

MLB Winter Meetings

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San Diego Padres

Mike Shildt

Press Conference



2024 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS DALLAS

Q. You just announced your staff (indiscernible)?

MIKE SHILDT: Very, very pleased staff is back. The players are as well. It's a lot of continuity in our group that forged a very healthy situation for us that allowed us to compete very well I felt like this year.

Just a really talented staff. All of them back. I think we had one addition in the sense of Brian Esposito in a similar role, but now officially our bench coach, so that's good for us. More than earned. Ruben is back under contract. That's exciting for the entire organization, our pitchers. And Fritz, our bullpen coach, is back. And Peter Summerville is back, another game-planning guy. That part is in a really good spot.

We do have Victor Rodriguez back and extended, so that's exciting. Mike McCoy, Pat O'Sullivan, Morgan Burkhart, all these guys that are really part of our club that -- an important group offensively, that led the lead in offense in a lot of categories.

Leip is back coaching third. Have the elite man back doing the stuff at third base, and Macias is back as our first base coach. It's exciting to have the group back. Really excited, talented group.

Q. How, if at all, has Esposito's role (indiscernible)?

MIKE SHILDT: He really was the de facto bench coach and a lot of the responsibilities he took on. He will continue to grow in some of his responsibilities. He does a really good job of pregame preparation not only in his lane, but the pitchers, being the catching coach, which he will also continue to do.

Also, just the general preparation, how we're going to compete, how we're going to play. Being a voice for me that I can talk through things during the game. So that part will be pretty consistent.

We are looking to absorb a spot in our Major League field coordinators role. Ryan Barba made a decision for a

life-balance situation to go back on the Minor League side and be able to do that, which we're clearly supportive of, but we are going to miss.

Espo will occupy some of those responsibilities, but we do expect to fill that role.

Q. You have a lot of guys coming back. What do you think you guys need to do to get back to the level that you were at?

MIKE SHILDT: Yeah, we do. We do have a good core group coming back. We have a great nucleus of guys that are under contract that are coming back, that are having good, productive offseasons that are excited about the opportunity for 2025.

That's really exciting for us. Now it's up to A.J. and beyond to figure out what the other pieces look like. We know we're not going to virtually no club is going to be able to run it back. I think that's normal with expectations relative to the industry, but we are having a lot of guys that are free agents that we would like to have back. Again, it's more of A.J.'s purview. Our core is intact and excited to have a good offseason.

Q. Who will be the shortstop?

MIKE SHILDT: It's a question we didn't answer the day before Spring Training last year. I don't know that we'll answer it this year so early.

It's interesting. We have a lot of people that talk about our club. You have shortstops all over the field. Determine who your shortstop is going to be, but Bogy did a great job towards the end of the season. We're still having conversations with him.

A.J. has a job to do during this offseason to figure out our roster. It will be a little early to name that shortstop at the moment. Clearly Bogy is a definite candidate for that.

Q. You sounded confident earlier about Sasaki and your chances of landing him. Just to be clear, what's your optimism level?

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MIKE SHILDT: I'm an optimist by nature, but I'm not a blind one. I don't think I know. The organization -- the long answer probably to your question, I feel like the organization is in a really good place with Sasaki. If there's an open market competition to be had, I feel like we're in a good spot for a multitude of reasons.

One, we're in San Diego. We sell out our ballpark every night. We have a very competitive ball club. It's a chance for him to come in and create a legacy for himself to help win the first World Series.

We have a general manager that has roots in Japan that clearly has been in the market with Darvish. We traded for Darvish and going to get Matsui. Heck, A.J. learned to speak Japanese years ago and the recruitment of Darvish.

We have Nomo as part of our organization that's clearly a Japanese presence, real respected figure in that part of the world.

We got all these different things that are in our court that allow us to have a real competitive opportunity to get him to be a Padre.

Q. What is your sense of if Darvish wants to be in this process? He knows him, has played with him?

MIKE SHILDT: I think there's definitely a respect level. I would say definitely. A strong assumption there's a respect level, rightfully so, for Darvish from any player from Japanese market players.

