion amplified when he launched seven homers in 30 Triple A games at the end of the season with the juiced

major league/Triple A ball. Though strikeouts always will be part of his game, Dalbec's understanding of the strike zone can fuel solid on-base percentages, and his hitting intellect seems to allow him to adapt and improve with greater exposure to new levels. He's a solid defensive third baseman who likely will have to play first or the outfield (the former pitcher has exceptional arm strength) to break into the big leagues, but he's positioned himself to help in 2020.

3. Bryan Mata, RHP (age 20)
7-7, 3.43 ERA, 9.5 K/9, 3.6 BB/9 in High A/Double A

In 2018, Mata struggled to throw strikes while transitioning from a pitcher who primarily threw four-seamers to one who, taking advantage of his arm slot and action, threw two-seamers. But that transition gave way to success in 2019. Mata paired a mid- to high-90s two-seamer and slider, a combination that (in tandem with a four-seamer, change, and curveball) gave him the look of a mid-rotation starter. He dominated in High A Salem (3-1, 1.75 ERA) before struggling in Double A (4-6, 5.03) and had an up-and-down run as a reliever in the Arizona Fall League (5.23 ERA, 11 walks and 10 strikeouts in 10½ innings). The Sox hope that Mata, 2020 or 2021, can challenge the team's longstanding homegrown starting pitcher slump.

Around the horn: How should Chaim Bloom approach changing the Red Sox bullpen?

4. Jarren Duran, OF (age 22)
.303/.367/.408, 5 HR, 46 SB in High A/Double A

Duran complemented game-changing speed with the regular ability to square up balls and produce line drives while dominating in Salem (.387/.456/.543). His performance ticked back in Double A (.250/.309/.325), though he enjoyed stretches where he still looked like a top-of-the-order catalyst. That profile represents his ceiling, though his struggles against more advanced pitching raise questions about whether he'll reach it. All the same, his speed showed up as he moved from the infield to center, and he looks at least like a valuable fourth outfielder — with the possibility of a more Jacoby Ellsbury-ish profile if everything clicks. With the Sox entering a time of change in their outfield, Duran's development could prove critical for the Sox.

5. Darwinzon Hernandez, LHP (age 22)
0-1, 4.45 ERA, 16.9 K/9, 7.7 BB/9 in MLB; 2-6, 5.02 ERA, 12.4 K/9, 7.5 BB/9 in Double A/Triple A

Hernandez somewhat absurdly retains prospect status, but in his 29 games (and 30½ innings), he showed one of the most electrifying fastballs in the game along with a sharp slider. That tandem allowed him, at times, to overpower even superstars (he blew away Mike Trout with high-90s fastballs). If he throws a decent number of strikes, he could emerge as a strikeout machine in the late innings. If not, he could struggle to stay in the big leagues.

6. Thad Ward, RHP (age 22)
8-5, 2.14 ERA, 11.2 K/9, 4.1 BB/9 in Single A/High A

Ward entered pro ball with a sinker/slider combination that made him look like a big league reliever, but the 2018 fifth-rounder added a cutter in spring training and created considerable confusion in opposing hitters, who struggled to distinguish between those three pitches. With improved velocity, he had one of the top performances of any pitcher in the minors. The rangy righty emerged as a potential No. 4 or No. 5 starter who will be tested in the upper levels, starting this year.

7. Jay Groome, LHP (age 20)
0-0, 2.25 ERA, 13.5 K/9, 2.3 BB/9 in Rookie/Short-season

Groome got back in games by the end of the year and topped out at 96 miles per hour, enough to make the year a success. The 2020 season will determine whether he is still the pitcher with a potential top-of-the-

rotation mix – his curveball is a devastating pitch, and he showed good feel for a changeup before his Tommy John surgery – or if his ceiling will need to be adjusted.

Sunday baseball notes: Could Chaim Bloom do for the Red Sox what Andrew Friedman did for the Dodgers?

