

AL Championship Series: Mariners vs Blue Jays

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T-Mobile Park

Seattle Mariners

Cal Raleigh

Pregame 3 Press Conference



going out and getting Geno and Naylor and doing things like that. It's exciting and it really brings that clubhouse together, creates a lot of energy and buzz, and that's what you want heading into the last two months of the year.

Q. You guys went to Toronto the other day. A lot of things were stacked against you guys. Felt like you maybe went in a little bit of an underdog mentality. Now that you're up 2-0, what's the process to try to keep that edge, keep that mentality?

CAL RALEIGH: I don't think you change anything. You keep executing, keep the game plan the same, and just go out there kind of in that reverse mentality of down 0-2 trying to finish this job and understand that things can change pretty quickly.

Q. What has made George so effective in the postseason? We have seen him struggle at times in the regular season, but in the postseason he seems to have another gear. What has made him so effective?

CAL RALEIGH: I think he's done a really good job of really mixing really well. Obviously, I think he's kind of, in a way, kind of hitting his stretch just because of the injury this year and he's finally found that groove. He's really been good about locating the sinker both sides of the plate, which has been huge, you know, away and in, and then obviously mixing in the rest of the stuff has been a big key, I think.

Q. I know remembering back probably isn't easy, but three years ago you guys at the deadline go out and get Luis. What did that acquisition tell that group when you guys were still kind of young and sort of learning how to win at that point by the front office going and getting him, and what did getting him do for that group?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I think doing something like that, it's one of those things where you can say whatever you want, but the actions speak louder than words, and it kind of excites the room when you're going out there because the message is clear, we're going for it. We got our team significantly better. And you can look at this year as well,

Q. With what you've done personally this season, it's sort of taken your own star to a different level. What have you enjoyed about that, maybe, and how has it changed things for you off the field?

CAL RALEIGH: I mean, nothing really. Still try to do the same thing every day pretty much. Nothing's really changed for me, in my eyes, I guess. So just really enjoying, obviously, the success of the team and everything that's been going on. I think the last month was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun and enjoying that with those guys, and kind of coming together there at the end was a lot of good memories and trying to keep doing that right now.

Q. About the Mariners and staying here and committing, what about their vision finally sold you on it, like the wanting to stay here and see this thing out? What made you trust?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of factors. Obviously, sitting down with Jerry, Justin, John and just talking things through and understanding -- I think first things first, we got to go out there and execute. We got to put our best foot forward and that's really all we can do every day.

Then after that, we have seen things come together, looking at, like, what he just said with Luis and Naylor and Geno this year, putting us in good positions, and also just kind of falling in love with this place and the fans and the city and really kind of finding a home here.

So I would say those are kind of the things that kind of brought me to that conclusion.

Q. 2004 is a long time ago, but I know you were a Red Sox fan growing up and watching the team that year. What are your memories of what that team meant? Because, obviously, basically for all their fans, they

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had never seen that team win the World Series and of course you're trying to do something that's never been done in this city. So when you look back, what was it like as a young fan back in 2004?

CAL RALEIGH: I mean, it was crazy. Obviously, the year before, Wakefield and giving up the homer to Boone, I remember how devastating that was and how close. Obviously, the next year them being able to do that and coming back like that was crazy.

I was, obviously, very lucky not to go through all the suffering that fans did for many years. But you see what it does to an organization and a city and how important that was, and that's just something that was amazing. I thought it was awesome.

Obviously, now you're looking back 20-something years, you're seeing all these documentaries coming out and how important that was and how it really kind of bolstered the next couple championships for them coming years after that. It means a lot. It kind of gives you that little extra gear, little extra edge as far as we're doing this for something more than just ourselves or this team. We're doing it for fans and people here to remember something for a long time.

Q. Do you have a specific recollection of watching a particular games during that journey, whether it was at a relative's house, your own house, who you were watching it, whether it was Game 4 against the Yankees or Game 7 or when they eventually won?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, unfortunately, the one that really sticks out was the Aaron Boone home run. That was really devastating. I remember I was on my living room floor. I was just sitting there watching with my dad, it was obviously late, and that was kind of a crushing one.

So unfortunately, that's the one that sticks out out of all of 'em. But I also remember kind of very vividly the Johnny Damon home runs and how much that game was and it kind of got things going. So I believe was it Game 7? Is it 6 or 7? One of those. Those are the ones that really stuck out to me.

And then it was crazy, obviously, how big the CS was and then the World Series they won was a 4-0 to the Cardinals, so they kind of almost just steamrolled them.

Q. You were the Platinum Glove winner last year. The Gold Glove nominees came out today. You weren't on it. Did you think you were worse defensively this year?

CAL RALEIGH: I mean, a lot of that is based off of numbers and analytics, so I think this year with the new strike zone, it kind of changed a lot. You saw it early on and, obviously, that big article came out, and they mentioned they shrunk the zone for the umpires -- or at least the shadow zone of what can and can't be called down from 2 to .75.

