

MLB Winter Meetings

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

San Francisco Giants

Manager Tony Vitello

Press Conference



2025 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS ORLANDO

Coverage Presented By

CohnReznick 

Q. How are you enjoying your first Winter Meetings?

TONY VITELLO: It's interesting. It's kind of chaotic. And then being a part of the Giants, I feel an extreme amount of pressure to do something. You've got Jeff Kent's honor; Matt Chisholm of course with the Fishel Award, which is well deserving; and then for our clubbies too, Brad Grems and Gavin Cuddie also getting an award. I'm ready for more exciting news, I guess.

Pretty cool. To be honest with you, it validates -- because they win those awards, it doesn't come off as cheesy. When I first was walking around the park and getting to meet people, one after another, I feel like I've got -- you know, recruiting, you've got decent standards of how impressive somebody is. And just an incredible amount of impressive people that I met in the first few days. It's good that it's validated by others stating how well accomplished those people are.

Q. I'm sure you know a lot of the managers here already just from the baseball world, but was there anybody in particular that you were kind of looking to get to know in this bunch as this process is going on?

TONY VITELLO: Pat Murphy stands out because of the college background and having competed against him. During this process -- Frank Anderson knows him well. Brett, his son, knows Pat Murphy even better. So everyone agreed like we'd better wait until the season is over because he's as competitive as it gets.

He was still able to kind of, through Frank and Brett, kind of relay some things to me. So I haven't seen him yet. It's been busy. I don't know what I'm doing at this thing, to be honest with you.

Then also I had a very minor surgery earlier this week, so kind of battling through that a little bit. I crashed pretty hard last night. I was pointing to my water because the cotton mouth is real.

Q. Are you doing okay?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah. Kind of something that just needed to be cleaned up. Glad to have it out of the way.

Q. What does it say that he trusted you guys would do well -- Buster is someone you lean on a lot. Is that something you found as a little bit of a necessity at this point in terms of getting into this?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah. I think in talking with other people about pro sports in general -- just because I've always been a fan, it's been hard. Ever since becoming a recruiting coordinator, you are paid and you're better off knowing who the seventh best left fielder is in the country than you are knowing all the managers and everything else.

Alignment in pro sports is very difficult. So I think getting along with Buster or kind of seeing things in a similar fashion is more important than anything. But, yeah, you'd be crazy not to lean on him. If you're in any kind of competition and you're trying to win, he might be top -- I don't know how you quantify it. Top ten people in the dang world to seek counsel.

Q. What were some of the nuggets that Frank and Brett were able to relay to you from Pat Murphy?

TONY VITELLO: I think, to be honest with you, confidence that there is a translation from the college game. I know that's been a big topic or might be a question coming that there's an appropriate translation there. Then also just the things they've done to have success where they're at.

Everybody's kind of got their own brand. It's all Major League Baseball, but obviously it's 30 different teams. You learn that when they're drafting your players or your signees or things like that. So what's worked for them and how's it gone that way.

Sure, you don't want to give up too many ingredients or the secret sauce, but some of it is pretty obvious. When he was at Arizona State or Notre Dame, it was competitiveness at an incredibly high level, to an extreme

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really. That should carry over at any level, you'd like to think.

Q. You talked earlier this off-season about still trying to get to know a lot of guys on this team. I think you also talked about maybe even going to the DR or Korea to get to know the makeup of this team. How much have you gotten to know the guys on this roster on a personal level and some travel plans you've already had and plans coming up as far as meeting players where they are?

TONY VITELLO: Those trips will take place next week and then the first week of January. So not nearly as well as you would think or that I would like to be at a place with the players, because my answer would be more -- I know the coaching candidates very, very well, either the ones we've hired or the ones we've considered. That became an all out project on top of some other things that came with this unique transition from the program I was very much a part of to now.

So the biggest thing has been that staff.

I don't know. I'm still learning what I'm allowed to do and what I'm not allowed to do in life and also in this. But as far as the staff goes, the one thing we don't want to do is have to go backwards in any way, shape, or form.

