

The Boston Red Sox Friday, November 22, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox earn award for philanthropic work

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox on Thursday were named the recipient of Major League Baseball's Allan H. Selig Award for Philanthropic Excellence. The announcement was made on the final day of the owners' meetings in Arlington, Texas.

The Red Sox were recognized for their partnership with Massachusetts General Hospital to develop the Home Base Program, a nonprofit dedicated to providing clinical care, wellness, education, and research initiatives for veterans, active military service members, and their families impacted by PTSD and traumatic brain injuries.

Team chairman Tom Werner was a driving force behind the initiative, which has aided more than 24,000 veterans, service members, and their families.

"We are honored to be the recipients of this prestigious award for the second time, and for a program that has been incredibly special to me personally," Werner said.

The Sox received a \$10,000 grant from MLB Charities as part of the award. They are the first team to win the Selig Award twice. The first time came in 2010 for the Red Sox Scholars program.

ESPN picked up the April 6 Rays-Red Sox game, which has a 7:05 p.m. start.

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox free agent targets include plenty of bargain options

Chris Cotillo

Unlike most years, free agency won't be the top focus for the Red Sox this winter. Instead, as Boston looks to accomplish its goal of dipping under the \$208 million competitive balance tax threshold, new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom will first have to look at ways to trim payroll before actually adding to his roster.

That's a big task, made even bigger by the fact the Red Sox have some legitimate holes to fill on their roster as currently constructed. Considering multiple players currently on the major-league roster are likely to be traded, even more holes will open up as the winter progresses.

The free-agent market is starting to move, so here's a look at some players who could interest the Red Sox at their clear areas of need.

Catcher

THE NEED: Christian Vazquez is entrenched as the starter but it's likely the Sox will look to move on from Sandy Leon (and his projected \$2.8 million salary) before the Dec. 2 non-tender deadline. That means Boston will likely be on the lookout for a new backup catcher, likely looking for one with more offensive potential.

There are a ton of backup types available on the open market. Guys like Travis d'Arnaud, Jason Castro, Alex Avila and Martin Maldonado are likely too expensive.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS:

Stephen Vogt - 35-year-old was drafted and developed by Rays under Bloom, had solid bounceback season in San Francisco (.263, 10 HR, .804 OPS)

Austin Romine - former Yankee had a solid offensive season in 2019 and has A.L. East experience

Yan Gomes - fresh off World Series with Nationals and hit 12 homers in 2019, might be too expensive for Sox

Francisco Cervelli - veteran who has dealt with concussions and injuries but still can hit, might be had for cheap

Rene Rivera - spent most of the year at Triple-A and hit 25 homers, likely will take a minor-league deal

Matt Wieters - former All-Star with the Orioles still has some pop but is a shell of his former self

Jonathan Lucroy - ex-Brewer has struggled over the last couple years but could bounce back and is still just 33

Chris Iannetta - hasn't hit much over last two seasons in Colorado, Providence native who may be amenable to finishing his career near home

First base

THE NEED: The Red Sox have a clear question mark at first base with both Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce departing in free agency. Michael Chavis can play the position, as can Sam Travis and top prospect Bobby Dalbec.

All three of those players are righties, and Chavis might project as a second baseman in the future. The Sox will likely look for a left-handed hitting first baseman.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS:

Mitch Moreland - reunion seems unlikely, but he's familiar and a fan favorite

Eric Thames - ex-Brewer might be had for cheap after a 25-homer season

Justin Smoak - Red Sox-killer is available after a down year in 2019, still hit 22 home runs in 2019

Matt Adams - has regressed offensively and could accept a minor-league contract

Justin Bour - same as Adams, but a couple months older

Logan Morrison - candidate for a minor-league deal who hit 38 homers for Bloom's Rays in 2017

Second base

THE NEED: Dustin Pedroia, even if he attempts as a comeback, isn't going to play much. Brock Holt is a free agent and Eduardo Nunez is long gone. Chavis, Marco Hernandez and Tzu-Wei Lin are the top internal options.

