

# MLB Winter Meetings

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Dallas, Texas, USA

## Tampa Bay Rays

### Manager Kevin Cash

Press Conference

**Q. Start with the stadium situation. It's obviously been a big topic. How do you view the challenge that you're going to have? Eric talked about the need to kind of focus on the positive, things like that. You're the guy that's going to be the one kind of being the guy talking to the players about that and kind of getting that message across.**

KEVIN CASH: I do think it's going to be a challenge, but it's going to be a fun, exciting, good challenge. First of all, appreciative of the Yankees and MLB for being so accommodating, allowing us to go over there.

We're going to do everything we can to make the most of it. I know that we have a great group of people that do the ins and outs behind the scenes on a daily basis for many years, and that's going to transfer over. It's just going to be a little different being outdoors now.

The challenges that everybody is talking about is probably whether it's the heat and the rain. I personally think the heat will be more talked about than the rain. Just having played in the Florida State League, knowing that you get some rainouts, you get some rain delays, you miss out on BP, that's not the worst thing in the world to happen over a course of 81 games or whatever it is.

Challenge -- I'm going to bet on our group. I'm going to bet on our guys that are going to embrace it. We'll come together and do everything we can to make the most of it.

I know from Stu to Matt to Brian and certainly Eric and myself, whatever I can do, we will be as accommodating to our players, their families as we possibly can.

**Q. How do you kind of handle the future uncertainty as well -- guys are going to see what's happening and wonder what comes next -- as far as keeping them focused on the present?**

KEVIN CASH: I think it's just that message. The second we know something beyond 2025, the players are going to be the first to know. We just don't know. It does sound like



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there's some better news recently locally with some of the voting, so that's a good thing.

But I know that once we get into Spring Training and we kind of check that box of getting into Steinbrenner and that complex, the next conversation is going to be, well, what are we doing in 2026? We've just got to wait for some answers.

**Q. To kind of walk through kind of the real world implications that are more important with everything that happened, at what point did you stop and say, whoa, this is going to impact us in a big way in 2025, you guys as a club?**

KEVIN CASH: I actually realized that as it was happening during the storm. When I saw it, I think I was -- like many people, I didn't think it was real. When I did see it -- we went to Gainesville to my in-laws and then drove down the next morning and saw three-quarters of the roof gone. Your mind just starts racing and wondering what is going to take place.

I certainly didn't appreciate the magnitude of it in the moment, but I'm happy that we have a home and that we're going to be able to play in the Bay Area. I think that was the most important thing, certainly given what has taken place over the last couple months there. I'm glad that we're going to be able to represent our community by staying local.

**Q. Do you think it will take a different type of motivation that you'll have to do, like you'll have to talk to the players more? Some guys are going to complain. It's only natural in a group. Some guys are going to act like they're annoyed. Do you think that will be something you have to try to do differently?**

KEVIN CASH: Look. This is not COVID, it's definitely not. But the change and the transition that we're going to have to make in this organization is going to be similar to maybe what 30 other teams had to do in 2020. We did a really good job embracing that, and I think we can pull from maybe some of those experiences.

We want our players -- and I certainly am going to hear

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what they're going to say -- and want them to have their voices and be as accommodating as possible. But there is going to have to be some tunnel vision put on and some motivation, inner motivation and group motivation. Is it ideal? Is it perfect? Probably not. It's not going to be, but we still can make the most of a tough situation.

**Q. What do you make of the change from an offensive environment perspective, especially maybe for your left-handed hitters?**

KEVIN CASH: I hope it's as good as everybody -- what they're talking about. Runs were tough to come by. We talked about it more than I would have liked last year. A lot of belief in our offensive group. Really like the way some of the guys finished in September, highlighted by some young players between Junior and Jonny Aranda. We know what Brandon and Yandy can do, and I think you're just adding playing outdoors at that ballpark.

Our venue has maybe not been the friendliest to left-handed hitters in the ten years I've been there. I think we could see a really quick turnaround, and if we get some of those wins we've seen in the past, that's going to make it more friendly for righties and lefties.

**Q. What's it like for you seeing Tito back?**

KEVIN CASH: I'm excited. I got to see him in Boston about two weeks ago. He got some award that he probably asked to get himself. Got to hang out with him for a night in Boston.

Very similar to kind of how I felt or I think how a lot of us felt with Bochy coming back. Baseball is better with both of them in it. I'm glad he decided. I'm glad he's healthy.

I did not see it coming that quick. I thought for sure he'd be back because I don't know what the hell else he would do. So having him back is good for all of us.

**Q. Thoughts on Sasaki.**

KEVIN CASH: Super talented pitcher. Super talented player. Really put himself on the map there in the World Baseball Classic. Wish him nothing but the best. I'm wait and see what happens with him moving forward. I think we're all waiting.

