

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, November 20, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Manny Ramirez is apologetic, contrite, and renewed by his faith

Dan Shaughnessy

All these years later, Manny Ramirez wants you to know that he loves you and that he is sorry for mistakes he made while playing in Boston.

He is sorry he knocked down Red Sox traveling secretary Jack McCormick over a ticket issue when the Sox were in Houston in 2008. He is sorry for the way he shot his way out of town and got himself traded to the Dodgers later that season. He is sorry he got popped for PEDs three times.

“It’s a mistake,” Manny said of his failed drug tests. “It’s like Barry [Bonds], Alex [Rodriguez], and everybody that was in that [Mitchell] Report. We made mistakes. I cannot go back and change it. I think it’s going to be good for young players to see what happened in that time. But when you’re good, you’re good. Those things don’t make you a better hitter.”

Manny is scheduled to be honored by the Sports Museum at its annual Tradition event Wednesday at the Garden. It promises to be a cathartic night for Ramirez and Boston fans.

Manny signed an eight-year, \$160 million contract with the Red Sox before the 2001 season and made good on 7½ seasons of the deal. He was a latter-day Jimmie Foxx, good for about .312, 40 homers, and 120 RBIs every year. He was MVP of the World Series when the Sox broke the Curse of the Bambino in 2004. Paired with David Ortiz, he gave the Sox a Babe Ruth-Lou Gehrig combo.

But he also was goofy. Fans loved it most of the time, but “Manny being Manny” sometimes triggered headaches for teammates, managers, and owners.

Pushing McCormick to the floor in 2008 was one of the last straws. McCormick, a former Boston police officer, was 64 at the time. Manny was 36.

“It’s been such a long time,” Ramirez said. “I think maybe he said something and I reacted in a different way. When I went back to Boston, I really apologized.

“It doesn’t matter what people say to you, you’re not supposed to react like that. That’s somebody older than you that could be your dad, and when I went back and apologized, it showed a lot. It showed that you are growing up, when you go back and apologize and recognize that you did wrong.”

It was one in a series of misdeeds (remember when he took three strikes down the middle because he didn’t want to pinch hit against the Yankees?) that led the Sox to trade him to the Dodgers at the deadline in ’08. In 53 games with the Dodgers that season, Ramirez hit .396 with 17 homers and 53 RBIs. The Sox, meanwhile, lost Game 7 of the ALCS to the Rays. Boston fans were not happy.

I asked Manny if he intentionally misbehaved to get himself traded.

“I did,” he admitted. “But the more I tried, the better I played. My mind was so strong. I don’t know. I think I learned all that from my mom. She is so mellow. You can do anything to her and she is cool.

“To be honest, I was not in a good place at that time. I wanted a change. I thought going someplace else was going to make a difference. But now, man, I know it wasn’t the place. It was me. It was my mind. It was my heart. I wasn’t thinking right.”

This is the first time Manny has acknowledged any of this stuff. Now 47, he says he has found God and is dedicating his life to preaching and helping others. He last played major league baseball in 2011, but kicked around with international teams and finished his baseball career as a hitting instructor with the 2016 Chicago Cubs.

Today he lives in Miami and has raised three boys — one college graduate and two teenagers. It is a comfortable life. Ramirez made more than \$200 million in his 18 big league seasons.

Describing himself as a reformed Baptist, Ramirez said, “What I’m doing now, I preach. That’s what I do. Go into hospitals just to preach and teach people the Bible.

“I went back to school because I wanted to be in a seminary just to learn. I’ve been doing that for five years now. It hasn’t been easy. It’s something that’s great. It’s changed my mind-set. I’m like a rookie. I’m just on the bench. Sometimes they give me 10 minutes or 15 minutes. And that’s it.

“I’m growing. It takes time. It’s like playing baseball. If you want to be the best, you got to hit it every day. If you want to get to know God, you have to have a relationship with him.

“I remember when I retired, to be honest I didn’t know what to do with my time. And that’s hard. That’s something very hard. We are so young and we got so much power and so much fame.

“You think you can do whatever you want, but there are consequences. You get knocked down and you say, ‘What’s going on here?’ But then I started going to church.

“Everything that happened for me has been a blessing. You know why? Because I learn. With all the power and all the fame, if you don’t learn, you’re going to keep falling, worse and worse. And being in the wrong places at the wrong time. Thinking you can do whatever you want.

“But when God calls, you should humble yourself and you can see. Like, I hit all those home runs and it doesn’t mean anything. It’s something that I really can’t explain.”

How does he look back on his Red Sox experience?

“To be honest, I think Boston was the best thing that ever happened to me,” he said. “I played in Cleveland. Cleveland was kind of mellow. Smaller than Boston. But when I went to Boston, it made me be better.

“In Boston, you’ve got to be on top of your game every day. It was something that I have, and only the good players have it. I knew how to turn the page. If I had a bad day, I knew tomorrow would be another day and I would do better.”

He loves Boston fans.

“Man, they’re the best fans ever,” he said. “I remember when we used to go and play in Toronto, Pittsburgh. They always were there for us, supporting us day and night. And that’s special. Everywhere you go. And they really had fun with me.”

Ramirez will be honored Wednesday (he will be presented by Manny Delcarmen) along with Patriot Matt Light, Celtic Paul Silas, and Bruin Zdeno Chara. None of them produced controversy on a par with Manny, and museum officials are aware that not all Boston fans are happy to see Ramirez honored after the way things ended here.

Rusty Sullivan, executive director of the Sports Museum, said: “Manny is still a popular guy in these parts. He really symbolizes an era in Red Sox history more than anyone else — back when the Sox were appointment television.

“He had some great years here and he was at his best in the clutch. He’s got the postseason records to prove that. Certainly there were some down moments as well. You take the bitter with the sweet.

“He’s got some baggage. Roger Clemens and Robert Parish [past honorees] had baggage. If we only honored choirboys, we wouldn’t have an event. Are you going to be morally sanctimonious or realistic? People are excited about him coming here.”

Manny is not embarrassed to express his regrets.

“I think, like, everybody makes mistake every day,” he said. “You fall and you get up again. Every time you fall, every time you make a wrong decision, you regret it because that brings consequences. To you, your team, your family, your kids.

“But for all the things that happened, it was for the good. God is making it for good for me to appreciate what I have. I appreciate my family and my kids. And that’s what matters.”

A 12-time All-Star and lifetime .312 hitter with 555 career homers, Ramirez hit a big league-record 29 postseason homers. But he has gotten no love from Hall of Fame voters because of his positive drug tests.

“I really want to be there,” he said. “I’m praying for that. Don’t get me wrong; if it’s God’s will, it’s going to happen. I think it’s going to happen with time. All I got to do is keep praying. When it happens, be thankful and move on.

“I’m going into another Hall of Fame. If you read the Bible, the Bible says that your name is going to be written in the Book of Life. So it’s going to be more impressive than this. Remember, when you die, you can’t take this with you.”

