



(WINSLOW TOWNSON/GETTY IMAGES)

RED SOX

## Donnelly: Red Sox' best win of the season over baseball's best offers more belief than ever in 2023

BY [PATRICK DONNELLY](#)

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**Rafael Devers** doesn't see himself as much of a golfer.

It's a good thing, too, considering Wednesday's crowd at Fenway Park wasn't exactly fit for the quiet splendor of Augusta National beyond the sixth inning. The sellout, announced at 37,475 in the stands, was the largest paid attendance at Fenway since Aug. 20, 2019, against the Phillies.

With the rooters reduced to golf clapping through the pitchers' duel that enveloped the first five innings, **Ozzie Albies'** three-run homer to break the stalemate in the sixth inning took further wind out of the sails in the bleachers, Monster seats and beyond.

But Devers put a quick stop to it when the inning flipped over. His lash at the Rawlings coming in as a low, inside slider from **Spencer Strider** looked like his best attempt to maim his Titleist on a wing and a prayer through a thicket of coastal fescue. Somehow, he caught a flier, sending the poor baseball deep into the right field corner – far enough to make it a bomb in all 30 MLB ballparks – and popping the cork off a sellout crowd that was waiting for something, anything to get excited about.

"I try to always be aggressive," Devers said via an interpreter. "There are some times that I get to hit the ball out of the ballpark with a bad pitch, and today was one of those nights."

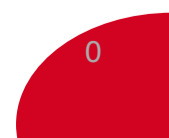
**Alex Cora** said, "We're amazed at the ones he can hit, and sometimes we're in awe like we're surprised with the ones he doesn't hit."

As for Devers' future in major championships?

"No, no. I'm very bad at playing golf," he added. "I think that's just my natural swing, and I'm glad that ball went out."



Not found



Absurd Devers homer off a truly unhittable Strider slider tonight pic.twitter.com/Ux9tbtXgQT

— Red Sox Stats (@redsoxstats) July 27, 2023

With the crowd alive, Boston's dugout followed suit. Two home runs and a rocket two-RBI double later, and the Red Sox took hold of the lead as quickly as they fell behind.

"A hundred percent [Devers' homer changed momentum]," said **Justin Turner**, who drove in the game-tying and winning runs with his rocket off the Monster. "I've said it to you guys plenty of times, you know, offense breathes energy. ... We kept battling, found a way to get [Strider] out of the game, get into the bullpen and take advantage of it."

The Red Sox are in the best position they've been in all season, sitting eight games above .500 after sweeping the MLB's best team and taking the season series, 3-1. At 55-47, Boston is 1.5 games out of a wildcard spot, trailing the Blue Jays, who have lost five of nine and are 0-7 against the Sox this season with a three-game set coming up in a week.

It was the second straight game that Boston took it to Atlanta, albeit in very different styles, following Tuesday's 7-1 trouncing. After such a series and such a comeback on Wednesday, believability in the clubhouse has likely never been higher than it is right now.

"Of course," Devers said when asked if it was one of the best wins of the season. "Coming back against a team that's one of the best in the Bigs gives us some extra confidence. We know that they've been playing very good baseball since the start of the year, and for us to come back and win today is very huge for us."

The confidence has always been there for Turner, and it's been coming to fruition for the better part of a month.

"I think really the way we've been playing all month kind of reinforces that we are a good baseball team," Turner said. "Starting pitching's been outstanding, the bullpen's been great for us. Even the offense finds ways to score, and it's not a one-trick pony. We're not just relying on the homer, we're finding ways to get on base, we're staying in the zone, taking our walks, stealing bases, using the whole field. Going first to third. Doing a lot of things really well."



Not found

Justin Turner has been incredible this year and Strider can't watch pic.twitter.com/tQZ3WxhoQ3

— Red Sox Stats (@redsoxstats) July 27, 2023

While the Braves may have the best record in baseball on the balance of the season, Boston has been baseball's best since June 30 with its 15-5 record. The Sox have been the best team in the American League since June 14, going 22-12 in that span.

"We're playing very good baseball the last few weeks," Devers said. "I know we started a little bit slow and struggled a little bit, but this is a great group and we're getting along really well. We knew it was a matter of time until we would get some wins, and we're starting to do that right now."

Proving themselves against a favorite such as Atlanta is a nice consolation, but there are bigger accomplishments that this Red Sox team hopes lie ahead. Surely, any of the 37,475 would take a thrilling series between the two clubs they saw on Wednesday. Nevertheless, Cora knows the dangers of getting too high during this 2023 season.

"We don't go with that," Cora said of beating the best team in baseball twice in a row. "We lost to Oakland 2-out-of-3 a week ago. So, every team is good at this level. They can beat you. Like I said, we play well against [Atlanta]. They have a great team. ... Hopefully we can play them again. That's the goal here, but we've got work to do and they've got work to do. It's still early in the season."

Still, with a Wild Card spot practically within reach and a division beating up on each other, it's hard for the manager to not get ahead of himself, either.

"Now, if you start looking, it's not only the wildcard you know, I think the division, you know, everybody's coming back to Earth," Cora said. So we know we're going to play a lot of games against the Orioles and the Rays, all that stuff. What looked impossible two months ago or a month ago, we were down what, 15 games? And now it's down to seven or six, whatever it is. So we'll keep shooting up there and see what happens."

Cora's shirt in his postgame press conference read 'Believe in Boston.' Judging by his divisional cartography, it's clear he does. The crowd at Fenway did tonight, too.

If things keep on the way they are for this Red Sox team as they have over the last month, all of Boston might soon believe in Boston. 0