

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Tuesday, October 8, 2024

Detroit, Michigan, USA

Comerica Park

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. (Audio interruption) considered bulk?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So he did not throw to hitters the other day. He has been off the mound, like all of our guys. And, you know, obviously, he can pitch at any moment, and, yes, he can still be considered really whatever we want to call him, whether it's something short, something long, anywhere in between.

So he's keeping himself ready by continuing to touch the mound. That's what a lot of our guys are doing. And he's not the only one. The reason we did the lives with Kenta and Casey is because they're pretty much guaranteed not to pitch in this series except for injury.

So the other guys have to be ready every day, and so we have to be careful that we don't tax anybody to the point where they're not going to be 100 percent when the next game is.

It's a new role for some of these younger guys, especially like Jackson and Brant and Ty and Keider, but it's an introduction to October baseball. You know, they gotta be ready.

Q. A.J., you've alluded to it, and again yesterday, but I guess what does it mean for you guys to be bringing October baseball, playoff baseball back to Detroit after ten years?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. We're really excited. I mean, I think a lot of our guys are anxious to get to tomorrow's game to see Comerica at its best. We got to see it a little bit when we clinched against the White Sox. We've seen it at various games celebrating somebody, whether it was Jim Leyland or Miguel Cabrera or the '84 team. There's been a lot of buzz around our ballpark at different times.

But I think our guys know we've earned this game and this



appreciation from our city by how we've played. And we had to earn it to get here. We had to win a series on the road in Houston to make this playoff game happen. And I know our players appreciate playing in Detroit, our fans.

They're learning more and more about the patience. A lot of these guys haven't been here during this ten-year stretch very long. So when they get asked about it, you know, they're learning more and more about the time line.

But I think our place is really incredible to play. I've seen it packed before. We expect it to be packed for this series and help us create an environment that's tough on the other side.

Q. A.J., can you share some thoughts on Alex Cobb, who we'll see tomorrow?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. I talk about new things all the time, we're playing in new ballparks, we're facing new teams, a lot of firsts for a lot of our guys, and that goes into Alex Cobb as well. We haven't faced him a ton. I know how competitive he is. I've seen him from the other side in multiple uniforms.

And one thing I've learned around baseball, when multiple teams want you and you end up popping up in a lot of different places, it's because you're good. You know, he's going to be able to move the ball around. He's not going to throw the same pitch twice. He doesn't make a lot of mistakes. He gets the ball on the ground.

So we're going to need to try to do the opposite of that. We gotta get him in the air and we gotta capitalize on any mistake that we get or opportunities that we get. We've been really good in, and specifically yesterday, giving ourselves a bunch of opportunities. So if we can do that against Cobb, we're going to need the big hit like we got last night again.

Q. Jake obviously had the two-out hit against Clase. He's said a lot lately if Rog can do it, anyone can do it. Can you just kind of reflect on the player he's become and how he's rubbed off on the rest of the team?



A.J. HINCH: Yeah, I think his steady influence is very easy to see on our guys. He was thrust into this veteran leadership type while he's still trying to learn how to do things for the first time as well. So his steadiness, his personality, his self-deprecating, poking fun at himself, it's all good at cutting any tension that's naturally built because of October.

He's been good for Dinger. He's been good for our pitchers. I don't think anybody has as big an influence on Tarik as he does in terms of in the middle of the competition and the in-game adjustments.

He's just been a very good influence on our guys. I mean, even the way he talks about at-bats, I mean, you know, he doesn't take himself too seriously, but he wants to do so well for our guys. He'll come up and ask me -- even last night he asked me, Are you going to hit for me? And I'm like, No, it's your at-bat. He's like, Sweet, thanks, it's Clase. You know? He has a way of balancing out the stress and tension that comes with October, and I think it's been noticeable on both sides of the ball.

Q. Heard you on the radio earlier saying that everybody except Tarik and Reese would be available tomorrow. How do you balance using your full staff with having games on back-to-back days, which oddly enough it is kind of a change from what you've been doing? You haven't had to do the -- I guess the everybody is available on -- for back-to-back days in a while here.

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. We did it a lot during the season, but you're right, in the playoffs we haven't done that because Tarik has taken down a lot of innings. He did it in Houston. He did it yesterday. And we've had the off day.

But in the season we were able to navigate that because a lot of our guys can go a long ways. Every decision that I make in Game 3 will impact availability in Game 4.

But this time of year guys are more available than they are during the regular season. So if somebody throws 30 to 40 pitches, they will be available the next day if they're in the bullpen. If somebody goes 60, 70, 80 or the way that Reese did the other day, then he's on the natural five-day rest period.

So I think it's -- we've had to be creative. We'll explain it to our guys as we develop our plan for tomorrow, and guys will be ready to go. I'm watching guys get ready faster. I'm watching guys throw at peak velocity. I'm watching guys bounce back and proactively come to me and say, I can go. It's because it's October, and guys will post.

Q. I know we talked about Trey Sweeney yesterday morning, but the double play that he made, did you think that he was going to go one? Or what did you see on that double play?

