

MLB Winter Meetings

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Atlanta Braves

Manager Walt Weiss

Press Conference

Q. How has this past month been? And just kind of as you prepare, how much more excited are you for the upcoming season?

WALT WEISS: Yeah, it's getting real. We're getting closer. Obviously it slowed down a little bit the last few weeks, and it will only pick up again. But when I spoke to you guys last, it was a whirlwind.

I got the position and then 24 hours later I'm sitting in front of you like this. So it all happened fast in the end.

But, yeah, it's been -- obviously Alex and I have been talking a lot, just trying to make our team better right now.

Q. What do you think of that coaching staff that's been assembled, and how much input did you have into it? It seems like it's a really good, young coaching staff.

WALT WEISS: Really good staff. Look, we had a really good staff, and I think it took some of these guys being available for those changes to happen, you know what I mean? I think everyone was very comfortable with the staff coming back. But there were some guys who became available that were really enticing and we ended up getting them in the fold.

But Alex and I talked a lot through all that. And it's not easy putting together a staff. There's a lot to think about. There's a lot of boxes that have to be checked, and there's several people that have to check all those boxes, when you're looking at candidates.

The game is a lot more collaborative now, as we know. The days of the manager just naming his staff like 40 years ago, 30 years ago, those days are over. And rightfully so, because there's so many people involved in the day-to-day now. The guys upstairs. Alex's team. The game planning stuff. So, the people we bring in have to fit the entire group.

Q. What does stand out about Hefner?



WALT WEISS: Hefner? Yeah, he's a sharp guy, man. I think the sweet spot in this game -- we're in the age of information and analytics and technology -- the sweet spot is the guy or the guys that have feel, that have done it and understand the tech, understand the info, know how to use it. And Hefner's the poster child for that.

Really good feel. Pitched. Pitched in the big leagues. He's worked his way to the top. He's dealt with -- he's been in one of the biggest markets, dealt with Hall of Famers, some pretty big personalities. And everybody raves about him.

The thing that makes me feel good as a manager, every time we announced one of those coaching hires, my phone blew up from people who knew him, said, wow, you guys are putting together an unbelievable staff. So that's very reassuring.

Q. Antoan Richardson, along those lines, everybody raves about him as a base-running coach and a coach in general. Is that one of the guys that you're, like --

WALT WEISS: Yeah, exactly. And once a guy like Antoan became available, things changed. So, I saw the impact he had with the Mets. I think they were 30th in sprint speed and fifth in stolen bases. That math doesn't add up unless you've got somebody who's making a big difference, and that's Antoan.

We feel like there's some low-hanging fruit there with our club, not that we're built to do that necessarily, especially once Ronald stopped running last year when he was playing a little more careful.

But there's some opportunity there to create some things on the offensive end. And I think Antoan is really going to help that. And he's passionate about it. I think he's going to get our guys to be passionate about it.

So, yeah, that's an exciting hire, and that's an exciting part of our club that I think there's some low-hanging fruit there.

Q. Is Ronald running down in Venezuela more this

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winter, and is that an indication he's ready to do that next year?

WALT WEISS: Yeah, and whether he did that or not, I kind of assumed that he would be a little more aggressive next year. Totally understand how the way he played in '25. I mean, with both knees, there's not a lot of comps for that, right? So, I just thought naturally he would be more aggressive, but it's nice to see that. He's an exciting player, and I think he'll get back to where he was.

Q. I know you haven't necessarily got to the point of making lineup cards, but he moved down a bit in the order. Do you anticipate him moving back up?

WALT WEISS: That's a good conversation. I'm looking forward to that with him. I want to pick his brain with that. It's enticing to have him at the top of the order because I'm I really like when a lineup turns over that there's teeth right away. Your pitcher -- you've got to run through a gauntlet as soon as that lineup turns over.

So there's some incentive to -- he was prolific in that position. The other argument is, you could put him in a more RBI position in the lineup and hit him third.