New DOD guidelines mean Noah Song’s future — Navy flight school or Red Sox farm system — could soon be determined

Alex Speier

The Department of Defense issued a memo approving new guidelines to give graduates of military academies more latitude to pursue professional sports careers, according to a report from the Associated Press. It remains to be seen, however, whether righthander Noah Song — drafted by the Red Sox in the fourth round this year after graduating from the Naval Academy — will get an opportunity to pursue his professional career in 2020 in the wake of that memo.

According to the report, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper signed a memo last Friday allowing military service secretaries to nominate athletes for service-time waivers if they have “a strong expectation that a Military Service Academy cadet or midshipman’s future professional sports employment will provide the DoD with significant favorable media exposure likely to enhance national level recruiting or public affairs missions.”

The nomination requires the approval of the Secretary of Defense and an agreement by the athlete to eventually fulfill his or her military commitment. If approved, the waiver is subject to annual review.

Since Song already graduated from the Naval Academy, the new policy technically does not affect him. However, according to a source familiar with the pitcher’s situation, the Navy was waiting for the new Department of Defense guidelines before the Secretary of the Navy made a decision on Song’s formal request for a waiver.

“The Navy is still reviewing the new policy to understand its impact on current commissioned officers,” Lt. Cmdr. Adam Cole, a Navy spokesperson, wrote in an e-mail. “The Navy will make a decision on ENS Song’s future service guided by current authorities. At this time, it would not be appropriate to comment on a Service member’s personal request, especially one that has not fully staffed through the chain of command.”

Song is scheduled to report to flight school in December. If he does start training, it’s likely that he would be unable to pitch for at least two years, at which point he would again be able to petition for a waiver. That said, there’s no guarantee he will get a waiver at that point — a fact that Song acknowledged prior to the recent Premier12 tournament.

“It very well could be the last time I throw,” said Song. “It doesn’t make me feel any more demoralized or anything like that. It’s the cards that I’ve drawn and what I’ve chosen to do by serving, so if that’s what it takes, then that’s what it takes. I’ve understood that.”

The Navy already had delayed Song’s flight school reporting date to permit the righthander — a Golden Spikes Award finalist as one of the best players in college baseball this year — to pitch in the Premier12 tournament. Song originally had been scheduled to report to flight school in November.

Song dominated as a reliever in the tournament. In five appearances, he threw 5½ scoreless innings, holding hitters to a 1-for-16 mark with two walks and six strikeouts. Song’s arsenal proved head-turning, as he showed a 96-99 m.p.h. four-seam fastball while also flashing both a curveball and slider that elicited swings and misses. His overall repertoire was consistent with reports from his strong showing in seven appearances with the Lowell Spinners in his pro debut this past summer.

Though Song threw 1½ scoreless innings against Mexico in the bronze medal game, the US lost, 3-2, missing out on a chance to qualify for the Olympics. The US will have another chance during an Americas qualifying tournament in Arizona in March. Whether Song gets the chance to be a part of that effort — and whether he gets to pursue his career with the Red Sox — remains to be seen.

In seeking a waiver, Song is exploring a path that has been made available at times to other athletes. Patriots long snapper Joe Cardona has balanced an active-duty commitment at the Naval Preparatory Academy in Newport, R.I., with his football career. In August, West Point graduate Brett Toth received a waiver to pursue an NFL career, signing with the Eagles. The left tackle subsequently was claimed off waivers by the Arizona Cardinals.

MLB responds to politicians taking up the fight to preserve minor league baseball structure

Michael Silverman

After taking heat for their minor league contraction plan from Minor League Baseball last month and more heat from Congress on Tuesday morning, Major League Baseball struck back Tuesday night.

In a feisty letter directed to “Dear Member of Congress,” Dan Halem, deputy commissioner and chief labor negotiator for MLB, argued that baseball only wants to conduct overdue pruning and reshuffling of its sprawling, 160-affiliate system to improve the product.

And, said MLB, stripping 42 teams in 22 states of their big-league franchise affiliation is not as drastic as it seems because MLB will help operate a new, independent “Dream League” for many of the disenfranchised teams.

The letter attempts to shift much of the blame for contraction onto the Minor League Baseball owners who allowed the system to become bloated and fall into disrepair.

“We know for a fact that many Minor League owners — including owners in districts represented by Members of Congress who signed the letter to the Commissioner — are presently attempting to relocate their affiliates to different cities or sell them outright,” said the letter from Halem.

Halem’s letter came hours after US Representative Lori Trahan (D-Mass.) and US Representative David McKinley (R-W. Va.) co-authored a scorching letter to MLB commissioner Rob Manfred, Halem, and all 30 club owners about the issue.

With 60 Democrats and 46 Republicans signing on, the letter beseeched baseball to reconsider its plans for the sake of the communities that would lose teams.

The Lowell Spinners play in Trahan’s district, and they are the only Red Sox affiliate on the list.

The letter also reminded MLB that Congress is responsible for baseball’s antitrust exemption, an implied threat that the exemption could be reexamined if the plan is not reconsidered.

MLB did not sound particularly cowed by the threat.

“We cannot commit to you that the next PBA [Professional Baseball Agreement] will require MLB to guarantee 160 affiliates,” said Halem’s letter. “Even if Major League Clubs determine that they will commit to 160 affiliates, they are not willing to send their players to substandard facilities or impose on them unreasonable burdens with respect to travel and working conditions.”

Halem’s letter said that a majority of its owners believe there are too many minor league players and that contraction will allow MLB to compensate its minor league players better, improve the ballparks and clubhouses where they work, make them travel less, and provide them with better hotels and food.

Minor League Baseball does agree in principle that the current geographic map of teams and affiliates needs to be redrawn, and it has said that it wants to upgrade its facilities.

But on the issue of the number of players and teams, it’s only the big-league owners who see excess.

“Most of the players on the rosters of rookie, short-season, and low-A teams are there to fill rosters so the Minor League teams can stage games for their fans, not because the Major League Clubs require all of those players to develop Major League talent,” Halem’s letter stated.

Major League Baseball and Minor League Baseball are expected to return to the bargaining table for face-to-face negotiations on a new PBA later this week in Dallas, where MLB owners are currently meeting, and then resume in San Diego next month at baseball’s Winter Meetings.

The current PBA expires on Sept. 30, 2020.

The Spinners have played for their parent club, the Red Sox, for the last 24 seasons.

“The abandonment of Minor League clubs by Major League Baseball would devastate our communities, their bond purchasers, and other stakeholders affected by the potential loss of these clubs,” stated the letter from Congress.

Two other New England teams play in the NY-Penn League, the Vermont Lake Monsters (Oakland) in Burlington, Vt., and the Connecticut Tigers (Detroit) in Norwich.

MLB wants to drop some, not all, of the affected teams into a new independent “Dream League.”