A.J. HINCH: I thought he was going to go to second. I just thought it was a slow developing play and it may not get turned, by no fault of anyone. I thought Colt did a really good job of making that play. I think Trey did a good job of cutting the distance and being able to speed that play up a little bit without hurrying, which is a great attribute to have as a player where you can play fast but not hurry, you can create extra outs by handling the ball cleanly.

So I knew we were going to get an out. He came aggressively to charge it, and so I thought when he flipped to second, was the play going to be too slow developing to turn the double play.

But we executed that play pretty flawlessly, and it was a big moment of the game where one of the first times that Tarik was under some stress.

Q. Two things. A.J., the first one not really related to Game 3, but people said they saw Javy on the bench yesterday, and how cool is that if that's so, and is he going to be with the team through the series supporting y'all?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Javy came yesterday. He made his way back. He was in Puerto Rico attending some family matters and then came back, flew to Detroit, drove down with his family for yesterday, and now he is back in Detroit and will be here tomorrow.

So he's been in constant contact with us. And same with Alex Faedo who, by the way, we are keeping in our thoughts. He's in the middle of that hurricane that's headed towards Tampa, as is our people in Lakeland. We're in touch with all of our people. But specifically to your question, Javy was there on the bench yesterday. He came to the hitters' meeting and will be in Detroit.

Q. Secondly, what are you seeing, not performing-wise, but what are you seeing presence-wise from Riley? He doesn't like what's going on in terms of whatever his numbers are, but do you still see him being like the presence you talked about yesterday? He's still upbeat in the clubhouse. I know he's grinding, but is he still Riley?

A.J. HINCH: Have you ever seen Riley change?

Q. I know he gets angry at himself when he's not producing.

A.J. HINCH: He does, but he's fine. I mean, listen, all of these -- when you don't hit a ball perfectly or you go a game without getting a hit or you feel like you're not doing your part, these guys get frustrated.

But he's not any different now than he was before. He's a huge presence. He's going to come up to bat at a big side. And one thing I know, they don't want him up to bat. I'm watching them manage against him. I know they are always aware. They intentionally walked him in the middle of this. Probably all we need to know about kind of what we and what they think of Riley Greene.

He's going to have a big swing in this series. Could be tomorrow. Could be the next day. But I don't see any sort of difference of behavior or stress. These guys just want to do well and do their part and get a good pitch to hit, and the more he does that, he could be the biggest player in the game tomorrow. You never know.

Q. A.J., are you going to wait till tomorrow to announce who will open the game, and is that any sort of advantage that a team has to wait till the game day?

A.J. HINCH: We're going to talk about it today. We're not really having a workout today. We'll have a couple pitchers throw, some treatment. I'll talk to Fett today and the rest of our group, and we'll devise a plan on how we're going to lay out the beginning of our pitching. We will make sure and let Cleveland know tonight so that they can build their lineup and build their strategy as well.

So we just haven't come to that determination yet. We've got a lot of options. Like I said, 10 of the 12 pitchers we have are going to be available, and we're going to use them. We're not hiding the ball on them at all. They'll know by the end of their workout what our plans are for the first inning.

Q. I know Tork is going through it at the plate, but what are you seeing from him defensively, particularly with the decisiveness on plays to his right? It seems like the last couple weeks he's been less in between and taken more quick decisions on that. Was there talk about that, and was there a talk with pitchers about being quick to react and go to the mound to cover?

A.J. HINCH: So, no, there wasn't a meeting or anything on that. Where Tork's development -- I'm glad you brought that up because we only notice them when we don't make the plays. He's making these plays look routine because they are for him.

It was a point of emphasis when we sent him down, Billy Boyer and our Triple-A staff did a really good job of creating better angles for him, and he's reacting accordingly. He's doing a really good job of finishing plays on defense. It is a big part of it, especially against this team that's predominantly left-handed. They're high contact. We've had guys that get ground balls, and he's answering making every play.

So we didn't have a specialty meeting. The pitchers know it's their job to get over when the ball is hit to the right side. That tweener play between first and second is a tough one. I've seen both sides of it where Andy has made a really good play with the glove flip where Tork has gone right to the base, and then other plays he's had to read and get the ball first and flip it to the pitcher.

I just like that he's finishing plays with more confidence and more aggressiveness than earlier in the season, and it is a high-impact play, especially in October, to finish plays.

Q. A.J., obviously very exciting postseason throughout the game -- throughout all of baseball so far, but in the American League Division Series, what is the American League Central showing maybe the rest of the country that kind of over looks this division?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. No, I know there's been a lot of talk over the last few years with teams having tough stretches, tough seasons. And, you know, obviously every team in the Big Leagues deserves respect.

I think when our division has the type of season that we have where we're playing everybody in the league, the balanced schedule really does challenge you to not just play well in your division and get a playoff berth, but play well across the league.

And we have three teams that did it, and actually four with Minnesota because they were in it all the way until the end.

So I think the AL Central deserves more respect than it's gotten, and the proof is in the teams that are still fighting to represent the American League in the World Series.

And it's funny. I don't know if familiarity is a good or a bad thing, but I know that the rest of the baseball world is seeing what we've seen all year, which is a growing number of teams developing their players and realizing that the talent is pretty deep in this division as it is to some of the more popular divisions.

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