

# MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 9, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

**Cincinnati Reds**

**Terry Francona**

Press Conference

**Q. After getting Martinez back and landing Singer, what do you think of your rotation these days?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Well, you know, kind of the old adage, if you think you have enough pitchers, go get more. I think that's a good thing. If we get to the --

**Q. Are you going to get more?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I mean, we did get more. If we get to the end of Spring Training and if we have to kind of like aggravate somebody like because we feel like we have too many starters, good for us because I think we've all seen when you don't have enough pitching, that can derail your season. So the idea of going out and getting two guys really, really helps.

**Q. I was going to ask a follow-up. Martinez was a swing guy last year. Is he firmly in that top five all things being equal at this point?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think we would certainly like for that to happen. The season has a way of playing itself out, and we don't need to make the rotation or the batting order now because we don't know what our team is going to be, but I think we would like it. The way he finished was pretty damn good.

**Q. You went down to the Dominican and talked to some players. I think you probably went all over the country and talked to players. You got to meet Cruz and a couple of others. What did you take from that meeting, and what do you want to see him do this coming season?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I went down with our guys. They were going down to look at the academy, so I kind of hitched a ride and saw Elly and Jeimer and Marte. They were great because they all came down to Santo Domingo to make it easier on me.

I just wanted to visit with them. I would like to visit with as many guys as I can. I probably made a comment when I



## 2024 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS DALLAS

first got hired about trying to get to everybody. I thought we were having the -- what is it, Reds Fest? What do they call it? And they're not, so I probably -- a little overreach there, but I enjoyed it thoroughly.

I hate to just talk about guys -- rather speak in generalities, not singling guys out. I think the idea is that trying to create havoc on the bases, but also being intelligent, and I think taking that step forward will be really big for us, and that's the idea.

You're going -- when you play that aggressively, like our guys do, you're going to make outs. We don't want to leave a way.

**Q. When you see that kind of mistake, are you the kind of manager that will correct it on the spot, or is it something that you kind of talk about it over time like if you see a guy being overaggressive, how quickly do you --**

TERRY FRANCONA: Again, the game is going fast, and I don't want our guys ever looking over their shoulder like, oh, man, I don't want to mess up. That's a every not a good way to play.

I think you try to use common sense. The idea is not for me to show everybody in the whole world that I am a task master. You know, I'm penalizing this guy. The idea is, if we make a mistake, not to do it again. However we correct it, that's the idea.

**Q. Were you following the Soto free agency at all? Were you shocked at the final total money? Were you surprised somebody actually left the Yankees? That doesn't happen much. What's your thoughts?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I was shocked when I saw the bonus. My goodness. Yeah, I wasn't really -- I wasn't probably following as close as maybe you guys were because I didn't really think we were going to sign him, so kind of looking at other stuff.

**Q. Every organization is structured different. What stands out about the relationships you are building with the front office, Nick and guys you are working**

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

**with, and kind of organizationally how they go about things?**

TERRY FRANCONA: That was one of the first things that jumped out to me when they came out to Tucson to talk to me. It just felt good quickly. I think I told some of the guys, I've caught myself a few times saying "we" early on. I had to kind of grab myself and go, hey, wait, slow down here. You're a half hour into it.

It's really similar to how I felt when I went to Cleveland. I didn't leave Cleveland because I was mad at anybody. I left because I didn't think I was doing the job the way you're supposed to.

Having a year to maybe get a little healthy and feel like I can do the job the way you're supposed to, then you get, again, with -- you align yourself with people that you know kind of have your back and you'll have theirs. That's appealing.

Even on good teams you're going to get challenged a ton, but going through it with people that you care about, I enjoy that.

**Q. You wrote a manifesto before your first game or whatever. Have you written anything formal about the way you're going to go about the job?**

TERRY FRANCONA: All my thoughts were -- I only have so many thoughts (laughing). Kind of still using the same one.

**Q. Have you given much thought of how your cornering field is going to shape up? You have a few candidates at first and third base.**

TERRY FRANCONA: It's a good question. I'm not going to have an answer yet because we want to see what our team is when we get to Spring Training. I will say this in generalities. We would like to make our defense better. You talk about adding good pitching. We need to catch the ball. If we don't and you start giving teams extra outs, extra opportunities, it's going to be hard to be a good pitching team also.

**Q. Are you getting a sense that you might be able to improve that with any more outside moves?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I mean, I think we're trying to get better any way we can. I don't think we're opposed to -- I mean, I think we're just trying to see how good we can get.

Now, there are guys, McLain being back, Friedl being healthy. Those things will help it along without doing other

things already.

**Q. You are talking about first base and the corners. First base, how have you seen that change? It used to be, like, big slugger --**

TERRY FRANCONA: Put the big slow guy there.

**Q. (Indiscernible) Hall of Famers. Now it's like if it gets sluggish from first base, it's like the lowest it's been maybe ever.**

TERRY FRANCONA: I didn't know that. I do think you can't just put the guy that you want to hide over there because I don't think you can hide over there. They impact too much that goes on in your infield. So having a good first baseman makes everybody else better in the infield.