8. Gilberto Jimenez, OF (age 18)
.359/.393/.470 with 3 HR and 14 SB in Short-season

Jimenez is incredibly raw but incredibly talented, a player with five-tool potential who still has a ton to learn. In Lowell, his insane speed turned every groundball into a potential hit, inflating his batting average. Even though new to switch-hitting (Jimenez only batted righthanded until signing with the Sox), he occasionally showed the sort of hard contact to suggest a player with shoot-the-moon possibilities. He could be an above-average or even an All-Star outfielder, or he could stall out in the upper minors.

9. Noah Song, RHP (age 22)
0-0, 1.06 ERA, 10.1 K/9, 2.6 BB/9 in Short-season

Song was one of the top college pitchers at the Naval Academy this year, showing a starter's four-pitch mix anchored by a mid- to high-90s fastball that was on display in the recent Premier12 tournament. He fell to the fourth round because of his uncertain baseball future given a forthcoming military service commitment of at least two years. It's possible that the government will waive his military obligation, or that the military will change its policy to permit athletes to pursue professional careers prior to their service. If he is able to pursue his pro career immediately, then he'd probably at least rank fourth in the system. If he must wait two years (or more), then it's difficult to say what shape his career might take.

10. Tanner Houck, RHP (age 23)
8-6, 4.01 ERA, 8.9 K/9, 3.8 BB/9 in Double A/Triple A

That Houck ranks 10th speaks to the improving state of the Red Sox system. At the least, Houck's two-seamer and sweeping slider will give righthanded hitters fits, making him a potentially strong late-innings option. If he can command his slider against lefties and work in a functional changeup, the 2017 first-rounder still could emerge as a back-end starter.

Former Red Sox players Josh Beckett, Carlos Pena join Derek Jeter as newcomers on Hall of Fame ballot

Julian McWilliams

The Baseball Hall of Fame announced its candidates for 2020 Monday, and seven former Red Sox players are on the list: Josh Beckett, Roger Clemens, Carlos Pena, Brad Penny, Manny Ramirez, Curt Schilling, and Billy Wagner.

It is the first time for, Beckett, Pena, and Penny, with Beckett having the longest — and most successful — stint in a Sox uniform.

The pitcher spent parts of seven seasons with the Sox from 2006-12, including the 2007 World Series. He was the MVP of the American League Championship Series that year after he posted a 1.93 ERA in two games (14 innings pitched) against the Indians while fanning 18.

Beckett finished second in the Cy Young race that season and was an All-Star twice with the Sox. He finished his Sox career with a 4.17 ERA and an 89-58 record. Beckett's career ERA is 3.88.

It is Curt Schilling's eighth time on the ballot and Ramirez's fourth. Schilling received 60.9 percent of the vote in 2019, and Ramirez received just 22.8 percent, which largely has to do with his suspension for performance-enhancing drugs.

Clemens — whose name has also been attached to PEDs — pulled in 59.5 percent of votes in 2019. This will be his eighth year on the ballot.

To be inducted into the Hall of Fame, candidates must receive at least 75 percent of votes cast by members of the BBWAA with 10-plus consecutive years of coverage. Each player needs at least five percent of the vote to stay on the ballot the following year (they have up to 10 years on the ballot).

Derek Jeter, another newcomer, is the 32-member class headliner. Here is the full list:

- Bobby Abreu
- Josh Beckett
- Heath Bell
- Barry Bonds
- Eric Chavez
- Roger Clemens
- Adam Dunn
- Chone Figgins
- Rafael Furcal
- Jason Giambi
- Todd Helton
- Raul Ibanez
- Derek Jeter
- Andruw Jones
- Jeff Kent
- Paul Konerko
- Cliff Lee
- Carlos Pena
- Brad Penny
- Andy Pettitte
- J.J. Putz
- Manny Ramirez
- Brian Roberts

- Scott Rolen
- Curt Schilling
- Gary Sheffield
- Alfonso Soriano
- Sammy Sosa
- Jose Valverde
- Omar Vizquel
- Billy Wagner
- Larry Walker

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox's Jackie Bradley Jr. honored with MLB's 'Play of the Year' for game-saving catch in Baltimore

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox outfielder Jackie Bradley Jr. was honored for one of the best catches of his career over the weekend.

