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Sox like steady diet of Aceves

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With each impressive outing, it becomes a more relevant hypothetical question: Where might Red Sox reliever Alfredo Aceves be if not for a bicycle accident last November that left him with a broken collarbone?

'I don't know,' Aceves said.

For starters, there's at least some chance he still would be pitching for the Yankees. Although they already had concerns about Aceves' recovery from a back injury that hampered him for most of last season, the accident clinched the Yanks' decision to non-tender him, making him a free agent and allowing the Red Sox to scoop him up and sign him in February to a split contract worth about \$650,000 if he pitched in the majors, \$200,000 if he pitched in the minors.

But while there isn't any way of knowing which side of the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry Aceves would be on, the right-hander is sure of one thing: Accident or not, he wouldn't be having so much success without the help of Red Sox nutrition consultant Tara Mardigan.

'This year, I learned how to eat,' said Aceves, 9-1 with a 2.82 ERA in 42 games as the Yankees arrive for a three-game series that opens tonight at Fenway Park. 'I didn't even know what was behind the food. I didn't know the carbohydrates or the proteins. She said, 'When you're not going to work out and use your body, you don't need carbohydrates.' Sometimes, we eat carbohydrates like crazy and we don't even need it.'

Per team policy, Mardigan wasn't available to comment on her work with individual players. But Aceves claims he's about 20 pounds lighter than he was for most of the past three years in the Yankees organization. Regardless, he's getting results.

Manager Terry Francona has used Aceves in several roles, from spot starter and long reliever to set-up man. He has done his best work out of the bullpen, going 8-0 with a 2.15 ERA and allowing only 46 hits and 19 walks in 67 innings.

And so, the Red Sox put up with Aceves' eccentricities. He often changes his delivery without notice, and earlier in the season, his improvisation led to a pair of balk calls.

'Sometimes you've got to kind of bring him back to where we're at,' catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia said. 'But he's got great stuff. The guy's passionate about the game. He wants to do so well. He's been a huge, huge help to this team.'

Ultimately, Aceves prefers to be a starter, and he may get that opportunity next spring. With neither Erik Bedard nor Tim Wakefield signed for next season, and with Daisuke Matsuzaka slated to miss at least half the season while recovering from Tommy John elbow surgery, it may be left to Aceves and lefties Andrew Miller and Felix Doubront to compete for a spot in the rotation.

For now, though, a leaner, meaner Aceves is content with his jack-of-all-trades role.

'My velocity is high - 94, 95, 93, 95, 94. When I was with the Yankees, it was 92, but I was chunky,' he said. 'I was 20 or 30 pounds more. The other day, I was watching the video, and I was more slow. This is forming something for the future.'

Red Sox notes

Adrian Gonzalez was named AL Player of the Week. The first baseman went 11-for-28 (.393) with a double, five homers, nine RBI and eight runs scored in seven games against Texas and Oakland. . . .

Third baseman Kevin Youkilis (back) and right fielder J.D. Drew (shoulder) are scheduled to begin rehab assignments tonight for Triple-A Pawtucket in Rochester, N.Y.