

NATIONALS

Victor Robles has been driving everyone crazy for years. Enough is enough.

After years of blunders and gaffes, it's time for the Nationals to plant Victor Robles on the bench.



Perspective by [Barry Svrluga](#)
Columnist | + Follow

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Victor Robles is caught in a rundown during the Nationals' loss to the Red Sox on Saturday. (Michael Dwyer/AP)

Victor Robles turns 27 on Sunday. Why does he still play like he's 7?

This should be it for Robles as a starting outfielder for the Washington Nationals. He's maddening. The leash became short a long time ago. After a Sunday in Boston in which Robles was the biggest reason the Nats lost a game — and we'll get to the hows and the whys shortly — he can't be penciled into Manager Dave Martinez's lineup anymore. He's out of chances, and there are other options.

How can you trust this guy? The latest fiasco — sorry, *fiascos* — came in the Nats' 3-2 loss to the Red Sox that cost Washington both a series win at Fenway Park and the chance to climb back above .500. Robles dropped a routine flyball that has to be caught, a key play in Boston's three-run second inning.

A frame later, he must have been running the bases with his eyes closed. That's the only way he could have tried to go from first to third on CJ Abrams's single to right, given that teammate Riley Adams was standing *directly on the bag!* (Relevant fact: Riley Adams stands 6-foot-4 and weighs 263 pounds. He's hard to miss.)

"I don't want to see that kind of stuff," Manager Dave Martinez told reporters.

Oh, wait. Martinez didn't say that Sunday. He said it in 2022, when Robles wore a clown nose in the dugout in Arizona, an attempt to mock Diamondbacks lefty Madison Bumgarner, who a day before had called Robles a "clown" for admiring a home run in a blowout Nats loss.

"He's got to be smarter than that," Martinez said.

Oh, wait. That wasn't Sunday, either. That was back in 2021, when Robles got caught stealing with a runner on third and no outs and the Nationals trailing the Dodgers by a run. They lost, 1-0.

"He's got to understand the situation of the game" Martinez said — less than three weeks later! That's when Robles was thrown out at third trying to extend a double into a triple and later blew through the stop sign of the third base coach, who was standing with both arms in the air, in a loss to the Mets in New York.

Earth to Victor. Earth to Victor!

"It's going to happen with a 21-year-old," Martinez said.

Oh, wait. That was back when Robles got picked off second in a game against the Dodgers in 2019 — when he was 21 years old.

The problem: It's still happening at 27.

"I still can't believe it," Robles said Sunday.

Why not, Victor? You have played in 523 major league games over eight seasons. The. Same. [Stuff]. Keeps. Happening.

“That just can’t happen anymore,” Martinez said.

That, finally, *was* from Sunday.

The Nationals of the first part of this season are more admirably plucky than truly promising. But they aren’t the god-awful product they were too many times over the previous three seasons, either. They are competitive almost every day but with an almost nonexistent margin for error.

So the errors — particularly those of the mind rather than the body — gain outsize importance. Would the Nationals have beaten the Red Sox had Robles caught the routine flyball or run the bases like a normal human? We’ll never know. And thus, the frustration.

This frustration isn’t just from Sunday. It’s built up over years. And the Nats have tried just about everything with Robles — including sending him to the minors to close an exasperating 2022. Martinez could have benched him Sunday — indeed, he said he wanted to, but his roster was hampered by the fact that Jesse Winker was battling back spasms. But who knows whether such a midgame humiliation would turn Robles’s brain back on? Nothing else has.



Washington's Victor Robles was tagged out in a rundown during a loss to the Red Sox on Sunday. (Winslow Townson/Getty Images)

It all makes you want to pull your hair out. If General Manager Mike Rizzo had any, he probably would have done so by now.

Look, there's an argument to just jettison Robles altogether. He's making just \$2.65 million. He's a free agent after the season. His time with this team and this town is almost certainly coming to a close. What difference does it make if he finishes the season here? Particularly if his replacement is James Wood, the 21-year-old outfielder who is knocking down the door at Class AAA Rochester.

There was a time when Robles occupied the role Wood does now — a glimmer of hope for a promising future, a player around which to build. That was so long ago that it's easy to forget his rookie season, in which he played 155 games, ripped 33 doubles and 17 homers and was the starting center fielder on a team that won the World Series.

Since then: 334 games played in which he has produced a .224 average and an anemic .311 slugging percentage — with just 11 homers in more than two full seasons' worth of games.

But this isn't really about production. It's about preparation, about general awareness, about learning from mistakes, about playing and acting like a big leaguer. Five full seasons into his major league career, and Robles is still struggling with them all.

And yet ...

On Friday night, Robles returned from the injured list, where he had been since the fifth game of the season. Martinez immediately inserted him into the lineup. He singled in his first at-bat and might have driven in a run had Trey Lipscomb not been thrown out at home. He singled in his last at-bat to drive in an important insurance run. He patrolled Fenway's expansive right field. He stole a base. He has a way of reeling you back in. He helped the Nats win a game.

And on Sunday, he helped them lose one.

What to do?

He's an extra outfielder and pinch runner, that's all. Start Jacob Young in center, Eddie Rosario in right and Winker — assuming he's healthy — in left. When Lane Thomas comes back from injury, Young can return to the minors.

But don't return Robles to the lineup. By now, with a list of blunders and gaffes that extends over seasons, he should have lost Martinez's trust. Sunday was one game in one season in which Victor Robles's mistakes made it harder for the Nationals to win a winnable game.

But it wasn't a one-off. It's a pattern. Pull your hair out, if you have any left.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2024/05/13/victor-robles-nationals-blunders/>

Poor Victor. Trade him to Oakland; no one is watching the A's now. No one will notice or "pick on" him there.

TJB