Bradley Jr.'s game-saving catch against the Orioles on May 8 was ranked the No. 1 play of the season in baseball on MLB Network "Plays of the Year" special, which was released Sunday.

With the Red Sox and Orioles tied, 1-1, in the 11th inning, Bradley Jr. climbed the left-center field wall at Oriole Park at Camden Yards to rob Trey Mancini of a walk-off home run. Mancini drove a Ryan Brasier fastball 401 feet with an exit velocity of 101.5 mph for the loud out.

Andrew Benintendi gave the Red Sox a 2-1 win with a game-winning home run in the 12th.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora called the play "unreal" while lefty Chris Sale also marveled at the catch. When asked where it ranked among the best plays of his career, Bradley Jr. admitted it was "up there."

Lowell Spinners, Boston Red Sox affiliate, could fold under new MLB proposal

Chris Cotillo

A new proposal from Major League Baseball is threatening to eliminate the Lowell Spinners -- the Red Sox' Class A Short Season affiliate -- according to a report from The New York Times. MLB's proposal came as part of its negotiations with Minor League Baseball on a new contract between the two entities.

The Spinners, which have been affiliated with the Red Sox since 1996, are one of 42 teams proposed to be removed under the proposal. Other New England teams involved in the proposal include the Connecticut Tigers and Vermont Lake Monsters.

Spinners owner Dave Heller told The Lowell Sun that he is "fighting hard" to keep the team alive.

“This is a very real and very, very serious threat,” Heller told the Sun’s Elizabeth Dobbins. “The most serious threat the Spinners has ever faced.”

The Spinners have a rich history of hosting top Red Sox prospects, including Mookie Betts, Clay Buchholz, Jacoby Ellsbury, Jonathan Papelbon, Hanley Ramirez, Brandon Workman and Kevin Youkilis. Lowell reached the New York-Penn League finals in 2019, falling to the Brooklyn Cyclones in the championship series.

According to The New York Times, the removal of the 42 franchises could come before the 2021 season.

2020 Baseball Hall of Fame ballot: Seven ex-Boston Red Sox, including Roger Clemens and Curt Schilling, up for induction

Chris Cotillo

Seven former Red Sox -- including right-handers Roger Clemens and Curt Schilling -- headline the list of candidates on the 2020 Baseball Hall of Fame ballot, released Monday.

Pitchers Josh Beckett, Brad Penny and Billy Wagner, first baseman Carlos Pena and outfielder Manny Ramirez are the other former Sox on the ballot. Beckett, Penny and Pena are among the 18 first-timers on the ballot.

Schilling (60.9%) and Clemens (59.5%) both fell short of the 75% vote required for induction in 2019 and are now in their eighth year of eligibility. Ramirez (22.8%) and Wagner (16.7%) were lower in voting totals.

Four players -- Schilling, Clemens, Barry Bonds and Larry Walker -- received over 50% of the vote in 2019. Walker is in his final year of eligibility in 2020.

Former Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter is the only surefire first-ballot candidate, with Bobby Abreu and Jason Giambi and Cliff Lee headlining the other first-ballot options.

Former Red Sox outfielder Dwight Evans is also eligible for election, via the Veterans Committee ballot. Results of the Veterans Committee voting will be announced Dec. 8; results of the BBWAA ballot will come out Jan. 21.

Full ballot (year of eligibility - amount of 2019 vote; former Red Sox in italics):

Curt Schilling (8th - 60.9%)

Roger Clemens (8th - 59.5%)

Barry Bonds (8th - 59.1%)

Larry Walker (10th - 54.6%)

Omar Vizquel (3rd - 42.8%)

Manny Ramirez (4th - 22.8%)

Jeff Kent (7th - 18.1%)

Scott Rolen (3rd - 17.2%)

Billy Wagner (5th - 16.7%)

Todd Helton (2nd - 16.5%)

Gary Sheffield (6th - 13.6%)

Andy Pettitte (2nd - 9.9%)

Sammy Sosa (8th - 8.5%)

Andruw Jones (3rd - 7.5%)

Derek Jeter (1st)

Bobby Abreu (1st)

