

## ***The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, November 26, 2019***

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

#### **Brian Johnson, Red Sox might part ways, report says**

Julian McWilliams

Lefthander Brian Johnson's time with the Red Sox might be coming to an end. Johnson was outrighted from the club's major league roster Monday, according to The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal.

Johnson had a down year in 2019 and suffered a number of injuries. The Sox placed him on the injured list with left elbow inflammation in April, and he hit the IL once more in June with a non-baseball related matter. He pitched just 40½ innings and put together a 6.02 ERA. His best months last season came in June and September, when he posted ERAs of 2.16 and 3.68, respectively.

Johnson did a solid job of filling in for both David Price and Chris Sale down the stretch in the opener role, but he never appeared to be a long-term option for the Red Sox. Chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom recently acquired Josh Osich, who could be Johnson's replacement, and possibly an upgrade. Though he had a forgettable year in 2019 (4.66 ERA), Osich's fastball can reach into the upper 90s. He also could fill the opener role. Johnson, on the other hand, is a soft-throwing lefty who tries to get by on finesse. Yet opponents made contact 79 percent of the time in 2019 (career opponent contact percentage is 80.7 percent).

Johnson was drafted by the Red Sox in the first round (No. 31) out of the University of Florida in 2012. Teams have a two-day window to claim the southpaw off waivers.

#### **Worcester Red Sox get their nickname — the WooSox**

Alex Speier

WORCESTER – The 218 suggestions for the nickname of the Worcester Red Sox came from more than 1,000 fans and ran a gamut. Over 15 months of deliberations and community feedback, the team mulled a number of possibilities around which to build its identity while working toward a move from Pawtucket to a new city and ballpark for the start of the 2021 campaign.

The possibilities included “the Worcesters,” a nod to the name of the professional baseball team that resided in Worcester in the 1880s; the “Wonderdogs” and the “Dirt Dogs,” meant to reflect the spirit of the city and a minor leaguer's hard-nosed, dogged pursuit of a big league future; the “Rocket Sox,” in homage to Robert Goddard, a city native who invented the modern rocket; the “Mudville 9,” inspired by Ernest Thayer's “Casey at the Bat,” a poem written in Worcester; the “Defectors,” presumably suggested by aggrieved Pawtucket residents; and the “Wicked Awesomes.”

Yet in the end, in what team president Charles Steinberg described as a bracket-like competition, one name emerged as the clear and consistent favorite among fans. And so, at a naming ceremony at Mercantile Center on Monday night, the minor league franchise introduced “the WooSox,” giving an identity to a team that will start playing in Polar Park in 17 months.

“The fans were the ones who kept making WooSox defeat all oncomers. It was an unusual display of verbal pugilism,” said Steinberg. “This was designed to be the opposite of an imposition of some independently clever name that could have gone to any city. This is what the fans were talking about, and the logo was what we've learned from the fans.”

The outcome wasn't always a given. Team officials spent months trying to see if another moniker might take hold. But ultimately, those debates gave way to a landslide.

"Nothing ever really displaced WooSox," said team executive vice president Dan Rea. "It's kind of like the political candidate that wins Iowa and New Hampshire and then goes week after week and wins every one."

The WooSox logo, which was also introduced on Monday, features numerous elements meant to celebrate both the city and the team's links to the Red Sox. The "W" in the logo invokes the lettering style of the Worcester Worcesters, with the creation of a heart in the middle of the letter pointing to the city's self-selected title in 1848 as "the Heart of the Commonwealth."

The swinging smiley face in the logo – dubbed "Smiley Ball" – pays homage to the original Smiley Face, designed in 1963 by Worcester advertising executive Harvey Ball. The swing, meanwhile, was meant to bear resemblance to those of Red Sox greats Ted Williams and David Ortiz.

The introduction of a team nickname and logo drew excitement among the few hundred people who crowded into the lobby of the building where the naming event took place. For them, the day represented a landmark.

"I never thought in my wildest dreams we would have Triple-A baseball in the city of Worcester. It's crazy," said 44-year-old Russ Lamacchia, a lifelong Worcester resident. "I'm a diehard Yankee fan, but the fact that I'm wearing this [jersey], my love of Worcester trumps the Yankees. This will bring some national recognition to the city I love."

"We never thought we would get a team here," said 71-year-old Pete Rojcewicz. "To see this night come to fruition, I've got goosebumps. I've got tears of joy in my eyes. What it's going to mean to the city, I told somebody tonight, I think this is going to be the most successful minor league franchise in minor league history."

Despite that enthusiasm, the team still has a significant amount of work remaining before it moves to its future home. The groundbreaking ceremony for Polar Park in the Canal District took place in July. The ballpark – whose design continues to evolve – is a long way from completion.

For that reason, while principal owner Larry Lucchino viewed Monday as a celebration that "concretizes the concepts" surrounding the team's future in Worcester, he also described the event merely as "the end of the beginning."

"We're now in a race. We're really out there doing this, doing a lot of the excavation and all of the site preparation that has to be done. It will be a challenge to get it done right and well," said Lucchino. "But if ever there was a city that deserved us to do it right and well, it's this one."

### **Spinners owner cites 'human cost' of baseball's contraction plan**

Michael Silverman

As Dave Heller begins to list each of the losses he sees coming, the owner of the Lowell Spinners sounds more and more upset.

If the Spinners are put out of business by Major League Baseball's contraction proposal, that means no more crowd-loving dances atop the dugout by LeLacheur Park usher and Vietnam veteran "Dancing Bob Moore."

No more hugs and smiles in Section 114 from 89-year-old usher Dottie Gendreau.

No more all-expense tuitions paid by the Spinners for Middlesex Community College competition winners.

No more donations to other charitable and nonprofit groups by the Spinners.

And no good answers to the children and staff at nearby Lahey Hospital who will wonder why Spinners baseball players stopped visiting their ward.

What, Heller wonders, is he supposed to tell the sick kids?

“ ‘Sorry Billy, the Spinners don’t exist anymore — Major League Baseball wiped them out,’ ” said Heller. “There’s a real human cost here and I hope MLB remembers that.”

The negotiations between Major League Baseball and Minor League Baseball over a new operating agreement to begin next September contain a proposal to strip 42 teams across the country of their big-league franchise affiliation.

