

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Saturday, October 5, 2024

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Pregame 1 Press Conference

Q. A.J., before we talk about the pitching strategy in using all these pitchers in different roles, what do you consider to clear the threshold for a pitcher that is able to go multiple innings or full time through the order, even facing a pitcher twice, besides Skubal, of course?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, generally it's not as scripted as people might think. You do want the guys to be pitching well. You want them to have their full arsenal. A lot of it comes down to game planning, scouting reports and where you're at in the game.

You've gotta count outs really from the beginning, and you need them all. And so you have to have a path to get there. In order to do that and use a lot of pitchers, you really do need somebody to go one plus, two, two plus, three.

If it wasn't for off days and the fact that we're in the playoffs, I mean, a lot of these guys went three and four innings during these type of games. But getting the opposite-handed hitter out is critical because the way lineups are constructed nowadays and the way that they're balanced, and especially against this team, you're just not going to run into friendly matchups all the time or platoon matchups all the time that's in your advantage.

But you can't guess on how the guy is going to do. You also can't overestimate what the actual performance is doing. When you see things and it passes the eye test to go along with the strategy of makeup probabilities, like you're in a pretty strong position.

I do pay attention to how guys are doing, not just the platoon or not just maybe even the ideal matchup. When a guy is in a good place, we try to squeeze as many outs as we can and hand the ball to the next guy in a good spot.

Q. Could you explain what went into the decision with



Mize and Montero on the roster?

A.J. HINCH: It's always hard this time of year choosing a roster because we have a lot of guys who are capable, Casey being one of them. He was on the last roster in the wildcard, and Keider wasn't. He used the time to get his body moving better, work on his secondary pitches.

We knew who we were going to play if we won that series, so we could even target some things that he's going to need for this series. And obviously with Casey, you know, coming back from his injury, he showed flashes of velo. He showed flashes of the split that's really gotten guys out. He also had a couple of outings that were less efficient.

So it's nothing that he did or didn't do. It's just a strategy of picking the guys that you think are going to be put in position to get as many outs as we can, and we're going with Keider this time. Obviously the secondary stuff is going to come into play, especially the left-handed hitting lineup or switch-hitting lineup. And the fact that he pitched well against these guys during the season was in Keider's favor.

Q. What's the prep like for you in a game like this compared to Monday when you have Tarik going on?

A.J. HINCH: Well, you know, with Tarik going tomorrow, but it doesn't mean I'm not going to work tomorrow. I work all day every day. You know, it becomes a little bit maybe a tad more strategic earlier in the game because now we get to pick who's going second, and I said this the other day that we don't have the whole game mapped out.

What we really can choose is the first guy, when the first guy ends and the second guy. And after that we've gotta read the game, and depending on who that is, he has strengths or weaknesses or guys that we're going to try to exploit or guys that we're going to try to avoid him against.

So you play maybe the first few innings hoping that Holt goes three up, three down. And then maybe the next inning starts at Naylor, do I send Holton out, do I bring in Hurter, do I bring in Guenther, do I bring in a righty.



That's the fun of the planning. And once that happens, you react to the next stress point. It's generally Jose Ramirez. That's not uncommon for managers in my chair to worry about that guy.

So my work and with Fett and our advanced group and really our whole coaching staff is we met yesterday and played out a million scenarios to start the game. But you get going too far too deep into the game and assuming too many things, you're going to miss something along the way. So you have to trust your eyes and what you see as much as what you know.

Q. You have to plan for the negative ones, too?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Not everything is perfectly as planned as you want it to be. Somebody is going to punch you in the mouth at some point, and you gotta react. That's why we have Beau Brieske (laughter).

Q. A.J., we talked earlier in the season about how Jose Ramirez kind of shifted maybe your thought process on the intentional walk.

A.J. HINCH: Not as to my thinking. My actions.

Q. When you get into a postseason series and you look at his presence in the lineup, how judicious do you have to be when you weigh that option?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. No, it's hard. Those are big points, and I think, you know, when the intentional walk is obviously a strategy, I tried it, and Naylor got a couple of hits after him. We also linked in the game a little bit by avoiding a couple of at-bats in Comerica with him.

It does bring up the risk of giving up multiple runs. It doesn't necessarily -- may help you feel better for the moment until the next guy after him does something. So we have to be careful giving them too many base runners, like case in point being guys are on third and everybody wants to walk him with two outs, and he steals second like he always does. Now you're staring second and third where a single can score both runs.

It's not all upside. And it's not all downside to pitch guys. Sometimes you have to get the best hitters in the world out. We'll try to balance all that. There may be a spot that I do it. There may be a spot that I don't. But it's a risk either way. It's not just a one-sided play or one-sided decision.

And I was joking with our group yesterday, the last time we were in this position with Jose Ramirez, Naylor was beating him to the batter's box before I even signaled

intentional walk. So if you tell me that doesn't motivate him, you know, you're crazy. So I'll be aware of the situation and react accordingly.

The best way to approach Jose Ramirez is get the guys out in front of him. And if he's hitting with nobody on base, he's still a major threat. He can still change the scoreboard. He can still impact the game, but it makes my decisions better when nobody is on base.

Q. Having already seen Tanner Bibee four times this year and even last year as a rookie, what have you seen his evolution since he debuted and has he changed?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. He's changed. He's matured and grown and developed, and these guys have done a really good job with him and others with the pitching department. Seems like they maximize their strengths just like we talk about.

And he's changed his style a little bit. I think he's very confident in his secondary pitches, probably more so today than ever before. He attacks the strike zone. He has a ton of confidence. It looks like he pitches with an edge. I've never met him, but when he runs out to the mound and gets on the mound, there is a certain presence to him now that has only gotten better.

And so we know we have our hands full. We know how well he pitches, specifically in September, and we know he's going to pitch with a chip on his shoulder because he is familiar with us. We're familiar with him. We've had some good success. We've also -- were rescued by I think a hamstring cramp at one point when he had to come out of the game early.

He's truly a good-looking young pitcher who will be on the stage for the first time and will leave it all out there given the stuff he has.

Q. What did winning Houston do you for you guys in terms of just like, okay, we took down kind of a dynasty. What does that do for you all?

A.J. HINCH: I just think every new step for our team is another building block. We talk -- and the things that I say I mean about stacking good days and stacking wins and building confidence. I mean, these are new experiences for our group.

And I think what it showed us is two things. One, we can continue to play with no pressure. Nobody expects us to be here, nobody expects us to have gotten here, and the way we got here some would call improbable and very

unique for us. We're just trying to stack good days on good days.

The second thing I think it shows is we can play with anybody. I said this to our team after we won that everybody was saying we're not playoff tested. We're pretty tested now and we're heading into this series with a ton of confidence. We got to play in a tough environment, against a team that it was a mainstay in October. So it'll build some confidence.

It'll also -- it got us to the next round. What was it started at 12 and now that number is smaller. And we're still one of them. So I expect our team to continue to play with a ton of comfort knowing we deserve to be here.

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