Those are conversations we're going to have, we're going to talk about. Like you said, we're a ways away from the lineup, talking about lineups and that type of thing. But it's on my radar.

Q. When you look at the roster as a whole, do you kind of look at anything where, hey, this is our biggest need or these are our two biggest needs? What do you think?

WALT WEISS: Pitching is near and dear to my heart, especially after my last experience. So I always, I'm always looking at that side of things. And truth be told, our position players, it's pretty set.

So it's a little bit more difficult to create some fits there. Now, you can do it with some trades and you can be creative and make some things work. But a lot easier on the pitching side as we sit here today to add.

We all know Alex. Alex is just relentless in his pursuit of improving the roster. So he never stops. He never stops trying to do that. I'm sure he's doing it as we speak.

Q. As a guy who served the last eight years as Snit's bench coach, how excited were you to be able to add a bench coach the ilk of Mansolino and what he's done?

WALT WEISS: I'm really excited about Tony. He's here

with me. Him and Hef came so we can spend some time together. I've got a little history with Tony, and I know his dad really well and coached with his dad, Doug Mansolino. So --

Q. How is that?

WALT WEISS: Doug worked for us -- he was like a senior advisor in player development for the Braves. Of course, I was on the other side of the field from him throughout my career a lot, when he was a coach, a big league coach.

I know Doug really well. I know Tony some. But Tony's got a sharp mind. He's impressive well beyond his years. I know he's not a young guy. Compared to me he is, but who isn't?

But, yeah, he's an impressive guy. And he sat in that seat. I do think there's some value there for a bench coach. It doesn't mean everything, but it means something.

And he's got really good baseball eyes, he's got a good baseball mind. We've had really good conversation already. So he's going to work with our infielders, along with Tony Diaz.

I was in a similar position, and this will probably help him. I was in that position the last couple of years where I was the bench coach and the infield guy. Now, in game, you've got to delegate a little bit because the bench coach can't be lining up the defense and all that at the same time, working with Snit.

So, Tony Diaz will take care of the defensive linemen. That's what Tui did and what Fredi González did while he was here while I was bench coaching in-game. It will help Tony that I sat in that exact seat that he's going to.

Q. Can you tell me what lessons you learned after you left Colorado as a manager, what lessons you learned as your first time around? Second part of the question, did you ever think you would get this chance again?

WALT WEISS: I talked about it in my press conference, the circumstances couldn't be more different from the first time I did this. In Colorado, when I got hired, I'd been out of the game for four years. I was coaching high school football. I was out of baseball.

I took the interview just to -- you know, to experience it, to experience. I had never done that. And I end up getting the job. Here I am, I'm, like, now what?

But a lot of on-the-job training. I had a good staff in

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Colorado that helped me along the way. It's early on. And the team was coming off, at that point, was the worst season in franchise history in 2012. They had a couple of tough ones lately, but at that point it was the worst.

So very different. So I didn't even know what was important to me as a manager first time around because I hadn't done it.

So very different now, eight years as a bench coach with a team that is built to win now. I know the team like the back of my hand. I walked into that first situation in Colorado completely blind. I wasn't even in the game, let alone know our team.

Just completely different, but a lot of lessons learned along the way. I'm grateful for that opportunity because I wouldn't be sitting here today without that.

And the record wasn't great back then, obviously, but I'm proud of some of the things we accomplished in those four years culturally, especially. A lot of great lessons learned.

Did I think I'd get another chance? I didn't know. And I didn't have to. I didn't have to do this again. And I loved being Snit's bench coach. I loved being back in the Braves uniform. And I think it's fairly well documented I turned down some interviews over the last several years, because it was going to have to be really good to pull me away from what I was doing.

I truly didn't know if I would ever manage -- like I said, it was okay if I didn't manage again. I was perfectly fine with that. Once Snit stepped away and Alex asked if I was interested, I got pretty excited about it.