**Q. With the possibility of rain delays in the home games, you guys (indiscernible) the opener concept. Can that opener concept help in that sort of herky-jerky, not really sure when the rain's going to come and how long it's going to last?**

KEVIN CASH: I think it can. We've done that here recently. If we're in Baltimore, we're in Boston, and we think there's a chance of rain or we're going to have a delay, call it 45 minutes to an hour in a ballgame, we kicked that idea around.

I think we'll put our heads together. We haven't started having those conversations, but I think everything will be on the table for us to discuss. I'd like to think we'll be better in July than maybe we were in March.

**Q. I know the deal's not final yet, but to add a catcher like Danny Jansen who's got some experience and pop, leadership, what's that like?**

KEVIN CASH: I've always appreciated watching him from the Toronto dugout or recently the Boston dugout. He goes about his business the right way. He's a pro.

I've had some conversations with him that I really enjoyed. I think that, if that were to happen, we'd be fortunate to having a veteran backstop that has shown a lot of talent. I know he's had some injuries, some freak injuries, broken hands and wrist in there with some foul balls. Maybe part of being a catcher.

I'd like to think that if we were fortunate enough to land a player like that, he's going to really add to our production on the field. And having talked to him, I know he'll add to our clubhouse dynamic.

**Q. Kind of the potential of your rotation adding Flanagan back took shape towards the end of the year?**

KEVIN CASH: That's the most exciting thing that we were talking about heading into the off-season -- definitely this off-season going into Spring Training. I know there's going to limitations and talks about workload and all that. We'll take it step by step with Shane. We just saw Tarik Skuba win the Cy Young. Him and Shane, I think there's a lot of similarities there.

You talk about the strides that Taj made, that Baz made, Drew Rasmussen healthy, Jeff Springs being healthy, Zack Littell and the body of work he put together. I don't want to leave anybody out, but it's probably the most exciting part about our club.

**Q. Eric told us the other day that you guys made the group decision to put Ras back as a starter, prepare him as a starter. What kind of went into that decision?**

KEVIN CASH: A lot of conversations with him, that he had with his wife. This is something that Ras is really

committed to. I know that Eric has talked to Danny a lot about this. We care a lot about Ras, the person, the work that he put in to get back.

I know the injury history and some of the concerns there, but if you're going to bet on somebody to carry a workload like that with his work ethic, he'd be the guy to do it. So excited to see where we come into Spring Training and how that competition unfolds.

**Q. Lovell was another guy that had an uncertain role heading into the off-season. Where do you see him fitting in, and what are your hopes for him bouncing back?**

KEVIN CASH: He went into the off-season pretty excited to get to work. He learned a lot about himself through ups and downs between Chicago and Tampa. This is a guy that's incredibly talented that we want to find a way to get the most out of it.

He has talked about working on his swing and some things that maybe he learned the last two months with us that he wants to take in. I know he works alongside Willy Adames in the off-season. I can't think of a better guy to go train with as you build up.

I don't think we've totally found out that exact position, is it second, is it third, is it left? We'll find out a lot of that stuff and see how the roster unfolds in Spring Training, but really happy we have him coming into camp with us.

**Q. As far as Junior, what you saw as he kind of got more comfortable, full season of him, knowing his way around the league a little bit and some of the numbers that are out there, the projections look really good. What's a reasonable expectation?**

KEVIN CASH: I don't know. He exceeded my expectations coming in and watching him play for 2 1/2 months with us -- or 2 months, whatever it was -- above and beyond what I was anticipating. I'm not slighting the player. The defense was unbelievable. The hitability, the adjustments that he made, the knack and the desire of wanting the big moment in the game, and then coming through.

We've got a very special player that's incredibly talented. I do think that phrase, sky's the limit, it's on him. He's working really hard this off-season. We've had Joe Benge, Bryan King go down and watch him train. Rodney Linares has been there with him weekly. I think he's getting close to playing in Escogido, and I will make a trip there close to the end of the year to go watch him play.

Excited with the work he's putting in. I think he learned a lot about himself. One of the many things that was special about Junior is the way that he interacted with some of the veteran Dominican superstars that came in and played against us. The messages that he received from them, he really took to heart because he's put to work this off-season.

**Q. First base, you knew what it looked like. Like that was the guy, right? That sort of changed in recent years, right? You have sort of a different profile of the first baseman and it isn't maybe a primary priority. What do you think changed with what the average first baseman looks like today?**

KEVIN CASH: The biggest change is hitting is hard. Pitching is so dominant. I didn't know if it goes to that one position, but I think teams are -- they're going to do everything they can to maximize their roster. They're going to put a defense first guy over there. Teams have valued that, and they've found that value.

We've got a guy in Yandy that he gets there with on base, Brandon plays third base, he gets there with probably more slug. We've got a complement of the two. We want them both in the lineup. I'm not overly concerned with where they're playing as long as they're being able to be the offensive producers they've shown for many years that they have.

**Q. Going back to Jansen for a second, I'm sure this wasn't why you signed him, but the fact that he went through the experience of playing for the Blue Jays, that's probably a little added benefit?**

KEVIN CASH: We talked about it. We flew up and met with him and met his wife and had breakfast. A lot of people have kind of played a part in getting to know him really well, and throughout those conversations, that was talked about.

