

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Astros

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Minute Maid Park

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Pregame Press Conference

Q. A.J., Tucker-Alvarez hitting back to back, what kind of -- how dangerous is that duo compared to maybe some other guys in the league?

A.J. HINCH: Oh, man. They're as good a duo as any. I know Judge and Soto, you know, there are others around the league. But it ranks right up there. Mainly because they're dangerous against lefties and righties. I mean, there's not one way for them to attack them. You've got to give them as many different looks as you can. You've got to hope for the best some days when they're hot.

They both have hit tools and power and decent discipline. So I don't like it at all from this side.

Q. A.J., there's been a lot of talk about you mixing and matching your arms. Do you enjoy doing that with your lineup as well? Seems like you will do that throughout games and within a series.

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, so I think change is always hard in baseball. Historically, everybody really enjoys the known. Whether that's who's your lead-off hitter or who's your four-hole hitter or your three-hole hitter, which modern day has turned into a two-hole hitter, you hear all the different -- I hear it all the time from baseball purists.

But the reality is you're calling your plays against the opponent and against who -- how you're matching up against these guys. Especially when you have flexibility, when you have advantages, when you have certain guys. Of course, I like to pair up certain guys or there's reasons why lineup construction changes.

I'm not saying the other way's bad. Like when you have a set lineup that is talented at hitting righties and lefties, is talented at getting on base and driving in runs, that can -- there's a ton of value in stability.



But it doesn't mean the other way is not good. And so, for us, with our group, they're all in on whatever it takes, whether they've got to hit -- Parker Meadows hit ninth yesterday. He's going to hit first today. Riley Greene has hit in the top four. Carpenter started out in the middle of the order. Now he's hitting second. I flirted with hitting a bunch of different guys.

For our team, if you don't tie their value and their self-worth to a particular part of the order, then you can really -- to use the football analogy -- call the right play and put them in a position to do well.

Q. A.J., there was a large portion of the summer where you had three outfielders down and Matt Vierling was the constant and kind of held down the fort. How important was he in allowing you to be in a position to make a run late in the year?

A.J. HINCH: Matt Vierling is never underappreciated, but maybe we don't talk about him enough. It's not just the versatility he provides. It's the quality of play. Even within games, you've seen me play him in center, move him to right, move him to third. He played first base the other day.

It allows me to make any decision at any point. It's all connected to how our roster is built and how do we maximize their strengths to beat the opponent, and he's a perfect example of that.

It's not easy. He makes it look easy. He doesn't complain when he doesn't play. He doesn't complain when he doesn't know what glove to bring out for early work. He's an amazing human who is willing to do anything to win.

Case in point, yesterday, he's playing third base on the biggest stage for our team. Maybe not the biggest stage for him. He's played in the World Series, but that was in center field in this ballpark. I don't think he's played third base in this park in the playoffs.

So very important to have selfless players who -- with versatility and understand they're asked to do different things on different days, and they respond.



Q. We know you love to hit the reset button, and you've taught these guys how to do that. But certainly, along the way this season, and with your résumé of experience, you've also learned how to carry positive momentum from day to day when you want to carry that. What's the key to that in this situation?

A.J. HINCH: I think, because we've been practicing staying grounded and where we're at, we're going to approach the day with the same enthusiasm that we did yesterday because it's worked for us.

It doesn't mean we don't celebrate. We celebrate hard. We enjoy wins, and we know the position that we're in, and I've just got to convince them that three hours from now or from game time, we're not going to get emotionally tight and crushed if we're forced in a Game 3.

We'll also celebrate if we win. We know what's at stake. We'll play the game the same way. It's most important to play the game the same way and stay aggressive.

I know Matt Vierling got thrown out on a dirt ball yesterday. I don't want him to stop. He needs to continue to do that. Otherwise, we wouldn't capitalize on the first to thirds yesterday. You have Jake Rogers running in the face of the center fielder, you have guys making crazy slides in order to put pressure on the opponent. That's got to continue.

We're not going to win carefully today. We're going to keep pushing this. If we win, we know the reward. If we don't, we know we have a game tomorrow. The fact that we can push the reset button after both good things and bad things has been an underrated portion of our ability to stay grounded.

Q. A.J., you know firsthand how dangerous Altuve can be. Is there any added, just you having known him for so long, and do you kind of breathe a sigh of relief when, okay, we got that guy out?

A.J. HINCH: So the first pitch of every game we play against the Astros is one of the toughest pitches to manage through because you know he can change the scoreboard from the first pitch of the game. He electrifies their team and this crowd. I think I was quoted years ago saying he's everything right about the Astros, and he is.

So, yeah, when he comes up to bat in the lineup rolls around, it's a difficult spot to be in on the other side. So we always say George and me, Fet, we talk about every top of the inning, hey, get the first guy. Generally, that's going to put you in a better position to keep them down.

I'm not sure there's many guys in the league that that's not more critically important than getting Jose Altuve out, and that's a tall task.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, A.J.

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