

MLB Winter Meetings

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Kansas City Royals

Manager Matt Quatraro

Press Conference

Q. I want to ask you about Carter Jensen, the month you saw from him in September and how you feel like that can help you guys in 2026, and what you see with his playing time at all (indiscernible)?

MATT QUATRARO: To start with, September was really impressive. It was fun to watch. Anytime you get that infusion of energy from a young player, especially somebody like Carter that's from there and is a big hometown hero, so to speak, that was great.

But Carter, he's a baseball rat. And I think he can help us in a lot of ways. He's improved a lot behind the plate over the last few years with Boskie (phonetic), who obviously that will continue with (indiscernible). He's a sponge when it comes to the game calling and all those kind of things, the processes we have in place with Brian and those guys, that's going to be great for him, continue to learn and from Salvee (phonetic).

Because when he first came up, he wasn't catching much, so he was around Maley (phonetic) and Salvi, and understanding what they did day-to-day. We have big hopes for him to be a big part of what we do, whether it's behind the plate or offensively.

As far as playing time, I think in a perfect world Salvi, I don't know an exact number, but we need to utilize his bat as much as his catching. So hopefully to be able to keep him fresh, Carter can handle a decent workload.

Q. When you had Fermin as well as Salvi, it was almost 50/50 by the time he left. Do you hope that one day Carter can get to that point? Does he have to work his way up there?

MATT QUATRARO: Sure, yes, I do hope so and will work your way up to it. It can be on the fly, too. We don't have to start out and say we're going to force these many games. But if he swings the bat well and he's handling himself behind the plate, there's no reason -- you guys know Salvi better than anybody. He just wants to win. So whatever best combination of players out there is going to



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help us win he'll be on board with that.

Q. Do you see a bounce-back campaign for (indiscernible)?

MATT QUATRARO: John's a proven Major League player that's had a down year offensively for him, but I don't think there's any reason to think, with his bumps and bruises healed up and being in a second year in the city and understanding the organization, I think we really think it's going to be a bounce-back year.

Q. How do you view second base with him and Michael Massey both being there, more a platoon in that situation?

MATT QUATRARO: Hopefully it's not a platoon. Hopefully there's at-bats for both of them. We like to use the whole roster. It doesn't have to be one guy can only play second. We have a DH spot. We can righty and lefties. And Massey can obviously play in the outfield as well. They have to earn their at-bats, but I don't look at it as a strict platoon at second base.

Q. Does that include (indiscernible)? Does he have to earn his at-bats?

MATT QUATRARO: He'll have an inside track to play on a regular basis. That's why we acquired him because we really value the on-base and the lead-off ability and the neutrality of the splits and all those things. You come in the season thinking about him as an everyday player.

Q. What went wrong with him this year in terms of what --

MATT QUATRARO: I think we have to shoulder a lot of that blame. Early in the year we tried to play him in left, at third, things he'd never done before, transitioning to a new organization, just the general comfort of being out of his routines. And then asking him to do it at a new position.

And I think the new ballpark, all those things. You talked to him, he wasn't happy with the quality of his at-bats. He

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knew he was popping too many balls up. It wasn't that he was trying to hit homers, he just couldn't get out of that swing funk.

But more than anything, I would attribute a lot of that to the fact that he was trying to learn two new positions in Spring Training and went into a first year with a new organization out of his comfort zone.

Q. What's the latest with Kris Bubic? Has (indiscernible) he back to run again?

MATT QUATRARO: Yeah, he's throwing now. I think his first bullpen scheduled for early January. But he's throwing and everything's been great.

Q. I knew you introduced new voices into your hitting program. When you look at some of the top offenses last season that also had a lot of success in the playoffs, like Milwaukee and Toronto, in which contact, the ability to make contact really was high up on their list of trades. Where do you see that just in terms of importance in the way the offense needs to be played, just the way the majors are right now?

MATT QUATRARO: We value that right now. That's something we do a really good job of. I think we were right at the top, first or second in fewest strikeouts.

