

AL Championship Series: Guardians vs Yankees

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Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

New York Yankees

Mike Harkey

Workout Day Press Conference



Q. Mike, with Clay Holmes just turning his season around, what do you think has allowed him to bounce back after he had some rough times there?

MIKE HARKEY: The fact that he's never really wavered in his confidence for his stuff, even with the role change that he had late in the season. But he's been one who's really taken to the old Mariano adage where if he's going to be a closer or a late-inning high relief pitcher for the Yankees, he's going to have to have a short memory, and that's what he's been able to do since he's been here.

Q. Luke Weaver said you guys sometimes talk about Mariano stories. What do you tell guys about him?

MIKE HARKEY: Basically we talk about how he was mentally, how he handled being the New York Yankee closer and why was it that -- what did I think was the reason why he was able to have so much success, and I always tell them, obviously number one, having short memory, number two, being able to have a delivery that he could repeat constantly, and number three, the fact that he had command of his fastball.

If you look at a lot of the Major League closers, they have that one resigning trait is the fact that they command their fastballs.

Q. With Luke, do you see a mentality that reminds you of Mariano a little bit? Obviously Mariano did it for 20 years and this is a month or two into this closing, but it seems like he handles things pretty well. What's your take on his personality and how that can affect being a good closer?

MIKE HARKEY: Personally I think he has everything it's going to take to be a really, really good closer. Now, I think he's -- what's he got, six career saves now? But he's got four in the postseason, which is pretty, pretty huge.

I just think the fact that he's mentally prepared, he's got a slow heartbeat, he knows how to slow the games down, and he's kind of mastered that very, very unorthodox delivery that's allowed him to be consistent with his stuff.

He can take a lot of direction and he can take the little bits out of it, and he can use it to the best of his ability.

Q. On Austin Wells, I'm curious what you see from a young catcher, how he handles pitchers. When you're around him for a young catcher, is he different than some young guys? What's your take on him?

MIKE HARKEY: He's very, very ready for this moment. I saw him a couple years ago, and I've watched his growth from there, and I've watched him do some things. I've watched his interaction with the pitchers. I've watched the pitchers kind of gravitate towards him.

I mean, he's got the respect, and he takes constructive criticism really, really well for a young catcher.

A lot of times -- there's a lot put on your plate for a catcher, especially with all the noise that comes with being a Yankee catcher, especially in the postseason, especially batting fourth. There's a lot that goes into it.

I watched Jorge do it for a long time. He has a lot of those traits. I think he's got a chance to catch for a long time. He takes a lot of pride in what he brings to the table, and he brings a lot of confidence.

With that, our pitchers, they have a lot of trust in him.

Q. Going back to Luke for a second, with us in front of the cameras and recorders, he's very goofy, quirky, does a lot of funny things. I'm curious, what's he like in the bullpen, particularly the early innings before you guys are really starting to lock in down there?

MIKE HARKEY: He's very much like you guys see him. Very, very loose, has a very, very dry sense of humor that's super contagious. He's a great teammate. Guys feed off of his energy.



We have a pretty close-knit bunch of guys down there that makes it really easy to relay information, makes it really easy for guys to lean on each other.

I think his presence is a big part of that.

Q. You pay attention to the things he says post-game and on TV, and if so, do you have a favorite quote that's stood out so far?

MIKE HARKEY: No. I mean, I was talking to Meredith yesterday, and he says he compares himself to a big jungle cat, and I said maybe not such a jungle cat, maybe closer to a lynx. But he does have the heart of a lion, definitely a big reason why we are where we are right now.

Q. When you look at some of the pitchers like Clay and Luke and Mayza and Hill, is there anything in common that you think works in the approach that you guys take when they arrive and you evaluate them and you start making suggestions and alterations to their pitches and selection?

MIKE HARKEY: I think a lot of credit goes to our front office guys for being able to find these so-called diamonds in the rough, guys that are -- I don't like to say cast-offs from other teams, but where teams have not shown the patience that we were able to do because of the depth that we've had.

