

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, November 27, 2019

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox's Chaim Bloom must add fifth starter, stopgap depth via MLB free agency/trade as rotation depth is lacking

Christopher Smith

Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez combined for 184 ½ innings in spot starts and middle relief during 2018. They helped keep the starting rotation fresh. Boston starters posted the fourth best ERA (3.77) in the American League, then led the team to a fourth World Series title since 2004.

Johnson and Velazquez failed to duplicate their workloads in 2019, combining for just 96 ⅔ innings and a 5.68 ERA. They aren't the reason the starting rotation's ERA (4.95) increased more than a run from the previous year. But they didn't help the cause, either.

The Red Sox have placed Johnson on outright waivers. Another MLB club could claim him. If he clears waivers, he'll be outrighted off the 40-man roster to Triple-A Pawtucket.

The Red Sox made the transaction despite a serious lack of starting pitching depth, something chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom must address this offseason. The winter meetings begin Dec. 8 in San Diego.

Bloom also needs to acquire/sign a fifth starter. The door remains open for Boston to re-sign free agent Rick Porcello, who posted an ugly 5.52 ERA in 32 starts during 2019. Boston didn't offer him a qualifying offer.

A potential one-year contract could benefit both sides. Porcello could reestablish-increase his value and then pursue a multi-year deal next offseason.

The Red Sox, meanwhile, need a durable starter with Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi all returning from injuries. Porcello always has the potential to lead the staff in innings.

Wade Miley and Tanner Roark are two other durable starting pitchers on the free agent market.

Sale, Price, Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez count for approximately \$83.1 million toward the Competitive Balance Tax threshold. Maybe Bloom will try to trade Price and/or Eovaldi in deals that could help the Red Sox stay below the \$208 million threshold. Price's \$31 million counts toward the CBT. If the Sox ate \$20 million, they'd save \$11 million toward the threshold.

In that type of scenario, Bloom would need to add multiple starting pitchers this offseason.

Internal options on 40-man roster

Without Johnson, who are the top internal depth options?

The Red Sox still have Velazquez, who has pitched two scoreless innings in the Mexican Pacific League this winter. He has one minor league option remaining. The hope is he'll bounce back and show better command like he did in 2018 when he posted a 3.18 ERA and 4.15 FIP. Velazquez always thrived because of strong command dating back to before signing with Boston. But he averaged 4.5 walks per nine innings in 2019, an increase from 2.8 in 2018 and 2.6 in 2017.

The Red Sox added Kyle Hart to the 40-man roster last week. He pitched well at both Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket in '19.

Hart doesn't throw hard. But Red Sox vice president of pitching development Brian Bannister told MassLive.com in July. "He's got a little bit of a Patrick Corbin-style to him with his mix. 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."

Mike Shawaryn, Ryan Weber, Denyi Reyes and Travis Lakins are on the 40-man roster as well.

Weber brings the most major league experience from this group but he has a career 5.04 ERA. He has one minor league option remaining and is a candidate to be outrighted if the Red Sox need to open a roster spot.

Shawaryn struggled as a rookie last year (9.74 ERA, 14 relief outings). He pitched much better as a starter for Pawtucket, posting a 3.59 ERA in 14 starts compared to a 8.47 ERA in 12 relief outings at Triple A.

Reyes, who recently turned 23, has never pitched above Double-A Portland.

Lakins is a multi-inning reliever who the Red Sox used as an opener during September. He finished with a 3.86 ERA in 16 outings. He tossed 5 2/3 scoreless innings over three starts as an opener.

The Red Sox could get creative with Hart, Lakins and Shawaryn, using them as openers or following the opener whenever necessary.

"My confidence is at an all-time high," Lakins said during the final week of the regular season. "I'm going to go into this offseason and prepare like I've never prepared before. And I'm going to try to break camp next year and not get sent back to Triple A."

Internal options not on 40-man roster

Tanner Houck, a 2017 first-round pick who is not yet on the 40-man roster, likely will make his major league debut in 2020.

He's the closest starting pitching prospect to the majors. It remains to be seen whether his longterm future exists as a starter or reliever.

Five of the top 10 Red Sox prospects (Baseball America rankings) are starting pitchers. That bodes well for the Red Sox who have experienced obvious difficulties developing starting pitching since Jon Lester and Clay Buchholz.

Bryan Mata, the No. 3 prospect in the system who Baseball America ranks No. 81 on its top 100, has an outside chance to pitch in the majors later in the 2020 season. He's only 20 and Boston has used a slow progression with him the past couple years. His fastball ranges from 95-98 mph. He added a slider in 2019 and his walk rate dropped significantly.

He more likely will be ready to debut in 2021.

Baseball America ranks Thad Ward fifth in the system, Jay Groome seventh, Noah Song ninth and Houck 10th.

Ward, Groome and Song all have ETAs of 2021 and beyond.

Ward, a 22-year-old righty out of UCF, won 2019 Red Sox minor league Pitcher of the Year. The 2018 fifth-round pick combined to go 8-5 with a 2.14 ERA and 1.16 WHIP in 13 starts at Greenville and 12 starts at Salem.

