

MLB Winter Meetings

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New York Mets

Manager Carlos Mendoza

Press Conference



Q. What was your reaction to getting Devin Williams?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Excited. I got the call from David, and I was excited. You're talking about one of the best relievers for the past few years, a guy that's used to pitching in high leverage and closing experience. Yeah. We're looking for help down there, and the fact that we got one here, I was excited.

Q. Have you had any interaction with Pete in the off-season? How do you feel? How much do you want Pete back? How big a piece is he?

CARLOS MENDOZA: I texted a couple of times with him, but obviously giving him his space, kind of like the same process that we went through last year. As far as how much do I want him, of course I want him. We're talking about a guy that -- as a manager, his ability to post every day. You don't have to worry about who's playing first base and who's going to be hitting in the middle of your lineup. You can't beat that.

Again, he earned it. He's going through the process right now. I think David's been very vocal how much we want him, but we'll see how it goes here.

Q. Is it at all difficult from your chair? Obviously he's a free agent. He has the right to go out and talk to everyone he wants to, but is it difficult to kind of sit back and know that it is a process and he's going to go talk to other teams, he's going to go do this and that?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Yeah, I guess the more you do it, the more you're used to it now. Last year I was kind of like waiting, waiting for that text from David or a call. Now you've just got to let it play out.

There's a lot of back-and-forth from so many people that, as a manager, you've just got to sit back and wait.

Q. Going into the off-season, did you expect the kind of -- you guys traded the cornerstone for the franchise, fan favorite. Were you surprised by that, or did you

expect that kind of move to be done?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Not really. It wasn't an easy decision. When David gave me a call, I kind of paused for a little bit, to be honest with you, because of how much Brandon represented and what he meant to the team. But at the same time, when you're talking about a guy coming back like Marcus Semien with a lot of the same traits, qualities, makeup, proven winner, you're like, okay.

Also, gives us the ability to improve our defense on the right side of the infield. Yeah, it was a tough one. Wishing Brandon nothing but the best because, as a manager, he represented everything. But again, excited to have a player of that caliber like Marcus.

Q. When Semien now occupying second base, how do you view third base? Obviously second base you could use that to get some of the other guys playing time, but now you don't have that much of a luxury.

CARLOS MENDOZA: I think Brett Baty took that step forward last year. We had tryouts there between Mark Vientos, Brett Baty, Ronny Mauricio at times. I think Brett Baty got comfortable and played really well on both sides of the field, defensively, offensively.

Going into camp, I think as we sit here right now, you can say that Brett will get the majority of the playing time.

That doesn't mean that Mark Vientos won't get any reps there. He's preparing for everything. We know how much he means to the team, and we'll see what happens. But as of right now, Brett Baty will get a lot of the opportunities.

Q. When you have a situation like that and you have players who you maybe don't see an everyday spot for, how do you communicate to them they're still an important part of the team?

CARLOS MENDOZA: There's constant communication with them, not only during the season but during the off-season. I met with Vientos a few weeks ago face to face to check in with him. A lot can happen between

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March and the opening day. When you get to the regular season, you have to communicate with those guys day in and day out. At times they're not going to like it because they want to be in the lineup, they want to play.

But just be transparent and honest with them, that's how I'll continue to approach that situation.

Q. Vientos said that he's taking equal defensive reps this winter at third and at first. Are you anticipating him playing more third base, especially if Alonso doesn't sign?

CARLOS MENDOZA: We're preparing for every scenario. We're not throwing third base out the window. He's working a lot at first base. A lot can happen. The one thing I tell him is controlling the things you can control. That's putting yourself in the best position and show up to camp and ready to compete.

Q. How do you create chemistry and cohesion in the clubhouse when you have such a big roster overhaul but also such a big change to your coaching staff as well?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Talking about the coaching staff, yeah, we lost so many coaches and good people. Not easy decisions, especially from the chair where I'm sitting as a manager. You develop so many relationships with these guys, they become part of your family.

At the same time, I'm excited about the coaching staff and some of the guys we were able to bring on board. Talking about continuity and the team chemistry, we brought up four guys from player development, guys that are so used to our players, our processes, our system, their relationship with players.

