

NL Wild Card Series:

Braves vs Padres

Tuesday, October 1, 2024

San Diego, California, USA

Petco Park

San Diego Padres

President & GM A.J. Preller

Pregame Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for A.J. Preller.

Q. I'm wondering if you could go back to the trade deadline when you added the relievers to the bullpen. How much were these games what you had in mind? I know you had two months to get there, but was this what you had in mind when you did that?

A.J. PRELLER: Yeah, obviously we talked about it as a group. And I think we knew it was going to be a really competitive pennant race. We basically have been playing playoff games since the All-Star break and since the trade deadline.

Again, we knew we were going to be playing some really close games, tight games. We needed to have a deep bullpen. So I think it was -- our conversations were really about, you know, playing these playoff games down the stretch, which we've had a lot of practice with. And then obviously getting here to October, which having a deepen is always a good thing.

So I think definitely getting there and then hopefully having some success there, I think that was the main idea for the pen acquisitions.

Q. So basically you're the one team that you had to cut about \$90 million in payroll, give or take, and you were able to go out and make a number of trades to keep the club sustained. How did all that work? It got you back to someplace where you weren't last year with a much higher payroll.

A.J. PRELLER: Obviously each year is a little bit different. I think we've always looked at it on a one-year basis and then also on a three- to five-year basis. I think this past offseason we had the decision to make, really started with Juan Soto and how he factored in for us and obviously his pending free agency and which direction we wanted to

take.

But we knew if we were going to deal Juan, we would need a lot of different ways to replace him.

I think both from a roster standpoint, a dollars-and-cents standpoint, that took us down a different path -- getting pitching depth, obviously finding some offensive production in different ways, with Profar and Merrill and others that really stepped up for us this year and then rounding the club out.

I think that was our focus from day one was we had last year's roster which we felt really good about. But obviously some real impactful star -- some top-end players, losing a couple of those guys -- Hader, Snell, Soto, Wacha Lugo -- some guys who have had a lot of success elsewhere this year.

But we knew we would have to take a different approach to a roster build. And obviously we've done it with different teams here in the last few years -- at least get to the playoffs, and win some series.

And this year's team a little different, little different version but started in the offseason with that Soto decision.

Q. The Arraez trade, where basically you got Miami to pick up most of the money, that's worked out fantastic for you.

A.J. PRELLER: Yeah, Luis has been exactly what we our evaluators thought he was and our scouting group in terms of that presence at the top of the lineup -- a guy that obviously doesn't strikeout, a hit collector -- just his energy and the way he kind of starts these games for us.

Obviously I was riding in the car with Tony Gwynn before that deal. And just talking about what somebody like that can mean to our club, our team, our lineup. He was a guy we had our eyes on in spring training and were able to line up with the Marlins.

They were going down a different path as a team and organization. And we felt Luis was the right fit for us. And



he's been tremendous -- 200 hits, a batting title and what he's brought to our lineup, it's worked out the way we were hoping on our end for sure.

Q. When Joe Musgrove was out for an extended period of time, what was a reasonable expectation of what he would look like when he returned based on what you knew about the injury and everything and the rehab timeline? And how important was it that you guys got the Joe that you got when he did come back?

A.J. PRELLER: I think from really from day one, for myself, I talked to our staff a lot about Joe and Darvish and they've thrown a lot of innings. They come into these seasons super prepared. But just wanted to make sure, unlike at least last season, we wanted to make sure we had those guys when it was winning time down the stretch, et cetera.

We were real cautious, I think, early in the year in both guys' situation. But with Joe I think probably could have pitched through -- I think maybe one of the first episodes that he had from a physical standpoint, just wanted to be safe, because we knew if we get to August/September and he was in a good place physically, he was going to, the type of pitcher competitor he is that's what we would need down the stretch.

