

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Astros

Tuesday, October 1, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Minute Maid Park

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Postgame Press Conference

Detroit - 3, Houston - 1

Q. You talked before the game about the moment, the stage, and you were correct. It didn't look like anything -- like they came out playing loose, like we've seen them the last two months.

But to jump forward just a little bit to --

A.J. HINCH: Can I comment on that? That's who we are. I don't want to gloss over that because I'm proud of this group because it's exactly who we are and exactly how we talk.

And we talk about pressure on the bases. We talk about good at-bats. We talk about tossing the baton. All those things came through with Tarik on the mound too. I don't think it's a small thing today in the first playoff game from a lot of these guys that it looked eerily familiar to the last two months.

Q. Especially the last inning there. Did you have Baltimore flashbacks bringing Beau into that one, same situation?

A.J. HINCH: Listen, I know this team that we're playing. I know the coach cliché of they're going to play their 27 outs, but they are. This is a very difficult momentum-built team to get through over and over and over again. I thought our pitching staff did a really good job, from Tarik to Vest to Holt. Then Jason gets -- Foles gets in a good count against Yordan, and Yordan does Yordan things.

So that woke the building up, and all of a sudden off they go. So it's not coach speak to say 27 outs. You've got to get the last one. And until you get the last one, nobody really feels very good at this time of year.

Q. A.J., what was the concern with Skubal when you



went out there, I think, in the 6th?

A.J. HINCH: 100 percent panic. I'm going out there to see what's going on with this guy. It's just the same exact thing. And the 6th was different. Sorry. The ball off his glove was the same exact thing that happened a couple weeks ago. He needed a second to capture himself.

And then I saw him uncomfortable, cramping was the main issue, and he felt like he was about to be in a full body cramp. So once he could take a deep breath, I felt a lot better when he said the word "cramp."

And then Jake asked him if he's got a couple more in him, and I'm not sure if he meant pitches or innings, but we took the pitches.

Q. What impressed you most about that three-run inning for you guys, from Parker beating out the double play to Jake swinging 3-0? It seemed like a lot of stuff that have made you guys effective over the last --

A.J. HINCH: We just didn't try to do too much. We say this sometimes about not trying to be the hero and just play the game and see where it takes you.

You saw that with the 3-0 swing, not trying to lift and hit the ball to the train. A good, solid base hit. You saw the torque walk, which was a long at-bat, and he was able to battle him to get in that -- at the beginning of the inning. You saw Sweeney be aggressive.

You just saw a lot of things that signalled that the guys understood the moment and they understood that Framber is not somebody that is just going to miss middle-middle and give you something easy to hit. The ball moves, it cuts, the sinks, it curves.

He threw some change-ups to some of our guys, and we continued to stay disciplined. Wenceel today, the oppo base hit, everybody loves oppo base hits. They say that's good hitting.

So I like that about our team as we took a game plan and



took it into the game. Executed, stayed really disciplined, and put a guy on base every inning to put pressure on the other side to have to deal with that.

Q. We all see Skubal's stuff. What is it about him as a person that makes him so special as a baseball player?

A.J. HINCH: He's all in. He will do anything. He's intense, but he's under control. He's competitive, but he's a thinking man's pitcher. He's got weapons. He's the complete package of a guy that you want anchoring a staff.

As he's gotten more popular and more attention and more status within the game, he continues to work harder. I mean, before I came over here, I wanted to find him, and he was doing his arm exercises with our training staff.

So he's just all in. He's competitive. You see him screaming off the mound, as competitive as he is. We see that every day, and I'm glad the baseball world gets to see that on the biggest stage of the year so far because it's authentic, and it's a real impact to our club.

Q. What it means for you, win a postseason game?

A.J. HINCH: It means a lot for our team to have a 1-0 lead. It wouldn't have mattered what ballpark we're in, who we're playing, what sentimental values there are.

We're trying to win a series. I say that all the time at the beginning of a series: What do we have to do to win a series? Now we reset and get to the next game.

I'm proud of our group because we came into a hostile environment. And it's one game. We have to continue. It takes two to advance. So we'll reset tomorrow, get the day game again, and get right back after it.

Q. A.J., can you walk us through your thinking when you brought in Foley, rather than stick with Holten to face Alvarez?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Three-run lead, Yordan, if I sent Holten back out there, he's got to get to Bregman, and then I'm not saying this would happen, but the worst-case scenario is first and second or first and third or second and third and you're bringing Foley into the loudest stadium in baseball.