Jason Giambi (1st)

Cliff Lee (1st)

Rafael Furcal (1st)

Eric Chavez (1st)

Josh Beckett (1st)

Brian Roberts (1st)

Alfonso Soriano (1st)

Carlos Pena (1st)

Paul Konerko (1st)

Chone Figgins (1st)

Raul Ibanez (1st)

Brad Penny (1st)

Adam Dunn (1st)

J.J. Putz (1st)

Jose Valverde (1st)

Heath Bell (1st)

*** *RedSox.com***

Is this the year? Schilling, Clemens eyeing HOF

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Curt Schilling and Roger Clemens, two of the most dominant right-handed pitchers of their era, appeared on the Hall of Fame ballot together for the first time in 2013.

In what is now their eighth year on the ballot, two pitchers who dazzled for the Red Sox could have their best chance yet at gaining entry to Cooperstown.

While Derek Jeter -- the marquee newcomer to the 2020 ballot announced Monday -- is as close to a lock as there is to be elected, none of the other first-timers are sure things.

This could open the door for Schilling and Clemens, who gained the most votes last year of any candidates who weren't elected.

With 259 votes last year, Schilling received 60.9 percent of the votes, easily his best total in his years on the ballot. Clemens got 253 votes, which was 59.5 percent, also his best total. A candidate must be named on 75 percent of the ballots from eligible Baseball Writers' Association of America voters.

Schilling proudly carries the distinction of being one of the best big-game pitchers in history, having gone 11-2 with a 2.23 ERA in 19 career postseason starts.

Perhaps most impressively, Schilling's teams were unbeaten in the six career starts he made in potential elimination games. His combined body of work for the Phillies, D-backs and Red Sox on those occasions? A 5-0 record and a 1.39 ERA. Schilling didn't allow more than two earned runs in any of those must-win starts.

Schilling was co-MVP of the 2001 World Series along with Randy Johnson when Arizona prevented the Yankees from a four-peat by winning Game 7 on Luis Gonzalez's walk-off single against Mariano Rivera.

While a Hall of Fame resume can't be built on October alone, Schilling did plenty in the regular season as well. In 569 career appearances (436 starts), Schilling was 216-146 with a 3.46 ERA and 3,116 strikeouts.

Though Schilling never won a Cy Young Award, he finished second three times. That included 2001-02, the best two seasons of his career, when his teammate Johnson -- a first-ballot Hall of Famer -- beat him out for the trophy.

Injury-prone early in his career, Schilling emerged into a dependable horse, making 35 starts four times and topping 250 innings four times. He topped the 300-strikeout mark three times.

As for Clemens -- who earned the nickname Rocket early in his career with the Red Sox -- he would be the epitome of a no-brainer if statistics were the only thing that were being evaluated.

However, the 354-game winner carries baggage when it comes to his Hall of Fame candidacy. Clemens was associated with performance-enhancing drugs several times in the Mitchell Report, which was released to the public two months after the righty pitched the final game of his career.

Clemens has adamantly denied that he used steroids, and he never failed a test during his career.

The powerful righty won seven Cy Young Awards and finished with 4,672 career strikeouts. He won the World Series with the Yankees in 1999 and 2000. In 1986, when Clemens won the AL Cy Young Award and the AL MVP Award, the Red Sox came one strike away from winning the World Series before falling to the Mets in seven games.

PED use has also kept another Red Sox star out of the Hall of Fame to this point in Manny Ramirez. However, unlike with Clemens, there is no gray area when it comes to Ramirez and PEDs. He was suspended by MLB for failing drug tests in 2009 and '11.

This is Ramirez's fourth year on the ballot. He received 22 and 23.8 percent of the votes in his first three years.

A right-handed hitter with a near perfect swing, Ramirez was a force for nearly his entire career, slashing .312/.411/.585 with 555 homers and 1,831 RBIs. Along with Schilling, Ramirez helped guide the Red Sox to World Series championships in 2004 and '07. Ramirez also played in two World Series with the Indians (1995 and '97) and helped the Dodgers to the National League Championship Series in 2008 and '09.

