

# MLB Winter Meetings

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**Toronto Blue Jays**

**Manager John Schneider**

Press Conference



## 2025 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS ORLANDO

Coverage Presented By

CohnReznick 

**Q. How would you describe the process of decompressing from all you'd experienced and then transitioning into the off-season mode in a really compressed time frame?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: It took a while. I think I'm finally at the point where you can kind of peel back and reflect on the good and not just the, wow, what just happened of Game 7.

It took a little bit of time. It took a little bit of avoiding watching highlights or anything like that for a while. But I think realizing how we kind of moved the needle forward and what certain players did, whether Barger, Ernie, Vlad. I mean, there was a lot of great stuff going on. So trying to just focus on that now and how we're getting better in 2026.

**Q. How much during that time did you communicate with players, leave them to their own devices? How did you navigate that?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: A little bit of both. I tried to talk to them before they all left for sure, then slowly starting to kind of get back engaged with them. I think everyone kind of processes that a little bit differently. First time for, I think, almost everyone to kind of go through that Game 7 of a World Series and be that close.

So wanted to give some space, but starting to kind of get reconnected with the guys. I feel like everyone's in a decent frame of mind right now.

**Q. How did it feel for you as a manager to be part of the Cease signing so early in the off-season to get that momentum going?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, it happened really quick. I think just the initial Zoom call with him, you could tell he was pretty intrigued with what we were talking about. We obviously value him pretty highly, and it just kind of lined up.

After the initial communication -- really I think the deal was done in about a week -- which is really, really rare at that point in the off-season. I think it's important to keep some of that momentum building, building, and thrilled that he's part of our rotation.

We've been in love with his stuff for a while, and I think there's a real opportunity for him to kind of continue to get better with what we can offer him.

**Q. When you look at your roster now, where are the areas that you think you can still get a little bit better?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think bullpen sticks out a little bit and probably a bat of some sort. We're coming off of a really, really good offensive year in a lot of different ways that we did it and scored runs. I'm booking -- there's a time we did it without Tony, a time with did it without Bo for a little bit.

You feel good about your offense, but adding would be nice. I think that's a priority. I think adding another high leverage bullpen arm is another one.

**Q. Over the last five years or so, you guys have made a lot of additions through free agency with some big contracts. How have you seen that evolution during your time here of guys being interested or into the idea of coming here? Has it stayed the same, or has there been a noticeable change with the success you guys have had this year?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah. You can see it swinging to the other end of not just, wow, you guys have some cool stuff and some bells and whistles and you've won. I think you can kind of see it going to people kind of seeking you out a little bit. The resources and the finances obviously help, and I think that word spreads.

I think getting to the World Series and being close to winning it obviously helps too. And having an elite culture that guys can be brought into, I think resonates with the players. You can definitely feel a difference this off-season going back to last year and the year before.

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**Q. What are some of the things you guys messaged to Dylan in terms of how you guys might help him take the next step to be consistent that might have helped him make his decision?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think he's a really, really inquisitive mind, if you will. We tried to kind of poke him with questions. Simple things like how has your fastball grip evolved? It hasn't really, we learned, in quite a few years. Okay. Have you tried this? He got intrigued with some of the things we were talking about. I think there's some delivery stuff that has been a little bit inconsistent, like every pitcher, over the last couple of years.

Hearing how aware of all those things he was and the openness to even start saying, hey, let's start thinking more about a change-up that I've thrown a little bit and how can you help me develop it? I think that kind of caught his attention as well.

I think Toronto is a perfect place for him to kind of spread his wings a little bit as he gets a little bit older, the city. Kind of those things and the fact that we have the people that not only know that stuff but can really coach it, I think was appealing.

**Q. How much do you think the progress that you've seen -- you've had guys like Kevin Gausman, Chris Bassitt, Robbie Ray, Kikuchi -- in the past help on that front?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think that Pete and Sam and Graham do a great job. They're kind of like the three-headed monster. We identify certain consistencies with pitchers like that with swing and miss stuff and how you get it a little bit better. It could be something the catcher is doing, could be a mechanical thing, could be a grip thing, it could be a mindset thing. I think having different people attack those areas is really important.

