

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

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

Kansas City Royals Manager Matt Quatraro Pregame 1 Press Conference

Q. Q, going with the same roster as the Wild Card series, what allows you to feel good about having 11 pitchers and 15 hitters?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, a lot of things. The off-days play a big part of that. We also feel good about our starters, and we feel like as long as we can have as much versatility on the bench as we can with the pinch running, pinch hitting, defensive versatility, all those kinds of things, we have to play that way. So we want to be that way as long as we possibly can.

Q. With the roster, I'm curious if you like the makeup of guys who had prior postseason experience and the guys who don't, and if you maybe need guys on the roster who don't know what they don't know along with those guys with experience.

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, I don't think there's any perfect formula to experience, no experience. You've seen plenty of guys over the years with no experience have huge postseasons. The way our guys performed in Baltimore, the majority of those guys did not have any experience.

Now, we have a lot of guys in that room that do. Obviously Salvy is out there every pitch. But even the guys that aren't active with Will and Strat, we've had -- Frazier has had a big influence on things here, Renfro. So we do have that blend, but I don't think there's any one formula for it.

Q. Could you talk about the impact Tommy Pham has had since he joined the team? What has he done off the field and on the field?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, Tommy is the ultimate competitor. He's incredibly intense. We knew that getting him. He's a great worker, tireless worker. He's constantly trying to figure out what he needs to do to improve. And



for a guy that's played as long as he has, that's not always the norm. His willingness to make some changes and listen to suggestions. He plays extremely hard all the time. I think our guys respect that.

Q. Your team only needed three runs to get through Baltimore, but I'm curious, number one, what you saw from your team's approach at the plate, and if you feel like there's something else you'd like to see from them in this series.

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, I don't know if we only needed three, but we could have used more.

Well, we knew going into that, facing Burnes, we thought that would be a very challenging game. Just the way he's been all year, the way his pitches profile and play off of each other, we expected that to be a low-scoring game. Very fortunate that we were able to win that Game 1-0.

The second game, Eflin, we've seen him a decent amount over the last couple years with Tampa. He's a challenge because of the different movement. I'm not surprised they were low-scoring games.

To your point, what can we do? We just have to continue to put up consistent at-bats, quality at-bats. We need to use the whole field. We need to understand what they're trying to do in certain situations.

One of our strengths all year has been putting the ball in play. When we get the ball in play -- getting Vinnie back is big there because it opens up a little bit of space between Bobby and Salvy. The first inning of Game 2 we got the RBI out of Vinnie. Even his first game, he walked. He provides a different look for the opposing team, and it's something they have to plan for when they go to the bullpen, as well.

More so than anything, just continue to put up at-bats where we're not trying to do too much.

Q. Q, where have you seen the biggest growth in Lucas Erceg to be able to handle these high-pressure situations in the playoffs?



MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, we didn't give him any time to grow. We just threw him right in there to the high leverage as soon as we got him. We were bringing him into the biggest spot in the game from day one. Everything we heard about him from the people in Oakland and the intel we tried to dig up, his competitiveness was what stood out.

He has not backed down one time from any of those challenges. Only a couple outings that have not gone his way. But for the most part he comes in and he's attacking regardless of who's hitting, and that's what we like about him.

Q. Big picture about your team, to improve by 30 games from one year to the next is a ton. When you assessed last year after the season, what did you think was going to have to change to have a pathway to the kind of turnaround?

MATT QUATRARO: Pitching, plain and simple. We had to pitch better. We had to throw more strikes. We had to challenge hitters more. I'm a big believer the more decisions you make, opposing hitters make at the plate, the better it is for you.

Now, they might beat you sometimes, but the more swing decisions they have to make, the better. We didn't do a very good job of that last year. We walked a lot of guys. We got behind in the count a lot. This year it's been a lot different, and I think that's the biggest change.

Q. You've got three guys in the bullpen that can really give you length in Lorenzen, Singer and Lynch. Obviously it's a short series. Can those guys go short, too? How do you see deploying them?

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, absolutely. Lorenzen had been coming back off the hamstring so the last couple outings were two innings for him. Lynch can do both. We've used him for one out, and other times he's gone three innings or more. He's been extremely versatile.

Brady clearly can give us the length, but at the same time we know in the right situation, we get a couple righties or a good spot in the order for him, he can go in there and blow it out and be as good and as tough as any righty.

