

MLB Winter Meetings

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Houston Astros

Manager Joe Espada

Press Conference

Q. I think you said at some point Correa would be somebody you would talk to as the offseason went on, moves you make and everything. What were your conversations with him and what does he view this team as you piece things together?

JOE ESPADA: We met a few times during the offseason. We've had lunch a few times and we've talked about not only the team and Spring Training, but obviously our families and just making sure that we all are on the same page, empowering our players to have kind of a say in Spring Training mostly and in the direction that we're going to go.

But he's very involved in my plans for the season. And just want to include him in our conversation the same way I include the rest of our players.

Q. What kind of role do you see I guess -- a lot might have to do with what happens the next couple of weeks but Zach Cole, what he showed last year, do you think he's ready to step up take a bigger role for you?

JOE ESPADA: I feel comfortable giving not only Zach but some of our young players -- we are going to give him a longer look in Spring Training. I think not only they showed that they could play at our level but they did it in an environment where we were in the middle of a playoff hunt, and they were able to handle that very well. And performance was better than what we all expected.

So I am really excited about what these players can do. And I am going to give those guys an opportunity to play a lot in Spring Training and give them an opportunity to make the club.

Q. You've been pretty forthright (indiscernible). With young players like that if you're going to carry them --

JOE ESPADA: Give them an opportunity to play.

Q. You want them to play everyday. Is that still your



mindset going in? If these guys do pop in camp you want them to play every day?

JOE ESPADA: Yeah, and I feel the same way. That's the player development side of me, that I view these players as everyday players you become the everyday player you get everyday reps. So if we can do that, we'll do that.

It's early in the offseason where we are working through all these things, but I do envision some of these players taking over some of those every day roles in the near future.

Q. Added some coaches to your staff. What did you guys like about Ethan Katz, and how do you envision that dynamic working with Josh?

JOE ESPADA: My conversations with Ethan during the entire process were really good. I was very impressed from the very beginning. My conversations with other people around the industry say some really great things about him.

So once we sat down and I went to the interview process, he caught my attention right away. His ability to connect with veteran pitchers but also with young pitchers which we are having right now in our organization. I saw when he had the veteran core at the time and then transitioning the transitioning to the young starters and the job he did, something that caught my attention. That's something that we are doing now at the organization.

So I spent some time asking him about those things, but he answered all the questions. There was conviction behind his answers. Smart guy. I think him and Josh would be a really good duo.

Q. Will it be the same setup -- will Ethan be in the bullpen and Josh be in the dugout or both in the dugout?

JOE ESPADA: No, Ethan will be in the bullpen, Josh will be in the dugout.

Q. Explain a little bit about wanting more of a

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hierarchy or clear-cut roles coaching side how you put that together. But from your perspective, how do you envision the message being delivered now?

JOE ESPADA: I'm very excited about that trio. Obviously Victor Rodriguez will -- he'll lead the pack. He's the main hitting coach. Victor Rodriguez is someone I've known for a very long time. The work he's done with veteran players and young players, both with Guardians and in San Diego, he's a proven winner.

It's someone who I am very excited to lead our hitting department. Anthony Iapoce, I've also known him a long time. He used to be with the Miami Marlins. I'm excited because he's a really good glue with Victor and having Dan Hennigan as the hitting coordinator. He's going to be our hitting director. Danny is going to be more focused on the game planning, the strategy. He's the bio mechanic, I like to call him. He really knows how that swing mechanics work.

So having all those three guys working together is important. My job is to when I sat with him is this how I want this department to be run. This is who I'm going to go to when I need X and when I need, this is who I'm going to go to. So I've been spending some time with him the last couple of weeks making sure that the specific things that I want done in that area to get done.

Q. How vital is a healthy Alvarez to your team next year? He swung the bat so well when he came back before the knee injury and seemed he carried you at some points. Getting him for a full season, what would that --

JOE ESPADA: I think that's going to be one of our goals is how we keep Yordan Alvarez healthy. Obviously the DH, it's something that I'm going to focus and really try to get him to spend most of his season there. We do have some depth in our organization, in our team. We can move some guys around.

But keeping Jordan healthy, I think DHing will be a good spot for him. Obviously he can also play some right. But keeping Yordan in the lineup for a long number of games is crucial to us.

