



Thursday, April 7, 2022

SPECIAL
RED SOX
PREVIEW
SECTION

RAFFY IS THE ONE!



Why the Red Sox
can't let their young
franchise cornerstone
get away

PAGE S3

Boston Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers is one of the best young players the Red Sox have had in decades and the club should make signing him to a long-term extension a top priority.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo



RED SOX SPECIAL SECTION: WHAT'S INSIDE



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Trevor Story the missing piece in Sox lineup?

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Devers poised for superstardom

On Baseball

Mac Cerullo



Rafael Devers might be the most underrated athlete in Boston sports. In fact, he might be the most

underrated player in all of baseball.

Since making his debut at age 20 back in 2017, Devers has accomplished feats not seen by a Red Sox player his age since the days of Ted Williams. He's topped 100 career home runs, posted two seasons with 30 homers and 100 RBIs, led the American League in doubles and helped lead the Red Sox to a World Series title. All before his 25th birthday.

Yet even locally Devers rarely seems to move the needle. But not for much longer.

This year Devers should become impossible to ignore.

Heading into his sixth big league season, Devers is on the precipice of superstardom and has shown every indication he's ready to make the leap. Last year Devers hit a career-high 38 home runs and earned his first all-star nod, and with the season on the line in Boston's regular season finale he had the game of his life, going 4 for 5 with two home runs, four RBI and three runs scored to carry the Red Sox over the finish line and into the playoffs.

He is by all accounts a franchise cornerstone, and the Red Sox can't allow him to get away.

Despite his overwhelming talent, Devers' future with the Red Sox is uncertain. Unless he and the club can agree to a contract extension, Devers will hit the



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Boston Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers gets a high-five from assistant coach Ramon Vazquez after hitting a solo home run during Game 5 of last October's ALCS playoff series against the Houston Astros.

open market after the 2023 season.

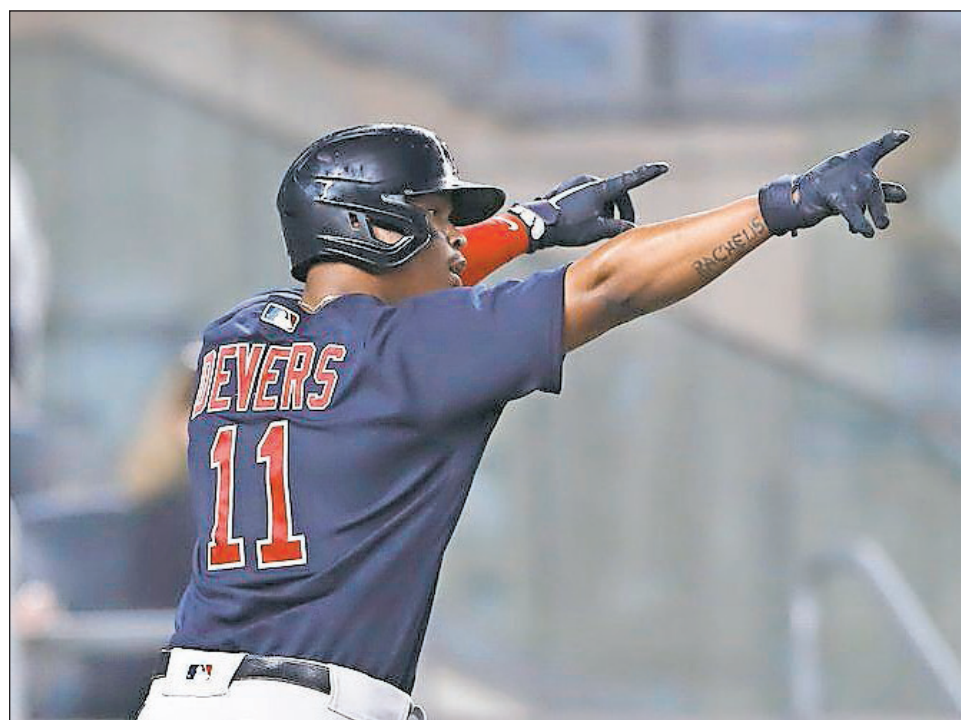
Two years might seem like a long time, but the Red Sox would be playing with fire allowing him to get any closer to free agency than he already is. We've already walked down that path with Mookie Betts, and nobody liked how that story ended.

Things should never come to that with Devers.

Players like Devers don't come along often, and he's the rare example of a prospect who both exceeded expectations and has somehow still managed to fly under the radar.

He's not particularly flashy. He is not on the cover of "MLB: The Show" like Fernando Tatis Jr. and he's not a global icon like Shohei Ohtani. He's never even been in a Dunkin' Donuts commercial.

See **DEVERS**, Page S12



NOAH K. MURRAY

Boston Red Sox's Rafael Devers celebrates after scoring against the New York Yankees last year.

