

# Blue Jays lose slugfest in series finale with Red Sox

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By Israel Fehr

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TORONTO – Mock cheers on Friday in a blowout loss and a raucous atmosphere on Saturday during a tight win. What stood out from the close to four hours and combined 18 pitchers used it took for the Toronto Blue Jays to lose 11-8 to the Boston Red Sox on Sunday was the silence that hung over long portions of the game.

Down 4-1 in the second inning with Aaron Sanchez on the mound the Rogers Centre was eerily silent. A lone heckler's cries were the only thing saving the stadium from going completely quiet.

Troy Tulowitzki's grand slam in the third momentarily brought the crowd to its feet but the good vibes were temporary.

Sanchez was lifted in the fourth inning after allowing six runs and he struggled with his command, walking a season-high four batters. The sharpness the Blue Jays have come to expect from Sanchez was perhaps the result of a blister on the middle finger of his pitching hand, but the 24-year-old right-hander did not want to make any excuses.

"At the end of the day, you've got a job to do," said Sanchez. "For me it was to give my team a chance to win the game. I just have to go a little deeper than 3 2/3 (innings). We'll see how it goes.

"I've had these (blisters) come and go throughout the year. It's been something that I've dealt with since I left spring training. I feel like I've got a good grip on it, but it was just one of those days. It is what it is, I'm not worried."

By the time the game ended, it felt like Sanchez had pitched days, not hours, earlier. David Ortiz crushed a three-run home run in the sixth off Joaquin Benoit to cancel out Edwin Encarnacion's two home runs and give the Red Sox a lead they wouldn't relinquish. As Ortiz trotted around the bases and polite applause surprisingly rang out from the stands for the soon-to-be retiring slugger, who was likely playing his last game in Toronto.

But the silence returned swiftly and stayed until the final out. It wasn't a nervous kind of quiet, either, the one that generates a recognizable buzzing sound. No, this was a sullen silence that conjured a feeling somewhere between indifference and confusion.



Even when a Russell Martin double that would have given Toronto runners at second and third with one out in the ninth was first changed to a foul ball on the field and confirmed by video review the reaction wasn't overly emotional.

When the game ended the fans quickly headed for the exits and the noise in the empty stadium wasn't all that different than what was heard in the few hours prior when it was packed to the brim.

"It was one of those games that was back and forth, it was really a slugfest. We battled back, took the lead a couple times, and then gave it right back. That's what's tough," said manager John Gibbons.

The Red Sox's lead over the Blue Jays is back to two games in the division after taking two out of three in the weekend series and Toronto is tied with Baltimore in the wild-card standings.

Now comes a 10-game stretch against the Rays, Angels, and Mariners – non-playoff teams – that will determine how important the final two weeks of the season really will be.

The starting pitching has hit a rough patch – J.A. Happ's solid start Saturday excluded. Josh Donaldson is in a 0-for-23 skid and Jose Bautista has returned from injury but his power still isn't back.

With 20 games left in the season the Blue Jays need to turn it around quickly, otherwise silence may fall over the Rogers Centre earlier than expected. Sunday's loss provided a preview of what that might sound like.

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