

MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 9, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

Miami Marlins

Clayton McCullough

Press Conference



2024 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS DALLAS

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I'm the oldest one. I didn't even realize that, so thank you for pointing that out.

Q. What's the latest status on the coaching staff?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: We've been able to get a majority of the staff in place. Still have some spots that we need to fill out. That's something we're working on daily. We understand where we are right now in the calendar, but then also we have a really strong candidate pool for positions we have open and just want to do our due diligence on getting it down to where we have a very full staff that can contribute in different ways.

So we're getting close.

A. Is it one, two assistant hitting coaches, assistant pitching coach, (indiscernible) --

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: We have our base coaches we are looking to fill out as well as assistant pitching coach, bullpen coach, and I feel strongly on the hitting side that we're at. So that's the open ones right now from a field staff side that we're working through.

Q. (Indiscernible).

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: We're all extremely excited about this. I think the energy that's come in, and you are doing your best to try to get to know people from phone conversations, texts, through this process some video calls, in-person, and the quality of the people have continued to shine through.

We're really excited about not only the technical acumen of those that we've hired, but then also their willingness to understand where we are and to roll our sleeves up. We have a lot of work to do, but a lot of us taking on positions for the first time, they are super motivated to just come in and are ready to get to work and get us moving.

Q. I asked Peter last week about having a young coaching staff. You are the only one above 40. How important it is to have a young and fresh staff to give the best possible position to the players?

Q. I'm sorry.

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: With that comes, again, we were looking for staff, guys that would be innovative, forward-thinking, add to our culture. We've hit home runs in those areas. Some of those that we've hired, and the same kind of quality we're looking for on the other.

Again, coming into this with our roster and where we're at, they are looking to have development at the forefront, and then also we're going to have a lot of innovative ideas, be able to blend in some different experiences. We come from different organizations, different backgrounds. So it just feels like we're off to a really good start there, and they've hit the ground running.

Q. Is Pedro Ramirez the only bilingual guy on the staff right now?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: Right now, yes, Pedro and Carson Vitale, our bench coach. He does speak some Spanish. He spent a couple of years down running the Academy with L.A. and with Anaheim. Carson speaks some Spanish as well.

Q. How do you go about trying to bridge the language gap and especially with the pitchers?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: It's certainly important. It's something we've being mindful where we're at with this process and people we've spoken to and certainly that being an important point. You want those players to feel comfortable and to have the ability at times to speak in your native language. It's an important thing. We're being mindful of that.

If we're not able to fill that out with staff members, we certainly have qualified individuals that are willing to help us in those regards.

Q. You mentioned how everyone is in the positions maybe they haven't coached before. What do you see as your relationship with those types of coaches as



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the manager now? Will you be hands-on? How do you expect that relationship to be?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: Some of this will just evolve over time. Our staff feels like they have the autonomy to just go do great work. A beautiful part of this too is most of us are going through certain experiences or situations for the first time kind of all together.

We're very aligned in the way in which we're going to look to approach our players, approach our day-to-day. Even staffs that have been together for longer than us, each year is kind of its own, and we'll just adjust. The beautiful part at least initially is just the willingness everyone has come in with looking just to get to work and the excitement that we all have.

Q. Why was Carson the right fit to be your bench coach?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I've known Carson previously working together. Someone there that was my right hand during games and just have seen -- he has a really good baseball mind. I think he's forward-thinking not only in-game in the moment, but he's going to challenge me in areas kind of hopefully complement me as a manager.

I know his work ethic. I know he cares about people. He's a terrific connector, excellent communicating. Those were qualities that I've always appreciated in Carson, and now they're going to be real beneficial for our staff.

Q. From the coaching staff, what do the next two months look like for you and making sure that you're ready to take on a team when Spring Training starts?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: Kind of ongoing discussing that now. A big part is getting our staff filled out, and then the next part is, okay, you go to the next thing. How are we going to approach some things that we're going to look to implement in Spring Training, and certainly communication with the players is ongoing now.

As this offseason continues to roll around and we get past the holidays and getting specific with areas in which we're targeting to try to improve on an individual level and then also as a team what are we going to look to try to build upon, but I think right now it's getting everybody on board, building some connections with each other and our players.

Guys are excited about it. We are. We're getting to Spring Training, and the next phase is going to be just as prepared as we can for things to get started.

Q. So far from Sandy and also Jesus, talking to them knowing that they'll be in the rotation from the last few years (indiscernible) --

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: Sandy, everything you have heard about him before this comes as advertised. Certainly an exceptional reputation for his ability to not only lead on the field, but the way he can post and the success he's had. I think his ability too to bring out the best in others.