I think the second time we had an issue there with Joe this year, it was, like, let's be safe. Let's make sure he has his time dealing with I think more with back-of-the-elbow type of situation. I think he made some adjustments. He always works really hard, so he's going to give himself every chance to come back. But I think also part of it was planning to make sure we had a fresh Joe for down the stretch the last two months.

We had some other guys step up for us in that time. The Waldrons and Randy Vasquez and other guys.

Again, I think a little bit of looking forward, a little bit of understanding, hey, we want Joe for down the stretch. And he did what he needed to do, and our medical team did a great job getting him back on the field. He's been outstanding here the last couple of months.

Q. You had belief in all of your top prospects. Could you have imagined a full season like this from Jackson Merrill in his rookie season?

A.J. PRELLER: It's super exciting. I think all of us, our evaluators, our minor league staff that was around Jackson, they felt this was the type of player Jackson would be in big leagues.

To expect that day one, minute one, we knew he would have some moments of this kind of impact the way he's had it, but just the consistency day in, day out; the adjustments he's made. He's gotten better as the season's gone on.

Again, I think from all of us, we were excited that Jackson potentially could take his spot, one of those outfield spots when we started Spring Training. But like anything, the players kind of tell you when they're ready and how much they're ready for.

I think he showed in Spring Training he was ready for the opportunity. He's just continued to get better throughout the year. I think it's a great story for, again, like our scouting group, our player-development group that helped prepare him for this moment and the big league staff that also worked with him is just a testament to Jackson. As a first-year player to make the impact he's had, and to me obviously a very strong candidate for Rookie of the Year award and it's pretty cool to see.

Q. Last year's roster was supreme talented. How much credit does Mike Shildt get for the success of this year's Padres team and have you guys talked about an extension?

A.J. PRELLER: Shildt's been great. Obviously I think when we -- I think the last couple of years just getting to be around him, seeing him, he's been around the team. He had a really good feel for our group, our team. Obviously we made some changes to the roster but we still have the core group of players that are here.

I think the ability, like, just from a fundamental standpoint, he does a great job with our players that understand the impact of some of the little things that lead to winning. But I think it's just a daily reminder that he's able to connect with our players and make it important to them in terms of teaching game, winning baseball, the fundamentals standpoint, offensive baseball.

And I think we've played together as a group. And that's a big part of what you're hoping for from your coaching staff and your manager is to get like a talented group and have them play together.

And whether it's the first inning, the seventh inning, the ninth inning, it's a group that has no quit. That's in large part to Mike and the staff.

And we'll obviously get to, like anything, when we get to hopefully a long run here in the next couple of weeks, we'll start looking forward. But he's done a great job.

Q. Last month when Ha-Seong injured everybody thought he could not be back sometime during the season. But now he's done for the season and he is ready for the (indiscernible). When you look at his process, what went wrong?

A.J. PRELLER: I think, again, I don't think anything really went wrong with Ha-Seong. I think to me just unfortunate. He's a huge part of our team. He's been here for now four years.

Obviously what he brings to the table -- defense, offense, energy, fan favorite, but he dove into that base in St. Louis, subluxed his shoulder. Anytime you do that, there's some kind of labral issue, labral tearing.

He went to see three doctors. Everybody gave him the idea hopefully this is something that's non-surgical and that he would be able to get through without a surgery. But a surgery was a possibility.

He did everything he could in his power, the medical team did a great job trying to get him on the field. I think last week in Arizona he got on the field a little bit, still didn't feel right. He knows. He knew at the end of the day this was something that he's not going to be able to rehab from.

So he's going to go down the surgery path and he'll be back. It will just be at some point next year he'll be ready to go for the Padres.

Q. Any update on his surgery schedule?

A.J. PRELLER: We're working through it. I think he's kind of picking and choosing who the surgeon is going to be and when that date is. But we'll have more info, I'm sure, in the next couple of days. I assume at some point in the next week or so he'll do the surgery.