The Spinners are targeted for Dream League play, but in a statement attached to the letter’s release, Trahan voiced enough distress to make it clear that affiliation with a “Dream League” and unattached to a big-league franchise is not a viable business plan.

“I was alarmed by news that the MLB is considering a reorganization that will wipe out the Spinners and 41 other minor league teams across the country,” said Trahan. “The Spinners bring enormous pride and joy to the Greater Lowell Community and the City has invested heavily in LeLacheur Park and surrounding infrastructure, providing an affordable, fun night out for families in the region.”

* **MassLive.com**

Boston Red Sox could make first trade under Chaim Bloom on Wednesday; here’s why

Chris Cotillo

By the time the clock strikes 8 p.m. Wednesday, don’t be surprised if the Red Sox have made a small trade or two.

As teams approach the deadline to protect eligible players from next month’s Rule 5 draft, the Red Sox are in an enviable position: Boston already has six open roster spots, only a few players to protect and a handful of current players who could easily be cut from the 40-man roster without much thought.

Those factors point to new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom looking to make his first Red Sox trade by the end of Wednesday.

Bloom’s first order of business will be to determine which of his own players he wants to add to the 40-man roster. Some calls (like infielders Bobby Dalbec and C.J. Chatham) will be easy while others (like pitchers Eduard Bazarzo and Yoan Aybar) will be more difficult.

Bloom has six open spots to play with and only two or three locks to add to the roster. That will give him some flexibility to feel out other clubs throughout the day in hopes of nabbing a piece that simply doesn’t fit on a rival’s roster.

Former Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski actually did just that a year ago, filling an open roster spot by acquiring reliever Colten Brewer from a Padres club that was short on 40-man spots at the protection deadline. Bloom could follow suit by grabbing a spare part or two from a counterpart looking to move pieces to create room for others.

More than half the league has less roster room than the Red Sox, and five teams (Oakland, Toronto, San Diego, San Francisco and Kansas City) currently have zero open spots. Bloom could turn to some familiar faces (Dodgers president of baseball operations Andrew Friedman and Rays GM Erik Neander) because both Los Angeles and Tampa Bay have a few players to add and just three spots apiece.

The Rays made two trades before the protection deadline in the last three years, sending Richie Shaffer and Taylor Motter to the Mariners in a rather significant deal in 2016 and trading Chih-Wei Hu to Cleveland a year ago to create roster space. Neander is not averse to the possibility and Bloom’s familiarity with Tampa Bay’s players could facilitate a deal.

Speaking at the GM Meetings in Arizona last week, Bloom promised a unique approach to roster-building this winter. Wednesday will provide his first opportunity to churn his roster in real time.

“I would say to look at it in terms of Need A, Need B or Need C might be a little limiting for us,” Bloom said. “To zoom out and take a look at... we know our objective is to prioritize sustainability and competitiveness, not just this coming year but also in the long-term. To think of moves through that lens instead of trying to arrange an order of needs is how we’re approaching it and it should open up more options for us.”

Boston Red Sox face Wednesday deadline to protect prospects; Bobby Dalbec, others will be added to roster

Chris Cotillo

Wednesday marks an important early date on the offseason calendar for the Red Sox. Before 8 p.m., the Sox must put any Rule 5 draft-eligible prospects on their 40-man roster to ensure they don't get poached by other teams at next month's winter meetings.

What does that mean, exactly? Here's a primer.

What's the Rule 5 draft?

The Rule 5 draft is one of the most complicated and unique events in baseball every year. Simply put, it's an annual mid-December draft in which teams can take certain players -- guys who have a certain level of professional experience but are not on their team's 40-man roster -- and poach them for a fee.

If a team selects a player in the major league portion of the Rule 5 draft, they must keep that player on their active roster for the entire season. If that does not happen, the claiming team must offer the player back to his original team, and if they refuse, expose him to waivers.

Eligible players include guys who were signed when they were at least 19 years old and have played professionally baseball for four years and are players who were signed at 18 and have played for five years. Players on team's 40-man rosters are ineligible, causing teams to protect their eligible players by adding them to their rosters before the draft.

A handful of promising prospects are taken every year because their original teams didn't have roster room. A few players stick with their new teams in the majors for the entire following season and then are under club control with no restrictions after that.

Which Red Sox players are eligible?

The Red Sox have over 50 eligible minor leaguers (hat tip, SoxProspects.com) who fit the criteria to be Rule 5-eligible, but only a few would interest other teams and therefore have to be protected.

Six of Boston's top 30 prospects (per MLB.com) are Rule 5-eligible: 1B/3B Bobby Dalbec (No. 2 prospect), SS C.J. Chatham (No. 9), OF Marcus Wilson (No. 18), RHP Eduard Bazarzo (No. 26), LHP Kyle Hart (No. 28) and LHP Yoan Aybar (No. 30). Other players who could intrigue rival clubs include first baseman Josh Ockimey, second baseman Chad De La Guerra and first baseman Pedro Castellanos.

Some familiar names who are very unlikely to be added to the 40-man roster include righty Austin Maddox, shortstop Nick Lovullo and outfielders Tate Matheny, Cole Sturgeon and Rusney Castillo.

Who will the Red Sox protect?

As our Chris Smith outlined last month, the Sox have some options. Boston has six open 40-man roster spots, meaning they can add six Rule 5-eligible players Wednesday.

Dalbec and Chatham are locks to be added and Wilson and Bazarzo appear likely to be. Hart and Aybar would seem to have a shot while a surprise like Ockimey, De La Guerra or Castellanos could crack the roster as well.

Boston's decision will come down to two things: how they value their own players as prospects and if they think a rival club would actually be willing to carry a certain player on their big league roster for all of 2020. Last year, the Sox -- somewhat surprisingly -- left Ockimey unprotected and he ended up not being taken.

What will the roster look like after Wednesday?

Due to free agency and some cuts, Boston's 40-man roster currently sits at 34 players. That number will increase Wednesday as the Sox protect players by adding them to the roster.

If the Red Sox, say, wanted to add more than six players or wanted to acquire someone from outside the organization, they have a handful of current 40-man players whose spots are tenuous at best. Pitchers Trevor Kelley, Ryan Weber, Josh Osich and Denyi Reyes, catcher Sandy Leon and infielder Tzu-Wei Lin are among the dispensable pieces if the Sox wanted to make further moves.

Are trades possible?

Yes -- it would not be a surprise if new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom views Wednesday as a way to add a piece or two from outside the organization via trade. Other teams have more prospects to protect and fewer spots than the Red Sox, meaning teams will be talking about minor trades throughout the day.

Boston made its only trade of the winter right before the protection deadline a year ago, acquiring reliever Colten Brewer from the Padres. The situation fit both clubs: San Diego needed spots to protect prospects and the Red Sox had room for a major leaguer.

A similar situation could arise Wednesday.

