

MLB Winter Meetings

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Athletics

Manager Mark Kotsay

Press Conference



2025 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS ORLANDO

Coverage Presented By

CohnReznick 

Q. Talking to David yesterday, obviously about needs this offseason and looking at areas of improving. Kind of points to pitching as maybe an area you're looking at. Obviously you had a nice finish to the last year with a group of pitchers you felt good about. How do you feel -- what maybe needs to happen for, I guess, the next step you guys are trying to take 2026, improvements that can help to get to the goal you want to get to?

MARK KOTSAY: I think if we start with the pitching side of it, right, we talk about the improvements that we made in pitching over the last probably four months, and I think a lot had to actually maybe the improvement we made on defense, and I think it helped in ways outside of just the data type of numbers.

It helped with the confidence that the guys had in being able to being able to execute pitches in the zone and be confident we were going to get outs and be able to defend.

So at any point everyone wants to add pitching, the depth that you need to get through a season, you know? The adversity that takes place throughout the course of the season, if we can add starting pitching, it's only going to help, right?

I think for our club right now, we've seen the transition of the position group over the last two seasons take place, the success that they've had. And no one can argue that against the fact that our position group is our strength.

And I think we're in a position here now where the young, talented pitchers are in a very similar kind of spot. They may be a little bit younger than what our group was, if you look at and identify the guys that we've looked to be impactful pitchers in our future, which Gage Jump and Arnold and Echavarria, and we've got Morales in the big leagues. You've got kids like Morris, Nett, Baez.

So, there's names there. There's a group there that, I think, the development of that group is going to help us and maybe catapult us on the pitching side. But by all

measures, if we can add some pitching, I would welcome it with open arms for sure.

Q. That position player group, obviously Kurtz and Wilson (indiscernible) Rookie of the Year. Can you look back the impact they had and just kind of knowing that those two headline a group that you mentioned just, I guess, how good is that knowing that core is in place here for a while?

MARK KOTSAY: Yeah, and it's great to know that the core group of position guys can possibly be together for an extended period of time, led by a Rookie of the Year and another rookie to finish second in voting.

So really exciting group. Tyler Soderstrom is a really exciting piece of that group. Shea Langeliers is also -- Rooker, Butler -- you get six guys in that core group kind of going forward together, I think that the continuity, the culture can only elevate our success.

And I know that the last three months, four months of the season, outside of that 20-game stretch we went through, we had a legitimate opportunity to make a season really successful. And it was just unfortunate that the adversity that we took on in May really impacted the total number of wins we were able to achieve.

Q. Mentioned potential extensions for maybe some of those young guys. It's kind of a change, I guess, from recent times. We saw last year with guys like Rooker and Butler. What's it like knowing that these talks keep going on and maybe the effort is there to kind of keep these guys around?

MARK KOTSAY: There's a big effort there to keep this group together. There really is. And I know ownership is making that effort, which as you talk about, is a change, right?

If we look at the group prior to this, that you could identify as a group that you would have wanted to move forward with, a group that came together in '17 and '18 and '19.

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The resources weren't there to afford to keep that group together. I think there's a vision and a future here going forward with this group that we were able to at least get those opportunities out in front of these players.

But at the same point, it takes two to come to the table and reach that agreement and make that commitment. And that's going to be ultimately, at the end of the day, the challenge.

These players have had really successful starts to their career, and not that that hurts us, because it really helps us -- but at the same point, at times it can be difficult for a player -- I've sat in those shoes -- to make that commitment prior to really hitting a pinnacle in your career and taking advantage of that opportunity monetarily.

But we're hopeful that we can get it done. And I think we've got two guys that have made that commitment that are really supportive and that will really push to get their teammates on board.

Q. You mentioned the young core, and obviously Wilson and Kurtz have been outstanding, Rooker and Butler and everything. One of the things I'm wondering is Denzel Clarke is amazing defensively, but where do you see him playing next year or so?

MARK KOTSAY: The goal has always been out in center field. The unfortunate injury which led to him not being able to kind of come back and play in, what we want to say is a sufficient amount of games to evaluate his future.

There's a few of those guys in that kind of category. Max Muncy being another one of our young, talented player.

But for us, Denzel solidified an area on the defensive side that we were really lacking to start the season. And it showed. It impacted games. For me, Denzel can be that same player if we can get him on the field for 140 games and let him go out and control center field.

The offensive side is, to me, a bonus. We saw flashes and the athleticism is in there. He was making some great adjustments at the plate.

I think that this coming season, he's got to come to Spring Training healthy and prepared to go out and be that impact player in the middle of the diamond.

Q. One of the bigger offensive transactions was obviously JJ Bleday being no long (indiscernible). How difficult is it to see the guy that showed glimpses but it just didn't come together?

MARK KOTSAY: JJ is an interesting player. And we, as coaches feel, you know, there's a level -- what we always talk about is we want to push the needle forward for players. And, unfortunately, last season we weren't able to accomplish that together with JJ.

This was a decision, I think, where you look at the roster and you look at areas that we felt are a strength, and that is in the outfield with the players that we currently have.

At the end of the day, I think JJ is going to end up in a great place, and hopefully he will have a season that's reflective of his season two years ago. We were just not in a position, I think, to wait for that or to give him that full opportunity with the players that are currently on the 40-man.