DEVERS SAYS NO EXTENSION TALKS YET

Will Rafael Devers sign a long-term extension with the Red Sox? Usually those talks happen before or during spring training, and heading into camp said he hadn't heard from the club. "We haven't talked about that but obviously this is a great place to play baseball in, this is the Boston Red Sox, but I'm not really focused on that right now," Devers said back on March 15. "Obviously this is the team that gave me a chance to be in the big leagues and I'm so comfortable with the staff, from the minor leagues up to the major leagues, this feels like home so obviously I'd love to play here."

Welcome to Boston!

Trevor Story a game-changing late addition

By MAC CERULLO
CNHI Sports Boston

It took right up until the last minute, but the Red Sox finally made their big splash.

With nearly all of the big free agents off the board, the Red Sox landed one of the last impact bats on the market by signing former Colorado Rockies shortstop Trevor Story to a six-year, \$140 million contract. Story will play second base in Boston and alongside Xander Bogaerts will form one of the most formidable middle infield tandems in all of baseball.

"This is really a dream come true for me, to play for an organization like Boston," Story said at his introductory press conference. "This has been a true privilege for me and my family. They've already made us feel like we're at home here and at the end of the day this comes down to winning, and we felt this was a great fit for me and my family and I'm so looking forward to this opportunity to get on the field and chase this championship."

Story is coming off a 2021 season in which he hit 24 home runs with 75 RBI, an .801 OPS and 20 stolen bases for the Colorado Rockies. Since making his big league debut in 2016 he ranks 11th in baseball among position players in wins above replacement (26.7) and overall has posted 158 home runs and 450 in six seasons, including two all-star nods, two Silver Sluggers and three down-ballot MVP finishes.

The Texas native is also renowned as a rangy defender who will provide a badly needed burst of speed and athleticism on the base paths for the Red Sox. Last year Boston's team leader in stolen bases was somehow catcher Christian Vazquez, and with Story expected to bat near the top of the lineup he should give middle of the order hitters Bogaerts, Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez more opportunities to drive in runs.

"Trevor's work on the field speaks for itself," said Red Sox chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom. "He's been one of the most dynamic players in the game."

By adding Story, the Red Sox offset some of the offensive production lost by Kyle Schwarber, who signed with the Philadelphia Phillies, and Hunter Renfroe, who was traded to Milwaukee for Jackie Bradley Jr. and two prospects just prior to the lockout. The Red Sox offense is now expected to have enough juice to keep up in a ferociously competitive AL East, and long-term Story provides some measure of stability with key players like Nathan Eovaldi, Martinez and potentially Bogaerts and Devers soon set to hit free agency.

Jackie Bradley Jr. will boost outfield defense

There were times last season when Boston's outfield defense was a mess. Several games turned at key points on cringeworthy miscues, and by bringing back old friend Jackie Bradley Jr. the Red Sox hope his elite glove can help shore up one of the club's biggest weaknesses from last year.

Bradley is back after a one-year stint in Milwaukee and is now expected



Steve Helber/AP

New Boston Red Sox shortstop Trevor Story smiles as he speaks to the media during a baseball press conference at JetBlue Park in Fort Myers, Fla. on March 23.



Jackie Bradley Jr. will be back in the Red Sox outfield this spring after a year away in Milwaukee.

AP photo

to patrol right field for the Red Sox. Widely regarded as one of the best defensive outfielders in baseball, Bradley should team with Alex Verdugo in left and Kiké Hernández in center to form what should be a much improved outfield trio.

Offensively Bradley is coming off a dreadful season in which he batted .163 with a .497 OPS, but while he was never a particularly good hitter in Boston he does have a .732 career OPS as a member of the Red Sox. If Bradley were only needed to bat out of the eight or nine spot Boston would probably be fine with that level of production.

Hill, Wacha and Paxton adding key depth to rotation

They may not be big names, but the Red Sox starting rotation is a lot deeper and potentially much better this year thanks to the additions of Rich Hill, Michael Wacha and James Paxton.

At age 42, Hill is the oldest active pitcher in the major leagues but recently has enjoyed some of the best years of his entire career. Hill is coming off a strong 2021 in which he made 31 starts, posted a 3.86 ERA and had 150 strikeouts in 158.2 innings split between the Tampa Bay Rays and New York Mets. The lefty,

originally from Milton, signed with Boston on a one-year, \$5 million deal and is now in his third stint with the Red Sox as a big leaguer.

Wacha is best known to Red Sox fans as the rookie wunderkind who starred for the St. Louis Cardinals in the 2013 World Series, but he now comes to Boston as a 30-year-old veteran looking to get his career back on track. Wacha is coming off a down year in 2021 in which he had a 5.05 ERA over 124.2 innings with the Tampa Bay Rays, but prior to that and a tough pandemic year with the Mets he had a 3.91 ERA over seven seasons with the Cardinals. He signed for one-year, \$7 million.