Yu will be involved. To what degree, that will be up to Darvish and, of course, A.J. will help shepherd that. I do feel confident that Darvish will take his rightful spot in doing what he can.

Q. What's your reaction to the contract of Soto?

MIKE SHILDT: The contract that Soto signed.

Good for Juan. That's my initial response. Good for him. That's the beautiful thing about our industry is it's a free agent. He's able to negotiate. It says a lot of positive things about our industry.

If you look at this from a bigger picture and look at other sports and some of the contracts that have taken place in other major sports, you have really big contracts that are taking place. Economies are growing. It's good to see that baseball is a part of that.

Also, if you look at it, we are a competitive entertainment. What I mean by that is, look, we show up every day to

compete. The better team wins most every day. We compete for a world championship, and that's what this is all about.

Also, there's an entertainment value to this as well. If you look at it relative to the market, it's a big number, right, but good for Juan, good for the industry mostly I guess.

I think about this. I said this and looked at it for years going back to bigger contracts, and I said this earlier. To her credit, Judge Judy was making \$47 million a year on average between 2012 and 2020. \$47 million a year. I don't think she throws a really good curveball or can hit a good slider. She's making way more than anybody before Juan has made in our industry.

So it's all perspective. Good for Juan, and I'm happy for him.

Q. With the guys leaving for the Rangers, obviously it's a ways away from Spring Training. You can have signings, trades. How do you view Higashioka after his season just in the catching situation right now?

MIKE SHILDT: You know what, we're going to miss Higgy. We've created a familiar organization where we're all close and looking towards one common goal. You do recognize when you aren't able to re-sign a Higgy. We wish him the best of luck, and he's in a great situation. He has to do what's best for him.

You realize it's a business, and that's part of it. To your question specific to Campy, we're excited about Campy. He made strides last year. He is going to play winter ball. I think he's going to play another game or two down in the DR. He's always looking to improve and get better at his craft.

It's just about continual progress. Campy, no different than myself or any part of our staff. Most importantly, our club is just looking to get better, and it's our responsibility to help with that.

Q. Follow-up on Kyle. Can you just speak to his contributions defensively behind the plate and then also on the preseason?

MIKE SHILDT: He made a lot of contributions behind the plate. The catching position, you're going to be a force multiplier one way or the other. It's such a polarizing position. For me it's the most important position on the field. I don't think I'm in a silo on that.

He did a wonderful job of being able to shepherd his staff, partner with his staff, lead the staff. Worked really well with



myself, Ruben, the pitching coach, great attack plans, but also use his own experience to see the game, react to it and work with the staff for what they had that given day.

The game starts, and you are prepared for the black and the white, and then the game starts, and you have the gray, and Higgy was able to handle the gray really well.

Smart guy. He was able to navigate and compete. Of course, he helped us in the playoffs and went to bat well and got a lot of big hits. That's an experience we're going to miss, but we're going to look to figure out the next step.

Q. What do you see in your rotation now and whether you need to add Sasaki (indiscernible)?

MIKE SHILDT: I like what we have. We'll start with Darvish with the nod towards the experience. He threw the ball fantastic when he was available to us this year, and he's having a good offseason.

So playoff game, he was pitching as well as he could possibly pitch. It starts with him. That's great.

Michael King not only the next step, but multiple steps and really taking that next level not only to be a Major League starter, but to be like a front end Major League starter. Michael had a phenomenal year. Again, another guy that played exceptionally well in the playoffs. Got two wins. Expect him to continue to grow and take those next steps and fortify the front end of the rotation, which the club we expect to have we'll need.

Then you have Dylan Cease. Dylan had a great year. Took the ball, threw the no-hitter and got us into the playoffs. Threw the ball exceptionally well. You know you're going to get or feel confident you're going to get a quality start and give yourself more of a chance than not to win a baseball game with all three of those guys.