Now what we're trying to get out of that is it is because we don't strike out, can we take a little, be a little more disciplined early in the count and not just put pitcher's pitches in play because we have the confidence to be able to hit with two strikes and put the ball in play with two strikes?

It's just refining each guy's strike zone. But I think putting the ball in play is hugely important for a team like us in our ballpark where we have speed, we have guys that can run the bases. We've got to put pressure on opposing defenses.

Q. Were you expecting Zach (indiscernible) to get the opportunity with the White Sox and what he brings to the Royals this time of year?

MATT QUATRARO: I think winning was only a matter of time until we lost Zach to an opportunity. He did a phenomenal job for us. He's a very process-oriented guy. He's a very forward thinker. He's somebody that challenges the norms. I think he was somebody that we were lucky to get when we got him. And I think he worked really well with Brian and Mitch and moved our pitching department forward.

I'm not surprised we lost him at all. I'm disappointed that we lost him, selfishly. But I'm happy for him and his family.

Q. With (indiscernible) how big of a year are you expecting from him? And how much do you feel he can be part of the solution for you guys on offense?

MATT QUATRARO: We know his upside, right? We know the power, the batted-ball profiles all those kinds of things. I think he learned a lot from what he went through last year. There were things that we all wish were better, himself included, but I think we were also some positives.

I rewind to the first series and he gets a couple of hard hit balls that are robbed from him. You just don't know how much, with a young player, a couple of those hits fall in and things go differently. And they went the other way.

But when he would go back to Triple-A on his rehab assignment we saw improvement in his quality of at-bat and he carried it over when he first came back up from that. We've seen some of the bright spots we're hopeful for because obviously we know the power's there. We know the hard hit. So we think we're looking for a bounce-back from him as well.

Q. Do you have to balance those expectations though, knowing, with Carter, too, knowing they're so young?

MATT QUATRARO: Oh, yeah.

Q. With what the front office is trying to do this offseason trying to find more offense (indiscernible) that you've got these two guys?

MATT QUATRARO: We think we've got a team that can win currently. With that, you saw the benefits with putting the Yazzes (phonetic) and (indiscernible) and Fraziers in the mix there -- it's not because the other guys can't do it but because there's going to be days where it might be better to have a day off or get a better match-up against somebody, and you've got to produce. So you have to give yourself that cushion or the protection against ups and downs of young players.

Q. Heading into your postseason, how do you view teams in general from your standpoint of leading them to get back to the playoffs and what are some of the things you want to work on personally?

MATT QUATRARO: How do I view the team? I think it's an exciting team to be around. These guys, they compete, they prepare. They're good to each other. It's an easy clubhouse. They have a very common goal of understanding of what our end goal is, is to win the World

Series. They understand that. They know it's not going to be easy.

Personally, I think one of the things focusing on for myself and the staff is to make sure that we know the players as well as we possibly can, that each guy is completely different and how we reach one guy may not be the same as the other. So knowing them at a deeper level.

And the same with our staff, getting to know the staff, even though we know them well, understanding what makes each person tick that much more, and hopefully it leads to more harmony, synergy, whatever the word is, to help us through the tough times and get over the humps.

Q. And (indiscernible)?

MATT QUATRARO: Great, two different backgrounds. Marcus has a long-time playing career, coaching career. Connor a younger guy that's moved up quickly. They both bring really interesting skill sets that complement each other and complement what Zumi does as well.

Q. The Royals over the years have had different identities, I guess you would call them, the (indiscernible) pitching team. What do you think the identity of this team is?

MATT QUATRARO: Both of those things. Pitching, defense, speed, contact, play hard, force the issue, situationally hit. I think we want that to be our identity.

Now it's not all 13 position players have the same skill set. So we're not looking for the speed and base running out of Salvi and Vinnie like we are out of Maikel. But the contact, the competitiveness, the relentlessness are things that we're looking for.

Q. Do you think teams ideally would have a balance of speed, (indiscernible), et cetera, compared to -- it used to be easier to have an identity like to be a speed team or be a power team.