How the Sox view Chavis will determine if they make an external option at second. It's possible they could use him as the right-handed half of a second base platoon and add a left-handed hitter there, too.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS:

Brock Holt - reunion can't be ruled out considering his ties to the community and success in Boston, but may be too pricey

Eric Sogard - versatile veteran spent the end of 2019 in Tampa Bay and would be a fit

Brad Miller - enjoyed a nice stretch with the Phillies in 2019 and is a former Ray who can play multiple positions

Jason Kipnis - will be 33 entering next year and may get a richer deal elsewhere, but has potential for career renaissance

Scooter Gennett - one year removed from an All-Star season, seems like a diamond-in-the-rough type Bloom might pursue

Logan Forsythe - former Ray hasn't hit for a couple of years but could sign a minor-league deal

Outfield

THE NEED: As currently constructed, the Red Sox could use a fourth outfielder considering J.D. Martinez's back issues. If Boston trades Mookie Betts or Jackie Bradley Jr., then Bloom will obviously need to fill the hole in a more permanent fashion.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS:

Kole Calhoun - had option declined after 33-homer season with Angels and plays right field, potential cheap replacement if Betts is moved

Hunter Pence - solid clubhouse presence and 2019 All-Star who had injury issues last year

Jon Jay - didn't do much with the White Sox last season but as a Miami alum, is a likely favorite of manager Alex Cora

Cameron Maybin - scrap-heap pickup ended up having an .858 OPS for the Yankees in 2019, extending his career

Matt Joyce - ex-Ray who had a great year for the Braves (.295 average, .858 OPS) and can play the corners

Jarrod Dyson - serviceable fill-in if Bradley Jr. is traded, could get a two-year deal

Billy Hamilton - defense-first option if Bradley Jr. is dealt and still a threat on the bases

Juan Lagares - another defense-first guy, former Met has hit a little in the past

Starting rotation

THE NEED: Rick Porcello is a free agent, so the Sox have a clear need at the back of the rotation. Prospects Kyle Hart and Tanner Houck have a shot, but it'll be a major surprise if they don't make an external addition.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS:

Rick Porcello - if he can be had for cheap, he could come back after a horrendous 2019 season

Collin McHugh - Righty has experience as both a starter and reliever and is familiar with Cora from Houston

Jordan Lyles - could be stabilizing force at the back of the rotation after strong season in Pittsburgh and Milwaukee

Chad Bettis - ex-Rockie could be had on a minor-league contract

Jared Eickhoff - lottery ticket type, likely would take a minor-league deal

Danny Salazar - All-Star in 2016 who has dealt with injuries but will likely draw widespread interest

Julio Teheran - ex-Brave had his option declined but is a strong bounceback candidate

Jeremy Hellickson - ex-Ray who is still pitching and could intrigue Bloom

Matt Moore - see Hellickson, but left-handed

Felix Hernandez - the ultimate lottery ticket

Edwin Jackson - journeyman is close with Chris Sale and David Price and is a former Ray, could take minor-league deal

Bullpen

THE NEED: In a shocking twist, the Red Sox don't really need a ton of bullpen help. The core of Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Josh Taylor, Darwinzon Hernandez and Marcus Walden might be augmented with an external piece or two, though Boston could cut costs by once again seeing what they can get out of guys like Heath Hembree, Ryan Brasier, Colten Brewer, Travis Lakins and others.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS:

Will Harris - rare case of the Sox potentially going for a top reliever, ex-Astro could intrigue Cora

Sergio Romo - ex-Ray alert, and likely will take a cheap one-year deal

Steve Cishek - Mass. native who has had a solid career and -- stop me if you've heard this before -- used to play for the Rays

Pedro Strop - former Cub could make a lot of sense in Boston on a short-term deal

Dellin Betances - if his market drops, he's as good of a lottery ticket as anyone

Shawn Kelley - Sox had some interest last year, even making an offer

A.J. Ramos - if healthy, the former All-Star could take a minor-league contract

10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. Righty Jose De Leon -- traded from the Rays to the Reds to clear roster space Wednesday -- was the exact kind of guy I expected the Sox to target in potential trade talks. Can't blame the Rays if they didn't want to see the former top prospect thrive within the division and decided against that risk.