**Q. Are there players you've enjoyed learning more about, getting to know? Any relationships --**

TERRY FRANCONA: Everybody. We just met as a staff for the first time in Cincinnati before we came here. We were there for three and a half days. So it was the hold-overs and the new guys, and we went into the stadium, and we went over our team and went over kind of some of the things we want to do in Spring Training. It was a lot of fun.

It was our first time together as a staff, and now the next time we won't be introducing ourselves. We'll be re-acquainting and laughing. Don't ever want being new to be an excuse for us not winning.

**Q. Is there anything in those meetings from the coaches especially like that just jumped out that's maybe something a little different than you were expecting?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I wouldn't say different. I think it reinforced some things. I think our guys want to be coached and maybe want to be held to maybe a higher -- you know, things that will help us get better.

I've kind of gotten that feeling from talking to them anyway.

**Q. How much does it help that there are hold-overs that know the guys as opposed to a guy says he wants to be coached, but a guy saying he can be coached?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Having the right hold-overs is important. When I talk to Nick and Brad when I took this job, we talked about selecting a staff together, and that's what we did. The guys that are staying put, I mean, I knew a few of them already anyway, but I think it's going to be a

really good staff.

**Q. I'll also ask you about Dave Parker. Dave was '75 to '79 maybe the best player in baseball. Then you played with him when he was really that second thing where he went in with the Reds and helped with Eric Davis, Barry Larkin, went to the A's, helped with those young guys, and you saw that.**

TERRY FRANCONA: Milwaukee.

It's funny, '75, '76, growing up in Pittsburgh, I was a junior in high school, and he was the best, most exciting, best player in baseball. Then playing with him, I mean, he just is a big sweetheart. Our room, when it came across everybody's phone last night, everybody is pretty excited in that room for good reason.

**Q. At this point in your career as a manager, are there any new challenges that you are looking forward to this season bringing to you?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I mean, there are always the same challenges. We want to see how good we can get. When we lose, it will kill me. When we win, I'll be fine.

I've never found a way to gain perspective. I think it's too late for that. That's okay. Being healthy was such an important part of -- because it didn't allow me when I wasn't healthy to enjoy as much as you want to. I thought I was putting too much stuff on the coaches. Everything was hard. The game is hard enough. I want to be able to enjoy the challenges that come our way. Not knowing -- knowing that we don't know what they all will be.

**Q. Is there a certain point over this past year that you just started to get the itch a little bit more of coming back?**

TERRY FRANCONA: No. Truthfully, no. I had a really good year. I watched -- my girls went to Europe for ten days, and I watched the grandkids. That was the one day I thought maybe I'll go back to baseball (laughing).

Towards the end of the year like maybe talking to Chris a little bit, I was, like, you know, I was trying to start to think, okay, what do I want to do next year? But, like I said, I had a really good year, and maybe I just needed that, but then when these guys called, it just felt right.

**Q. When you talked about how it was so tough, was it physically dragging, mentally dragging? How did it affect you?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Physical. You start to get mentally

too. It just physically was really hard. I felt like I was starting to short-change people, and I didn't feel good about that either.

**Q. When you look at the 11 years you spent in Cleveland, what can you say about the fans and how they treated you and...**

TERRY FRANCONA: I got treated so well, and that's why I always wanted to make sure people understood that I didn't leave because I was mad or -- there was no ulterior motives. Those 11 were the best years I've ever had. Those guys made me a better person, and I'll always feel that way.

**Q. How much baseball did you watch over the year --**

TERRY FRANCONA: This year? More this year than I have in the past. I had gotten to the point where I was probably watching the team that was coming up on our next series.

This year I would turn on -- you know, I have the baseball package, and there would be a game tied in the eighth inning, and I would see and watch three or four of the ends of games. I still love listening to baseball on the radio.

So it's kind of relaxing. I know I'm showing my age, but I still really like that.

**Q. What was that experience like kind of being removed from it?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I didn't get out of baseball because I hated it. I just didn't think I was doing a very good job, and it wasn't as much fun as it can be because it was just hard, but I love watching baseball.

If I'm healthy, I feel like I can get in there and get dirty and, okay, how are we going to get better as a ball club and be a part of that instead of just watching or relying on some coaches to do it.

**Q. When you were watching those games, did you watch as a manager, or did you watch as a fan?**

TERRY FRANCONA: That's actually a really good question. I know everybody here probably thinks you can watch the game as a manager. I never felt like I could do that.

When I wasn't totally healthy in Cleveland and I would sit up with Chris and Cherny sometimes, they would ask me, hey, what do we do here? I would try to explain to them that, man, when you're in the dugout, you get in this tunnel,

and you know everything. You have all the information.

When you are sitting up there, you don't. You don't know who is not available. You don't know whose arm is sore. There's just so much that -- so I have never tried to manage a game unless I'm managing the game.

