

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Saturday, October 12, 2024
Cleveland, Ohio, USA
Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Postgame 5 Press Conference

Cleveland - 7, Detroit - 3

Q. A.J., I don't know if you've had time to say anything to the team before you came in here, but what is kind of your message, if you can?

A.J. HINCH: I did. I did have a chance to talk to them, because I have a heartbroken team for all the right reasons. I mean, we left everything we could on the field against a really good team, and we didn't want the season to end as abruptly as it did.

So I thanked them. You know, I thanked them for everything that they're about in that room. I'm really proud to be the manager and represent them so many days in front of the camera, in front of the media, get to run the team on the field because of who they are and what they're about.

And I let them know. I mean, there's only one team that doesn't have this pit in your stomach at the end of the year, and we were the next one to go through it.

So I know it's going to sting, but we're also going to use it as fuel to get to next spring. But seasons end fast, you know, when you're in the middle of this sprint race through the playoffs and come up a little bit short.

Q. Tarik was in complete control for the first four innings. Do you feel like it's just one mislocated pitch just swung at, or there was a delay after José got hit? I mean, did you think any of that was a factor?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. They did a really good job of putting together the inning to get the lead-off base hit. You know, the cued hit to second base. José gets hit in the elbow, and it sets up Thomas for an at-bat, which was the exact at-bat we chose earlier in the game. Tarik made pitches and we got out of a major issue earlier in the game, and he



didn't miss the mistake. I mean, I think he yanked it down and away a little bit and the second time in a big spot like that that Thomas came up big and hit the ball out of the ballpark.

We weren't out of it. We kept chipping away and made a game of it, but they are as relentless as advertised when it comes to competing through the whole game and giving themselves as much chance to win as anybody in the league.

Q. When did you know about Carpenter's availability going into the game, and how did you decide when to --

A.J. HINCH: Yes. I knew he was able to do one of two things. If I got him in the DH spot, he could stay in the DH spot and go base to base, albeit it uncomfortably. If I hit him in a different spot, then his day was over.

So the debate in my head going into the game was where is the big at-bat going to come where you either need to extend your lead, get a lead, come from behind or whatever. And then when Sweeney led off with a walk, that's as good a time as ever in the DH spot, which now I knew I was going to get a couple spots, hopefully get a couple at-bats out of him.

I know how uncomfortable it was for him. He came up really big with that spot and was able to squeeze three at-bats from him on a day where when I got to the ballpark, I didn't know if he would do anything. And so for that, our training staff did an incredible job. Carp gutted it out and was available for how I used him.

Q. Throughout the run you guys had done a really good job of putting balls in play, creating pressure. Today the punch-outs happened in bulk. How big a factor is that, and how big of a concern is that part of your game offensively going forward?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. I think it's so different in playoff baseball because you're facing the best. Like, this is literally one of the best bullpens in baseball we saw in its entirety. And obviously Boyd did a good job getting out of



some issues early in the game.

I don't know what it means long-term. I haven't had a chance to really dissect it a ton. We chased a little bit more than normal, but they create that by getting into good counts and getting us to swing and miss.

It was part of the story today. We had a lot of opportunities. If you look down, they only had opportunities in three or four innings. We had it in seven or eight. But they got the biggest swing in the biggest moment with the most at stake and separated themselves, and they were able to hang on with a beast of a bullpen that is tough to deal with.

Q. And it's tough to reflect in the moment, but do you think you look back on these last two months as a really remarkable and special time?

A.J. HINCH: It was incredible. Our guys, what we had to do to galvanize ourselves and put together stretches of good baseball as the notoriety enhanced, as the expectations rose, as the attention grew, we did an incredible job as a group of just staying grounded and trying to do our best every day, and it led us to where we are.

And our players, our coaches, our organization never flinched. Like we never thought that we shouldn't be here, and that is going to fuel us moving forward, and we're going to be a problem for people if we can continue that mindset and continue that hunger to feel this.

I just told the guys, like once -- I think I said it earlier this week. Once you play in one October, you never want to miss one the rest of your career, ever. And so we're going to need to do a lot of work to get better and continue to play the brand of baseball that is winning baseball.

Q. With how close the last four games were and all the matchups on both sides, how draining was this in this series?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Obviously I wish I could sleep it off and then get to the next game. I mean, that's the goal. But this was an incredible series. It's great for baseball. It's great for the AL Central. You know, obviously congratulations to Stephen and his group across the way. They're more than capable to do more and more winning because of how they go about it.

Obviously, when you see how close the game is on so many levels and so many instances, you know, obviously they did just a little bit more. And so it doesn't surprise me given how we played these guys the entire season. But

hats off to them for winning this series as opposed to anything else.

Q. Did you anticipate that they'd go with the bullpen so strong? Eight guys pitched today. Did you anticipate that Matthew would only go two innings?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. He got Cade Smith up with Tanner Bibee on the mound in the second inning in Game 4, and so that kind of signaled what they were wanting to do is get the ball in the hands of all those guys.

I tell you what. Those guys -- I've been through a lot of playoff series where the bullpen gets used a lot. I'm not sure I've quite ever seen the Cade Smith, Gaddis, Clase pitch at that volume and stay at that level. We put some good swings on those guys, and I do think seeing them a lot helped us a little bit as it got on.

But they're so hard to score against and so hard to match up against because they can create swing and miss in soft contact and high in velo, high in spin, high in everything, and that's why they won 90-plus games, and that's why they're advancing.

Q. I know you don't want this to be the peak of anything but when you reflect on what this run has meant for the organization and your coaching impact, what do you want this chapter to mean?

A.J. HINCH: I mean, we're back being a winning organization. You know, we earned it. We're going to have to back it up now with a good off-season, a good spring, growing expectations and a group of players that is now battle tested at the highest level to date. You know, obviously we wish we could keep playing.

I'm proud that we had a winning record. I'm proud we played winning baseball. I'm proud that we got a chance to test ourselves in a heartfelt series against a team we respect and a team we expect to see a lot of next year.

Q. Steven Kwan, you see him a lot. How would you describe him as a ball player?

A.J. HINCH: He's a problem. When he gets in this mode where he's pulling the ball and he's shooting balls up the middle and he's able to stay on balls down the left field line, he's really hard to deal with.

He is the engine. I love a lot of their players and a lot of what they did, but he is an engine that creates a lot of pressure that you've got to deal with behind him, whoever they put in the two hole, and then here comes Jose Ramirez and Lane Thomas, I will remember for a long

time, and Josh Naylor and Gimenez at the bottom now. They made contact, and that type of style of player and type of mindset is ignited by Steven Kwan. He had an incredible series.

Q. I thought I saw some hugs for Skubal after he came out after the last inning. What was the message to him, and just what he's meant for you guys this year?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Obviously he gave everything that he could and more. And today wasn't his fault. I mean, he was in complete control of the game, and wish we would have staked some runs for him to give him a little bit of breathing room, and it was a big blow.

This one is going to eat at him through the entire off-season because of what was at stake. But give me that guy again in a playoff series, in a playoff-deciding game, and I look forward to putting his name in the starting lineup as a pitcher.

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