

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Thursday, October 10, 2024
Detroit, Michigan, USA
Comerica Park

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Pregame 4 Press Conference

Q. A.J., can you talk about the decision to let Reese make a traditional start?

A.J. HINCH: I don't want to bore you guys. You know, it's just part -- we know he's going to face this team for the second time. He's made a ton of starts for us. He's really good, and part of his routine we don't want to interrupt again.

I think the challenge is always when you do as many openers as we've done and you use as many guys as we have, it always brings up the question if you should do it all the time.

But we really believe in Reese. We like the way he threw the ball the other day. It does let them set their lineup. They did, and now we'll react accordingly. But it's okay to have a regular start by somebody not named Tarik Skubal, and we'll be ready to go.

Q. Do you feel like Reese had to shake off any rust after he got back from the IL, and how important was it to see him go several innings?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Last start was his best start since he came off, and I don't think it was necessarily rust as much as it was building up his endurance, in the middle of the competition. We activated him pretty early after his rehab assignment started. He didn't really get built up as a starter for -- I think he only threw a couple innings in the Minor League.

So we were trying to do both things the last ten days of the season and use his innings to get into the playoffs and then hopefully continue to build him up to where his endurance is up to 75 to 100 pitches.

So the other day when he came in, it wasn't ideal circumstance. He'd never really inherited a runner like that



before. He ends up giving up a homer on his first pitch and then he settled in and was able to not only build his endurance but be pretty good through the lineup.

Up until probably his last outing it was all part of his rehab assignment. It happened to be in important games in a playoff race, which is sort of unheard of.

Q. I was just curious, we didn't get a chance to ask you last night about the crowd?

A.J. HINCH: Oh, yeah.

Q. And the vibe and how do you think that might have helped?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, it was great to have October baseball back in Detroit, and our fans delivered. I mean, it was an incredible environment. The orange towels were legit. The timing of the noise, the end of the game, the vibe around the club, the excitement in introductions, I thought it was all appropriately dynamic and positive.

I mean, it was an environment our guys continue to talk about throughout the day and into the night, and it was good to see Comerica at its best, and it's because of the fans in this city and the patience they've shown to get October baseball back and back in Detroit. You know, they delivered.

Q. A.J., from a pitching perspective, you guys obviously mix and match based on advantageous matchups, but just like the way they've kind of deployed their bench throughout this series, do you notice an extra layer of preparation to how you kind of strategically map out your pitching?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So they have the platoon advantage almost all the time. I mean, it's hard to get the match up with them, and if you are, you're getting Steven Kwan against lefties that is not a great recipe, or you're getting Naylor, the guys that stay in the lineup a ton regardless of handedness, and with Jose in the middle, who gets all of his at-bats that way, it's a dynamic lineup to get through and continue to attack.



I think one of the things that we preach against lineups like this is getting the opposite-handed hitter out. And that's really hard against these guys because, like I said, you never can guarantee yourself, even with how they use their pinch hitters and they use their bench as much as anybody.

Opposite-handed attack plans are really important against these guys, and we spend just as much time on that as we do trying to get our guys to pitch to their strengths when they have the advantage.

It's hard, and I think that the thing in a five-game series, trying not to give these guys a second look at the same pitcher over and over, and it's hard. Beau Brieske is throwing the ball great. Is he going to face the same guys today? You never know. Will Vest, same thing. Tyler Holton starts the game, closes a game. Pretty good chance he's in the middle of this game somewhere.

So we talk a lot more about that than specifically how they're shaping their lineup or what they're doing, and we know they can do a lot of different things to your pitching staff because of the versatility of their lineup.

Q. Question about where Matt Vierling was playing for that line drive. How much of that was scouting and analytics? How much of that is instincts and his own decision-making?

A.J. HINCH: Probably a little bit of both. We spend a lot of hours and a lot of people in the organization spend a lot of hours going over positioning. Joey Cora does a tremendous job of challenging the information and making sure that those instincts come into play.

And so to the pull side with Fry, you know, you're questioned, it depends on the pitch. It depends on which pitcher is there. You get a lefty with a cutter sometimes you play to the pull side. You get Will Vest throwing the ball hard down and in with a sinker, he'll take a few steps to his pull side.

You never want to lose either side of that question. You don't want to lose the information. You don't want to lose the instincts. And when both come together, you get a big out at a big moment in the game.

Q. A.J., obviously things can be a little unconventional in the postseason. Have you ever considered or would you ever consider using Skubal in relief in a tight situation late?

A.J. HINCH: Today?

Q. Yes.

A.J. HINCH: No chance. I shouldn't tell Stephen that, though. Maybe he will. (Laughs.)

Q. You mentioned hitters having the second look at pitchers. To flip that, how much did that factor into how you laid out your lineup for this game with the second look at Bibee?

A.J. HINCH: Exact same lineup. Yeah, I thought we had pretty good at-bats against him, and he won the big at-bats. And this is, what, the sixth or seventh time we've faced him this year. And McKinstry is a good example who's had pretty good success against him throughout this season. So he's back in there again today.

I think there's always the curiosity on whether to mix things up or -- it's hard to sit Wenceel Perez, but he hasn't had great success against Bibee, and you go back to -- if you really break down the last games, I thought our at-bats were very competitive. We didn't get the two-out hit. We put pressure on them early where we thought they may even have to go to their bullpen earlier than they wanted to. He got out of it, and then he settled in until they took the ball away from him and gave it to their bullpen.

I'm going to go with the same lineup because I like the quality of the at-bats that were there, and the advantage for the hitter of seeing somebody for the same time in five days is sometimes good, sometimes irrelevant. We're hoping for the good side.

Q. A.J., from an outside perspective, it seems like you have an egoless team here. Yesterday, Kerry was the hero on Monday, gets pinch-hit for yesterday. Your bullpen always is evolving. Where does that stem from and where does that come from, and how hard is it to create that in a professional environment?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. We do have the definition of a team. Up and down this lineup, up and down the pitching staff. I'm so happy with how we can deploy our guys at their strengths and their best, and the player buy-in has been the single biggest impact on this entire team.

It's probably a little unusual. You know, everybody wants their moment, but we have high-character guys that are willing to do anything that you can. We have a lot of capable guys, but we have a lot of guys who are willing to take a seat if the next guy has a better advantage.

I think the player buy-in is the number one key. The players have to go out and believe that that's the right



strategy for us to maximize our abilities, and I'm very appreciative of it, and I see it in action every day.

Keider Montero comes out after six pitches. He's got everybody back home watching. The whole world's watching his playoff start. And he comes out of the game, and he's on the top step yelling for his teammate that he played with in Double-A in Erie when Brant Hurter comes in.

Kerry Carpenter, who's going to get his moment against a lefty. It may be tonight. It may be tomorrow. It may be later if we continue to play on. Understands that J-Hen has every bit of a shot to do something special. So he stays in the top step.

I've done it for Tork. He's homered after the day after I've hit for him. Andy Ibanez waits and waits and waits, helmet on, batting gloves on, bat in hand, ready for a left-handed pitcher. If it doesn't come, he's the biggest cheerleader on the field. If it does, he goes up and gets a game-winning hit.

So the players are incredible on this team, and the buy-in is special, and I think it's part of the reason that we're doing special things.

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