

AL Division Series: Royals vs Yankees

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

New York Yankees

Alex Verdugo

Postgame 1 Press Conference

Yankees 6, Royals 5

Q. From the outside, it seems you certainly were not sure you were going to be able to play tonight or if you were in the lineup. How have you managed to stay ready and have a big game like you did tonight?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, I mean, obviously we had a couple days off, so just doing the workouts with the guys, kind of trying not to go through the motions, just keep everything with the same kind of intent as like a playoff game. I know it's hard to mimic that, but Boone told me within a couple of days that I was going to be starting, so I had a good idea that I was going to be in here for Game 1.

I know it wasn't out there to the media or anybody else, so a lot of speculation on that end, but for me, he had told me a few days early, so it was just kind of just get it ready. There was no doubts, no hesitation in my mind. It was time to play ball.

Q. On base three times, RBI single in the seventh, scored the go-ahead run. How validating was that RBI single?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, it was huge. Obviously look back, too, it's the game-winning RBI. Our bullpen came up and closed the door on them. Really this is -- this kind of baseball is going to take everybody. We see it's not going to be our big guys that are always going to come through. It's going to take everybody.

I think playoffs kind of -- you can kind of see it. Even if it's a lead-off walk, it's going to lead to something. Every at-bat, every pitch in the playoffs matters, and this is the kind of baseball that I love.

Q. You had mentioned Aaron Boone had told you a couple days ago that you were going to be the guy and



you were starting in left field. Just before he said he knew you would be ready for the moment, he trusted you would be ready to go. What does his trust meant to you throughout the course of the season?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, Boone is a great manager, he's awesome, handles outside noise really well, handles the internal stuff with the team and all of us really well, as well. For me, I just wanted to -- he's going to trust me, and I just wanted to kind of put that back to him as in like, hey, man, I got you. I know the season didn't go the way I should have really wanted it to go, but the ultimate goal at the end of the day was to get to the playoffs, and that's where we are. And now it's time to really just go out there and ball out and give it 100 percent.

Q. How does Boone handle it when he has to have what could be difficult conversations about playing time like he may have had to have with you in September?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, it came out in September, just -- obviously Dominguez came up and I kind of already knew. I was struggling a little bit. Actually at that time I was starting to find my swing again, getting a couple hits here and there. But I kind of already figured with him being up, they wanted to give him some playing time and just more consistent.

So for me, it was -- it wasn't the -- I wasn't happy about it. I was obviously a little bit upset, but I understood what went into it.

I just started eating better, started kind of doing some stuff to address certain things that were bothering me throughout the year while I was having some more days off than I would have liked. And I feel like that's really benefitted me now into feeling fresh and feeling ready to go and ready to run through a wall now.

Q. Did you feel like the communication was always clear on what your role was going to be and when you might be playing and not playing?

ALEX VERDUGO: It was a little bit -- I kind of figured after



a few days of how it was going to go, it would be -- I would play, maybe one or two off-days, play again, one or two off-days, play again. It kind of fell into that. I mean, really, just like I say, I just kept trying to stay ready and do the best I could to just be locked in and work on my craft.

Q. You mentioned the outside noise. How did you handle that and some of the criticism that came your way from a mental perspective?

ALEX VERDUGO: I mean, mentally, man, I feel like I'm pretty real with myself, as in fans booing me, fans getting on me. I understand it. I was booing myself, too.

We ran through a course where I just kind of let it spiral out of control a little bit. For me, it was just really leaning on my guys in the clubhouse. They all got my back. They all know what kind of player I am and how I played throughout my whole career and just kept telling me, man, don't let this season or this little glimpse make your whole year. You can make up for a lot of things in the playoffs.

Q. Was there anybody in particular other than Boone who was really in your corner and sharing those things?

ALEX VERDUGO: I could probably list the whole team. I'd say Captain, Riz, several pitchers that all had my back. This team, they really care for me. I really care for them. They had my back, and it's -- I appreciate it a lot, and it goes a long way.

