

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

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

New York Yankees Manager Aaron Boone Workout Day Press Conference

Q. Aaron, how equipped, how ready is your ballclub in your mind?

AARON BOONE: Ready. Had a long week of work. The guys have been focused. We'll have another workout today, obviously, here in a little bit. But I know the guys are champing at the bit to get going. It's been a long road to get here, and now we get to go compete for a championship, and that's what we set out to do.

Q. Do you think about the term "long playoff run," or do you start with this series and go from here?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, the here and now. We've got the Kansas City Royals in here coming off a really strong series playing with confidence. Our focus is on Michael Wacha in Game 1, and you've got to stay present, certainly, especially in the postseason.

Q. You said yesterday you were going to let left field marinate a little bit. How is the marinating going?

AARON BOONE: I know, but I haven't talked to all the people yet, so I'm not going to reveal anything right now.

Q. Do you have a lineup in your mind for tomorrow?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, yeah, I do.

Q. Have you guys arrived on a decision with Anthony Rizzo?

AARON BOONE: We have not. He's going to test it some more today. Again, still feel like it's a long shot, but we'll see what we have today. But today is kind of that day of really finding out.

Q. Have you decided on whether you'll carry 11 or 12 pitchers?



AARON BOONE: Just about, but still want to finalize that over the next few hours.

Q. Austin struggled in September, didn't have many results. Are you still committed to him batting fourth in your lineup?

AARON BOONE: Yes.

Q. And why is that?

AARON BOONE: I just feel like within those little bit of bump, I feel like we're seeing a real mature hitter. I mean, it's one at-bat, but I go back to that at-bat that we clinched in against Perez where to me it was the at-bat of that game that set us up.

I just feel like he's swung the bats well through this week. I feel like the week off has probably served him well. Feel like he's had good live at-bats this week. But have a lot of confidence in the presence he brings there.

Q. Just with the uncertainty you had with Gerrit earlier in the season, how comforting is it to have him healthy going into the playoffs and how do you think he's throwing?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, I feel like he's throwing the ball really well. There's no one else we'd want to hand the ball to. He's battle tested. He's pitched in a ton of big games in his career, obviously. He's our ace. He's been through a lot this year and working his way back from injury really for the first time in his career, and he's worked his tail off to get to a point. And it's been a process the whole way, but I feel like over the last six, eight weeks, he's thrown the ball really well. We have a lot of confidence when we take the field behind him.

Q. Do you feel like Gerrit has returned to that Cy Young form as the season has gone on?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, I feel like he looks like Gerrit Cole, like an ace. He's got a lot of ways to beat you, a lot of ways to get you out. I feel like he's got a handle on his



arsenal right now and a pretty good command of the entire arsenal, too. Excited to see him go do his thing tomorrow.

Q. The Pete Alonso home run last night, you have some familiarity with a moment like that in the playoffs. What went through your mind the minute you knew the ball was out, and what was that trip around the bases like?

AARON BOONE: Me personally? I don't remember it very well, honestly. It's one of those -- I tell people this all the time. You have those moments in your life that you can remember, like recall it, picture yourself there. It's very foggy for me.

I knew it was gone. I was just making sure initially it was fair, and then I knew it was going to be fair. Turned into a pretty good night.

Q. Did Jake come away okay from throwing yesterday, and is he still on track to pitch are you guys in the series?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, so he threw in the sim game. Stuff was really good. Again, want to make sure he gets through his catch play and everything today. But in talking to him a few hours ago, felt like everything was going to be good. But want to get through that part, too.

Q. You said also you're still deliberating on how many pitchers, close to finalizing. Do you expect Marcus to be part of that?

AARON BOONE: We'll make that call here in the next few hours.

Q. Do you feel the team is any different as far as -- you've got to make a decision at left, you've got to make a decision at first, you don't have a set closer, maybe you'll pinch run a little bit more -- that it's a different kind of team you're taking to the playoffs?

AARON BOONE: Maybe a little bit. I mean, every year is different. I do feel like we're a little more whole than we've been in some years going into the playoffs. Obviously Riz getting hurt was a blow down the stretch there for us and Nestor not being there and DJ now being out for a few weeks. But I also feel like we got a lot back over the last month that hopefully serves us well and that we have better -- more options going into a series that can play a factor or play a role.

Q. Did everybody come through the last two days of workouts healthy?

AARON BOONE: Yeah. Just making sure Cousins plays catch and all good.

Q. With Judge, how much do you sense his playoff runs have eaten at him, not ending how he wants them to over the years?

AARON BOONE: Look, I think Judgey first and foremost just like all of us has been through this a lot now. We want to win a championship. That's where the focus is.

I know that's where his focus is, and I feel like he's in a really good spot right now. Yeah, it's not about individual stuff at all. This is about us going out and doing things to try and win baseball games and compete for a championship.

