

# MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 8, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

**Cincinnati Reds**

**Manager Terry Francona**

Press Conference



**Q. How much pride do you take out of last year just getting to the tournament and making your guys feel like they're a winning possibility?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I mean, our goal isn't to win 83 games. I do think getting into the playoffs, as long as our trajectory is going this way, that's good. I don't want us to be, like, the feel good story. That was a good little story, and we fall back to whatever.

Our trajectory needs to be going this way. And as long as that's the case, and I think it is, then it's good. I think we all got a taste of what it can feel like to pop champagne, which is good. Then a couple days later, we also felt the sting of getting beat up two quick games and getting sent home before you want to.

I told our guys to remember both those feelings.

**Q. How, if at all, with the talk about Kyle Schwarber, have you been involved in the process at all? Have you been in touch with him in any way, shape, or form?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think the best way to address that question is I'm probably not on an island when I say he's a really good player and he's a really good kid and he's got a great reputation. Other than that, I'd like to leave it to him to speak about whatever he wants to because I think that's the most respectful way to handle it.

**Q. What about how he could fit what your needs are in that lineup?**

TERRY FRANCONA: He could fit on any team. I mean, he's going to score over 100. He's going to drive in over 100. He's a team leader. He's a great guy. And I'm not in the minority in saying that.

**Q. Any chance to meet him along the way or get to know him a little along the way?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Not too much. He was too busy

beating us in the World Series.

**Q. You haven't talked to him this time?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Again, I'm going to leave things to him. I think it's the more respectful way to go about it.

**Q. How do you see development of your offense taking the next step next season?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Well, we need to take the next step. I do think there's some things in place like Steer the first -- Steer DH that first three, four weeks. He was supposed to be on the IL. He DAs because he's a great teammate and a gamer and he didn't hit a lick. Then when he started playing and he got his shoulder feeling good, he was a really good player. Hopefully we have that guy from the get-go, a guy that can play left, play first, play right -- because that's valuable.

I think McLain -- again, I know I was stubborn early on with him. It's just because I believed in him so much, and I still do. There's a really good player there. I think being a year removed from that shoulder, I think we'll see that. That's two things just off the get-go.

I think that's what happens when you have a younger team. They're still -- like I said, you hope the trajectory is still going up. Sometimes you have a team that's a real veteran team, and that's okay, but you kind of are what you are. And you hope guys are healthy and you see how good you do.

We're still trying to -- like our pitching staff. We had guys that went through kind of for the first time that are finding out what they can do, like, Lodolo and Abbott. They're still going this way.

**Q. You talk about Schwarber in the clubhouse and all that. Is it like a relief from you, for Pagán to be back just because you know what Emilio can mean to a clubhouse?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Oh, I was so happy about that. I

... when all is said, we're done.®



think everybody talks about leadership, and I understand that. This was one of the best clubhouses I've ever been around, and I've done it for a long time. When you ask guys to not be late and then when they're not late, that's meaningful. Because everybody says it the first day of Spring Training, everybody. If you don't live by it, it doesn't really mean much.

Every day in Spring Training we'd meet. They'd all be sitting like you guys are in those chairs. Nobody's eating breakfast. They're ready. That makes me appreciate that. They're an easy group to like.

**Q. You mentioned McLain and the last thing you were saying about obviously the shoulder killed him, not being in there. What does he need to do, I guess, to take the next step and kind of grow from the year he had as a rookie and obviously to grow from the setbacks he had this year?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think it's probably the first time he's ever struggled anywhere, and do it at the Major League level is probably a hard place to learn. But he's a very competitive kid.

In my opinion, he's probably our best base runner. I don't mean fastest, but he always knows where the ball is. He runs the bases like a veteran. Plays second base, he knows where the ball is supposed to go. The ball jumps off his bat way more than you would think when you look at his stature.

Just I think that shoulder -- you talk to guys that have had that, and they kind of said the same thing. Like I played, but it wasn't the same.

**Q. You mentioned Steer. You just sort of mentioned him being able to move around again. Is that something you guys have decided that he'll do that again as opposed to some first?**

TERRY FRANCONA: A couple of things about that. One, he likes to do that. Two, it would be dependent on the makeup of our team. If he is moving around and still getting 550 at-bats, we're okay. I hate to even use the word like utility with him, but if you're moving him around but you're getting everyday production, that's really helpful.

**Q. How does someone like Sal Stewart fit in your plans? Knowing obviously you have more roster choices coming up, but how do you see him fitting and growing within the month?**

TERRY FRANCONA: I think Freddie went down to visit with him for a couple of days in Miami, just to help him

defensively at first base. It's going to be interesting because we love, love the hitter. I remember all the way back last year in Spring Training -- I think I told you guys I thought he was one of the most advanced young hitters I'd seen, and I believe that. Rarely do you see guys come to the Big Leagues like that late in the year, and he wasn't overwhelmed.

Where his game goes defensively, we're still trying to figure that out. I talked to him at length -- it's been a while now -- but about being agile. People talk about his weight. I said, I don't want to talk about your weight. I want you to be athletic. Because he's a baseball player. Where that fits, we'll see.

