

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

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New York, New York, USA
Yankee Stadium

Kansas City Royals Manager Matt Quatraro

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. Q, just wondering about Bobby and everything that's put on his shoulders all year starting with the contract and being the star, MVP candidate throughout the year. How have you seen him handle those big moments?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, I mean, I haven't seen him change one bit. I think everything that's put on his shoulders is a positive thing and well deserved. I think at the end of the day he's a really grounded person, and I think he understands that that attention is going to come his way. And it's okay to be positive, to understand that it's okay to accept compliments and it's okay to know that he doesn't have all the answers, either.

He's going to continue to grow. He doesn't ever proclaim anything like he's got it figured out. He's still growing and learning and trying to be the best teammate he can be.

Q. When you think about Vinnie coming back in this series, how did your expectations relate to what he was able to do in a lot of ways just being back in the lineup?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, I mean, my expectations went from 0 to 100 in a hurry, really, and it was last weekend in D.C. where I was able to see him hit for the first time in a cage. And just to see that he was not guarding it, he was not wincing, he wasn't just trying to fight his way through it. I'm sure he doesn't feel normal, but to be able to see him cut it loose like that, that was really encouraging to me and really pretty cool for him.

I know he just provided a boost to the morale of the team to come back. You lose your 3 hole hitter, a guy that's been that productive, that's a big blow. These guys understand, it's great somebody else got an opportunity, but they want to win, and they think that's the best chance for us.



Q. How would you describe this opportunity for you and your ballclub going up against a team that had the best record in the American League and with their longstanding tradition?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, thankfully we're not playing against their tradition, right? We're playing against the team that we're facing off against this week. That's going to be plenty of a challenge. We understand how talented they are, but nobody gets to this point in the offseason or the postseason without being talented and being a good team.

We take it as a challenge. We understand that most people are going to think that they are the favorites, but that doesn't matter when you get out on the field. It doesn't matter what the fans think or the media says or whatever. We have to compete one pitch at a time, one inning at a time, one game at a time and do the best we can, and that's the mindset that our guys have gone with the whole year.

Q. Coming off the season you had last year, when you got to Spring Training, was there any particular approach you took with the guys to build self-belief or did that progression happen naturally?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, I can tell you it started in the offseason. We made a dedicated focus to have a better mentality, a more competitive mentality, and understanding that what happened last year was not going to dictate one thing about this year unless we let it.

Then once we signed the free agents we signed, they were crystal clear with me that they had no interest in talking one bit about last year because they were not part of that team, and it had nothing to do with them.

I think that from day one of Spring Training was the thing that really stuck with me and inspired me the most, that this was going to be different.

Now, what does that mean? I don't know. I didn't know we'd be sitting here. But nobody knows they're going to be



in the postseason.

But the mentality and the belief that they had with themselves of we're going to win games, that was good enough for me.

Q. For the returning guys during the offseason, were there any specific communications to get across that message to them?

MATT QUATRARO: The competitive part was huge. J.J. was emphatic about that with players, with staff, with player development, because we're in an age of baseball where there's a lot to be said about training, whether that's pitch design or swing mechanics or biomechanics. All that stuff which has its place and is vitally important.

But that's not going to make one bit of difference when we're out there facing Gerrit Cole tomorrow. It's who's going to compete better, who's going to be in the right mindset to go out there get the job done, whether that's moving a runner, stealing a base, getting a curve ball down below the zone, whatever it is. And those are the things we tried to instill and embrace the best we could throughout the offseason and then in Spring Training.

Q. What's your favorite quality in Bobby?

MATT QUATRARO: His humility, because I think if you're humble and you understand that you don't have it all figured out, this game will do it to you. But he doesn't need to be humbled because he is a humble guy. He approaches it that way every day that he's just one of the guys going out there to compete at the highest level he can.

Q. What have you seen from Gerrit Cole as his season has rounded into form and getting him to this point?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, we haven't seen him live. Following -- I know he didn't pitch until June, so we missed him both times we played him. But I've seen plenty of him over the years to know that he's a unicorn in this game. He's a closer that can do it for nine innings. He locates, he's got plus pitches on every front, he can pitch to righties and lefties. He's super competitive. He seems to be built for the big stage and really embraced that.

He is the ultimate competitor. He's been one of the most elite pitchers in the game for a long time now, and it's a tremendous challenge to go up against him anytime you get the opportunity.

Q. To that point, how do you approach facing him tomorrow?

MATT QUATRARO: You have to be disciplined because he can strike the ball with the best of them, and if you expand, you're going to have a tough time. But if you get him in the zone, you've got a chance. You're going to have to understand that what he does -- you can't chase him around the zone because he's so good at executing his pitches. You're going to have to be disciplined at what you're looking for and hope it matches up.

