

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Astros

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Minute Maid Park

Houston Astros

Joe Espada

Pregame Press Conference

JOE ESPADA: Good morning, everyone.

Q. I was just curious, you flipped Tucker and Alvarez yesterday before the game. Where are you at as far as where they're batting or that decision?

JOE ESPADA: I thought I answered that yesterday.

Q. Did you?

JOE ESPADA: Yeah. For me, it's more -- it's getting Yordan more in that middle. I figure, you know, if he hits second, he has Tucker, Breggy and Diaz behind him. The running aspect of things, it's more a health decision.

Him in the middle, having Altuve and Tucker in the first two spots allows Yordan to be in a position to drive guys in.

So that was the decision between flipping those two guys. Two really good hitters. For me, doesn't matter where they hit. They're two of the best hitters in this league.

Q. I'm going to have to tell you, Hunter was kind of quiet with us. How have you seen him grow into this role where he can sit there yesterday and say "I know the situation. I want the baseball," and then fuel the confidence inside your clubhouse in him?

JOE ESPADA: That's why he's starting a do-or-die game. He has pitched his way into one of our most reliable pitchers. He's done it all year. He's been one of the best pitchers in the second half of the season in all major leagues.

And I trust him. This team trusts him. He has pitched big games for us when we have been in a position to win.

And I never hesitated when it was time to make a decision who was going to be our Game 2 starter.



Q. Joe, 15 pitches for Hader yesterday. Do you foresee today as a multi-inning scenario for him? How long do you think he could stretch if needed?

JOE ESPADA: It's a multi-inning game for a lot of guys today.

Q. Hi, Joe. I have a question about how do you keep them motivated with so much on the line for this game and the organization just as a whole, in general, the fans. We've kind of never been in this position. How do you keep everyone in the clubhouse just motivated?

JOE ESPADA: I see this is a team that is motivated to win. So they don't need a ton of motivation from their manager. This team knows what we're playing today for. They know. We've been in this position before. So there's no need for speeches and rally or anything like that. These guys know. We've been in this position before.

Those guys in there, if you walk in this clubhouse right now, it does not feel like it's a do-or-die game. It's just a regular day. We've got to go out there and take care of business on the baseball field.

Q. A lot of times when you face an opener, you have a bit of an idea of what's going to come after that. Is it different constructing a lineup when they can go in any number of directions after the first guy?

JOE ESPADA: Yeah. And, you know, they've done that before, and we do have kind of an idea. So when you construct a lineup, you're trying to find opportunities within those nine innings to find an opening, try and score a run or two. Or try to find the match-ups, the right match-ups you hope for.

But there's no written script where your opponent is going to go. So that's the nature of where we're at today in this game. So we've just got to score early. We've got to attack early and put us in a position to -- put Hunter a position where he can pitch with a lead and hand the ball to our backup, our bullpen.



Q. Joe, yesterday one of the things Bregman said is that being here is, like you said, it's not foreign. But the way you started the season, being so far out, it prepared you for moments like this. Do you see that as well?

JOE ESPADA: Absolutely. Absolutely. We have weathered the storm, and I think we are in a position right now where we feel comfortable as a club. This is where we all work for, towards this, and this team has played big games after big games in the postseason. And this is another big game, and I expect them to go out there and give everything they've got.

Thank you, guys.

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