Paxton is recovering from Tommy John surgery and isn't expected to return to the mound until midseason at the earliest. His impact on this year's team will likely be limited but he could provide a boost down the stretch.

Diekman, Strahm give bullpen a lift

In order to shore up the

team's bullpen, the Red Sox added a pair of lefties who are both known for their ability to get both right-handed and left-handed hitters out. Jake Diekman, formerly of the Oakland Athletics, is one of the best pitchers in baseball at forcing whiffs from opposing batters, while Matt Strahm is known for his standout control and for his ability to pitch multiple innings.

Diekman, 35, is coming off a season in which he posted a 3.86 ERA with 83 strikeouts in 60.2 innings. He signed a two-year, \$8 million deal and is expected to be one of Boston's top options in the later innings. Strahm, 30, battled knee injuries throughout last season but has a 3.81 career ERA dating back to 2016. He signed for one-year, \$3 million and could potentially serve as a multi-inning weapon similar to how Garrett Whitlock was used for much of last season.

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Will Sale get back to his old self?

That's the \$30 million per year question for Sox

By MAC CERULLO
CNHI Sports Boston

When Chris Sale takes the mound this season, what version of the lefty will we see?

The dominant force who ranked among baseball's best throughout the 2010s? Or the not-quite-there-yet version we saw last year after Sale returned from Tommy John surgery?

That's the \$30 million per year question for the Red Sox, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

Sale remains under contract for another three years and the Red Sox are counting on him getting back to his old form. That Sale struggled at times last summer after missing two full years due to injury wasn't a surprise. Now, after another offseason of recovery and another setback in the form of a stress fracture in his right ribcage, it will be telling how he looks when he eventually returns.

If Sale gets back to being an ace, the sky is the limit for the Red Sox. If not? The club could have some problems.

Even before the injury Sale already had a lot of mileage on his arm, having thrown 1,629.2 innings through his first 10 seasons. Now at age 33 he's reached a point where the reconstructive surgery could help springboard him into a new phase of his career, or it could signal its impending end.

The good news is there is plenty of precedent for a pitcher to undergo Tommy John surgery close to the same age Sale did in 2020 and come back strong.

Before the 2011 season longtime St. Louis Cardinals



AP Photo

Chris Sale walks back to the dugout after a strikeout during his first start back from Tommy John surgery last August.

ace Adam Wainwright had Tommy John surgery at age 29 after two straight top-three Cy Young Award finishes. When he returned in 2012 he made all of his starts, got back into the Cy Young conversation in 2013-14 and is now about to begin his 11th season since the surgery.

Another example is fellow Red Sox starter Rich Hill, who also had Tommy John surgery in 2011 at age 31. His road back was much longer and bumpier

than Wainwright's, but he eventually emerged on the other side to enjoy a remarkable third act. He's now the oldest active starting pitcher in baseball at age 42 and set to begin his 18th big league season.

One of the early tells for Sale will be how his changeup looks during live game action. Following his return Sale struggled to rediscover the pitch, which lacked consistency and too often resulted in what Sale described as "batting

practice" offerings. Eventually Sale was forced to abandon it, making himself a two-pitch starter against whom opposing batters only needed to guess fastball or slider. If they guessed right, the results usually weren't pretty.

Even if the changeup has never been Sale's best pitch, at his peak Sale could still count on it to keep batters off balance. In 2018 opposing hitters batted .228 with .329 slugging and a 38.5% whiff

percentage against it. The following year, when Sale's elbow became a problem, hitters were averaging .279 with .523 slugging and 33% whiff percentage. Last year, following his return, those numbers ballooned to .444 with .667 slugging and the whiff percentage was down to 23.8%.

If those numbers start trending back to where they were in 2018, that will be a good sign.

A better changeup should allow Sale to more

effectively use his fastball and slider, the two pitches that made him a Cy Young contender for the better part of a decade. Should all the pieces fall back into place, there's no reason why Sale shouldn't be able to reestablish himself as one of the game's best.

But until that actually happens, Sale remains the team's biggest unanswered question heading into 2022.

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10 THINGS TO WATCH IN 2022

Houck, Whitlock may be key to championship breakthrough

BY MAC CERULLO
CNHI Sports Boston

The 2022 Major League Baseball season is to begin, and after a surprise run deep into the playoffs *about* last fall the Red Sox once again look poised to contend. Here are 10 thoughts on the upcoming season and things to watch out for as baseball returns.



AP photos

Red Sox starting pitcher Tanner Houck has flashed some tantalizing potential in his first year or so as a big league pitcher.

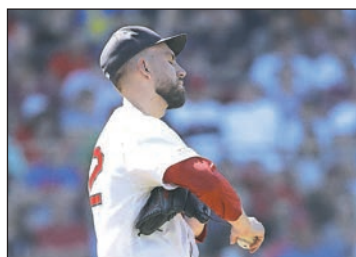
Garrett Whitlock was terrific as a rookie relief pitcher for the Red Sox in 2021. Could he be just as effective as a starter?