The plan has sparked considerable pushback, and last week spilled into political waters when 100-plus bipartisan members of the House of Representatives, spearheaded by US Representative Lori Trahan, whose district includes Lowell, sent a scathing letter to MLB commissioner Rob Manfred.

On Monday, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders penned his own angry missive to Manfred.

Heller has been personally stunned and professionally flummoxed by what he sees as the capricious inclusion of the Spinners on the 42-team list. He said he has yet to receive a satisfactory answer for what criteria the Spinners have failed to meet in the eyes of Major League Baseball.

In its defense, MLB has said it wants to contract because the system is bloated (too many minor leaguers without a shot at reaching the majors and too many underpaid players), poorly designed (too much travel, and teams too far from their big-league affiliates), and in disrepair (too many cramped and crumbling ballparks).

Yet since buying the Spinners in 2016, Heller said, he and the city have made every change requested by the Red Sox, and he cannot fathom where Lowell falls short.

“In the four years that I have owned the team, there has never been a single instance where the Red Sox have asked for something and we have said no,” said Heller.

He mentioned installing new energy-efficient LED field lights that make it easier for the players to see the ball, and a new irrigation system so the field can drain better. Those two improvements alone cost almost \$1 million, said Heller, and were paid for by him and the city of Lowell. The partners are sitting on \$835,000 in a ballpark improvement fund for future enhancements that may never be needed.

“We now today have the best playing field in the New York-Penn League, and then we get put on the contracted list and told that our facility is not up to standard?” said Heller. “Really?”

Five of the 14 teams in the New York-Penn League are not on the contraction list. One of them, the Brooklyn Cyclones, is owned by the New York Mets themselves. The Cyclones are being sent to the Double A Eastern League to replace the privately owned Binghamton Mets, who, like the Spinners, would be stripped of their affiliation.

A major league source said last month that MLB considered the Spinners’ facility to be up to snuff enough for it to be part of one of the new independent “Dream Leagues” that MLB has proposed without much specificity.

Heller is not warming up to the idea of being the owner of an independent team overseen by MLB. “That doesn’t sound like a Dream League; that sounds like a Pipedream League,” he said.

“The Spinners employ nearly 150 people every summer, from pizza makers to ticket-takers to ushers to janitors to ice cream scoopers and merchandise sales people, and it would be heartbreaking if the Lowell Spinners were to be killed off by Major League Baseball and those 150 people would have to be told that they were being fired.

“There is a very real human cost here, and I hope that Major League Baseball will take that into account.”

Sanders’s letter to Manfred decried the cuts by billionaire owners and included the threat of having Congress reexamine baseball’s antitrust exemption.

“Shutting down 25 percent of Minor League Baseball teams, as you have proposed, would be an absolute disaster for baseball fans, workers and communities throughout the country,” the letter said. “Not only would your extreme proposal destroy thousands of jobs and devastate local economies, it would be terrible for baseball.”

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

### **Worcester Red Sox announce new logo and ‘WooSox’ nickname**

Jason Mastrodonato

Drawing on the famous swings of Ted Williams and David Ortiz, the Worcester Red Sox revealed their new logo and nickname for the Red Sox’ Triple-A affiliate, which will be known as the WooSox.

The Pawtucket Red Sox will play out the 2020 season at McCoy Stadium for the final time before moving to Worcester to open Polar Park for the 2021 season.

The club spent 15 months asking more than 1,000 community members for suggestions for a new nickname.

“We love that the fans actually named the team,” said WooSox chairman and principal owner Larry Lucchino. “We asked everyone from kids in kindergarten to octogenarians at senior centers to give suggestions and reactions, and while many suggestions and debates were clever, in the end, we discovered what Worcester already knew: nobody beats the WooSox.”

Some of the more unique name suggestions, which were shared with the public Monday night, include the Diggers, Diners, Duck Boats, Heart Sox, Hot Sox, Holy Sox, Ruby Legs, RocketMen, Righteous Rebels, Wicked Worms, Wicked Coolers and Wonderdogs.

“Many were references to the city’s history, penchant for innovation, passion for baseball, and artistic iconography,” the club wrote in a release.

The logo, a smiley face with red socks swinging the bat like Ortiz and Williams, is in ode to the birthplace of the original Smiley Face (drawn in 1963 by the late Worcester advertising executive Harvey Ball) and the 1880 Worcesters of the National League.

The heart in the “W” of the logo is “ubiquitous in Worcester, which officially declared itself ‘The Heart of the Commonwealth’ when it transformed from a town to a city” in 1848, according to the club.

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

### **Which Boston Red Sox prospects will make their MLB debut in 2020? Power-hitter Bobby Dalbec, 9 others could make jump**

Christopher Smith

Six Red Sox players, Michael Chavis, Josh Taylor, Darwinzon Hernandez, Mike Shawaryn, Trevor Kelley and Travis Lakins, made their major league debuts in 2019.

Chavis ended up appearing in 95 games and bashing 18 home runs. Taylor posted a 3.04 ERA in 52 relief outings (47  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings). Hernandez posted a 3.95 ERA in 28 relief outings (27  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings).

Which prospects could we see debut for Boston in 2020? Here's a list of 10 prospects nearing the big leagues:

#### 1. Bobby Dalbec, first baseman/third baseman

Dalbec batted .239 with a .356 on-base percentage, .460 slugging percentage, .816 OPS, 27 homers, 19 doubles, two triples and 73 RBIs in 105 games at Double-A Portland and 30 games at Triple-A Pawtucket combined. He crushed two home runs and posted a .364 on-base percentage in 28 at-bats during the WBSC Premier12 tournament this month.

The Red Sox added the power-hitter to the 40-man roster last week to protect him from December's Rule 5 Draft.

The 24-year-old should compete for a 2020 Opening Day roster spot during spring training, especially if the Red Sox don't add a right-handed hitting first baseman this offseason. First basemen Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce both are free agents.

Baseball America ranks Dalbec No. 83 on its top 100 list.

#### 2. Kyle Hart, starting pitcher

Everyone loves an underdog story, right?

Hart, a 27-year-old Cincinnati native, has a strong chance to pitch for the Red Sox this year after Boston added him to the 40-man roster last week. Boston drafted him in the 19th round out of Indiana in 2016.

