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RED SOX

Donnelly: The Red Sox are proving they're 'underdogs' this season, and that's a shame

BY PATRICK DONNELLY
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The Red Sox are who **Chaim Bloom** thought they were, and it's a shame.

After a run of 15-5 through most of July and 23-12 from June 14 through July 28, Boston had put itself into the thick of the race for the final Wild Card spot in the American League. The city [was ready to believe](#).

Nine days later, and the Sox sure feel like they've taken themselves out of the running.

The deadline came and went with hardly a peep from Boston, which sent out **Kiké Hernández** for what as of right now is a pair of minor-league arms before going bargain-hunting in the acquisition of utility infielder **Luis Urías**. Reports surfaced of trade talks involving **Justin Turner**, **Alex Verdugo**, **James Paxton** and **Adam Duvall** were the subjects of ongoing speculation themselves.

Not exactly the actions of a team that finally had the city's attention for the right reasons in 2023.

As it turned out, unlike the city, the organization was hardly ready to believe in this season's Red Sox, who sat just 2.5 games out of the Wild Card spot at the deadline.

"We really like what we're building, you've seen it," Bloom told reporters after the deadline. "Like I said, it's not something that we're asking people to close their eyes and dream on — you're seeing it more and more each night on the field, the core we're building, what we're building towards.

"Understanding that we're underdogs this year, right now, where we are in the playoff odds, we just tried to stay true to that."

Underdogs. That's what the Red Sox believe themselves to be, and they showed their true colors in this weekend's sweep at the hands of the Blue Jays, a team they sat just 2.0 games behind for the Wild Card on Friday. Since, the Mariners and hated Yankees leapfrogged Boston, who is 5.0 games out. We've seen larger deficits evaporate (the Sox were on the other side of that in 2011, if you recall), but the molehill feels like a mountain.

After Friday's series opener got away from **James Paxton** and the Sox, the worst appeared to come with Saturday's blunders in the field and on the base paths. Instead, it came in Sunday's 13-1 blowout, capping off a series that saw Toronto outscore Boston, 28-5, after the Sox previously dominated the Jays this season. The Sox surrendered at least 14 hits in all three games at Fenway this weekend.

"Tough weekend. Tough," **Alex Cora** told reporters. "They pitched better than us, played better defense than us, run the bases better and hit. ... There's not much we have to say. They outplayed us the whole weekend, and obviously, we've been through stuff like this the whole season. Up and down. ... Show up tomorrow and play good baseball. That's all we can do."

Now with four straight losses and eight in their last nine, Boston currently isn't ready to return to the adult table in the AL East. Meanwhile, the Jays have three straight wins, four in their last five and nine in 14, and are taking control of their own destiny in the playoff push.

With back-to-back bullpen days once again, the arms are taxed, having just three starting pitchers to lean on, still. The internal trade deadline adds are still yet to arrive. **Trevor Story** feels he needs more time, despite making light work of his rehab in Triple-A. The current goal for **Chris Sale**, **Garrett Whitlock** and **Tanner Houck** is to return ahead of the next road trip on Aug. 15, still over a week away.

Bloom's words after sitting on his hands at the deadline are now plastered onto the side of the sinking ship that the 2023 Red Sox have turned into since they opted to neither buy nor sell. The lack of belief has trickled right on down from the front office to the field, painfully evident to those who watched Boston against Seattle and Toronto. Saturday was ["probably one of the worst days" Cora has had](#) as a member of the organization.

Jonathan Papelbon said it best as he repeatedly poked at the front office's deadline inaction during the NESN postgame show on Saturday, "Players just following suit because 'we're underdogs.' Nothing special is really happening."

Essentially standing pat at the deadline was a lose-lose, no matter what, for the Sox, and it continues to look worse by the day. If they had continued to the run they were on before the deadline, it would be easy to say they should have added. Now they're in a free fall, and hindsight appears to show they should have sold to recoup something. Had they bought and still faltered, then at least they would have tried. On the flip side, if they sold and caught fire, it would have been a pleasant surprise.

In the end, all they're left with is more frustration as they continue to stay in neutral, rolling up and down the hill at the mercy of gravity, even if they're where Bloom expected them to be all along.

"We've got to shake it off and move forward and get ready for tomorrow," **Justin Turner** said as winnable games against the Royals, Tigers and Nationals lie ahead.

This is a team that's done a lot of shaking and had a lot of tomorrows already this season. They just might be running out.