2. Kudos to the Braves for striking early and often in free agency. They've taken control of the bullpen market by committing about \$60 million to the trio of Will Smith, Chris Martin and Darren O'Day.
3. The free-agent market is moving in November, somewhat unbelievably. Smith, Jose Abreu (accepted qualifying offer), Jake Odorizzi (also accepted qualifying offer) and Yasmani Grandal are already off the board.
4. The Sox' decision to add lefty Kyle Hart to the 40-man roster was likely based on the lack of top-level rotation depth they had last year.
5. It's starting to feel like Chaim Bloom's first move will come out of nowhere and shock us all.
6. With every passing day, the chances of the Red Sox -- and manager Alex Cora -- being implicated in the Astros' scandal seem to become more remote.
7. We might get more of an indication on Mookie Betts' future on Friday with owners John Henry and Tom Werner and team president/CEO Sam Kennedy appearing at an event outside Fenway Park.
8. Manny Ramirez seems to be in a good place. He appeared at The Tradition this week and was very introspective about his past transgressions.
9. Congrats to the Red Sox, who received the Allan H. Selig Award for Philanthropic Excellence from Major League Baseball on Thursday. The organization was recognized for their successful "Home Base" program.
10. The above list of Red Sox targets is really a list of items available in the bargain bin. This anecdote from John Tomase's story earlier this week was incredible -- and fitting.

*** *RedSox.com***

Manny doesn't regret his journey in baseball

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Manny Ramirez, one of the best and most controversial players in Red Sox history, is at peace these days in part because he doesn't hide from the mistakes of his past.

Some of those mistakes, like being suspended twice for failing PED tests, threaten to keep him out of the Hall of Fame. So Ramirez, who was honored with a baseball legacy award at the Tradition event at Boston's TD Garden on Wednesday night, must regret the poor choices he made in his past, right?

As with nearly everything that has involved Ramirez, his answer to that question is the definition of unconventional. It was also from the heart.

It is the 2019 version of Manny being Manny.

"Not really," Ramirez said when asked if he wishes he could have a do-over. "I [tell] myself it was a good thing for me, because it made me grow up. Maybe a lot of people didn't get caught and maybe they are doing so many crazy things and they're not learning from it. I think everything happens for a reason and everything is happening for the good. I'm in a better place than I've ever been, even when I was playing. I don't regret it, because it makes me grow up."

During Ramirez's career, he alternated between being goofy, unpredictable, irritable and petulant. But all the while, he was a machine with a bat in his hands, putting together a monster line of .312/.411/.585 with

555 home runs. He was also legendary for his work habits, beating all of his teammates to the ballpark on a regular basis.

These days, Ramirez says that his mood is as consistently productive as his statistics once were.

“I guess, you know, you keep growing up,” said Ramirez. “You keep maturing and you appreciate life more than sometimes when you’re young. Really, you don’t appreciate what you have.”

It’s not unnatural for one to wonder why Ramirez couldn’t appreciate it this much when he was playing, particularly after the Red Sox signed him to an eight-year, \$160 million contract in 2000.

“Yeah, but something that I learned [is] money’s not everything,” Ramirez said. “Money doesn’t buy happiness. I’m happy now.”

Where once Ramirez tried to get most of his joy from majestic home runs and clutch hits, he gets it these days from spending time with his wife, Julianna, and his three boys.

“You thought beating the Yankees was hard? Raising a family is harder,” said Ramirez.

