

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Wednesday, October 1, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

Manager A.J. Hinch

Postgame Press Conference

Cleveland 6, Detroit 1

Q. A.J., you talked all year, saying you'd pinch-hit for anybody at any time. What did you like about going to Jones for Riley?

A.J. HINCH: If you look at what Jahmai has done against lefties, we had to take the shot. You saw the same game I did. Up to that point, I think we were at double digit guys on base and almost all of them in scoring position. So I didn't think that he thought I was going to hit for Greeney. They'd brought the lefty in for him in that spot. We needed the ball in play.

Now, we didn't get it, but we're taking our shot with Tork and Jahmai to get the ball to the outfield and Wenceel too.

Q. A.J., after winning yesterday on ball in play, what did you make of the at-bats you had?

A.J. HINCH: It was a tough day. Obviously, they made the most of their opportunities and we left 15 guys on. I think that paints the picture that it was today. I mean, it was a hard-fought game, and the score doesn't really indicate how the game was. But we kept giving ourselves a chance.

And the last at-bat was ending poorly a lot of times with the punch-outs. It's not easy. They've got good pitching. We knew they were going to go to their pen early. We knew what was at the back end of the game as well, which is why we were aggressive, whether it's the Jahmai at-bat against Herrin or we're trying to get to Gaddis when we could. Cade Smith is tough at the back. Got to take your opportunities when you can, especially against a team who can pitch.

Q. Why was Melton your choice for the eighth inning?



A. Just velo and the plus stuff. We needed to extend the game. He was going to get probably a couple innings if he could go to it. I needed Finnegan earlier in the game. Needed Holton earlier in the game.

In the playoffs, these games are -- it's going to be in any order. When we got to that point, I wasn't going to go to Will. We didn't have the lead. And so we needed somebody to have the ball, and I love the velo against these guys. They obviously took some good swings off of him.

Q. In the inning that you did score, you had a run nullified at the plate. The aggressiveness from McKinstry, good play or just a good play by them --

A.J. HINCH: If you saw the replay, they had -- it was like a four-minute delay. Like that tells you exactly how close that play is. And if they'd come back with it stands, was it a good play or bad play? Those are hard calls, right?

So obviously, we'd been aggressive all season. I don't mind that at all. It's just McKinstry's faster than Dingler is in going to bases. And the kid at center made a nice throw. So probably had to be perfect, you know, for it to -- and even in the replay, it literally could have gone either way. I don't know if he tagged his helmet or his shoulder or where he tagged him.

Near safe, near outs are good plays.

Q. A.J., what did you see from Casey? What did you like about opening the bullpen door when you did that for the walk?

A.J. HINCH: Casey, I thought the stuff was fine. I thought the execution was a little erratic today based on how he's thrown. They made him work a ton. He had to use a lot of resources early to get through his timeline -- through his time.

So when I got to the Manzardo at bat, I had Holton up the previous inning as well. Not knowing if they were going to counter and get their righties in, were they going to stay with their lefties. If they stay with the lefties, we have the



Holton inning. If they'd flipped them out, that could have changed the course of the game later with who was coming in.

These are all hands on deck games. It's the American League Wild Card series. Every pitch, every at-bat, every mistake, every big swing seems to count as two. And so we were going to be aggressive.

Q. A.J., 15 guys left on base obviously an issue. You try some unorthodox things like pinch-hitting for Riley Greene. Are there other unorthodox things you can't even look at because that's been an issue the entire series?

A.J. HINCH: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Q. Runners left on base.

A.J. HINCH: Obviously, contact is the biggest issue with guys on base today. A lot of at-bats we had ended with their ability to miss bats. And it's not easy. You can't just touch it easily. It's a tough game. But I think the pinch-hit was really more about Jahmai Jones. This guy has been good, including the last series where he almost single handedly won the game for us when we clinched.

Not a knock on Riley. Not a knock on all the at-bats we had with runners in scoring position. It's a competition, one on one, and they won a lot of them.

Q. Can you speak to the quality of the bat in the ninth inning in running up Cade Smith's pitch count?

A.J. HINCH: That was the goal. Obviously, going to the pen when I did to get some lefties on Manzardo and Naylor, the hope was to keep it there. In the playoffs, I know Cade Smith's really good, but you're a couple runners away from having extreme pressure on him.

Now, when they hit the homer and Cade goes back out, you're trying to do two things. Make him work as hard as he can and chip away and try to get back in that game, maybe bring the tying run to the plate and crazy things happen in October.

So we did the first part of making our at-bats tough. Even J-Hen had the tough called third strike. It was a six or seven or eight-pitch at-bat. Tork is going to be fine, got hit by pitch. Wenceel put up a good at-bat. We continued to make him work and maybe it pays off tomorrow.

Q. To go back to the Riley thing, he's the one guy you haven't historically hit for. Did you talk to him in the moment? Do you think you'll have a conversation

about him later?

A.J. HINCH: So our players are all in. I'm going to go make sure our clubhouse music is on, make sure we're upbeat. Make sure we realize that we have an opportunity to win the series tomorrow. I have no need to really talk to Riley about it because our players know how we're built, what we're trying to do, and there's immense trust amongst all of us. If I see him, I'll talk to him. He'll be in and ready to go tomorrow.

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