

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

Friday, October 4, 2024
New York, New York, USA
Yankee Stadium

Kansas City Royals

Michael Wacha

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. Michael, what has been maybe the differences in preparation knowing that you were preparing to start Game 3 against the Orioles to now preparing for the Yankees in Game 1?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, you know, as soon as we clinched, I would just say the focus kind of all went into the Yankees then. Just started my prep work on them to face them tomorrow night.

Q. Why do you think over the years you've had such success against Aaron Judge?

MICHAEL WACHA: I don't know. You know, he's a guy that you definitely game plan for, and you know that you have to make really quality pitches to a guy like that.

I don't know if you up the focus against him or not because I try to keep the same focus for everybody, but maybe just a little bit more aware of, hey, this is where I can miss and different things like that.

Yeah, you just have to make really quality pitches against a guy like that.

Q. After at-bats against him when he doesn't succeed against you, do you go, whew, or, yeah, it worked?

MICHAEL WACHA: I don't know if I really have those thoughts. It's kind of, all right, who's coming up next type of deal.

Yeah, he's definitely a guy that you try to keep quiet in the lineup.

Q. As a pitcher, what impresses you most when you've watched Gerrit Cole over the years?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, no, he's an absolute stud. I



think just very consistent. Year in and year out, he's throwing up really good numbers, a lot of punch-outs, low ERAs and throwing up a lot of innings, as well. He's healthy a lot of years, and that's something that I admire as a starting pitcher, as well.

That's what you try to be as a starting pitcher is consistent, and you want to give the team something that they can count on going out there. And he's been a staple of that over the past 10, 12 years now.

Q. What's impressed you the most about playing with Bobby Witt? Is there one thing that really stands out for a young guy at his age to be playing the way he has?

MICHAEL WACHA: Bobby, he's an unbelievable player. Played against him over the past couple years. And then getting to join up with him, getting to see it firsthand for a full 162 has been something really special, that's for sure.

I love the way he just -- how he plays the game. He's full throttle, running on and off the field, he's hard 90s down to first. I've never seen anybody square up that many balls. A lot of hard contact. Even his outs are loud.

He's an unbelievable guy, unbelievable player. Looking forward to seeing him in this next series, as well. He seemed unfazed in his postgame seasons there in Baltimore. Just credit to him, to the way he preps for each game and each series, and the way he prepares his mind, as well, is really impressive.

Q. You're no stranger to playing in the postseason. How are you planning on using that experience in order to kind of prepare for your start tomorrow?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, lucky for me, I've had some postseason experience, and I think each time you're in the postseason, it just gets a little bit more and more comfortable, kind of what to expect when you're out there and how to handle certain situations.

Definitely going to draw on past experience in this postseason, as well. Lucky to have that experience in the



past, and hopefully will use that to my advantage.

Q. What was your thoughts watching Cole Ragans and Seth Lugo do what they did, masterful pitching performances against the Orioles, and did it inspire you to follow in their footsteps going into tomorrow?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, absolutely. Those guys took the ball in that series and did exactly what they've been doing all year. They go out there and compete, they throw strikes and attack hitters and keep guys off balance and have a lot of success doing that. That was no different that series there.

Similar to what we've been doing all year, we try to feed off of each other and keep that starting rotation just rolling and keep building off of each start and things like that.

But no, I was very impressed with the way they went about it last series.

Q. What is it like to throw to Salvy Perez, and how much has he helped your season this year?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, that was one of the most things I was looking forward to whenever I signed here was getting to throw to Sal. It's been great. Getting to build that relationship with him out there on the field has been incredible. He's got a great mind behind the plate. He's a big target to throw to. He controls the run game behind the plate. He's got an absolute cannon back there.

We're lucky here; we've got two really good catchers here with Sal and with Freddy. But speaking about Sal, it's been a lot of fun to work with him, bouncing different ideas off of him, and he's got a lot of experience, as well. So he's seen a lot of these hitters, seen a lot of baseball games, and has a really good feel for the game.

Getting to work with him this year has really helped me a lot, as well, just taking my game to another level I feel like.

Q. I know the changeup has been so important for you throughout your career. I wonder as a pitcher changes and goes through different phases of your career, how have you adapted that changeup, whether it's the grip or the mechanics that have helped it remain the pitch that it is right now?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah. No, it's definitely an important pitch for me in my repertoire. But as far as the grip and mechanics of it, I would say it's a pretty similar grip that I've used kind of my entire career. I would say things that have changed with it. Different counts that I throw it in, finding what hitters and kind of locations on where to throw it has

kind of evolved over the years, I would say. But yeah, it's definitely one of my go-to pitches for sure. It's definitely something that I can use to keep guys off balance, I would say.