Groome, a 2016 first-round pick, returned from Tommy John surgery in August. He said about 2020, "My goal really is just to throw as many innings as I can and just stay healthy. I've got a brand new arm, basically. So I know if I can maintain it and keep it healthy, the sky's the limit."

The Red Sox drafted Song out of the Naval Academy in June. He might have the most potential of anyone in the system but he's waiting for the Navy's decision to accept his petition to become a reservist and delay his active service time to play professional baseball.

The future appears promising but Bloom needs to add stopgap rotation depth for 2020.

Eduardo Rodriguez contract extension: Boston Red Sox starter 'would love to stay' (report)

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox starter Eduardo Rodriguez enjoyed a career year in 2019, finishing with a 19-6 record and 3.81 ERA in 34 starts. He topped 200 innings (203 ⅓ innings) and 200 strikeouts (213) for the first time in his career.

The lefty finished sixth in the AL Cy Young voting.

He is open to signing an extension to stay in Boston, he told MLB.com at the David Ortiz Celebrity Golf Classic in Miami.

"I would love to stay with Boston," Rodríguez said. "If they offer me an extension and we come to an agreement, I would love that. That's where I began my career and I would love to finish it there."

Rodriguez is eligible for free agency after 2021. He made \$4.3 million in 2019. MLBTradeRumors.com projects he'll earn approximately \$9.5 million in salary arbitration for 2020.

*** *RedSox.com***

Devers, Betts star in Boston's best wins of 2019

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Without question, 84 wins was a far lower total than anyone expected the Red Sox to have in 2019. But there are a few that stood out above the rest by the time the six-month grind had ended.

What defines a great win?

Sometimes it's a clutch hit. Sometimes it's a masterful pitching performance. Sometimes it's a win on a day the team desperately needed one and found a way to make it happen. Sometimes it's a combination of them all.

Here is a look at Boston's top five wins in 2019 and what they tell us about '20.

1. Devers' clinic, Sale's milestone lift Sox in Cleveland

August 13

One night earlier, the Sox had tied the game with two outs in the top of the ninth inning, only to lose in the bottom half of the frame on a leadoff walk-off homer by Carlos Santana. Chris Sale and Rafael Devers made sure the sting of the defeat didn't linger in a 7-6, 10-inning win. In what wound up being his final start of the season, Sale struck out 12 batters to reach 2,000 K's in his career faster than any pitcher. Meanwhile, Devers went 6-for-6 with four doubles, becoming the first player in history to have six or more hits and four or more doubles in one game.

What does it tell us about 2020?

Devers is emerging into the type of hitter who can carry a team when he's hot. The fact that he already established this in his age-22 season is a clear positive for the Red Sox, who control his contractual rights

for the next four seasons. Though Sale had the worst season of his career, this start in Cleveland -- and quite a few others during the season -- proved that he is still capable of dominance.

2. E-Rod outduels Verlander

May 26

The Red Sox had lost the first two games of their three-game showdown in Houston, with Eduardo Rodriguez slated to face Justin Verlander in the finale. At that point of the season, Rodriguez hadn't established that he was on the verge of a breakout. But he started down that path by outpitching Verlander in a 4-1 win for the Red Sox on getaway day. In his 10 starts before that, Rodriguez was 4-3 with a 5.43 ERA. Beginning with that win, E-Rod went 15-3 with a 3.21 ERA in his final 24 starts.

What does it tell us about 2020?

While there is obvious uncertainty around Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi given the health woes they had in 2019, Rodriguez is on the upswing. The 26-year-old is coming off a 19-win season and should be poised to build off that in '20 and beyond. Red Sox manager Alex Cora often said that Rodriguez's game preparation reached another level beginning with that start in Houston.

3. Devers lifts jet lag in Toronto

July 2

The Red Sox had just suffered two crushing losses to the Yankees in London and had to re-acclimate to the Eastern time zone in the first game of a three-game series in Toronto. Devers wouldn't allow jet lag to be an excuse for a team that couldn't afford to lose any more ground in the division race. The third baseman carried Boston to a 10-6 victory with four hits, two homers and six RBIs, and the Sox then went 5-1 on that six-game road trip leading up to the All-Star break.

What does it tell us about 2020?

Though things didn't always go their way last season, the Sox often responded to adverse situations in a positive way. That was a credit to the tone Cora set and the attitude many of his players had on a daily basis. Look for that winning attitude to continue in 2020. If the pitching staff can get back on track, the Red Sox should be right back in the mix for the playoffs.

4. Red Sox out-savage Yankees

July 25

Everyone knew how loaded the Yankees' offense was when they showed up for a big four-game series at Fenway Park in late July. But on this night, the Red Sox proved that their offense could stack up with any club. The Sox belted their rivals with a 19-3 romp that spurred them on to take three out of four in the series. At that point, Boston was still thinking about the playoffs.

What does it tell us about 2020?

