

# AL Division Series: Tigers vs Mariners

Friday, October 3, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

T-Mobile Park

## Detroit Tigers

### A.J. Hinch

#### Workout Day Press Conference

**Q. Do you have a Game 1 starter or some form of a pitching plan?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, we do. So Game 1 will be Troy Melton. Game 2 will be Tarik Skubal. And then we will -- you know, we'll have a plan after the off day.

So I let Troy know on the plane last night that he was going to start, and we're excited to hand him the ball. Plus stuff, great demeanor, the ability to handle what's probably going to be the most excitable outing for him in a couple months' worth of Major League outings.

So we're excited to get him normal prep, normal routine, normal warm-up. You know, it's going to be somewhat abbreviated, just given, you know, how we've used him over the last couple of months. But we have a plan after him as well.

**Q. To add on to that, how much do you expect him to go? Obviously you got him up out of the pen in Cleveland. What are some of the other options to get him to the path to win?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So we have -- we try not to script out too much, because I don't know how the game's going to go, but I've watched him be an incredible strike thrower when he's right and use all of his pitches and exceed my expectations that I would set on the front end.

I've also seen him, you know, have a shorter stint. If we want to flip the lineup or bring in a lefty or bring in a different righty or bring in spin or do something different.

So I'm going to read the game, and I have an idea where his limitations are, but I hate to even put that on him going into this start because of the outing like he had where it was fifteen pitches, five innings. I'm going to keep rolling with him.



Other times he's been in some duress and had to work a little harder and I've had to get him out of the day. So not a traditional start, but not necessarily a limited one either.

**Q. How much of his nontraditional start in Cleveland made an impression on you?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. That was a big start. Number one, we see this guy as a starting pitcher, so I don't want the back of the baseball card in his Major League experience to take anything away from what we see. This is a guy with multiple plus pitches, high-end velo. He can throw strikes in all quadrants of the strike zone. He can attack lefties. He can attack righties. He is a starter.

So we've limited his innings and limited a little bit of his exposure just out of the length of the season and what we've needed to get to this point, but he has all the starter attributes that you would expect.

And had we gone a different path in the back half of this season or if he was in a different point in his career, maybe he would just continue to be in the rotation.

So I love that he's adaptable, and I think that he can handle the moment of excitement, telling his family that he's starting a playoff game, getting to what's going to be a rowdy environment in a big series.

**Q. I saw Bailey Horn and also Matt Vierling here. What's kind of their status, and what other roster decisions are you guys weighing?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So part of our taxi squad are extra players from the previous series is here with us. We have a group that's working out in Toledo that did not make the trip. But Bailey, Colt, Vierling -- those guys all came to give us the most time to make the decision on how the roster's going to shape up.

So we're still likely to carry twelve pitchers and fourteen position players. Obviously it's a longer series, so you take a little bit of a deeper dive into what can happen over a five-game series as opposed to the previous three-game



series.

But those guys that are here are ramping up rehab for Colton and Matt. They're in a separate column. Bailey's here in the event we want to carry three lefties. We needed to have him here as opposed to across the country.

**Q. How close is Colt?**

A.J. HINCH: We're going to find out today. Colt and Vierling are both going to -- there's going to be a live BP session here in a half hour where we're going to get a few reps to see where Colt's at, to see where Vierling's at, to see a couple of our pitchers off the mound that haven't pitched in the last series and things like that.

So we don't need to make a decision until 10:00 a.m. tomorrow, and we're likely to take as much time as we have allotted to us to make the final decision.

**Q. Unrelated, but what's been the value of having Finnegan, a guy with reverse splits and a splitter -- have you been able to use him in a lot of different situations?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So Finnegan is -- you know, it's amazing when you acquire somebody at the deadline, you know, with a history, and so that history would suggest -- you know, we were looking at the back end of the game and working back towards the middle.

In reality, when we acquired him, we just liked him as a high-end quality pitcher when it mattered the most. In the regular season, that doesn't always mean the fifth and sixth and seventh inning or even bridging multiple innings, but he has the ability to do that. He has endurance. He has plus stuff. He can handle plus-sided hitters. And he has, like, big-moment experience.

So the closing experience just gives you the confidence that he's going to be able to handle, you know, the pressure of the situation.

So in the previous series we used him creatively just to get us to bridge the game and keep it where it needed to be, as if that was the closing situation. We have the luxury to be able to get to the back of the game in a couple different ways, and him being able to go multiple innings, which he hasn't been challenged a ton doing in his career, but can; and then using his pitches the way that he's using them now sets up the ability to get a ton of outs for us at critical moments.

**Q. With Cleveland, you had to prepare for, you know,**

**facing a bullpen with four lefties, four righties, you know, various matchups. How much does the different makeup of the likely Mariners bullpen affect the way you put together your roster?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So we also had the, I guess you'd say, luxury of ten games in fourteen days, or whatever it was, playing Cleveland where there weren't a lot of surprises. We haven't seen this team since July. And prior to that, we saw them in early April. It was our first win of the season, our first series win of the season. And this is just not a team that we overlap with a ton.

So familiarizing yourself with their pitchers, their strengths, how they get to the middle part of the game, how they finish their games is pretty -- it's pretty obvious. They have super high-end starting pitching. They have a tremendous bullpen. You've got to earn your runs against these guys.

Now, they're predominantly right-handed. Speier is going to come in at some point with the game on the line, and he can face anyone, and he can get a swing and miss out of anyone.

