

MLB Winter Meetings

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Dallas, Texas, USA

Pittsburgh Pirates

Derek Shelton

Press Conference

Q. Starting with (indiscernible), what was it about that that resonates with this group some?

DEREK SHELTON: I think there were a couple of things. Number one, his passion for hitting. When we started talking to players about him, the feedback that we got from players was so good. How he listens, how he is in the cage, the in-game conversations, everybody we talked to, it was just effusive in terms of this is a guy that you want around you.

Q. Just following up, how much is him working --

DEREK SHELTON: IKF is one of the guys we talked to. We talked to guys here and guys other places he had been, in front. IKF spoke very highly of him.

It wasn't directly correlated because IKF came from Toronto, but he had a lot of positive things to say about how he was. When you get firsthand from one of your players about a guy's demeanor in the cage, that's really hard to quantify in an interview process. So I think the player portion of it was really important to us.

Q. Flip side on the coaching staff, Strom, what do you like about bringing him to the coaching staff, experience-wise, and what's the familiarity with him?

DEREK SHELTON: Familiarity, just respect from being in the game. He's one of the most respected pitching minds in the game. I think this was a two-way street. He wanted to be part of our group, and then once we heard there was a possibility, we started to talk to him. We just realized how good a fit it was.

How often do you get a guy that's done what he's done in the game willing to come and take the title of assistant pitching coach. The fact that he and Oscar hit it off immediately was something that was really important for me.

I think he's going to have an impact not only on our player group. He's going to have an impact on me, on Oscar, on



2024 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS DALLAS

Donny. I mean, everybody that's been around him, all he talks about is wanting to make young pitchers better, and that's what we're all about.

Q. You mentioned wanting to make young pitchers better. David Bednar, not necessarily a young guy, but he mentioned a meeting with him and Oscar going out and --

DEREK SHELTON: I haven't heard the feedback. It was just this week that Oscar and Stromy were in Pittsburgh. They were going to get with David. That's encouraging.

We're early in the offseason.

It's the first week of December, and the fact that those guys are there because it's not like David is in a full throwing program. It's just the ability to kind of learn and be around. It was impactful.

Also, it's time for Oscar and Stromy to spend together. They both live in Arizona, so they can do that. You get into Pittsburgh. You have the ability to be around. I think that was important.

Q. What kind of conversations have you had with Bryan Reynolds, just the offseason he's having and obviously the kind of season he was taking reps at third base and things like that? Have you been working through that in the offseason?

DEREK SHELTON: He's just starting that. Donny is putting a program in place for him to follow, and Donny will follow back up with him. We'll go to Nashville and be able to do the work.

Right now it's just rest. He played in 150-something games. We need him to rest. He'll start his offseason program, but the idea is that we're going to see what it's like at first base, to see if he is going to play there full-time. I wouldn't say that. He's a good athlete. He likes taking ground balls.

The initial stuff that he did, the initial work that he did at the beginning -- or end of the offseason into the season was very positive. We'll see how it goes. Then we'll see how

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the rest of our club plays out.

Q. Are any other players maybe going to be part of that first base program? You have three catchers.

DEREK SHELTON: As of right now, no. I think we'll be a little fluid with that. We have to figure out who we acquire, whether it's via trade or who we sign to be able to do that.

Once we put the club together, that's not to say that we wouldn't move somebody else over there, but right now we don't have any plans to.

Q. Any kind of update status on key and (indiscernible)?

DEREK SHELTON: Right now he's doing really well. He's doing all baseball activities. He's moving around. He's swinging. He's in a good spot.

The strengthening program that he went on through the back has continued. All the conversations at our medical and performance group have had with him have been extremely positive. Really excited about that.

I mean, he's a big piece to what we're doing. I think we know when he is healthy, we saw it in '23, the months at the end when he was healthy how he performed offensively, defensively. You guys know I feel he's one of the best defenders in the game.

Just need him to be healthy. The fact that he's there is very encouraging for us.

Q. Now that a couple of months has passed since the end of the season, can you put more into perspective what Paul Skenes did this season?

DEREK SHELTON: I think as you sit back and unemotionally and reflect on it, I mean, historic. A sub-2 E.R.A. I think our pitching group and our organization in general did a really good job.

I know there was a lot of criticism about how we handled the innings. We needed to be thoughtful. We know what we have is a very special pitcher, so we were very diligent and thoughtful with the process.

It was very important for us -- for him to finish the season. He had the last start in New York, and it was shortened. We need him to build off that. We want him to build off that.

That was a major part of the plan, but to look back on what he did, it was fun to watch. The thing that's been even

more important is his thirst to continue to get better. The conversations, how he worked. I don't think you see very many 22-year-olds that are as regimented in terms of his process, and he wants to get better.

