

As Chris Martin heads to the IL with anxiety, Red Sox, MLB address mental health directly

By JEN McCAFFREY
The Athletic

Boston » In May, MLB promoted Mental Health Awareness Month featuring a video on social media of top players across the game repeating the phrase, "It's OK to ask for help."

On Wednesday, Boston Red Sox veteran reliever Chris Martin did just that.

The Red Sox placed the 38-year-old, who owned the lowest ERA of any pitcher in the majors with at least 50 innings last season, on the injured list with anxiety. They recalled reliever Zack Kelly to fill his spot hours before a 9-0 win over the Atlanta Braves.

While the Red Sox have struggled with physical injuries all season, ones that can easily be recognized and diagnosed, mental hurdles can be just as debilitating, if not more so.

But since Martin entered professional baseball in 2005 as a 21st-round pick of the Colorado Rockies, resources for players have broadened and the stigma around mental struggles — while not completely gone — has been greatly reduced.

"I think we should applaud Chris' willingness to speak up and confront this challenge head on," said chief baseball officer Craig Breslow, who pitched in the majors for 12 seasons. "As an organization, we fully support that and have a bunch of resources here, including a behavioral health program that's intended to help players and staff address situations like this. And then I think across the league, baseball and a number of teams and sports generally, have done a pretty good job of de-stigmatizing these types of situations over the last few years."

Mental health issues in baseball are not new. Former Mets prospect Bill Pulsipher has spoken openly about his struggles in the late '90s. Eventual Cy Young Award winner Zack Greinke nearly quit baseball in 2006 after being diagnosed with depression and social anxiety disorder. Dontrelle Willis



Boston Red Sox relief pitcher Chris Martin throws during the ninth inning of a game against the Texas Rangers on Sept. 18, 2023, in Arlington, Texas. The Red Sox placed Martin on the injured list with anxiety on Wednesday.

and Khalil Greene were sidelined with social anxiety disorder in 2009, the same year Joey Votto landed on the disabled list with a stress-related issue.

But also in 2009, the New York Times ran a story quoting a psychiatrist "suspicious" of the social anxiety disorder diagnoses for players.

For years, baseball has been actively working to diminish the stigma around mental health, allowing players like Martin to be honest and open about what's at the root of their struggles. A league official noted on Wednesday that there has been an uptick in recent years of players being put on the IL to address mental health concerns, which suggests less need and desire to hide such problems behind physical ailments.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora, who played from 1998-2011, lauded Martin for stepping forward, noting that he quietly battled his own demons as a player, trying to

succeed at the highest levels and punishing himself for failures. It bled into his family life.

"I feel like at that time, at that moment, the family suffered, it suffered a lot," Cora said. "As you guys know, (my daughter) Camila is the daughter of divorced parents. Probably early in my career, I didn't help my family to be as strong as it should be because there were a lot of demons, a lot of stuff going on in between the lines and in the clubhouse and out of baseball."

Breslow said Martin's symptoms manifested in ways that were affecting him physically, keeping him from competing at a high level. The Red Sox tried to place Martin on the IL on Tuesday, but the transaction occurred too late to be processed in time for the game.

Each time a player is headed to the IL for mental health reasons, the placement is approved by an MLB psychiatric consultant. MLB

offices review the submitted documentation and discuss the club's request for an IL placement with the qualified mental health professional(s) who evaluated the player.

"Teams now are exhausting resources on building out mental health and behavioral health programs that are maybe a little bit different than the traditional mental skills, sports psychology domains that they had spent time with in the past," Breslow said. "I think recognizing that mental health is a really, really important piece of not just athlete well-being but people well-being here is critical."

As society has become more vocal about the importance of mental health, it's slowly become an accepted topic to address in professional sports rather than one of which to be ashamed or embarrassed.

Awareness and acceptance have not only helped young players but also veterans.

Reliever Daniel Bard's story is well known. And despite a comeback in 2020 after several years away from the game, he began the 2023 season on the IL with anxiety.

Nine days after Bard's announcement last year, the Tigers' Austin Meadows was put on the IL with anxiety.

The following week, Oakland's reliever Trevor May also went on the injured list with anxiety, noting that Bard and Meadows speaking up allowed him to address his own mental health.