1. Will Houck and Whitlock make the leap?

Tanner Houck and Garrett Whitlock have given Red Sox fans a lot to be excited about. Houck, a former first-round pick, has posted a 2.93 ERA in 86 career big league innings dating back to 2020, and since Whitlock was poached away from the New York Yankees in the Rule 5 Draft he's done nothing but dominate, recording a 1.96 ERA in 73.1 innings in 2021. With young players it's obviously prudent to temper expectations, but still, it's hard not to get excited about the possibility they could take their games to the next level.

Right now the Red Sox rotation is good but not great, boasting an ace in Nathan Eovaldi and potentially also a revitalized Chris Sale (once healthy) along with solid mid-rotation options including Nick Pivetta, Rich Hill, Michael Wacha, Houck and Whitlock. That group is probably better than what the Red Sox had last year and it's certainly deeper, but if Houck and/or Whitlock emerge as breakout performers, the Red Sox rotation might suddenly rank among the very best in baseball.



AP photo

Matt Barnes had a disastrous second half after earning all-star honors and a contract extension through the early part of 2021. Can Barnes get back to his old self in 2022?

2. Barnes hopes to get back on track

One of the biggest keys to success for the Red Sox is reliever Matt Barnes rediscovering his mojo and getting back to being the dominant closer we saw throughout the first half last year.

Barnes' second-half implosion was one of the more confounding developments of 2021. From the start of the season through the end of July Barnes had a 2.30 ERA and 66 strikeouts over 43 innings while holding batters to a .164 average and .487 OPS. He recorded 23 saves with four blown saves and allowed just 11 walks and four home runs.

But from August onwards? He had a 9.26 ERA and 18 strikeouts over 11.2 innings, with batters torching him for a .321 average and 1.051 OPS. He had one save and two blown saves in the last two months, allowed nine walks (nearly one per inning) with four home runs.

Barnes told reporters at the start of camp that he feels confident he can get back to being his old self, but he acknowledged that maintaining his performance into the second half has been a struggle throughout his career. Only time will tell if he can buck the trend this year.



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

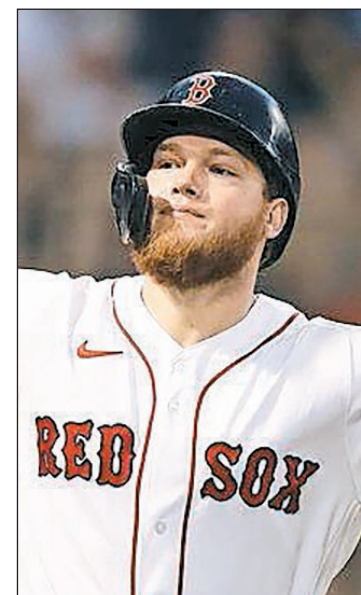
Red Sox center fielder Kiké Hernández has made a bigger splash than expected. Will it continue in 2022?

3. Kiké sticking with center

Throughout his career Kiké Hernández has served as something of a Swiss army knife, playing just about every position depending on his team's needs. Last year the plan was originally for him to mostly play second base, but he wound up finding a home in center field and by season's end was among the best defensive players at the position in the league.

Now, for the first time, Hernández goes into a season with a specific starting role to call his own.

Even with defensive ace Jackie Bradley Jr. back in the fold, Hernández is expected to retain the starting center field job. Hernández is coming off the best season of his career (20 home runs, 4.9 wins above replacement) and also enjoyed a historic postseason showing, batting .408 with a 1.260 OPS and five home runs in 11 playoff games.



AP photo

Alex Verdugo might be a breakout candidate in 2022.

4. Don't sleep on 'Dugie'

Alex Verdugo had a solid showing in his first full-length season as a starter last year, batting .289 with 13 home runs and a .777 OPS on the year. He performed particularly well against righties (.321) and got hot down the stretch (.328 from August onwards), but he also struggled against lefties (.228) and had some bizarre defensive and base running miscues.

Those issues are all easily fixable, however, and at only 25 there's no reason why Verdugo can't overcome them and take his game to the next level.

Verdugo will be a player to watch in 2022, and if he can get back to hitting lefties the way he used to before last season he could emerge as one of the most prolific and impactful hitters on the team. Best case scenario, Verdugo might even have a shot at being a dark horse candidate for the American League batting title.

5. AL East loaded again

Last year four of the five AL East clubs finished with more than 90 wins, with the Toronto



Vladimir Guerrero Jr., pictured during his Double-A days with the New Hampshire Fisher Cats.

