

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Tuesday, September 30, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

Manager A.J. Hinch

Postgame Press Conference

Detroit 2, Cleveland 1

Q. What you saw from Tarik today, was that --

A.J. HINCH: Anyone new to the Tigers/Guardians, this is what they look like. Like every game. And obviously, Tarik set an incredible tone for us.

He's been incredible for us all season, but what a performance at the biggest moments in the biggest stage to get us in a great position to win the game.

So saw a little bit of everything out of him. He was efficient. He was dominant. He had every pitch. He was up to 100 all the time. He didn't let any big moment rattle him and then put an exclamation mark at the end with his last few pitches and the last, let's call it, four outs of handling the ball over to Will.

Q. I think the bunt surprised a lot of people. Can you walk us through the decision-making and the execution of that in the 7th?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. These games are so crazy and there's so few opportunities or there's a ton of opportunities and you feel like you're one hit away.

Today, just given where their pitching was at and they turned the game over to Gaddis, we know who's coming in next in Smith. They have a couple lefties that they could go to. It's just good pitcher after good pitcher where one run was going to be a big deal.

You can play for the big inning, which we often do, but we have that play in our playbook for moments like this where it was an extreme need to take the lead with so few outs left.

Q. A.J., what was your thinking in sending Tarik back



out for the 8th and then also when you eventually pulled him?

A.J. HINCH: So a couple thoughts there. One, you saw the 7th. That's a good baseline for where Tarik was at. And where we were at in the order, I knew I could control their bench a little bit at the bottom, and then Kwan was at the top.

So when you get to Martinez, you know they're going to hit for him with their run of lefties. We know José is right behind that. So I told Tarik at the end of the 7th that he had three hitters. And he was going to come out at that point, and part of it is controlling who's at bat. And, obviously, Tarik, it's super hard to take him out of the game, especially when he's as dominant as he was.

Q. When he came out in the 7th, just coming out of the inning after the three strikeouts, he was pumped up, fired up. What does it mean to see him --

A.J. HINCH: He probably thought he was done. I'm going to be honest with you. Just because of the emotion and where I've taken him out of games for six months was precisely for a moment like this, where that's the right time in my opinion to go back out. So he's an emotional guy at face value.

But where the game was, the way that he -- the way he pitched the seventh, maybe a slight not knowing whether he was going to be in the game, a lot of energy comes out. And I love it because these are big moments and big-time players play well in big moments. They should be thrilled, like he was.

Q. Things obviously spiraled for you guys late in the season. At the end of the day, you lost home field in this round, but you had Skubal on regular full rest. Did you kind of feel like you had the best worst outcome for --

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. I don't like the way you put it. I think having Tarik at the beginning of the series, in any series, whether it's regular season or certainly the postseason, is a huge boost for us.



And, yes, given how we were prepared to use Tarik on Sunday if we needed to get into the playoffs, we needed a win. We got walked off on Friday. We come back with a hard-fought win on Saturday. So it was a great outcome.

Whether it was the best worst outcome or a good outcome, I'm good with either.

Q. A.J., I know you said Tarik made peace with last week and everything that happened. But just the fact that this was his first start since everything and the pressure-packed environment, was it just another level he had today?

A.J. HINCH: I saw this -- I've seen this all year. He's likely to have hardware at the end of this year for precisely games like this that we've seen with maybe only one or two exceptions.

So I think his focus is determination. This guy trains super hard in the off-season. He never lets up. He carries us through so many of his starts. He's an emotional leader. There's a great presence with him. Everything changes the day that he pitches, which is what should be around an ace.

He takes that responsibility, whether it's game 1 of the playoff series or some random June in interleague series. Probably not -- a little tick up at the level of the importance of what's going on with the playoffs, but it's vintage Tarik Skubal for those who don't know him. This is what you get.

Q. We saw velocity was up with Tarik. What about the secondary pitches? The slider in particular felt like he was relying on that. We've seen the change-up all year.

A.J. HINCH: He loved the slider, 3-1 to the Hedges. It's the pitch he felt he could get in the zone. Everything ticks up with the fastball, velocity being up. He even dropped a couple of breaking balls, curveballs that just missed. When he solves that small little blemish on his résumé, he's almost unhittable.

So what I see -- he's a pitcher. I know 100 impresses people and I know the presence and the physical body of work and also just his presence on the mound is intimidating, but he doesn't just reach back and fire at 100. He's a pitcher. And moments like that where the sliders or change-ups or slow curveballs and then the front door two-seamers, he's a beast. And it's why he's considered by many as the best pitcher in the big leagues.

Q. What was going through your mind when the

Guardians scored the way they scored in the fourth inning?

A.J. HINCH: I was kind at a loss for words because they just scratch and claw and come at you. And even getting Ramírez into -- to third the way they did, which was almost an incredible play that turned into an unfortunate play -- really the fault of no one. He kicks it down the right field line with nobody out.

Crazy stuff happens around the Guardians when you play them because they play their 27 outs. They compete. They're going to touch the ball. It's a play I've never really seen. I'm sure I have in my years, but sort of par for the course when you play Cleveland and Detroit.

Q. A.J., what was going through your mind when Ramírez gets on third after the crazy sequence where Baez makes an amazing play but the throw goes awry. You have no outs and he gets hung up. Take me through the roller coaster of emotions there and if it could lead to momentum going forward.

A.J. HINCH: Never a doubt. I don't think anyone had a doubt. In our room, in this room, their room. Everybody knew it would work out the way that it did. You have to keep playing, obviously. Even after the first one, you're still not out of it. And then the second one, you're still not out of it. And then obviously, we get -- we had to make plays.

I think whether it's a fundamental play that you practice way back in February in Lakeland to get the runner running back to 3rd. I know it sounds super simple. Every Little Leaguer in America knows how to do that play. Doing it on the big stage was a huge out for us and not letting the batter get to second was huge.

Small things in close games in the playoffs matter. The ability to produce a secondary pitch to get a funky swing created a series of events that led us to a 1-0 lead in a three-game series.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