Q. Ragans left the first game of the Wild Card a bit early due to leg cramps but he is set to start Game 2. How is he feeling?

MATT QUATRARO: Completely fine. He was really okay that night or the next day. It was just one of those unfortunate things where those cramps, they don't let up in the moment. He just had to get hydrated and get off of his legs for a little bit. But he's completely fine.

Q. Michael Wacha talked a little bit about how veterans helped him as a young rookie during his first postseason. How have you seen him step up into that veteran role that helped him once to the other young players in the clubhouse?

MATT QUATRARO: I can't say enough good things about him as a teammate. I really can't. He is the most dialed-in pitcher I have ever seen when he's not pitching. He's into every pitch. He's high-fiving guys for keeping the double play in order, for breaking up a double play, for throwing to the right base. He's into every at-bat when his teammates are up there. He's looking for things with the other team when he's on the bench.

He is the consummate professional.

Now, when it comes to his own preparation and watching how he goes about it in planning, we have a lot of guys that are good, and he's one of them, and I think our younger pitchers have followed that lead.

It's also the steadiness, the understanding that not every outing is going to be a gem, and how do you bounce back from that. And then how do you handle the successes when people do start talking about you. He checks every one of those boxes.

Q. I think I've heard you talk about the Royals-Yankees rivalry from late 70s, early 80s, but what did you hear about them or what did you remember from the later years of that intense rivalry?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, that's the word I would have said, "intense."



They were the team -- as a fan of the Yankees growing up, oh, we're playing the Royals again. As a kid, Kansas City was another planet away for me. That was out west. They'd go out west, and they were tough games or whatever that kind of mentality. But clearly knew who George Brett was and how good he was and Willie Wilson and the guys that affected the games. Was always aware of Dennis Leonard because he's from the same town as my aunt and uncle lived in and all that. Just had a pretty good awareness of them from a young age and how talented they were.

But when you keep playing the same team year after year in the playoffs, you have no choice but to take note of them.

Q. You mentioned Yankees fandom. Just being a New Yorker, does it mean anything extra to you to be managing here in the postseason?

MATT QUATRARO: Not necessarily, no. I'm so focused on our guys. I was a Yankees fan a long time ago. That was another world ago in my baseball career.

To be able to be here with our guys, I'm super proud of them. That's where my focus is.

Q. How do you make sure that Judge and Soto don't beat you in this series?

MATT QUATRARO: We've got to execute. There's going to be opportunities, I'm sure, where we're going to pitch to them. We're going to have to pitch to them. But there's other times where we'll try not to let them beat us. But we don't have the answers written in stone. We're going to have to execute.

But I do like our guys and their stuff and their ability to execute. I think it's got to be one or the other. You've got to attack or you've got to put them on essentially. You can't try to be careful. That's not a philosophy we're going to take.

Q. I'm curious about Erceg and his arrival. In what way has he both directly and indirectly helped you, both directly because of what he does and indirectly because of the way you can utilize the guys ahead of him?

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, great point. He's been incredible, as you've seen. His stuff is remarkable. His efficiency is really impressive. He doesn't back down from anybody. He has that mindset of I'm coming after you. You're going to have to beat me.

Then to the second part of that, guys understand that, okay, we have a guy that can do that now, and we understand that we're asking a lot of him in that role. But we've asked a lot of a lot of young guys this year -- inexperienced guys in high leverage. We were saying all along internally that we thought that would benefit us down the road.

We didn't realize it would happen as quickly as it has, but the Sam Longs and Zerpas and Bubic coming back from injury. And prior to getting hurt McArthur and the list goes on, Daniel Lynch, guys that have stepped up and executed. Roles take a while to define themselves, but when they do, they tend to work.

Q. You mentioned before another life ago. Years ago in Bowling Green or with the Renegades or Albany, did you envision yourself one day running a big league team on the postseason stage?

MATT QUATRARO: No, I think if anything I would have envisioned myself playing, but that didn't happen.

No, and I can truthfully tell you, every step of the way wherever I've been, I've embraced that and taken pleasure in wherever I've been and just enjoyed the moment.

I think that's what's allowed me to enjoy this as much as I have, too, because it wasn't about getting to the next step. It was about doing the best I could at the step I was in and understanding that you're nowhere without everybody that supports you. It's not you, it's the group that you're with.

I've been super fortunate to work with and play for and learn from some of the greatest people and some of the best baseball minds in the game.

Q. Which job tested you the most?

MATT QUATRARO: I can honestly tell you I've been tested every step of the way. You don't come into any job having it figured out. At least in my case, I certainly haven't. I've learned tons in every job I've been in, whether that was my first job as a professional coach or getting this job. I think every day I'm learning something.

Now, whether I can manage to retain it all and keep getting better, that's another story, but I think -- I don't think I've ever had one job that hasn't challenged me.

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