Boston Red Sox top 10 prospects 2020: Triston Casas, Bobby Dalbec headline Baseball America list

Chris Cotillo

Baseball America released its list of the top 10 prospects in the Red Sox' system Monday, with Alex Speier of the Boston Globe providing his ranking of the best young stars in the organization. First baseman Triston Casas and corner infielder Bobby Dalbec headlined the list. Here's the entire list, including 2019 stats and some background on each prospect.

1. Triston Casas, 1B - .256/.350/.480 with 20 HR, 81 RBI, .830 OPS in 120 games at A (118) / Hi-A (2)
Casas was taken with the 26th overall pick in the 2018 draft and had a breakout season in 2019. The 19-year-old projects as Boston's first baseman of the future despite being a few years away from the majors. He won the organization's Offensive Player of the Year award in the minors.

2. Bobby Dalbec, 1B/3B - .239/.356/.460 with 27 HR, 73 RBI, .816 OPS in 135 games at AA (105) / AAA (30)
Dalbec, 24, followed up an impressive stint in major league spring training with a strong season split between Portland and Pawtucket. He seems likely to start next year at Triple-A but could push for the major league roster if the Sox have a need at first base.

3. Bryan Mata, RHP - 7-7, 3.43 ERA, 111 SO, 42 BB in 105 innings at Hi-A (51 ½) / AA (52 ⅔)
Mata, who turns 21 in May, was Boston's representative at the 2018 Futures Game despite a high walk rate (58 BB in 72 innings) that season. He cut down on the walks and reached Portland in 2019.

4. Jarren Duran, OF - .303/.367/.408 with 5 HR, 38 RBI, 46 SB, .775 OPS in 132 games at Hi-A (50) / AA (82)
Duran was Boston's seventh-round pick in 2018 and tore up Hi-A in the early part of 2019 before being promoted to Portland. The 23-year-old was Boston's Futures Game representative this season and was the organization's Baserunner of the Year in the minors.

5. Darwinson Hernandez, LHP - 0-1, 4.45 ERA with 57 SO, 26 BB in 30 ⅓ innings for Red Sox
Hernandez was a steady contributor in the big league bullpen and will be part of the group again in 2020. The soon-to-be 23-year-old may project as a closer of the future.

6. Thad Ward, RHP - 8-5, 2.14 ERA with 157 SO, 57 BB in 126 ⅓ innings at A (72 ⅓) / Hi-A (54)

Ward, a fifth-rounder out of UCF in 2018, was Boston's Pitcher of the Year in the minors last season after a breakout campaign in which he made 25 starts across two levels. He appears ticked for Double-A in his second full major league season.

7. Jay Groome, LHP - 0-0, 2.23 ERA with 6 SO, 1 BB in 4 innings at Rookie-level (2) / A- (2)
Groome, now 21, was the 12th overall pick in the 2016 draft. He missed two full seasons due to Tommy John surgery before returning late this year and is back on the radar as a high-potential prospect.

8. Gilberto Jimenez, OF - .359/.393/.470 with 3 HR, 19 RBI, 14 SB in 59 games (A-)
Jimenez, 19, had a strong year at Lowell, emerging as one of the top hitters in the New York-Penn League. He has plus speed.

9. Noah Song, RHP - 0-0, 1.06 ERA with 19 SO, 5 BB in 17 innings at A-
Song, who was taken in the fourth round of this year's draft, was lights-out in seven starts for Lowell. The big question in regards to the 22-year-old is his military future, as his Navy obligations might cloud his baseball future. If he is allowed to play professionally, he is one of the top prospects to watch in 2020.

10. Tanner Houck, RHP - 8-6, 4.01 ERA with 107 SO, 46 BB at AA (82 ⅔) / AAA (25)
Houck, who was the 24th overall pick back in 2017, was shifted to relief duty late in the season and was considered for the big league bullpen at points over the summer. It remains to be seen if the Red Sox, under new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, still view him as a reliever or see him going back to starting in 2020.

*** ESPN.com**

The case for the Red Sox trading Mookie Betts: Examining Boston's two paths forward

Keith Law

This year's MLB tepid stove season is dominated by talk of whether contending teams in Boston and Cleveland, both of whom won their divisions in 2018 but missed the playoffs in 2019, might trade their best players - Mookie Betts and Francisco Lindor, respectively - now before they reach free agency next November. Cleveland's financial picture is its own set of problems, but Boston should have no issue whatsoever paying Betts -- who seems to want to go to free agency -- \$30-plus million a year to spend the rest of his prime years with the Red Sox. There is, however, an argument for trading Betts now to address the organizational deficiency in starting pitching, even though it means trading their best and perhaps most popular player.

The Red Sox are not in a great competitive position right now; their rotation for 2020 depends on two veterans, Chris Sale and David Price, whose health and durability are both gigantic questions. Neither threw 150 innings last season; both had the worst ERAs of their careers and both ended the year on the injured list. Their healthy returning starters are Eduardo Rodriguez and ... Nathan Eovaldi, if you are an optimist. The Red Sox had a 4.70 ERA last year, putting them at the league median, and would project to worse than that in 2020 unless they bring in a lot of outside help.

Their system is on the way back up after bottoming out in 2018, but there isn't a starting pitching prospect in their system likely to contribute in the major-league rotation this year. Their two closest starter prospects, Tanner Houck and Bryan Mata, both show platoon splits and have delivery concerns that might lead them to the bullpen. Thad Ward is probably their most likely starter prospect, but he finished 2019 in high-A and likely won't see the majors till mid-summer or later. Jason Groome and Noah Song might be starters in the long run, but both are farther away, with Groome just back from Tommy John surgery and Song drafted out of the Naval Academy just last June. Without a significant expenditure on players not currently in the organization, it's very hard to imagine the Red Sox fielding a contender's rotation in the next three seasons.

What does J.D. Martinez's opt-in mean for Red Sox, Mookie Betts?

That's the crux of the real problem here: The Red Sox are a large-market team that could run just about any payroll they'd like, but they're operating as if their budget is limited. They're committed to more than \$140 million for 2020, not including \$25-30 million for Betts and an equivalent amount for other arbitration-eligible players on the roster. If they bring everyone back, they'll be close to \$200 million -- again, they can afford this -- and would still be at least two quality starters short of a contending rotation, assuming they don't get 30 good starts from each of Price and Sale. (Even so, it would be those two, Rodriguez and maybe Eovaldi, who was neither healthy nor effective as a starter last year.) They could field a tremendous offense this year with the players they already have, but end up well below the league median in run prevention if Price and Sale pitch at or below their 2019 levels -- or just don't pitch at all.

This leaves Boston with two paths forward:

They could try to spend their way into a few more years of contention, signing two top free-agent starters this winter for probably \$40-50 million a year in total, or try to sign one and then trade for another starter with the prospects they do have. Free agency seems more likely for this strategy, as the crop of starters who might be available in trade because they're approaching free agency and with non-contenders is thin, with Mike Minor and Robbie Ray the only two who might be on the market who are also good enough to move the needle for Boston.