That's a good start. We have experienced guys that helped us this year. Vasquez got 20 starts. Matt Waldron carried the mail, was a big part. I feel like Matt got lost a little bit in the postseason shuffle in a sense of we added Martin Perez, and Darvish came back and Joe was back for a while. Matt Waldron, without him especially in the first half and in the middle of the season, able to accomplish what he was able to accomplish, we're not where we ended up being. That was a playoff World Series caliber contending club.

Having those two guys back is really important. Jhony Brito, we expect to contend for an opportunity to compete for a rotation spot. After that we're open for business.

Q. You were talking about Soto and being happy for him. What does signing a long-term contract mean for the other people in the clubhouse? You guys had a few of them yourself.

MIKE SHILDT: It's important to have that anchor. It's good to know. I alluded to it earlier, but talked about our core players. It was really important to know that you can sit down with Manny and Toddy and Croney and Boggy and Darvish and Musgrove at the beginning of the season and talk about not only this coming season, which is fine. You can have this conversation with your better players and your clubhouse leaders, but if they're on one-year deals or two-year deals and they have a foot in and a foot out and they're not sure where it's going, it doesn't really have a sustainable substance that you can partner with.

So having somebody you know is going to be there that you can work with in that clubhouse that are your better players and your leaders on and off the field, it's really critical for short and long-term success.

Q. You guys must have done autopsies on the playoffs like crazy. Have you come to some sort of conclusion about what happened? Have you guys shut down offensively for 24 straight innings there?

MIKE SHILDT: Listen, there's been a lot of thought about our season from the beginning, I alluded to that, to all the way through, my job, our staff's job, and our players' job is to look, which we've done, bigger picture and then more specific and granularly.

To your specific question, we feel like, yeah, we've grown as the season went. We're going to grow from the experience in the season relative to what happened the last couple of games. Combination of things. I'm never going to -- I think the people that cover this club and know me, I'm not going to alibi anything, but I really feel comfortable and confident it was as much about they performed.

They pitched really well. If you go back and look at it, and I don't look at it a ton because I was there, and I have a pretty good feel for what took place, they pitched really well. They really did. They had a bullpen game that was not one guy missed a spot. They were on point with everything they did.

Then in Game 5 Yamamoto threw as good a game we had seen against him the entire year, and we opened the season with the guy over in Korea and had experiences against him. He's a talented pitcher. He threw the ball exceptionally well in a big moment. Life on his fastball, split, looked like a strike the whole way. He was really

good.

Another bullpen, again, brought it home. It was the strengths of their club. Their strength was able to neutralize our strength -- one of our strengths. Really comes down to as simple as that.

It was two good teams going at each other, and they didn't make as many mistakes that we couldn't capitalize. We made a couple of mistakes. Hernandez got us for a couple of solo home runs, and that's the end of the story.

Q. It was a streak of four games (indiscernible) over two series. What did you think of their comments that the Padres were really the strongest team that they faced in the playoffs and that your fans were really the most enthusiastic?

MIKE SHILDT: Yeah, definitely. Petco Park is one of the best places, if not the best place to play. We're blessed to be in that environment. We don't take our fans for granted. We're excited to continue to perform with them and for them.

It's a great atmosphere. Relative to whatever comments were made about whoever -- both teams knew it during the series. I don't think it was a state secret that both of us out of complete respect for the remaining field were really well aware that clearly there needed to be more work to be done, but the two teams that -- whoever was going to win that series would have a chance to move on. We felt it, and it sounds like they felt it as well.

Q. We asked you a lot about Jackson during the course of the season as he was doing what he was doing, but now that you've had some time to reflect on it, how do you sum up what he accomplished last season, and if any, is there room for him to grow even further?

MIKE SHILDT: Yeah, that's a lot to unpack. I have to get my thoughts around this one right.

Definitely a phenomenal year. You think about it. I won't get into it because it's already been settled, but I have a strong opinion about who was the Rookie of the Year. Out of complete respect to Mr. Skenes, Jackson, what he did was tremendous. Am I biased? Yes. But we'll leave it at that.