So we thought the clean inning, in having Yordan as a tough match-up. Yordan is tough on everybody. There's no good match-up on him. If I sent him out for one, I'd have to send him out for another with the three-batter rule. That takes us to Bregman and takes the potential for the

tying run to come to the plate when Foley's coming into the game, as opposed to one runner if Yordan got on.

He got in a great count with Yordan. He got a ball he didn't quite get. Riley gave a great effort, but you heard everybody wake up when he got on second.

Q. A.J., you said before the game you talked to the team yesterday about the noise, the environment, what to expect, that sort of thing. Did you talk to them just now a little bit ago about that ninth inning and that being playoff pressure, surviving the tipped ball in the dirt, that sort of thing? Just try and navigate all that?

A.J. HINCH: No. You know, I think the best thing we can do is live it and learn. I think our guys understand, because it's not -- again, like I'm not trying to overplay this, but we've been playing these kind of games, close games. I think we led baseball in one-run games. We've been playing kind of Game 7 mentality, everybody available, for a while now.

We've been trying to take every single little advantage, match-up-wise, is why you see us hit in the fourth or fifth, see us bring guys in for one single batter when it's two outs and nobody on. We're going to grab every match-up advantage we can. By playing that, practicing that, preaching that, today's just another day for us.

It's how we've gotten here, and I have a club that's very aware of how we're good and why we're good.

Q. A.J., you stuck with your platoon guys in Andy and Justyn-Henry. And they put together some pretty good at-bats. How was that?

A.J. HINCH: It's big for us. It's the way that Joe managed against us. You saw them always paying attention to where Carp was with the left-hander. They bring in Hader at the end, Ferguson comes in, King comes in. There's no secret a lot of our hitters are left-handed and they've got to pay attention to them. Riley, obviously, as well. Colt when he got in there.

So the other side of that is it's important for us to be able to defend the left side of a bullpen with our right-handed hitters or left-handed starters. So I think for those -- you guys have that have been around us, you've seen Andy be almost an automatic hit. You've seen J-Hen do a lot of damage. That's not how September went for either one of them.

But just because it didn't work or didn't work out or they weren't in a great place in September doesn't mean when the calendar flips that they can't get right back to who they

really are.

Q. You mentioned a little bit ago the loudest crowd in baseball. I'm sure the people here love to hear that. Did you get any flashbacks to your time here once things livened up in the ninth inning?

A.J. HINCH: Not during the ninth inning. Listen, I can reflect back after the game, but I'm pretty locked in when I manage. So no real room for sentimental emotions. We're trying to get to the 27th out. I'm in a completely different dugout. I'm wearing this uniform. I don't need to relive my time here.

I live here. I hear about it all the time. Every time I come back, it is a topic, and I appreciate the support that I get, even on a tough day for fans to cheer for me because I'm in the opposing dugout as the opposing manager.

But direct answer to your question is I'm pretty locked in the ninth inning and not worrying about my past.

Q. A.J., were there any early signs for you, either early in the start or in the days leading up to it, that Tarik was going to be in the right frame of mind going into his first postseason start and he would have the attack mentality today?

A.J. HINCH: What I liked about the time leading up to his start was he was laser focused on Sunday to get us in the playoffs if we needed it. And didn't even talk playoffs or didn't talk about Tuesday until after we clinched. And, actually, that night that we clinched, we didn't talk a lot about playoffs either. We celebrated the hell out of that accomplishment.

So that was his lead-in. He was locked in on starting on Friday. He's the same. This start today, I know it's on a grander scale, and it's in front of a big crowd, both locally here and in our fans and the country. We've seen a lot of these Tarik Skubal starts. Like this is not an outlier. This is why many people refer to him as one of the best pitchers on the planet.

Q. A.J., quite a playoff baptism for Brieske to come into that situation. Can you tell what you saw on him and your view on Caratini's ball and Heyward's?

A.J. HINCH: So I'm not even sure -- it's the toughest environment I've brought him in. I don't think it's the toughest situation. I think second and third and nobody out with our season on the line in Baltimore was a tougher situation. So he's battle tested.

But, look, the one benefit of having managed here is the

ballpark view. I can see where balls are going. I actually thought Yordan's ball was going to be able to be caught. It was almost caught. And most of our guys thought Bregman's ball was gone. They thought Yordan's ball was gone. They're not quite -- they don't have that experience with the balls in the air.

I thought Caratini's ball was going to be caught. I did have to check to see where Tarik was on Heyward's. I couldn't see quite how hard he hit it. I saw the looping liner and it was right at Tork. I had a pretty good vision on it. Obviously, bases loaded, came on the line. Heyward taking monster hacks. The count getting deeper. Well-placed defense.

Good job, Joey.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming in, A.J.

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