

MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 9, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

Chicago Cubs

Manager Craig Counsell

Press Conference

Q. Have you had a chance to talk to Matthew Boyd today? What's your impression on his fit with the pitching staff. What made him a good pick?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think pitching is -- it's cliché right away, but you feel like you have a good -- I think we have good depth. I think making that a strong point of the team, depth of our staff, is important.

I think Matthew's in a good place kind of post some injuries where we feel like this could be a really good season for him or a couple seasons for him. Then like I said, it's just a place where you can't get caught without depth, quality. You have to have it, and we thought that was a good place to go.

Q. Between Boyd and kind of some of the younger guys, do you have enough depth right now, or do you think that's still an area that you can tick up?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think at this point in the winter you're not saying we're done anywhere. I just don't think on December 10th you say that. You kind of see what the winter brings and go from there.

Q. I think a lot of people are wondering about Dansby's surgery. When did it impact him? How much did it impact his offensive season?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think it was an injury that nagged at him throughout the year. Look, he played, right? So it was an injury that he was able to play with, but it was also an injury that just makes it hard, right?

I don't think -- I don't have an answer as to how much it affected him, but it was an injury that required surgery, so it's clear that there was something there. I think he'll be in a better place next year without having to deal with it.

Q. Can you tell us what the injury was?

CRAIG COUNSELL: It's essentially -- I don't want to get this wrong, but it's essentially hernias is what it is.



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Q. Is Dansby's off-season going to be pretty normal? I know you said he's not expected to miss any time next year, but what does his off-season look like?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think he's fine. He's fine for the season. He's fine going into Spring Training. His off-season is obviously affected because he had surgery. So the first part of his off-season certainly is affected. But he'll be ready at the start of the season.

Q. His injury, obviously he has surgery. Dealing with that with two important guys the last year, how did you evaluate that area of the team and how do you think the impact will be moving forward next year having them fully healthy and hopefully not have to deal with nagging injuries?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Look, I think we have two very good players there up the middle. They're going to have injuries this year. They're going to deal with stuff this year. That's part of playing every day.

I would say I'm grateful we have two guys who will go out there with things going on and still give really good efforts and still be productive players.

I think every player goes into a season hoping this is the year I'm going to feel really, really good and not going to get bit by any of the injury stuff. I think in both cases they dealt with some stuff. It's both things that they were able to stay on the field with.

But like we said, it affects you. I don't have a prognosis that they're going to be healthy 100 percent this year. I think both of them are going to go into camp knowing, hey, I'm in a really good spot right now, and that's always a good feeling.

Q. (No microphone.)

CRAIG COUNSELL: No. Look, you just try to get the best pitchers you can. I think good pitchers come in all shapes and sizes and velocities and strengths. So I don't know if that's something required. We just want to get as good of pitchers as we can. You always want good pitchers.

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That's just something you're trying to check off.

Q. Going from Milwaukee to Chicago, there's obviously the expectation that the team is going to spend more. How do you see that spending at the top of the free agent market for Juan Soto? Does that surprise you, disappoint you?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think we are just trying to -- there's always -- there's opportunities. You have to figure out what the best ones for your team are and the right time to do them. I think you have to be prudent with looking for those opportunities, no matter what team you are.

Q. Do you expect in Spring Training the team to look significantly different?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I expect the team to look different in Spring Training than it is now, yes.

Q. What was your reaction to Cody deciding to stay, given what you saw last year, what he was able to play through?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I'm glad Cody is back in the mix. I think kind of the second half of the season, just how our lineup, I thought, started to -- with Cody back in there kind of full-time post trade deadline, I thought the lineup really started -- the runs started to become consistent, and I think that lineup produced runs.

I think that's what we're looking at right now, and a lineup that was productive in the run scoring business. A lot of that was because some of the younger players started to pick it up as well.

Q. You're talking about opportunity, great moment or whatever. Back-to-back 83-win team, but missing six or seven or eight core kind of players, is it time to get -- push it up into the 90 range?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think from that -- you're leaving out a big factor.

Q. I'm leaving out a big factor?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Well, there's got to be a fit and a price for a player that fits, yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, good players get asked about. That's just how this works now. I think I worry about it a little more during the season. In the off-season, it's just part of it. It's part of being a good player. It's a compliment

in a lot of ways.

Major League Baseball players deal with a lot of uncertainty, and they get used to it. I think that's just how a lot of guys in the off-season have to deal with it.

It's really about -- again, it's about being a good player. That's who gets asked about. That's who gets talked about.

Q. Coaching staff thought process about changes?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think just from a base coach perspective, Quintin is somebody that I've worked with and understand what he's going to bring, know what he's going to bring, what he's good at, how he's going to impact our team.

Jose Javier is a young coach that we did some homework on and found out really good things about him. I think he'll be a good partner for Quintin in our base running.

Casey Jacobson is someone who knows the Cubs very well and I think has put in his work with the Cubs.

And Daniel Moskos got a great opportunity. Happy for Daniel that he got a great opportunity.

And Casey was really a logical -- someone that we -- it was only a matter of time before we felt that Casey was going to get that opportunity.

I'm trying to think did I miss anything?

A.J. Lewis. A.J. Lewis is a really interesting Chicago kid who is just fresh off the playing field but kind of really, for me, piqued my interest kind of what he did off the playing field as much as anything. He had been really accomplished kind of off the playing field in his winters when he wasn't playing. Very accomplished and did a great job.

We got to know him about just where he's going in the game. I think he's a young man with a really bright future in baseball.

