

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Friday, October 4, 2024
Cleveland, Ohio, USA
Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

Will Vest

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. A lot's been made of how you have deployed your pitching this season, and A.J. talked earlier about the buy-in of the players. So from your perspective, at what point did you realize that we all gotta be ready really at any point in any game, and how did you guys embrace this?

WILL VEST: Yeah. I think A.J. has done a phenomenal job. Even in Spring Training we had a meeting, and he made it a priority to have an open communication line from him to us and from us to him, and we've had that all year.

And so, yeah, when the starter situation kind of happened a couple months ago and we moved to a lot of bullpen days, it was pretty transparent, but it was also we relied on him and trusted in him to put us in good spots.

And he's always done that. So it makes it easy to buy in when you've got a manager like that that'll take care of you and also put you in the best spots to succeed.

Q. Throughout your career, we've seen you kind of grow up here and in Seattle. Adrenaline has been a big part of your game. Has it been something that you've had to learn to channel to get to where you are now where you're in these leverage situations and it's all emotion and adrenaline? Has that been a process for you?

WILL VEST: Yeah. A little bit. Definitely I think early on adrenaline can -- it's kind of like a wild bull if you don't know how to control it. So, yeah, it's definitely something you've gotta learn to use to your advantage. And I always make a joke about it, and now it's kind of come true once we get to the playoffs.

Everybody's like, man, guys are running on fumes; how do they get through? And I always say adrenaline is a hell of a drug. It's fun to feed off of that. But, yeah, you definitely



have to know how to use it to your advantage.

Q. From your vantage point, what impresses you most about Skubal, and what do you think has allowed him to take this jump that he's taken this season?

WILL VEST: Yeah. Man, it's hard to explain, and it's been fun to watch. You almost become a fan watching it. I've had the pleasure of playing with him since he got drafted in 2018, and I still remember his first outing. He came out of the bullpen, punched the side, I think, on like 11 fastballs, and it was remarkable. And I was like, dude, this guy can pitch.

And watching him grow into the pitcher that he is today, it's been a treat to watch, especially dealing with the injury, coming back from last year and watching how he's kind of tailored his routine, his recovery, his workouts. He's a pro's pro. And he's fun to pick his brain, learn from and just watch pitch. But it's been awesome to watch him develop into the pitcher that he is today.

Q. Beyond just the mindset for you particularly, is there one thing that you kind of figured out along the way that really enabled the elevated success that you've had this season?

WILL VEST: It's hard to put a finger on exactly, if anything. I think Juan always kind of gets at us in the new age of baseball it's easy to get caught up in the numbers, the analytics and the stuff and everything like that, and he keeps it as simple as possible where he's like you still gotta execute.

And that's something that, you know, he's really harped on with me throughout this year is, you know, because in the past I've been known to go down some rabbit holes and look at some numbers and look at some mechanics and things like that. But this year I've simplified as much as I can just to get out there and execute as best as you can.

Q. The Houston series was so loud, so intense.

WILL VEST: Yeah.



Q. And I know you guys were loose and comfortable before that. But how do you think that that experience can help you this week?

WILL VEST: Yeah. I think it's huge. And that's something that we talked about after the Baltimore series. A couple of guys were just like, you know, where would you all rather go? Do you want to go to Baltimore, or do you all want to go to Houston?

And I kind of made a joke, like when I was younger and I got in trouble, my dad would always ask: Do you want your licks now or later? So I said that about Houston, and I was like, I want to go to Houston. And they kind of looked at me like, dude, they're a postseason juggernaut! And I said, yeah, if we beat them, imagine the confidence that we'll have moving forward. And now that we're here, I think we got some good confidence going into this series.

Q. You mentioned Juan earlier. What kind of impact has he had during your Tigers tenure, but also especially the last couple of months with so many new faces in the bullpen?

WILL VEST: Oh, man. It's hard to put into words what he brings along with Fett and Lund. I mean, those three guys complement each other phenomenally. They each bring something different to the table.

But to speak on Juan specifically, he's got experience. He's got four World Series rings, and he's been through this a time or two. So it's awesome to kind of pick his brain on things that he's seen.

And that's the crazy thing is we're still playing the same game. Even though it was in the past, the things that he's learned and seen in his days still ring true today. And so it's awesome to go to him and ask advice, you know, how to deal with the crowds that we're facing or even little things like sequencing or how to read ABs, how to read guys' swings or what they're looking for. And he's a wealth of knowledge, and it's awesome to have him on our side.

Q. When you guys were here in July four or five games under 500, on the verge of some trades, et cetera, was there a belief then? Where did you think the season was going at that point?

WILL VEST: Yeah. I think we've always had that belief. I remember being interviewed in Spring Training and someone had asked, what's the expectation for this year, and I think everybody that was in that clubhouse believed that we were going to the playoffs. Now, it may have looked grim after June. June wasn't a great month for us, but I don't think that belief ever left.

Now, once we -- we basically got a brand-new team, you know, after the trade deadline, and we brought up a lot of new guys. But, I mean, just that burst of energy that we got with all those young guys was awesome. It was fun playing with everybody. Guys were excited to be making their MLB debuts. And once that training got rolling, it was fun to be a part of.

Q. Just talk about the chemistry with this team has always been good, but how much has kind of the brotherhood grown throughout all of this?