It's been a patient process and a diligent one, and I've really enjoyed it. It's one that's coming to an end here pretty quick. If that's a question, when will that be announced, I think it will be much sooner than later.

Q. What's the downside of your first Spring Training in light of a lot of players away for the WBC?

TONY VITELLO: I think the WBC is phenomenal. I think there's varying opinions. It's case by case what a guy needs to do, in particular a pitcher with his arm and innings. But that event in general is one of the more fun sporting events I've witnessed. I've never been able to be there in person, but just watching it on TV.

Any time you've got something going on, there's pros and cons. I think there's certainly cons to it. I just think the event is phenomenal. So the guys that choose to or the guys in a quality enough position with their body or arm to try to compete in that, I'm all for it. I think the fallout is kind of worth the squeeze.

Q. The Tennessee guys you brought with you, can you maybe speak to what stood out about them and how you anticipate them transitioning?

TONY VITELLO: I think the whole group stood out. It would have been cool to just pick everything up and leave, but I don't know if there would have been any players left at Tennessee. There was a group effort that went on there to get the program to where it's competitive in an ultra-competitive conference.

But I think there's some guys there with Big League experience one way or another. I think the cat's probably out of the bag on Frank. He's never been in a Big League dugout, but he's been in a Big League household with Brett. Those two are close. They've got a fun and a funny relationship. And I know his involvement in Brett's career, I think not just coaching him, but through the life experience, kind of provides him with some background that will be beneficial for him.

Then Quentin Eberhardt too -- again, I don't know if I'm supposed to name names or not -- he's been at the Big League level, the Minor League level, he's been in development at the college level, and also just has a personality that makes you want to be around him.

And so with all that staff -- I just finished with a Zoom upstairs -- one comment I made with staff, you look externally to like, I don't know, what would fire up the fans or what will win you games or what will make the players happy. But selfishly I was looking at too who are the guys that I want to work with or get out of the vehicle every day and walk into the park and be excited about just hanging out with?

In baseball there's a lot of work, but there's a lot of hangout time too. Certainly a group of guys I'm excited to do that with.

Q. How do you anticipate kind of striking the balance of being your authentic self and being the guy who got to this position while also understanding that you can't just copy and paste what worked in college and into pro ball?

TONY VITELLO: I think, first off, speaking of like managers or walking in the halls, I don't know if this is smart to admit, but I still kind of see myself as the kid that grew up going to Whitey Hertzog's-coached team's games, and I'd go to Wrigley with my dad, he's from Chicago, cheering them on. Even when Bill Mueller was playing with the Giants, the only reason I was going to those games was because the tickets were free, and also I was a fan. For a while the Giants became my favorite team because of him.

There's still a little bit of that in me walking around. I almost kind of caught myself with my head down. There's



a high level of respect for these people that are in the game, but for me, maybe because I was around my dad and all these athletic teams, I think it changes when you're in a building together as a group, like we're a part of a team. In order to be a good teammate, I don't think you can see yourself as above somebody. I think it would be crazy to see yourself as below somebody as well because you'd be cheating yourself and them.

I think for me the balance is once we're in the dugout together, regardless of who's on the other side or the doors are closed in a meeting or you're just underneath the stadium in the concourse, in the locker room, we're all one group. I think that's the same kind of across the college level, the high school level.

It's just the athletes are better. These are the best players in the world, and obviously they're some of the smartest people involved in baseball too working.

Q. A lot to be said about you making this job and kind of how unprecedented it is. Why do you think it took so long for someone to go straight from the college side to the pro side?

TONY VITELLO: There's been assistant coaches do it. I think for that direct jump, I think college baseball had to become closer to what pro baseball is. We had a really -- I was given a gag order over an argument over SEC -- like what level does SEC play? It was fun hearing the debate back and forth, and they were all very good points. You never know because they're not playing against each other, it's fewer games, and all these abstract things.

But I think the college game has just gotten so good. It doesn't matter. You don't have to be in the SEC. You could be out at Coastal Carolina or out on the West Coast, college baseball is now heavily covered by media. TV is a part of the deal. There's fans at every game, and the players are better.

You name it, these indoor facilities that are in Wisconsin are producing guys like Gavin. I think it's pretty great.

Sorry to go on an even further tangent, but maybe this thing, and who knows if you want to call it the guinea pig or sacrificial lamb or it goes well or doesn't go well, who cares? I guess I should.

(Laughter.)

Again, I wish there was somebody like with a shorter haircut and more reputable up here to say it's time for college baseball and Major League Baseball to be married a little closer for a lot of different reasons. I think working

together ultimately makes Major League Baseball a better product, which is great for the fans.

Then sorry, money is a big factor in the world, whether we like it or not. Ultimately, if Major League Baseball is a better product, then there's more money being made. There's countless other reasons too why if that -- again, smarter and more responsible people can come together and join some ideas, I really think they can feed off each other. So I think that's the reason why.

Q. Being raised in St. Louis, a baseball city, baseball culture, what impact did that have on your DNA as a baseball guy?

TONY VITELLO: I think those fans, and it carried over into Arkansas -- maybe sorry, Tennessee, to talk good about their fans, but the Cardinals fans, they just seem to know the game and appreciate the things like a guy who hustles, or a story like David Eckstein, and a relationship with the community that Ozzie Smith and Willie McGee had. Whitey Herzog, he was as likely to be a poster on a wall as Jack Clark.

It certainly had something to do with it. And then baseball, why you could argue it's the greatest game in the world is the tradition is heaviest or there's a heavier emphasis than any other sport on that. My dad being from Chicago, going to Wrigley Field, if you don't feel that, you're missing out on it.

To combine it with my current job, that Giants-Cardinals deal there for a while was -- I mean, now I like Jeffrey Leonard, but if he would have showed up on my street, there probably would have been people trying to do some bad things.

Kevin Mitchell caught that ball bare handed in Busch Stadium, if I'm not mistaken. I was at the Will Clark slide into second base. I was in right field. I had a good view of that whole melee. So it was pretty fun to watch that.

Q. Do you have one memory from your childhood in St. Louis, baseball-wise, that stands out the most?

TONY VITELLO: Probably up the road in Columbia, Missouri, to be honest with you. I was not a great player and certainly was not a Big League player, but I had a game where I started against Texas A&M, and my dad met me by the fence afterwards. The things he said are in a framed deal, and it will go in my new office. That exchange we had was what stands out.

Q. Getting back to college baseball, you're in kind of a unique position maybe facing guys you coached when



you're in the Bigs. That's got to be pretty strange. What do you think about that?

TONY VITELLO: I can think of some right now. Some of them you're grateful that you're never going to see them again, that's your thought. Others, if you're competitive -- Bregman is one of the best competitors I've ever seen in my life, and again I've been a big sports fan.

In the moment there might be things you say or feelings you have, but when the moment is over, it's kind of like UFC fighters or boxers, like an NFL game. These guys are just trying to kill each other, but afterwards you have an appreciation because those are the people that push you the most or bring out the most intense feelings and emotions.

Yeah, it will be unique, and it will be interesting. The one thing about all the reps in pro baseball, they change who you are as a person and who you are as a player. That can be for the worse certain times, and other times it's for the better. I think each of those guys will have a different look the next time I see them.

Q. What about some of your own guys?

TONY VITELLO: That will be tough. I know one in particular I could see we won't be friends during the game but afterwards we'll embrace. That will be interesting because those are guys that I really feel because -- because I wasn't a good player and I don't consider myself anybody that's going to -- you know, the Giants are going to be successful because I'm a great coach. That's just not going to happen.

Players are what got me to where I was able to keep moving down the line in college coaching, and I owe those guys a lot.

Q. You're going to deal with people from not white backgrounds, coming from other countries, how are you managing that part of making the connection with them, maybe something different than what you have dealt with in college?

TONY VITELLO: I'm excited. I think just kind of my background, I was fortunate to have a great childhood thanks to my parents, but I was in a bubble. There were some different things in there where it wasn't all kind of down one avenue, if that's the best way to say it, but as I've grown up, I've fallen in love with traveling.