I mean, I think we saw it in the one start where he just decided, all right, I'm going to throw the change-up, and like, all right, that's a weapon. Where did that come from?

He basically -- I don't like using this word, but the splinker he used in Spring Training, and it became one of the best pitches in the game. That's what excites me, his thirst to learn.

Q. A follow-up on that, have you ever seen rookies be so poised? When he won the Rookie of the Year, it's almost like he had no emotion on his face, another day at work at him?

DEREK SHELTON: I don't think I've ever seen a rookie that poised. I don't know if that goes to -- it has to go to how he was brought up. It has to go from the time he spent at Air Force in terms of -- but it's who he is. He is authentic.

There's nothing that he doesn't do that isn't authentic. To see the lack of emotion, I think right now if you called Paul Skenes, he is ready for the season to start. In fact, I talked to him about a week ago. He's, like, I'm itching to go. Hey, hold on. We're in the offseason. Enjoy the time.

I think he has his mindset on we're going to win, how we're going to win. That's what he is thinking about. I know he was excited about winning the award, but he is a more of a team-first "how we're going to get better" type of person.

Q. That was his benchmark, Rookie of the Year and Cy Young finalist. What do you see as the ceiling for him?

DEREK SHELTON: I don't know if we know what the ceiling is. He is 22 years old. He is going to continue to get better. I'm really excited he's a Pirate, and I'm really excited to see what that ceiling is.

Q. What are you hoping to see from Jared Jones? He started the offseason strong and had some injuries. What's next for Jared?

DEREK SHELTON: He had the injury. The first month and a half of the season he was probably one of the best pitchers in the National League. It's just the consistency.

Like Paul, he is 22 years old. Him being able to finish the season, the grind of it, being able to execute his pitches,

stay under control. I think that's the next step. But that's going to come with reps. That's going to come with time.

Again, a guy we're really excited about. Our pitching group is young. It's exciting. Not just the guys in the Big Leagues, but the guys we have in the Minor Leagues that are coming. So the next step is just going to be consistency.

Q. He finished really strong. You saw him move back into (indiscernible). What do you like to see for his development?

DEREK SHELTON: Development is the most important word there. We taught him a cutter midseason. A big bonus when your pitching group identifies something that you need as a weapon. All of a sudden it works. We go from in the bullpen to low leverage to we open it for him and then one of our better starters because of a development of a pitch.

It takes two things. It takes a group to identify what we need to do and then, most importantly, a player that's willing to, all right, I'm going to throw this and do it in games. It starts in catch play, and then all of a sudden he's running it out mid-game. It became one of the better pitches that he had.

Q. There were a few picks. You referenced the Minor League pitching that you have. Have you had any discussions of how you want to build this rotation for next year? Is it going to be five, six, maybe build in days like bullpen games? Is that something that you need to see first?

DEREK SHELTON: We need to see first. Last year obviously we were very thoughtful in terms of spacing out. Now, a lot of that was because of Skenes and Jones. Their first years in the Big Leagues. We're going to have to be thoughtful because he's coming off Tommy John, so there will be innings we have to benchmark him and watch for.

We're in a better place than probably any of the time that I've been here. Not only those guys. You add Falter to it, and you start to talk about the guys in the Minor Leagues with Chandler, Harrington, Marco and Ashcraft. That's a deep group of pitching, which is really important.

How we're going to deploy them right now, I can't tell you that. You guys know how am I am. I don't want to talk about that until we get through Spring Training and then have to make a decision.

The good thing is we're going to have some decisions to

make.

Q. What do you feel like has to be done to take the line up to the next level?

DEREK SHELTON: I think we have to add to the group. We have Oneil. We have Bryan. Adding IKF. Joey Bart had a really good year. We have to add Major League depth to that group.

How we're going to do that I think is what we'll find out over the course of between now and Spring Training. I think we have the good ingredients at the floor, and to Alex's first point, adding Matt into that group with the hitting group. How we deploy offensively will come once we know our personnel.

Q. Do you think there's more there for Joey Bart? Obviously his career took off this year.

DEREK SHELTON: Yeah, I definitely think there's more there. Just with the fact that he's going to get more reps. It's one of those things, everybody wants to put a timeline on what a prospect should be. Sometimes it takes a little longer. Sometimes it takes a change of scenery. I think what we saw is a really productive Major League player. He got volume last year catching.

We will take that next step forward in terms of how he drives the ball, how he controls at-bats. The steps forward he made last year were really impactful for us.

Q. Sticking with that, catchers, any updates on just how D is doing with the elbow?

DEREK SHELTON: He's doing well. The fact that we got him in games last year was really important. We shut him down under abundance of caution. We didn't want to push it over the last two weeks, but expect in Spring Training he'll be fully healthy to go.