**Q. Is the idea that because you were a Minor League manager for a while before you were in the majors, and it appears each team now has four to six players that are still in big time development mode when they get there, does that help you look at guys and really have a better handle on, yeah, I think personally this guy's going to be --**

TERRY FRANCONA: I'm not sure. I mean, I hope it does because you're supposed to learn from everything you do. But I just think the game has evolved, and guys are getting called up way before they're ever the finished product. That's just the way the game is. It's not just us, but especially markets like us, it's going to happen.

If you think, okay, they're here, leave them alone, you're missing the boat.

**Q. Kind of almost tangential to that, did you see Pat Kelly won the award today?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Yeah.

**Q. What does it mean to you, and how long have you known Pat, and what does it mean to have a guy like that in Triple-A?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Managed against him in Double-A.

**Q. Yeah, he was with the Expos.**

TERRY FRANCONA: He's the type of guy where -- like he was in Milwaukee the last weekend of the season. We really needed to win those games. He's the type of guy, I said, PK, God dang it, man, come on in and visit me.

Sometimes you're trying to keep people at arm's length. He's the kind of guy, hey, come on in, man, let's visit. You ask him something, he tells you the truth. He's got a great feel. We're really fortunate.



**Q. I'm so happy for him.**

TERRY FRANCONA: I was literally just texting him a half hour ago.

**Q. I don't know if you're aware of such a thing as a perfect fit, but you talk about how much you liked this group. Does that sort of turn back the chronological calendar? You look like you're trying to get back. I don't know if at 45 you thought you'd be doing this 21 years later.**

TERRY FRANCONA: I didn't think I'd be alive still. You know what, when I went to Cleveland, I think a lot of people were kind of surprised, and they kind of like, man, what are you doing? I've never been accused of being the smartest person. I know that. But I did it for the right reasons.

The same thing here. When I met Nick and Bob, I immediately kind of bonded with them. Yeah, I love our players. That doesn't mean we don't have tough conversations, we don't have tough days. But I enjoy the hell out of them. At this point in life, I don't want to do something that I don't want to do. That's not -- doesn't seem very advantageous.

**Q. You mentioned a few guys in the offense, Elly when you look back at his second half and then heading (no microphone)?**

TERRY FRANCONA: There was a lot of things going on. I think I need to take responsibility -- and I have, and I will. I need to find ways to get him off his feet from time to time, and I didn't do a very good job of that, and I own up to that.

I love the fact that he wants to play, and he's one of the rare guys where he can bring energy every day, which is really amazing. But saying that, he gets beat up so much. Sometimes the day game after the night game might be really helpful for him.

I think the same thing like with Friedl. Like there was a time -- and it was when Benson was in Triple-A and TJ was kind of beat up. We had just started playing Marte. We put Marte in center once, but it just wasn't quite ready to do that. So TJ was going out there. He clutched up for us, but I thought it was putting a lot on him.

**Q. Have you started to think about your ball strike challenge strategy for your team?**

TERRY FRANCONA: No, but I've thought, I've asked -- like PK, Pat Kelly, I did talk to him -- well, I have thought about it, but we have a camp in early January. I think they

call it battery camp. Got a lot of our player development people out there, and that is one of the things on the agenda is to talk about it.

**Q. Kind of interesting, isn't it?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Very.

**Q. And every team probably would be a little different.**

TERRY FRANCONA: My guess is most of the teams will not allow the pitchers to do it. That would be my guess.

**Q. Knowing that there's still a lot of things that have happened, how do you see the outfield right now? It just seems like there's guys but it's not a clear-ish picture.**

TERRY FRANCONA: Well, I don't think -- we've been pretty clear we want Marte to play. We all think he's going to be a pretty good right fielder. TJ is fine in center. And then what we do in left, I think is to kind of be determined.

So often one signing sets off the -- you know, where you move. Where's Luxy go? We had Austin Hays last year. We just need to see how things play out.

**Q. How are you kind of doing that with Marte in this off-season now that you've gone through a full Spring Training? Is there anything you guys are doing in the off-season?**

TERRY FRANCONA: Yeah, to go to center. When he takes balls out there -- if for no other reason, it's really good for you. Seeing balls go both ways. As long as you can do it physically, it's really good. And he's -- I think it's freed him up so much.

If you look from one year to the next, what a turnaround in his journey. I think it's going to get better. There's bumps in the road. There's going to be. But he's easy to like.

**Q. Following up on the question about the ABS system, how do you take the emotion away from the player that they always feel they're right on a ball or a strike and letting them make that decision?**

TERRY FRANCONA: That was kind of what I was referring to with the pitchers. I've never seen a pitcher who doesn't think everything's a strike. You're right, if they get emotional, you're going to be in the third inning and you're out.

So that's the one common denominator. Like PK has told me, he said don't let the pitchers do it. I'm sure there's



going to be some strategy. I think everybody doesn't want to get to the ninth inning and not have one, but those are things I'd like to listen to some of the player development people talk about how it worked best for them.

Last spring I didn't want to do it because we weren't going to use it. And then the guys from the league asked me -- they were actually great about it -- they go, can you just please do it? Okay. Actually didn't mind it. I thought it was okay, and I thought the fans loved it. Didn't stop the game much. Everybody waited for the scoreboard. I think it will be okay.

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