The Sox have an offense that should again be among the best in the league. Most of the key contributors to that blowout win should again be core members of the roster in 2020. That includes Xander Bogaerts, J.D. Martinez, Andrew Benintendi, Michael Chavis and Christian Vázquez. If new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom decides to keep Mookie Betts rather than trade him, the Sox would be that much more dangerous.

5. Mookie starts, finishes marathon win in Anaheim

August 30

At a time when the Sox were hanging on in the fight for the postseason, they showed their resilience in the opener of a three-game series against the Angels. Betts led off the game with a homer, and many hours later, he was at it again, lacing another long ball in the top of the 15th inning to lead Boston to a 7-6 victory. It was a big turn of events, considering the Sox surrendered a two-run lead with two outs in the bottom of the ninth.

What does it tell us about 2020?

The decision Bloom and his front office make with Betts this winter figures to have a big impact on the success the Sox have in 2020. Though he didn't match his American League MVP Award-winning numbers from '18, Betts proved again that he is a five-tool star who can win a game in a variety of ways. If

Bloom does deal Betts, it would have to be for a package that sets the Red Sox up well for the short and long term. As the Nationals proved without Bryce Harper, teams can still win when they lose a superstar.

The AL East's most attractive trade chips

Ian Browne

Once the Thanksgiving holiday ends, MLB teams tend to go full-steam ahead in the execution of their Hot Stove battle plans.

To make an impactful deal, you must have assets you are willing to part with. In the American League East, each team has an intriguing player that could have a "For Sale" sign attached to him.

The Red Sox have a franchise player with a sticky contract situation. The Yankees might move a third baseman who has already proven his ability to be a stud offensively. The Rays have impressive depth in their starting rotation, which could make one of their arms available. The Blue Jays have a closer coming off a big year, but they might not want to pay him what he would make in his final year of arbitration. And the Orioles could move their best player from last season in the right deal.

Here is a breakdown of the top assets for all five teams in the AL East.

Blue Jays: Ken Giles

Giles had one of the best seasons of his career in 2019, posting a 1.87 ERA while striking out 83 batters in 53 innings and saving 23 games. After making \$6.3 million through arbitration last year, the right-hander is due for another raise in his free-agent walk year. The Jays have done well in the past signing lower-cost relievers and getting value out of them, so don't be surprised if they go down that road again. In exchange for Giles, perhaps Toronto could find a cost-controllable starter and an outfield prospect that would patch an obvious weakness in their farm system.

Orioles: Trey Mancini

During the O's rebuilding period the last couple of years, Mancini has emerged as the face of the franchise, while also being their most productive player. This could make things sticky if the Orioles try to trade him. Given the position they are in, with many needs to fill, they will need to consider everything. Mancini is, without question, their best trade piece. He isn't a free agent until 2023, meaning that his value is tied into his years of team control. Not a defensive specialist by any means, Mancini would be more attractive for an AL team. While it isn't necessarily likely that Baltimore will deal Mancini, the club needs to keep the option open.

Rays: Young pitchers

The Rays are the envy of most organizations due to the depth of their pitching staff. This could allow them to deal from their talented pool of young power arms to help fill another one of the club's needs. Despite numerous injuries, Tampa Bay had one of the best pitching staffs in the Majors last season, and it's only projected to get better in 2020. Blake Snell, Tyler Glasnow and Yonny Chirinos will enter the season at full strength, and they will join Charlie Morton and Ryan Yarbrough to form one of the most formidable rotations in the AL.

The Rays are looking to upgrade their offense during the offseason, and they have the assets to complete a significant trade if that's the route they take. Brendan McKay, Anthony Banda, Jalen Beeks and Brent Honeywell are all young arms that could appeal to other organizations.

Red Sox: Mookie Betts

In an ideal world, the Red Sox would sign Betts for many more years and he could be the face of their franchise. However, they've made attempts to do this in the past and Betts has stated multiple times that he'd prefer to test free agency and make his decision then. Betts is now entering the final year of his contract, meaning this is Boston's last chance to package him in a trade rather than lose him for nothing more than Draft-pick compensation after the season.

What might also compel new chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom to deal the ultra-talented Betts is that Sox ownership would like to bring the team's payroll below the Competitive Balance Tax threshold of \$208 million for next season. Betts earned \$20 million in the arbitration process last year and he will top that next season. Boston's farm system could use some replenishing, and trading Betts would be another way to bring some top prospects to the Red Sox.

Yankees: Miguel Andújar

With Andújar out for all but 12 games last season due to injury, Gio Urshela stepped up in a big way at third base. That leaves Yankees general manager Brian Cashman with the ability to unload Andújar, who was the runner-up to Shohei Ohtani in AL Rookie of the Year Award voting in 2018. Cashman has said he's already getting calls from GMs wondering what the plans are for Andújar. If he stays, he would give New York additional lineup depth and could play first base or left field in addition to backing up Urshela at third. If the Yanks trade Andújar, expect Cashman to try to score some starting pitching.