There are four other former Red Sox players on this year's ballot, though rightly Josh Beckett is the only one with more than a brief association with the club.

Beckett is on the ballot for the first time. He was a key force for two World Series championship teams (2003 Marlins, '07 Red Sox), but his 138 career wins and 3.88 ERA will leave him well short of the Hall of Fame. Beckett was the MVP of the '03 World Series and the '07 ALCS.

Carlos Pena, Brad Penny and Billy Wagner -- each of whom played less than a full season for Boston -- are also on the ballot.

Of those three, Wagner is the only one with a shot at Cooperstown. The lefty closer had 422 career saves, most of them for the Astros and Mets. This is Wagner's fifth year on the ballot. He topped out a 16.7 percent last year.

Candidates can stay on the ballot for a maximum of 10 years, provided they get at least five percent of the votes. That means that Schilling and Clemens will have two more cracks at it if they don't get enough support this year.

Results will be announced at Jan. 21 at 6 p.m. ET on MLB Network.

*** *WEEI.com***

Hall of Fame candidates include 7 former Red Sox

Rob Bradford

The Baseball Hall of Fame has announced the candidates for its 2020 class and it a healthy amount of Red Sox connections.

The list includes 32 candidates, 18 of which are new to the ballot. Former Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter is undeniably the most notable addition.

Candidates must be named on 75 percent of ballots cast by selected BBWAA members with 10 or more consecutive years of MLB coverage to gain election. Along with the electees, the other players who were named on more than half of the ballots cast in last year's election were pitchers Curt Schilling (60.9 percent) and Roger Clemens (59.5) and outfielders Barry Bonds (59.1) and Larry Walker (54.6).

Players may remain on the ballot for up to 10 years provided they receive at least five percent of the vote. Walker is on the ballot for the 10th and final time. Other holdovers from the 2019 ballot are pitchers Andy Pettitte and Billy Wagner, first baseman Todd Helton, second baseman Jeff Kent, third baseman Scott Rolen, shortstop Omar Vizquel and outfielders Andruw Jones, Manny Ramírez, Gary Sheffield and Sammy Sosa.

Here is the entire group:

Bobby Abreu, Josh Beckett, Heath Bell, Barry Bonds, Eric Chávez, Roger Clemens, Adam Dunn, Chone Figgins, Rafael Furcal, Jason Giambi, Todd Helton, Raúl Ibañez, Derek Jeter, Andruw Jones, Jeff Kent, Paul Konerko, Cliff Lee, Carlos Peña, Brad Penny, Andy Pettitte, J.J. Putz, Manny Ramírez, Brian Roberts, Scott Rolen, Curt Schilling, Gary Sheffield, Alfonso Soriano, Sammy Sosa, José Valverde, Omar Vizquel, Billy Wagner, Larry Walker.

As for Red Sox connections, there are seven candidates who played in Boston -- Beckett, Clemens, Pena, Penny, Ramirez, Schilling and Wagner.

The results will be announced by new Hall of Fame president Tim Lincecum on Jan. 21.

Triston Casas heads list of Top 10 Red Sox prospects

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox entered the 2019 season with the lowest-ranked minor league system in the game according to Baseball America. Midway through the year, they jumped up to No. 23. And judging by BA's most recent list of Top 10 players in the Sox system, there might be some optimism regarding the future after all.

Baseball America released its annual ranking Monday -- with the Red Sox rankings penned by the Boston Globe's Alex Speier -- and it is heavy with almost-but-not-quite-ready talent, led by 2018 first-round pick Triston Casas.

Here is the latest Red Sox Top 10:

1. Triston Casas, 1B

Casas hasn't disappointed since being drafted out of high school, getting a taste of High-A ball in Salem at the end of 2019 after managing 19 home runs, a .820 OPS and .254 batting average with Single-A Greenville. ("How Red Sox 1st-round pick Triston Casas' hair sent a message")

2. Bobby Dalbec, 1B

Dalbec seemingly has a shot to crack the 2020 major league roster after continuing to excel offensively and defensively in the minors, hitting a combined 27 home runs between Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket. The 24-year-old also made his mark with the major league coaching staff while getting private instruction at Fenway Park in September before holding his own in the Premier 12 international tournament. He is also viewed as above-average defender.

