

# MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 8, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

**Baltimore Orioles**

**Manager Craig Albernaz**

Press Conference

**Q. If the season started today, unfortunately it doesn't, how do you feel about this club so far?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I feel great about it. I feel great about it. We have a great young core and we have some really good veteran pieces around it. And our coaches right now, now that we're almost in place, they're having great conversations with them, starting to get into the plans going heading into the Spring Training. So, I feel very good.

**Q. How well do you think you know this team?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: As well as anyone could that that has a month and a half on the job.

**Q. When the trade occurred for Taylor Ward, what was the initial reaction? How do you think he can help that outfield?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: The initial reaction was we're excited for it, just on the Taylor Ward side alone. To have someone that can impact bat to bring in, but the biggest thing with me with Taylor is he plays every day. I think having a steady presence out there and someone that posts every day is a big asset for us.

But then also on the flipside, you lose someone like Grayson where, me, personally, I haven't had a relationship with him, but knowing the name and obviously speaking to him after he got traded, obviously that's a blow for us. But also it's a great experience and a great, I would say when everyone -- when someone gets traded, that means the other team really wants you. For him to have that it's really cool.

**Q. When you go into the strengths and weaknesses of the club, what stood out about the roster that you'll have to work with in a couple of months?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I think that the strengths is just pure athleticism these guys have and the engines.



As far as weaknesses, it's really tough to say just because you don't ever want to look at video or film or numbers and say this is a weakness. You want to see actually the guys out there playing the game.

And for us as a coaching staff, that's what we're trying to do right now, with these conversations, making sure we have a great plan heading into Spring Training where a plan for us as a staff to, one, evaluate the players, but also support them. I think that's the biggest thing we have to do now as a coaching staff is to best figure out how to support the players so we know how to coach them.

**Q. You've brought a lot of coaches in with whom you have a lot history with. How good do you feel about the coaching staff as a whole, and how do you think they'll blend together as a staff?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I think the first -- we had our first initial Zoom call with everyone. I think it's going to be a great fit for everyone. All of our guys -- I said this numerous times -- our goal for our coaching staff is to have great coaches, great teachers, great communicators, but, more importantly, great people.

I think all the coaches that were brought in and the coaches that have been here, our pitching group, and also Buck, they're great people. And so for us, we just needed great people around our players to support them.

**Q. Are there more hires to be made or are you done with the staff?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: We're pretty much done. We're still -- we could have a fit for one more. We're still trying to figure out what that looks like or if there will be a need.

**Q. How would you describe the philosophy offensively for (indiscernible)?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Our offensive philosophy is to touch home plate more than the other team before the 27th out happens. That's basically it. Our coaching staff, they're going to be -- the reason why I say that, it's not tongue in



cheek, but our coaches are going to cater to the individual. And I think that's where we lose sight of what makes players special. And we're going to be very individualized with how we attack each player and how we coach each player.

**Q. Have you watched most of the games from last year on tape?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Yes.

**Q. What have you learned from doing that?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Just watching the games. It's tough to -- when you're not in the dugout, you don't know what's being said, what's even before the game what's being worked on. And also baseball is an extremely hard game. It's very unpredictable.

So you just take it for face value. And you're pretty much seeing how the guys move, how they swing, how -- their body language, like all the little stuff.

But as far as to take a lot of context out of just watching video and looking at the numbers, it's extremely difficult. That's why, for us as a staff, it's just kind of a foundation for us as we move forward.

**Q. There's obviously still plenty more moves to be made, but how do you envision Ryan Hellsley fitting into your back-end plans? Is he someone you see as a closer or are you open to the kind of high-leverage role, multiple innings, that kind of thing?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: For the regular season, yeah, he's going to be our closer. I think for someone like that, it's tough to put guys like that into like different spots in the game in the regular season, because now those guys, they're going to pitch 200 innings.

So by having a guy in the ninth inning as your closer, it protects us and them from being overused. So for us -- the bullpen pieces we have in place are more than capable of getting the ball to Ryan.

**Q. In general, how excited are you to have an experienced closer out there? And what's your confidence level in him being able to bounce back from what was kind of a down second half of the season?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Extremely excited. The initial thought is also with Bautista. It sucks to have that injury, because he was that dude, and then to now have Ryan step up and be that guy, it's awesome.

And for him, just like a lot of our guys on the team, development and learning is messy. It's not linear as far as like success in this game. So for him, to kind of have not the year that he wanted and hit the free agent market, and then him choosing us because he had a bunch of different teams, that says a lot about our coaching staff and our front office and our organization that he wanted to be here.

We're excited to have him. And I think it's going to be a really good year for Ryan.

**Q. When you look at the rosters (indiscernible), is there anything you think could be added or used this winter?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I love our players we have now. That's my only focus now are the guys in the Orioles uniform right now, and I love our group.

