



Extra Innings Mechanical Nugget of the Day

Wednesday, March 4th

After becoming one of the elite offensive catchers in the majors with the Padres in 2006-07, Bard endured a brutal year. While battling injuries (strained right triceps, high ankle sprain), he hit just .202 with a .279 OBP and .549 OPS. Sox hitting coach Dave Magadan's explanation for his struggles will serve as our **Extra Innings Mechanical Nugget of the Day**:

"You could tell he was fighting some injuries. He was a little heavier than he was in the past. He was in and out of the lineup, then he started trying to do too much," said Magadan. "We talked about that we felt like he was pulling off the ball real bad, that he wasn't staying centered. All those are going to be contributing factors. You add up the injuries, the lack of playing time, some bad habits mechanically at the plate, and then you're going to end up having the year that he had."

Tuesday, March 3rd

Jon Lester has steered clear of throwing cutters in games this spring. His reason serves as the **Extra Innings Mechanical Nugget of the Day**: "I throw (the cutter) in the bullpen. It's just that, in the game, they want me to stay away from it to work on other things. They know that pitch is there. It's a very confident pitch for me. It's not something that I have to continually work on to get the feel for and get the confidence for. I know it's going to be there," said Lester.

"It's not a hard pitch to throw. It's just coming right off my fastball. I'm actually glad we try to stay away from it. It definitely helps my other pitches because I stay away from it, I don't fall in love with it. It's not going out there (throwing) cutter, cutter, cutter and then I don't get any work done. I think it definitely helps with my arm, keeping it stretched out. I cut myself off a lot when I throw that pitch. I think it's a positive thing that we do stay away from it, especially early in camp."

Monday, March 2nd

Daniel Bard, a righthanded closer-in-the-making, provided more proof that he is developing into another solid prospect in a fruitful Sox farm system. He pitched a perfect fifth, striking out one and provided the **Extra Innings Mechanical Nugget of the Day**.

"He's been working on trying to get his hands pre-set a little higher so there's not that having to catching up with his delivery where's he leaving those balls up," Red Sox manager Terry Francona said. "And he's driving the ball down. When he does it right, it's pretty. There's not a lot of effort and a lot coming out of the arm."

A star at the University of North Carolina, Bard was Boston's second first-round pick, 28th overall, in the 2006 Draft.

“I bet you if you look up, there’s probably a 96 (MPH fastball),” Francona said of Bard lively fastball on Monday

Friday, February 27th

In our **Extra Innings Mechanical Nugget of the Day**, it’s worth noting that there was actually some good news coming from Michael Bowden’s outing. He showed very good command of his changeup and breaking ball, both of which gave him some trouble last season.

“I think that just the fact that he had really good command of his breaking ball and his changeup, which last year his breaking ball was kind of an iffy pitch for him,” said Dusty Brown, who caught Bowden on Friday. “To see him command that this early is a good sign. His fastball command will come, he knows it will come. He’ll figure it out, he’ll get it.”

Brown added, “He wasn’t missing by much. He wasn’t all over the place. He was just a little too fine early in the count, falling behind some guys with close pitches. Inches either way could have made a huge difference in the game.”

Thursday, February 26th

Junichi Tazawa, the Japanese amateur who signed with the Red Sox this offseason, has a deliver that is unfamiliar to most American ballplayers. The delivery features a sort of hitch when his hands are apart, and he curls the ball behind his back (in a fashion vaguely reminiscent of former Cy Young winner Rick Sutcliffe, but not as smooth) to hide it from hitters.

The Sox have not been inclined to tinker with the delivery for a couple of reasons. First, they wouldn’t consider doing something so drastic in the getting-to-know-you phase of their relationship with the 23 year-old. Secondly, Tazawa, like many of his countrymen with unusual delivery flourishes, does a great job of repeating his mechanics and getting his arm in proper position for his delivery.

“We don’t do anything with anybody the first week, whether it’s a young player coming from minor league camp,” explained Red Sox manager Terry Francona. “If you look at the Japanese pitchers, they seem to have some uniqueness to their deliveries. But the guys that are good, they all get to the same spot. Daisuke may give you an extra (winding motion), but when he’s right, he’s at the same spot all the time. They all get to where they’re supposed to.”

Wednesday, February 25th

With all the talk surrounding Josh Bard catching Tim Wakefield it seemed like the perfect time to bring you today’s Extra Innings Mechanical Tip of the Day: How to catch a knuckleball.

Serving as your teacher, catcher George Kottaras...

“The big thing is to just trust in yourself and not get all amped about going and getting the ball. Just letting the ball come to you and catching the ball deeper into your body rather than going out and getting it.

With the stance, we’re more turned to the side, with our chest pointing toward the second baseman and our left knee tucked in a little bit just to free up our left hand. When you’re squared you’re a little more tied-up so when your knee is bent it allows for a little more range of motion.

You just keep your thumb up to the sky because Wake's throwing to our facemask and he's got his focal point already so he's not looking at a target. So, just keep your thumb up so you can roll over. You kind of give with the glove anyway, but you want to start (on the side) with the knuckleball."

Tuesday, February 24th

Red Sox outfielder Josh Reddick (ranked the No. 2 position prospect in the organization) tried to incorporate a larger front leg lift as a timing mechanism meant to improve his plate discipline after his promotion to Double-A Portland last year. But after hitting .340 with a .397 OBP at low-A Greenville and .343 with a .375 OBP at high-A Lancaster last year, he hit .214 with a .290 OBP for the Sea Dogs.

"It did help me walk more, but my batting average suffered severely because my timing was way off. It wasn't just a small leg kick. It was a bring-it-up leg kick," said Reddick. "I'm used to just a little knee roll and going at it. That was a tough adjustment for me because, in my mind, I was trying to do too much at one time."

Reddick, 22, spent the offseason working to return his swing to its more natural mechanics in hopes of reclaiming the success that he had in the lower minors.

Monday, February 23rd

The command lapse aside, there was another intriguing element to Jon Lester's B.P. session that will serve as today's **Extra Innings Mechanical Nugget of the Day**. Lester tossed a couple of swing-and-miss changeups on Sunday. Last year, the pitch was a rarely used fourth offering (after the fastball, cutter and curve) that Lester used for the sake of ground balls. With the caveat that it is very early in the spring, and batters have yet to lock in their timing, it was worth noting that on a couple of occasions Lester sold the arm action of the changeup well enough, and achieved sufficient fade with the pitch, that he elicited swings and misses from right-handed batters.

Sunday, February 22nd

Clay Buchholz is in a good place after throwing to major league hitters for the first time since last August. "Mentally, as far as this being the first time I pitched in a big league atmosphere," he said. "It certainly is a better feeling than the last time I pitched in a big league atmosphere, last year. That 2 1/3 innings (Aug. 20 in Baltimore), I had a little adrenaline going. Overall I felt smooth."

Every day we're going to give you a key Extra Innings mechanical adjustment by one of the Red Sox. Today that comes from Buchholz. After being sent to Pawtucket to alter his arm slot — bringing it down to more of a three-quarters delivery — Buchholz is now coming from his usual over-the-top spot.

"We changed it last year because me and a couple of others started panicking a little bit," he said. "The organization wanted to give me as good a chance to get to the big leagues as possible. It feels more normal, I guess."

It evidently has paid off according to one of the hitters who faced Buchholz in BP.

"Buchholz looked pretty good today," said outfielder Brad Wilkerson. "He was consistent, hitting the strike zone. I don't like "Iron Mike" guys like that who come over the top. He was pretty tough."