Having guys that have had success with similar skill sets, I think players take notice of that too.

**Q. John, one of the strong narratives with the team last year was how tight they were in the clubhouse. With the inevitable turnover part of the roster, what are the things you can do to ensure that remains a strength?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: You've got to rely on the guys. It's funny. We met as a staff last week over at Clearwater Beach, and we talked about that for three days. How did that come to be as strong as it was and what were the things that were done?

I think we have our opinions about it as coaches, but I think asking players like was it really this? Or was it something we didn't see? When a player's going good and he's swinging the bat well or pitching well, you almost want him to document what he's doing at that time, so when he goes off the rails, he can get back to it.

Same with the clubhouse culture, what do you feel you were doing well? What were the players doing? What was I doing? What was my messaging or demeanor like? And just go back to it if you need to.

We spent a lot of time talking about it. At the end of the day, the players live it, the players drive it. I think it becomes the norm. When new players do come in, whether it's Dylan or Cody or whoever it is, they're going to feel welcome to whatever has already been established.

**Q. How have you processed or digested the World Series or have you?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I don't think I ever will, to be honest with you. I think I'll think about it until the day I leave this earth, you know what I mean? Unless you get another opportunity to kind of squash that one.

There's so many things that -- there's plays that get highlighted, right? There's the play at home. There's the Baez catch. There's the home run from Rojas. That's just Game 7.

I think the craziest thing that people don't talk about is the bottom of the eighth inning with Ernie at second and Jiménez is squaring a bunt, he pulls back, slashes, and somehow Max Muncy caught that ball. I think that doesn't get talked about enough.

Every time I kind of go down a rabbit hole, I find myself in a new rabbit hole, to be honest with you. I'm doing it right now. I haven't watched everything. Regular check down on a regular season, game over, next day or that night, boom, you're checking tape, you're running back. I haven't done that yet. I don't know when I will. It will probably involve a beer or two when the kids are asleep so I can throw some stuff against the wall.

We'll see. I'm starting to appreciate it from a fan standpoint. I know I told you guys I try to do that every day, appreciate the baseball part of it, not just the stress of managing it. So looking back at some of those things, you just appreciate it from a game standpoint.

**Q. Do you have to do or say anything with Hoffman or Trey or Shane to make sure that what happened sticks**



with them?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: No. Hoffman took it especially hard after. He was open to me and to the guys. I told him look at your postseason numbers. Look at your first year with us numbers -- which probably get inflated with some home runs that weren't home runs in every park. Hof was elite for me, and there wasn't another guy that I wanted out there in that situation to get four outs to win the World Series.

Me, it was funny, my thought process in the eighth when Max is catching that ball was am I going to walk Shohei in the ninth? I figured the first two, Kiké and Rojas, were kind of outs. Nothing against them, you know what I mean, but just how Hof was throwing. Then that quickly changed -- my thought process quickly changed after the 3-2 slider.

I don't think Hof will have any problems moving on. I don't think Trey will have any problems moving on. I think the way they're going to be welcomed back to the city and to the country is going to be outstanding. Baseball happens. You know what I mean.

I think Biebs threw 11 pitches in that inning, boom, boom, homer, quick out. Hof strikes out Will Smith and gets Ohtani out after the homers. They locked it back in. I think they're going to be just fine going forward. They're going to be better for it.

**Q. We talked earlier about just kind of being a shift or an uptick in player interest, playing for you guys. How has it shown up for you so far this off-season? What makes it noticeable, coming off of what you guys did last year, this is more of a destination spot?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: You hear it a little bit when you start playing these guys in the regular season, when they come into Toronto and what they say about the city and the stadium and the people. Then the off-season, it started obviously later. So maybe the perception for me is that much different because we kind of hit the ground running. You're on Zoom calls with high profile players that are speaking very, very highly of the organization, the facilities, the players that are on the team and how they conduct themselves.