**Q. What role do you have when Mike is talking with players or whatever, does he involve you at a later stage with a player, say Hellsley, and have you give a pitch on what it might be like playing under you?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Sometimes he'll ask me for my opinion and stuff and also sometimes ask me to talk to a player, whatever that is. It's never a pitch. You just want to talk to the player.

You want to see -- because that's the coolest thing about the free agent world with players is not many players get to reach free agency. It's such a special time for them. When these guys have options, they're also interviewing you as an organization as well.

So it's not a pitch. You just want to show them, talk to them what you bring to the table, what the organization brings and the team.

**Q. Last year, this team had the fewest sacrifices of any team in the majors. Are you a guy who will do that more often? Do you think you'll be an aggressive kind of manager with running game? What are your thoughts?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Sacrifice bunts or flies?

**Q. Both. No, bunts.**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I was going to say, that would be great if you could hit a sacrifice play, put the sign up, that would be sick.

**Q. If you could invent a sign for that, that would be**



cool.

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Right? Maybe we should do that. I might implement that this year.

No, I think it's going to be whatever the game dictates. I think if it's sacrifice bunt the game is dictating, yeah, we'll sacrifice bunt.

For us, we're not going to be running just to run on the bases. Everything is, like, 27 outs are extremely valuable. And how if you just want to give up an out, it has to be a very specific situation. And also when we're running, we want to make sure we're not just running into an out.

We have to do our prep work to make sure this is the right time, that we can make it. And there's never a sure bet in this game, but we try to place pretty strong bets that we're going to succeed in that situation.

**Q. What's your impression of the pitching coaches that you're working with?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: They're studs. They're elite. It's been refreshing to come in because you don't really know the staff when you come in, the people that are there. But with Frenchy and Mitch and Ryan, those guys are as elite as they come.

The best part about all three of those guys is we have the same philosophies and views on this, where everything we do is for the boys. Everything we do is for the players to make sure that they're heard, that they're a strong voice in their development process, and they feel the same way.

**Q. So much of your gig is going to be about building trust with these players, right, having meaningful relationships. How do you go about doing that with 26, 30 new people in a span of a month and a half?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Just be myself. That's the biggest thing. You want to -- you always want to showcase who you are to everyone. And every player just wants to feel like they feel valued. And that's something that I believe in, that every player should feel valued.

If they're the last man on the 40-man who might get a call up or not, that person is going to help us win, that player. For me, it's just taking the time out and hearing everyone and talking to them.

**Q. Seems like you spent quite a lot of time in the city of Baltimore at this point. What's your impression of where you're going to live for the foreseeable future (indiscernible)?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Want me to tell the masses where I'm going to live? (Laughter.) Are you kidding me? Come on, man. What are we doing?

**Q. The general idea of the city.**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I know what you're saying. I know what you're saying. I love the city. It's awesome. It feels like a big northeast city, but it's not. It's smaller, too. Which is it's awesome in itself.

The people have been outstanding to me and my family. Great food. I mean, just even like taking the drive down to go to the Ravens practice facility and seeing that area, which I hadn't been down there, so first time doing that. Yeah, it's a great area.

**Q. It's a convoluted question, but what is your philosophy on developing young position players at the Major League level, especially when you're trying to win? Platooning guys, (indiscernible) playing on an everyday basis, do you feel there's a balance to be struck there or do you feel people have to work through their (indiscernible) top of your mind?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I appreciate you prepping that it's going to be a convoluted question.

Yeah, I think each player you have to attack differently. Each player, even though they might be young but they're at different stages of their development. And that's for us as coaches to identify where they're at. And also I think what gets lost in development is players lose sight of what they do really well. And that's something for us as a coaching staff, we have to really double down on what our players do well and what makes them special.

Once we find that out, we'll work on the areas of growth. But every player is going to have a strong voice in their development path as they get better.

Anyone that I've been around that has played 10 years in the big leagues, they don't do that just by showing up every day. They get better. There's no level above the big leagues. So you have to keep on getting better, no matter what stage you're at in your career, young player or a veteran player.

So it's us as a coaching staff to help the players identify their areas of growth and help them work on it.

**Q. Few months away but do you have an idea how you want to run your first Spring Training?**



CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Yeah, I do. Again, want me to tell the secrets to the masses, you know what I mean? I'm kidding.

It's going to be fun. We're going to work. We're going to work. That's the biggest thing. I think when we get to Spring Training, you really have to focus on the little details.

When the season happens, it's difficult to keep up with that as far as because you have time constraints with how long, when the field opens and with the grounds crew and whatnot. But for us, spring training, we are going to attack the small things, the fundamentals, so we have the strong foundation and baseline heading into the season.