Jesus, the same way. You can tell there's a real commitment to being a great teammate. The ability as a player to give back to other players, which is an important thing in our game. You're looking to try to pass things along and give back, be a great teammate.

So those guys in the top part of your rotation that exemplify that and the way they go about their preparation and the way they treat people certainly a terrific example.

Q. You mentioned getting a bunch of new coaches and the ability to (indiscernible). Those are things that interested you about bringing in these different people. How do you innovate in a sport -- I guess you've had 120 years of history, but also the last 10 to 15 years it has changed so much. How do you continue to innovate in baseball?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I think there's definitely some ways to maybe to capitalize in the manner in which we train, creating environments, whether that be in the cage. Defensively is an area where you can kind of raise the floor of people rather quickly by just challenging them in different ways, drill packages.

I think everything from player comfort. We just are at a point where it's exciting that we don't look at things as they always have been or at least we're going to be challenging ourselves to kind of what's next. It wasn't along ago where shifting was a crazy idea and what that looks like now I think we just have some areas we can capitalize on the training aspect and environments that we are ready for guys to improve.

Q. Is there something about the state of your roster right now, where you are looking just as much at players (indiscernible) -- and do you have the luxury of trying things a little bit more at this time because you might not be expected to have guys who are (indiscernible), you're not just playing for this year?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I think one of the beautiful parts we have is we have a great opportunity for a lot of players to continue to get chances and get opportunities to

play. Us being there as staff to help them grow, take next steps as players.

We have a unique opportunity in a unique time right now with as many new as we're bringing on to chart a course the way -- the blank canvas which we can paint from. Everything from a nutrition standpoint or travel standpoint to training standpoint. Again, like the player improvement aspects.

Certainly that is exciting. We can bring in as many fresh ideas to this kind of start up, and the goal is still going to be to go out there every night and win. That's going to be what guys want to do. We'll just try to put a focus on getting a little bit better every day.

Q. When you were in your 20s and you had the older leaders with wisdom in baseball, while you were in your 20s, who was it that you looked up to, that you watched their leadership, whether player or coach?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I'm thinking back to some of the guys that were really influential on me as a young coach. Luis Rivera, long-time coach in the Big Leagues with Toronto. He was great. I had him as a Minor League manager. Just a terrific person.

I've been fortunate enough the last four years closely, more intimately, and the previous five years with Dave Roberts. Very influential on me. Just the manner in which he treats people and the consistency of which he showed up to the ballpark each day and the real desire for us to punish our guys to get better with a sense of urgency and the timing of that. I think Dave has been a big influence on me.

I think back to my more Minor League playing days in my early to mid 20s, Luis Rivera.

Q. The roster could change by Spring Training, but have you already started thinking about what the lineup could be, the starting rotation? If so, are there any not locks, but things that are clear in your mind, like Xavier at the top of the lineup?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I think Xavier had a terrific season last year at the top. High on-base ability. Impact the game on the bases. Jake Burger last year, supplying some power. Connor Norby coming via trade this summer. A lot of up side. Otto Lopez had a terrific year defensively. Jesus Sanchez has, I mean, some really big impact.

I think that's what's exciting is it's going to be, again, opportunities for those there to go and try to come up and make an impact and grab ahold of some Major League spots.

On the pitching side getting some of the names you said back last year. Getting Sandy back and Jesus back and Cabrera has a tantalizing arsenal and arm. I think he's ready for a breakout.

Q. A couple of those players are right now in Winter Ball. Is there a philosophy or vision on players going down there and during this time of the year to come for Spring Training and the season itself?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: We look at it as a case-by-case thing. The native players going back there to play and how important that is for them at times to play in front of their family, and not getting that opportunity as often. So you certainly have pull there.

Then maybe it's missed time if there was missed time during the season. There's a way to accumulate some at-bats or get into a more challenging environment where your performance does matter. Winter Ball is important down there. It's a chance to go compete against real competition. It definitely has some benefits for setting guys up for next year.

I think just always you're weighing the up side, down side of those opportunities when they come up.

Q. Where are you as a coach as some of the areas you're going to stress or see improvement from this year where you are this year into next year, whether it's defense or pitching?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: That's one thing. One prevention being an important aspect with us. Having success here in the defense is a big part. I'm definitely looking to just raise the floor of our defense as a whole. Hitting cutoff men, making the routine plays routine, collecting outs that we should. Especially with a pitching staff you hope you get the benefit of maybe some better help this year, you get some guys that have some experience under their belt, and they're going to need us to play solid defense.

