

The meaning of David Ortiz' annual charity golf event

CAP CANA, Dominican Republic (December 3) — **Bobby Valentine's** chat with **David Ortiz** lasted for only about 15 minutes Friday night. But that's all the time he needed to convey how much he values the free-agent slugger.

"I wasn't here for a message," Valentine said. "I was here for a check."

This may have looked like a recruiting trip, and to a large degree, that's what it was. But to the new Red Sox manager, it also was a chance to support Ortiz' charitable foundation, which raises money and provides care for critically ill children in the Dominican Republic and throughout New England. Ortiz' power-hitting lineup of corporate partners includes JetBlue, Vitamin Water and Reebok, and he works in concert with Mass General Hospital. Valentine, invited here by Ortiz' marketing agency, said he wanted to lend his assistance, however large or small.

For what it was worth, Ortiz appeared to be impressed that Valentine flew here Friday, less than 24 hours after his introductory press conference at Fenway Park and with the winter meetings set to begin Monday in Dallas. And if dropping in on Ortiz' annual charity event helps to convince him to return to the Red Sox, either by accepting salary arbitration by Wednesday's deadline or by signing a reasonably short-term contract, Valentine will have achieved his mission on dual fronts.

Of course, where Ortiz plays next season, and perhaps beyond, will be almost entirely a business decision for both him and the Red Sox. Surely, it wouldn't be easy to replace his production — 29 home runs, 96 RBI and a .953 OPS last season — in the middle of the lineup. How much is that worth to the Red Sox, given Ortiz' age (he turned 36 last month) and position (DH)? How



much is it worth to Ortiz? And now that he is a free agent, how much is it worth to other teams, like the Blue Jays or the Orioles?

But this weekend offered a reminder that Ortiz' impact goes beyond homers. His fourth annual charity golf event at the new Fishing Lodge resort featured plenty of sun, fun and swigs of Presidente beer by the usual star-studded guest list that included **Johnny Damon, Tim Wakefield, Jim Rice, Eddie Murray, Jose Bautista, Robinson Cano, Bernie Williams** and **Bill Russell** (photo by Peter Staples). On Friday, though, Mass General president **Dr. Peter Slavin** discussed Ortiz' philanthropic work, from delivering Teddy Bears during hospital visits to hosting children in the dugout before games at Fenway Park. Last year, with help from money raised by the David Ortiz Foundation, more than 60 children were able to undergo open-heart surgery. Ortiz is hardly the only charitable celebrity, but he's as altruistic as any.

And so, for reasons that extend beyond being a lifelong Red Sox fan, Slavin said he has "all my fingers and toes crossed" that Ortiz re-signs.

We're getting closer to having our answer. But regardless of his baseball future, there surely will be another gathering here next December to recognize Ortiz' admirable deeds off the field.