**Q. One of the biggest issues with the team last year and a half has been the underperformance of Adley Rutschman man. From what you've talked to people and talking to him and watching tape of him, do you feel confident that you can see the Adley Rutschman that was in the big league that was in the first couple of years as opposed to the one we saw the last year and a half?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, to even -- like how you even ask that question is a testament to Adley. For a young player to come up and make the impact like he did and now he has these expectations, that's a credit to Adley of how good of a player he is.

Like I said in the previous question before, development is messy, especially for a young catcher. To me, obviously I'm biased because I was a former catcher but catcher is the hardest position in baseball. They make every decision on defense. Then they get their butts kicked and then they have to go hit.

So for Adley, and any young catcher, you have to learn how to navigate the grind of the season. And Adley now has that baseline now, so now it's us as a coaching staff with him to figure out what's the areas that he needs to really focus in on, whether that be in the weight room prep or if it's like how he even structures his day.

A lot of it is not actually like the skills. A lot of it has to do behind the scenes, like the leadup to the game and where he's putting his energy and direction.

**Q. How much do you think it will help not just Adley but (indiscernible) having you as a former catcher and other former catchers on staff, how helpful will be to have those resources (indiscernible)?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I'm excited for it. I think when you

have a manager who is a former catcher, obviously you talk to anyone on any team, the manager-catcher relationship is different than any other player just because they're in every decision they make on the field or on defense.

But then support with now you have Joe Singley teaching the technical aspect and you also have Hank Conger on staff. Our staff will be very supportive. As a catching staff we have to be cognizant of not overwhelming them. Now you have three catching minds on staff. You don't want to overwhelm them.

You have to learn the give and take of that and also the support of the pitching group with Ryan and Drew and Mitch, they have a lot of support. Now it's us to figure out what they need to go out to game and compete.

**Q. You mentioned expectations on Adley. How even to ask a question like that speaks to who he is, has that come up with the players, their path at this point in their conversation with them, how their careers have gone in terms of what's expected of them and what they expect of themselves?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: No, it hasn't. But they've talked through of what they need to do to get better and win games. A lot of it has been just attacking little things each day. That gets lost, especially with young players, but all baseball players. You kind of lose sight of what makes team baseball like a team functioning aspect of the game.

So for us, it's getting back to that point. That's why our Spring Training is going to be like that, with a high focus on fundamentals and the little things, but as we move through the season, that's a diverse team, in my opinion, is like, yeah, we can go toe to toe and slug with teams, but also we have to do the little things to win those close games as well. And those guys have identified that. So that's something that we're going to be striving for in Spring Training.

**Q. Was it surprising to have that observation about themselves and the team?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: It was surprising not the observations, it was surprising to me how each player said the same thing. When you have -- it wasn't, like, a mass call. It was all these individual calls and each individual was saying the same thing. So it was really cool for me because, one, the self-reflection, the self-awareness was off the charts. And no jaded views of like the season either for them or the team, but it just speaks to the character of these guys and the culture that's built here, is that these guys are all saying the same thing and it's nothing personal



about personal aspirations, it's all about the team.

**Q. I've seen a lot of different types of managerial hires in this cycle. I'm curious, in today's game, what do you consider the most important aspect of that role?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: It's people. At the end of the day, you're a manager, you're a manager of people. And that's something that's never going to change in this game is that people still play. Front office members don't play. Coaches don't play. The players play. And for a big league manager, for anyone, even a coach, you have to be a connector of people, and it doesn't matter where you come from, if you're a college coach like Tony, or if you're a (indiscernible), who is 33. All the guys do the job because for a reason because they're great communicators, great connectors of people.

**Q. How much did you learn from Stephen Vogt and how much --**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I learned nothing from Vogty, nothing at all. I'm not going to put that on record. There is no way I'm going to put to that on record.

**Q. How much did he learn from you?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I'm kidding. I learned a ton from Vogty. My two years at Cleveland were probably the best experience I've had in baseball in two years. That's saying something, from where I've been.

But to work with one of your best friends, and also an organization like Cleveland, it allowed me to feel comfortable with sitting in front of you guys and having these conversations. Like, just being a part of all the behind-the-scenes work that goes into being a big league manager, it was great to see Vogty work. His communication skills, the way he connects with people. He makes everyone feel like, when you have that conversation with him, that you're the most important person in the organization.

**Q. Do you feel like you set a tempo with the other teams trying to follow, with a guy with a relative recent playing career, not going through the ranks of minor league managing, making a quick jump?**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: Vogty?

**Q. Yes.**

CRAIG ALBERNAZ: I don't think it's a trend. If you're qualified to do the job, you can do the job. I think that's Vogty -- Vogty is a great case and great testament of

someone that played the game right, went about his business the right way and afforded him an opportunity to manage a big league team.

For I think anyone, it's all about the fit for the organization when you get hired.

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