MATT QUATRARO: I don't know. I don't know how far back you want to go but the first thing that comes to mind is you had the Royals with Willie Wilson and those guys, but you also had guys like Steve Balboni that could hit homers and do different things. I don't think you ever had just one type of player top to bottom. You want a diverse way to beat other teams.

Q. With the success of Noah Cameron coming up to help you, what are some prospects you're looking at to help your team when stuff happens?

MATT QUATRARO: It's exciting. Hopefully we have healthy year from Luinder Avila, Steven Zobac, Ben Kudrna. Those guys on the pitching side, two of those were added to the 40-man this year. Luinder made his debut last year, pitched out of the bullpen as well.

On the pitching side, those are the few names that jump out. We had a healthy Steven Cruz, Jonathan Bowlan back up. So those guys that had either had a little bit of big league time or had just been added to the roster.

Q. Do you see Avila as a starter (indiscernible)?

MATT QUATRARO: I do. He's the kind of guy you need for some depth. And depending what happens throughout the rest of the offseason and the spring, he's obviously shown the ability to get righties and lefties out. I think that was a great experience for him pitching out of the pen, but that's the kind of guy early on, especially early in the season, is a good guy to have as a starter.

Q. Have you had a chance to start thinking about some protocols and how to deal with the new automated ball and strike system and what did you think about that innovation?

MATT QUATRARO: We're hoping to get them all right, that's our protocol. That's what we're going to tell the guys. I mean, we're working on it. We hope to use different technologies to have guys get more reps at it, and certainly do it in Spring Training, obviously, with the live reps you're going to get, but other ways to learn the zone, whether you're catching or hitting.

So, yes, we're working through whether we want to have certain mandates for different leverage situations and those kinds of things, but I think you also have to trust your players.

Q. I want to ask you, you grew up in the Rays organization (indiscernible). What is it about this organization that develops quality people?

MATT QUATRARO: I think they get quality people to come in. I think you help develop the person, but the people that they've hired over the years have been quality.

I think there's a culture of learning. I think it's something that is promoted. And I think honestly it's very similar to what I see here in Kansas City. So that's exciting for me.

Q. Talking about the identity of this team, when you guys target outside help, external help, do you look for people who will fit that type of identity, or do you look for players who can shake it up a little bit based on



what you saw last year, what you hope to do this year?

MATT QUATRARO: Both. I mean, we want guys that play hard, that understand what kind of team we are, and more than anything, an understanding of who they are because if they're a guy that's a 30-home run guy and a strikeout guy, we certainly don't want to bring him in and tell them they need to spray the ball around the field or whatever. We want to acquire guys to do what they do well and understand how that can fit with the team.

But understanding what we value as an organization is important as well.

Q. How much change do you see happening with the offense going into next year given the front office has been pretty clear about wanting to add some bats this offseason? But in terms of both personnel and identity, do you see a lot of changes?

MATT QUATRARO: I don't see how the rest of the offseason as far as player acquisition goes, that kind of thing, I can't really say as I sit here. But I think the things that we can control are the processes that we have in place.

Obviously we talked about we have two new assistant hitting coaches. I think their skill sets will help us evolve in our processes and make sure that our meetings are dynamic and that the information comes to life and, like I mentioned, we know how to reach each player on an individual level. I think that's where we'll see the most change from what we were doing prior.

And I think understanding these guys need to know that, they all understand this, that we're going to be that competitive, relentless, selfless team that's going to get after it.

Q. You mentioned Salvi loves to play every day, but to see him go to Venezuela and play this offseason, just what does that say about his willingness to just be out there around the game at (indiscernible)?

MATT QUATRARO: I think that's what makes him who he is. He loves the game. And the passion for winter ball in Venezuela is remarkable. Now, this is his first year of being with Caracas, and I know that's a big team there. I worked there, so I understand the dynamic there.

And for a guy like Salvi to go play for a team like Caracas is as big as it gets in Venezuela. I think that's really special. And I'm happy that he's doing it.

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