What the Blue Jays went through starting in Dunedin into and Buffalo, there was a lot of transitions in there. I don't think that we're going to be as challenged as maybe they were because of playing out of their country without their fans. We're going to have our fans. I'd like to think a lot of them are there showing up for us.

He is going to be a guy that potentially we could lean on for some of the experiences that he went through, and I'm all ears. We will all be all ears.

**Q. Eric mentioned Caballero might play winter ball, outfield?**

KEVIN CASH: He is. We've exchanged a couple of text messages. He's so athletic. Why not let him explore if there's an avenue for him to get at-bats out there, see what it looks like. I think he's played two or three games out there, maybe late games when he was with Seattle.

Spoke to him about it before the season ended. The best thing about Cabby is he wants to help us win. He'll do whatever it takes to win. Certainly he wants to play. He's an elite defender on the dirt, and I think that can transition in the outfield in a pinch.

We've got really good outfield options as we have now, but to have that possibility for late game maneuvers, keep your options open.

**Q. It sounds like DeLuca is going to get the lion's share of work in centerfield. What did you see from him defensively and offensively?**

KEVIN CASH: Jonny was as consistent as any player that we had. I look at what him and Taylor Walls did, they're just game changing, and they're consistent.

Wallsy, he makes a lot of the highlight reel plays. Jonny gets there with a consistent ground coverage, arm strength. So I do think it's a good opportunity for Jonny.

And I think it was challenging for him to get going offensively. You look at the broken hand or wrist that he had in Spring Training, then some of the inconsistencies with playing time, with what we were running out on a daily basis. He wasn't out there all the time. If there is some more inconsistencies, there's some pop in that bat that I think we're going to see.

**Q. Terry Francona back in the game, what does Tito bring to a team like the Reds?**

KEVIN CASH: I think he's the best in baseball. He's the best in the business at it. Whether it's a young team or a very veteran-based team, he knows how to get the most out of his players, interact with his players better than anybody.

This situation coming on Cincinnati, outside looking in, there are some similarities to maybe what he took on in Cleveland. I would guess that Cincinnati will quickly become a force in Major League Baseball with him at the lead.

**Q. Is there a point where in your interactions with him, you're like, oh, my God, this is a guy that I need to watch? Or is it just that you always knew Tito coming up? Is there any memories that strike you as a good**

**way to encapsulate what he does?**

KEVIN CASH: Getting to play for him and watching how he managed that roster that was incredibly talented, a lot of personalities. Look, I saw in 2007, 2008, 2010, and it was kind of cool to see that documentary come out. And just a little bit of the documentary, it's the exact same guy that I had three or four years later. It's the exact same guy that he is now when I worked for him as a coach in Cleveland and hanging out with him last week.

It's very impressive to me that Tito is going to be authentic and genuine, true to himself, and he's done it for many years.

**Q. At the end of the time in Cleveland, you're like, okay, he had some health problems or whatever. But spending time with him now, does he seem like he's fine?**

KEVIN CASH: Yeah, he overplayed the health problems, though (laughter).

No. He seems healthy. He looks good. We'll check with him come All-Star break and see how he's doing.

**Q. When you put that bullpen together last year, kind of emerged --**

KEVIN CASH: I didn't put it together. I wish I had a hand in that.

Incredibly talented group of players that all came together. We lost some good arms. Eric had some really tough decisions to make there at the deadline, albeit Phil went on to do good things in New York. Jason Adam was our rock for us in multiple seasons. You said it, Manny Rodriguez, Hunter Bigge, Mason Montgomery -- these guys, they really came in and stepped up for us, a lot to be excited about.

I compliment our starting rotation, and that's highlighted by guys coming back from injuries that we have a track record. A lot of these guys did not have a track record in the bullpen, but we've got to be very similarly excited about them for what they showed the last six, eight weeks of the season.

**Q. With the stadium situation, you talked about the rain, rain delays may affect it, whatever. Did you mention the heat? What are the specific ways that the heat affects?**

KEVIN CASH: Look, we've been fortunate to play in the Trop for the last umpteen, so many years. When we go on

the road, we all feel the heat. We had a series, I believe, in Atlanta and Pittsburgh, where this past most recent season was the hottest I can recall.

You have to manage your workload a little bit. I think I'll probably talk to some other managers. I'll call Brian Snitker and get some ideas what they do. Brandon Hyde in Camden, that can get really hot at that ballpark.

You're in the summer playing on the road, you see how teams manage their workload, shave off batting practice. First and foremost, you have to listen to your players. We try to work really hard and try to do that really, really well. So listen to the players and try to let them drive -- they know what their bodies need, and we'll do a good job of that.

**Q. Does the uncertainty affect the moves you made with the team or transactions or anything like that?**

KEVIN CASH: I don't think so, but that's a great question for the guy that's getting ready to sit in the seat. If you're ready for him, he's right there. (Laughter).

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