3. Bryan Mata, P

Just 20 years old, Mata got his feet wet with 11 starts for Double-A Portland after dominating Single-A (1.75 ERA in 10 starts). He opened more eyes with his performance in the Arizona Fall League, hitting 99 mph while serving as a reliever.

4. Jarren Duran, OF

Duran initially struggled in Double-A after his shock-and-awe performances throughout Single-A. But the speedy lefty hitter -- who once aspired to become a Navy SEAL -- showed improvement throughout his stint in Portland, ending up with 28 stolen bases for the Sea Dogs. For a system in dire need of young outfield help, Duran represents an important piece of the equation. ("Red Sox prospect Jarren Duran strived to become Navy SEAL")

5. Darwinzon Hernandez, P

Considering Hernandez got 29 appearances in the big leagues in 2019 classifying him with these other names may seem to be a reach, but there is no doubt that the 22-year-old represents part of the solution when it comes to the back-end of the Red Sox bullpen heading into 2020.

6. Thad Ward, P

In 25 Single-A starts -- splitting time between Greenville and Salem -- Ward didn't skip a beat, finishing 2019 with a combined ERA of 2.14, striking out 157 in 126 1/3 innings while walking just 57. A 2018 fifth-round pick out of Central Florida, Ward boasts a fastball that sits 93-95 mph, having implemented a solid cutter this past season.

7. Jay Groome, P

This designation is based purely on potential, with the Sox' first-round pick in 2016 having to fend off injuries throughout his pro career, with a recent recovery from Tommy John surgery serving as the latest obstacle. At 6-foot-6, 220 pounds it's easy to see why the lefty offers so much optimism, with the 21-year-old getting a chance to turn in a couple of appearances with Single-A Lowell at the end of 2019. He is expected to hit the ground running in spring training.

8. Gilberto Jimenez, OF

Just 19 years old, the speedy outfielder held his own with Single-A Lowell, hitting .359 with an .863 OPS in 59 games. Considering the Red Sox got Jimenez in international free agency for just a \$10,000 signing bonus, this might be shaping up as a solid success story for the international scouting department.

9. Noah Song, P

You probably know the story by now: Song is drafted in the fourth round after finishing his career at the Naval Academy having placed as one of the four finalists for the collegiate player of the year. Teams pass on him due to the uncertainty regarding the righty's military commitment, leaving his availability beyond 2019 in doubt. Song leaves a very strong impression in both his stay with the Spinners and then his performance with Team USA in the Premier 12 tournament. It's fair to say that if Song -- who now heads to flight school in Pensacola, Fla. -- can get clearance to return to pro baseball he will undoubtedly fly up this list.

10. Tanner Houck, P

The former Red Sox first-round pick is presenting himself as an intriguing option for the 2020 Red Sox, showing the ability to start and relieve thanks in large part to a wipeout slider. He is certainly considered on the cusp of contributing at the major league level.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Forget about Bloomingdale's — Red Sox will be shopping at this defunct discounter all winter

John Tomase

The Omni Resort in Scottsdale features nearly 300 rooms spread across a series of villas at the foot of Camelback Mountain.

When the Red Sox contingent of Chaim Bloom, Brian O'Halloran, Raquel Ferreira, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott arrived for the GM Meetings last week, they checked into Building 19, which caught the attention of an executive with New England ties.

"You know what that is, right?" he asked.

Of course, came the reply. It's where they're going to be shopping this winter.

For those who aren't local, Building 19 was a chain of discount department stores founded in Hingham with a motto of, "Good stuff cheap." They operated for nearly 50 years before declaring bankruptcy in 2013, and they specialized in the flotsam of everyone else's damaged, discontinued, or flawed remainders.

If there's a more apt description of how the Red Sox will fill their roster while cutting costs and maybe dropping the payroll below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold, it's not springing to mind. Whether or not they trade Mookie Betts, they'll dumpster dive this winter, flipping through piles of irregular area rugs, stacks of Nikes with swooshes slightly askew, and reams of unicorn calendars that have gifted September a 31st day.