Blue Jays just barely missing the playoffs by one game despite boasting arguably the most formidable roster in the division. This year the Red Sox will likely have to navigate a similar gauntlet, as the Blue Jays, New York Yan-

kees and Tampa Bay Rays have all arguably improved since last season. The good news is all four teams will still have 19 games each to fatten up against the Baltimore Orioles, who remain a cellar-dwelling outfit even with a handful of top prospects nearing the majors.



Jarren Duran celebrates after rounding the bases for what initially appeared to be an inside the park home run.

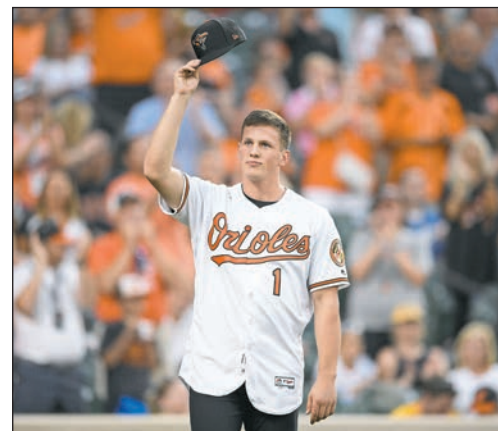
AP photo

6. Help on the horizon

Speaking of prospects, several of Boston's top young players are nearly big league ready and should make an appearance at some point in 2022.

Center fielder Jarren Duran, who struggled after his midseason call-up last year, will likely start the season in Triple-A but boasts elite speed and could become a factor at the big league level again before long. The same can be said for first baseman Triston Casas, who ranks among the top prospects in baseball and boasts a combination of power and plate discipline that compares favorably to Cincinnati Reds star Joey Votto.

In addition to those two, numerous Red Sox pitchers are knocking on the door as well. Kutter Crawford and Connor Seabold both made emergency spot starts last September, and prospects like Josh Winkowski, Jay Groome and Brayan Bello could pitch their way into the equation as well.



Baltimore Orioles first-overall pick in 2019, Adley Rutschman, tips his cap to the crowd after being introduced soon after signing. The Orioles have been mired in an excruciating multi-year rebuild that the club hopes will eventually produce a future World Series contender.

AP photo

7. Will anti-tanking measures work?

One unfortunate dynamic we've seen take hold in baseball over the past decade is the willingness for clubs to lose big now so they can try to win big later. The Houston Astros and Chicago Cubs successfully built World Series championship rosters by tanking, and now it seems like nearly half the league is actively trying to lose at any given point.

With new anti-tanking measures included in the new labor deal, it will be interesting to see if that dynamic begins to change. Since the lockout ended we've already seen a wide variety of teams move aggressively to try and improve, most notably the Minnesota Twins and Colorado Rockies, so hopefully the gap between the haves and have nots will start to close a bit. Struggling, low salaried franchises like the Baltimore Orioles should be on notice.



AP photo

Boston Red Sox baseball team owner John Henry listens to a question during a news conference.



DAVID LE PHOTO

Boston Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts, right, celebrates his two-run home run with teammate Rafael Devers during the 2021 American League Wild Card Game.

9. Will Sox extend Bogaerts, Devers?

Boston's flexible financial future also allows room for what should be among the team's top priorities over the next year, which is re-signing Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers to long-term extensions.

Bogaerts will have a chance to opt out of his current contract next offseason, giving him the opportunity to seek a bigger deal than the three years, \$60 million he'd have remaining otherwise. Devers, meanwhile, is set to hit free agency after the 2023 season, but if he and the club can't reach a deal before then he could potentially become a trade candidate like Mookie Betts back in 2020.



AP photo

David Ortiz will be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame this July.

8. Sox back over luxury tax threshold

For all the flack the Red Sox front office has taken for employing what critics describe as a "small market" mindset, nobody can claim they aren't spending money this year. After signing top free agent Trevor Story to a six-year deal worth approximately \$23.3 million per year, the Red Sox payroll is now expected to exceed the new competitive balance tax threshold of \$230 million.

The better news for fans is that quite a lot of that money will be coming off the books next year, meaning owner John Henry and the Red Sox will have ample opportunity to spend even more in 2023 as well.

10. Ortiz gets call to the Hall

There weren't many bright spots for baseball over the course of this offseason's lockout, but the one big one was the election of Red Sox legend David Ortiz to the Baseball Hall of Fame back in late January.

Ortiz earned induction on the first ballot after he received 77.9% of the vote, and now he will be enshrined alongside six selections of the Golden Days and Early Baseball Era committees, including Jim Kaat, Tony Oliva and the late Bud Fowler, Gil Hodges, Minnie Miñoso and Buck O'Neil. The Hall of Fame's induction festivities will take place on Sunday, July 24 at 1:30 p.m. in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Wacha's a long way from 2013 World Series, but could be diamond in rough

Mac Cerullo

CNHI Sports Boston

It feels like another lifetime ago, but the Red Sox did make a couple of moves before the lockout this offseason.

