

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

Saturday, October 5, 2024
New York, New York, USA
Yankee Stadium

New York Yankees Manager Aaron Boone

Pregame 1 Press Conference

Q. Obviously a couple decisions made when it came to the lineup today. Starting with left field, how much of a debate was it between Domínguez and Verdugo and what was that process like?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, I'd even throw Grish in that mix. I felt like this was the way to go for Game 1. Obviously Alex has been tremendous for us out there defensively, and even though it's been up and down for him in the second half, especially offensively, I still feel like there's a really good hitter in there that can provide something for us at the bottom.

Q. What gives you confidence in Cabrera at first base?

AARON BOONE: You know, obviously losing Riz is a tough blow, but Cabby has been such a steady player for us this year and just a guy that you can count on in so many different roles. He's very prepared. Feel really good about him taking the field tonight for us. And again, hopefully not only providing a spark for us offensively but doing his thing on the defensive side, which he usually does so well.

Q. We've seen him there in the past but not a ton by any stretch of the imagination. What was his reaction when you said he was starting tonight?

AARON BOONE: Vamonos.

Q. How much was Verdugo's experience a factor?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, I think that factors in for sure. Yeah, I mean, Dugey is obviously a veteran in this league, playoff experience, outstanding defensively. Yeah, I think that all factors in, but it doesn't mean Jason is not going to play a big role and kick in an opportunity and still impact us in some way, shape or form.



Q. What was the best thing you saw from your team this week as you prepared?

AARON BOONE: I think what stood out to me about this group all year is their closeness and their togetherness and how much they lean on each other, how much they communicated with one another, the game and situations, different pitchers. That's been something they've done really well throughout the year.

I feel like in game, talking through at-bats, sharing information with one another, playing for the guy next to you. Those kind of things that you want to see and develop within a team, I feel like have happened for us this year. I feel like there was a workmanlike focus of making sure we took advantage of the prep as much as we could, whether it was the sim games and guys getting at-bats, all the way to last night we did -- before we left, a handful of guys wanted live at-bats, so we had that going.

I think just that focus on preparation was, I feel like, where it needed to be.

Q. How different is it managing a pitching staff, a bullpen in these tournaments compared to the regular season, and how different do you think it will be not having the, quote-unquote, traditional roles that you do have in a bullpen?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, it's a little bit different. You're a little more aggressive in situations. You get a little more creative sometimes in situations, and obviously you have some starters that are kind of in the bullpen mix that could play a role at some point and a different kind of role.

As far as the traditional roles, I don't know. I feel very comfortable with our group of relievers and where I feel like they can be deployed most successfully. And hopefully the game unfolds to where you have opportunities to put them in the best position to be successful.

Traditional, not traditional, I feel comfortable with where these guys are kind of and how they finish the season.

Q. Gerrit got a lot of blowback, fair or unfair, a couple



weeks ago for the intentional walk. After that moment he was pretty excellent, about as excellent as you could ask for. Do you think he took that moment to heart or it added any extra fuel to the fire for him?

AARON BOONE: The one thing -- and I've probably said this to a lot of you over the years, as great of a career as he's had and as great a Yankee as he's been in his career so far, look back and he's had a number of gut check moments of truth, and he's answered that. Like all the time.

I remember a couple years ago going into 2022, it was should he be starting Game 1? That was a real question. And not only did he, but he dominated the series in a huge way.

That's who he's been. He's faced his share of adversity here, as successful as he's been, and he's always answered it. I think that was the case from what happened a couple weeks ago, and he put that to bed with some pretty strong performances.

But the biggest thing right now is I feel like he's throwing the ball incredibly well, he's throwing the ball like our ace, and we're excited to give him the ball and see him go do his thing tonight.

Q. When you guys traded for Leiter, you talked a lot about his competitiveness and ability to pitch in big games. What went into the decision not to have him on the roster?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, close call. Obviously only going 11 pitchers here, just felt like a number of guys -- and he was very much in that mix until the very end. It could have been him.

But we felt like because of a number of guys that have been performing really well for us. And I feel like Mayza coming over and kind of in that same bucket where -- obviously Tim being lefty and very good against lefties, but Leiter's bread and butter, too, is being able to get lefties out, as well. Just felt like this was the way we wanted to go.

It doesn't mean that Mark is not going to play a huge role for us potentially in the next series and beyond. We'll see. But really I think just performance from other guys that just nudged him.

Q. Gerrit being an ace and having that mentality will clearly most of the time try to push you to let him stay in as long as possible. How do you weigh that against knowing the stress involved in the postseason and

having the tendency to have a shorter leash?

AARON BOONE: I don't know. You do. I mean, that's the gig.

You monitor how his outing is going. You certainly communicate with him a little bit. Not all outings are created equal when you get to that point of no return, so there's some outings that are a little more stressful, so there's a lower threshold. Some where you're cruising through and maybe there's a higher threshold. You just kind of weigh that and have to try and make the best decision ultimately for our team.

Q. A little bit of an unusual format here because you've got the off-day before Games 1, 2, 3 and 5. What does that allow you to do pitching-wise, and was it a factor in leaving off Stroman because maybe you don't need a long man really?

AARON BOONE: Yes, and maybe you don't need the fourth starter in theory. With Clark and Luis Gil as potentials to take that Game 3 start but keeps them in the pen mix on some level, the first couple of games, yeah, that factored into it.

So with those off-days, that kind of pushed us to go from 13 or 12 pitchers to 11 pitchers, especially when you've got an extra starter that probably ends up not making a start in this series.

That's really what it came down to. So just wanting -- so then looking at the role and what made the most sense, I think for us it just made the most sense to go with another reliever.

Q. Gleyber Torres had a slow start to his season but seemed to turn it around in the second half and particularly when he moved into the lead-off speed. What was it that told you that would work with him at the top of the lineup?

AARON BOONE: Well, remember at the start of the season he was leading off. When we broke camp in Houston, he was my lead-off hitter. He just got off to a little bit of rough start and was pressing in that spot a little bit.

I always kind of thought this and spoke it, like he's such a good hitter that I just felt like eventually he's going to get it going. It was just the first half, he just never gained that traction.

All the while, I felt like even early on when he was going through some struggles, he was making some of the best swing decisions of his career. He's continued that, but now

he's started over the last couple months to really hit like Gleyber Torres is capable of hitting.

And you add in the fact that he's still doing a great job with his swing decisions, and he's taken that lead-off spot and kind of run with it and been such a spark for us.

Q. How might you deploy Ben Rice in this series, and what role does he play on this roster?

AARON BOONE: Yeah, we'll see. He could start a game. You could end up being aggressive with a pinch-hit in the middle of the game, because I find Berti in the first base mix, too. Just provide some depth at that position where you might be a little bit aggressive.

Q. I wonder how you think Chisholm will handle big games in particular here where it's going to be 45,000 people?

AARON BOONE: I mean, I think he's cut out for it. I'm not worried about him. I think he's excited for it. I think he feels like this is what he's made for.

We got a little glimpse when he came to us right away, and he's in Fenway Park and Citizens Bank Park and kind of takes over the games in that week, in his kind of welcome to the Yankee world. I know he's loved every step of the way. He's thrown his arms around third base and done a great job of adapting to that and also I feel like continuing to just -- with the experience he's gained over there, he's gotten better and better.

I think he's cut out for it. It doesn't mean he'll go off or won't. Sometimes that's baseball. But I think he's cut out for it.

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