

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Sunday, October 6, 2024

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. A.J., there have been a handful or exactly a dozen times this season that Skubal has had a fifth day of rest. So I'm curious if you've noticed from a personal perspective how he's been able to take advantage of that and not turn it into a rest-versus-rust situation?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So we've done this pretty much all year. I mean, there's been a handful -- actually a handful of starts on regular rest, and we haven't really seen a pattern either way. He's fully rested. Changes his routine. We've been able to give him as much notice every single start.

So it doesn't change -- we don't ambush him with extra rest or ambush him with short rest. And I think that -- for a guy who is pretty regimented in his program, he's allowed to tailor it based on the rest and recovery.

So, I mean, listen, he's going to come out fully ready to go. I mean, this guy will answer the challenge and give his best and give us what he can regardless of the situation we put him in with rest. But he's been great either way.

Q. And as a follow-up, I know more recently you've discussed, but it's been a theme all season when you have these bullpen games, it's kind of an inning-by-inning read. You're not coming in with that much planned out per se. But when you do have Tarik on the mound, does that take away some of the adrenaline early on for you personally, just knowing you've got a little ways to go?

A.J. HINCH: I mean, not in the playoffs. I've managed a lot of playoff games with high-end starters where you gotta be alert and read the game as much as you can. And so I think these games bring a sense of urgency from the get-go regardless of who you're pitching and regardless of your predetermined plan.



I mean, in a perfect world, I get to sit back and watch arguably the best pitcher in baseball do his thing, but we still gotta do a lot of work and a lot of prep to be ready to audible either way. I mean, the big decisions are coming at this time of year regardless with how you get there. So it doesn't really change me.

Q. A.J., we haven't known Matthew Boyd for that long, but yesterday Tarik was talking about what an influence and kind of a mentor he had been for him for a couple of years there. What did he mean to you and to your staff and to have a vet like that who can kind of show the young guys the way?

A.J. HINCH: Man, you're going to make me say positive things about Matt Boyd before Game 2. You know, I mean, everything that has been said about him, you know, really can only be positive. I mean, this guy was an anchor on a team that was trying to find its identity certainly on the pitching side.

He was asked to be a huge leader as young pitchers were broken in, as the transition of learning how to be a Big Leaguer, to learning how to win. He was instrumental in pouring some of this foundation.

And to a man, everybody loves Matt Boyd. He was the Opening Day starter. I got the chance to have a meeting with him and name him that. I also had him take a leadership role on these first teams that I had that have the names now we know, Tarik and Casey and others, that as a veteran stability piece to a team that desperately needed it.

You know, baseball is incredible. It leads -- like I said this last series, it leads you to sometimes familiar places, and this one is leading us to a familiar face in a really big game against somebody who, you know, we all respect and admire.

We'll turn that off for a couple hours, you know, as we get to the competition, but I'm proud to know Matt Boyd and proud to have crossed paths with him in our careers.

Q. A.J., this "backs against the wall" thing, it's not



new. You guys have been -- feels like you've had your backs against the wall since August. But I wondered in this situation what's the balance you have to walk with a young team, young hitters who, you know, small sample size but are struggling a little bit to -- between overreacting and lighting a fire in a situation like this?

A.J. HINCH: Well, first off, I'd challenge the premise that your back's against the wall. This isn't an elimination game. We want to win every game, but we don't even come to the ballpark today with that sort of mindset. I mean, that's a defeatist -- I'm not saying you are. I'm just saying in general. I'm not going to have a team that ever panics.

So we're going to show up to prepare. And pretty upbeat clubhouse. We're going to have an upbeat workout. We're going to be prepared to play important games just like we all expected.

And we don't get caught up in recency stuff. I mean, I understand like, you know, yesterday didn't go our way and we had a number of strikeouts and we had a hard time scoring. We didn't score. We're not too far removed from the most electric inning offensively to even get us to this point.

So we finished yesterday. We reset. We come to today for a clean workout. We get to tomorrow. But we don't have a lot of pressure that we're going to bestow on ourselves. We know the situation creates enough of its own, and our mindset is to focus entirely on how to combat Cleveland and how long is Matt Boyd going to be in the game and how do we answer this bullpen that we know is famous around the league. That's enough for us to worry about let alone some self-induced "back against the wall" mentality that doesn't exist.

Q. A.J., hate to ask you to say more great things about Matt Boyd, but is there any particular area where you've seen his influence on some of the guys who came up under his watch and came up and kind of him mentoring them?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. I think give you a couple of things that remind me of Matt Boyd. One is the will to win. Like at our leanest moments and maybe our lowest times while I've been here, Matt has a winning mindset and a winning attitude. And he always wanted to work towards winning.

And some of that is in an individual way with the pitcher. Like you want to win the days that you start. Some of it is built through the second part of his influence on this team, which is routine. No one is as manic about their routine as Matt Boyd, and I think I see that sprinkled across a lot of

our pitchers who crossed paths with him when it's their workout, it's their arm care program. It's the throwing program. It's the diligence in their rehab. It's the learning of a new pitch or at least maybe making some of his pitches a little bit better. Those are all common threads that link Matty with our young pitching and that was here when he was here.

And it comes out all the time. Now, how much of that was Matt's influence versus the evolution of young players in the Big Leagues and where does Fett and Robin and Juan fit in? You have to ask the players. But I see similarities. So I know there's some influence in that seeing it from a teammate, up close and personal, and also creating the mindset as a starting pitcher that you want to win the days you pitch. You want to win other days, too, but when you're actually impacting the game, it's a different mindset for a starting pitcher.

Q. And, secondly, you've seen plenty of games in Cleveland. I'm curious what unique challenges the 4:00 start creates, particularly with shadows.

A.J. HINCH: Yeah.

Q. And with the late afternoon.

A.J. HINCH: Now, they told me at the beginning of this series there was no weather problems in Cleveland, and I'll believe it when I see it at the end of this game tomorrow.

But it's all about shadows here and how difficult it is to transition from daytime to nighttime. It'll be both ways. We know they're going to be there if the sun's out. If it's cloudy, it's less of an impact. But I think it'll be kind of see it as it goes literally with the shadows. Saw that in a couple games yesterday, too, at other ballparks. It's October baseball.

Q. A.J., Reese Olson was really solid for you guys aside from one pitch yesterday, really. I mean, how reassuring, I guess, is that for you if and when you have to go back to him sometime in these next couple of games as well?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, no. We believe in Reese Olson. We know he's a good pitcher, and he's allowed to make a mistake here and there. We're going to turn to him again and look forward to the next time that he pitches. We'll see if that's somewhere out of the pen or do we start him, we'll find out later in the series.

But I think he demonstrated exactly the reason that we wanted the ball in his hand, even at the most critical time. He's nasty. He's got good stuff. He's got great demeanor.



He can make adjustments. He's calm. Nothing is too big for him.

So that was all on display, and despite the first pitch that he threw on the day, I was very proud of how he threw the ball.

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