Q. Along those lines, they haven't pitched in a little bit, those three guys you were talking about. How have they stayed ready, and do you feel pretty good about them going into this series?

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, absolutely. I think the rest was actually a good thing for Lynch and for Lorenzen.

Lorenzen because of the hamstring. Lynch, we put a big workload on him these last few weeks. He was throwing two, two-plus, two days off, three innings, two days off. We asked a lot of him and this was a big role change for him after starting all year in Triple-A. I think this rest is really good for him.

Q. Just a quick one on Bobby. When you guys were here recently, he had mentioned that he's been able to just be himself, just be Bobby, and that's allowed him to have the success he's had. If you had to pick something tangible that you've seen him elevate his game or to be able to have that success, what would you pinpoint as something tangible?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, I mean, on the defensive side of the ball, he's improved immensely, especially going to his left. He's worked extremely hard on that. He's always been really good to his right. So I know how much work he put into that in the offseason and continues to put in throughout the year.

On the offensive side of the ball, we've seen some stretches from him this year that are just otherworldly. 9 for 12, a few homers, those kinds of things. I think when he gets into those stretches, it's because he's, kind of what he said, being himself. He's not trying to swing at every pitch. He'll take a walk.

He'll understand what the pitcher is trying to do, and then he slows the game down a little bit for him. When he gets going a million miles an hour and tries to do too much, he gets out of his game a little bit.

Q. Ragans mentioned the "Today" tee shirt you talked about. Why was that the right message for this group?

MATT QUATRARO: I don't know. It was not intentional. It wasn't this group, actually, it was last year. It was at a point in the year sometime in August, we were also-rans and really scuffling. I just felt like the mindset of a lot of those guys had turned to what they could do in the offseason or what they would do next year.

And I didn't want the last two months of the year to be that, looking forward to next year. I said, there's very little that's guaranteed in this game as well as in life, so you're here now, seize your opportunity today to start making those changes. You've got nothing to lose. There's nobody that's guaranteed to be here next year, so don't wait.

It certainly wasn't intentional, but I guess in the course of that meeting, I said "Today" a bunch of times, and as clubhouse managers like to do, they seize something and make a tee shirt out of it. That was not an intentional thing

on my part to come up with a mantra or whatever. But I try to live that way, and I think our guys embrace that and understand that there is no reason to think about the future until you take care of the business right in front of you.

Q. Do you remember what series that was?

MATT QUATRARO: I don't want to say for sure, but I think we were getting ready to play Boston or we were in a series with Boston at home.

Q. Tell me a little bit about what you saw in Michael Wacha all season. What has been the most impressive thing that he's brought to you in terms of his approach or his presence or whatever?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, that's an easy one for me. I've said this a million times. He is the most dialed-in pitcher I have ever been around when he's not pitching. He's into every pitch. He's high-fiving guys for keeping the double play in order, for taking an extra base as a runner, for a big strikeout with the bases loaded.

He is into every single pitch, and that understanding and that intensity of the game spreads throughout the team, and he means it. It's genuine.

Now, what he's done on the field has been really remarkable. The only start he missed were he got hit with a ball in the foot. He's extremely diligent about his prep and his arm care and all that kind of stuff. We know he's dependable. We know he's been through it. He understands he's going to have some ups and downs, but he doesn't waver in his approach, his intensity, his ability to turn the page from a good outing or a bad outing. He's really the consummate pro.

Q. When you're looking for a lefty at the top of the lineup, what do you like about Massey up there and what kind of spark has he brought when you've put him up there?

MATT QUATRARO: Well, we think Massey is one of our best hitters, so we're going to try to get him as many at-bats as we possibly can. We understand that not every matchup is ideal, regardless of where you have guys in the order. But he can still go first to third, he can work the count, he can hit the ball hard, he can hit a homer.

We just want to get him as many at-bats as we can while keeping some of the handedness and those kinds of things balanced out.

Q. How impactful has Yuli Gurriel been not only at first base but in the middle of the lineup, now that you have

Vinnie back to add a little bit more protection?

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, he's shown really quality at-bats from day one. He was in Triple-A all year, he's coming off the injured list when we got him. I feel like he was trying to feel things out a little bit. But I actually looked it up yesterday, he played in like 80-something postseason games, which is incredible. And to have somebody that's slow heartbeat -- he moves around at first base extremely well. The guys have gravitated to him as a person. He's very calm but he's also very focused on what he needs to do. It's a very good feeling.

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