So that's been a shift. I feel like in years past, with some high profile players, it's kind of been us selling us to them, whereas I think the players know what they're getting into as soon as they start talking to us.

**Q. Why do you think that happened? Was it simply a results thing?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think it takes time. I think it's kind of like a slow drip. I remember telling guys three years ago how cool our resources were. You kind of sound like a broken record. When guys start to get into town and see it, they kind of have an "oh wow" moment. That takes time to bleed into everything else.

Getting into the World Series definitely helps. The two teams that are last one standing, they're shoved down everyone's throat, you know what I mean? I think within that it was a likeable team that played the game the right way, and they kind of wanted to see what we're all about.

**Q. The IKF lead is a pretty polarizing topic after the World Series. Whit Merrifield, Justin Turner, some of your players came out really strongly in defense of you guys. How do you view that play now?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: For one, I feel so bad for Izzy for getting all the blame, you know what I mean? Izzy is an unbelievable baseball player. I think peeling back a couple layers, now that I have the platform to talk about it, could we have done a better job of getting him off a little bit? Yeah, another step or two. There's been video of Carlos kind of telling him where to go.

What's not talked about, I think, enough is the fact that Will Smith likes to back-pick to third with left-handed hitters up. It's something we talked about before the series, something that Carlos reminded Izzy of. I think it finally came out -- I think Max Muncy was talking about it a couple of weeks after the World Series -- that they were actually about to put the play on. Or maybe I heard that incorrectly. Or that they at least talked about it.

So it's not runner at third going on contact selling out, if it's a line drive, you're okay with it. It's bases loaded. A, you don't want to get back picked. B, you don't want to get doubled out on a line drive. What are the odds that Varsh is going to line out to third? Fairly low, right? That's just where he doesn't hit the ball.

So could we have done a better job of getting Izzy another step or two down? Yeah, for sure.

I don't really think he could have done much more. People said, could he have run through the plate? Could he have slid head first? I do know from my vantage point, a play like that -- we've all seen it a million times from our view -- in my head, with the way Varsho hit it, I thought one of three things was going to happen.

It was going to be fielded and Rojas falls backward, game over. Fielded, falls, throws a warm burner to the mound, game over. Or field, throw wide of Will Smith, game over.



So when none of those things happened, I can't tell you what was going through my head or out of my mouth at that time. Then to challenge the play, okay, it stands. Within 10 seconds, those same exact thoughts are going through your head on the ball Ernie hit to left.

Again, we're going to use it as a tool to get better. That sounds corny to say. Holy cow, it's the World Series. Yeah, we could have told him to get off a little bit more. It stings. It hurts. I've seen that video 3,000 times, and 1,500 of them it looks like Will's off the plate. In the other half, it looks like he's on. That's how close it was. That's why details matter.

**Q. What's it like for you when you have the entire baseball community, the entire baseball world for a week or two after that, they're all talking about kind of that? Do you try to avoid all that and shut it out?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Again, I try to. When you're experiencing it in realtime -- we had the best view, you know what I mean? I think when you go down that rabbit hole, then you go down the other one, you go down a million more that happened just in Game 7, let alone Game 6 or let alone Game 3, you know what I mean? There's so much that happened in that World Series.

So many firsts, pinch-hit grand slam, back-to-back home runs, 18-inning game. Lost in it is Lauer and Klein, what they did in Game 3. Lost in that is Yamamoto. Who does that? I hope he's still tired. I don't know how you do that.

There's so many things that happened, I try not to just pin it down on one thing.

**Q. Last year you basically had no Santander there. It was an up-and-down season for him with injuries. How much does it impact your planning for this off-season?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yes, Tony is going to be huge for us. Speaking to him end of the year in postseason, battled to get back, just to get back. He wanted to be part of it so bad. He wanted to get off a five-year deal, he wanted to get off on the right foot. So it didn't happen.

He is motivated. He is hungry to get back to the player we know he is. He's a big part of what we're doing. Again, I don't want him -- I've told him this, I don't want you to think you have to do anything you don't do well. You don't have to come back and hit .300 with 50 homers to make up for last year. We need Tony to fit in the way we know he can when we signed him.

