

MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 8, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Minnesota Twins

Manager Derek Shelton

Press Conference



Q. Have you had a chance to meet with more players?

DEREK SHELTON: Yeah, I'm trying to think when the last time we actually talked. I've met. I talked to everyone. I met with a couple more guys just because we've had more time. So it's been nice. And hopefully at TwinsFest we'll get the entire group at some point or whoever is there just to be able to spend time with them.

Q. What's your process with new eyes on a team but like evaluating the guys going into, this is what we want to see next spring?

DEREK SHELTON: In terms of the conversations, they're pretty generic, in terms of just introducing, getting to know. The one thing I learned over time is once you -- you want to introduce yourself to guys, but you also -- it's their offseason. And not only are they talking to me, but the position player group are talking to K.B. and they're talking to Mark and they're talking to Rabs.

Most of them already know Toby. On the pitching side, they're talking to Pete and they're talking to Troy. It's not a situation where, like, every single day somebody is calling them. It's their offseason. I realize I'm excited because I wasn't doing anything for four months, but they were doing things.

I think the process there is generally just introduction, giving them the opportunity to ask questions. I think the one thing I told them, if you have anything, if you think anything, shoot me a text, give me a call. And giving them an outline of what our expectations are going to be. But a lot is just getting feedback from them on what their experience was the last couple of years.

Q. It seemed like Royce, in particular, was really excited to get to talk to you and kind of get -- what's your read on when you look at what you know he is capable of and what he's shown the last year or two, what he can be going forward and what kind of a role you and your staff can be in unlocking him to be that guy?

DEREK SHELTON: I think Royce was really important. Number one, we had a lot of good barbecue. I don't know if you talked to him, but he took care of me there. But in Royce's case, I didn't have a relationship with him before because he just got drafted, got hurt in Spring Training while I was here. I wanted to make that sure I give an introduction. He's so important to us because he's so talented.

He's been on and off the field with injuries. I wanted to make sure that we talked about how he was taking care of his body. I was able to look him face to face and tell him what I thought about him and how much that I believed in him.

I just really felt that was important just to have a conversation. He's a young kid that has a chance to be a really good player for a long time. And then the second part is just making sure he was taking care of himself. Wanted to get eyes on him and see how he looked.

And his answers were so good. I mean, it was almost like he got away for a couple of weeks. He started to work out a little bit, and he's got a fresh outlook on 2026.

Q. I know you guys have said you want to build around this group. But what's the process been like talking about the uncertainty? I mean, the team still needs to have a sale finalized, there are still some things still out there that I'm sure some of these guys would like to know. What's that part of the conversation been like with guys wanting to know, am I going to be here in two years?

DEREK SHELTON: I think we publicly said, you know, the guys that everybody's questioning if they're going to be here, that they're going to be here.

I think Derek said that last week. The guys that in terms of Joe or Byron or Pablo, like, they're going to be here.

I think when I had the conversations with them, it was more like, hey, I'm planning on you being here and I want you to

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be part of this and we're going to build. These are three guys important to us, just like Royce was important to us. I think it was important for them to hear that from me. And the second part of that, in the offseason there's always uncertainty because of the fact that we have to rebuild an entire bullpen; there's guys we have to add to.

I don't think it's unique to this, and I don't think it's unique to the Minnesota Twins. And I also don't think it's unique to me because we've been in situations, every manager is in a situation where you're going to add four or five guys to your team. There's going to be guys that we bring NRIs that people are going to be, like, why is this guy here? And then he ends up being your best pitcher or player for a month.

I think the uncertainty there is like that until you get to Spring Training because you don't know who your group is. But I think the main component of that is we came out publicly said, hey, we expect those three guys to be part of our club, and that's the way that I dealt with it from the day I got the job.

Q. Did you get to meet Buck in person?

DEREK SHELTON: Yeah, Buck and I were able to have dinner together and it was great. It was nice, it was like seeing an old friend. I'd only seen him across the field. But I think the thing that impressed me the most about my time with Buck is just how much he's matured from -- honestly, that was six years ago. And I see him across the field. I see him in Spring Training to give him a hug, but when he walked in the restaurant, the presence that he has, like, that's a superstar. That's an All-Star player, that's a guy that won a Silver Slugger.

Not that he wasn't back then, but that's what we all expected he was going to be. But the presence he has, it was really cool to see. I got goosebumps when he walked in because this is a guy, this is a Minnesota Twin, this is what you build around and do. The fact that he wants to do that and we want him to do that, it was kind of special. Like seeing one of your kids after they came home from college and you're, like, damn, that's what it looks like, it was awesome.

Q. Did you go to (indiscernible)?

DEREK SHELTON: No, we met in Jacksonville. We met halfway in between. I give credit to him because he met me halfway. So I just said, hey, do you want to go Jacksonville, do you want to go to Atlanta or Savannah. We met in Jacksonville and had dinner.

Q. You guys have a lot of interesting Major League

and virgin Major League pitchers. You've got five rotation spots. Have you started having those conversations with Pete about how you track those guys, need to fill a bullpen somehow, because there's going to be some of those guys who come from potential starters, have you started looking at how you apportion this mass of pitchers you have?

DEREK SHELTON: I would say on a very macro level, yes. To be finite, no. I think the one thing -- maybe this is the superstitious part of me, is you can never have enough pitching, never can have enough starting pitching. I don't even want to talk about the changing of roles and what we're going to do because you want to get through Spring Training healthy. The last thing you want to do is get ahead of yourself and think, hey, we'll adjust and do this.

So the fact that we have a surplus of starting pitching or starting pitching options is something that I'm fine with. And then we work from there. Now to say in my heads at times I don't play around with it, yeah. But the other thing that's different is I personally have to get eyes on these guys and watch them throw, see them do these things but I feel we're in a good spot because we have really good pitching.

Q. Would you anticipate that part of what you do with the bullpen does come from those however many starting?

DEREK SHELTON: I think there's a potential it can happen. I don't want to lock ourselves into saying we are doing that because it may be a situation where we send a guy down because we want him to stay as a starting -- your schedule depends on that. But to say, like, we're adverse to that, no, but I think that's going to be an individual basis.

Q. You said last week, announcement came out, that you had the three core guys coming back. Did you know that that was the plan when you took on the job, or was that something that you were kind of waiting to see whether or not that was going to be -- was there a process to get to that?

DEREK SHELTON: I think there's always a process to get to everything. But my assumption, when I took the job, was those three guys were going to be part of our team.

Q. How do you guys get better? This core group that maybe projects to 82 wins, that's pretty relevant in the division, but how do you see marching out this roster?

DEREK SHELTON: Our young players still have to continue to develop, I think that's the biggest thing. And



the other thing is we have to build out our bullpen because there's so many games won or lost in a bullpen, especially during the regular season. We've talked about this. There's teams that go out and spend a ton of money on their bullpen and use their starters as bullpen.

Building out our bullpen is going to be extremely important. I think that's a step we're going to need to take to continue to get better, and our young position player group, we've got to figure out ways for them to get better. For me to say specifically what that is right now, that's hard because I don't know this group. I think I'll have a better answer of that -- I better have a better answer of that by March 25th.

Q. With Luke Keaschall, have you talked about whether he'll play defensively?

DEREK SHELTON: Yeah, defensively I think we're still having those conversations. We love the flexibility. The main thing right now is to make sure that the arm is in a good spot. But the fact that he has flexibility to move around the diamond is something that's really important for us, but I don't think we've locked in specifically of what we're doing.

Q. Do you see any places on the roster where you'd like to see the team add some offense?

DEREK SHELTON: I think we have some places we can add. I think one of the things -- I think we have multiple places we have the opportunity to add. And when I say that, it's not because we don't like the group we have. But it's a situation of how the market's going to play out.

I think the longer you do this job, you want to make sure you don't pigeonhole say we need something at X position and the market doesn't bear itself that way.

I think, going back to Bobby's question, the fact that we have guys that have flexibility to play in different positions, then we can be a little more finite in terms of how we add to our club.

Q. Do you think you currently have internal options beyond Clemens to play first base? For something like taking one of those outfield DH guys giving him a look at first base if you were to add somebody as the possible option?

DEREK SHELTON: So far we've not talked about that. It's not to say we won't talk about that. I think as we get through the winter meetings and what the market bears out what's available, the first base market is a little fickle this year I think as we all know. You've got the guy at the top and you kind of work off that. So I think we will have to

make a determination probably in the next couple of weeks.

The reason why you have to make that determination, because then you're asking a guy start adjusting positions, taking ground balls. You go into the fact, all right, it changes your training program because now you're bending over, how does it affect your back, your hamstrings, all those things come into play. I think we'll probably see how the market bears out a little bit make a decision on that.

Q. Do you think it's important to have a few veteran relievers to sort of build around your bullpen outside of your organization, or are you comfortable building up eight guys on the fly?

DEREK SHELTON: I think we need to build the best bullpen possible. If we add veteran guys to that mix, I think it's important. I think one of the things that was really important to me is the guy that's sitting down there as the bullpen coach is a veteran guy in terms of LaTroy. And that was extremely important to me because a good majority of that bullpen is probably going to be young. It could be transition, like we're talking about.