So not having the four or five lefties, I don't think they're going to have that like Boston or like Cleveland had, our last couple of series, but that may alter our bench. It might alter our -- the lineup construction that I go with on am I going to stack the lefties? Am I not? You know, I've got 24 hours to figure it out.

**Q. A.J., Dan's going to manage his first playoff game tomorrow. You have a few under your belt now. If you had -- if you could think back, just, like, what were some of the things that you remember from that first turn through that you just didn't know?**

A.J. HINCH: You're trying to make me give him advice?

**Q. Yeah. Exactly. Just what you didn't know until you went through it for the first time.**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. Listen, experience matters, but I also think the best, I think, attribute that you could have as a manager in the playoffs is the knowledge and trust of your own team. Nobody knows your team the way that you do. No matter how many people try to tell you about your team or tell you about your decisions or weigh in on what should have or could have happened, the manager's chair supplies an incredible opportunity to get to know your team and make decisions accordingly.

Now, obviously the game's fast-paced compared to a normal game in June or July. Playoff baseball has a sense of urgency that you can only get in October, and that



comes with decision-making. It comes with seeing your players under this pressure for the -- for sometimes the first time, which is something Dan's going through.

And, you know, I'm fortunate that on this team, you know, we have played a lot of playoff baseball, you know, to date. You know, we had the opportunity last year. We've had the opportunity this year.

And so everybody has their own style or their own belief on what playoff baseball means.

For me, I think I see it as an opportunity more than stress or pressure or anxiety-filled days. It's the best time to play baseball.

**Q. Just kind of generally speaking, the final two months of the year is where you guys did have some challenges relative to the first half. Some guys in the clubhouse mentioned how that kind of hardened the group, maybe better prepared it for this time of year. As you said, you can't really prepare for October baseball, but do you think in any way that did help this group to have it more battle-tested, for lack of better phrasing?**

A.J. HINCH: We were not not battle-tested before. I think if anything, it challenged the distractions that come with the peaks and valleys of a season. You know, I think the -- we were on quite a journey to start the season. We race out. We have this big league. We get a lot of love and a lot of attention and a lot of power rankings and all the stuff that doesn't mean anything at the point of the season until you get to the finish line.

So we've had to deal with a lot. Maybe that hardened us. Maybe that toughened us up. Maybe that challenged us to play the full 162. My media will tell you they're tired of hearing me say you need to play the full 162, and we did to qualify for this playoff race.

And maybe that was expected because of how much attention we got at the early part of the season, but the message remains the same.

And the same with this series. You have to play well to beat these good teams. The teams advance. They earn the right to keep playing. And the scoreboard gets smaller and smaller with the amount of teams that get to have their name up on that board.

So it's awesome, and I think you need that experience in order to know what I'm talking about. I'm sure some things that I said in the spring maybe make more sense now, given the road week that we travel.

But our team has a ton of confidence. We've always had a ton of confidence, and we're coming off a big series win that we hope to carry that momentum into playing the Mariners.

**Q. A.J., Cal Raleigh was obviously a huge story this year, and I wanted to ask you for your perspective as a former catcher. How much do the demands of catching, physical and mental, take from a guy's offense? And in light of that position, what does that tell you about the year you had?**

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So I'm very biased about the catching position, and I know it's an integral part of any winning team, and especially a playoff team. You've got to have a good catcher who knows what he's doing.

When you have an offensive catcher -- you know, I feel like so many times -- so many of us in the game label a guy an offensive guy and a defensive guy. And Cal is just a catcher, man. He's everything.

So for him to be able to separate the physical demands and the mental demands of that position, I have the utmost respect for, because he's not allowed to have a slump on both sides at the same time. You can struggle on one side or the other and probably feel okay about yourself going home and having contributed somewhere.

But I'm amazed at the ability to maintain two swings, an entire pitching staff, the weight of an entire organization after signing a big deal, and posting every single day with the foul balls, the balls in the dirt, the fatigue, the travel from Seattle.

I don't want to love on him too much because I don't want him to have a miserable series, but I do want to offer a ton of praise to someone who has answered the challenge and the demands of the job at the highest level that I've ever seen in my years in baseball. It's a remarkable season, and he should be -- he should get all the praise.

**Q. A.J., Will Vest was a guy that the Mariners selected in role five?**

A.J. HINCH: I'm glad I gave him back.

**Q. That was one of the worst decisions. That was a roster thing.**

How have you seen him grow?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. I think when you look back at decisions like that, I think it's really easy now because you

wish that -- I'm sure the Mariners would like to have this version of Will Vest right now. But how many years ago was that? Three, four years ago? He's grown a lot. He's matured a lot. He's been optioned to the Minor Leagues after coming up to the big leagues since then.

I don't want to ease off on the Mariners too much, but we are getting the benefits of a guy who had to run that race or walk that path, and he's worked his tail off to get there.

So he's grown because he's been challenged, you know? He's been challenged to find a secondary pitch for left-handed hitters. He's been challenged -- and he has two of them, a good slider and a good changeup.

He's been challenged in a variety of roles. Oftentimes the nonglorious middle reliever where he's coming in and looks good but isn't quite getting the love of a back-end reliever, I think that's an area of growth for him.

Now he's on the back end. I stop just short of calling him the closer, yet I close him almost every game. That comes with added attention if you do have an off day or do have a bad pitch or do get hit around.

So this version of Will Vest is a legit, bona fide, high-end trustworthy reliever who you want to have the ball in your hand with your fate determined by his ability to execute.

And I know his time as a rule five pick in coming to Seattle is part of that, and the way the rules work and the way that we were able to get him back is good for us because we needed him. We've needed him, and we've used him.

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