Way back in November the Red Sox helped bolster their rotation by signing free agent starting pitcher Michael Wacha. Best known to Red Sox fans for his role in the 2013 World Series, Wacha signed a one-year, \$7 million deal in hopes of getting his career back on track after a couple of tough seasons with the New York Mets and Tampa Bay Rays.

"I feel like last year I had some ups and downs. It felt like it would click for a little bit and then things wouldn't go the way I planned," Wacha said last fall in his introductory press conference. "Towards the end of

the season I felt like the ball was coming out ... and my approach on the mound were where I needed to be to move forward."

Wacha first rose to prominence as a 21-year-old who played a pivotal role in leading the St. Louis Cardinals to the 2013 World Series. Back then he was a rookie standout who dominated down the stretch and nearly threw a no hitter in his final regular season start. He was similarly dominant in the postseason, beating the Red Sox in Game 2 of the World Series to improve to 4-0 in the playoffs before Boston finally got to him in the championship-clinching Game 6.

But nearly a decade later, Wacha arrives in Boston at a much different point in his career.

Now 30, Wacha is entering his 10th big league season and joins the Red Sox



Michael Wacha, shown here pitching with the St. Louis Cardinals, was one of a handful of free agent additions the Red Sox made this offseason before the lockout.

AP PHOTO

as an established veteran with something to prove. Though he never became the ace his stellar 2013 suggested he could become, he was consistently a reliable big league starter throughout his seven seasons with the Cardinals, but is now looking to bounce back from a couple down years.

Like many pitchers Wacha struggled during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, but while he says last year was the healthiest he's been in

ages, he still struggled for much of 2021. Wacha posted a 5.05 ERA over 124.2 innings with the Rays and his -0.7 wins above replacement was tied for second worst on the team. More concerning were his Statcast metrics, which ranked in the bottom quarter of the league almost across the board.

One of the main problems, Wacha said, was his cutter wasn't as consistent as he needed it to be. So midway through the year

he scrapped it and started throwing his curveball more, which combined with his fastball, sinker and changeup gave him a better pitch mix to keep batters off balance.

"It was a big difference from my other pitches so I felt like it kept hitters more off balance and it ended up being a pitch where people would either take it and it's still a strike or it would be weak contact, and then it helps that fastball play up," Wacha said. "Towards the end of the year I started throwing that more and started having more success."

The numbers bear out that improvement, as Wacha's numbers improved substantially from September onwards. In August he posted an 8.49 ERA over 23.1 innings while allowing hitters to bat .373 with a .415 on-base

percentage and .582 slugging percentage. From September through the end of the regular season that improved to a 3.00 ERA over 30 innings while opposing hitters split .164/.207/.308.

That's the type of production the Red Sox are undoubtedly hoping to see.

What role Wacha ultimately serves remains to be seen. He is expected to compete with Rich Hill, Tanner Houck and Garrett Whitlock for a spot in the starting rotation, and he said he understands nothing is going to be handed to him. Whether he makes the rotation or emerges as a weapon out of the bullpen, Wacha is a low-risk, high-reward signing who could potentially emerge as a diamond in the rough if he can get back to his St. Louis form.

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Mac's 2022 Red Sox roster projection

By MAC CERULLO • CNHI SPORTS BOSTON

Projected Lineup

1. Kiké Hernández CF
2. Rafael Devers 3B
3. Xander Bogaerts SS
4. J.D. Martinez DH
5. Alex Verdugo LF
6. Trevor Story 2B
7. Bobby Dalbec 1B
8. Jackie Bradley Jr. RF
9. Christian Vazquez C

Projected Bench

Christian Arroyo Util.
Kevin Plawecki C
Travis Shaw 1B
Jonathan Araúz INF

Projected Starting Rotation

Nathan Eovaldi RHP
Nick Pivetta RHP
Tanner Houck RHP
Rich Hill LHP
Michael Wacha RHP



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Sox catcher Christian Vazquez was a big force offensively last year.

Projected Bullpen

Garrett Whitlock RHP
Jake Diekman LHP
Ryan Brasier RHP
Matt Strahm LHP
Hirokazu Sawamura RHP

Hansel Robles RHP
Austin Davis LHP
Kutter Crawford RHP
Darwinzon Hernandez LHP

Projected Injured List

Chris Sale LHP (rib, 15-day)
Josh Taylor LHP (back, 15-day)
James Paxton LHP (elbow, 60-day)

Potential Call-ups

Position Players: Triston Casas 1B, Franchy Cordero OF, Ryan Fitzgerald Util., Jeter Downs INF, Ryan Refsnyder OF, Yolmer Sanchez INF, Connor Wong C

Pitchers: Eduard Bazarzo RHP, Brayan Bello RHP, Michael Feliz RHP, Jay Groome LHP, Derek Holland LHP, Bryan Mata RHP, Kaleb Ort RHP, Connor Seabold RHP, Phillips Valdez RHP, Josh Winckowski RHP

Projections don't reflect roster moves made after March 30.