Q. I hate to ask about a player that's gone, but you had Willy Adames for so long. What makes him such a special player?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I would say my favorite thing about Willy is he's just a unique connector of people in that he connects with every corner of the clubhouse. That's my favorite thing about him. The stats, you guys can print those out and people can tell. But there's very few players

that can connect with all corners. I'm not just talking about players, I'm talking about everybody that walks into a clubhouse and sees Willy Adames.

Q. (No microphone.)

CRAIG COUNSELL: Not enjoyable, bad, any negative comment you can come up with.

Q. You guys go up against the reigning World Series champ in Japan, what are you looking forward to with that series?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I guess what I think is the great thing is I'm so anxious to just watch Ohtani. That's probably first for me. Second is just an unbelievable opportunity to visit Japan.

But us being able to give back to two players who have given a lot to the Cubs and watching them have a lot of joy of being able to compete in a great environment, that's going to be really cool.

Q. What do you say about how the game of baseball is growing internationally with the World Series this year?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I think it's probably the two franchises that have maybe the biggest viewership in Japan, in terms of like players there. The Yankees and Mets are doing pretty good too. I think the viewership that the league is getting from Japan is meaningful.

That we get to kick it off there with great players from each team competing against each other, we're lucky to be a part of it for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

CRAIG COUNSELL: Bullpen is -- every GM will tell you the same -- give you the same answer with that. Ultimately for us, right now it's depth. That's what we're tagging it with. It's trying to have enough answers and not get in a situation where you don't have depth and you don't have answers because of whatever happens.

Then wait for the right opportunity if something comes up to attack in a different way.

Q. With the bullpen, there's still a lot of young arms and not necessarily guys with a lot of experience. How do you combat that? I know you have a lot of depth, but maybe you don't necessarily have the level of experience that maybe you want or something like that?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I think we want -- the quality is the most important thing, and we have found some guys that we think can pitch that are going to -- I mean, leverage is -- I think you're talking about quality essentially, guys that you're going to go to in the late inning with leads. We found some guys that we have confidence in doing that.

They didn't have much experience, and they had a lot of success doing it last year.

Q. (No microphone.)

CRAIG COUNSELL: Let's see. I think we're going to add to our catching depth.

Q. Your thoughts on what that may be like?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I can't comment on it, but I'm happy to comment at a later date for you guys.

Q. How much would Miguel benefit from having someone who could share the playing time?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think it's important that we add somebody that has experience and that can -- look, Miguel showed at times last year. He deserves to be -- he should be the guy. At other times he showed us he needs a break.

I think Miguel is still going to have the opportunity to be the answer -- or not the answer, but be a guy that is a regular contributor. But it's also important for us to have a backup plan. I think we're going to make sure we have a really good plan for that.

Q. (No microphone.)

CRAIG COUNSELL: Look, on December 10, I'm not writing out lineups. We got into a situation where he ended up being DH'd for a while. I think that's unlikely, but again on December 10th, I don't know.

Q. With the bullpen, without depth, how do you get confidence you can have it right in April? So you're not figuring -- you're not still trying to piece it together in April or May?

CRAIG COUNSELL: We didn't run into trouble because we couldn't figure it out. We ran into it because we had massive injuries that just wiped out -- and then we didn't have depth behind it to fill in essentially. That's what I thought we ran into last year.

I don't think any -- I think very few teams go into the



seasons like I've got it figured out for my bullpen. I think if you do, you're going to be making a mistake.

So I think having a set of good answers, letting it sort itself out a little bit is generally the process that teams go through. Someone's going to pitch the ninth inning of Opening Day, I hope. I think we want to have -- try to keep those guys healthy as best we can, hopefully provide depth behind the guys that make the team.

That means probably sending some good pitchers to Triple-A that it's not going to be fun to do at the time, but a good thing to do for the depth of the team.

Those are the things that I think are important when thinking about our bullpen and our rotation, quite frankly.

Q. How important is optionality for bullpen arms especially and having guys you can bring up-and-down?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think I've talked about that before, but I think it's not everything. Certainly when you're signing free agents, you're not worried about optionality. But I think it is a place to have some depth and flexibility that during the course of a season you're always -- you're absolutely going to need.

Q. What are your impressions in the organization with Matt Shaw?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I would say, just generally speaking, of all those guys that finished the year in Triple-A, put a blanket over them. Those guys will all impact a Big League team this year in some way or another. They are essentially -- I think they could be depth. Some of them could be a regular by the end of the year. I think they're all good enough and young enough that they're still in a big developmental stage. There could be huge growth for some of them during the season or when they show up at Spring Training.

Those are the guys that they force their way onto a team or force their way into a platoon situation, whatever it may be, and I fully anticipate that to happen. Hopefully more than -- maybe just one of them, but hopefully more than one of them.

Q. How do you view building a bench? Do you have a pathway for those guys?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think the bench is a place that we have some uncertainty right now. With the young position players and kind of the guys that finished on the field kind of mostly every day last year and then some guys that

have left, that's certainly a place that I think the team will look different by the end of the year, by the time we get to Opening Day. And maybe some of those guys aren't in the organization yet.

Q. (Indiscernible) for guys like Matt and Jordan, they just didn't pitch a lot. How does that affect what the pitching staff looks like?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I think the guys with injuries, the first thing you're trying to figure out is are they healthy coming into camp? I think you anticipate that. But it's one of those you've got to see it. Look, you finish the season and then you miss a big chunk of the last -- it affects you coming into camp. How much so, we've got to figure that out. Who else do we acquire through the course of the winter, that affects it.

Yeah, it's certainly part of it. And then we've got to figure out where they line up and where's the best place to get their season off to a good start is.

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