

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

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Cleveland, Ohio, USA
Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Pregame 2 Press Conference

Q. A.J., Trey Sweeney is going to come in here after you, and we've asked you a bunch of times about his calmness. Like, he barely speaks to us. I barely heard him say more than two sentences at a time. What do you think it is about his makeup that has allowed him to kind of transition in this situation?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. See if you guys can make him laugh or make him smile or make him nervous. We have not been able to do that. So his steadiness really comes from his preparedness. He's very routine based. I love the way he goes about his pregame work.

Now, he's pretty competitive. So it's not a lack of energy or competitiveness. But I think his calmness is just -- it's who he is. We ask these guys, just be who you are. If you're hyper, be hyper. If you're calm, be calm. But always be prepared. And he embodies that and has since the day that he got here.

My biggest fear for him coming up to the Big Leagues was not whether he could handle the competition. It was whether or not he could get to know everybody's name fast enough and get comfortable in a clubhouse that was emerging as a young, driven clubhouse.

And he's fit perfectly in. So playing a premium position and handling the ups and downs of breaking into the Big Leagues in the middle of a pennant race.

Q. Kind of a similar question about J-Hen. He's a young guy, but yet you have him in the top of the order. I'm just curious why and what he has given you?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Big personality for him. It will not be shy of joy when you talk to him. And, you know, obviously everything is new for him, and I remember back in the spring seeing the newness for him and him seeing players



that he grew up watching or grew up idolizing. And he knows a lot about a lot of things, and I've enjoyed his development continuing as he's gotten into the Big Leagues.

He's at the top of the order because he's a real threat against left-handed pitching. He's a threat against right-hand pitching, too. But right now he's doing better against lefties. So that threat from the first pitch of the game tonight is real. The ability to get on base in front of Matt Vierling and Andy before we get to Riley is really key, and he's ready for that challenge.

He knows why he's on this roster. He knows what his role is, and he's usually one step ahead in preparing for that. So I love getting him up to bat and sticking with him through his growth because coming off the last series he played an instrumental role against their left-handed pitching, and I'm hoping for the same this series.

Q. How important do you think, in terms of Malloy, the mid-season stretch where you had some outfielders injured and he was playing pretty close to every day, how important do you think that was for him in terms of his development? And what do you think has been key for him to kind of transition into this part-time role?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. We see these players come from the Minor Leagues to the Big Leagues, and they're great performers, and oftentimes like we around them are more comfortable with them being here than they are themselves. And so they need stretches like that where they are figuring it out. They are struggling with still being put in the lineup. They are performing well and coaches and staff are letting them know why or they get a ton of feedback.

It's all brand new for them, and this is not a plug-and-play league. Like there is an adjustment period for everybody. So when you can get a stretch in the middle of the year where J-Hen could be in the lineup, that pays dividends now when he has a distinct role on a playoff team, you know, trying to win today's game.



So I think his -- when he got called up, there was a lot of talk about his own control, his ability to get on base, and people were coming right at him thinking that he was waiting for a walk and that got him into swing mode. And now he's tailored that back into being appropriately aggressive but also appropriately patient, and when you get that combo together, he's very, very dangerous when he gets the right pitch to hit.

Q. A.J., half the guys on your roster were regulars in Toledo this year. Big picture, how crazy is that to wrap your mind around? And second of all, obviously, all levels of this organization contributed to this amazing run. What role did kind of delete play?

A.J. HINCH: I've tried over and over to recognize our player development system as being key in this, and we're the forward-facing group in the Big Leagues and in front of cameras and you guys, we answer a lot of questions about it, and but it starts in the Minor Leagues. It starts with challenging them to be better.

And Toledo is really the crossroads of when guys figure it out. They get to continue on through. If they don't figure it out here, we send them back there, and it's important that the time is well spent.

One of the anchors in our player development system is we're unafraid to challenge hitters and challenge pitchers to do things not just the right way, but the right way for them individually to be successful.