This is a big world we live in. So it's fun to experience different cultures and get to meet different people and understanding with they're coming from and maybe you

learn something that you make a part of your own life.

So I'm kind of excited about that as anything. We'll go to a couple places, either as a staff or I'll go on my own, to visit with some of these players. Part of it is work, and part of it is me stealing a free trip to go see a new place because I truly kind of enjoy that.

Q. In addition to getting to know these guys as people, how have you gone about getting to know the roster and just the skills that these players have coming from the college game where maybe you weren't watching these players as regularly as some of the other people in pro ball?

TONY VITELLO: Ears open for sure. With Blade Tidwell and then Drew going over, I started to follow all of a sudden. Those guys have reached out to me about those kids and their background, so things kind of picked up that way for me getting to know the organization and, in particular, some of those players.

But listening to these conversations upstairs, like I've probably talked too much at this point, and it's more out of excitement than it is knowledge. But just ears open and trying to get a feel for who these guys are.

Then also being a little guarded. It would be great if I exchanged 25 more text messages than Chappy and I have, or we've yet to hook up in person, but nothing is going to be like being in Spring Training and being around somebody every day. So I've been a little guarded too to not jump to conclusions, oh, he's this type of guy or that type of guy.

Q. I want to ask you about Quentin Eberhardt because you've credited him with your success at Tennessee and being in a place where guys that had a great power and a couple of them with a good fastball, I was curious what does having a good conditioning and strength program look like at the Major League level? Is it possible to build a meaningful advantage like you had in Tennessee?

TONY VITELLO: I think so. He would be quick to push out that Joyce broke the velo record, whatever it may have been. And there was certainly never an emphasis on home runs, but drove a bunch over the fence when we were there. He would be quick to point out, that's a group effort.

Gresh being on our training staff fires everybody up in the strength and conditioning part, and Q being added is awesome. But it's a whole group. As I've learned, the staffs are bigger, the media's bigger. Everything is on a

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grander scale. It first requires everybody to work together to make it an advantage, but if you've got good people in place, I think any advantage you can find is beneficial.

The record is so interesting from last year, and I know it doesn't meet the standards of the Giants organization, but you're split. So even guys just staying healthy as far as strength and conditioning or the coaching staff or the training staff all working together, maybe that's a difference in one game. Now at least you can call it a winning season, which I know it doesn't fire everyone up just to be at 82, but if guys are a little stronger in a certain area, when you can start making up those inches, that I think everybody upstairs has been talking about.

Q. Do you think you can make a difference in getting this team to the postseason as a manager? How do you see that? How do you see the Giants within this division going up against the Dodgers, the big rival, and the Padres at this point?

TONY VITELLO: The first part, I think I want to do a good job, and that's kind of always been my criteria. I think I formulated it over the years, especially following my dad's teams. But with all due respect to him, I don't think he could even affect what my opinion is of a good job. That's kind of what I'm going to hold myself to. I think, if I am doing that, then I'm helping in some form or fashion.

I just talked about everything being bigger. The players are the ones out on the field. There's a whole group of people that are going to be working to make the organization a winning one, whether you want to call it making the playoffs or having success there or coming close or having a better record than last year. I've never been part of a Big League season, so we'll see. I'm just trying to figure out what's going on here at both hotels that we're occupying.

With the teams in our division or that are out there in general, I think -- again, I don't know what you're supposed to say or not. It sounds like the Phillies got better today. There's the best players in the world and with some of these big market teams or teams that are spending a lot of money, a lot of them are lumped together on one roster.

So day in and day out you have to compete against, and if you want to have success, beat the best players in the world. Again, the trend in all pro sports, a lot of them are now lumped together. If that's the case, the cliché is you're going to have to beat the best. But at the end of the day, having success against those teams can come as a group as opposed to matching up man for man. Is this guy a better left fielder or whoever it may be?

Q. You can say whatever you want.

TONY VITELLO: I appreciate that, but be careful what you ask for. Be careful what permission you give me.