WILL VEST: Yeah. Chemistry has been good. I've been up in the Big Leagues with the Tigers since '22, and the clubhouse has always been great, but I think the biggest thing that can bring a clubhouse together is winning. And once we started doing that, I mean, it's a whole new level.

You know, I've even said to my wife, I've never had as much fun playing baseball as I am now. And it's just -- I mean, every game you feel like there's something where you're just looking to the guy next to you and you're just like, What the heck just happened? Like how -- I mean, you know.

And that's what's so beautiful about baseball. Even the game last night with the Brewers and the Mets. Playoff baseball is there's nothing like it. And so once you're going through those situations, you know, the crowd in Houston, as Skip even said, it's one of the loudest parks in the league, and when you go through that with your brothers and you come out with the W, that'll bring you together. So it's fun.

Q. Even talking about talking about playoff baseball now?

WILL VEST: I almost annoy my wife with how bad I've wanted to be here. Every year I go immediately -- I get home and I get on the couch and, We're watching another month of baseball, and she's just like, Are you not tired of this? I'm like, This is the best of the best right here. I'm like, This is it.

So I've always been on her, like, man, I've gotta play in that. I've gotta feel that. And, yeah, now that I have, it's unbelievable. It's indescribable.

Q. When you first saw the graph that's on your shirt, what kind of feeling did that --

WILL VEST: Yeah. Can you all see that? It's actually funny. I've got a group chat with some of our best friends back at home, and when I went home in it was late August



to have my second kid, our playoff chances were very low. I think it was like 5 percent or something like that at that time.

And I texted that group chat and I was like, Hey, don't count us out, we've got a 5 percent chance. And they kind of did what you all are doing, like they were laughing. And while I was at home for the paternity leave, I think I left Chicago, we were playing the White Sox and we won four in a row, and it went up to like 7 percent. And I was like, hey.

So every day I would send in that group text what percentage we were at. And, you know, they were kind of laughing at it. And then once we got to like the middle of September it started like getting up there to like 20, 30, whatever, and they were just like, holy crap.

And the best message of it all was when we clinched, I immediately went and got my phone and just sent: 100 percent. And they all three loved it. And that was a cool text to send. It was really cool.

Q. Jake Rogers has been a huge part of, just his responsibilities as the catcher for a pitching staff that is changing so often on a daily basis. As someone who's kind of seen him in this organization for a while, what has he kind of meant to this team?

WILL VEST: Oh, man. Again, it's hard to put in words. You love having that guy back there. You know he's got a good game plan. He's unbelievable at just reading the game, reading what the hitters have done early and also matching that with what your strengths are.

And he's easy to game plan with. He doesn't have an ego as far as, you know, if you don't agree with him on a certain pitch or you want to shake, and he's always open to kind of talking about things or he's going to let you know why he wanted to do certain things.

But I think the best thing about Rog is just his ability to keep things light. You know, with such a young team, I think you gotta have that. I think that's what kind of keeps that energy alive is not taking things too seriously or putting too much pressure, which once you get to these situations, that could be easy to do.

So it's always good to just look up and know that you got Rog back there to kind of help you calm down in the moment and you can put your full trust in him to rely on him to help you get through however long -- however many outs you gotta get.

Q. As someone who had to make the transition

learning about the relief teams and everything, how much have you tried to help guys like Jobe get the hang of this on short notice and learn how much to throw, what to do between outings?

WILL VEST: Yeah. And that's definitely something that I even -- we actually had a conversation a couple weeks ago when we were in Baltimore with some of the guys in the bullpen, just talking about routines as far as, you know, throwing your catch play of the day after you throw and how to stay loose or stay fresh, you know, because we knew down to the wire we're like, hey, boys, we're going to be in there a lot.

And so we kind of talked about things that we've learned, that I've learned through my tenure, and this year I've learned a lot about myself on how to keep my body fresh.

And so some of us have kind of relayed to some of the younger guys as far as what we do to help with that, but also the guys that have come up, they've got phenomenal routines and know how to get their body right as well.

So, you know, it wasn't that much of a transition with Jobe. Even with Gunny, too, we talked about the other day where it was like he got hot in the first game in Houston and he was like, Dude, I threw two pitches and I felt warm. Like I was ready to go. I was like, Exactly.

Back to the adrenaline thing, it'll get you going in the playoffs and you don't need much. Right now it's just everybody hands on deck and you gotta be ready to go.

Q. What's it like playing in front of Parker Meadows, and just the fact that he makes so many incredible catches that get you guys out of jams, but it also seems like they serve as momentum-seizing moments for the offense?

WILL VEST: It's a breath of fresh air to have that guy behind you. I mean, he's a deer out there. Even yesterday Peña squared that ball up to center field. But literally, like off the bat, I was like, he's catching it. Like I turned around and I even see him in a full sprint, and I was like, he's catching it. And as he got closer to the wall, I was like, come on, he's catching it, and sure enough, he comes down with it.

But the plays that he's made. The rob that he did at the Mariners' place, the rob that he did in Baltimore. I think he even had one early in the season -- or I think it was the first weekend in Chicago. Like that guy's a pitcher's best friend. I know double plays are supposed to be our best friend. Parker Meadows is our best friend. It's good to have him back there.



