

MLB Winter Meetings

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Toronto Blue Jays

John Schneider

Press Conference

Q. Juan Soto, how involved were you, John? What was your kind of role in trying to sign him?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think it was kind of all of us together really. Me personally, I wasn't the lead part of it. It's obviously Mark and Ross and Edward. So made our best offer. We were obviously interested, like a lot of teams. So I wish him the best, but for me it was kind of just business as usual.

Q. What's your level of disappointment, frustration? Two off seasons in a row now you guys have tried to sign the best free agent on the market, and you guys haven't been successful. What's the level of disappointment knowing that this guy could have changed the franchise?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think both of those guys, they're obviously great, elite players. Every team that didn't get him are disappointed, but I think you wish them well. You try to move forward, and you try to make your team better, but I think the fact that we're in it as much as we have been the last two years is exciting. You have to kind of move on and hopefully make your team better another way.

Q. What do you think this team does need to get better? What are the areas you need?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think you look at ways to make our offense a little more efficient, power and just scoring runs in general. I think base running needs to be a little bit better and then bullpen. I think that we've with all kind of talked about that over the year, the offseason. Still talking about that now with the front office.

It's easy to say go right for power. I think obviously, yeah, we want that as well, but just scoring more runs and locking up the bullpen a little bit.

Q. As you look at lineup upgrades, what kind of style do you think would fit that spot on your order best?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Someone that can do damage. I



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think having a threat. You kind of want that around Vlad. I think we make a lot of contact. We want a guy making a lot of good quality contact too. That would kind of stand out to me.

Someone that's going to run the bases well too. I think that's kind of going to be a big area of focus going into the year.

Q. John, with the coaching staff Daniel Popkins has been -- what would be some of the focus of some of the messaging going on to different players?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Having a better understanding of how their bodies are working and moving. Pop is really, really good with that, really hunting areas to try to exploit where hitters can really handle the ball.

We talk about it. I think every team talks about it, but I think just really narrowing in on areas where they can handle and taking some more shots to do some damage. We did that really well in Minnesota. I'm looking for more of that here.

I think just having our guys really understand how their bodies are moving, when it's in sync and working correctly and when it's not, how to get it back.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Man, I know not a lot of people have heard of him, but Pop knows him well. I think what he brings is tireless work. He's really process-oriented. Has a really good understanding of what makes hitters good and how to keep them there.

They're very aligned with how they view the swing and how it should work. They've already been down a few rabbit holes this offseason with some of our guys. It's going to be a lot of video, a lot of swing, and making sure that everything is kind of staying in line as the season goes.

Q. How does Hunter fit into that with (indiscernible)? Is there some continuity? What are the dynamics to bring to that group?

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JOHN SCHNEIDER: Definitely wanted some continuity. Yeah, I think with guys coming back and having a familiar face. I think Hunter is going to be heavily involved in the game planning part of it in terms of who we're facing, how we're going to approach them. Pop is going to headline it, but I think Hunter is going to spend the majority of his time doing that. Obviously being in the cage as well.

It's been a good back and forth with all three of them this offseason, and looking forward to see how they're going to undo the puzzle that is hitting together.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Oh, man, you have to ask Vlad. It's the nature of the beast. I've known Vlad for a long time, and I want him to be here for a long time.

It happens every year when someone signs a deal, and kind of ups the ante a little bit. I'm just looking forward to Vlad having another good year really. He's going to get taken care of, you know what I mean? He's a really good player, and we want him to be here for a long time.

So I don't worry about him taking his attention off of what he's doing right now. I think things will work out for him obviously, but we want it to be here.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, he grew up quite a bit, and I understood what he needs to do to keep himself ready every single day. Understands his swing a little bit more. I think him and a lot of our guys are kind of ready to take that next step in their career really.

They've wanted more information. I think they're going to get more information going into this season. Not that they weren't getting it, but I feel like they're ready for it a little bit more than they have been.

That's kind of where Vlad falls into as well. Just really, really talented, but I think he's really starting to put together a plan and understanding what makes him good.

Q. When you talk to free agents, do you have a pitch to them or just say, Hey, I'm here to answer questions? How does that go?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, I have a little song and dance. Yeah, I mean, I think we're a unique draw, right? We're representing the whole country, and we have a ton of resources. We have really good players, and we have a lot of money to spend.

So I think that in itself is exciting. I try to answer as many questions about the team, the country, the city, the organization, kind of what the personalities are and how we like to do things. But, yeah, it's a little bit of a pitcher if you will, and we do our homework on everyone.

It's been pretty cool to talk to a lot of guys.

Q. What are some of the questions that you got from Wat?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: He's a sharp dude. There were some pretty deliberate questions. Where does my family sit? When do you open the roof? What's your farm system like? It's not a surprise that he's gotten the contract he's got. Albeit, it's really, really big, but I think players like that, he's buttoned up on the field and off.

It was really in-depth. He had a lot of things that I wanted to uncover about us. There's a reason he's that good.

Q. How convinced are you that his hitting style, his hitting genius is going to (indiscernible)?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: He's a unique blend of discipline and power. You do not like facing him when you're an opposing team. I think whenever you -- I say that about all of our hitters. When you control the zone, you have a chance, and he does an elite job of that.

You put that with a good approach and a really bright guy, I think he's going to be good for a long time.

Q. Is that the hitting skill that tends to age the best?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, I think so. You are only as good as what you swing at. He's pretty darn good at that.

Q. Did Wat ask you about Vlad and what your plans were with him, if he were to sign with you guys?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Not that I was aware of, no. Not to me, no.