He had a phenomenal year. Position switch. First year in the Big Leagues. No Triple-A experience, and he's going to go out and be Silver Slugger Award, Gold Glove-caliber center field. Big moments. Not only doesn't shy away from them, but thrives in them.

A lot of real positives. Room for improvement? Absolutely. I saw him just recently. He was in the weight room and getting after it. Again, there's a respectful break from the field after a long season, but there are conversations about what's next. How do we get better? That's applicable to Jackson, myself, and the whole club.

Q. You talked about the team over the season. I wonder for you how much do you feel like you feel different or how much growth do you feel in your position with the club from this time last year to this year?

MIKE SHILDT: Yeah, no question there's definitely a lot of growth. More familiarity with not only our club, with the staff, the organization, and I can only tell you this. It's been nothing -- while it's not always a straight road, no path is always straight. You're trying to get an organization to move in one -- as one living organism, so there's going to be healthy conversations and dialogues, but if you know that one group is moving together for one common goal, that's a really fun and special thing to be a part of.

To Bob's question earlier about having a player and players that are there when you can partner with that group, you can partner with your front office and partner with your staff and to A.J.'s question earlier about the staff being together and back again and continue to do that, now you wade through a lot of the more challenging things to navigate, and now you are on the same page and now it's about just continuing to get better in some of the smaller, more, like I said earlier, granular processes.

It's continuing to be a work in progress. We've made some ground, but we have some ground to cover.

Q. To Lynn's question a little bit, from a Big League perspective, what does it look like when you know your player development apparatus is working the way it should work? What does that look like for a manager?

MIKE SHILDT: Jeff, that's a good question. There's a lot of different ways for a team to compete, right? We know there's trade obviously. We've used that. You know there's free agent. That's in play for us as well.

The question back to Jackson, a big part of the lifeblood especially for organizations from an economic standpoint is your Minor League system. So having that continuity with our Big League staff to the player development staff and how we want to instruct, how we want to teach, how we want to nurture our players, what the expectations are, that is vital to the lifeblood of any organization.

There's a lot of layers to it. It's a lot of layers that requires a lot of time and energy and synergy.

Q. How do you cope with the growing disparity with the bigger contracts and even the regional sports networks, which are affecting your club and others?

MIKE SHILDT: I think I've got this right, the question is the economics of the game relative to cable contracts and -- yeah. That's bigger-picture question for front office and so forth. From my seat, listen, we're not naive that there are certain organizations that have just more competitive advantages. That's no state secret, right? We live that every day.

I can look at that, and we can look at that as, oh, woe is us. We don't have the resources. We don't have the flexibility. We don't have the payroll or the income streams, and that can be absolutely accurate and factual, and it is.

The reality from my seat, our clubhouse seat, our team seat is, it's still a game that requires you to play right, compete a certain way, play the game a certain way. Clearly the more resources you have, the more talent you can accrue, and that's real. Talent shows up. We can't kid ourselves.

But effectively it's about how we're going to figure out a way to compete and play the game right with the ability that we've been given. The other market, maybe, imbalances are way out of my pay grade. Does that make sense?

Q. (Indiscernible) do you think he'll be extended by the time it gets to the season?

MIKE SHILDT: The question being Luis won his third batting title with his third different club. I made a statement that we expect Luis to win multiple more, which I think no one is surprised by that, but very expected him to do that as a Padre. Kind of the next Tony Gwynn lineage.

Would that be great? Yes. Do I expect it to happen? He has another year of control under his contract. I don't know where the organization is relative to an extension on that. That's, again, more of an A.J. question. But I just know he's a really good fit for the organization and for our lineup. He's talking about partnering with somebody. He's a really great talent, but he has the heart of a lion, and he's just a really good human being. He's just a great guy to have on the field.

Q. Just following that up real quick, do you have any concern that the Soto thing sets a precedent that they decided they want to pay the arbitration in the last year

and then -- could the same thing happen with Luis?

MIKE SHILDT: Again, I'm going to stay away from the arbitration money. I have my hands full with the balls and bats. I'll let A.J. and the ownership figure out the dollars and cents.

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