Then the offensive side, controlling the strike zone and making the at-bat quality as a whole top to bottom. You're just trying to create as much pressure on an opposing pitcher and staff as you can by working the good at-bats, swinging at what you want to, passing the baton to the next individual in the lineup.

Q. Is there any communication with any of the outgoing guys of the last staff engaging certain players that you are going to be coaching now and get the most out of that guy?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: We have, fortunately, our PD leadership group that have spent some time this year. Certainly lean on them because you want to try to get what makes someone tick. What type of coaching style has maybe worked in the past? Is this particular individual -- in what ways can you challenge them? What ways can you push them?

Yeah, those that are still in our organization have some history with players, we have leaned on and will continue to lean on them for an intimate feel and what those relationships have been like.

Q. Have you got into a process with your front office like Xavier and giving him (indiscernible) -- or Norby stick him on third for now? Have you guys made decisions on those things yet?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: Those aren't things that we specifically really got down and plotted out. The time with everybody getting on is trying to fill things out, and now once we get everybody in place, us kind of gelling, coming together, and wanting to put out there what we are going to make important for our group coming into '25. A lot of those discussions will be continuing to have as we get closer.

Q. Is there a player that you are looking forward to seeing what he can prove next season? I know you mentioned some on an unrelated question.

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I'm really excited about Edward Cabrera. I had the chance for the last few years, a few opportunities where you are competing against him and those hitters weren't fans of having to go up there and take that at-bat. Again, it's young, great stuff. There's so much more in the tank there.

I think that's -- he's a really exciting one for me just because the up side is so big, and not everybody's path to success is linear, right? It's real ability that can win Major League games.

Q. The consistency has been the biggest problem for him so far. Knowing the type of stuff that he has (indiscernible). I don't know if there's an answer for how do you get consistency, but what will the message be for Cabrera just to try to get it done?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: He is not the only one that has walked that path maybe where the initial few years of the Major League career maybe don't go as planned or is choppy, whether that's health or just inconsistency in performance. So everyone still believes big-time in the

arm. It will be great for Daniel Moskos and our pitching crew to get a chance to get in there with Edward, and hopefully we're able to provide him the kind of support and some tangible things that he can take and just lead to some more consistent performances. It's real ability.

Q. (Indiscernible). What gives you confidence that you can get where you want to get?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I just believe in people. I spoke to Peter leading up to this, how important it was going to be, just the culture here. This goes out to, like, the clubhouse culture.

I think things here are great. Those guys, they enjoyed each other and even through a difficult season. Maybe for us to create some environments where we're taking where these players are right now and putting them in positions to, again, elevate their game.

Player development has kind of always been -- that's what I've been doing for most of my professional career, and I really enjoy that, the have a chance to watch young people grow as players on the field and off the field. That's exciting to bring in a group of staff and have front office personnel view it the same way.

I think some have embraced that, and we just have to go at it in a way that we best think is going to give the Miami Marlins a chance to get back to competing and winning more than we have.

Q. Aside from the win-loss record, what would you consider a successful first season for you? What are some of the things you hope to achieve?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: I think growth from our group. That's some areas we've talked about. Defensively, on the bases, offensively as some of the things that our staff will make important, and are we seeing some growth and some elevation in those areas? Then the individual players taking -- you know, what is the next step from a performance standpoint and grabbing hold of some of these opportunities that are going to be there. So I think that's what's exciting.

And for us just to -- I think we'll look back at year from now and think, wow, how much was done. I think we'll just put our best foot forward each day and try to keep a positive outlook on things. You know, go to win tonight's game but also move the ball forward and get a little bit better.

Q. How much do you put into the base running game knowing that it is very important? You cannot lean only on homers given how big it is. You might have to

get creative on the side with the pieces that you have?

CLAYTON McCULLOUGH: Running the bases it's probably the one way to show your teammates some real care factor. In today's game with some of the rule changes that have been enacted, you have seen some of the aggressiveness across baseball that has gone up. There has to be so many different ways you have to find to score runs. On the bases is one -- it's getting more guys on the bases. Let's be really intentful and understanding, hey, how important the extra 90 feet is going to be. Not just stealing bases, but going first to third, getting in throwing lanes, finding any kind of marginal gain that we can on the bases to create more run-scoring opportunities because at the end of it, it's a real way to show your teammates your investment and your care factor. You're running them for them and not yourself.

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