Q. With Jordan Bonomo moving on, can you speak to what he meant to the organization, if there was any pursuit of bringing him back?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Jordy went from role five guy to closer with an awesome light show. Everyone loves him. I spoke to him after we non-tendered him, and he understood it. Very professional about it. I haven't heard back from him yet today, but he was great. He was kind of what we stood for in how he went about his business, the teammate that he was, the intensity in which he competed

with.

I wish him nothing but the best really, and I think we definitely wanted to pursue bringing him back, and it didn't work out. Jordy is at a point in his career, too, he understands that. He gets it. I'm happy for him, and he landed in a great spot with the Phils, so wish him nothing but the best.

Q. Danny Jansen, what do you think of him as a player and a guy?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Jan and I go way back. I'm thrilled for him to get an opportunity to stay in the AL East so we can try to hit him in with a few pitches this year. I'm happy for him. I know it's a down year, weird year for him. I'm glad he landed on his feet.

As a guy, again, he's kind of like Jordy. You kind of just love going to work with him every day. They put the team ahead of themselves. Everything you want in a teammate. Wish him nothing but the best, and I hope he sweats a ton behind the plate down at Steinbrenner Field next summer.

Q. You were on the coaching staff when you had a play (indiscernible). I know you were only there for a few months. They'll be there the whole year. What was that experience like? Did you ever get the players to stop bitching and buy in?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: A little bit. It was more so people behind the scenes really that were taking care of families and kids and the players. It's a lot that goes into it.

You have to be able to adjust on the fly and be ready for some things you're not really used to in the Big League season. I think Tampa has a good way of doing that. They're pretty agile, as they are. I'm sure they'll be ready for it.

Q. John, you faced the Yankees a number of years before Soto got there. You prepared to face them a lot this year with him. How much do you think changed that lineup from that perspective, and how so?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think in years past you look at a large outfielder in Aaron Judge that you really focus on, and then this past year -- I'm not taking away against anyone in the lineup, but then you put a guy like Soto in front of him, it posed a huge problem. He's on base at a ridiculous rate, and then Judge was hitting 60 homers. That's tough. That's tough to navigate.

Yeah, it changed their complexity really. The on-base -- the Yanks, they did a lot of damage. I think when you put

Juan in that lineup, he's on base and he is doing damage. It made them a little more difficult to navigate.

Q. You guys obviously targeted him because it could change the structure of the lineup. How many players can do that the way he does?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: There's a handful, guys that can flip the leverage with one swing. There's a handful around the game, I think. I think whenever you're looking at .900 OPS and higher, those are the guys that are doing damage and getting on base and helping their team win. There's a handful around the league for sure, and I think he was at the sweet spot of age and ability. I'm happy for Carlos and over there in New York. They got a great player.

Q. Vlad, you talked about how much growth he showed this year. What's the next step for him in his development? How much better can he get?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Good question. I mean, I think it's just kind of maintaining what he can do, you know? If you take away April of this past year, it's a pretty elite season. It's still an elite season, but it could have been even better, which is saying a lot.

I think with Vlad each year he understands himself a little bit more. I think he's at the point now where he's understanding and looking around the league. These players that are getting all of this money, these huge contracts, there's a lot that goes into it. It's not your batting average and your OPS and your Silver Sluggers. There's a lot that goes into it.

That's part of Vlad getting better too. How he trains in the offseason, how he supports his teammates, how he understands people pitching him, that's part of it too. I think that's where he is making progress.

Q. When you look at the lineups around the game, they've got that one central piece, but they're trying to accumulate multiple of them. As you imagine facing the potential of one year of Vlad and one year of Bo, can you build a competitive lineup without that one central figure? What are the challenges of having a lineup without those couple of major damage players?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: You can do it multiple ways. If you are doing it without the major damage guys, everybody has to be pretty consistent. You have to formulate your game plan accordingly with how you run the bases and things like that.

Having Bo back this year I think has gone under the radar a little bit and what he ended up doing. That immediately

adds an impact bat with 30 home run potential at that position.

I think if we can throw one more in there, you're looking at a pretty intimidating middle of the year there. That's kind of what we're shooting for, and I think we're banking on Vlad to continue to do what he has done and looking for a normal season out of Bo, and you're off to a pretty good start.

Q. When you have a little time to look back on Bo's season, do you have a sense of what happened? Why it was not --

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Oh, man. Just in talking to him and watching him, got off to a slow start. I think he's such a competitor. He's so obsessed with being great. He kind of got into a little bit of a funk. I think for the first time since I've known him as a Minor Leaguer or Big Leaguer, his swing didn't feel perfectly correct every single day. Which is saying a lot.

Searching for that a little bit, and then the injuries came on, and it was a snowball effect. Weird year. When you have been as consistent as he has been and you have one bad year, it just gives you a lot of confidence that he's going to return to what it normally is. It happens.

Q. Was that how you look at it, as just a weird year, just something that happened, or do you have to address something specifically that you've not?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think within it, you try to say, okay, here's where this happened and why. There was a difference in what he was swinging at or how he was hitting the ball. With a guy like him that's so accomplished and so elite with his bat and ball skills, you trust that he's going to figure it out pretty soon. I've seen him do it over the course of his career.

We've dug in on some things. He's hard at work with Pop on a few things that they've agreed to attack, and we trust that he's going to come out and he's going to have a little bit of a chip on his shoulder too. Bo doesn't take losing lightly, and he doesn't take not being healthy lightly. I'm excited to see him.

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