Q. What was the bullpen sim game schedule for Clark and Hill the last few days, and did you do it thinking that either or both could be available out of the pen in one or two and then lineup --

AARON BOONE: Yeah, they didn't throw in those because they threw at the back end of the week of the regular season. So they'll throw bullpens.

Q. You could have used them in the sim game for an inning just to simulate --

AARON BOONE: Yeah, but we're more -- their day is more lined up on bullpen days to have them ready going in early in the series.

Q. Are they both options out of the pen?

AARON BOONE: Yep.

Q. What are your expectations for Soto? He's about to become a huge free agent. You've only guaranteed him this year. The playoffs are here and you've seen him for a whole season now. What do you think this is going to be like for him?

AARON BOONE: I mean, I'm not thinking of the free agency part of it. I don't think he is. I think he's loving being here and being part of this team and knowing what's at stake and what he has an opportunity to do. He's been in playoff baseball before. He's won a championship before. He obviously knows what it takes.

I think that's where his mind is. Talk about being present; I think he's very present with where he is, and obviously he's coming off an amazing regular season. Obviously a guy we count on heavily in our lineup, but I think he's in a great place.

I don't think he ever gets ahead of himself like that. I think that'll be for -- when that time comes, they'll handle that. But right now, I think he's completely focused on going out there and performing on a big stage in the playoffs.

Q. You've managed a Yankees team that almost got to the World Series and you've also managed a Yankees team that didn't get to the playoffs. What's your intuition about this year's team? Where is it falling within that spectrum?

AARON BOONE: I think we have a chance to win it all. But I think everyone that's still going probably feels that same way, rightfully so. Again, I feel like in a lot of ways we're in a better position going into the playoffs this year with some of the things that have kind of come together at the end. But I've been -- anytime we've gone into the postseason, I've felt really good about our chances, and no different now.

Last year we weren't as good as -- not close to as good as what we are now. That's the reality. I'm excited to see us take our shot, and I know our guys are all ready to roll.

Q. Back on Soto, you've had him for a few season. What's that been like?

AARON BOONE: It's been awesome. I mean, obviously getting to see what him and Aaron have done together. We talk about the historic nature of the seasons they've thrown up. But I've really enjoyed the person, really since -- one of those memories I can remember when I first called him in the offseason, it was in the evening in my hallway upstairs off my bedroom and talked to him for the first time. And then just seeing him come into Spring Training and just immediately get integrated in our room.

I grew an appreciation for his love of the game that you can tell he has, and obviously he's just been a really good teammate and person in our room.

He obviously came in here with a ton of attention and all the attention that goes with him being a free agent at the end of the year, and you've never felt that. It's been about being part of this team, and he's fit in perfectly. It's been a lot of fun to get to know him and to see how much he cares about his craft.

Q. You said you think he's really loving being here. What gives you that observation?

AARON BOONE: I don't know. I just interact with him every day on some level, and to me it seems like he's enjoyed his time here. I'd probably enjoy my time, too, if I

walked out with that skill set every day.

But to see how he -- watching him interact with his teammates and just watch his ease with which he moves through the room. And in my view the comfortability he has in our room, that's what tells me that.

Q. If Rizzo can't play in this series, what kind of impact could he still have considering, one, you guys have some first basemen who are still newish at the position, and two, that he is a guy with championship experience?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, no doubt. That's one of the things Anthony brings to the table from an intangible standpoint anyway. Yeah, there's always those things that you can bring to the table, and certainly with some of the inexperience we have at first base with some guys.

He's already been out there working with guys and talking through situations. And if he can't go, that'll be the case moving through this series.

Q. Your former bench coach Carlos Mendoza, what have you thought about his run and his leading his squad to the postseason as the first year as the Mets manager?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, I think he's done great, and not surprisingly. He's just such a quality person. Worn a lot of hats in the game for being a young man. He's played through the Minor Leagues, coordinator, manager, coach, my bench coach. You get to be around him and you understand what a quality person he is and what a great baseball person he is and what a great baseball mind he has.

For him to be leading that team, especially with all they went through the first two months -- they got off to a pretty crappy start -- and not surprisingly, he was steady at the helm, and it's been fun to watch him do his thing.

But I'm not surprised. We communicate a lot. I texted him after the game last night. Yeah, I'm excited for him.

Q. What's the biggest challenge you have facing a Bobby Witt, Jr., especially in a playoff series?

AARON BOONE: Just the complete player that he is. Obviously he plays a premium position at a high level at short. His speed is second to none maybe. I think he's as fast as there is, which shows up on the base paths. He's obviously got great bat to ball, on base, hit for average, and then he's got thump in there, too. He's one of the game's great players. He's a handful, and certainly a guy

that has our attention.

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