Q. In regards to the (indiscernible), looking at the lineup, there's a lot of homegrown talent there. Coming into the season, it's pretty strong (indiscernible) on the pitching side and the hitting side. How does it feel as a manager, knowing the guys coming up next are in a good position and developed the right way as they come up to the majors?

MARK KOTSAY: It's great. We went through that process where we gave players a lot of opportunity, a lot of leash to go through the ups and downs of their seasons. And I think what's exciting now is that there isn't that opportunity to go through those ups and downs -- that there's enough talent on this roster, there's enough talent in this organization at the Major League level to force guys to have to really go out and perform to push them out of their spots.

And that says something about the guys that are there currently that have established themselves now.

We always talk about track records, and these guys have started to put some numbers together that are track records. And when you can have five, six guys in the lineup that go out and play every day -- we talked about this -- being able to write a consistent lineup also helps in the challenges of a season.

But it's exciting to think about this upcoming season and our opportunity that lies in front of us to go out and have an impactful year and a winning season.

Q. Also getting Ryan Christenson, someone that has familiarity in the organization, how big is it to have him (indiscernible)?

MARK KOTSAY: The lineup card is going to look good, that's for sure, because I know Darren Bush isn't going to



do it. (Laughter).

But it's great to see a familiar face come back. He bleeds green, and the opportunity to bring him back presented itself this offseason. He's a detailed type person. He's obviously been a bench coach for eight years. And I think he's going to have some impact with us.

The position he's going to coach in with the outfielders and a first base role. I think that's going to have immediate impact in the way we run the bases and the way we play the outfield.

Q. With the seasons that Nick and Jacob had, how can you push the needle forward and help them avoid the dreaded sophomore slump that we hear about?

MARK KOTSAY: I think for both these young players, obviously there's going to be a high level of expectation on them. They'll probably put that on themselves. But I think our group does a good job with kind of insulating each individual on the roster. I think Rook takes a lot of that and shoulders it himself.

So they've got some players that have been through it with Rook, with even Butler last season, going through a little bit of, whatever you call it, sophomore slump, or maybe not having the type of year he had the previous year. But still, that 2020 season, you can't just turn your head on that.

But Jacob and Nick have both had a high level of expectation on them throughout their short window in the minor leagues or the team they played on in college, and I think they've handled it really well.

That being said, they're going to have to make adjustments. The league is going to make adjustments. And I'm confident that they're both athletic enough and they're both diligent enough to recognize those weaknesses and make those adjustments and continue on a trajectory of success.

Q. On a team starting its upswing, do you get questions or have discussions with your guys about how aggressive are we going to be in the offseason?

MARK KOTSAY: Rook texts me quite a bit. Rook throws some names at me even. And that's welcomed. I always tell our guys, hey, you pick up a phone, you text me any thoughts you've got. During the offseason, I'm here for you. I'm here to help, I'm here to talk about it.

Yes, these players are always at this point looking to add and make us better, which is great. That's their mindset. I think for us as an organization, we look at the areas of

need, per se. And even though we have some homegrown players, as we talk about, in the Max Muncy and Darrell Hernández and Brett Harris and Zack Gelof, that mix of guys competing for that second and third base spot, that really, on our roster, we look at having to fulfill a need.

They're also aware that if we have ability to go out and identify a player that has a track record that can come in and impact either of those two spots on the field, that they're all for it.

Q. (Indiscernible) soon to be highly aggressive in the winter, the timeline?

MARK KOTSAY: I mean, for us it's difficult. And we're still in a situation where we're in Sacramento for two more years. We're still in that trending-up phase, right?

I think had we maybe not gone through a season where we had some adversity in May and finished better, that maybe there's a perception that we were really ready to go.

But I do think that we're right there and we have an opportunity in this division to go out and be competitive all the way through September and win.

Q. In your playing career you made a quick jump from college game to the Major League game. Now we're seeing that more frequently. You've got a couple of guys (indiscernible) infield to show for it. What is it about the college game and MLB today that makes that jump more feasible for more players?

MARK KOTSAY: That's a great question. For me, when I made that jump, I struggled. Even though I felt like I was ready, it's still challenging. There's always nuances to the Major League game that you have to learn and you have to go through, right?

So (indiscernible) for Jacob and Nick, they both are afforded a little bit more leniency, but they performed. They hit the ground running. We've had guys, you mentioned JJ Bleday, when he first came up with the Marlins, it was difficult. He had to make adjustments. We traded for him in a timeframe that we thought there was more upside and he had a great year. Unfortunately, there was a pullback from that.

So the college game, it's becoming closer and closer to a very high level of Minor League Baseball. I mean, you can identify guys on the LSU pitching staff that -- you could probably just insert them in a bullpen and they'd get through an inning for sure because they're all 97-plus.

It's funny, my son played in a Area Code game in Long



Beach where he faced Hunter Pence's nephew or cousin who is throwing 100. My son is 16, 17 years old. I never saw 100 until I faced Robb Nen in the big leagues in '97.

I think there is a level of preparedness by the college player that there's some confidence in pushing them, but it's hard to balance. And we've seen that a few times with some highly talented players that come up and have to go back. But that's not a bad thing either.

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