*** *WEEL.com***

Why the Red Sox' Brian Johnson move means something

Rob Bradford

This was from new Red Sox pitching coach Dave Bush in The Monday Baseball Column:

"It's been well-documented that we don't have a ton of depth right now. It's something that may get better in the offseason or it may not. Either way, I'll be prepared for it and I'll have our guys prepared to be ready to go when the regular season starts."

For the time being, it may have just gotten thinner.

The Red Sox placed Brian Johnson on outright waivers Monday (as was first reported by The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal). What that means is that there is a two-day period in which teams can claim Johnson and put him on their 40-man roster.

While the numbers (6.02 ERA) and injury issues (elbow) left a cloud over Johnson's 2019, he is still just a year removed from serving as one of "MVPs" identified by manager Alex Cora thanks to his ability to provide the aforementioned depth throughout the Red Sox' World Series run. That 2018 season he made 13 starts, compiling a 4.15 ERA with the team going 9-4 in those games.

With the occasional bumps and bruises landing with the rotation's top five starters, Johnson and Hector Velazquez (8 starts, 4.15 ERA, 5-3 team record) served as the perfect complement.

But that was then and this is now.

With the uncertainty hovering over the Red Sox' starting rotation (especially the trio of Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and David Price) the Red Sox' need for certainty when it comes to their depth options is more important than it has been in some time. This is why they are most likely choosing to use Johnson's 40-man roster spot to identify what they view as a pitcher who represents an upgrade from the 29-year-old.

Johnson has certainly proven to be a major league pitcher, and it will be intriguing to see the results of his offseason work with Driveline Baseball. But the Red Sox went into 2019 hardly prioritizing the depth behind the Top 5 starters and it came back to bite them. They were left scurrying to fill in the gaps when it counted the most with the likes of Andrew Cashner and Jhoulys Chacin instead of being able to rely on some of their own.

Was it worth potentially parting ways with Johnson instead of some of other candidates currently on the 40-man roster? That's debatable. But what this is a reminder of is how little room for error finding the next version of the 2018 Johnson/Velazquez ticket will be.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Dodgers have prospects to trade for Red Sox' Mookie Betts, and here are names you need to know

John Tomase

Any team acquiring Mookie Betts this winter needs two items in abundance: money and prospects. A wide-open contention window, an opening in the outfield, and a home in the National League — where Betts can't haunt the Red Sox directly during the season — would be added pluses.

It doesn't take an advanced knowledge of Venn Diagrams to recognize that one team sits in the overlap of all of those circles — the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Blessed with a \$200 million payroll, a perennially Top-10-rated farm system, and the need for a player to put them over the top after three straight near-misses, the Dodgers should be considered a prime destination for Betts this winter.

If we operate on the assumption that the Red Sox will be moving the former MVP primarily for cost-controlled prospects in order to keep their payroll manageable and allow them to build for the future, then it's worth considering whom they might receive from L.A. in return. And the possibilities are tantalizing.

The Dodgers are loaded not only with prospects, but redundancy at certain positions that could make a deal more likely.

Start in the outfield. MVP Cody Bellinger isn't going anywhere, and A.J. Pollock is signed through 2022, but there's an opportunity to upgrade Joc Pederson's spot. The natural heir apparent is Alex Verdugo, a consensus top-35 prospect who hit .294 with an .817 OPS in 106 games last season.

The 23-year-old would be the perfect Betts replacement, however, thanks to a high-contact, all-fields approach at the plate, a howitzer of an arm in right, and solid overall instincts. He'd be a steep price to pay, but Betts would still represent a clear 2020 upgrade, and he'd solve a corner outfield logjam by shifting to center.

Another name to remember is catcher Keibert Ruiz. Signed out of Venezuela in 2014, all he has done since is hit, posting a .299 average and .351 on-base percentage despite consistently being one of the youngest players at each stop in the minors.

Baseball America's most recent list of L.A.'s top 30 prospects includes no fewer than three catchers in the top 10, which means that Ruiz, 20, could be dealt from a position of strength. His former Triple-A teammate, Will Smith, got the call to L.A. this season and posted a .907 OPS with 15 homers in just 54 games behind the plate.

Continuing up the middle, the team's top prospect is shortstop Gavin Lux, and the odds of the Red Sox receiving him for what could amount to a one-season rental of Betts are nil. However, Lux does create the possibility of the Dodgers dealing middle infielder Jeter Downs, a former Reds first-rounder who came to L.A. in the Yasiel Puig deal.

Downs was born in Colombia and raised in Miami, and yes, his first name is exactly what you think. His dad named him after the Yankees great and Downs showed considerable power potential this season by smacking 24 homers between High A and Double A at age 20. He'd fit a Red Sox roster with no clear

internal choice to play second base moving forward and the organization is familiar with his family, since his older brother, Jerry, is a first baseman in the Red Sox system.