Q. Can you describe your relationship with Jayce Tingler over the years and what are some of the advantages he's going to provide having him on your staff?

TONY VITELLO: I don't think I've ever said this, but I got to walk on at Missouri because of my dad being a high school coach, and he had good players. And at Missouri, if you walk out of the facility, you come around the left field corner, and there's the old cages. The very first person I saw -- because I'm going to be the first one, I'm walking on -- and the very first person I saw is Jayce Tingler hitting in the cage. Jayce now is physical, but at the time, he's small, and I thought who is this guy?

It kind of immediately boosted my confidence, maybe I can make this team. It turns out he's our best player and our best competitor and became one of my best friends. Part of it is we got to work together. We used to go to Thursday night practices and eavesdrop. Because if you travel as the Texas Longhorns, you practice Thursday night at Missouri after we practice. So we'd linger around and eavesdrop on Augie Garrido and put extra time in the cage, but it was watching the other team.

One time OU's old coach thought I was a grounds crew guy and tipped me a hundred Bucks. So being friends with Jayce has paid off. But then just because I'm enjoying talking about it, we'll go to -- the first year of coaching I had was the Volunteer coach, and I was the outfield coach. Now all of a sudden, I'm coaching Jayce. We about killed each other about 17 times that year.

Drew is probably close, but he's probably the most intense player I've ever coached. It's been fun watching his career. I guess he won the contest. I've always been trying to get him into college baseball, and he's always brought up pro baseball. Either way, we had a feeling we'd always work together one day.

Q. You mentioned Blade earlier. What was it like to coach him at Tennessee?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, he's a psycho.

Q. What do you think about the potential he has to impact your rotation next year?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I think it's fun watching some of the guys we've had or -- it is fun watching those guys you



competed against, now when they have success, you can be like I know who that guy is, and I thought he was a good player. He's on George's team trying to beat you.

Blade is every bit at good or better, was better, than some of the guys who are having real, real success in the Big Leagues right now. I have high hopes for him. And I joke that he's psycho, and that's because he's so intense about getting better, and he really likes to compete.

I think a whole different personality comes out when he is between the lines. I think that combination is one that the coaches have to be excited about working with, in particular, ones that are familiar with him already. I've always been a fan of Blade. He's one of those guys that was first to say no to pro ball and come to college.

In college to have success, you've got to have a certain amount of those guys. He and Drew were the first two to do that along with Jordan Beck.

Q. You mentioned this is a period of transition for you, but a couple months in, how would you assess the needs on the roster?

TONY VITELLO: I think it's a really fun roster when you look at -- it's almost got a parallel to a college team because there's high turnover with guys graduating or getting drafted. You've got a solid group of guys that are solidified as, at the very least, this is their role. We expect this guy to be our everyday this or that.

There's also open competition at several spots, whether it be on the position side or the pitching side. I think the combination is good to already have a quality roster.

The whole point of recruiting or front office conversations or the ones we're having here is where can we improve things? I think a cool thing, a heavy emphasis of our conversations up there is how can we improve the players we currently have?

Some of those needs might be filled by a guy finding his true self or getting more experience, but I also think there's ambition with 29 other teams too to add on either side of the ball that could complement things.

Q. Every year new Japanese player come to Major League Baseball. If you know any know any player this off-season, please let me know your impression of them.

TONY VITELLO: I don't have any particular experience with new players, but I think the one thing that's interesting to see is the crossover of -- there's a different style that I

think comes from each culture that's represented in playing baseball. But at the same time, they're all battling the same thing. It's long-term success that everybody's shooting for.

And managing those, a lot of your background can play into that. How can you handle it? Are you disciplined enough? Are you tough enough? And other attributes to it.

It's something that's been fun for me to see, whether it's watching Team USA or seeing guys from different countries coming into college.

That's one area I think college can improve. I don't see why there can't be more diversity in the college game, especially with online classes in Zoom and things like that now. Of course, watching pro baseball too, seeing how some of those different cultures play into a guy's career.

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