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Boston Red Sox starting pitcher Nick Pivetta has surpassed a lot of expectations and is penciled in as a key starter in 2022.



ELISE AMENDOLA

Matt Barnes had one of the biggest roller coasters of a year imaginable for the Red Sox in 2021. Will he be the closer he was the first half of last season?



TONY DEJAK

Boston Red Sox's Jarren Duran appears to have improved his game and will make his mark in 2022.

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					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
				10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

MAY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

JULY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	1
2						

*ALL GAME TIMES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

■ HOME □ AWAY



At 25 and 29 years old respectively, Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts carried the Red Sox offense last season.

ELISE AMENDOLA

DEVERS

■ Continued from Page S3

But man, is Devers fun to watch.

Devers plays with a childlike enthusiasm, and manager Alex Cora once joked that every at bat is like a Comedy Central routine. He makes over the top expressions when he disagrees with a call, and even more so when he misses a juicy pitch. He's constantly talking to himself, but when the chips are down, his game speaks for itself.

And again, he's only 25. He's just going to keep getting better and better.

Sure, Devers isn't perfect. He's not a strong defensive player at third base and he might eventually shift to first base or designated hitter. But players with his pure talent don't come along often, and Red Sox fans should appreciate what they have.

Devers is a superstar, and it's high time everybody started treating him that way.

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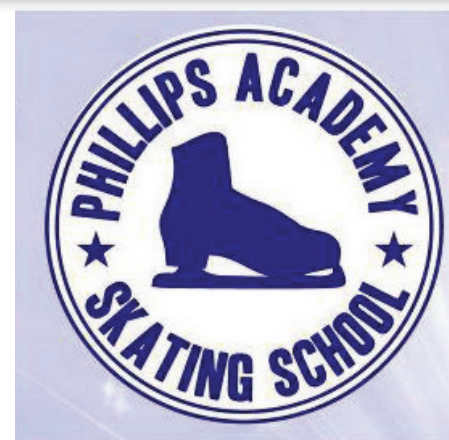
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Blue Jays poised to bring World Series back to Canada

By MAC CERULLO
CNHI Sports Boston

After falling just short of the playoffs in a season marked by injury and pandemic-related disruptions, this looks like it could finally be the year for the Toronto Blue Jays.

Toronto has loaded up and now boasts what might be the most talented roster in the American League. The Blue Jays have added Cy Young contender Kevin Gausman and standout third baseman Matt Chapman, and coming off a breakout season 23-year-old MVP candidate Vladimir Guerrero Jr. could potentially take his game to even greater heights.

Considering how good he's already become, the prospect of Guerrero Jr. taking another step forward is scary to consider.

Guerrero will anchor a lineup that now includes Chapman and returns a healthy George Springer, an improving Bo Bichette and impact bats like Teoscar Hernandez and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. On the pitching side, Toronto's combination of Gausman, Jose Berrios, Hyun Jin Ryu and Yusei Kikuchi is as good a top four as you'll find in any rotation, and the addition of Yimi Garcia should strengthen the bullpen as well.

The Blue Jays won't have an easy road, however, with the rest of the AL East looking strong as ever.

Thanks to the addition of Trevor Story, the Red Sox lineup should be just as potent as a year ago. The starting rotation is considerably deeper, especially once lefty Chris Sale returns from his freak rib injury that's sidelined him throughout the spring, and the defense should be much improved as well.

The Rays, coming off a 100-win season, aren't going anywhere either. Young standouts Wander Franco and Randy Arozarena could



STEVE NESIUS - FOREIGN SUBSCRIBER, THE CANADIAN PRESS

Toronto's Vladimir Guerrero Jr. takes batting practice during a spring training workout. Guerrero will be among the favorites to win AL MVP this year.

be poised for breakthrough campaigns and Tampa Bay's deep farm system should help the Rays' pitching staff remain among the best in baseball.

The New York Yankees were uncharacteristically quiet in free agency, but did re-sign Anthony Rizzo and swapped out catcher Gary Sanchez and infielder Gio Urshela for former MVP third baseman Josh Donaldson, shortstop Isiah Kiner-Falefa and catcher Ben Rortvedt. The Yankees also still have their formidable core of Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton and Joey Gallo, plus AL Cy Young Award favorite Gerrit Cole.

All four will have a great chance to make the playoffs, and as for the Baltimore Orioles, let's just say they're still a couple of years away.

AL West could be in flux

Out on the west coast, the AL West should be in a state of transition. The Oakland Athletics are in fire sale mode and should crash to the division's basement,

while the Texas Rangers made some big splashes by signing Marcus Semien and Corey Seager, though their pitching situation remains a question mark.

