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RED SOX SLUGGERS OUTSHINING YANKS' PAIR

The American League East is loaded with sluggers and the two-headed monster getting the most attention — they operate out of New York, after all — is the Yankees' slugging duo of Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton.

But a far scarier, far more powerful two-headed monster is operating this season out of Fenway Park in Boston. Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez may not garner the Judge-Stanton headlines but they are the most potent pair of sluggers of 2018.

It's easy for Martinez, who played with Arizona and Detroit last year, to get lost in the shuffle. A quick check of the internet shows that 46 players with the surname Martinez have played Major League Baseball. (You've heard of Buck, the former Blue Jay who's now a team broadcaster; you've probably heard of Pedro, the former Expos' star pitcher; and you might know of Dave, who's the current manager of the Nationals).

But J.D. is currently at the mountaintop of Martinezes, and is having an MVP-calibre season, a potential Triple Crown season, and an offensive season that could carry the Red Sox to championship glory this year.

With 25 homers in Boston's first 84 games, he's on pace for a 48-homer season, far ahead of his career average of 34 per year. That homer total would put him in elite Red Sox slugging company, alongside Ted Williams, Yaz, Jimmy Foxx and David Ortiz. But Betts's numbers may be even better. The Red Sox leadoff hitter leads the league in slugging percentage (Martinez is second) and is runner-up to Jose Altuve of Houston in the batting-average category. Betts is fifth in homers (Martinez is No. 1). Betts and Martinez are No. 1 and No. 3 in OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging), the most tell-tale stat for hitting proficiency.

While New York fans think their Judge-Stanton one-two punch might be baseball's best, Red Sox fans know differently when they see Betts and Martinez in action daily.

Team-wise, the Red Sox trail the Yankees in home runs, but lead the American League in almost every other offensive category. Boston and New York are neck-and-neck in the A.L. East standings, with the division's other three teams needing high-powered binoculars to see the two front-runners.

It's going to be baseball nirvana on the final weekend of the season when the Yankees visit Fenway Park Sept. 30-Oct. 2. Pennants, home-run titles and Triple Crowns could all be on the line.

- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: "A hot dog shot out of a cannon by the Phillie Phanatic injured a fan. Which was still less harmful than if they had actually caught and eaten it."
- Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** on Twitter, after watching a College World Series game in Omaha: "Starting a Go Fund Me to buy CWS umpires a copy of the rule book."
- **Dickson** again: "Those shirtless Arkansas fans with H O G S written across their bare chests still met the dress code at Applebee's after the game."
- TBS's **Conan O'Brien** after President **Donald Trump** tweeted that he is considering a pardon request made by **Sylvester Stallone**: "The pardon is for the guy who wrote Rocky V'."
- **Brad Rock** in the Deseret News: "ESPN and Netflix plan to air a 10-part documentary on **Michael Jordan**. Because what the world seriously needs is more stories on **Michael Jordan**."
- Barach again: "The father of pro golfer **Maverick McNealy** is selling his home in Palo Alto for \$100 million. His son is the golfer who shows up with the golf cart driven by a chauffeur."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "Canadian **Shai Gilgeous-Alexander**, chosen 11th in the NBA draft, says he gets basketball tips from **Steve Nash**. And judging by his suits, fashion tips from **Don Cherry**."
- **Currie** again: "The Milwaukee Brewers have promised their famous racing sausages will compete 'beyond 2018' with new sponsor Johnsonville. It reassured fans who had feared for the wursts."
- Another one from **Currie**: "Brewers pitcher **Adrian Houser** made it through an inning of relief against the Phillies despite vomiting — twice. If ever a guy deserved to be called a hurler."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "The host country's team, Russia, is playing extremely well in the World Cup. Here is an interesting World Cup fact: it turns out soccer players do not like the idea of getting poisoned to death."
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Golfer **Bryson DeChambeau** used a compass in a tournament, prompting a PGA Tour investigation. Veteran Tour watchers were stunned — to learn that a man actually thought about checking for directions."
- **Brad Rock** again: "Egyptian goalkeeper **Essam El-Hadary**, 45, is the oldest player in World Cup history. How old is he? He remembers when people thought U.S. men's soccer would rule."

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