"He's got a little bit of a Patrick Corbin-style to him with his mix," Red Sox vice president of pitching development Brian Bannister told MassLive.com this past July. "He's gone heavier with two different shapes of cutters and sliders and made it a bigger part of his mix. So I think he's a little more complete and well-rounded vs. both right-handed and left-handed hitters. He's able to attack."

The lefty began 2019 with Double-A Portland, posting a 2.91 ERA (55  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, 18 earned runs), .199 batting average against and 1.01 WHIP in nine starts. He recorded a 3.57 ERA (85  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, 34 earned runs) .253 batting average against and 1.30 WHIP in 15 starts for Triple-A Pawtucket.

He could be used as an opener or after an opener like the Rays have done with former Red Sox prospect Jalen Beeks.

#### 3. C.J. Chatham, shortstop/second baseman

The 2016 second-round pick finished strong at Pawtucket with a .302/.330/.430/.760 line, two homers, five doubles and 10 RBIs in 20 games after a promotion from Portland.

The shortstop played some second base near the end of the regular season. He again played second base in the Arizona Fall League and the WBSC Premier12 tournament this offseason. He's comfortable at second base and the outfield.

The 6-foot-4 right-handed hitter joins Marco Hernandez and Michael Chavis as second base candidates for the 2020 Red Sox. Dustin Pedroia is taking a "we'll see" approach to his comeback.

Chatham likely will begin 2020 at Pawtucket unless he makes a major impression at spring training. The Red Sox added him to the 40-man roster last week.

#### 4. Marcus Wilson, outfielder

The 23-year-old Wilson, who Boston acquired from Arizona for Blake Swihart, experienced major strikeout issues at Double-A Portland last year (34.5% rate).

He initially struggled for Portland after the trade, then the Red Sox demoted him to High-A Salem where he slashed .342/.413/.603/1.016 with eight homers, 12 doubles and one triple and 29 RBIs in 45 games.

He then returned to Portland where he posted a .250/.325/.486/.811 line, seven homers, 13 doubles and 20 RBIs in 43 games.

Boston also added Wilson to the 40-man roster last week. He provides needed outfield depth.

#### 5. Tanner Houck, starting pitcher

Houck spent the final two months of the 2019 regular season serving as a reliever for Pawtucket, but he'll return to the starting rotation in 2020.

He's has enjoyed a busy offseason. The 23-year-old, who Boston drafted in the first round in 2017 out of Mizzou, went 3-2 with a 3.47 ERA (23 ⅓ innings, nine earned runs) in six starts in the Arizona Fall League. He struck out 26 and walked 12. He then posted an 3.86 ERA (9 ⅓ innings, four earned runs) in two starts in the WBSC Premier12 tournament.

#### 6. Jarren Duran, outfield

An opportunity could open for the center fielder if the Red Sox trade either Jackie Bradley Jr. or Mookie Betts. An opportunity still will exist even if chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom signs/acquires a replacement for Bradley or Betts following a potential trade.

The Red Sox lack outfield depth. DH/outfielder J.D. Martinez has dealt with back issues the past few years, limiting him to 37 starts in the outfield during 2019 (20 fewer outfield starts than in 2018).

Duran turned 23 in September. Baseball America ranks him the No. 4 prospect in the system as well as the top hitter for average among Red Sox prospects. Those rankings were released this offseason — even after Duran struggled at Portland.

He slashed .387/.456/.543/.998 with four homers, 13 doubles, three triples, 19 RBIs, 18 steals and 49 runs in 50 games for High-A Salem. He then posted a .250/.309/.325/.634 line with one homer, 11 doubles, five triples, 19 RBIs, 28 steals and 41 runs in 82 games for Portland.

#### 7. Bryan Mata, starting pitcher

The Red Sox are without a fifth starter as of now. Plenty of time this offseason remains for Bloom to add one.

Mata is Boston's top starting pitching prospect. He has a chance to debut for Boston later in the 2020 season but it depends on how he performs in the minors and how quickly the Red Sox want to move him. The staff has taken a somewhat slow progression with him so far. He began 2019 at Salem after spending the entire 2018 season there.

He's still so young. The native of Venezuela turned 20 on May 3. No need to rush him.

He posted a 1.75 ERA, .201 batting average against, 1.09 WHIP, 52 strikeouts and 18 walks in 10 starts (51 ½ innings) at Salem. His numbers dropped at Portland (5.03 ERA in 11 starts, 53 ⅔ innings), but he had some strong starts.

Mata added a swing-and-miss slider to complement his 95-98 mph fastball and changeup. He averaged 3.6 walks per nine innings compared to 7.3 walks per nine innings in 2018.

#### 8. Eduard Bazarido, relief pitcher

The Red Sox decided not to select Bazarido to the 40-man roster last week, which leaves him unprotected for December's Rule 5 Draft.

He's certainly a candidate to be drafted as he features a mid-90s curveball and plus-changeup.

The Venezuela native, who turned 24 in September, began 2019 at Salem where he posted a 1.76 ERA, 0.93 WHIP and .191 batting average against in 17 relief outings (41 innings). He then recorded a 2.78 ERA, 1.24 WHIP and .225 batting average against in 21 games (32 ½ innings) for Portland.

A team that drafts an unprotected player in the Rule 5 Draft must give \$100,000 to the player's previous team. The player must stay on his new team's 25-man roster for the entire season (barring an IL stint) or be returned to his former club for \$50,000.

He has a chance to make his MLB debut in 2020 even if he left undrafted.

#### 9. Chad De La Guerra, infielder

The 27-year-old De La Guerra missed some time during 2019 because of a right wrist sprain and right knee sprain. He finished with a .288 batting average, .361 on-base percentage, .540 slugging percentage, .901 OPS, 13 homers, 16 doubles, one triple and 37 RBIs in 61 games for Pawtucket.

He's Rule 5 Draft eligible. He certainly a candidate to make his MLB debut in 2020 even if he remains in Boston, especially if Brock Holt doesn't re-sign or if Boston fails to add another utility player.

Tzu-Wei Lin, Marco Hernandez and Chatham are on the 40-man roster ahead of De La Guerra.

#### 10. Josh Ockimey, first baseman/DH

For a second straight November, the Red Sox chose not to select the slugger to the 40-man roster despite his raw power. Ockimey, who turned 24 in October, belted 25 homers, 17 doubles, two triples, drove in 57 runs and posted a .204/.353/.459/.811 line in 122 games for Pawtucket in 2019

He's a streaky hitter. He has some flaws defensively. But his power is undeniable. It was surprising no team selected him in the 2018 Rule 5 Draft. It again will be surprising if he goes unselected this December.

### **Boston Red Sox place Brian Johnson on waivers; lefty can be claimed by any team**

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox have placed left-hander Brian Johnson on outright waivers, according to a report from Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic.

Johnson, who has pitched in 65 games since debuting in 2015, can be claimed by any club over the next 48 hours. If he clears waivers, he will remain in the Red Sox organization but no longer be a member of the 40-man roster.

Johnson was a bright spot for the Sox in 2018, posting a 4.17 ERA in 99 ⅓ innings while boomeranging back and forth between starting and relief roles. The former first-round pick made 13 starts and came out of the bullpen 25 times that season, pairing with Hector Velazquez to give the Sox two effective swingmen during their championship season.

Injuries limited Johnson to just 40 ⅓ innings in 2019 and he struggled to a 6.02 ERA and 1.884 WHIP in those limited opportunities. In seven starts, he was 0-2 with a 5.09 ERA, highlighting Boston's depth problem when top starters Nathan Eovaldi, Chris Sale and David Price went out with injuries.

Under new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom, the Red Sox are clearly trying to improve their pitching depth in case any of their starters (Eovaldi, Sale, Price or Eduardo Rodriguez) is not healthy in 2020. Boston will likely need to add a veteran fifth starter to replace Rick Porcello, who is a free agent.

Internal pitching options who can give the Sox length include Velazquez, Mike Shawaryn, Marcus Walden and Ryan Weber. Boston recently added left-hander Kyle Hart to the 40-man roster, providing an option who can pitch multiple innings, potentially in a swingman role.

Placing Johnson on waivers may not be the only move made by the Red Sox this week. In advance of next Tuesday's deadline to non-tender players, teams are cutting players from their 40-man rosters before the Thanksgiving holiday later this week.

Johnson, who turns 29 next month, owns a 7-9 record and 4.74 ERA in parts of four years with the Sox. He is scheduled to be arbitration eligible for the first time next season.

### **It's 'WooSox!' Worcester Red Sox make name official while unveiling mascot honoring Harvey Ball's smiley design**

Michael Bonner

Earlier this month the Worcester Red Sox asked fans at an event "Who beats the WooSox?"

The question resurfaced Monday when the organization revealed its nickname and logo at the Mercantile Center in Worcester.

Whether asked Monday night, last month or last year, the answer remained consistent: nobody.

The team will retain its Red Sox moniker as it moves to Worcester from Pawtucket in 2021. For more than 40 years, the Triple-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox has been known more colloquially as the PawSox, a name coincidentally sparked by a Worcester native. When it makes the 45-minute move up Route 146, that will change to the WooSox.

"We love that the fans actually named the team," club Chairman and Principal Owner, Larry Lucchino said in a statement. "We asked everyone from kids in kindergarten to octogenarians at senior centers to give suggestions and reactions, and while many suggestions and debates were clever, in the end, we discovered what Worcester already knew: nobody beats the WooSox."

Accompanying the name is a new logo, featuring the iconic yellow smiley face with two hands swinging a bat engraved with a "W." He's also wearing a red hat and red socks.

His name is "Smiley Ball" in honor of Harvey Ball, a Worcester native who designed the smiley face in 1963.

Worcester Red Sox WooSox reveal logo

The Worcester Red Sox revealed its logo on Monday at the Mercantile Center in Worcester.

His son, Worcester attorney Charlie Ball, viewed the WooSox logo design during the process to ensure accuracy, as did Bill Wallace of the Worcester Historical Museum.

The cursive script of WooSox created a heart in the middle of “WooSox,” meant to pay homage to Worcester’s motto that it’s the “Heart of the Commonwealth.”

Worcester Red Sox reveal team logo

The Worcester Red Sox revealed a team logo and lettering in the Mercantile Center on Monday. The "W" features a heart that's signified the city's motto that it's the "Heart of the Commonwealth."

Since the team announced the move last year, many around Worcester began calling the team the “WooSox.” Through more than a year of prodding and polling fans, no other nickname could knock WooSox off its pedestal.

More than 1,000 people submitted 218 team names.

Submissions ranged from the Diggers, Diners, and Duck Boats to the Heart Sox, Hot Sox, and Holy Sox. Fans also offered such names as the Ruby Legs, RocketMen, and Righteous Rebels, as well as the Wicked Worms, Wicked Coolers, and Wonderdogs.

“It’s not as though everyone goes ‘I want it to be WooSox.’ But when you test it versus Dirt Dogs and Gritty Kitties and Rocket Sox and Ruby Legs or Ruby Sox and the Worcester Worcesters, it’s not 100 percent to zero,” Worcester Red Sox President Charles Steinberg said in May. “It’s that it just seems to be the little engine that could. It just continues to nudge ahead and maybe that’s a metaphor for Worcester as well.”

In May, the Pawtucket Red Sox ownership filed trademarks on three nicknames: the Worcesters, Wicked Worms and Ruby Legs.

Minor League Baseball, though, acquired the rights to the WooSox name in July of 2018, about a month prior to Worcester and the organization reaching a tentative agreement.

The WooSox are scheduled to begin their first season in Worcester in April of 2021 at Polar Park. Ground officially broke on construction for the new stadium in July.

Minor League Baseball now allows clubs to change their name for a promotion that reflects the fun, food, and culture of a city. The Pawtucket Red Sox, for example, were the Hot Wieners for one night in 2018 and the Fightin’ Quahogs for a night in 2019.

Expect the WooSox name to stick, but occasionally the club has 218 options to dig into for special nights.

“We were amused by the Gritty Kitties, Night Owls, and Green Bananas, a reference to the unripened fruit that will soon head from Polar Park to Fenway Park,” Steinberg said. “So some of the remaining suggestions, such as the Worcester Worcesters, the Wonderdogs, and the Wicked Worms, may yet see the light of day — or the grass and the dirt.”

## **\* *The Pawtucket Times***

### **De-Pawed: Worcester baseball team re-branded ‘WooSox’**

Brendan McGair

WORCESTER — The new nickname for the soon-to-be-going-going-gone Pawtucket Red Sox has been unveiled.

In an announcement where the obvious choice became crystallized, the team will officially be known as the WooSox once the final out is recorded at McCoy Stadium.

Hand-in-hand with the smiley-faced logo that features elements that are inspired by some of the top left-handed hitters in Red Sox history – the names mentioned Monday night before a live television audience inside the lobby of the Mercantile Center included Ted Williams and David Ortiz – there also comes a merchandise rollout. Just in time for the holidays, fans can purchase WooSox apparel, including caps, T-shirts and sweatshirts.

As the overlap between the still current Triple-A affiliate of the Red Sox and the club's future home continues to hang in the air like a pop-up, will those lines be drawn even closer in the form of selling WooSox gear inside the McCoy team store? It was a question that was posed to three of the club's top officials after Monday's hour-long program had concluded.

"I would love to know how many of our fans would want that because it is a question," said PawSox president Dr. Charles Steinberg. "Out of respect, we originally thought no. We didn't want to do anything that would further stoke the emotions. But a lot of [Pawtucket] fans have told us that they're coming with us. Just like naming [the Worcester team], we need to listen to the fans in Pawtucket and Southeastern Massachusetts. Do you want that?"

Stated Larry Lucchino, principal owner chairman, "If people want it, we will serve our constituents."

Ever since the PawSox announced plans for relocation in August 2018, the team has been operating with a dual purpose.

The expiration date in Pawtucket had been established. Only two more seasons remained where fans could head to McCoy Stadium to see Red Sox hopefuls while enjoying the action at a ballpark that remains charming but is crying out for upgrades that would cater to the modern-day fan. On the flip side, there was a new market to make inroads with – patrons and businesses that couldn't wait to attach their name or brand to the new baseball team on the block.

With one season remaining at McCoy, the goal is to finish up strong. However, business is business. If there's already a built-in template that can accommodate merchandise, why not pedal the goods in the name of enticing fans to follow the ballclub up Route 146?

"There still are sensitivities there that we want to be respectful of. Having a retail spot [in Worcester] is a great option, but we'll manage the dual tracks like we have over the past year and a half," said Dan Rea, PawSox executive vice president. "We want to leave Pawtucket with our heads held high and do it in a way that keeps us in a good place as far as our legacy."

The PawSox aren't the first minor-league franchise to wrestle with the conundrum of trying to cater to two markets at the same time. In the summer of 2014 when New Britain, Conn. was getting set to say goodbye to its Double-A club, fans had the chance to purchase tickets to the Hartford YardGoats from a booth that was set up inside New Britain Stadium.

Again, it's about walking that fine line between focusing on the present but also looking ahead to the future.

"I think every situation is a little bit unique, but there are good lessons to take from teams who have moved to another market or someplace else within the same market," said Rea. "We're combining all those lessons and trying figure out what's tasteful and appropriate to both Pawtucket and Worcester."

The nickname "WooSox" was deemed the top choice of the 218 unique names that were submitted for consideration. The list of possible names for the Worcester ballclub included PawSox, Osos Polares, Polar Bears and Defectors.

## \* **RedSox.com**

### **Big Papi returns to doing what he loves**

Nathalie Alonso

MIAMI -- Nearly six months after suffering a gunshot wound while visiting his native Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, David Ortiz is back doing what he loves.

After undergoing three surgeries, the first in Santo Domingo and the others at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, the retired slugger recovered in time to return to the FOX broadcast booth for the MLB postseason. And this past weekend, he hosted the 12th annual David Ortiz Celebrity Golf Classic in Miami.

To fellow Dominican José Bautista, currently a free agent, it's no surprise that Ortiz has bounced back so quickly.

"David is a fighter," Bautista said in Spanish. "I had no doubt that he could recover, so long as his injuries allowed it. As I suspected, it was difficult, but he was able to recover."

Thanks in part to a charismatic personality that complemented his prodigious power and clutch hitting, Ortiz became a beloved figure throughout baseball and beyond during his 20 seasons in the Majors. He spent his final 14 seasons with the Red Sox, whom he helped lead to three World Series titles.

Ortiz's outsized persona was on full display at his annual fundraiser for the David Ortiz Children's Fund, which helps cover the cost of medical care for children in the D.R. and New England born with congenital heart disease. The crop of current and former Major Leaguers in attendance included Bautista, Robinson Canó, Eduardo Rodríguez, Melky Cabrera, Jackie Bradley Jr., Jesús Luzardo, Aníbal Sánchez, Adam Jones, Johnny Damon and Mike Lowell among others.

"He's happy, like always, being Big Papi, that big teddy bear, as people have called him in the past," Bautista said. "He's being that happy, extroverted guy who brings joy to many."

Ortiz, who retired after the 2016 season with 541 career homers and a .931 OPS, says that the only conscious life change he's made following his scare last summer has been with regards to his accessibility.

"I went about life care-free, because I never thought that something like that could happen to me," Ortiz said in Spanish. "I understand that, going forward, I have to be more careful."

In the aftermath of the shooting and throughout his recovery, Ortiz received an outpouring of support, that he says came from "all over the planet." That's the reason why he's vowed to stay true to himself.

"Personally, I'm not going to change in any way," Ortiz said. "Because that's why I received so much love. Because of the way I am."

### **First time ever: Vote Red Sox onto All-MLB Team**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Voting for the inaugural All-MLB team launched on Monday, and the Red Sox have a strong chance to be represented at multiple positions.

The Sox have seven nominees (outfielder Mookie Betts, shortstop Xander Bogaerts, third baseman Rafael Devers, designated hitter J.D. Martinez, starting pitcher Eduardo Rodríguez, catcher Christian Vázquez and relief pitcher Brandon Workman). Only the Astros, with 10 nominees, have more.

The selection process for the 2019 All-MLB Team began Monday and runs through 5 pm ET on Dec. 3, with 50 percent of the vote coming from fans and 50 percent coming from a panel of experts.

