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## The progression of Xander Bogaerts

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The 2015 season has been nothing short of a disaster for the **Boston Red Sox** (<http://www.outsidepitchmlb.com/category/al-east/boston-red-sox>). Picked by many (<http://grantland.com/the-triangle/mlb-2015-al-east-preview-red-sox-blue-jays-orioles-rays-yankees/>) to be division champs before the season started, the team has fallen flat in just about every aspect possible. Some of it was predictable ([http://espn.go.com/mlb/stats/team/\\_stat/pitching](http://espn.go.com/mlb/stats/team/_stat/pitching)), some of it wasn't. (<http://www.sportingcharts.com/mlb/stats/team-run-differential/2015/>)

An offense that, on paper, was supposed to be the best in the business hasn't come close to living up to the hype. **Hanley Ramirez** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/r/ramirha01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/r/ramirha01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) crushed the ball for the first month of the season but hasn't been the same since colliding with the wall in a game against the Rays on May 4th. **Pablo Sandoval** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/s/sandopa01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/s/sandopa01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com))'s lack of power overshadows league average on-base percentage and on-base plus slugging percentage plus numbers, but nothing has overshadowed his defensive liabilities at third.

**Mike Napoli** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/n/napolmi01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/n/napolmi01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) and **David Ortiz** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/o/ortizda01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/o/ortizda01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) have both been accused of finally losing the battle to Father Time, though this wouldn't be the first time either have heard those whispers during a slump.

If there is a silver lining – and if anything it's more gray than silver – it's the emergence of **Xander Bogaerts** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/bogaexa01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/bogaexa01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) this year. A player that needs no background introduction, Bogaerts was cast into the spotlight during the 2013 World Series run, drawing one of the most important – albeit questionable – walks (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mri0GJKjW3E>) against **Max Scherzer** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/s/scherma01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/s/scherma01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) in the American League Championship Series.

Since then, the young shortstop from Aruba has been a mainstay in the lineup, primarily at short (I assume most Red Sox fans want to pretend the great **Stephen Drew** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/d/drewst01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/d/drewst01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) debacle of 2014 never happened). He started his first full season strong, including a scorching-hot May when he hit .327/.407/.490, although his unsustainable .421 batting average on balls in play was probably a good indicator of things to come.

Then, as is well documented, came The Slump. Summer '14 didn't treat Bogaerts particularly well. From June-August, Bogaerts hit .162/.252/.460. He looked lost at the plate, especially susceptible to off speed pitches low and away. After drawing twelve walks in May of 2014, Bogaerts only drew twelve in the next three months combined. He showed signs of life toward the end of season, hitting .313/.317/.490 the final month of the season.

Still, the underwhelming first season coupled with the emergence of **Mookie Betts** ([http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/bettsmo01.shtml?utm\\_campaign=Linker&utm\\_source=direct&utm\\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com](http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/bettsmo01.shtml?utm_campaign=Linker&utm_source=direct&utm_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com)) had many in New England wondering if Bogaerts was old news.

This year, the 22-year-old has begun to give them an answer. Bogaerts has been consistent at the plate so far, hitting in the mid .270's the first two months of the season before coming on strong in June. Through the first two weeks of the month, Bogaerts has hit .333/.357/.453 with a .820 OPS. The breakout actually started earlier than June 1st; he's hit .330 over the last 28 days.

Because it's baseball, there's a caveat. Over at Fangraphs, Owen Watson goes into detail (<http://www.fangraphs.com/blogs/xander-bogaerts-and-the-uneven-road-to-success/>) about the adjustments that Bogaerts has had to make in order to raise his average. Those interested in the nitty, gritty details that Watson's article offers should definitely take a look – it's a fascinating read packed full of charts that really help visualize the year Bogaerts is having.

But because you're still here (hopefully), here's the gist of it all: Bogaerts, like is common among many hitters, has sacrificed some power for average. It's not a thrilling or particularly new concept, but for a shortstop whose most shiny tool in the toolbox was power, it's an interesting development. After struggling to make contact with pitches low in the zone last year, one would think that he'd avoid the bottom half like the plague.

That's not the case, however. Per FanGraphs, Bogaerts is swinging at pitches low and out of the zone almost 50 percent of the time. He's making contact more often – you can see all the numbers in Watson's article – and driving them to the opposite field with more consistency.

In that light, it's easy to understand why the power hasn't been there for him yet. Because he's been around for the better half of three years now, it's easy to lose track of the fact that he's only 22 years old. Hitters tend to peak between the ages of 25-27, so there's still more than enough time for the power to come around. With not much else going right for them this year – looking at you, Wade Miley (<http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/m/mileywa01.shtml>)

utm\_campaign=Linker&utm\_source=direct&utm\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com) and Justin Masterson (<http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/m/masteju01.shtml>)

utm\_campaign=Linker&utm\_source=direct&utm\_medium=linker-www.outsidepitchmlb.com) – Red Sox fans can take some comfort in watching their young shortstop mature before their very eyes.

*Cam Ellis is a reporter for the Goldsboro News-Argus and contributes to MLB Outside Pitch. You can find him on twitter here. (<https://twitter.com/KingsleyEllis>)*

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