So I would say that was a big factor early on. But right now, I'm not crazy looking into it. We've, obviously, got bigger things ahead of us, so that's something maybe I'll address in the off-season, take a look at something I can do better, kind of dive a little deeper into that.

Q. We mentioned about the Bryce mound visit, and he said he doesn't remember what you said. And then we asked Logan, and he said that you come out there oftentimes, put your glove up to your mouth but just stare at him. Is this true and what is your philosophy on mound visits?

CAL RALEIGH: Everyone's different. A lot of the time you go out there and you just want to give the guys a breath. You don't want to sound like Dad going out there every single time saying the same thing because then it starts to get repetitive, and you're not getting your point across.

Sometimes you are just going out there to give them a breath, and you don't want them to be rolling their eyes hearing the same cliché thing every time. So a lot of times I'll go out there, give them a breather, and then, like I said, a lot of times you're just trying to take as much time because everything's clocked now with time, and you're trying to give them the most amount of, I guess, time to recuperate, recover, catch a breath. And then sometimes it's a very simple message at the end before I leave. Most of the time they know what to do. They already know what I'm going to say. It's usually coming after a walk, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

CAL RALEIGH: No, he's very high effort with his delivery, so a lot of times you do need to just go out there and give him a breather. It's all situation-dependent, is there people on base, is there nobody on base, did he have a long at-bat before, is it a hot day out. Obviously, we're not dealing with that too much right now. But a lot of those factors come into play. Do we have a lot of mound visits play with. Sometimes when you use 'em up early in the game, you got to be a little more smart about it versus if we're cruising through five and you can afford to use one in the sixth, then go take it. Better safe than sorry.

Q. We hear about George, the big-game competitor, and what he did three years ago in the ALDS, what he's



done now for this year. Whether it's preparation or mentality, what sticks out to you as far as the biggest difference for him in big games like these?

CAL RALEIGH: I think you've seen it a lot with a lot of our guys on the mound. It seems like when the bright lights come on, they're not shying away from the spotlight. You always feel -- you can look back to so many games, you can look back to the Astros game a couple years ago when George started that one. I believe it was King Felix night when would we played the Orioles a couple years ago. He pitched a full nine innings, and we didn't get any runs. But he went a full nine innings, it was unbelievable. With a packed house that night.

So he doesn't shy away from it. He really accepts that and takes the challenge on. He kind of busts through in a way and uses that adrenaline and focus to make a really good outing usually.

Q. Mitch said the other night that he was going to say something. Has he addressed the team or just done it on an individual basis about the situation he was in two years ago, going on the road winning the first two games, and then coming home, losing the next three, and having to go back out there, and just keeping that same mentality, given that anything can happen in a series like this?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I mean, we understand. Obviously, we put ourselves in a good spot, but the job's not finished. I think we've done a good job of that so far this year, all the way starting back to when we did clinch. We weren't satisfied with just making the playoffs. We wanted to finish this thing off and get the division. And then, you know, fast-forward to the Tigers series, just trying to keep that focus and whether we go down or go up, trying to keep the same level of consistency and focus. And like I said, we want to try to finish this thing out here and take care of business that way. We're not giving them any kind of room to breathe.

Q. Josh talked a couple weeks ago now about getting the big inning, kind of the inning that you guys had a lot of during the last month of the season. Game 2 you guys had that. With you guys approaching game by game with a looking at just what's in front of you mentality, what's the key for you guys to continue on the momentum of what you had in the previous game while also staying in the moment and not trying to do too much or go out of what the game is presenting you at that time?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I think kind of what you mentioned with big innings, those are huge in the postseason. Putting

up crooked numbers can really be a huge thing, especially with how much shorter pitchers leashes are and getting to bullpens and getting to see guys multiple times. So crooked numbers are huge.

As far as the mentality and approach, kind of just do the same thing. Obviously, we're going to be home these next three -- or two, three games, and we know it's going to be loud and it's just going to be about keeping the heart rate down and not trying to do too much, kind of like we did in Toronto.

So in postseason, you're always going to be a little more amped up and the heart rate's going to be going a little more, so it's more about just slowing the game down, trying to take a deep breath here and there and understanding that we're going to have some tough games and tough moments and trying to slow things down.

Q. This hasn't been a normal season for George this year. He started on the IL. It took him a little while to get into what he does, and he seemed to be battling things trying to do that. What did you see from him and getting back to where he is doing what he is doing right now?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I think kind of there early on his command wasn't quite there that we have seen from old George. We talk about a guy that's up there with these crazy names like Greg Maddux as far as how well he can locate. Early on he was maybe not quite having that same kind of feel. He was throwing a few more walks out there than we're used to seeing.

But now you're kind of seeing he's commanding to both sides of the plate, kind of like we have seen in the past, east/west, north/south, and I think that kind of just grew with confidence and building up a little bit and getting that feel back, and it seems like he's -- kind of like I said with him kind of now getting some starts under his belt and going a little deeper into games, and I think you're starting to see that feel back. And like I said, that's kind of the thing that popped to me was like, all right, that command's there now, we're seeing it to both sides and lefties and righties as well.

