

## Grading Theo Epstein

by Hollie Mendillo

It has often been said, not just by me, that the Red Sox broke the Curse and won two World Championships in spite of Theo Epstein. I gave the credit to the leaders on the field, players like Kevin Millar, David Ortiz and Dustin Pedroia, not to mention, our skipper, Terry Francona. When both he and Epstein left the Red Sox post collapse, I shed tears for Tito not for Theo.

Let's get one thing straight, I'm not suggesting that Terry Francona was blameless, but I trusted him. I never trusted Epstein. I doubted his ability to recognize a player's true value. I imagined his working relationship with Terry to be tenuous, at best, and I believed it was this strain and perceived discord that was to blame for everything that happened last season, from the horrendous start to the historic downfall.

Thus, you can imagine my shock when Francona sang Theo Epstein's praises last weekend on Sunday Night Baseball. Of course, I expected Terry to be fair when asked about his former boss, but then he went out of his way to be complimentary. This I did not expect, and it got me thinking—have I misjudged Theo Epstein?

On Sunday night, it was the young guys who led the Red Sox to victory. Three bright and budding stars, call-ups from Pawtucket, who were either drafted or signed by Theo Epstein. All right, I conceded, I'll give him credit for Middlebrooks, Nava and Kalish. On the other hand, he signed Crawford, Lackey and Dice-K. Still, he got us Big Papi. Interesting, I thought, how does it all add up?

I needed a more empirical approach, so I created a report card, of sorts, grading Theo Epstein on his most significant acquisitions and trades. Let's see how he did.

<b>Student Name:</b>	Theo Epstein		
<b>Level:</b>	General Manager of the Boston Red Sox		
<b>Term Ending:</b>	October 2011		
<b>Evaluator:</b>	Hollie Mendillo, Fan		
SUBJECT	AKA	GRADE	COMMENTS
Calculus	Carl Crawford	C-	Difficulty meeting expectations Math doesn't quite add up
Chemistry	Adrian Gonzalez	B	Talent is evident Struggles in clutch situations Good fit for AL is questionable
English Literature	2004 World Series Team (esp., Schilling, Millar, Mueller, and Roberts)	A	Could not have scripted a better story Listed players were especially impactful
Health	John Lackey	D	In danger of failing Needs to show improvement next season
History	Nomar Garciaparra and Manny Ramirez	A	Able to make difficult decisions Did what was best for the team
Physical Education	Farm System	A+	Good eye when it comes to young talent Strong foundations lead to strong franchises
Physics	David Ortiz	A	It's not rocket science This was his best effort
Business	Daisuke Matsuzaka	INC*	More work needs to be turned in before final grade can be determined
<b>Grade Point Average</b>		<b>3.14</b>	*Does not factor into GPA

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It's no surprise that Carl Crawford and John Lackey did not get him the best marks, where his work to sign David Ortiz and Curt Schilling earned him A's.

The tipping point is the farm system. The headlining trades and the multi-million dollar contracts get all the attention, but they can also distract from what really builds a good team and that is homegrown talent.

What struck me the most about what Francona said during the broadcast was that Theo Epstein was the one who told him to believe in Dustin Pedroia. Theo saw talent in him. He knew before most people the kind of player Dustin would become and that deserves recognition. Therefore, he gets an "A+" for drafting and developing quality players, like the guys who shined on Sunday. Not to mention Jacoby Ellsbury and Jonathan Papelbon. The "plus" is for believing in unlikely heroes like Dustin Pedroia (although pluses and minuses don't technically factor into the calculation).

Add it all up and Mr. Epstein's grade point average is a 3.14—a "B" average not excellent but more than satisfactory. Add in breaking the curse and the two World Championships and that number goes up astronomically. Of course, the gorilla-suit-get-away does drop the average back down to Earth.

Based on these highly scientific calculations, I have concluded that I should be a little nicer to Theo Epstein. As a matter of fact, all I really needed to hear was that he believed in Dustin Pedroia.

I think I've done some healing here. After everything that happened last year and the poor start this year, I have seen the light at the end of the tunnel. Fear not fans, whatever happens this season the Red Sox have a solid system in place. The future is bright, thanks in large part to Theo Epstein.