

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

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

New York Yankees

Aaron Judge

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. How are you feeling about the team chemistry going into the postseason?

AARON JUDGE: Excited. We've got a really good group here, tight-knit bond that we've kind of developed all the way to -- even before Spring Training. We've got a good group of guys that came out early down to Tampa and started working out, started talking. I think it's just built over the course of 162 ups and downs, adversity.

This team is built for it. Got some good chemistry going into the postseason.

Q. Historically there's always been a role player that comes out of nowhere during the postseason and drives the team all the way to the chip. Is there anyone on your team that you're feeling can have that impact?

AARON JUDGE: Like every single guy we've got on our roster. It's an exciting time of year, like you said, where anything can happen. You never know who's going to step up, have that big moment, have that big play. But I think everybody on this roster is primed to have a big moment like that. Like I said, over the course of what we've done this whole season, there's been some good times and bad times, but I think that ultimately prepares you for the real season now, the postseason.

Q. You just said you think everybody is primed to have that moment. For you as the captain, you haven't really had that October moment in your career. Do you feel any pressure to perform this time of year more so than the regular season?

AARON JUDGE: It's just about going out there and trying to do your job. Guys are on base, try to drive them in. If not, move them over. Try to do the things we've been doing all year. It's really not about putting any pressure on anybody. It's the same game we've been playing all year.



Q. You guys are facing the Kansas City Royals; what's your impressions of seeing them in the postseason and what they've done and also Bobby Witt, Jr. I know you guys went back and forth in the AL MVP race.

AARON JUDGE: Yeah, they're an exciting team. To see where they've come from last year and then pushing themselves all the way into the postseason this year, it's an impressive run and fun to watch. Athletic guys all around the diamond on that team. Like you said, starting with Bobby Witt, what he's done this year, it's been fun to watch him develop the past couple seasons into what he's doing now, leading this team into the postseason.

They're tough at-bats, they've got great speed, great defense all around. They play great fundamental baseball. It's going to definitely -- they're not going to give you too many mistakes or errors so you've got to earn every run and every hit you get, which will be definitely exciting.

Q. Gleyber has had an uneven season from struggling in the first half to getting benched. Now he's turned his season around in the past two months. How do you feel like he's handled everything mentally?

AARON JUDGE: He's been great. He's definitely mentally strong, mentally tough. I think that's one -- you've got to have that trait if you're going to play here in New York. Like you said, it's been an up-and-down year for him, but he's continued to show up every single day, continued to work, continued to try to improve. Then he gets that opportunity again in the leadoff spot to do his job and he's kind of ran with it. Excited for him to go out there and do what he does in the postseason.

Q. Wacha has had some success against you in the past. What makes him a tough matchup?

AARON JUDGE: He's a great pitcher. He's got five or six different pitches he can throw. Got a good feel for his fastball changeup, works that cutter to both sides of the plate. He comes after you, man. It's a tough at-bat but definitely a fun one.



Q. How would you assess Gerrit Cole's season and how much confidence you have going into Game 1 knowing he's on the mound?

AARON JUDGE: Yeah, this season is tough because coming back from injury like that, anything with the elbow for a pitcher is tough. So I kind of threw away the first four or five starts that he had coming back because that was basically his spring training, basically his time to kind of ramp up and get back into the feel of the game speed and kind of get your feet underneath you a little bit.

But what I saw from his past couple starts, especially his last one going up against Baltimore, a tough team, and how he was able to attack a lot of those hitters and come after them, great feel, great control for all his pitches. I'm excited to have him out there. There's nobody else I want out on the mound for Game 1 than Gerrit.

Q. You mentioned the other day getting within a game of the World Series your rookie year and then almost expecting that every year around here. How much has that stuck with you over the years, not being able to get back in that position?

AARON JUDGE: Well, it eats at me every time we don't finish the job. I take a lot of responsibility for that, being on the team, and if we don't win it all, I feel like it's my fault.

We've got a good group, though. Like I've been saying, we've got good chemistry, got a good group of guys in here, battled through a lot. So we're definitely excited to re-right the ship and go out there and do our thing. We've just got to take it one game at a time, and if we take care of our business and do what we gotta do, we'll be where we want to be.

Q. The feeling that anything less than a title is an unsuccessful season, it's different. Other teams, division titles are success. Did that feeling here come from day one when you were drafted and walked in? Did you learn it through the Minor League system when you got to the Bronx?

AARON JUDGE: I think it's just always how I've been, I think how my dad taught me playing anything is you're going out here -- even if it's a pickup basketball game in the front yard, you're here to win. That's all that matters. If you don't win, then what are we doing out here. I think it kind of started with that.

And I had great coaching along the way at Fresno State who had the same mentality of going out there and laying it all on the line, and if you don't win, start over and let's get it next year.

I think that's where my coach Mike Bates at the time when I got drafted by the Yankees said this is the best place for you to go. They have the same mentality as you, that they're here to win championships, and that's all that really matters.

I think it was kind of -- I'm blessed to be in the right spot at the right time surrounded by some great people that think the same as me.

Q. How would you describe what it's been like to hit behind Juan Soto all season?

AARON JUDGE: Ooh, it's been a treat, definitely been a treat, and excited to see what he does down in the postseason. It's just tough at-bat after tough at-bat. I get a chance to see 8 to 12 pitches every single time I'm on deck there. Get a feel of what the pitcher is -- hey, what's he feeling today, what's working for him, what's he trusting with two strikes.

Man, if there's nobody on base, he's going to get on base for you. He'll move guys over when he needs to. You'll see him multiple times try to go up there and bunt, if we got a guy on first base just to get a guy in scoring position for me. He's just the ultimate team player, ultimate guy you want up there at the top of your lineup. Looking forward to hitting behind him for a while in this postseason.

Q. Hitter to hitter, what do you see when you watch Bobby Witt's swing?

AARON JUDGE: No real holes. You see guys trying to throw up and in, throw in on him, and he can fight you off and drill it to right. Or if he's looking for something in there, he'll leave the park to left field. Off-speed pitches he does such a good job staying in his legs. Just a complete hitter. I really know what else to say. Even if gets a single, okay I kept him at first. Well, in a couple pitches he might be at second base and at third base.

He's just a threat at all times when he's on the field, even on defense. But just as a hitter, he's a complete hitter, can hit any pitch. And no moment is too big for him. We saw it in this Wild Card series against the Orioles. He had all the game-winning RBIs for the team. Just speaks volumes to not only the type of player he is but just the type of grit he's got.

Q. You guys finished with the best record in the American League so you get home field through the CS. Can you talk about what an advantage it is to play here in front of the fans in the Bronx, especially in October?

AARON JUDGE: They're a rowdy bunch out there. They've been rowdy all year, too. But they've been definitely waiting for this, especially missing out on it last year. I think they're going to be packing this house out all postseason long. They get this place rocking all the way from the intros in the beginning, which is always my favorite. We'll see what they bring tomorrow night.

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