

MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 8, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

San Diego Padres

Manager Craig Stammen

Press Conference



Q. Let's start generally. Craig, what's it been like for you getting off and working as manager the last month?

CRAIG STAMMEN: It's been a lot busier than being a special assistant. I think it's been exciting talking to all the players, talking to staff, getting our staff organized and put in place. It's been a big part of the off-season. Then also organizing player plans and what these guys are going to be doing in the off-season to get us ready for Spring Training and get ready for the season.

Q. How was your trip to the DR, and why was that so important for you, and what came out of it?

CRAIG STAMMEN: It was a lot of fun. It was the first time I'd ever been there. It was an experience for me to see what so many of my teammates, where they live and how they grew up and how important baseball is to that country.

Then we drove all over the place and got to see different cities and different places. We got to visit with Fernando and Loriano, Wandy, Randy Vásquez. Saw Campusano playing. And we got to see our DSL complex, which is absolutely amazing. It made me very proud to be a Padre visiting that complex and how they take care of our young men that are in our organization at that level.

Q. What came out of the meeting with Fernando from your perspective?

CRAIG STAMMEN: From my perspective, I realized he's really, really good at baseball. We hit with him one of the days, and I'm like this is amazing what he can do. From a simple even hitting off the tee, you can tell he's special at that too. He's not just an ordinary player. He's a special player, a special person.

He had his chef cook for us. We ate in his house. It was a blast. He took care of us like we were just friends coming over for a dinner. And then we talked some baseball, talked about how we thought the team could get better, how he personally could get better. I thought it was a great

conversation and set us off right for the off-season and to be ready for the season.

Q. Just making sure you expected him and Manny to be participating in the WBC during Spring Training?

CRAIG STAMMEN: That's up to them. I think my expectation at that point is both those guys are going to be on that team. I know they're excited to play for their country and they're big pieces of that team too, of their success. Looking forward to watching those guys play in those types of games, those playoff atmosphere games that will only get them ready for us when we have that opportunity.

Q. There was some talk in '23 about guys going and participating and maybe that setting the team back just a little bit in preparation, but still it's great for guys to go play for their countries. Have you talked about that?

CRAIG STAMMEN: There's definitely pros and cons to that. Those guys are not going to be with us for a little while, and that chemistry that you try to build throughout Spring Training isn't probably as good. But it also opens up opportunities for other players to lead like Jackson Merrill, Gavin Sheets, Jake Cronenworth. Those guys can kind of take the reins in Spring Training and get the training rolling so that, when those guys come back, they're like, holy crap, everything's in a good spot. We've just got to join in and do our thing.

If we can accomplish that, that's when we know we nailed Spring Training.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about relievers might convert to starters. Is there any progress on that?

CRAIG STAMMEN: I don't know if you were talking about me or players on our team. I wish I could have done that. We got a lot of good pitchers in our bullpen that we can pitch in numerous innings and a lot of different parts of the game.



As far as starting, I think we're still having those conversations but leaning towards those guys staying in current roles and just being valuable assets that we deploy through different parts of the game.

Q. Mason and Adrian specifically, how well they pitched in relief, how big of a factor is that in those talks given what they can do?

CRAIG STAMMEN: To me, that's the biggest factor because when you take someone that's the best at what they do and put them in a completely different role, you don't know if they're still going to be the best or they're going to be a shell of themselves or somewhere in between.

It's a risky proposition, one, health-wise and just performance-wise. I think using those guys strategically in the bullpen is probably what's best for us. It's best for them also. I think that's what they want to do, and that's a big piece of this too. The player knows what he really wants to do and what he's going to be best at.

I can tell you as a player I wanted to start, but I knew I was going to struggle at it. I was much better suited for the bullpen. That's a good home for me. I'm not saying those two guys are comparable to me, but when you have that mindset, it's much easier to have that success in a role you feel comfortable with.

We've tried Adrian in a starting role before. He had different variants of success. We put him in the bullpen, and he's been dominant. I think keeping him in a dominant place is going to be important for the Padres.

Q. That said, you need starting pitchers. What's your outlook there? How big of a need is that?

CRAIG STAMMEN: It's a need. I think depth-wise we're definitely not where we want to be in that spot. Having more pitchers that are capable of starting is definitely important for us. We also value the guys that we currently have. We've got five guys that we feel can be very good and have been very good in the Major Leagues.

I'm not going to discredit those guys at all and say we need somebody that's better than them. They could very well be in our starting five and could pitch a lot -- and, honestly, whoever we do -- if we were able to sign somebody or trade for somebody, those guys are going to have to pitch meaningful innings anyway. And they're very valuable for us.