Q. You went with 12 pitchers. Could you walk us through that decision versus 13?

A.J. PRELLER: I think, again, like three-game series, short series, overall we have our three starters that are lined up. We have Darvish as a possibility that Mike can use as well.

So I think just again from a reliever standpoint, we feel like we had length and starters that go deep in the game. Mike and Ruben, they always have contingency plans and backup plans. But ultimately we felt we had coverage for what's going to be more of a shorter series.

Obviously we get to, as you progress through the playoffs, and hopefully advance, it starts to make some changes. But for us we just figured the extra position player in this

situation with our starters that are rested hopefully take us deep in the games. And a bullpen that's rested, we felt maybe the position player was a little more important for us if we got into a scramble-type situation.

Q. Yuki was not used the last month of the season. How did he kind of make it on the staff?

A.J. PRELLER: Yuki has been -- the last few weeks, obviously, we've played some like some super tight games. But we're going to need everybody on our staff. Yuki has been a big part of it all year.

You look at the second half, you look his walk-to-strikeout, he's cut the walks down. He punches guys out. He's been a big part of our team and we've let him know that.

I think from Yuki's standpoint there's going to be some situations the next few weeks we'll need everybody on the staff. And Yuki has been a real part of it.

That wasn't much of a decision for us. He was one of our guys. Again, the roster was a pretty easy conversation overall with Mike and the group. I think we were pretty much in agreement this is the group we wanted for this round and we'll go from there.

Q. Sean Reynolds, what kind of consideration did he get, and how is his left knee and is he an option moving forward?

A.J. PRELLER: Sean's definitely put himself in the conversation. He opened a lot of eyes when he was here over the last couple of weeks. He tweaked the knee there in Triple-A, as you mentioned, but we just saw -- Mike Shildt and a bunch of the coaches, myself -- we got to see him the other day in Arizona. They're playing simulated games. He pitched there.

But he was a consideration for us in this round. He'll continue to be a consideration if we're able to advance.

Q. Understanding it's the playoffs and the ball bounces crazy ways and who knows what happens, I'm wondering from a team building perspective, you guys have cut down on such -- you have so few strikeouts in your lineup. Other teams, a lot of home runs, a lot of strikeouts. From your observation, is there a better way to go in October? It seems like your club is built pretty well in that regard?

A.J. PRELLER: I think obviously like tough at-bats, the pitching gets better. The guys' ability to command the ball and the stuff gets better. Being able to command the strike zone, that's always a big thing. But there's definitely

different ways to do it. You've seen I think one team, you think about the '02 Angels team, couldn't punch the guys out, first to third all the time. That's one way to do it.

And the other teams, they're able to take a walk and hit a three-run homer. I think the bottom line of some version of controlling the strikeouts is a huge thing. Our group, it's putting the ball in play and we're able to get a lot of hits and string a lot of hits together.

I think when you look at all the teams that win, they usually have one of those two themes, able to take walks and hit bombs and control the zone that way, were able not to do it by punching. And our team is more the latter. Hopefully it plays for us the next couple of weeks.

Q. What's your take on what the Braves have had to do here in the last few days, which seemed unfortunate for them, perhaps fortunate for you and when did you find out who their starter would be today?

A.J. PRELLER: I think obviously we knew, honestly for myself, I probably started the score watching the first day of the second half of the season. I thought it was going to be heck of a pennant race. I think everybody knew it was just going to come down to the wire, in this case probably went past the wire, the circumstances with the hurricane kind of out of their control.

I think they're obviously a tremendous organization. They're one of the top organizations in the game here over the last seven or eight years, world championship, playoff-tested players, and they've had some injuries this year and just talks about the strength of their roster that they're here and able to go through those two games yesterday.

I'm just watching as a fan, it was a huge roller coaster. And in terms of the starter, yeah, I think we were watching like everybody else just trying to see who would start game two and kind of last night as a scouting group and the staff just kind of throwing out possibilities, and this morning hearing that they were going to go with (indiscernible) and go from there.

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