Though Ramirez has much more perspective these days, he has far less hair -- as in none. Ramirez shaves his head, joking that it is a must while living in Miami. He also adds that it saves him money on maintaining his hair. Religion has become a huge part of Ramirez’s life. He goes to South Florida hospitals regularly to preach and read from the Bible.

As for the Hall of Fame topic, Ramirez doesn’t shy away from it. The 2020 ballot, the results of which will be announced on Jan. 21, will be the fourth one Ramirez has been on. In his first three years on the ballot, he got less than 25 percent of the votes. Candidates need 75 percent to gain entry. He doesn’t expect to get in this year, but he hopes he will someday.

“I’m pretty sure in 15, maybe 20 years, we’ll probably get in,” Ramirez said.

When someone joked that the 47-year-old Ramirez might be too old to enjoy it by then, he said, “As long as you get in, it’s fine.” He’ll be rooting for his former teammate Curt Schilling to gain entry to Cooperstown.

“Why not? He was one of the best pitchers ever. I think he deserves it,” said Ramirez.

And PED users also deserve a shot, says Ramirez.

“Everybody makes mistakes,” Ramirez said. “I make mistakes every day. Everybody makes them. We’ve got to keep moving. What else can you do?”

The lighter side of Ramirez is still there for all to see. His favorite memories playing for the Red Sox?

“Going inside the Green Monster [during pitching changes],” Ramirez said. “I remember there used to be three kids working in there and they always had water or Gatorade, it was awesome.”

What about the ultimate Manny being Manny moment? That would be the night in July 2004, when he decided to cut off Johnny Damon’s throw before it got to the intended relay man, allowing the Orioles’ David Newhan to record an inside-the-park-homer.

“Remember, Johnny couldn’t throw, so I was trying to help him out,” Ramirez noted.

Jul. 21st, 2004

The way Ramirez speaks about the city of Boston these days, it's hard to believe it was only 11 years ago he all but forced Theo Epstein to trade him with a series of unnecessary antics. These days, Ramirez views Boston as every bit the home that Miami and the Dominican Republic are to him.

"It's always [good] to come back home and see your fans and see the people that have really been there for you in the good times and the bad times," said Ramirez. "They are the best fans, and it's the best city. I'm so happy to come home. Every time you come home, it's a happy place. The way they receive us is unbelievable."

* **WEEI.com**

What if the Red Sox don't re-sign Brock Holt?

Rob Bradford

There have been few Red Sox players heading into free agency more popular among the New England sports fandom than Brock Holt.

Good clubhouse guy. Charitable. (His work with the Jimmy Fund has been next-level.) His young son Griff has become an Instagram-induced Boston sports icon. And, most importantly, Holt is valuable in so many ways when it comes to the major league roster.

But the hard, cold reality of managing payrolls and turning over teams from one year to the next is hovering over the Holt discussion. MLB Trade Rumors project the free-agent infielder will land with a two-year, \$8 million deal, a number that might scare away the suddenly cost-conscious Red Sox.

Holt told the Section 10 Podcast guys that the Red Sox have reached out. And perhaps the 31-year-old takes the path of Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce and jumps at a one-year deal for short money in order to secure his place in the Sox clubhouse. But when you get that first crack at free agency after all those years it would certainly make sense for Holt to let free agency breathe at least a little bit.

In a vacuum, there is no doubt he would be a good fit on this team.

With the uncertainty of Dustin Pedroia's situation Holt represents a veteran the Red Sox know can play the second base position on a semi-regular basis while supplying enough offense. (He hit a respectable .297 with a .771 OPS last season.) There is also the ability to cover the lineup in a variety of other areas, potentially allowing to prioritize carrying an extra pitcher on what will now be a 26-man roster.

There are three issues, however: 1. The potential price tag with the Red Sox desperate to find cheaper options in different corners of their roster; 2. Holt's physical recent physical issues, making the idea of banking on his role being an almost-everyday second baseman another risk at an already risky position; 3. They may have alternatives.