So I was very proud of the fact that you're not only promoting players, but you're also giving a chance to some of the coaches that are grinding in the Minor Leagues. That provides a lot of that continuity and that team chemistry that you're talking about.

Q. What was your reaction to Adam Ottavino's criticism?

CARLOS MENDOZA: I'm not going to get in the back-and-forth there. The one thing I will tell you is as an organization our job is to put together a roster that is going to help us reach the ultimate goal, which is win a World Series.

In order for us to do that, we need our players healthy, playing in the field, performing at the highest level, whether

they're position players, whether pitchers, starters, relievers.

When you look at the numbers, the facts are right there. We were probably one of the teams that protected the bullpen guys better than anybody. You're talking about we were able to do that with so little length that we were getting from the starters.

I don't think this is a Mets issue. I think this is an industry that this year we were dealing with a lot of injuries. But like I said, I'm comfortable with the process too. When you're talking about guys, who's available, there's so many people, so many conversations that happen throughout the day.

As soon as you get to the ballpark, you're talking to the pitching coaches, you're talking to the trainers, you're talking to the players. Once the game starts, you have a pretty good idea who's available and who's not. That's when I make the decisions there.

But I feel pretty comfortable in saying that we are one of the better teams that protect the relievers.

Q. Carlos, a year ago you guys had just signed Juan Soto at this time. You're coming off a deep October run. This year is a lot different. You already made a pretty big clubhouse trade with Nimmo. The clubhouse staff is new. Does it feel very unsettled now as you guys are trying to get right in? I know it's early in the off-season, but how much of a different feel is it this year this off-season compared to last? It just seems like the momentum has been stopped a little bit.

CARLOS MENDOZA: Yeah. And when you don't play well, that happens. A team that had so much expectations, and we didn't even make it to the playoffs.

Yeah. Free agents, coaches, but here we are. We have a really good opportunity, and you just have to embrace the challenge. I'm excited about that and really looking forward to get going.

Q. Along those same lines, how do you assess kind of your job as a manager last season obviously coming up short? Is there anything you could have done a little bit differently?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Not good enough. When you're talking about a team that went into the season with so many expectations, we fell short. And that falls on me as a manager, and I've got to be better.

When you're talking about assessing the job, I fell short.

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Here we are working towards the goal of not only playing in October, but deep into October.

Q. What specifically do you think you can be better at?

CARLOS MENDOZA: At everything. You know, relationships, communication, processes. 2024 was really, really good, and you fell short. You've got to take a minute and sit back here and look yourself in the mirror. How can you get better? I think it starts with that. I've always been a guy that takes pride in communicating and creating an environment where people are really looking forward to come to work.

When you're not winning games and when it gets hard, you've got to take a step back and reflect and make those decisions like where can I get better? And here we are.

Q. There are reports of tension in the clubhouse, especially during the latter half of the season. Were you aware of that? And do you believe it was an issue for you guys?

CARLOS MENDOZA: It's amazing. I'm not going to get into what happens in the clubhouse. Obviously it stays there. Now, for the past few weeks, it feels like we were fighting pretty much every day. Nobody talked about our clubhouse when we got to the second week of June with the best record in baseball. We have the best clubhouse. And then we started losing, and now everybody's talking about, oh, some of the issues.

Like we had a professional clubhouse. Guys respected each other. Guys enjoyed being around each other. We just didn't play well in the field, and that translated into whatever people call vibe, team chemistry.

But at the end of the day, guys showed up, and they respected each other.

Q. Where do you see Ron Mauricio fitting in, and how are you guys going to be able to get him enough reps given all the infielders?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Look, again, it's the same case that I'm talking about like Mark Vientos, controlling the things he can control. It's good to see him playing winter ball and playing well. I just saw him last week and had breakfast with him. He's in a very good place. He's got to come in and compete for a spot on our roster. There's flexibility there.

I think the biggest thing for him to be healthy. If we get a healthy version of Ron Mauricio, he's an impactful player.

Q. Is there anywhere beyond second, third, and short that you're looking at him defensively or are those three positions it for him?

CARLOS MENDOZA: If he's healthy, you're talking about a versatile player that can play short, third, and second base.