So that's probably -- that's not probably why, that's why LaTroy was the first hire because we wanted to make sure we locked in somebody that has sat down there that's able to have those conversations to be able to educate and grow that group because we may get in a situation, depending on how it shakes out, that we have six young guys down there. I want someone sitting down there that has the ability to have those conversations.

Ultimately, you want to build the best bullpen with the best arms and the widest variety of looks as possible.

Q. What did you learn in your time at Pittsburgh about developing young hitters just around the game? And obviously it's harder than ever, trying to get young guys to have more success?

DEREK SHELTON: What did I learn? I learned that Triple-A does not prepare you for the big leagues. I think that's the biggest thing I learned. I think you have as good a chance getting as many Trajekt at-bats -- I don't know if you're familiar with the Trajekt machine, where you're actually seeing Major League pitching. It's just the automated strike zone in Triple-A, the quality of pitching, the velocity is just not the same.

It's why we're seeing as an industry so many young players come to the big leagues and struggle. They just don't hit. The pitching is just too good here. And the pitching they're

facing in Triple-A is not there.

On the flipside of that, I'm very curious now the fact that we have the challenge system how that's going to affect that on the Major League side. It's something that we're going to have to talk about.

But just continuing the reps -- as an industry we're seeing more young players fail and go back to the minor leagues, and you guys are able to write articles this guy has 1.100 OPS in Triple-A and he comes to the big leagues -- and this is not specific to the Pirates in that question or to the Twins, it's throughout the industry that guys are struggling.

I think it's something that we're continuing to look at how we can get better at. I wish I had a really good answer for you, but it's just the fact that the distance between the talent in Triple-A and the big leagues is probably the greatest it's ever been.

Q. If a lot of guys are going back to Triple-A and there's not a lot that you can really learn in the big league level, how does it help a guy going back to Triple-A as opposed to this continuing?

DEREK SHELTON: Sometimes it just helps them mentally. I mean, obviously. You get your teeth kicked in enough times, sometimes you need a reset, you need a refresh.

There are mechanical adjustments you can make. And I think, depending on the organization and where they're at, they have to make that decision of, you know, does this individual stay in the Big Leagues and try to figure it out or do you send him down give him a little bit of confidence?

Q. You mentioned the challenge system. What are your early thoughts on strategizing when to use it and all that kind of stuff?

DEREK SHELTON: My early thought -- this is initial -- I don't know if I should say this -- I don't think the pitchers should ever challenge.

Q. You're not the first person.

DEREK SHELTON: I think pitchers think everything is a strike. So I think there's going to be strategy -- that's going to probably piss off some pitchers -- I think there's a strategy to it. We've talked about it a ton. I don't know if anybody has an idea. I guarantee you're going to see a lot of copycat. You're going to see every organization watching other organizations and how they attack it.

This is one of those things that you're not going to get a

really good barometer in Spring Training because it doesn't really matter in Spring Training. I think we're going to have to make it matter a little bit in Spring Training. I think how we train it in Spring Training, whether it's using Trajekt, whether it's using bullpen situations to be able to educate your group of what's a strike and what's not a strike. And on the flipside of it, catchers are really good now. Sometimes they fool everyone.

There's that fine line. I do think in the first month, month and a half, teams that figure it out are definitely going to have an advantage.

Q. What do you think about (indiscernible) Jackson?

DEREK SHELTON: I know he can catch. There's some power in there. It's been sporadic playing time, but I do like his ability to catch a baseball.

Q. Did you have a chance to catch up with (indiscernible)?

DEREK SHELTON: I've not talked to any of those guys. I know Walker, I was just in Wilmington and I saw Jeffers. He was at Walker's wedding the day before. I'm hoping that I get an opportunity with those guys because those guys are going to be a big part of what we're doing moving forward.

Q. How do you pick where you're going to visit with a few group of guys?

DEREK SHELTON: There were guys I wanted to hit and I wanted to talk to Ryan, but my sister-in-law lives there. We went there for Thanksgiving. My wife was like, hey, I think we're going to go to Wilmington. So instead of being like, nah, I was like, no, that's good but I'm going to go spend the morning with our catcher.

But I think it was hitting on the key guys of like who I wanted to see, who I wanted to talk to, and again like you also have to make sure you respect guys' offseasons.

Q. Who did you see recently?

DEREK SHELTON: I've seen Buck, Royce, Jeffers. I didn't see Pablo. I'll see Pablo probably in the next month because Pablo was out of the country. And Joe, I was going to go see Joe, but he had a baby. I didn't go see Joe. The day I was going to go see Joe, he said, "Claire's due tomorrow." Yeah, I don't think I'm going to. But I have talked to him numerous times.

It's one of those things, this is surprising, but baseball players have lives outside of like what goes on and they



had other things going on. I wanted to be respectful of that.

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