You can vote right here, and may do so once every 24 hours between now and when voting ends next Tuesday. The inaugural All-MLB Team will be announced on Dec. 10 at baseball's annual Winter Meetings in San Diego.

There will be a first team and second team All-MLB, and voters are asked only to consider performance during the regular season when casting their ballots. Each team will include one selection at each position (including designated hitter and three outfielders, regardless of specific outfield position), five starting pitchers and two relievers.

Though the Red Sox didn't live up to expectations from a team standpoint, they had a collection of individuals who sparkled.

After a sub-par start, five-tool star Betts took off at the beginning of July and never stopped. He led the Majors with 135 runs while adding 40 doubles, five triples, 29 homers and 80 RBIs. All that, while winning a fourth consecutive Rawlings Gold Glove Award for his excellence in right field.

"I showed I could bounce back," said Betts. "It's a long season and I was able to turn it around and do a little better to help the team. Obviously it wasn't what last year was, but that would be kind of hard to repeat."

Then there was Bogaerts, who started the season by signing a six-year contract extension and spent the entire year proving he was worth it. The shortstop was Boston's most consistent player, turning in a career-best season which included a line of .309/.384/.555 to go along with 110 runs, 52 doubles, 33 homers and 117 RBIs.

"I was just trying to be consistent," said Bogaerts. "I just showed up every day to be consistent and wanted to someone the team could count on."

As for Devers, he was not just the top breakout player for the Red Sox, but one of the biggest in MLB.

The 22-year-old third baseman was the master of the hard-hit batted ball (balls in play with an exit velocity of 95-mph or more) with 252 of them -- the most in the Majors. The left-handed-hitting third baseman hit .311 with 129 runs, 201 hits, 54 doubles, 32 homers and 115 RBIs.

"Overall, offensively, I feel like I'm proud of everything I've been able to do," said Devers. "I give a lot of credit to Xander, who has helped me a lot with my preparation and just everything he's been able to help me with. Just, offensively, I had a really good season and I think I was able to have an overall season that I'm really proud of."

Martinez was again one of the top overall hitters in the game, combining average (.304) with production (36 homers, 105 RBIs, .557 slugging percentage with the ability to get on base (.383)). The good news for Red Sox fans is that the slugger chose not to opt out of his contract earlier this month, meaning Boston can have him in the middle of the lineup for at least one more season.

Meanwhile, Devers wasn't the only Sox player who broke out with his bat in '19. Vázquez did the same. He improved his OPS from .540 in '18 to .798 this past season while compiling 23 homers and 72 RBIs. He was also a weapon behind the plate, ranking sixth in the Majors by throwing out 22 runners whole attempting to steal.

The Red Sox didn't get what they wanted from the pitching department in 2019, but two arms stood out.

The first was Rodriguez, who went 19-6 with a 3.81 ERA and provided the durability (203 1/3 innings) the Sox didn't get from anyone else in the rotation.

“It was a very important step for me, because for the first time I was able to pitch an entire season,” Rodriguez said. “That was my goal when the season started, [to make] 30 starts and throw more than 200 innings, and I was able to do it. That’s what I’m most proud of.”

Due to the overall consistency of the bullpen – particularly in the first half of the season – the stellar season by Workman was overshadowed.

The righty emerged into the closer by July, and had a shutdown season, going 10-1 with a 1.88 ERA. He had 104 strikeouts in 71 2/3 innings.

“It’s been a good year for me, personally, and something I’m going to continue to try to build off of this offseason,” said Workman. “I felt like I’ve been a lot more consistent this year. I got myself in a spot where I feel consistent every day and it’s letting me repeat mechanics and puts me in a better spot to execute pitches.”

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

### **One window the Red Sox probably won't open into a potential Mookie Betts trade**

John Tomase

Red Sox fans need no reminder of the havoc a negotiating window can wreak upon a potential trade.

In the winter of 2003, they were given 72 hours by commissioner Bud Selig to restructure the contract of Rangers superstar Alex Rodriguez, and the sides actually reached an agreement that would've sent the (then) future Hall of Famer to Boston before the union refused to allow the sport's marquee player to take a pay cut.

Sixteen years later, the Red Sox may very well swing a deal involving another MVP, but this time it's their own. And as they try to finagle the best package for Mookie Betts, it's fair to wonder if they'd be willing to allow the acquiring team to open a negotiating window with Betts on a long-term extension.

In today's information age, those windows aren't as common as they used to be. The Yankees granted one last January before sending right-hander Sonny Gray to Cincinnati, and the Reds used it to negotiate a three-year, \$30.5 million extension, which paid off when Gray made the All-Star team.

The Cardinals, conversely, didn't even ask for one when acquiring slugger Paul Goldschmidt from the Diamondbacks last December, even though Goldschmidt was entering the final year of his contract and St. Louis wanted to extend him. He instead signed a five-year, \$130 million extension during spring training.

"The belief is that we need to make a deal that we're comfortable with, whether he agrees to an extension or not," said Cardinals GM Mike Girsch. "It's not a two-part deal. It's got to be a stand-alone deal that you're comfortable with. We didn't ask and it wasn't part of our process.

"Everything that we knew and did research on Goldschmidt suggested that he was the type of guy who'd be comfortable in the type of environment that we have, in the location that we are. But we didn't know. We can't know. You can't talk to the player until you actually made the trade. But you can talk to his ex-teammates who are also ex-Cardinals. There are ways you can find out about somebody, and our sense was he was a guy who'd be comfortable in a midwestern city in a baseball-crazed market in a place that was competitive in the type of clubhouse environment we have. It all felt that we had a good shot at making this work, but until you meet him, you're never 100 percent sure."

The problem with granting a window is that it introduces too many potential headaches, especially in a world with 24-hour coverage putting breaking news just a smartphone alert or Ken Rosenthal tweet away.

Any lag between completing a trade and negotiating a contract increases the possibility that the names of other players involved will leak, and if the negotiation collapses, it could result in hard feelings.

"Once you grab that 72-hour window, everything leaks out, it becomes a lot more complicated, and if you fail to reach an extension, the rumored players already have their names out there, and the potential issues that that creates have already arisen," said White Sox GM Rick Hahn. "The short answer is it's something we've asked for in the past and likely would ask for in the future, but it hasn't been too prevalent in recent years."