Q. How encouraged have you been in the health updates with these stars? Alex told us Grant Holmes, good to go; Spencer, seems like things are progressing pretty well?

WALT WEISS: They are. Look, you always have your fingers crossed when it comes to your pitching health, because your pitching depth is always going to be tested over the course of a Major League season.

Everything's good right now. Of course you've got to get on the mound and they have to start putting together a workload. And then you see how they respond. But as we sit here today, all the reports are really good. And that's really important, because you can't compete -- I think as we saw last year -- you can't compete without your pitching.

You have to have quality pitching in this league or I think --

it's literally impossible to win a league championship or a World Series if you don't have above-average pitching. So it's critical.

So there's some health questions there. But as we sit here today, it's all really good, as good as it can be here in the middle of December, whatever.

Q. As healthy as Reynaldo López stayed as a reliever, and then last year, even though two years ago even though he pitched so well, he hasn't stayed healthy as a starter. Are you tempted to move him back to relief since you have some other guys?

WALT WEISS: Not so much tempted but it's a nice fallback plan. These guys are going to be built up. I know I get those questions about Grant Holmes and this and that. These guys are going to be built up as starters in Spring Training, but it's really nice to know that, whatever, because of acquisitions, because of health, whatever, somebody all of a sudden steps up and opens your eyes, it's nice to know those guys can do that. They've done it before and they've been really good at it. But sitting here today, those guys are, we're looking at them as starters.

Q. You've got some options questions, too, obviously, right, this year complicates some things with a couple of the starters?

WALT WEISS: Yeah, look, Bryce, I was really encouraged by the way Bryce finished. I mean, the stuff ticked up. He was good against some really good teams, playoff teams in September. And he had another run, I think, early, I want to say May, maybe, where he had a nice run. Then he had some hiccups. That's the thing about Bryce, he's pretty unflappable. If he has a tough one or a clunker or two, demeanor doesn't change, confidence doesn't change, and here he is showing up and posting again and righting the ship. A lot to be said about that.

I'm excited about Bryce. I'm excited about Waldrep. I think the ceiling for Waldrep is pretty high, man. He's got a wipeout pitch. And it's hard to find where it's a legitimate wipeout pitch at the Major League level. He's got that. There's some things to be excited about. We talked about Grant already.

There will be some competition, which is always a good thing in Spring Training. But we have some -- I think there's some plan Bs there too when you talk about bullpen and that type of thing.

Q. It's really different because you know these guys so well and they know you so well, but messaging, first day, Spring Training, a lot of times we say we're

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going to flush last year, we're going to -- what do you want to remind them about the last couple of years? Have you thought about the messaging to the group?

WALT WEISS: Yeah, only every day since I got hired. But I'm really big on attacking the mentality of a team. I believe that the mentality of the athlete is the X factor in competition, I really do.

And when the margin of victory is so small, a lot of times it's the deciding factor. And we have a million and two examples of this in every sport.

So I'm really going to focus on our mentality. And that will be how I challenge them most, I think. But our guys are really good. We've got guys that are rock solid in how they show up every day, how they work, how they compete.

So it's not like they're not already built to do that. But, look, I think we all need reminders, myself included.

I will be reminding them about their mentality. That will be a consistent message. And I just believe that regardless of what sport it is, you could be talking about football, you could be talking about golf, I believe the athlete has to have an aggressive mindset. Without that, it's really difficult to compete at the highest level in any sport. I believe strongly in that.

Q. We used to ask Bobby, "Who did you learn the most from?" And he would say, "From every manager I ever had, I learned something from." How cool is it to know that you started with Tony and ended with Bobby?

WALT WEISS: Bookend, right? I got Tony in the beginning and Bobby at the end. Yeah, I've been around great managers, great players, been very fortunate. Played on a lot of great teams. Played in a lot of big games.