So ...

1. It doesn't seem like a lot of money, but when you're trying to get down to the \$208 million luxury tax threshold like the Red Sox are every little bit counts. And we look at "every little bit" attention immediately turns to positions like first base, second base, fifth starter, relief pitching and backup position players. It's also why the odds of trying to replace Holt with another free agent -- such as Howie Kendrick -- would seem slim.

2. It's hard to ignore the fact Holt has played in more than 100 games once since 2015. Some of that has been getting opportunities but a good chunk was also unfortunate physical ailments. He obviously gained great respect attempting to fight through the ailments at every turn, but this has been the uncomfortable reality.

3. There is a reason C.J. Chatham played so much second base at the end of the Triple-A season while continuing the process in the Arizona Fall League. Also, the talk that Marco Hernandez was going to be introduced to the outfield in the Dominican Winter League was no fluke. No matter who the player, the Red Sox will need the skill-set provided by Holt in 2020 and that's why they already started preparing for the veteran's possible exit. The problem is this: You know what you're going to get with Holt. The alternatives?

The Red Sox' offseason will be thick with tough decisions. For some of the faithful, this might be one of the most painful of them all.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Yankees cut Jacoby Ellsbury, proving that sometimes stars don't come back to haunt you

John Tomase

The duck boats were still idling on the infield dirt when a handful of reporters covering the 2013 championship parade asked Jacoby Ellsbury if he had a minute to talk.

"When I come back out," Ellsbury said while descending the dugout steps.

Those would be his last words in a Red Sox uniform, because he never returned.

Six years later, Ellsbury's a fascinating study in how sometimes the best decision a franchise can make is to walk away. A month after celebrating Boston's third title in 10 seasons, Ellsbury signed a seven-year, \$153 million contract with the Yankees. Despite being a homegrown star who had only just turned 30, Ellsbury's departure didn't inspire much rage amongst Red Sox fans.

That will certainly not be the case if Mookie Betts is traded this winter, and while it would be disingenuous to compare Ellsbury to Betts, it's nonetheless worth noting how frequently massive free agent deals end up biting the new team more than the old one. (Ask the Nationals if they miss Bryce Harper.)

The Red Sox made no effort to retain Ellsbury and fans were fine with it because they had him pegged. Those who considered him an injury-prone soldier-for-hire disinclined to play through pain watched his forgettable Yankees tenure confirm their instincts.

His career likely came to an end with a whimper on Wednesday night when the Yankees announced they would eat the final year and \$26 million remaining on his contract. He hasn't played since 2017, when he hit .264 in 112 games. The Yankees actually hold a \$21 million option for 2021, but they shan't be paying it.

What did \$153 million get them? A .264 average in parts of four seasons and only 520 out of a possible 1,296 games played. That's what's known as money hemorrhaged.

And yet the Yankees can partially thank him for their newfound financial discipline. When the 2013 offseason yielded overpaid bloat in the form of Ellsbury, Brian McCann, and Carlos Beltran, a profligate era (century?) effectively ended. Two years later, the Yankees sold off stars Andrew Miller, Aroldis Chapman and Beltran, released the disgraced Alex Rodriguez, and kickstarted the rebuild that has produced 100 wins in each of the last two seasons.

The Red Sox, meanwhile, suffered no consequences. In fact, they benefitted from Ellsbury's unreliability and the drag he put on New York's payroll.

Ellsbury was always a bit of an odd duck in Boston. Perfectly amiable and pleasant, he nonetheless projected a vibe of corporate detachment, that corporation being Jacoby Ellsbury Ltd. The phrase "Scott Boras client" is used pejoratively to describe players loyal only to their bank accounts, and even if it doesn't actually apply to the super-agent's entire stable, Ellsbury embodied that mercenary ethos like no other.

He tended to act in his own best interests at the expense of, say, playing more than 18 games in 2010 with the infamous "front . . . and back" rib injury that the team's medical staff considered nothing, much to Ellsbury's consternation. His clubhouse standing seemed directly tied to how well he played. Teammate Dustin Pedroia probably shouted, "Yo, Ells!" more in 2011 than the rest of Ellsbury's career combined. That's the year Ellsbury delivered one of greatest all-around seasons in Red Sox history, hitting .321 with 32 homers and 39 steals while winning a Gold Glove and finishing second in the MVP voting. He was Mookie before Mookie.

(It's also worth noting that he wasn't humorless. During Ellsbury's breakout 2011, hitting coach Dave Magadan held up a \$100 bill and asked if the center fielder could make change. "That is change," Ellsbury deadpanned before breaking into a wide grin).

Ellsbury never approached that level of brilliance again, but he did steal a league-leading 52 bases in 2013 and hit .344 that postseason, making him a priority for a Yankees club that had just finished third in the division while missing the playoffs for the first time since 2008.

Then the injuries started and everyone who ever doubted Ellsbury's ability or desire to stay healthy just nodded knowingly.

It's hard to imagine Betts's next team experiencing similar regret, but he's not the biggest guy and injuries happen. At the same age, after all, 27-year-old Nomar Garciaparra had already won two batting titles and a Rookie of the Year and looked like a first-ballot Hall of Famer. A couple of years later, the Red Sox couldn't win a World Series until they got rid of him.

They won a pair of titles with Ellsbury, so no complaints there. Then he ghosted us and took his talents to New York, and it turns out Red Sox fans had no problem with that, either.

Projecting the Red Sox' 2020 Opening Day roster

Justin Leger

The Boston Red Sox begin their offseason with a number of question marks. We could be looking at a familiar roster in 2020, but the hiring of Chaim Bloom as Chief Baseball Officer all but confirms significant changes are about to be made.

It's still too early to get a read on which way the wind is blowing for the impactful decisions Bloom will be faced with this winter, the most important of which will be the future of superstar right fielder Mookie Betts. But as we look forward to what's sure to be an eventful offseason, we can at least take a shot at what the 25-man roster could look like come Opening Day.

Here's a look at the potential roster before free agency gains some steam in the coming weeks:

Catcher: Christian Vazquez, Sandy Leon OR free agent/trade

Vazquez is locked in as Boston's starting catcher after producing the best offensive season of his career and earning a Gold Glove award nomination. The real question is who will back him up.

Leon could be non-tendered if the Red Sox ultimately decide they want more offensive production behind Vazquez on the depth chart. If Leon isn't brought back for 2020, expect Boston to sign a cheap alternative in free agency.

First Base: Michael Chavis, Bobby Dalbec, Sam Travis, free agent/trade

Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce both are unrestricted free agents with the latter pondering retirement. It's a possibility Boston re-signs Moreland on a reasonable one-year deal, but there are some interesting alternatives.

Chavis could see a lot of playing time at first depending on how the second base situation plays out. This also could be the year we see minor league slugger Dalbec get some big-league at-bats. We should expect to see Travis in the mix too following a 2019 season in which he appeared in 59 games.

Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic recently noted one player the Red Sox could pursue to replace Moreland and Pearce is free agent Justin Smoak, who spent the last five seasons with the Blue Jays.

Second Base: Michael Chavis, Dustin Pedroia, free agent/trade

It's safe to say we probably shouldn't enter 2020 with an optimistic outlook on Pedroia, but he's on this list as a formality.

Don't rule out Brock Holt returning in free agency. Though if he doesn't, we could be looking at another year of Chavis as the team's primary second baseman.

Shortstop: Xander Bogaerts

Barring some ridiculous trade this offseason, Bogaerts is locked in as the starting shortstop for 2020 and years to come.

Third Base: Rafael Devers

Devers ain't going anywhere.

