

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

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

Kansas City Royals Lucas Erceg

Pregame 1 Press Conference

Q. Lucas, can you take us throughout everything that has kind of been happening with you as soon as you came to the Kansas City Royals, getting the closer role and developing into that?

LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, it's been as far as I know a pretty easy transition from getting traded. I've never really been involved in any trade talks or anything like that. It was pretty overwhelming at first, but they welcomed me with open arms. Everyone in the organization has been awesome. It's been smooth.

Q. To be a closer, you sometimes have to have maybe a little screw loose, you have to thrive in situations that are very tough mentally and all that. It's a very new role for you. I'm wondering if you had to adopt that mindset or if that's something that was kind of always in you as a baseball player when you were having different roles?

LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, definitely. At first it was kind of like a "don't let the moment get too big," and that's something I worked on a lot with this offseason, just allowing myself to be present on the mound, assess the situation, play it over in your head tons of times before you get out there so that's it's kind of familiar. And the more I've gone out in those situations, I've gotten more comfortable.

But at the end of the day, man, you're playing baseball in front of tons of people. It's a cool moment to be in, so for me, I just like to really take it all in before I get going, and at the end of the day, I'm just out there competing.

Q. I know you have a very special date written on your glove. How do you reflect on the changes you've made in your life that have helped lead you to this amazing moment in your career?



LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, definitely. Without making that decision for myself, I don't think I would be anywhere close to this podium, let alone the New York Yankees stadium or field. For me, I try and take time out of my day to be grateful and kind of look back on that specific decision. The support system that I've had in that process has been nothing but awesome, and I'm just constantly thankful and grateful to be here.

Q. The bullpen over the last month has been really good for you guys. How have you seen that unit come together and get the results that you guys have on the field?

LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, I think I've mentioned this before, but we've never strayed from our process. We've worked closely with our pitching staff and our pitching coaches on what makes us good and not really allowing those bad outings to define us. It helps us stay on course with what we want to accomplish on a day in, day out basis.

Like I said, at the end of the day it's just baseball. We're going to have our tough outings, but the more we can stack on those good ones and really not get too high with those and not get too low with the bad outings, it puts us in a better spot to stay consistent. And I think we've done that pretty well the last month and a half going into the playoffs.

Q. Is there a detail that you feel like the coaching staff has been particularly attentive to that's allowed you to be your best self this season?

LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, I think we harp on a lot of the same things, and that's staying aggressive in the zone, winning the race to two strikes, and just being efficient overall while we're on the mound. We don't want to nit-pick too much. We don't want to pitch for the strikeout. We allow that to kind of happen organically.

As long as I think we stick with that process, we put ourselves in a good spot to create that success.

Q. I was going to ask you about the mentality of attacking the zone. You've only had three walks since you've come over here. Every pitching staff wants to



limit the walks and be aggressive. How are you able to do it and what's the key to doing that, especially facing guys like Judge and Soto who walk a lot?

LUCAS ERCEG: Sure. I think for me personally, I kind of started my professional career as a hitter, so even when I started pitching again, I kind of understood that hitting is definitely a little harder than some of these guys make it look.

For me specifically, I think that keeping that in the back of my head and knowing that I have a hard fastball and some decent secondary stuff that I can throw for a strike, it's going to make the hitters guess what's coming.

I think kind of keeping that in the back of my head is an important thing. But like I said, we work a lot on harping on the same two or three things, and that's staying aggressive in the zone and letting the baseball take care of itself.

Q. How much have you leaned on Will Smith being that he was a closer in his own right, and how has he helped you develop into this role?

LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, absolutely. Will has been a great teammate. I think the first thing he said to me when I introduced myself to him is, Hey, I'm the strongest guy on the team. So immediately it was just like a breath of fresh air, a guy that's not going to be out there and taking everything super seriously. He's been around 10-plus years. He knows what it takes. He knows how hard it is to pitch at this level.

So just having him kind of be the bright light in a chaotic atmosphere that we end up pitching in, it's nice, because he's been there before. He's done that before. Like even when he was talking to a couple of us about our first postseason atmosphere, he's like, Hey, listen, guys, at the end of the day it's the same game. It's just going to be a little bit louder. Just think about it that way. Don't think about anything else. Trust yourself. You're going to be fine.

I think that's helped a lot.

Q. You referenced a moment ago your time as a position player. Could you offer a scouting report of yourself as the hitter, and did you ever dream of doing both concurrently as a two-way player?

LUCAS ERCEG: Yeah, of course. I think when I first started pitching, I was trying to do the two-way thing, and I just wasn't prepared physically. I wasn't prepared mentally for that type of physical demand.

But I think if I were to guess to say whether I'd be a better pitcher or a better hitter against myself, definitely the pitching side would dominate, because I can hit a changeup to begin with, and I'd like to think that my changeup is pretty good. I think it's one of my better pitches.

I put myself in a pretty easy O-2 count and then kind of toy around. It would be pretty funny. But yeah.

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