Q. The rotation's been pretty similar for a few years now, but there's been a lot of turnover in the bullpen besides Brash and Muñoz. What stands out about this bullpen right now, and what's it been like watching them kind of jell at the right moment right now?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, they have been unbelievable. I can't really say enough about those guys and how well they have done. Not only that, just how much they have

been asked to do as far as covering multiple innings back-to-back days, short rest, etcetera, you can go on and on.

I look at guys like Bazardo and Vargas the other night, those are huge innings that they covered. Obviously, Brash and Muny are going to get the bulk of that just because of how great they have been, and deservedly so. But Bazardo, Gabe Speier, they have been awesome for us all year and really bridged that gap. That's helped a lot. And they have been great, they have been filling it up, they have been mixing, they have been kind of hitting their spots really well, and those are huge, especially this time of year.

Q. In speaking to Ty France, he told me that he noticed a shift in your mentality when you returned to the team from getting optioned in 2022. He said that he thought you had a lot more confidence in yourself and belief that you belonged in the Major Leagues. How accurate is that, and do you think that point of your career has factored into your success today?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I think looking back, you never want to be optioned and you never want to fail like that, but I think that was, honestly, the best thing for me at the time. I learned a lot from that and it was very -- it was a lot shorter than it originally was supposed to be with Tom Murphy getting hurt seven games into that. But coming back, I learned a lot just about -- not physically, not about the swing or whatever, but it was a lot mentally and kind of like that confidence he was talking about and understanding kind of the ins and outs of it and what I had to do and what I had to do to learn how to stick here and to survive and to end up ultimately trying to thrive in this game.

I learned a lot of lessons, and it wasn't just that, it took a couple more weeks as well, but I look back and I kind of am thankful for what happened there.

Q. With so many catchers the position is a big part of their identity. Like, they just love it. What do you love about the position you play?

CAL RALEIGH: I mean, I grew up around the game. My dad was a catcher. He was a coach. I was kind of always intrigued by the position. It was always in my bag. I was always catching -- I mean, not all the time. I was doing it as I was growing up here and there, and then ultimately kind of found my niche, and that was what I wanted to do, and when I got to college, started doing it full-time.

I just love the ins and outs of it. I said it before, the kind of mental side of it, calling a game, working with pitchers, reading hitters, understanding situations, kind of trying to

lead the team out there in a way, obviously they're all looking at you, and leading staff. So I think once I started doing that more as I grew up through high school and stuff, and you got those opportunities to do stuff like that, it was kind of where I kind of fell in love with it.

Q. J.P. mentioned the 2004 Red Sox. That team certainly was aware of the history they were trying to overcome, and kind of embraced it. How does the clubhouse kind of take on what you guys are trying to do, and how aware is the team of the history of the franchise?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, we understand that we live in a world today where everything is emphasized with media, social media, and you can't really go anywhere around here without hearing that. I think it's one of those things where you embrace it, you don't shy away from it. I think in a way you're grateful for where you're at and very happy, but at the same time you're still hungry because you're like, All right, we can do something that's never been done before here. This is more than just about me. It's about the guys in that room, it's about getting this chance, this opportunity, and looking at it like that and not like a burden, like it's something that we have to do. It's something that is fun, something that is bringing joy to the guys in the clubhouse, and as well as the fans and the city. And you're feeling it. You feel it when you're on the field, you feel it when you walk out there and it's 20, 30 minutes before a game and you can't see an empty seat. So you can just, like I said, it's something you can sense and understand how much it means to the city and the fans and it's a lot of fun.

Q. You're one of 37 people born in North Carolina to play in the big leagues this year, which is a pretty significant number. For those that might not be as familiar with it, how do you describe the baseball culture in North Carolina, and maybe the mentors that you had growing up in your home state?

CAL RALEIGH: Yeah, I didn't know it was 37. That's pretty cool. I think the south in general, you know, obviously it's a little warmer down there, so you get more kids that play and you can play more year round. Obviously it's no Florida or California, Texas, maybe, but the baseball there is pretty good.

There are a lot of colleges there. I think that helps a lot. I think that's the thing in the south is there's maybe not as many pro sports teams, but there's a lot of colleges and people kind of, you know, they look at people and teams and players that are on those teams and they grow up idolizing them. So to me that's what I was -- I loved college baseball. I was watching college baseball, and it's very



competitive down there. I remember watching Dustin Ackley, Kyle Seager, when I was a bat boy and my dad was playing their teams. Guys at Clemson, Tyler Colvin, those are kind of some older names, but yeah, those are the guys that you kind of grow up watching how good they were in college. And then obviously when I got here Kyle Seager made that connection and was kind of really crazy that that came together. So, yeah, like I said, it's very competitive down there and a lot of fun growing up there playing baseball.

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