Q. As someone who's been in several organizations, is there anything that stands out to you the way the Royals handle pitchers?

MICHAEL WACHA: How they handle pitchers?

Q. Yeah.

MICHAEL WACHA: I wouldn't say anything is too different from past organizations that I've played on. I can speak on, yeah, the staff that we have here is unbelievable. Getting to work with Sweeney and a lot of the guys behind the scenes, with different pitch designs, I guess. Over the course of this year just working on different pitches and kind of adding to my repertoire, I guess you could say. But they've done an unbelievable job with that.

They get us everything that we need as far as scouting reports, getting us ready game plan-wise, mindset going into starts. Everything that we ask for, they come through and get us more than what we actually need.

Everything is readily available, and it's a great staff that I'm lucky enough to be a part of.

Q. How for you since you arrived in baseball has pitching changed? When you got here there was a pitching coach that gave you ideas and now there's all these behind-the-scenes people with advice and data.

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, that's definitely changed. I think the technology part of the game has definitely increased from the time that I broke into MLB. But I think it's all really helpful.

I think you learn as a player how much you need, because I know that it can be, I guess, overuse or -- I don't know the word -- but can be overwhelming, I guess, for some players whenever they're just getting into it.

But over the years just gradually adding a little bit at a time is kind of what I've done, and I feel like it's been real helpful.

Every bullpen that I throw now, it's got the Trackman and we've got numbers. And especially whenever you're working on a pitch and trying to get it to do a certain thing, you have that instant feedback coming right there to you that wasn't there whenever I just came up in 2013.

It's kind of crazy to think about.

Q. I know you haven't faced Juan Soto too much in your career, but what makes him such a tough out?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, I haven't faced him too much. I think the last time was whenever he was still with the Nationals. But I was able to play with him last year in San Diego, so got to see him for a full year, as well, there.

No, he's just an unbelievable talent. He swings at strikes, lays off of balls out of the zone, and whenever he does swing, he makes really good contact with the ball and hits the ball hard and finds a lot of holes. He hits for average, hits for power, drives guys in.

He's an unbelievable talent, like I said. He's somebody that you've got to game plan for for sure.

Q. Beyond Soto and Judge, what is it that makes the rest of this Yankees' lineup challenging as you game plan to face them?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, it's a deep lineup. Similar to Soto, a lot of these guys, they swing at strikes, they lay off of balls, so you've got to make quality pitches in the zone to get them out.

It's deep. They battle. They foul off pitches and get deep into counts. You've got to game plan for that and try to work around those deep counts and try to get early quick outs to get deep into the game.

It's a challenging lineup, but looking forward to the opportunity.

Q. It's been a while since the Royals and Yankees have played in a postseason series. The last time was in the early 1980s. Have you seen highlights of those two teams playing against each other, and what does it mean to write the next chapter in that story?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, I wasn't born then, but definitely have seen some highlights over the past couple days once we knew the matchup. Yeah, it's great. It's great for the fans. To bring back those games and those memories. Like I said, looking forward to this opportunity that we've got here in New York. Hopefully we can go out there and compete the way we've been competing and make the Kansas City fans proud.

Q. What do you remember from your first ever postseason, and how does the lead-up to tomorrow compare to that?

MICHAEL WACHA: Yeah, it was my rookie year in 2013. I had a handful of starts underneath my belt, and my first postseason start was an elimination game on the road in Pittsburgh. It was definitely some nerves.

But I was lucky enough to have a lot of veterans on that team that I was able to bounce questions off of, kind of what to expect out there type of deal. That gave me kind of the peace of mind going out there.

Still falling back on those words of wisdom from those guys, taking it into this start tomorrow is something I'll be doing for sure.

Q. You talked about the Yankee lineup a couple of questions ago, but Soto and Judge are obviously the minefield in that lineup, and even with the numbers that you've accumulated against Judge, as a savvy veteran pitcher, how do you pattern your approach tomorrow to make sure those two guys don't beat you?

MICHAEL WACHA: I don't know if I want to go too deep into that question there. But yeah, those two in that lineup, I mean, their numbers speak for themselves. They're one of the best one-two combo in the league there.

But that doesn't mean that the rest of those seven guys aren't players there, as well. Like I was saying, it's a deep lineup that you've got to be on your game the whole time you're out there. You absolutely do. You can't take a pitch off against this team.

Just excited to get out there tomorrow and get this series rolling.

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