Their other strategy would be to accept non-contention for a year or two, given the strength of the Yankees and the Rays and the probability that the Blue Jays will keep improving as they rebuild, and use Betts to try to trade for long-term pitching help.

If they could get two pitchers who project to be important parts of the team's 2021-25 rotations, that would go a long way to justifying the deal. You can't argue that the team would ever be better off for losing Betts' 7 WAR a year, but you might argue that they're better off, given who else they have in the organization, with two 3 WAR starters at the minimum salary for several years and the payroll left over from trading Betts to supplement the team somewhere else. If, completely hypothetically, they traded Betts to Atlanta for two of that team's stable of promising young starters, then used the savings to sign Zack Wheeler, they'd probably be better set up to contend in 2021 and beyond than if they kept Betts and didn't simultaneously address the rotation.

Again, this is all based on two assumptions. One is that the Red Sox can't support a payroll above the luxury tax threshold, which is a bit of fiction. The other is an assumption that even if they were willing to go above that mark, that they'd still be able to land the two top-end starters they'd need to contend in 2020, which I feel confident is a fair assessment given how many other teams should be bidding on the likes of Gerrit Cole, Stephen Strasburg, Wheeler or Hyun-Jin Ryu. The Red Sox are a high-revenue team that should consistently run one of the game's highest payrolls and if they return to contention in 2021 or 2022 or some point beyond that, they should be in the market for the top free agents each year - going after the next Mookie Betts to hit free agency, whenever that should be.

Boston's self-imposed payroll crunch evaporates after the 2022 season, when the contracts they've given Price, J.D. Martinez and Eovaldi all run out, freeing up nearly \$70 million. That's not an argument for them to forgo spending until then, but they could also backload any signings before that point to try to pay any free agents more in the years 2023 and beyond, or acquire a younger star in the next few seasons and extend him through free agency past 2023.

This is all in service of winning, however, not of profits. If Red Sox ownership's goal is simply to make money, then of course they would trade Betts, 27, for younger talent and then simply not make the outside additions I've detailed here. The team would be competitive, but probably not a contender unless they get exceptionally lucky in the trade market, or if a number of their current prospects hit their ceilings.

Trading Betts for any package that doesn't promise to address their starting pitching shortage wouldn't make baseball sense, and even a trade that does so could always go awry if the pitchers get hurt or don't work out. Michael Kopech, for example, briefly the game's top pitching prospect when Boston traded him

to acquire Chris Sale, had his timeline pushed back by at least a year by September 2018 Tommy John surgery. However, the 'right' trade of Betts is probably the team's best chance to avoid a pitching apocalypse in the next few years and to restore them to contention a little bit sooner than they might otherwise have gotten there strictly through signing pitchers as free agents.

*** *WEEL.com***

How Red Sox, Dustin Pedroia are handling second baseman's situation

Rob Bradford

New Red Sox Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom and general manager Brian O'Halloran ventured over from the Omni Scottsdale to Dustin Pedroia's nearby Arizona home Thursday. An approach was reinforced.

The two Red Sox' executives offered their initial view of Pedroia's status heading into the 2020 season, with Bloom saying there is "every indication" the second baseman will be in a position to contribute in the coming season after managing just nine games in 2019 due to continued left knee issues.

In his appearance on the Bradfo Sho podcast the following day Pedroia explained where exactly his body and mind were at when it came to making another run at returning. In the conversation, the 36-year-old also explained how the organization and player will be proceeding when it comes to counting on Pedroia's presence.

"I've been around long enough so that I'm close with everybody in our organization," Pedroia said. "They know what I've gone through. They know everything about me. We're always in touch. Part of roster-building ... I've never had any say in any of that. Obviously, that's their job. Right now my job is to try and get healthy and try and help us. Obviously, if I'm 100 percent and I can play baseball, I'll be alright. But if it's like last year and I'm trying to go out there with bones sticking out of the side of my knee and all that, yeah we should probably make an adjustment."

Pedroia -- who is owed \$13 million in 2020 and \$12 million in the final year of his current deal the following season -- has experienced some recent optimism, with his weakened left leg making great strides. As he explained it, the left quad muscle -- which is vital to support his surgically-repaired knee -- is now at 60 percent the strength of his right one, which is a far cry from a few months ago.

"Right now I'm in a better place physically than when I was trying to play," he said. "One hundred percent."

"I'm 40 percent stronger than I was last year. I was trying to play with a leg that looked like my 10-year-old."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Why the way MLB teams value prospects is limiting Mookie Betts' trade value for Red Sox

John Tomase

The Bartolo Colon trade would never happen today. The Mark Teixeira trade would never happen today. Hell, the Ryan Ludwick trade would never happen today.

Ryan Ludwick? Surely you remember the deal that sent Colon from the Indians to the Expos in 2002 for a massive haul of future All-Stars: Cliff Lee, Brandon Phillips, Grady Sizemore. You might also recall that five years later, the Braves kickstarted a rebuild in Texas by swapping Elvis Andrus, Neftali Feliz, Matt Harrison, and Jarrod Saltalamacchia for 363 days of Teixeira.

What you're less likely to remember is the three-way deal on July 31, 2010 that sent Ludwick, two years removed from 37 homers and his only All-Star appearance, to the Padres. San Diego was clinging to a small lead in the NL West and hoped Ludwick would power them to the postseason. He instead hit just .211 and San Diego finished two games behind the Giants in the division and one behind in the Braves in the wild card. No playoffs for you.

The price they paid ended up being far steeper. The Indians joined the trade by sending promising right-hander Jake Westbrook to the Cardinals. The Padres completed the swap by shipping a Double-A pitching prospect to Cleveland. Perhaps you've heard of him. His name is Corey Kluber.

A decade later, it's hard to imagine a team parting with any one of the prospects listed above, let alone the many-for-one swaps that characterized the first two deals. A player like Ludwick would never command a prospect like Kluber.

And that's a problem, because with the Red Sox debating whether to make Mookie Betts available this winter, they'll be constrained by the fact that teams value prospects more than ever.

"Teams understand the value of their young players and want to find a way to build around them, not necessarily always trade them away," said Twins GM Derek Falvey. "That's why you don't see as many of those players moving anymore."

There was a time when farm systems, especially in big markets, existed primarily to produce prospects to be fed into the trade chipper for established stars. Those days are gone for a variety of factors. For one, teams recognize the importance of building around young, cost-controlled players. For another, the diminished influence of performance-enhancing drugs has restored more traditional aging curves, meaning fewer players remain productive into their late 30s. And for another, teams have become risk-averse, recognizing that if they really want a top-level talent, they can sign him in free agency without surrendering more than a draft pick.