On the pitching side of the equation, the Dodgers are also blessed with talent. Their top pitching prospect, right-hander Dustin May, is likely unavailable — his sinker hit 99 mph this season — but fellow righty Josiah Gray could be an option. Also acquired in the Puig deal, the 21-year-old owns a 13-4 record and 2.37 ERA in two seasons. He reached Double A in 2019 and went 3-2 with a 2.75 ERA in eight starts while striking out more than a batter an inning.

A former shortstop who didn't convert to the mound until his final year of college, Gray's athleticism is off the charts, and his breakout 2019 earned him Dodgers minor league pitcher of the year honors.

If the Red Sox are looking for someone more big-league ready, they could ask for right-hander Tony Gonsolin. The 25-year-old made six starts for the Dodgers and was effective, going 4-2 with a 2.93 ERA in 11 appearances. Another former college position player, he's the rare prospect to transition from reliever to starter, and he has done so with tremendous success, hitting 100 mph with his fastball and also featuring a plus splitter and curveball.

Any two of these players would make the start of an intriguing package, so keep your eyes on L.A. as the Betts rumor mill starts churning in earnest when the winter meetings open Dec. 8 in San Diego.

*** *The Athletic***

Big moves with giant impact: The 10 most significant Red Sox decisions of the 2010s

Chad Jennings

Red Sox history will forever celebrate the first decade of this millennium. That's when the curse was broken and lasting success began. It was the decade of Manny and Pedro, when Papi and Petey arrived and a bloody sock became iconic. For drama and significance, the first 10 years of the 2000s were tough to top. But the next 10 years came awfully close.

From utter failure to record-setting success, the Red Sox of the 2010s were a runaway train — sometimes completely off the tracks but often thundering through the American League on the way to two World Series championships. The Red Sox had four managers and three heads of baseball operations. They pulled off one of the biggest trades and most important draft selections in franchise history. They committed to player development and outspent everyone.

We've evaluated our Red Sox team of the decade and identified the most memorable games of the decade, but if nothing else, the 2010s were defined by massive decisions that shaped the short-term and long-term success of the franchise through a series of ups and downs.

Here are the 10 most important Red Sox decisions in a decade full of them.

1. The trade that reset the roster

Seven years later, the names and numbers remain staggering. In August 2012, the Red Sox traded Adrian Gonzalez, Josh Beckett, Carl Crawford and Nick Punto to the Dodgers for a package of prospects plus a whopping \$258 million in payroll relief. Just when the Red Sox seemed to be drowning, they found a California life raft and won a World Series a year later.

The trade remains one of the most stunning in baseball history. A new Dodgers ownership group was ready to spend and desperately wanted Gonzalez. The Red Sox, a year removed from the disaster of 2011 and mired in a last-place season under the leadership of Bobby Valentine, needed a do-over. First-year general manager Ben Cherington pulled it off.

The fact that none of the prospects amounted to much hardly mattered. The trade removed crippling payroll obligations — Beckett was under contract through 2014, Crawford through 2017 and Gonzalez through 2018 — and got the Red Sox just below the luxury tax threshold for the year. When Cherington responded with a bunch of stop-gap signings in the offseason (Mike Napoli, Jonny Gomes, Stephen Drew, Shane Victorino, Koji Uehara), the immediate result was a sooner-than-expected championship.

That one trade so thoroughly changed the franchise, it's impossible to imagine what the rest of the decade would have looked like without it.

2. Drafting Mookie Betts

An area scout named Danny Watkins believed in the skinny kid from Nashville and pushed the Red Sox draft him and the rest really is history. In the fifth round of the 2011 draft, at pick No. 172, the Red Sox selected Betts.

“That decision alone is the genesis of a player that has changed the face of an organization and won a World Series and an MVP and so many things,” vice president of scouting Mike Rikard said.

With four of the top 40 picks, and knowing the rules for draft spending might soon change, the Red Sox splurged in 2011. Eight picks from that draft graduated to the big leagues. Matt Barnes, Travis Shaw and Jackie Bradley Jr. are among them, but it's Betts who became one of the elite all-around players. According to Baseball-Reference, he led the Red Sox in WAR each of the last five seasons.

The Red Sox' worst pick of the decade? It was surely drafting Trey Ball seventh overall in 2013, when the team had a rare opportunity to pick near the front of the draft and blew it with a high school pitcher who has a career 6.09 ERA. The damage was mitigated by the fact the Red Sox missed out on little star power. Aaron Judge (32nd overall) and Cody Bellinger (124th) stand out, but 2013 wasn't a particularly notable draft class.

The downside of the Ball selection pales in comparison to the impact of Betts. Particularly within the 2010s, he defined the franchise's present and future. He remains one of the team's best draft decisions.

3. Twenty-one months of Yoan Moncada

In early 2015 and late 2016, the Red Sox made two franchise-altering decisions — under two very different franchise decision-makers — about one of the most celebrated international prospects in baseball history. Both moves were aggressive, but they went in different directions and should be forever linked to the 2018 championship.

It started in late February 2015 when Cherington shattered the international signing bonus record in a \$31.5 million deal with Cuban infielder Yoan Moncada. The signing came with a 100 percent tax, meaning the Red Sox doled out more than \$60 million for the 19-year-old sensation. A year and a half later, he was in the majors.