When the White Sox traded ace Chris Sale to the Red Sox in 2016, there was no need for negotiating windows because (a) Sale remained under contract through 2019, and (b) the Nationals were simultaneously offering a considerable prospect haul built around center fielder Victor Robles that left the White Sox in a position of power.

"It has become more and more rare because essentially teams have declined that request from most clubs and taken an approach almost like, 'Look, other teams are willing to do it without the window, so we're going to move him without the window,'" Hahn noted.

The whole idea of a window might not even apply to Betts, anyway, since he has repeatedly stated a desire to play out his contract and reach free agency. It's possible there's no offer he'd sign while limiting his negotiations to one club.

If it could increase the potential return, however, the Red Sox would at least have to consider it.

"If you're making a deal you're comfortable with, then you don't care whether he's going to sign," Girsch said. "It's just a whole separate negotiation. It just muddies the waters a lot of times and makes things more complicated if we make an agreement that's contingent on us making a separate agreement. And it's already hard enough to get an agreement done with the players involved. It just adds complexity."

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Red Sox place Brian Johnson on outright waivers**

Sean McAdam

With just over a week to go before next week's deadline to tender contracts to players, the Red Sox Monday placed left-handed pitcher Brian Johnson on outright waivers, according to The Athletic.

The move comes at a time when the Red Sox are trying to reduce payroll, with an eye toward getting under the first competitive balance tax (CBT) threshold of \$208 million, though it should be noted that the money saved should Johnson be claimed will be minimal. Johnson made just \$575,000 in 2019 — a notch above the minimum salary in the major leagues.

Johnson can be claimed by any team over the next few days. If he goes unclaimed, he would be assigned to the minor leagues and be removed from the 40-man roster.

Johnson is not yet eligible for salary arbitration and the Sox could have signed him to a very modest raise for 2020, keeping well below the \$1 million mark. The fact they have placed him on outright waivers suggests they don't see him as part of their plans for 2020, or need an available 40-man roster spot — or both.

In 2019, Johnson missed time early in the season with an elbow injury and returned to appear in 21 games — seven of which were starts — for a 6.02 ERA. That was by far his worst season among the four he had spent in the big leagues and a big comedown from 2018 when he was 4-5 with a 4.17 ERA in 38 games, with 13 of those in spot starts.

Johnson was a first-round pick in 2012 out of the University of Florida. He turns 29 in less than two weeks.

The move comes at a time when the Red Sox are on the lookout for additional starting pitching, with the expected loss of Rick Porcello to free agency and the potential of dealing off one of their high-salaried veteran starters as a means to reduce payroll.

## \* *The Athletic*

### **From all-in on free agency to investing in development: How the Red Sox have changed versus five years ago**

Chad Jennings

“I think the risk of doing nothing was much larger. The risk is avoiding free agency. You can’t put together a winning ballclub just through the minor league system. To me that would be really risky.”

— Red Sox owner John Henry, Nov. 25, 2014

Those words, spoken five years ago today, were the real-time justification for the most notorious set of Red Sox additions of the past decade. On that day, the team officially committed \$183 million to Pablo Sandoval and Hanley Ramirez. It was a massive one-two punch of free agent spending power, and it was meant to restore order following an erratic three-year period in which the Red Sox changed managers, changed general managers, finished in last place twice, and won a championship.

And if you didn’t know any better, you’d swear it worked.

The first year of Sandoval and Ramirez wasn’t much better than the year before, but the year after that, the Red Sox won the division for the third time in 20 years. Then they won it again the next year. And again the year after that. With the Sandoval and Ramirez contracts still on the books, the Red Sox won 108 regular-season games in 2018, cruised to a championship, and Henry himself declared his team the greatest in franchise history.

Of course, Sandoval and Ramirez were long gone by then. They’d been released back into free agency, paid millions to go away. What did \$183 million buy? According to Baseball-Reference, Sandoval and Ramirez combined to play in 592 games for the Red Sox, and while Ramirez himself was worth almost a win and a half, the two combined to play below replacement level. The Red Sox won despite them, not because of them, and they made up the difference because of deep pockets and a strong minor league system. Rafael Devers and Andrew Benintendi filled the third base and left field holes, Mookie Betts went from promising rookie to bona fide superstar, Christian Vazquez became a big league regular, Xander Bogaerts became an All-Star, and Jackie Bradley Jr. was named ALCS MVP. It was the pitching staff, it turned out, that really needed the money, and the Red Sox spent it. The team made two bad investments in November 2014, and four years later, they won a championship anyway.

Today’s front office faces a different financial challenge. Aside from, perhaps, Dustin Pedroia – whose knee injury makes him a potential non-factor – the team doesn’t have a Sandoval-level albatross on its books. There is seemingly no one on the verge of being released, contract be damned. But payroll is high, there are risky contracts on the books, and ownership would like to avoid another luxury tax penalty. That will be impossible without shedding some salary, which is easier said than done considering some of the money and the players involved.

Sandoval and Ramirez are mostly off the books – the Ramirez contract expired last year, and the Sandoval contract ended this winter with a \$5 million buyout – but the Red Sox still have four starting pitchers likely to cost nearly \$90 million next season, and most have some health concerns. Their homegrown shortstop, center fielder and right fielder could cost another \$60 million combined, their mercenary designated hitter

is on the hook for \$23.75 million, and their injured second baseman will cost \$13 million. It would help if the Red Sox minor league system were poised to bail them out, but the system might not be quite ready to fill holes the way it did when the Sandoval and Ramirez contracts went south in a hurry. That's especially true on the pitching side, which complicates the idea of dumping one of those rotation salaries.

"One of the things that we talked about that I think is apparent," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said two months ago, "is that we need to have more depth in our minor league system and more people coming up through the system that can be everyday baseball players."

That's a tone quite different from five years ago when player development was too hit-or-miss, and a free agent splurge was the relatively safe way to go. Truth is, there's risk in either extreme. When Ben Cherington was promoted to general manager earlier in the decade, he set about building an internal foundation, but he failed spectacularly in the Sandoval and Ramirez signings. When Dave Dombrowski was hired to take over, he brought a win-now approach that won a title, but he also thinned the minor league system and left the Red Sox with a massive payroll. It was the cost of doing business, and combined, the two approaches worked.