**Q. How's his shoulder?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Shoulder is good. Back is good. He's just feeling normal. I was just texting with him last week and a couple days ago. Finally feels normal, so that's a good thing. Just get him in here and have a normal Spring Training hopefully. The notorious low starter that he is, hopefully we can speed the process up and hit the ground running.

**Q. What's your read on Cody Ponce and what he brings and how he fits?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Nothing officially, obviously. When that does happen, hopefully -- we're talking about a guy who has kind of reinvented himself, has kind of stayed up with the times of what certain pitches do, how he can generate swing and miss, and gotten in the strike zone a lot more than he was when he was with Pittsburgh.

That's kind of pitching today. Physical dude. I like the stuff. I like the velo. I think he will fit in with other guys we have who throw change-ups. Even though they're splitters, they look like change-ups or change-ups that look like splitters. I'm learning more and more about the kick change as we go. It looks like a split pitch to me, and he'll have fun talking with Kev and Trey with it.

**Q. Going to be a starter?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Definitely going to be a starter.

**Q. You have a couple of gaps in your coaching staff from last year. Made any progress?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: We're going to announce it later today or soon. But it's finalized. We have filled assistant hitting coaching job. We have kind of back filled Donny's spot in a variety of ways. I'm giving those guys time to finalize with the teams they were with, and you'll have that full list really soon. One is internal, and two from outside.

**Q. Why did Donny leave?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think we had -- I was lucky enough to be, I think, one of the first ones to understand that he was going to be done. This is before the postseason even started. I think the way he put it -- it was so cool because he came in with me, same length of term and things like that, and he said, I've done everything that I can do for you, and you don't need me. I am good with how I'm going to leave this organization.

He did the hitting. He did bench coach. He did so many things. I think that he's at a point in his career where family



is really important to him, and spending time with Louis and Lori is really important to him. And he told me -- he said, I don't know what I'm going to do. He said -- there's probably one opportunity, which you guys have all heard, a really unique opportunity to work with his son and Rob, who he knows really well. If that wasn't the case, he probably would have been a travel ball dad.

I still say he should be a Hall of Fame travel ball dad, and I'm upset that he isn't. The situation worked out to where it was an opportunity that he couldn't pass up, but I think he did it the right way. He put everything he had into every single day. He made my job and life a lot easier.

For me, I'm assuming he's going to say the same thing. I gained a lifelong friend in the time that he was here. I wish him nothing but the best. Can't wait to take him out to dinner at Spring Training.

**Q. Ross expressed an interest at the end of the playoffs to sign you to an extension. How optimistic or hopeful are you of getting things done in the future?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, ver. This is the only place I've been. I think we're enjoying what we have built so far, myself, him, Mark -- and I want them to enjoy it too.

Right now the focus -- we've talked about it briefly, preliminarily, if you want to say that. Right now I want to focus on how we're making our team better. I expect and hope that there's going to be a time when we kind of sit down and talk more about it.

There's nowhere else I'd rather be. I've been here for a long time, and I want to continue to be here for a long time, and Mark and Ross, they both know that.

**Q. You're a player and team first guy, but getting recognized as manager of the year, does that mean anything to you?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, it does. Again, I think it's such a weird award. I was kind of looking back at previous winners, these guys all got fired soon after there. You know what I mean? Maybe second is good.

(Laughter.)

It's a weird award. It is a direct reflection of your team. And I am very fortunate to have awesome players and awesome people. And I'm the one that sits here and talks, so I'm the one that gets recognized. I said, win, lose, or draw, I was the manager of the team of the year in my opinion. That would have been an awesome honor.

I don't think it's something you can deflect, and I think Steve is an unbelievable manager. It was cool to get recognized, but to me, it was cooler to be the manager of the Toronto Blue Jays.

**Q. Do you have an interest about the Japanese players Tatsuya Imai, Munetaka Murakami, and Kazuma Okamoto?**

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I think they're great players. We have interest in great players. Those three guys have definitely been on our radar.

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