As monster free agents like Astros ace Gerrit Cole, Nationals counterpart Stephen Strasburg, or postseason star Anthony Rendon prepare to hit free agency, the Red Sox will be wandering the consignment bins, hoping to unearth a dusty dinged-up treasure.

That's a far cry from 2016, when the Red Sox and White Sox met at the very same resort to begin the discussions that ended with All-Star left-hander Chris Sale being shipped to Boston for stud prospects Yoan Moncada and Michael Kopech a month later.

"This is where we started our rebuild in earnest," noted White Sox GM Rick Hahn. "We were excited to get this process started, where we got the Bostons and the Nationals and the teams talking about acquiring premium talent and using premium prospects to get it."

The Red Sox aren't rebuilding so much as retooling, and while we've debated whether cutting salary is a suggestion or a mandate, there's no question that ownership won't endure a straight rebuild, not with a payroll north of \$200 million and premium talents like Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, and J.D. Martinez still on the roster.

Some aren't entirely convinced the Red Sox will cut payroll at all. Chief among them is super-agent Scott Boras, who obviously has a vested interest in the Red Sox continuing to spend prolifically.

Former MLB exec details what Sox could get for Betts

"I don't know that that's true, by the way, because I have not heard that from ownership," he said last week when asked about the team slashing payroll. "Until John (Henry) or Tom (Werner) tell me that that's their objective. . . . Again, I have spoken to them and until they tell me that publicly, I would not in any way think anything other than that they're always winning owners who are trying to win again and again and again.

"If your goal is 'threshold,' then I believe you have to say that if that is a priority, a principal priority, rather than winning, I think it's something you say to your fans. I think you need to tell them that our goal is to operate to limits, and in no circumstance does winning get in the way to our primary goal. You know what? I've yet to hear an owner say that to his fanbase."

It's possible to have it both ways, though, as Bloom proved in Tampa, Derek Falvey is proving in Minnesota, and even Andrew Friedman has done in Los Angeles, where the big-market Dodgers have hacked nearly \$100 million from their once-bloated payroll to create a much leaner contender.

That's going to require creativity of the type we laid out in the dissection of Tampa's three-way deal with the Rangers and A's that brought hard-throwing reliever Emilio Pagan to the Trop last winter. Bloom's Rays proved over and over that they could unearth winning players in unexpected places, and he'll need to bring that magic to a Red Sox club that will be looking to fill holes at first, second, starter, reliever, and almost certainly outfield when Betts and/or Jackie Bradley is inevitably moved this winter.

Plugging all of those needs won't be easy, unless you know where to look. Bloom's track record suggests he won't be embarrassed to bargain hunt. Maybe he'll even find some good stuff, cheap.

*** *The Athletic***

The tide could be turning: Takeaways from Baseball America's ranking of top 10 Red Sox prospects

Chad Jennings

When kept in perspective, prospect lists are fascinating. They reveal strengths and weaknesses, offer neutral and varied evaluations, and give some glimpse of organizational possibilities. Emphasis on the word possibilities. None of this is absolute.

When treated as gospel, prospect lists become flat-out dangerous. Unpredictability is part of the process, and even the most nuanced, informed and unbiased evaluations often prove faulty in the wilderness that is player development. That's the nature of the business.

So we tried to keep perspective Monday when Baseball America released its latest ranking of the top 10 Red Sox prospects. It came as no surprise that the magazine had 2018 first-round slugger Triston Casas at the top, but it was a bit surprising that 2017 first-rounder Tanner Houck had fallen to No. 10. You can see the full list [here](#).

Rather than debate how soon each of these guys will make it to Boston — some of them most certainly never will — here are five takeaways from the latest Red Sox top 10 prospect list.

1. A bottom-heavy system is gaining balance

At this time last year, the Red Sox top 10 included only two players who had played even a partial season in Triple A, and only one other with more than five games of Double-A experience. Those who just missed the cut were similarly inexperienced.