We've had those conversations in the off-season, and those guys are ready for Spring Training and put their best

foot forward.

Q. Have you settled on anything for David Morgan? You talked about maybe stretching out his innings.

CRAIG STAMMEN: Yeah, same conversation as Mason and Adrian. I think pitching him out of the bullpen is probably the best for him. He's going to be a weapon. He's going to take another step forward as a second-year Major Leaguer. He knows kind of the lay of the land. He knows the workload that's required. He knows what he's got to do to take care of his body. I think having him settle into one of those leverage roles is going to be perfect for him.

Q. Are a lot of the conversations about Miller, Morejon, Morgan, the idea of them stretching out, is a lot of that maybe also centered around kind of what happens before you get to Spring Training from an off-season standpoint?

CRAIG STAMMEN: Yeah, exactly. Those guys are all throwing already. Some of them are throwing off the mound. So for those guys to be prepared for that, there's a whole different -- not a whole different -- but a little bit more of training that they've got to be able to do and that's required.

It's just a little bit different process of building your arm strength up and being ready to hit Spring Training and pitch more than just one inning, but pitch a couple innings.

The other part of that too is those guys pitched a ton of innings for us last year. We've got to be careful of pushing them a little too hard at the beginning of Spring Training but getting them ready so they're peaking when Spring Training ends.

Q. If I could just ask generally, you've been around Jackson Merrill pretty much as he's come up and you've seen him grow. And his first season was fantastic, his second season a little stop/start, still very solid. What are you expecting out of him in year three?

CRAIG STAMMEN: That guy's a stud. I'm expecting him to be the stud he is. Great rookie year. Last year was kind of hit or miss with the injuries. The concussion, just coming back from those injuries was tough on him. I think at the end of the season, we saw who Jackson was and how he can bounce back from adversity. We're expecting great things from him this year.

He's going to be a stud in our lineup, somebody we rely on and count on, not just from on-field performance, but just



his attitude, mentality and leadership in the clubhouse.

Q. When did you realize he had those traits?

CRAIG STAMMEN: I think honestly one of the things that opened my eyes to him is when I went on a rehab assignment to Lake Elsinore, and they were doing pitcher's fielding practice, and he was playing shortstop, and he was running the show as an 18-year-old. You could immediately tell that he was the leader of that squad, and they were a very good team that year. I believe they got to the playoffs. I forget if they won or not. I think they did.

They won the California League that year, and he was one of the biggest parts of that. His leadership playing the shortstop position, you could tell he had control of what was going on. He was able to get those pitchers to do what he needed when they were fielding ground balls and doing a 1-6-3. If it hit him in the chest, he was talking about it.

That's what he brings to the table. Maybe as a young player, you're a little bit worried about ruffling feathers with some of the veteran players. I think getting into year three, all that stuff is kind of gone, and he can be himself.

Q. How much are you expecting Darvish to be around the team this season?

CRAIG STAMMEN: I expect him to be around the team a lot. Specifically him and Randy Vásquez have a really tight, close relationship. In fact, when I was in the DR, Randy said Darvish is texting him every day. By the time Darvish wakes up in California, Randy said, I've already got my workout done. So he keeps telling me that I'm not doing anything. They have a fun banter back and forth.

But Yu was very instrumental in Randy's season last year, of it getting better as the season went on, with game planning and knowing how to take care of his body. He's going to be a huge asset for us, not just with Randy, but the entire team, specifically the pitching staff.

Q. Can Darvish copy your mechanics?

CRAIG STAMMEN: Yu probably can although my mechanics aren't really ones you want to copy. So he'll be like, nah, we're not doing that.

Q. Is it your understanding that he intends to try to pitch again after this couple of years?

CRAIG STAMMEN: Yeah, I think so. I would not put anything past Yu Darvish. That guy has accomplished so many things in our game. Like you said, he can imitate

every pitcher. He can throw left-handed bullpens. He can throw left-handed curveballs. That guy is an amazing man, and he's been an amazing baseball player for a long time.

The work that he puts in, how articulate he is and how detailed he is with what he does on a daily basis, he's going to come back from this injury. Whether he and his family decide whether he wants to pitch anymore, that will be up to him, but I know he can do it.

Q. Left-handed footballs too? Spirals?

CRAIG STAMMEN: He can do anything. Joe Musgrove could throw left-handed spirals too. Those guys are way more athletic than I ever was. I can do things one-sided kind of good. Those guys can do both sides really good.

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