We're allowed to do things a little bit differently here. Desi and Matt do an awesome job of finding grip changes so they can get better seam orientation so that these guys can maximize the stuff they have. Then being able to put them in position.

I think Booney does a really good job of putting them in positions and in spots to have the most success so that we can build their confidence and then we can start adding more detailed things, and if guys have confidence, they're going to be willing to try anything.

Q. What is the process? How many times do you watch them throw in the pen and have the data before you start making suggestions of things for them to change?

MIKE HARKEY: It's usually pretty immediate. I mean, if our front office guys have pinpointed something that they think would be a good fit, we go to work right away on figuring out what we think is going to help them, and then we're able to approach the player as soon as he gets here.

More times than not, I'd say almost 100 percent of the time,

these guys are open to whatever is going to help them get better.

I think that our pitching department has developed a good enough reputation to know that if you go over there, you've got a really good chance of getting better.

Q. It was really late in the regular season when the bullpen was in quite a bit of flux and Clay Holmes was being removed from his role and there was almost sort of an audition process to figure out who was going to slot in where after that.

Going back to the closeness of that group out there and just their personalities, what was it that allowed this thing to work the way it has? I feel like that's the type of thing that if you don't have the right personality mix out there might kind of cause some tension or some friction.

MIKE HARKEY: Well, I think that's -- or I hope that my experience of having been there and done that with this Yankee organization for so long is that when you pitch for the Yankees, there's a lot of expectations, and expectations become tough.

Either you're trying to live up to them or you're trying to build up to them. It becomes one of the difficult hurdles that we have to push through is that we have to get guys to believe in themselves and believe that there's going to be ups and downs and you're going to have to fight through this adversity because you're going to pitch here, there's going to be way more adversity than anywhere else.

I think that's part of the reason why we have guys that once the playoff starts, having played Boston on Sunday Night Baseball or being in the pennant race year in and year out, that when they get to the playoffs, it's not that far off of the kind of pressure and the demands that are put on them during the regular season.

Now, as far as bullpens, bullpens are constantly in flux because we're trying to make sure that we get guys proper rest, so that means guys have to pitch in different roles. I mean, yes, everybody was talking about in July and August what we were going to go if we got to the playoffs with our bullpen, but we stayed the course, and we figured out a way to make it work.

Q. I just realized you're one of the last guys from 2009 still around this team. How would you compare what you're feeling now to what you felt in '09?

MIKE HARKEY: I would say very, very similar. It's really, really weird that a lot of things have to go right for you to win 11 games to win a World Series. We had a very, very

talented group in 2009. We had the best closer in baseball history. We have a lot of very, very talented guys now. The bullpen has been pitching well.

It's still got a long way to go. We still have a lot of games that we have to win to accomplish our goal, but winning is super simple. We just have to continue to do it day in and day out and continue feeding off the energy of every win and moving on to the next round.

Q. Do you feel like it's been 15 years?

MIKE HARKEY: Yes.

Q. It does?

MIKE HARKEY: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Q. Clay and Luke get so much attention, but Tommy has been really consistent and reliable all summer long, too. I'm curious what has allowed him to have so much success coming out of that injury that he had earlier this year?

MIKE HARKEY: Well, Tommy has been doing it for a long time. Albeit the last four or five years, he's been dealing with a lot of injuries. Just trying to find Tommy a consistent level of consistency with how we pitch him has probably been the biggest thing.

I think Tommy is a big game -- he likes to pitch in the big games, which works out well because the Yankees usually are playing in a lot of big games.

But being able to keep him healthy is definitely a challenge, but Tommy as he's gotten older has been learning how to listen to his body and we've learned how to listen to Tommy even when he's not saying things we don't understand and we have to figure out what's best for Tommy as far as keeping him on the field.

As far as the bullpen is concerned, you have Tommy, yes, he's had a great year, but Tim Hill coming here has been awesome, Cousins is growing into himself. He's become a big weapon, he and Hamilton coming here last year kind of -- there's a big combination of guys that have all stepped up when asked to step up, and it's actually helped us get to this point.

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