Where this leaves the Red Sox is murky, but it's worth considering the response of White Sox general manager Rick Hahn, who never mentioned Betts by name when discussing why his club is unlikely to dip into its considerable well of prospects for a rental, but also didn't make it hard to read between the lines.

Three years ago, the White Sox began discussions with the Red Sox on the deal that would send Chris Sale to Boston for mega-prospect Yoan Moncada and flamethrower Michael Kopech. The White Sox were a mess and effectively starting over. Sale, with three years affordable years remaining on his contract, represented one of the most desirable assets in the game, and the Red Sox weren't the only team to step up.

The Nationals also got involved, and were willing to part with some serious talent, including speedy outfielder Victor Robles and pitchers Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez. At that point, the White Sox made a pact.

"We made a commitment, starting with Jerry Reinsdorf, Kenny Williams, and all of us in the baseball department, that once we got ourselves in the position to be on the opposite end of these trades, where you were giving up talent for short-term gain, that it was going to be important for us to still try and remain committed to the long-term," Hahn said. "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. But when we got there, we wanted to do the same thing, but not at the expense of multiple years."

How does this relate to Betts? Let Hahn continue.

"When there's a guy like Chris Sale available who had multiple years of control and you're ready to win, making that push makes all the sense in the world," he said. "If you're talking about a guy on a one-year basis, we're not to that point yet. And if we do get to that point, that's going to be a tough trigger to pull, because we're trying to build something sustainable for an extended period of time. Quick hits don't

necessarily do that. After three years of rebuilding, we've gotten ourselves in a very good position, but not in one where we're going to do something just for an immediate bang in 2020 if we feel it compromises us in the long term. We've paid too big of a price to get to where we're at to compromise long-term."

The White Sox have built a consensus top-three farm system replete with both pitching and position prospects who will soon join young breakout stars like Moncada and AL batting champ Tim Anderson in Chicago. There once was a time when an MVP like Betts would've been too tough to ignore on the open market, even if he represented a risk to fly the coop after a year.

But now? The White Sox see little point in engaging, because acquiring him will just short-circuit the rebuild that is close to bearing fruit.

That kind of patience didn't necessarily exist when teams were willing to trade their best prospects for one shot at the postseason. Now they hoard their prospects because the alternative is trading a future Cy Young Award winner for an outfielder who fails to put you over the top.

Mookie Betts is no Ryan Ludwick, but teams have come to view them similarly for this reason: neither is worth mortgaging the future over anymore.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Q&A with new Red Sox pitching coach Dave Bush

Sean McAdam

After spending the last few years working in the Red Sox minor league system — most recently as the organization's minor league pitching coordinator — Dave Bush will serve as Boston's major league pitching coach, having been hired to replace the re-assigned Dana LeVangie.

Bush spent nine years in the big leagues, pitching for three different organizations. BostonSportsJournal.com spoke with him recently about his new role and how he views the job of pitching coach.

BSJ: How did the process come about that you were hired as pitching coach? Once the position became open, was it something you pursued?

Dave Bush: "I went into without any expectations, but pleased to be involved in the process and obviously I'm happy with how it turned out."

BSJ: We're seeing the job of pitching coach change quite a bit, including qualifications and background. How do you see the role evolving?

Bush: "I think all coaching roles have evolved quite a bit in the big leagues. There's so much more information available than there used to be. The qualifications that guys need to be good big league coaches has changed each year. I think things kind of fell into place for me in a good way. The last three years, I was working within the system, focusing on analytics and a lot of my responsibilities on the minor league side (included) taking the information and making it usable for players and helping the coaches to learn what the different things meant. So I had a lot of practice in working with staff and with players. I think the game has just kind of evolved and evolved a way that I figured I could contribute in a good way."

BSJ: How big a role do analytics play in the job now?

Bush: "When I first started to working with the Red Sox and was introduced to a lot of the information, it made sense to me immediately. That's the clearest way I can say it: it just made sense. It fit with a lot of the ideas and topics and things that I learned as a player, but when I learned as a player, it was trial and error."

We didn't have the same information to verify what we tried to do. We tried stuff, we thought about it, we talked about it, we looked at the results and then we made adaptations. Nowadays, we get that information much faster and we have a much more precise understanding of what's happening. But as I started to learn the information and the numbers, the concepts made sense. They matched up with things that I already understood, things I learned as a player.

"The simplest approach I take now as a coach is that the concepts are still very similar to what I did 10-15 years ago, But we have a newer, better way of evaluating it, being more precise with it. It's not necessarily that we're teaching things differently; it's just that we have a different and better way of understanding what's happening on the field."

BSJ: Are players less resistant to the use of analytics now?

Bush: "Each new year, guys are signed into pro ball, each class has had more exposure to the information. I won't necessarily say that they understand it or know totally what it means, but they're definitely not afraid of it. It's nothing that they feel is going to be used against them; they really feel it's going to be used to help them. So I'm not necessarily trying to get guys to buy in as much as making sure they understand exactly what it means.

"Like with all information, it can be used the right way or it can be used the wrong way. The challenge now is less about convincing people to use it and more about making sure they understand exactly what we're talking about."

BSJ: What role has Brian Bannister played in your development?

Bush: "He was responsible for teaching me a lot when I first started working here. He was the point man and for all the information we had. Certainly, without his help those first couple of years, I would not be in the position I'm in at this point. He was really, really helpful in getting me to understand exactly what the numbers meant and helping me translate it into usable words and terms and phrases and just making sense of it all.

"I don't expect our relationship to change a whole lot. I think he's a little more interested in working on the player development side. He really enjoys the process of helping younger players reach their potential and to do it sooner, maybe, than in the past. We have a great relationship. He's certainly responsible for me getting up to speed when I first started working with the Red Sox. I'm excited to keep working with him. He's a very talented coach, very talented analyst. He brings a lot of things to the table. Our roles are slightly reversed, but I don't think our relationship changes a whole lot."

BSJ: You've worked with most pitchers in the minor league system. How might that benefit them — and you — once they graduate to the big leagues?

Bush: "For the guys who do graduate to the big leagues this year, when they first get there, I think there will be a comfort level for them, walking in and knowing that the pitching coach is someone that they've worked with in the past. Anything that can make players more comfortable when they're first starting their big league careers, I think it is helpful.

"From my side, having worked with guys in the past, it gives me a little bit of understanding of what they're trying to do out on the mound. So instead of having to ask everyone what's happening, at least I have a little bit of an idea of what a guy's doing and the things he's tried in the past that have worked or not worked. If nothing else, it should speed up that familiarity process a little bit, let the player get comfortable and gives me a little understanding of what they're trying to do."

BSJ: The 2019 season was a disappointing one for most of the veteran starters. Have you looked into some of the reasons for that?

Bush: "I've definitely already started that process. In some ways, it's looking at the data and comparing this past season to prior seasons. I've definitely been in contact with the trainers and the medical staff about injuries that some of these guys have had. There were health issues with a bunch of different guys this past season that impacted the way they pitched in a number of different ways.

"I spent enough time around the big league team here to have started relationships with those guys, so that I'm not starting from scratch now. And I've reached out to everyone at this point in the offseason, just to find out where they are with their offseason throwing programs, how they feel about their health, when they're going to start throwing. And just to put some things in their mind about expectations that I might have going into spring training and getting all of them back to where they can be most successful."

BSJ: The Red Sox obviously invested a lot in veteran starters last year and when they failed, so did the team. On the other hand, the two teams that made it to the World Series took that same path. How do you see the importance of having experienced starting pitchers on the staff?

Bush: "I, along with a lot of people in the game, value starting pitching. There's a reason why really good starting pitchers get paid a lot of money. The innings they eat up and the presence they have on the mound, it's important. The more innings your starters pitch, the fresher your bullpen is going to be. We saw that value of traditional starters in October with the teams in the World Series, especially, that relief pretty heavily on traditional starters that went deep into the game.

"That being said, I'm open to creativity and to using the personnel that we have the best that we can. So if that means running five traditional starters out there and looking for six or seven innings every time, great. If that means being creative and using an opener or having some bullpen games or dividing up innings in whatever way we need to, I'm open to any possibility that puts guys in a good position to be successful. If that means we have guys who are healthy and can eat up a lot of innings, great. If we have injuries and have to rotate things around, then we'll do the best we can to be creative and find ways to maximize the staff that we have."

BSJ: The decision last spring to bring the starters along slowly backfired. How do you intend to prepare those guys in spring training?

Bush: "We've already had multiple conversations between myself and Alex and myself and staff about how we want to approach that. The biggest difference is, the season ended a month earlier this year. and we also had a number of guys that were dealing with injuries before the season was over.

"The unfortunate part of not making the playoffs is, you're finished in late September, early October. The benefit we're going to have is, it's given guys a little more time to recover and it's allowed us to build in a little more traditional offseason program where they can get all the rest they need and still start throwing programs at the appropriate time and be ready for spring training.

"The exact plan isn't set in stone yet. But because it will be a full offseason, we don't have to worry so much time about trying to crunch the recovery time like they did following the World Series. I don't expect anything radical. Also, I don't know that the program we had last spring was anything radical. It was just a product of having played so late into the season the year before that we had to build in the appropriate amount of rest time and also build in enough build-up time for the season. That can be challenging when the offseason gets crunched."

BSJ: How much communication have you had with the major league pitchers?

Bush: "I started reaching out to players almost immediately after getting hired, making sure that I knew what their plans were for the offseason. It's likely that, somewhere along the way, whether it's in Fort Myers or somewhere else, that I and other members of the staff will make some trips around to see players in person. We have staff members who live all over the country and we have players who live all over the country.

“There’s definitely some value in meeting players face to face. Whenever possible, we’ll do that and in places where that’s not possible, I’ll be in communication throughout the offseason.”

*** *The Athletic***

Breaking down whom the Red Sox will protect in upcoming Rule 5 draft

Chad Jennings

The Rule 5 draft is all about opportunity. It keeps teams from stockpiling minor league talent indefinitely. After a few years of team control, a player must be added to the 40-man roster or left exposed to any other organization willing to give him a chance in the big leagues. Decision day is coming up.

Wednesday is the deadline for teams to protect players from the Rule 5 draft by adding them to the 40-man roster. Last year, the Red Sox protected five, and four of them wound up playing in the big leagues. Among them were Michael Chavis, Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor, who became pretty important players at various points.

This year’s group of Rule 5 eligible Red Sox could have similar impact.

Here’s a quick reminder of the rules:

Players who signed at 18 or younger must be protected after five years in the minors. Players who signed at 19 or older must be protected after four years.

Practically speaking, the rules mean that college players drafted in 2016 are eligible for the first time this year. Anyone drafted/signed in 2015 or earlier is also eligible.

Teams pay a relatively small fee for drafting a player. That player must stick on the major league roster – or the injured list – throughout 2020, or else he must be offered back to his original team.

This year’s Rule 5 draft will be held on Dec. 12. It’s worth noting that many of the highest-profile Red Sox prospects are not eligible, including Triston Casas, Jarren Duran, Bryan Mata, Tanner Houck, Thad Ward and Jay Groome. Rusney Castillo is eligible, but a drafting team would be responsible for his massive contract, so he’s a non-factor.

Here are some names to keep in mind – three of whom we expect to be protected, a few who fall into a murky gray area, and a handful who likely will be exposed despite solid minor league numbers.

Expect to add

Prospects with upside, plus reason to believe they could be big league ready by Opening Day

Bobby Dalbec

Corner infielder, 24 years old

Why protect him: After hitting 27 home runs in Double-A and Triple-A last season, Dalbec seems ready to have a major league impact at some point next season.

Role to play: While Dalbec might be ready for the Opening Day job at first base, he has just 30 games of Triple-A experience and a temporary return to the minors isn’t the worst idea. The Red Sox could sign a cheap stopgap until they’re sure Dalbec is ready.

C.J. Chatham

Middle infielder, 24 years old

Why protect him: He's a solid defender who hit .298 in Double-A and Triple-A last season. His ability to play shortstop, second base and perhaps some outfield would make him a prime utility candidate if left exposed to the Rule 5.

Role to play: With Xander Bogaerts entrenched at shortstop, Chatham began getting reps at second base and even played a little left field. His versatility makes him an obvious bench candidate. He's routinely hit for average in the minors.

Marcus Wilson

Outfielder, 23 years old

Why protect him: The Red Sox have been thin on upper-level outfielders, but they acquired Wilson in last year's Blake Swihart trade, and he delivered a strong second half.

Role to play: The Red Sox might finally have an up-and-down outfielder who can provide depth, latch onto a bench spot, or perhaps fill-in more regularly. No more forcing a guy like Sam Travis into that role. Wilson has some power, some speed and he's played all three outfield positions.

On the bubble

Big league potential, but protecting them might depend on whether Red Sox analysis suggests they could stick right now

Eduard Bazarido

Right-handed pitcher, 24 years old

Why protect him: Smallish reliever has put up pretty good numbers. He's the type of guy a team could take in the Rule 5 just for a spring training flyer, but only 22 games of Double-A experience suggests making a big league roster might be a stretch.

Why on the bubble: This is the type of reliever teams regularly wrestle with whether to protect. Enough upside to be interesting, but not so much that the risk of losing him seems overly problematic.

Yoan Aybar

Left-handed pitcher, 22 years old

Why protect him: The former outfielder has been pitching only two years, but he has significant velocity, which makes the upside tantalizing. Add the fact he's a lefty, and teams might be curious enough to draft him.

Why on the bubble: He's barely pitched above low Class-A, and he walked six batters in eight innings in the Arizona Fall League. Upside is interesting, but can he really pitch in the majors right away?

Jhonathan Diaz

Left-handed pitcher, 23 years old

Why protect him: Probably less likely to be protected than either Bazarido or Aybar, but it seems foolish to overlook a left-hander who went to the Arizona Fall League this offseason.

Why on the bubble: Not a particularly notable prospect, though he did have a 3.86 ERA out of the Class-A Salem rotation last season, and he had a good strikeout rate out of the Arizona Fall League bullpen.

Performance vs. protection

Minor league production might not be enough to warrant Rule 5 protection

Kyle Hart

Left-handed pitcher, 26 years old

Why protect him: Because he's consistently performed in the minor leagues, including a 3.52 ERA in the Double-A and Triple-A rotations last season.

Why not protect him: Because the 19th-round pick doesn't stand out as a future big league impact pitcher. He's performed well enough to be on the radar, but there's still reason to wonder whether his minor league performance can carry over.

Chad De La Guerra

Utility infielder, 26 years old

Why protect him: Because he can play all over the infield, he's been a regular in big league camp, and he's coming off a .901 OPS in Triple-A (albeit in an injury-shortened year that included only 61 games).

Why not protect him: Because he went unselected in last year's Rule 5 draft, and his upside might be limited to a relatively replaceable bench role.

Josh Ockimey

First baseman, 24 years old

Why protect him: Because he has left-handed power. He cranked 25 home runs with a nice .353 on-base percentage in Triple-A Pawtucket last season.

Why not protect him: Because he strikes out enough to have hit just .204 last year, and his defense is limited to first base (at best). How many teams have room to keep a platoon 1B/DH all season?

*** *The USA Today***

Mookie Betts, Francisco Lindor and eight other MLB players who could be on the move this winter

Jesse Yomtov

As Major League Baseball's hot stove continues preheating, we know all about the top free agents on the market: Gerrit Cole, Anthony Rendon and Stephen Strasburg.

But what about players who could be made available via trade?

The league's Winter Meetings – often where major deals take place – are less than a month away, but it's not too early to take a look at some big names who could be dealt in the coming months.

While the cost may ultimately be exorbitant, offers for superstars like Boston Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts and Cleveland Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor will get some strong consideration from their respective teams.

Here's a look at 10 players who are prime trade targets this winter:

Mookie Betts, OF Red Sox: Expected to receive about \$27 million in arbitration for 2020, the 2018 AL MVP is a free agent next winter. Boston could choose to commit to their 27-year-old long-term, but shedding his enormous salary for the upcoming season – and beyond – would give the club a ton of financial flexibility after a disappointing 2019 season, plus an enormous return haul in a trade.

Possible suitors: Dodgers, Braves, Cardinals, Mets

Francisco Lindor, SS, Indians: Arguably the best all-around shortstop in the game, the 26-year-old is expected to get about \$17 million in arbitration for 2020. There's no real rush to trade Lindor since he's not a free agent until after 2021, but Cleveland could really clean up in return. That said, the Indians' title window isn't closed. With Lindor and a great rotation, there's no reason to think they can't win the AL Central and make a run. In March, Indians owner Paul Dolan seemed to hint that Lindor's long-term future wouldn't be in Cleveland. "Enjoy him. We control him for three more years," Dolan said. "Enjoy him and then we'll see what happens."

Possible suitors: Yankees, Phillies, Dodgers

Francisco Lindor and Mookie Betts are two of the top players who could be on the move this winter. Corey Kluber, RHP, Indians: Coming off a season wrecked by injury, the two-time Cy Young winner's value certainly isn't at its highest. He's making \$17.5 million in 2020 with an \$18 million team option for 2021. If Kluber can bounce back, that's a steal for a pitcher of his caliber. It would probably behoove the Indians to hold onto him until the season begins so that he can up his value, but teams in desperate need of pitching may be willing to roll the dice this winter.

Possible suitors: Phillies, Yankees, Dodgers, Padres

Kyle Schwarber, LF, Cubs: Chicago's 26-year-old enjoyed his best offensive season (38 HR, .871 OPS) in 2019, but he's a one-dimensional slugger with limited value. His estimated \$8 million salary for 2020 is quite reasonable and he would thrive as a designated hitter, making him alluring to potential trade partners, particularly in the AL.

Possible suitors: Yankees, Rays, White Sox

Starling Marte, OF, Pirates: Two years after an 80-game suspension, Marte posted career-highs with 23 homers, 82 RBI and an .845 OPS, to go with 25 steals. Pittsburgh is picking up his \$11.5 million option for 2020 and he's got another for \$12.5 million in 2021. The 31-year-old has spent most of the past two years playing center field and while he's not exactly an elite defender there, he handles the position well.

Possible suitors: Mets, Phillies, Reds, Cubs

Jon Gray, RHP, Rockies: The 28-year-old has been maddeningly inconsistent across his four full seasons in the majors, but he has great stuff and is coming off a good 2019 (3.84 ERA in 26 games). Gray is under team control through 2021 and a team that really needs a starter could be persuaded by his upside, particularly away from Coors Field.

Possible suitors: Yankees, Phillies, Cubs

Joc Pederson, OF, Dodgers: He's trending upwards again and the Dodgers have a logjam in the outfield, so the 27-year-old is certainly movable. Teams that need a center fielder may be put off by the fact he's barely played the position the past two years, but sticking him back in center could be a risk worth taking.

Possible suitors: Mets, Cubs, Phillies

Miguel Andujar, 3B, Yankees: Runner-up for AL Rookie of the Year in 2018, injury limited Andujar to just 12 games in 2019 and Gio Urshela shined at the hot corner in his place. That said, the Yankees aren't exactly facing pressure to trade him. It's possible Urshela's breakout year was a fluke and Andujar would provide insurance there, as well as being another bat that could fill in at designated hitter and when injuries inevitably strike. The flip side is that Andujar would be extremely desirable as a long-term piece for other teams, considering his negligible salary and four remaining years of team control.

Possible suitors: Phillies, Braves, Brewers, Angels, Rangers

Matthew Boyd, LHP, Tigers: Detroit may have missed the boat on this one, holding Boyd at the trade deadline only to watch him post a 6.11 ERA in his final 10 starts of the season. Still, the lefty is affordable right now and under team control through 2022. Boyd may not be the sexiest starter available, but any club that needs pitching will kick the tires on a potential trade.

Possible suitors: Padres, Phillies, Blue Jays

Hunter Renfroe, OF, Padres: After hitting 27 homers in the first half, Renfroe fell off a cliff after the break, batting .161 with just six home runs and 15 RBI. Renfroe is an above-average defender in the outfield, so it's not like he's entirely one-dimensional. This is yet another chance for the Padres to trade from their outfield excess in order to potentially add some pitching

Possible suitors: Angels, Cardinals, Indians, Tigers