And whether it's guys that have -- Parker and Tork and guys that went down to waiting patiently for the Malloys of the world, the Keider Monteros of the world, and Sweeney got over here and touched our Minor League system. Dillon Dingler who hasn't gotten in the series yet but could pay dividends later. It's important for that level to be locked in on not what makes them successful in Toledo but what makes them successful Big Leaguers.

And we haven't perfected it. No team has, but I like the development happening at all levels, including Triple-A.

Q. You've been around a lot of good pitchers, in Houston, for example. Is there a quality in Tarik that reminds you of somebody or -- I know great pitchers have similar qualities. Or is there something unique about him that is just his own?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. I see -- by the time I got around some of the bigger names that I've managed, they were well established. I mean, obviously JV and Garrett and Dallas won the Cy Young in my first year and Charlie and Zack. I mean, that group is uniquely talented. They were also

comfortable in our own skin and comfortable in the limelight of the Big Leagues and into October.

What I've gotten to witness with Tarik has been an incredible journey from trying to figure out how to just be a Big League pitcher to now maintaining performance at an elite level, being talked about by virtually every manager, coach, player, media member that I come across to and him not skipping a beat. Like he hasn't tried too hard. He hasn't tried too little. He hasn't been affected by the attention, the exposure of the All-Star Game, being called an ace by somebody who tries to lift as much pressure off of guys as much as I can.

He's been everything to us. And so when you hand him the ball, whether it's in this series, last series, the end of the year, the middle of the season, I know I'm going to get a guy who's prepared. I know I'm going to get somebody's best effort. I know I'm going to get an outburst of emotion at some point finishing an inning with a big out.

And I know the 25 other players on the team and the coaches and the manager think we're going to win that day. And that doesn't get bestowed on you because you're the starting pitcher. It gets bestowed on you because you prove that you're going to do it time and time again.

Q. A.J., we talked a lot about the players that have gone up and down and maybe debuted this year. What about Riley Greene and his development, particularly since I don't know when you first met him when you first got the job, and what he has become now for you as an everyday guy?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. He is another big personality on our team, and sometimes we want to wrap him in bubble wrap to make sure that we have him available for us because he'll run into a wall or dive or unfortunately foul a ball off his foot. He will do a lot of things to -- he's willing to do anything to -- and he's a big part of the fabric of what we do because he's all in, you know.

I mean, I love seeing him. He's one of the first guys on the bus in the morning when we're coming to a day game. He's kind of the life of the dugout at times that we need it. So it doesn't hurt to hit him in the middle of the order, too. I do want the at-bat coming up.

And what I've really been happy with is he was under a lot of pressure this season at times being the guy that every other manager was managing against. They would bring in their best relievers, they'd bring in their lefty. They'd bring in whoever they could to deal with Riley while the rest of the lineup was trying to figure it out. He didn't change. He didn't panic. He didn't stress. He just tried to do his part.

So it's rewarding. He's one of the first guys that I met when I got the job because I knew, as the organization had told me, he's a central part of what was going to go right moving forward, and they were absolutely correct.

Q. A.J., with so many young players who have never experienced this before, how important, regardless of how long you last in the postseason, how important do you think this will be to those players to experience this?

A.J. HINCH: I think it'll be easier to capture that emotion in time, but I know how much more comfortable all of us are after having done something. So you play in the playoffs, the next time it's better. You manage in the playoffs, the next time you're even more prepared than the time before.

And you get comfortable with experience. I mean, that's why everybody loves having it in and around your team. It's why people look to veteran players, coaches, managers for guidance when they've never done it before.

So this experience is invaluable. Obviously it should set the bar really high for what's expected for you and your team, but I think our guys are responding very favorably in an environment that they're unaccustomed to, but have dreamed about, and they expect to do well.

There's no excuses. When we didn't score yesterday, it wasn't because of a lack of experience. It was because we faced one of the best pitching staffs in baseball. And if we win tonight, it's going to largely be centered around guys that are in the playoffs for the first time.

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