

# AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Detroit, Michigan, USA

Comerica Park

## Detroit Tigers

### A.J. Hinch

#### Pregame 3 Press Conference

**Q. A.J., the 6-4-3 double play in the last game, how impressive was Colt's turn? Do you think that's a play he makes back in April?**

A.J. HINCH: You know, I don't know if he makes it in April, but I love the development that's happened with him over the course of the year. He and Joey and Jonesy have worked tirelessly to create some routines and kind of knowledge that the game is going to speed up and you gotta play fast but not hurry, like I've said.

And he's calm about plays around the bases now. He's reliable, and, in sort of an unspoken of that, he just came in the game. You know, it was a get up to game speed very quickly because the ball is going to find you.

He's probably fortunate that the rules nowadays compared to how it would have been back in the day, he probably would have been hit into left field and nobody may want to run into Colt Keith. But it was a clutch play at a really important time to get us out of trouble.

**Q. I just wanted to ask about the decision to start Keider Montero and what went into that?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Keider has been really good for us for much of his time up here. He's learned a lot. He's developed. He's grown. He's also been able to make adjustments. The work that he did when he was inactive in the Wild Card series was really important. We wanted to get his body moving better. We wanted him to get his delivery back in order. We wanted him to be able to execute all of his pitches and not migrate to a two-pitch pitcher and then he comes in and gets activated and goes out and demonstrates it.

He's a good matchup for these guys. That's been seen throughout the season. He can mix his pitches very well. This is a team you have to be unpredictable against and



not kind of feed them the same thing over and over again, and he's accustomed to starting.

We let him know yesterday and planned his work around it, and he'll be ready to go.

**Q. You've been on the road for a week, in very loud, intense places. What do you expect the crowd to be like today for you, and how does that help and what does it mean?**

A.J. HINCH: Well, it means they're going to be to be on our side. We've been in loud places that have not enjoyed having us there. There have been some sections of the places in Houston and Cleveland that were Tiger friendly. We heard them loud and clear. We traveled well.

But there's something different about playing at home. The buzz around the ballpark, coming to the field today, the energy has a different feel. The coolness of the air means it's not the middle of the summer, and from pitch one this group of fans here in Detroit are going to be rowdy and on our side.

Our players are looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to it because there's a different element wearing the English T, the white uniform. We're playing at home. We have 40-plus thousand fans that are screaming their heads off for us to do something positive, and it's October. Can you get any better than that?

**Q. We've seen the splitter become a much more popular pitch across league this season. That's a pitch that Alex Cobb has used as well. What do you make of the increased usage of that pitch across the league?**

A.J. HINCH: I think part of that is probably to combat the uppercut and getting the ball in the air. The best way to combat that is to try to find a pitch that can get the ball on the ground.

Tunneling plays into that. You want it to look as much like a fastball as you can, what looks like a fastball, than a split-finger fastball. And having that movement down is



conceivably can protect you against the modern swings.

I think more and more pitchers are trying to find little subtleties off of their fastballs as opposed to maybe the massive breaking balls, other than the sweeper. That's taken over the game. But everything else is just subtle little movements. It's the cutter. It's the split. It's the small sinker to try to give the hitters something to deal with late in the sequence.

I know Alex Cobb has lived on this -- he's also evolved and added a couple other pitches as well, but when he needs a ball on the ground or he needs something off the barrel, he oftentimes relies on a nasty split.

**Q. A.J., I don't know how often we assign toughness to baseball teams. Like we probably reserve it more for football, hockey teams. But you guys do play with toughness, it seems to me. Like between the lines when the game starts, how do you see your team's toughness shine through?**

A.J. HINCH: I think what you're referring to is maybe a mental resilience to just play the game and continue to push and keep your energy level high, keep your mindset in the right place. That toughness of whether it's coming back in an early game deficit or sort of grinding through a close game like we did the other day and coming up with a big hit, it's just this practice of resetting ourselves over and over and over.

I talk a lot about it between games. I don't talk a ton about it within the game. But there's so many different emotional pressure points of games, specifically in the playoffs, that you have as a team. You have to have the reset button to get yourself back to what you're trying to accomplish in that particular inning or that particular at-bat.

We've talked about it a lot. We've demonstrated it a lot. We preach it. The players buy into it. They go out and pick each other up, and we have a consistent 27-out mentality, and that -- I know how that can sound, like the easy thing for me to say, but I can point to so many games throughout the year where if we hadn't reset, if we hadn't sort of got ourselves back up off of a tough circumstance, then we wouldn't be sitting here.

**Q. How does Wenceel Perez fit into what you try to do with matchups beyond just being a switch hitter, just with his game?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. One of the toughest things with Wenceel is whether to start him or use him as a key piece off the bench. Obviously in October, especially against this team, you try to beat the starter because I know what

happened the other day, but that is not a way to live. It's not a way to live consistently.

He's such a good player because he offers something in every facet. His defense has gotten a lot better in right field. We've seen tremendous plays. He can move around the outfield if I need him to. His left-handed swing was more advanced than his right-handed swing. Yet his right-handed swing has produced some pretty good at-bats throughout the year.

So when you put him in the lineup as a switch hitter, and Cleveland has a couple of their own, it creates a huge matchup problem. They can pick which side they want, but it still gives us a platoon advantage. I love the fact that he's balanced emotionally. I love the fact that he'll stick his nose in the competition and not back down.

And as raw as he's been throughout the year in certain parts of his game, I've seen him become more and more controlled in his ability to execute a game plan and not just freelance. Like he's more advanced than he was at the beginning of the season, and that's true development at this level.

**Q. A.J., it seems like something that's kind of hard to quantify, but what have you seen crowd noise actually -- how does it impact performance on the field? What does that really look like?**

A.J. HINCH: Well, I mean, I've been on the mound in the World Series where the pitcher can't hear me, and if you can't communicate, then you got all sorts of problems, and I'm two feet away from you. So it just creates an element of pressure and an element of rising blood pressure, of stress, of -- I won't say panic, but it's a lot to deal with when you can't hear yourself think.

And if you need to take a look at what San Diego had going last night with Suárez on the mound and the Dodger hitters up there, you can't match it, and you don't get it on the road. The only time you get it on the road is when it's against you.

It does impact the competition. It can impact yourself at home when the fans are going crazy, but I've learned over the years that it's much better to be in your favor than on the downside of that.

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