Q. I'm curious if you can pinpoint the series where you felt that turnaround happen when you were eating better and maybe the swing came alive again, and then what you made of the outfield and the defense tonight in particular?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, so I would say this year I've been struggling just kind of -- I don't like to -- with my food -- I got a chef this year towards the end, back end of the season, and I really wanted to try it out to see if it would make me feel a little bit different. And it's worked out a lot. It's made me feel a lot better, a lot more energized on a day-to-day basis and recovering a little bit better, less lethargic or slow or less the next day. That helped a lot.

Then defensively, I'd like to say I'm known for my defense. I take pride in that. I want to help anybody I can, I want to save as many runs as I can. I take pride out there, so I just want to make the pitcher's job easier.

Q. What have you appreciated the most about Aaron Boone this season, kind of your first year with a new manager? I'm curious as you look back on your

interactions with him what kind of stands out to you? What do you appreciate the most?

ALEX VERDUGO: I think for me, if you really want to have a real conversation with him, he'll do that with you. If you don't talk to him or you don't go out of your way to -- hey, what's going on, what's your thought process behind this, he'll kind of leave it be. If you have anything you want to address or just stop beating around the bush and just go straight to the source, he's always there to have that conversation with you, to talk to you, and just let you know what's kind of -- going behind some decisions and things like that.

For me, I can appreciate that.

Q. As Massey's ball was off the bat, are you fairly confident you can get to it in time, and was everything reaction time as it hits off your wrist and chest?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, that one was more of like Jazz is super fast, so he's always getting way out there than what a normal third baseman would. I think for me, it's just trying to -- as I'm running, trying to size it up to how far am I away, how far is he away, who's going to have the harder play. And I think for me, I just called it at the end and kind of got heeled -- hit me in the heel of my glove and thank goodness it popped over to the left hand, so it all worked out.

Q. What are some of the foods that you're now eating, and was there anything that you eliminated from your diet?

ALEX VERDUGO: I don't even know what it's called. I'll be honest with you.

Q. Chicken, fish?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, I eat everything, but I'm eating stuff that I didn't even know you could throw into a plate. It's way over my head. It's way over my head. I'll show you -- I'll get back with you tomorrow. I'll show you some of the menus I have. I can't even -- I can't. Yeah.

Q. As far as your downtime, was there anything you worked on with regards to mechanics or approach that you feel has helped you in this game?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah, I think I had some backside issues just kind of with my left leg, just not really getting into my hip. Kind of was really crashing with my backside. I wasn't controlling it and kind of putting the foot down and working through the ball. It kind of felt like flip a coin. Like I'm just going and trying to hit it.

Just felt like from the beginning my swing was kind of out of whack. I was fighting an uphill battle against really good pitchers.

Now I just feel like I'm in a better spot to hit. When I hit balls like I did against Michael to left field with some authority and a line drive like that, that's when I know my swing is playing. That's my bread and butter. My bread and butter is hitting fastballs on a line, oppo and then we hit the off-speed pitches center to right center and we get a little bit more loft. I think for me it's just trusting my hands, being in my backside a little bit and just being a little bit more balanced.

Q. Understanding you had a few days to get ready for this start and you were in a good frame of mind, what can today do for your confidence? Do you feel like you don't need to look over your shoulder now going into the rest of the series?

ALEX VERDUGO: For me, I want to play every day. I want to be out there with those guys every day. I want to -- I look forward to this. When the lights are brightest, that's when we want to play. The whole year, every player checks off this time. They want to be playing now.

I think for me, it's just -- there's a finish line. There's finally a finish line, and when you see that, it's basically full sprint. Full sprint, and let's go get it.

Q. This was your first game in the playoffs as a Yankee. I'm wondering what you thought of the atmosphere here. And conversely, you've obviously been here as an opponent. Can a crowd that energetic and volatile and electric unnerve a visiting team?

ALEX VERDUGO: Yeah. I mean, I think obviously for me personally, this was awesome. To see all the fans standing up for as long as they did cheering, yelling, getting after it, from five lead changes, whatever it was, the fans stayed up, and they were letting the noise go.

I think from a visiting side, yeah, the louder they are, especially in those big moments for them, it takes maybe that little, hey, time out, try to step out of the box and take a deep breath.

I want to say it speeds up on you, but the adrenaline factor, it definitely starts spiking.

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