By that point, though, Dombrowski was running baseball operations, and in early December 2016, he traded Moncada as the headliner in a deal for White Sox ace Chris Sale, who had three years left on a team-friendly deal. Sale finished second in Cy Young voting in his Red Sox debut, then got the final out of the 2018 World Series. Moncada was long gone by then, but his brief time with the Red Sox had paid significant dividends.

4. Not signing Jon Lester to an extension

Given five years of hindsight, Red Sox owner John Henry recognized his mistake. “I think we blew the Jon Lester (extension),” he said in the spring. “We blew the signing in spring training.”

The turning point came in spring 2014, when the Red Sox made a low-ball offer. At the time, Lester had a 3.76 career ERA and had made at least 31 starts six years in a row. His most recent seasons, though, were among his least impressive, and he was already 30. The Red Sox traded him at the deadline, then watched

him sign with the Cubs for six years and \$155 million. He's gone another five straight seasons with at least 31 starts, and many of his Cubs numbers are even better than his Red Sox numbers.

Failure to keep Lester left the Red Sox rotation in dire need of help, which surely helped set the stage for signing David Price to a record contract and eventually giving Sale an extension (when the team didn't want to repeat the Lester mistake).

The Red Sox believed in Lester as a teenager. They gave up on him too quickly as a 30-year-old.

5. Hiring Dave Dombrowski

In August 2015, with the Red Sox heading for a last-place finish in the division, ownership announced a massive shakeup. Dombrowski immediately took over the baseball operations department. Cherington, the general manager who'd replaced Theo Epstein and won a title just two years before, stepped down rather than take, effectively, a demotion.

Within months, Dombrowski had traded four prospects for Craig Kimbrel and signed Price to the largest contract ever awarded to a starting pitcher. Moves like that were Dombrowski's bread and butter, a massive departure from Cherington's build-from-within strategy, and where Cherington's biggest moves largely failed — most notably Pablo Sandoval and Hanley Ramírez — Dombrowski's did the trick, filling holes to make the Red Sox champions again in 2018.

His approach seemed to wear out its welcome with ownership stating a desire to bring back a build-from-within approach by 2019. But Dombrowski was the right man at the right time.

6. Hiring Alex Cora

The Red Sox had four different managers this decade: The final years of Terry Francona, the failed experiment of Bobby Valentine, the roller coaster of John Farrell and the ongoing tenure of Alex Cora. While Farrell spent more years at the helm and won a title, it's the hiring of Cora that stands out as a franchise-defining decision.

Farrell was familiar. He'd been the team's pitching coach and was an experienced manager in Toronto. Valentine, too, was a known quantity with 15 years of experience in Texas and New York. Cora, though, had never managed and spent just one year as a bench coach. He was 42 and spoke of his players as peers rather than subordinates. He was well versed in analytics, welcomed data-driven input and helped usher the Red Sox into the modern era of technology and information. That he was the team's first minority manager added to the sense of progressive decision making.

Cora was an immediate success with his record-setting 2018 season. His follow-up was far more disappointing, but in the wake of missing the 2019 playoffs, the team keeps diving deeper into an analytic mindset. Hiring Cora signaled that direction and he's helped lead the way.

7. Becoming the sport's biggest spenders

Over the past two decades, the Red Sox have maintained one of the game's highest payrolls. They've occasionally dropped — including when they reset their luxury tax penalties in 2017 — but they were typically the second- or third-highest spending team throughout the past 20 seasons.

Then came 2018, when ownership soared past its peers, exceeded the luxury tax threshold by nearly \$40 million, paid almost \$12 million in penalties and fueled arguably the greatest season in franchise history. The Red Sox total payroll was \$239.5 million, far exceeding the Nationals, who spent \$205 million. No other team spent more than \$200 million.

Such aggressive spending let the Red Sox sign top offensive free agent J.D. Martinez to finally fill the void left by David Ortiz's retirement. It let them release Ramírez despite still owing him millions, just one year after doing the same with Sandoval. It let them reload with midseason trades for Nathan Eovaldi, Steve Pearce and Ian Kinsler. And that payroll figure did not include more than \$11 million the Red Sox were paying Rusney Castillo to play in the minor leagues.

Through much of the decade, the Red Sox developed a terrific homegrown core, then acquired outside help for the rotation, and when ownership added unprecedented spending to the equation, the team became a behemoth.

8. Everything about the 2011 debacle

This list is meant to be a series of individual decisions, but it's hard to fully separate the many interconnected choices that led to and came out of the 2011 season, one of the most notorious in Red Sox history. It began with one of the worst free-agent signings in recent memory and ended with Epstein and Francona walking away. The cherry on top was the hiring of Valentine, a spectacular flop that lasted less than 12 months. Look away if you must.