**Q. Do you like the playoff format after a couple of years? Do you like the extra teams, getting a bye, or are you old school about it?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Yeah, I do. The one thing I wish they were able to change is -- again, this is -- I'm not being critical. You're seeing too much bullpen games in the playoffs. That's not the way teams are really built.

Now, I would like to see after 162 games, I would like to see teams have to use their entire roster. I think you would find the true best teams that way. Not just maybe teams that are top-heavy with a couple of good pitchers and with days off you can throw your bullpen. I mean, I get it. They're competing. I'm not saying they're wrong to do it. Just don't think that's the way our game is built.

**Q. You mentioned shock at Soto's signing bonus. Do you worry at all that that lifts the cost for everyone else in other deals and makes it harder for teams like the Reds and all the revenue to compete for key players?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think it makes it harder, but I certainly don't begrudge teams for doing it if they can. They're not breaking the rules.

We're going to have to make really good decisions, and we're not going to be able to out-spend on mistakes, so we have to limit those.

**Q. Should the rules change, do you think?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I'm not smart enough to know. I really don't. In football they have the pie is split up evenly. Baseball, you know, with radio and television so regional, it's going to be really hard to do that. I don't have a good answer.

I hate to complain if I don't have an answer.

**Q. You've also been on the other side. Was it '11 when you guys -- Crawford, Gonzalez, and everybody is, like, this is going to be the greatest Red Sox team ever.**

TERRY FRANCONA: That's why I always don't complain. I also had that chance to live that side of it. When you go to the other side, I don't think you can just, well, we need to

change the rules now.

**Q. What's it like to have Valaika come back and --**

TERRY FRANCONA: Millsy. And even, like, Napoli. It's good. I explained to our hold-over coaches, it's not a knock on them. In fairness to me we need to have some guys that know how I want to do things before we even do it.

The hold-overs and the new guys have meshed so well, I think -- like I said, I think it's going to be a really good staff.

**Q. Have you settled on a role for Napoli?**

TERRY FRANCONA: He's going to be like our Swiss Army knife. He's going to help calling at first. He's going to help calling at first, he's going to help J.R. with the catchers. He's going to help me. We're going to turn him loose.

**Q. When Valaika talked to us, he talked about doing a lot of situational work in the spring. Has that been a big emphasis, a big talking point, kind of game reps as much as you can on the back fields?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I don't know. The game-like reps, we can turn up the machine as much as we want, and we certainly will, but situational hitting will certainly be talked about a lot, yes.

Situational hitting, situational base running, playing the game. Not just going up there and taking your hacks.

**Q. Do you have a (indiscernible)?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I'm hopeful we're going to get to that.

**Q. When you say you're feeling much healthier, healthy enough to throw BP?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Oh, God, no. Geez, I don't want to have a heart attack. I just want to feel better.

You know, it's funny because I actually thought about that at one point this year. I think it was in -- oh, it was Halloween, and I was throwing a football with my grandson. The next day I could barely move my arm, so I think BP is out (laughing).

**Q. How do you feel?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Pretty good.

**Q. Everything is --**

TERRY FRANCONA: I haven't had a surgery in, like, 11 months. I'm on borrowed time (laughing).

**Q. New personal best?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Yes, yeah, it is. I'm trying to stay away from it.

**Q. Nick said in the past that everyone is pretty much going to have to compete for a spot. There's no guarantees for roster spots. Do you kind of take that view as well? How do you sort out? I know you have to see your team. I understand, but how do you sort out the idea of guys that have jobs and guys that need to earn jobs?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think by being as honest as you can with guys in Spring Training. Some guys are there to get ready for a long season. Some guys are going to be in Spring Training to compete, but saying that, we're not going to just go on somebody's batting average or somebody's E.R.A. because those things get skewed.

The more you try to just base your evaluation on Spring Training, you're setting yourself up to make mistakes. Saying that, I think it's good that some of these younger guys need to come in and show what they can do and then let us make our decisions.

**Q. How confident are you to the bullpen in that context because you got some guys that have had the back-end roles that have struggled last year plus. Will you open up some of that?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think it will be really important in my communication with these guys to be really good from the get-go. The first two, three, four weeks of the season is always a little different anyway. I always ask our bullpen guys for patience because you're coming out of Spring Training where everybody is on a routine. You're not really having a lot of weather issues normally.

Then you come back, and you're in an eastern city like Cincinnati, and there's days off built in. There's weather. So you are trying to make sure guys -- obviously we want to win, but we also want to keep guys from going a week without pitching.

I always ask guys for their patience early on. They will grow into the roles as we get into the season.

**Q. Are you sticking with the closer that they've had the last...**

TERRY FRANCONA: I would certainly like to. Kind of hard in December not knowing who is going to come out of Spring Training. Normally not everybody leaves Spring Training feeling as -- it just happens with every team, so we'll see what happens.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports