

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Astros

Tuesday, October 1, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Minute Maid Park

Houston Astros

Joe Espada

Postgame Press Conference

Detroit - 3, Houston - 1

THE MODERATOR: Joe, you can open with comments on the game.

JOE ESPADA: I thought we were one swing away there, before getting back in that ball game. We ran into a pretty good left-handed pitcher. Skubal has been really good all year.

We had a few chances there in the middle of the game, and we couldn't capitalize. But credit to him. He made pitches. And we battled 'til the end. We had a shot there in the ninth, and we just couldn't get a big hit.

Q. Joe, who will start for you tomorrow?

JOE ESPADA: Hunter Brown.

Q. What did you see from Framber today overall?

JOE ESPADA: I thought his stuff overall was good. His sinker was staying up in the zone a bit, and they got some pretty good swings on those pitches. He battled through five. He gave us a shot there.

But I just thought that usually, when you see that sinker getting away from righties and you start seeing ground balls and the swing and miss on curve balls, that's a sign of where Framber stands that day.

But I give it to him. He battled. He gave us five innings. He gave us a chance to win.

Q. Was it encouraging for you to see Yordan out there getting hits even if he's not moving particularly well?

JOE ESPADA: Yes. That's something to look at today's game. He got two hits, a double and a single. Moving



around pretty good. The swings look like he got force behind them. He was able to rotate. He looked good getting out of the box. Got to second base there on the double.

So that was really good to see.

Q. How did you see the momentum kind of swing in the ninth inning and then that last swing by Jason off the bat? Did you think it had a shot to get through?

JOE ESPADA: Yeah, yeah. Game of inches, right? Hits that ball a few inches, a few feet over his head, that ball gets in the corner, McCormick score from first. McCormick, not seeing an at-bat in a couple of weeks, that's a heck of an at-bat against a tough reliever. Heyward, you know, battling, getting himself in a good position there to get a big hit for us.

Those guys never quit so I'm not surprised by our push there at the end.

Q. Can you kind of talk us through your decision to bunt there with Jeremy in the ninth inning? What was the calculus behind that decision?

JOE ESPADA: Yes, just trying to give our guys two shots to give us a lead. There with Caratini, McCormick, and potentially Heyward. Caratini's gotten some big hits for us from the left side and from the right side, but especially from the left side. Hit that ball pretty hard there to the left.

And after that, McCormick reaches first and we're one swing away. I want to give our team an opportunity there, second and third, with one out, an opportunity to get multiple runs there, try to keep us in the game.

Q. What went into the decision to start Hunter Brown tomorrow and not Kikuchi?

JOE ESPADA: Hunter was starting Game 2 from a long time ago. I just never told you that. He's one of the best starters in the game. He's been one of the best pitchers in the second half. So that was a no-brainer for me.



Q. Joe, what did you think of the performance from Blanco, not using -- being able to use Bryan Abreu or Ryan Pressly in that situation?

JOE ESPADA: Ronnie Blanco has been good for us all year, against righties, lefties. Gave us some strong innings. He's been really, really good. So he was able to save us some guys in the back end there, put us in a good position for the next two games. So outstanding job by Ronel.

Q. Can you confirm who will start Game 3?

JOE ESPADA: Tomorrow is a do-or-die game. So if I have to use Kikuchi tomorrow, I'm using Kikuchi tomorrow. If not, if we advance, he's your Game 3 starter.

Q. Joe, I think the early lineup had Yordan batting second. I was wondering why the change.

JOE ESPADA: Yeah, good question. My thought process behind that is having Yordan more in the middle of our order, probably allow him to kind of save him from running a ton. If he hits behind Altuve, you know, he gets on now.

There's Tucker, here comes Breggy, here comes Diaz. I feel like there would be more opportunities for him to run the bases and be forced to run the bays. You put him in the middle, he's got Altuve, he's got Tucker in there. Now he's in a position of driving in runs. Kind of sitting in the middle of the bus rather than driving the bus. Trying to protect him around running the bases.

Q. Alex was successful batting second this season. Would you have any idea or possibility of moving him back in there? I think you were 42-24 in the 66 games he batted second.

JOE ESPADA: Right now, to answer your question, no. Kind of like those guys hitting there, in 2 and 3, and having Breggy, who has delivered some big RBIs for us, hitting behind those two guys.

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