The Houston Astros, still the clear favorites in the division, did take a big hit by losing shortstop Carlos Correa in free agency, and good luck figuring out the Seattle Mariners and Los Angeles Angels. The Mariners far exceeded their projections in 2021, while the Angels employ several of the best players on the planet (Shohei Ohtani, Mike Trout, etc.) but haven't been able to translate that talent into a playoff berth in years. The Mariners lost Kyle Seager to retirement but added reigning AL Cy Young winner Robbie Ray, while the Angels now have former Mets great Noah Syndergaard and potentially a healthy Trout.

The AL Central is also interesting, though the Chicago White Sox remain the clear favorites. Behind them

Minnesota has made several big additions with Correa and starter Sonny Gray, and given that last year's team was initially expected to contend before plummeting into last place, a bounce back wouldn't be a surprise. The Detroit Tigers, Kansas City Royals and the newly rebranded Cleveland Guardians also have interesting rosters, suggesting a good amount of competition even if none are likely to sniff the playoffs.

NL is Dodgers' to lose

In the National League, expect the Los Angeles Dodgers to maintain their dominance. With Freddie Freeman on board the Dodgers boast arguably the best lineup baseball has seen in recent memory. The San Francisco Giants, who enjoyed a historic and incredible run to the NL West title last year, most likely won't be able to replicate the feat, and the San Diego Padres will need to prove themselves before we can anoint them realistic challengers.

The NL East, baseball's

Projected 2022 MLB Standings

***Earns first-round bye to divisional series*

**Qualifies for Wild Card round*

AL EAST

- Toronto Blue Jays 98-64**
- Boston Red Sox 93-69*
- Tampa Bay Rays 92-70*
- New York Yankees 90-72*
- Baltimore Orioles 60-102

AL CENTRAL

- Chicago White Sox 92-70*
- Minnesota Twins 86-76
- Cleveland Guardians 80-82
- Detroit Tigers 79-83
- Kansas City Royals 75-87

AL WEST

- Houston Astros 93-69**
- Seattle Mariners 87-75
- Los Angeles Angels 86-76
- Texas Rangers 76-86
- Oakland Athletics 72-90

NL EAST

- Atlanta Braves 92-70*
- New York Mets 90-72*
- Philadelphia Phillies 88-74*
- Miami Marlins 80-82
- Washington Nationals 74-88

NL CENTRAL

- Milwaukee Brewers 93-69**
- St. Louis Cardinals 84-78
- Chicago Cubs 77-85
- Cincinnati Reds 75-87
- Pittsburgh Pirates 65-97

NL WEST

- Los Angeles Dodgers 101-61**
- San Diego Padres* 87-75
- San Francisco Giants 86-76

- Colorado Rockies 72-90
- Arizona Diamondbacks 68-94

MLB Playoffs Predictions

AMERICAN LEAGUE WILD CARD SERIES

- White Sox over Yankees 2-1
- Red Sox over Rays 2-1

DIVISIONAL SERIES

- Blue Jays over Red Sox 3-1
- Astros over White Sox 3-2

CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

- Blue Jays over Astros 4-2

NATIONAL LEAGUE WILD CARD SERIES

- Braves over Padres 2-1
- Mets over Phillies 2-0

DIVISIONAL SERIES

- Dodgers over Mets 3-2
- Braves over Brewers 3-1

CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

- Dodgers over Braves 4-2

★WORLD SERIES★

- Blue Jays over Dodgers 4-3

MLB Award Predictions

MVP: Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Toronto Blue Jays; Juan Soto, Washington Nationals

Cy Young Award: Gerrit Cole, New York Yankees; Walker Buehler, LA Dodgers

Manager of the Year: Rocco Baldelli, Minnesota Twins; Bob Melvin, San Diego Padres

Rookie of the Year: Bobby Witt Jr., Kansas City Royals; Seiya Suzuki, Chicago Cubs

worst division until the Atlanta Braves turned on the jets late last year, should be much stronger. The defending champion Braves are still the team to beat but the top of the New York Mets rotation is scary good, especially if Jacob deGrom can get healthy and rejoin new ace Max Scherzer. The Philadelphia Phillies lineup is no joke either, with newcomers Kyle Schwarber and Nick Castellanos now backing up defending NL MVP Bryce Harper.

As for the NL Central, the Chicago Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals should be able to take advantage of the Cincinnati Reds' teardown and the Pittsburgh Pirates'

ineptitude, but the Milwaukee Brewers are still far and away the class of the division.

Once October begins, a third straight NLCS showdown between the Dodgers and Braves seems like a likely outcome, with the Dodgers avenging their loss to reach their fourth World Series in six years. On the AL side, the AL East contenders should beat each other up until the Blue Jays emerge as last club standing, edging out the Houston Astros in the ALCS to meet the Dodgers in the World Series.

And once there, baseball fans should be in for a treat. My pick, Blue Jays over Dodgers in seven.



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