Q. Your intention to keep Yordan at DH primarily, what's that mean for left field and how does Altuve fit into that? He played so many different positions last year. How do you view Altuve and left field?

JOE ESPADA: We're having those conversations right now because I think Altuve showed that he could play some left. But also one of my goals is to keep Altuve in the

lineup and how to keep Altuve healthy to play a big amount of games.

So right now, if you ask me specifically how our Opening Day lineup will look like, I can't tell you that, but we're working towards that. But health for me is my main focus. I think we're going to go into Spring Training, you guys will see a different setup. And we're going to do some things differently where we keep our guys be more efficient process, be more specific, get there, get your work in and try to get them off their feet so they can rest and recover because health is going to be my main focus once we get down to west palm.

Q. I think Dana said you spent time or talked to Brice Matthews lately. What's he doing, what's his offseason process?

JOE ESPADA: We actually spent Friday and Saturday with Bryce. He came, and we did a nice clinic in Austin for some of our fans and some of my friends up there. So he drove up and we spent some time. We talked about next season and my expectations, and I highlighted how impressed I was with what he did this year at the Major League level.

I think, second base, he played an above-average defense. And the bat we're excited about. He's dynamic. He can run. Hit for power. But I see him as being someone that can take over at some point and be one of those pieces that can help us win games for many years.

Q. Will it be hard for him to get everyday depth considering the depth you have on your infield?

JOE ESPADA: He's going to go to Spring Training. I'm going to give him some at-bats early. And we're going to let his play answer some of those questions. But I am excited about him and a lot of our young players.

Q. At the GM meetings, Dana said that Cam's going to have to come to Spring Training and basically have to win a spot again. How do you think he'll take that challenge, and what did you see from him in the second half that maybe you want him to go into this offseason and improve upon?

JOE ESPADA: I think Cam had a really good first season at the Major League level. He came out swinging the bat really well. He was a finalist for Golden Glove, so we know where he's at defensively. There's some adjustment that he needs to make. We gave him goals for him to meet leading into Spring Training, and we expect him to do that.

Just like Cam and some of our younger outfielders, some

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of our younger players, they're going to come in, continue to compete and improve themselves at the Major League level.

But me sitting here and telling you -- again, like I mentioned, this is going to be our starting lineup, this is the 26 guys that I'm going to take in March to open up at home against the Angels, I think that's very premature for me to do right now.

Q. Understanding the roster can still change, is it a viable possibility that Altuve can go in this season as the primary second baseman, is that something you would consider?

JOE ESPADA: I'm considering that. Obviously we know that's his prime -- he's played that position for a long period of time. So, yes, he will play some second base.

But again, I want to have conversations with Altuve. I want Altuve to be 100 percent entering Spring Training, and he's getting there. And once we get there, I'll sit down with Altuve like I do every offseason and we'll discuss how we're going to move forward.

Q. How do you feel about -- obviously you have to feel pretty good about the back end of your bullpen. But how do you feel about some of those guys last year that stepped up for you, and how do you feel about the state and the depth of your bullpen right now?

JOE ESPADA: King and Okert. Lefties, both had a ton of success against right-handed pitching. We had guys like De Los Santos and Ort, who did a nice job there in the fifth, sixth inning. And let's not forget about the young, the (indiscernible) and all the young kids that came up and gave us some big innings being a bridge to the back end of our bullpen. So I feel really good.

My conversations with Dana, we're always looking for ways to improve our bullpen. I mentioned this, and I continue to mention this, I'm always looking for ways to take that fourth out of Abreu's hands early in the season, and Hader, trying to keep those guys healthy.

That's going to be a focus early on in the season for me. So getting some of those guys that can do it and I can build trust for me to give them the ball is something that we're in conversations with some of these guys.

Q. Understanding it's December, but given Hader's injury to end the season, would you be more reticent to go to Hader for more than three outs?

JOE ESPADA: That's what I just said. I think at some

point in the season that's something that, if the situation calls for, he's done it.

But going into April, May, June, so early in the year, is something that I really would like to stay away from from him and Abreu. So just to keep those guys healthy. So looking at some of these young pitchers early in the season and giving them a good look in Spring Training, who can pitch in those leverage spots is something that I'll be focused on.

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