Red Sox closer Kenley Jansen has been very outspoken about seeking therapy after a difficult 2020 season.

"If I hadn't gotten help, I probably wouldn't — I think I would have gone downhill faster," said Jansen last year shortly before recording his 400th career save.

Jaren Duran credited Jansen, a 15-year big-league veteran and one of the top closers in the game, for giving him the courage to speak out about his own mental health battles.

On Wednesday, Breslow, whose career spanned from 2005-17, said he's seen the rise in resources from both the player side and now from the executive side as someone trying to ensure his team feels supported.

"It's hard to know whether the stigma was driven by just kind of the clubhouse culture or the lack of resources that existed but they probably go hand in hand, right?" Breslow said. "The fact that now we have a name and a face to the program, I think means that we support any player who's going to use it."

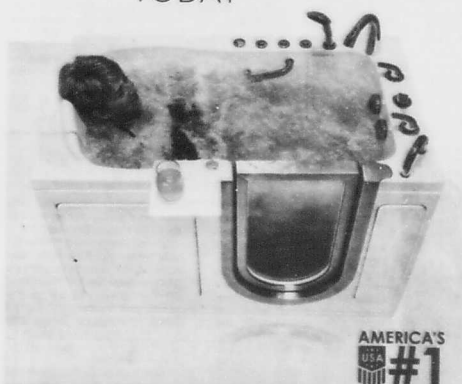
There's no timetable for Martin's return, with Breslow suggesting Martin doesn't currently feel it will be a long-term stint. Breslow acknowledged, however, there's no easy timeline for these types of IL stints.

"I don't think it would be fair for me to predict exactly how it will play out, outside of saying he's comfortable speaking about this, he brought this up to us," Breslow said. "He feels like even in a short amount of time, he's made significant progress."

+28 MODELS & OPTIONS TO CHOOSE

1,000,000+ UNITS SOLD

SAVE THOUSANDS TODAY



AMERICA'S #1 PREFERRED Walk In Tub

The Most Affordable Luxury Acrylic Walk In Tubs in the Industry

YOUR PERSONAL AGENT

855-271-1889

elliasbubbles.com/deals

"To you, it's the perfect lift chair. To me, it's the best sleep chair I've ever had."

— J. Fitzgerald, VA



Pictured is Luxurious & Lasting Miralux™. Ask about our 5 Comfort Zone Chair.

You can't always lie down in bed and sleep. Heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or back aches — and dozens of other ailments — worries. Those are the nights you'd give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in: one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises your feet and legs just where you want them, supports your head and shoulders properly, and operates at the touch of a button.

Our Perfect Sleep Chair™ does all that and more. More than a chair or recliner, it's designed to provide total comfort. Choose your preferred heat and massage settings, for hours of soothing relaxation. Reading or watching TV? Our chair's recline technology allows you to pause the chair in an infinite number of settings. And best of all, it features a powerful lift mechanism that tilts the entire chair forward, making it easy to stand. You'll love the other benefits, too. It helps with correct spinal alignment

and promotes back pressure relief, to prevent back and muscle pain. The overstuffed, oversized biscuit style back and unique seat design like a cradle you in comfort. Generously filled, wide armrests provide enhanced arm support when sitting or reclining. It even has a battery backup in case of a power outage.

White glove delivery included in shipping charge. Professionals will deliver the chair to the exact spot in your home where you want it, unpack it, inspect it, test it, position it, and even carry the packaging away! You get your choice of Luxurious and Lasting Miralux, Genuine Italian Leather, stain and liquid repellent Duralex with the classic leather look, or plush MicroLux microfiber, all handcrafted in a variety of colors to fit any decor. Call now!

journey perfect sleep chair

855-212-9415

Please mention code 601616.

REMOTE-CONTROLLED EASILY FROM PLAY TO A STAND-ASSIST POSITION

Now available in a variety of colors, fabrics and sizes.

Genuine Italian Leather classic beauty & style

Long Lasting Duralex™ stain & liquid repellent

MicroLux™ Microfiber breathable & antimicrobial

mobility | sleep | comfort | safety

enjoying life never gets old™

journey

Because each Perfect Sleep Chair is a made-to-order bedding product it cannot be returned, but if it arrives damaged or defective, at our option we will repair it or replace it. © 2022 Journey Health and Lifestyle.