Q. Any conversations with Henry and how he's been doing?

DEREK SHELTON: His offseason has been good. I mean, this is a guy that has dominated Triple-A baseball. It's going to translate to the Big Leagues. We just have to make sure that we do it.

Again, going off Joey Bart, everything doesn't work on the timeline we want, but we're really excited about our catching group. We're really happy with the work and the process that's going. We should have a deep group going into camp.



Q. So many guys, they (indiscernible) hard to translate to the Major Leagues?

DEREK SHELTON: Yeah, I think part of that is guys get to the Big Leagues a little bit quicker. It used to be you would get 1,500, 2,000 at-bats before you go to the Big Leagues, and this is not just the Pirates, but throughout baseball guys are getting to the Big Leagues, and they're showing those struggles. I think we have to find out what the common denominator is for the individual player to make sure that they translate to the Big League level.

Q. More coaching at the Major League level because of that than maybe they're used to? You miss the Minor League, 2020. Over these last couple of years, not just Pirates, but all of baseball, do you find there's a little more development at the Major League level than maybe you're used to?

DEREK SHELTON: I think so. To your point, it's not just Pirates-based. It's throughout the game. If you have talked to every manager or coaching staff, they're going to tell you that.

In the 2020 year it's lost time, but even the next year in '21 with lost time, and now we're seeing the effects of those guys were college kids that are getting to the Big Leagues. It's not just Minor League players. It may have been high school players. That has definitely happened.

Then organizations are rushing guys to the Big Leagues a little bit quicker whether right, wrong, or indifferent. Because of it, there's no coaching that's going on.

There's always -- for us in Pittsburgh there's always going to be development at the major league level. I think just identifying what those things are is the most important aspect.

Q. I have another roles question here. With Dave and just how his season progressed, if you look at this roster right now, do you have a idea of who is closing right now, or is there something you would like to see from him?

DEREK SHELTON: I think the fact that he has the ability to close is really important for us. Let's remember, this guy was a Two-time All-Star closer. He had a tough year last year. If I'm going to bet on anybody bouncing back, I'm betting on David Bednar bouncing back. He started the year, it was abrupted. Shorter Spring Training. Kind of was behind the 8-ball a little bit. Had some really good stretches where he threw the ball well. Just wasn't consistent.

I'm betting on David Bednar bouncing back and having a good year. To pencil in anybody right now, I'm not doing that because I want to make sure we get to Spring Training, but I'm really happy that he's with us.

Q. What did you see from Nick (indiscernible) last year, and how do you see (indiscernible)?

DEREK SHELTON: Well, he can really hit. He controls his own. He has the ability to drive the ball to the right center field as a young hitter. He controls the middle of the diamond.

He is a bona fide gap-to-gap guy. You like to talk about the ability to stay in the middle field. He has it. I don't know if we've had a young hitter over the last couple of years that controls the at-bats as well as he does at such a young age. It was a good trade for us. He we got an impactful guy.

Where he will play, I can't tell you. He has versatility to play all over the diamond. We saw him play third, second, and in the outfield.

We'll have to decide what the makeup of our group is of where he's going to be.

Q. Do you have the earliest memory of when playing or coaching that you decided you wanted to manage?

DEREK SHELTON: I don't know. I mean, I managed in the Minor Leagues, and then got to the Big Leagues as a hitting coach and was kind of focused on that.

I think it really first came into play when I got fired in Tampa and had the opportunity to do some other things and be a hitting coach. My wife was actually the one that was, like, you know, you've always said want to manage. Do you want to think about it? That's when I went to Toronto. I was really fortunate that Ross and Mark gave me the opportunity to do some different things.

I think it did two things. It opened up my eyes to wanting to manage, and then the second thing is it probably exposed the baseball world to, all right, there's a different skill set here besides being a hitting coach.

Q. The game of baseball has grown so much. Can you fathom a few years ago a contract worth almost three-fourths of \$1 billion?

DEREK SHELTON: Yeah, it has definitely changed. I think our game has changed probably more than any other game in terms of the rules, but the product on the field and the amount of money, I mean, I think it shows you that

baseball is strong and that there's good players out there. He's a very good player.

Q. What do you think about the (indiscernible)?

DEREK SHELTON: I'm not going to speculate on any rules that are put into place until they are put into place. I don't think I understand the full scope of that. What if that guy is on base. What if he is not. I'm not going to get into it until we actually apply it.

Q. If I gave you truth serum, what are you going to say?

DEREK SHELTON: Thankfully you don't have any truth serum. I do want to say -- I should have started with this, but really excited about Dave Parker. Congratulations to him and Dick Allen, but Dave Parker played a big part in Pirates history. He still is back for the Hall of Fame events for the weekend, and really excited. He is very much deserving to be in the Hall of Fame. Definitely want to congratulate him.

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