Left Field: Andrew Benintendi

We'll see what happens with Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts, who we'll discuss momentarily, but for now it looks like Benintendi will again be the starting left fielder for the Red Sox as he looks to improve in 2020.

Center Field: Jackie Bradley Jr. OR free agent/trade

Here's where it starts to get interesting. Ken Rosenthal reported the Red Sox trading Bradley this offseason "seems all but certain." Bradley is set to make \$11 million before he hits free agency in 2020.

For what it's worth, Rosenthal mentions Astros outfielder Jake Marisnick as a potential replacement if Bradley is moved. Of course, if Bradley isn't traded before Opening Day, he'll resume his role as the Sox' starting center fielder.

Right Field: Mookie Betts OR free agent/trade

To trade Mookie or to not trade Mookie? That is the most glaring question Bloom is faced with as he begins his Red Sox tenure.

Betts will become an unrestricted free agent after the 2019 season if he and the Red Sox cannot come to terms on a contract extension. If Betts is adamant about testing the free-agent market, Boston could opt to move the 2018 American League MVP for a haul. That would have to be a last resort as obviously the Red Sox would prefer to keep the homegrown 27-year-old.

This will be the most compelling storyline of the offseason. For now, mark Betts down as the starting right fielder.

Designated Hitter: J.D. Martinez

Martinez decided to not opt out of his contract, so he'll be back as the Red Sox' stud DH next season unless they decide to trade him, which doesn't seem likely. The 32-year-old can block trades to three teams.

Starting Pitchers: Chris Sale, David Price, Eduardo Rodriguez, Nathan Eovaldi, free agent/trade

The Red Sox are looking to shed payroll this offseason. One way of doing that would be to part ways with the expensive contracts of Price and/or Eovaldi. In fact, rumor has it Boston has already discussed such a deal with the Texas Rangers.

Sale, assuming he's healthy, is the clear-cut ace with Rodriguez looking to build off an impressive 2019 campaign. Rick Porcello is a free agent, so unless the Red Sox bring him back on a cheaper contract, they'll need to sign or trade for someone to replace him in the rotation.

Bullpen: Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes, Darwinzon Hernandez, Ryan Brasier, Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden, Brian Johnson, Travis Lakins, Heath Hembree, free agent/trade

Workman likely earned the closer role after being one of the bright spots in an otherwise bleak 2019 season. Barnes and Brasier should resume their roles as the set-up men and "spot-closers." Left-handers Hernandez and Taylor were effective down the stretch and provide hope for a more stable bullpen in 2020. There's some uncertainty in the rest of this group, including Hembree, who could be non-tendered.

*** *The Athletic***

Let's give the Red Sox credit: They made a great call on Jacoby Ellsbury, whom Yankees have now paid just to go away

Steve Buckley

Like all professional sports franchises, the Red Sox always put out the good china whenever there's an announcement to make about a big free-agent signing. It starts with lobster rolls and speeches, and it ends with the new guy trying on his crisp, new home jersey as everyone cranes their necks to view the new guy's new (or old) number.

When the news conference is over, one person, and one person only, walks out of the room with a target on his back. But it's not the newly signed free agent. It's the general manager, and for the simple reason that this latest high-priced acquisition is either going to work or it is not.

When it doesn't work, it usually ends with the free-agent bust — hello there, Pablo Sandoval, and hello there, Hanley Ramirez — simply moving on to another city.

It's the general manager — hello there, Ben Cherington — who pays. In Cherington's case he wound up being marginalized before Sandoval and Ramirez had even completed their first awful seasons in Boston, when, on Aug. 18, 2015, Sox ownership brought in Dave Dombrowski and gave him the fancy title "president of baseball operations." Cherington, who resurfaced this month as the new general manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates, did the noble thing and quit.