This year, half of the top 10 has spent significant time in Double A, suggesting they could be big-league options as early as next year. One who just missed, shortstop C.J. Chatham, played in Triple A last year, and one who's no longer eligible, Michael Chavis, is out only because he's graduated to the majors. Standouts from the 2018 and '19 drafts have helped replenish the lower levels (with many of those already fast risers in the system).

Having a bottom-heavy system certainly contributed to the Red Sox being ranked the worst overall system in baseball at the beginning of last season. Moving some of that talent into the upper levels helped the Sox move up to 23rd in Baseball America's midseason ranking. It's still not a top system, but it's clearing some hurdles and getting better prepared to contribute. Some of that talent has already arrived.

2. Rotation help still not a given

More than half of Baseball America's top 10 list is made up of pitchers, and those six pitchers have worked mostly as starters in the minor leagues. But Baseball America's ranking also makes clear that rotation help still isn't a given.

Darwinzon Hernandez (ranked fifth) has already been converted to the bullpen, and Houck at No. 10 was used out of the Triple-A bullpen last season (he will work as a starter again next year, but there's a solid chance that his ultimate role will be in relief). No. 3 prospect Bryan Mata has also been given a little bit of bullpen time. Jay Groome, the 2016 first-rounder who ranks seventh, carries the uncertainty of returning from Tommy John surgery. Noah Song, the 2019 draft standout, carries the uncertainty of his military commitment.

The Red Sox have made significant strides in pitching development, but their top 10 reveals some of the lingering and inherent uncertainty of rotation development.

3. Triumph of scouting

We've previously detailed the success of the Red Sox amateur scouting department, and Baseball America's top 10 list is further evidence.

The list includes the first-round Red Sox picks from 2016, '17 and '18, suggesting those top choices were not busts, at least not yet. (Their 2014 and '15 first-rounders were Chavis and Andrew Benintendi, two more strong selections.)

But the current Baseball America top 10 list better highlights the Red Sox later-round choices. The group includes two fourth-round picks, a fifth-rounder, a seventh-rounder and three relatively low-cost international signings. In his chat about the ranking, author Alex Speier noted that 2019 sixth-round selection Chris Murphy also received consideration, as did Chatham, the second-round choice in a strong 2016 draft class.

4. No more third-base redundancy

At this time last year, three of the top five Red Sox prospects were primarily third basemen, which seemed to be a problem considering the youngest player on the major-league roster, Rafael Devers, was also a third baseman.

That's no longer an issue.

Chavis has proven passably capable of playing second base, Casas has moved basically full time to first base, and Dalbec has also been getting a lot of first-base playing time in anticipation of possibly playing that position at Fenway Park next season.

With Jarren Duran (ranked fourth) and Gilberto Jimenez (eighth), the Red Sox have some young center field talent. Outside the top 10, trade acquisition Marcus Wilson has further supplemented the system's outfield depth, which was noticeably thin not so long ago. The 2018 and '19 drafts added some risk-reward middle infielders and rotation possibilities, which were also much needed. Positional issues are no longer as glaring as they once were, though catcher still seems to be a position of obvious weakness.

5. Making strides

Taken on their own, top-10 lists like this always seem promising. They literally highlight the most exciting talent in a given system, which seems great, but it doesn't mean much if a system stinks. Ultimately, the Red Sox system still does not stand out as one of the best in baseball. But it's clearly better than it was a year ago. Last year, the Red Sox had a top prospect graduate to the majors (Chavis) and had no first-round pick to fill the void, and they still moved up the organizational rankings. That's a good sign.

One thing to note about this top 10 is that Casas ranks No. 1 just a month and a half after Baseball America pegged him as the 65th-best prospect in baseball. He was one spot behind Rays infielder Vidal Brujan and two ahead of Braves pitcher Bryse Wilson. Brujan ranked fourth in the just-completed Rays top-10 list, and Wilson ranked sixth in the Braves list. That offers some perspective on where the Red Sox stand.

Ultimately, where they rank doesn't matter nearly as much as whether they get meaningful impact. Big-league strikeouts and home runs count just as much whether they come from a prospect who made a top 10 list or another everyone overlooked entirely.