Q. You talked some about coaching turnover. With Antoan Richardson gone, do you expect your base running to be the same?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Look, Anton was a really good coach. I considered him as a friend. Well, he's my enemy now. He's with the Braves. I'm excited about Juvie Gomez. This is a guy that is very respectful in the game, a lot of knowledge, good people skills, and he earned it. He earned the opportunity to be in the Big Leagues. As far as like the base running goes, I feel good with the group of people that are going to be able to impact our players and continue to help improving their game.

Q. David has talked about how you guys are prioritizing run prevention kind of as a theme throughout this winter. Was that something that went into consideration when building the staff, just in terms of the other pieces maybe on the defensive side?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Yeah. We were pretty aggressive, and we went after Kai Correa. This is a guy known around the industry as one of the best defensive coaches in the league. He comes with a lot of experience coaching in those areas, especially on the defensive side, infield defense, also experience as a bench coach.

So when we got Don -- and I remember having those conversations with David -- we knew that we needed to identify some of those names. Kai kind of stuck out, and we were pretty aggressive there.

Q. When it comes to run prevention, how does that affect how you change Spring Training or how do you approach Spring Training this year?

CARLOS MENDOZA: It starts with the personnel, right? We're talking about pitching and defense. We added a pretty good second baseman there now in Marcus.

But as far as like Spring Training goes, yeah, we might do things a little different, but we also stress fundamentals. We always stress attention to details. We're not going to shy away from that. It's not like we're going to be doing extra work. I think it starts with the personnel, and we're



doing that right now.

Q. Is giving Juan Soto bats at DH a consideration?

CARLOS MENDOZA: He doesn't like DH'ing (laughter). So he takes pride on being a good defender, and he will continue to do so. I'm pretty sure schedule will dictate. Sometimes if dealing with physical stuff that you're trying to keep his bat in the lineup, the DH might come into play. But if he's feeling good enough, he's going to be out there in right field.

Q. What were the reports you got on Carson Benge last year?

CARLOS MENDOZA: I watched a lot of films, talked to a lot of our people in player development. Exciting player, a guy that impacts the baseball, controls the strike zone, pretty good defender. The makeup, there's a lot to like about this kid. I keep hearing his name since we drafted him, and here he is putting himself in a position where he's going to show up in Spring Training ready to compete for a spot on our roster.

Q. With Soto, do you think he can be better with a full year under his belt not having to worry about injury in the off-season? Do you think he can improve in year 2 after a really good season in year 1, like having a full off-season with the team instead of changing through the off-season?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Yeah, look, this is a guy that -- he's determined to be one of the greatest players that ever played the game. Like I said earlier, he wants to be coached. He wants to be challenged. I just saw him last week, and he's pretty impressive with his routine and the way he prepares every day.

He's not satisfied with personal numbers. He wants to win. He wants to win a World Series. That's his goal, and he's working towards that. So I'm excited about year two from Juan Soto here with the Mets, and I can't wait.

Q. The trio of young arms that came up at the end of the year with Sproat and Tom McLain, are the training wheels off there? Are they fully Big League starters in your mind?

CARLOS MENDOZA: Are they fully starters right now?

Q. At the Big League level. Do you anticipate them contributing the full season?

CARLOS MENDOZA: They're going to play a big role in our season. Talking about having depths, things like that.

But who knows what's going to happen from here to whenever we report at Spring Training, once we get to New York, these guys, they're excited. They show flashes. Obviously McLain is really good for us. Sproat is outstanding. And Jonah has ups and downs. All three are pretty impressive, and we're counting on all three of them.

Q. What do you think went into the decision to let go of Jeremy Hefner? He'd been so well regarded here and done a good job with the pitchers.

CARLOS MENDOZA: Yeah, not an easy one. Not an easy one. I enjoyed working with him. I consider him a friend obviously, and he's well respected within the industry.

But when you have the type of season that we had, whether it was injury or performance, tough decisions are going to be made, and we had to make some tough decisions. Obviously I'm not going to get into the details, but it wasn't an easy one.

I knew he wasn't going to take long. He's now in our division. I enjoyed working with him.

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