

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Astros

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Minute Maid Park

Houston Astros

Joe Espada

Postgame Press Conference

Detroit - 5, Houston 2

Q. Hi, Joe. What do you think about Hunter's start today? Seemed like he gave you a real strong chance to win. Tough luck loss.

JOE ESPADA: He was really good. He showed gut. He showed grit. He was tough from pitch number 1. He did exactly what we expected him to do. I'm proud of where he's -- how far he's come, and that's the Hunter Brown you guys will see for the rest of, you know, his Astros career.

Q. Joe, you guys had to fight so hard to get here after the start. How disappointing is it to be swept in the first round like this?

JOE ESPADA: It's tough. But I want our guys to be proud of how far we've come. Like it was a very challenging season, and we reached the postseason, something that we -- that's our goal every year. We win the division, and then play deep into the playoffs.

It didn't happen for us this year, but I want our guys to be proud of their resiliency and how tough this season was and how -- we were just talking in there about we got Yordan playing with an injured knee, and we're trying to figure out ways to piece it together throughout the whole entire season -- injuries, young pitchers coming up and stepping up, young players coming up and being part of the process we have in place.

So many great things we did that I don't want us to hang our head down just because of the way the season ended. We should be proud of what we accomplished and how we did it. I think the process is important.

Q. Joe, why do you think both Pressly and Hader struggled today, and were you always planning to go Pressly and then Hader, or did you think about



multiple --

JOE ESPADA: No, no, that was the plan all along. You got to give credit to those guys. They put some good ABs together, and they've been playing pretty good baseball since mid-August. Credit to them. They played well and they executed well.

Q. Joe, I know it's not something you guys have talked about much during the year, this being Alex's potential final game here. Can you talk about what he means to this club and to you personally, perhaps?

JOE ESPADA: Start with the person. He's an incredible human being. I have gotten to know him very well, obviously, the last couple of years. But what he brings every single day, man, is a coach's dream, right? He's one of the toughest guys I've ever been around. This guy's the definition of a baseball player. It's Alex Bregman. He loves the game of baseball. He loves the community. He loves people. He's not afraid of sharing his experiences. He cares about everyone.

So he's been -- he's an incredible baseball player, and I hope I get an opportunity to continue to manage him here in Houston.

Q. Joe, looked like there were a couple of different times you guys were a hit away from breaking through against their procession of pitchers. What about the way they used their bullpen in the opener makes it such a challenge and also, particularly, the challenge of no-hitter facing the same pitcher twice?

JOE ESPADA: Yeah, it's challenging. We talked about it before the game started. So it creates challenges as a team because you're getting to see different arms, different angles, different stuff, different situations of the game. You could come up with men in scoring position, with bases empty. You have to adjust. We were a hit away the last two days from taking the series. But baseball, you tip your hat to them and you move forward.

Q. Joe, how difficult to put Kikuchi in at the same time you see the Game 3?



JOE ESPADA: Yeah, so the plan was if Hunter struggled early, Kikuchi was definitely going to -- think about bringing him in. Hunter Brown just came out just like we expected, threw the ball really well. If it would have gone extra innings, Kikuchi would have gotten the ball.

But since you talked about Kikuchi, you know, the job he did here. My God, you know. Outstanding. Incredible person. Just came in, and he became one of us really fast. His work ethic, his toughness. He was really impressive.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on a great year.

JOE ESPADA: Thank you.

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