So there's some things to fall back on, but at the end of the day, it's got to be me and my voice and my touch, and I understand that. But I've learned a lot, obviously, from all those people I've been around. From Tony in the beginning to Snit right up to this year and everybody in between.

And I'll take a little bit from all of them. But at the end of the day, it's going to be my voice. So it will be me and it will be different from anybody else that I've been around.

Q. Your offense obviously struggled mightily at times this year, in Tim's first year. But did you see enough and hear enough feedback from guys? Obviously you

guys did -- to bring him back for the second year of contract and do you feel good about where you are?

WALT WEISS: I'll say this about Tim Hyers. Tim Hyers is one of the best hitting coaches I've ever been around. I know there was a narrative out there. I get it. We were terrible in the first half, offensively. But fairly or unfairly, the hitting coach takes that hit.

But I'm here to tell you, Tim Hyers is outstanding as a hitting coach. His demeanor is tremendous. He's got a calm demeanor. The information, the delivering of the information is outstanding. So I want to put that to rest.

I know that's part of being a fan, I get it. That's what we sign up for, and we take the heat. But he's really good. And so I have all confidence in the world in him.

I don't have all the answers for what happened in the first half last year, I don't. I think maybe it's just the nature of the game and the ebbs and flows to this game and how difficult it is to hit at the Major League level in this day and age.

But we have a lot of guys with track records that have done it before. I believe they'll do it again. They're not old. They're not past their prime. I expect our offense to be really good.

Q. You kind of beefed up that hitting coach staff, too?

WALT WEISS: Yeah.

Q. Couple guys that have done it. Tony?

WALT WEISS: Yeah, no, I'm really excited about the staff and our offense. I feel good about our offense. Look, I know Alex is always trying to add. So who knows what it looks like a month and a half from now. But I think our offense will be good.

Q. And the guys -- I'm sure you talked to some of the players all season, you talked to players about Tim and --

WALT WEISS: The back and forth with Tim and the players was really good. The information was good. The conversation was good. They trust him, they believe what he says, and they should. So that relationship and that spot on our (indiscernible) is not a concern for me whatsoever.

Q. The designated hitter role is currently open right now. Osuna free agent. Feels like there might be some rotating. What opportunities come with the



chances of mixing and matching the lineup?

WALT WEISS: I like that freedom, to be honest with you, as a manager. There's certain guys, you acquire an impact bat that fits in the full-time DH role, you're good with it. If a guy is going to impact the offense, impact the game for you, yeah, anybody raise their hand for that.

And look, I don't know that the door has been shut on Osuna. But all things being equal, I do like the freedom of getting guys off their legs. It's like a half a day off. And using that position, using that position for Drake Baldwin because I want to get Drake's bat in there as much as we can. Drake hits right and left. He's not a platoon guy.

So at the same time we've got a Gold Glove-caliber defender in Murphy behind the plate. So there's some nice freedom there with that DH spot open. Will that be the case when we walk into Norf -- I don't know. But I do like the thought of it. Unless we just get some big hairy guy that wants to DH for us every day.

Q. What do you think about as a shortstop, you know the position as well as anybody. Can Dubon play that position every day?

WALT WEISS: Yeah, he can. Look, he protects us in a variety of ways because he can play all over the field. It's plus defense everywhere he goes, but he can play shortstop, and as we sit here today, he is running out to shortstop. And again, things can change. We know Alex is always working. But I have no problem with Dubon playing shortstop.

Q. How much do you know about Japanese free agent and the market, do you know anything about that?

WALT WEISS: Zero.

Q. Murakami?

WALT WEISS: I don't know enough to speak here and not look like an idiot. I'll probably refrain, respectfully.

Q. As the only manager with cauliflower ear, are you going to be continuing your MMA training?

WALT WEISS: I'm not winning any beauty contests, I know that.

Q. Are you going to be able to do all your training?

WALT WEISS: It's offseason stuff.

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