In December 2010, the Red Sox made two massive additions. They traded for Adrián González (losing prospect Anthony Rizzo in the process) and they signed Carl Crawford to seven-year, \$142 million deal (for which, they would get less than two years of barely replacement-level production). By August 2012, Gonzalez and Crawford were packaged with Beckett and Nick Punto in a remarkable salary dump to the Dodgers.

Gonzalez, Beckett, Ortiz, Jacoby Ellsbury and Dustin Pedroia were actually terrific that season, and the Red Sox led the division at the end of August. But they went 7-20 in September to blow the division and miss the playoffs, a collapse later detailed in a Boston Globe story about chicken and beer and clubhouse discontent.

When the losing was finished, the Red Sox got rid of Francona, their popular manager who'd won two World Series in eight years. Less than a month later, Epstein, the longtime general manager, resigned so he could become the Cubs' president of baseball operations.

An almost comical addendum to the 2011 season came in late November when the Red Sox hired Valentine. He lasted one awful season, almost immediately losing his clubhouse and the fan base, a fitting postscript to the 2011 collapse. In replacing Epstein, the Red Sox stayed in-house with Cherington, who brought a commitment to player development and won a World Series two year later.

In a span of 12 months the Red Sox made a massively regrettable trade, signed a remarkably regrettable contract, lost two popular organizational leaders and hired a wildly unpopular manager. Yikes.

9. Letting Jacoby Ellsbury go

Every free agent market is loaded with mistakes just waiting to happen, and in the past decade, the Red Sox fell into several of those traps. Ramírez and Sandoval were disasters. Castillo was a disappointment. Price has been valuable, but perhaps not worth his record contract. It would be easy to label any of them as franchise-altering choices, except that the Red Sox weathered the downside to win a title.

Perhaps the more important free-agent decision was letting Ellsbury walk away after the 2013 season. He had been excellent that year, finishing top 15 in MVP votes and FanGraphs WAR. He'd run into injury problems, but had more than 600 plate appearances in four of the past six years. Consensus pegged him as the second-best free agent on the market, and his most logical in-house replacement, Bradley, had hit .189 in the majors. But the Red Sox let him go, and not only that, they let him sign with the rival Yankees for seven years and \$153 million.

He's had one year of above-average production since then. Ellsbury has been a drain in New York. He was pretty solid in his first year, but he has an 89 OPS+ since 2015 and hasn't played at all in two seasons. The Yankees cut him last week with a year still remaining on his deal

When the decade started, Ellsbury seemed to be emerging as a key piece of the Red Sox future. Instead, he gave them two more terrific seasons before they moved on and never looked back.

10. Playing Xander Bogaerts in the 2013 postseason

The decision had a short-term payoff, but it was more significant for its long-term implications.

Bogaerts opened the 2013 season in Double A. He was still just 20 when the Red Sox brought him to the big leagues in late August and he did not become a truly everyday player until Game 5 of the ALCS. But he started every game the rest of the way, including all six in the World Series, which the Red Sox won for an unexpected and emotional title.

Beyond the championship, though, Bogaerts' arrival signaled the emergence of a new wave of young talent nurtured and utilized under Cherington. It was the start of the organization's current core, which largely defined the second half of the decade.

Brandon Workman was also on the 2013 World Series roster. Bogaerts, Bradley and Brock Holt had more than 400 at-bats the next season. Betts, Barnes and Christian Vázquez made their debuts that year. The next year, Andrew Benintendi arrived. Rafael Devers showed up the year after that.

Bogaerts was one of three homegrown players in the Red Sox lineup for the decisive game of the 2013 World Series. He was one of six on the field for the final out of the 2018 title.

Riding the roller coaster: The 10 most memorable Red Sox games of the 2010s

Jen McCaffrey

The past decade has witnessed the Red Sox both at their apex and their nadir. From the disasters of 2011 and 2012 to the triumphs of 2013 and 2018, we have seen it all.

Four managers and four general managers, hundreds of players, retirements, debuts and two World Series championships.

The challenge to narrow down the 10 most memorable or impactful Red Sox games of the decade was steep, but we tried. Here are our 10:

1. David Ortiz's grand slam
Oct. 13, 2013, ALCS Game 2

The Red Sox lost the first game of the series to the Tigers and were trailing 5-1 entering the eighth inning of Game 2. Boston's offense had been suffocated by Tigers starters Anibal Sanchez and Max Scherzer. The Red Sox were on the verge of falling into a deep hole as they headed to Detroit. But David Ortiz, stepping to the plate with the bases loaded in the eighth, stepped into the familiar role of postseason hero. He hit a grand slam into the bullpen as right fielder Torii Hunter flipped over the wall and bullpen cop Steve Horgan memorably threw his hands in the air. The Red Sox won in the bottom of the ninth on a Jarrod Saltalamacchia single off Rick Porcello before going on to win the series in six games.