Today, it's up to new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom and his team of front office holdovers to find a middle ground toward sustainability. With most of his spending done before he arrived, Bloom seems unlikely to repeat the Red Sox' high-cost mistake of five years ago. He will stage no press conference to announce a pair of signings quite like Sandoval and Ramirez. That's for better and for worse.

Henry thought five years ago there was far more risk in doing nothing. This winter, we might find out whether he was right.

## **Red Sox mailbag, part 2: What's the answer at second base?**

Jen McCaffrey

It's time to answer the rest of the questions we started in the first installment of the Red Sox mailbag yesterday.

Who plays second this year? — @Kaedeedada23 on Twitter

The easy and cheap answer is they let Michael Chavis continue to grow in that role. There will probably still be some bumps in the road for Chavis as he continues to develop, but he was able to provide solid defense at second last year, a position he'd never played professionally before 2019. Health will be key for the 24-year-old, but he could take a big step forward in 2020 if they trust he's ready to man the position by himself without the backup of a veteran like Brock Holt. Chavis' offense fell off after the first couple of months in the league, so making adjustments to how pitchers attack him will be important. He struck out in a whopping one-third of his at-bats last year. Marco Hernández is in play for a bench role to provide depth at second, and C.J. Chatham was just added to the 40-man as another middle-infield option. Again, if the Red Sox are looking to save money, they'll likely turn to Chavis to handle second base.

How likely is it that the Red Sox will use an opener as a primary option in 2020? Right now the rotation appears to be based on Chris Sale, David Price, Eduardo Rodriguez and Nathan Eovaldi, with at least two of them facing serious injury concerns. — @brett8055 on Twitter

I'll put it this way: It wouldn't surprise me if that's the route they go given Chaim Bloom's background. It would cut out a big expense and go a long way toward reducing payroll. But the biggest caveat is they'd need the right arms to make it work. There are a lot of uncertainties in implementing a system like that in Boston. The Red Sox tried it last year, but only out of necessity because of injuries. They didn't quite have the combination of pitchers to make it work, filtering through Hector Velázquez, Brian Johnson, Ryan Weber and others.

Bloom probably has a good idea of who might work in an opener system. Current free agent Sergio Romo was a big piece of that puzzle in 2018 for the Rays. The second part of all this is the health concerns that loom over the rotation. Eovaldi, Price and Sale are coming off injury-shortened seasons, and that could make adding another variable to the rotation with an opener as the fifth spot risky. At the GM Meetings this month, Bloom was asked about using the opener next season. Like most of his statements thus far regarding the team, he kept it vague and answered by noting they wanted to create as much depth for their staff as possible. So in short, I do think it's something they're considering as they map out their offseason plan.

First there was "increase your ground ball rate," and then the swing path revolution came through and it was "fastballs up in the zone." Will revelations that some "success" was predicated on knowing offspeed was coming affect Red Sox pitching philosophy at all? — @SamPfeifle on Twitter

I think part of the reason the Red Sox changed their pitching coaches from Dana LeVangie and Brian Bannister to Dave Bush and Kevin Walker for the upcoming season is that the game itself changes so quickly, as you've referenced. There's so much technology in the game at the moment that any advantages that are gleaned often don't last long, so having someone who can quickly adapt to those changes and communicate that to the staff is important. Having a fresh perspective never hurts, and I think the Red Sox were especially keen on Bush's background in pitching performance and analytics in that regard.

Like the offensive line for the Patriots offense, catching is vital to Red Sox pitchers. Who will be the backup to Christian Vazquez? Will they offer Sandy Leon arbitration or release him? Do they want him? What other options would they look at? Can Vazquez improve upon '19 stats? — @raycruddas on Twitter

León is forecast to make \$2.8 million in arbitration, and though there aren't many options in the farm system to turn to, it's possible the Red Sox non-tender him (in effect releasing him) and re-sign him to a lesser deal. The other option is to look for cheaper options in free agency. Defensive specialist Martín Maldonado is back on the market after signing a one-year, \$2.5 million deal last year with Kansas City. Though he bounced around from the Royals to the Cubs to the Astros, he still managed to have a better offensive season than León, who finished with a .192 average and .548 OPS. Maldonado hit .213 with a .671 OPS. There are options out there.

As for Vázquez, his numbers fell off a bit in the second half (.852 OPS vs. .738 OPS). I'm not sure if he's still working with the same swing coach this winter, but that was a big factor in his strong first half.

There's some obvious holes in the bullpen, but I'm curious about the rotation, too. How much can Sale and Price be counted on? ERod – can he repeat? Porcello's gone, who replaces him? — @\_Yayger on Twitter

One of the bigger questions for me is how a full offseason will affect Sale, in particular. In 2018, Sale was limited ahead of the postseason with shoulder inflammation and then came back for October, pitching deep into the postseason. I wonder how much that start-and-stop affected him heading into 2019, when, of course, he never really found his rhythm and then was set back again by elbow inflammation in August. Will having had the final two months of the 2019 season and all winter to recuperate help him?

As for Rick Porcello, it's still possible the Red Sox re-sign him on a shorter, cheaper deal that's heavy with incentives. But even coming off the worst season of his career, there were still talks at the GM Meetings that he might be able to get a one-year, \$10-12 million deal from other teams.

Any news on Mookie? — Trandy Moss, via email

Not much. At the GM Meetings in mid-November, Bloom said he and the Red Sox front office had run into Betts' agents and met briefly, but no formal talks have happened that we know of.

Ken Rosenthal wrote in a recent column for The Athletic: "Rival executives remain skeptical the Red Sox will get an acceptable trade offer for Mookie Betts, knowing he is entering his final year of club control, projected to earn \$27 million to \$28 million in arbitration and seemingly resistant to an extension, at least from Boston."

Rosenthal goes on to predict the Sox hold on to Betts until the 2020 trade deadline, suggesting they'd get a similar return then as they would this winter while giving them the first half of the season with their star player.

And in case you care to keep track of his exact whereabouts: Betts, a Nashville native, was at the MLS Expansion Draft this past week announcing his hometown team's selections (one of whom happened to be a player from the New England Revolution). Other than that, all's quiet on the Betts front.