Since tradition holds that we beat up baseball ops bosses for bad signings, decorum dictates that today we take a moment and applaud Cherington for a free-agent signing he did not make. We're talking about Jacoby Ellsbury, a star on the rise when the Red Sox added him to the big-league mix in 2007, and, as

Cherington surmised, a star on the wane when the outfielder signed a seven-year, \$153 million contract with the Yankees after the Sox won the 2013 World Series.

The Red Sox were double winners with this decision. One, they correctly read Ellsbury's value and shelf life and decided not to make the long-term investment. And that led to the second big Sox win: It was their forever archrivals, the Yankees, who stepped in and gave Ellsbury all that dough. That makes this Boston's biggest doubleheader sweep against the Yankees since that Sunday afternoon in July of '75 when Bill Lee and Roger Moret pitched back-to-back complete-game shutouts at Shea Stadium. (Hold the cards and letters: The original Yankee Stadium was being renovated that year.)

Ellsbury's Yankees years came to an end this week when the team paid off the remainder of his contract and wished him the best in his future endeavors. That works out to \$21,142,857 million for 2020 plus a \$5 million buyout of a \$21 million team option for 2021.

Ellsbury, 36, has missed the last two full seasons. It's been all oblique injuries here, back injuries there, plus hip surgery and plantar fasciitis in his right foot, one health issue leading to the next health issue. Things finally got to the point where the Yankees concluded that the man's spot on the 40-man roster was more valuable than the man himself.

For their \$153 million, the Yankees got 520 games out of Ellsbury over four seasons. He had a .264/.330/.386 slash line and hit a total of 39 home runs. With the Red Sox in 2011, the year he placed second to then-Detroit Tigers ace Justin Verlander in American League MVP voting, Ellsbury hit 32 home runs.

If you can follow the logic here, it's easy to say it was easy for Cherington to let Ellsbury walk. To an extent, yes, it was easy. Ellsbury did, after all, spend a lot of time in sick bay during his Red Sox tenure. But take a closer look at those injuries. One of them happened in 2010, after he'd been moved from center field to left field to accommodate the arrival of Mike Cameron. Ellsbury had a scary early-season mishap when he collided with his third baseman, Adrian Beltre. He played only 18 games that season.

On April 13, 2012, the traditional festive Fenway opener, Ellsbury slid hard into second base trying to break up a double play. Reid Brignac, the Tampa Bay Rays shortstop, came down hard on Ellsbury's right shoulder.

Ellsbury didn't play again until July.

Late in the 2013 season, he fouled a pitch off his right foot and wound up in a walking cast. He missed nearly three weeks.

These were injuries that took place in plain view of the baseball-watching public. And, yes, Ellsbury sometimes felt people didn't understand the full extent of his maladies, to the degree that he once felt compelled to refer to a set of talking points while speaking to the media.

Had the Red Sox chosen to give Ellsbury all the dough he wanted after the 2013 season, they could have easily justified it by saying his injuries were circumstantial. Remember the postseason Ellsbury had in 2013? He kicked away the walking cast and went 9-for-18 in the Division Series, 7-for-22 in the ALCS. He hit .250 in the World Series against the Cardinals, earning his second championship ring.

For whatever reasons, the Red Sox baseball operations department, under the management of Cherington, didn't see Ellsbury as a good investment. But while it's a shame Ellsbury's signing didn't work out for the Yankees, that's a Yankees problem.

For the Red Sox, for Ben Cherington, it was a crisis averted.

One year later, Cherington signed Sandoval and Ramirez.

You can't win 'em all.

Besides, building an organization from the ground up has always been Cherington's forte. The Pirates are lucky to have him.

Speaking of which, best of luck to Jacoby Ellsbury. Red Sox fans will never forget the good times, including the great catch on that smash to left by the Colorado Rockies' Jamey Carroll in the ninth inning of Game 4 of the 2007 World Series and his straight steal of home off Andy Pettitte during "Sunday Night Baseball" in '09.

It's just that Ben Cherington didn't envision too many more good times.

Ben was right.