

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Astros

Tuesday, October 1, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Minute Maid Park

Houston Astros

Joe Espada

Pregame Press Conference

JOE ESPADA: Good morning, everyone.

Q. Joe, good morning.

JOE ESPADA: Good morning.

Q. You mentioned you want to have Yordan both hit and run. What did you have to see to have him ready to go, and what did you see?

JOE ESPADA: I saw him hit and run. Obviously, we're not going to see, at least on the bases in his running, a 100 percent Yordan. But I wanted to see him hit. I wanted to see him kind of push off and spin on that front side and do things that I'm going to be expecting him to do today, and he did those things well.

So our lineup is different with that guy in there, and he's in there, and I'm excited about that.

Q. Joe, do you have your Game 2 starter set?

JOE ESPADA: I'll announce that postgame.

Q. Does the result of today impact your Game 2 starter?

JOE ESPADA: No.

Q. Since this is your first official playoff game as a manager, did you do anything different today, anything special to kind of commemorate the occasion?

JOE ESPADA: Good question. No. I woke up this morning, kissed both of my girls and the wife, like I normally do, thanked God for another day and the opportunity to coach a postseason game.

This is really exciting for me. So kind of what I do every



morning. So I'm really looking forward to taking the field with this team and fighting for another title for this great city.

Q. JV didn't make the postseason roster. What were those conversations like talking to him about it?

JOE ESPADA: It was a very easy conversation. Justin Verlander is a professional. He knows how well our starting pitchers have to perform throughout the season. So when we had this conversation, he was all in. He'll do what's best for this team. So I appreciated his feedback and how he evaluated his season and his last few starts. True pro. He is a true pro.

Q. Joe, it's been a long journey for you to get to this point, especially as a manager. You've had a lot of mentors along the way. Has there been anyone who reached out to you prior to today or any advice you lean on in particular?

JOE ESPADA: I got so many text messages and calls from so many people who have helped me throughout my career. I talked to a lot of people in different moments throughout the season just to get me through some very tough moments.

So I'm not going to share certain messages, but they have helped me along the way, and I'm grateful to have people who have my back and helped me through this journey. So very appreciative. People know, who are listening to this, they know who they are.

Q. Joe, your bullpen, a lot of lefties. Just kind of a by-product of what you guys are seeing in the Tigers' lineup and picking King over Ort?

JOE ESPADA: Correct. Also, in the playoffs, there's the extra inning rule of not having the base runner at second base, right? I need a little bit more pieces to manage this game. So keeping those two lefties, the way that A.J. deploys his lefties, I needed to have both of those guys in there.

Having Spencer and Blanco in the bullpen also allows, if



we have to go extra innings, we have length there. It can also be deployed in the middle of the game to bridge to our backup bullpen. I really like those guys that we chose to -- in the Wild Card.

Ort did a really -- you mentioned Ort. He did a tremendous job. My conversation to him, just stay ready. We advance, that roster might look different for the Division Series.

Q. So follow up on the last question, A.J. said yesterday he wanted to have a moment with you face-to-face, congratulate you on what you've accomplished. Have you had that moment, and will you speak afterwards at all?

JOE ESPADA: Probably during the intros, we can handshake and stuff like that. But A.J. has really helped me throughout my career. I know A.J. We were teammates. I worked for him here. He's a tremendous baseball guy. We're both competitors. So when that moment's going to occur, I don't know. But we'll see. I'll keep you guys posted on that.

Q. Joe, you've got three catchers. Are there any past playoff experiences that went into your decision to carry three in the series?

JOE ESPADA: Yeah, good question. For me, it's more the way I've used both catchers. Both play first base. Both will catch also. If I choose to potentially run for one of them late in the game, having Salazar, someone who we trust, someone who our pitchers like throwing to, someone who's been with us for so many years, having Salazar as an insurance policy there if I have to deploy him during the game, it's important.

Something happens to one of those guys, a foul tip or hit by a pitch, both of them are playing, having a third catcher is important to have.

I've been in playoff teams before where that conversation always comes up. And as a manager, if that were to happen, if something happens to your backup catcher, then it would be really tough to navigate because you really don't want to put someone behind the plate who has never caught before.

Q. Joe, you acknowledge that Alvarez won't be 100 percent on the bases, but where is that balance with you late in games if he does get on and you'll have to make a decision there, taking maybe your best bat out of the lineup to maybe score a winning run.

JOE ESPADA: That's right. So if he gets through that, I won't have to make that decision. That's just why I'm

carrying that 15 precision players because it might come up with the situation where he's the go-ahead or he's the winning run. Might have to run for him. We do have some guys on the bench who have done a tremendous job coming off the bench to pinch-hit.

Hopefully, Yordan provides enough offense where we don't have to run into that issue.

THE MODERATOR: Joe, thanks for coming in.

JOE ESPADA: Thank you.

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