2. The community rallies at Fenway
April 20, 2013

The Red Sox were headed to the airport after their Marathon Monday matinee game in 2013 when they first got word of bombs that exploded at the finish line. After a three-day road trip to Cleveland, a manhunt for the bombers ensued when the Sox returned home. Their Friday game was postponed with the city in lockdown until the final suspect was captured that night. When the Red Sox finally returned to the field on Saturday, emotion poured out in a moving pre-game ceremony for victims, survivors and first responders. Ortiz's memorable speech galvanized a grieving city and Daniel Nava's eighth-inning home run lifted the Red Sox over the Royals.

3. The collapse in Baltimore
Sept. 28, 2011

The fall from a near-certain playoff spot through a month when the Sox went 7-20 culminated in a 4-3 walk-off loss to the Orioles as Jonathan Papelbon gave up the tying and winning runs in the bottom of the ninth. At the same time, the Rays battled back with six runs in the eighth and another in the ninth to tie the score against the Yankees before winning on a walk-off in the 12th. The Rays' win effectively booted the Red Sox from the postseason to cement the epic collapse. Shortly thereafter, the Red Sox fired manager Terry Francona and general manager Theo Epstein left for the Cubs.

4. Clinching the first title at Fenway Park since 1918 Oct. 30, 2013, World Series Game 6

The Red Sox won in 2004 and 2007 to break up the decades-long championship drought, but 2013 was different for a lot of reasons. An improbable group of veteran free agents boosted the team, and the Sox rallied around the city in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings. Game 4 of the series might have been more memorable with Koji Uehara picking Kolten Wong off first base to end the game, but Game 6 allowed fans in Boston to see the home team celebrate with a World Series-ending out for the first time in 95 years. It fully exorcised any remaining demons of the past.

5. Andrew Benintendi's catch Oct. 17, 2018, ALCS Game 4

The game started with Mookie Betts nearly robbing Jose Altuve of a home run to right field, but Altuve was ruled out on fan interference, heightening an already tense atmosphere. The Red Sox and Astros battled back and forth throughout the game before Craig Kimbrel entered in the eighth. He gave up a run, narrowing the Sox lead to 8-6. And when he came back out for the ninth, he loaded the bases on three walks sandwiched around two fly outs. Alex Bregman came to the plate and smacked the first pitch he saw to left. It was sinking fast. Then Andrew Benintendi sprawled out and caught the ball just before it hit the ground.

6. Ortiz's final game Oct. 10, 2016, ALDS Game 3

In reality, it was an entire season of send-offs that built up to the game. And though the Red Sox wanted to give Ortiz a deeper playoff run to extend his career just a bit longer, it ended in a 4-3 loss and a sweep at the hands of the Cleveland Indians in the AL Division Series. Ortiz had already been given a Fenway farewell in his final regular-season game on Oct. 2, but the playoff finale allowed the Fenway fans to salute Ortiz. After the final out, fans started chanting Ortiz's name and he emerged from the dugout and walked to the mound. For several minutes, Ortiz saluted fans with tears in his eyes as the thunderous cheers echoed through the park.

7. Another World Series celebration Oct. 28, 2018, World Series Game 5

When Chris Sale struck out a flailing Manny Machado to close out the 5-1 victory, it led to the Red Sox streaming onto the field in celebration for an MLB-high fourth time this century. Sale closed out a game that David Price started as the Red Sox continued the theme of the Sox riding their aces at both ends of the game in the series. It marked the 119th win of the season for the Sox, which smashed a previous club record.

8. The 18-inning World Series game Oct. 26, 2018, World Series Game 3

For 7 hours and 20 minutes, the Red Sox and Dodgers battled at Dodger Stadium in what resulted as the longest game in postseason history. Nathan Eovaldi pitched six relief innings before allowing Max Muncy's walk-off homer at 3:30 a.m. ET. The Red Sox tied the score at 1 apiece in the eighth inning and took the lead in the 13th, but an Ian Kinsler error allowed the tying run to score in the bottom of the inning.

The Sox rebounded with wins in the next two games to claim the title, and it marked just one of three losses for the Red Sox that postseason.

9. The mid-game changing of the guard
Aug. 18, 2015

Beating up 9-1 on the Cleveland Indians in an otherwise awful season is not normally considered memorable. But the news that emerged from the Red Sox during the game — that Dave Dombrowski had been hired as the new baseball operations boss and that general manager Ben Cherington would be leaving — was monumental. The Sox, at 53-66 after the game, were headed toward a second straight last-place finish. Dombrowski entered as the third of four Sox baseball bosses this decade and engineered a run that culminated in the 2018 World Series title. Cherington, less than two years removed from his own World Series title at Fenway, declined an opportunity to stay on as Dombrowski's deputy.

10. Rafael Devers homers off Aroldis Chapman
Aug. 13, 2017

It was the 15th game of Rafael Devers' career, but you wouldn't have known it. The Red Sox were trailing 2-1 in the eighth inning at Yankee Stadium. Devers stepped to the plate against Aroldis Chapman, the Yankees' shutdown closer, just after Hanley Ramirez struck out. The rookie smashed a solo homer to left-center, tying the score. That sent the game to extra frame, in which Benintendi delivered an RBI single in the 10th to give the Red Sox the win.