

AL Division Series: Tigers vs Mariners

Sunday, October 5, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

T-Mobile Park

Detroit Tigers

A.J. Hinch

Pregame 2 Press Conference

Q. Looking ahead, A.J., have you kind of decided how you're going to handle your starters for the Games 3 and 4?

A.J. HINCH: Yes. So Jack Flaherty will be the starter for Game 3. Casey Mize will be the starter for Game 4.

So yeah. Those guys have all done their work with those days in mind.

Q. Just to amplify a little bit, you're flipping them from the order that they were last time.

A.J. HINCH: Yeah.

Q. Any particular reason for that, or just based on what you've seen?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. So every series is a little different. So we did flip them last time, and we're doing it again. Both are working off of relatively controllable pitch count, so that wasn't really a factor.

There's some slight, you know, reasons why we're doing it. Obviously Jack on a regular routine, regular rest is really attractive. Just the way -- when he catches his rhythm and timing and execution and the things that we've seen over the last few starts, that's really brought out a good version of him and someone that we trust a ton.

And Casey will get a little extra rest, a little extra work in between his games, but we have to pick an order, so it -- we feel really good about both. We could do it the other way and feel completely the same, but we have to choose, and we're going to roll with this order.

Q. A.J., we talked to Colt earlier. Obviously he's happy to get back. But with you getting him back, how much does that help both the chess match and just



having him in the lineup?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. He's someone we've relied on hitting all over the order, whether it's at the top for a really long time or in the middle. Now he's slotting in in the five hole, which is a really key spot, especially when I stack Carp and Greeney, and he's right behind Tork. We have a lot of left-handed hitters in our top five. And I may hit him sixth maybe as early as Tuesday or Wednesday.

So I think for him, the bat quality is something that we missed while he was out. It strengthens both our order against the starter, but also our bench. I mean, Wenceel, who I played, you know, I mean, every day of every game, and putting him on the bench is not an indictment on him at all, but it's a very useful player that I can deploy whenever -- whenever the game dictates it.

So it's nice. Almost two in one, where the switch hitter and his ability to play all three outfield positions, I see it as a great strength by adding Colt in the DH spot and having Wenceel.

I think when the lineup rolls around, Colt is a hit collector. He's a guy that, when he gets going and he has a controlled swing and he can use the whole field, he's an important cog in our order.

The thing that I like the most is when his zone control is in there, and he can -- hits matter, especially in the 5, 6 hole, when good things are happening above him.

Q. Luis Castillo obviously is good against everybody, but he's been really good against you guys. What is it about his repertoire, his mix, his attitude maybe that has been tough on you guys?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. He's a great competitor. He has a plan. You know, he's not just a stuff guy.

Very similar to Kirby. He has a way to entice you to want to swing, but he makes really difficult pitches, so he can live at the top if he wants to.

You know, he's evolved to having three true pitches as



opposed to the high-end fastball. And he used to be a pretty heavy changeup guy. Now the slider's gotten better.

The comeback sinker to lefties we're going to have to pay attention to. He pitches great in this ballpark.

But there's a lot to cover when you've got to deal with the fastball up, you have to deal with the slider, the changeup's always there. You can sink it.

He seems to pitch under controlled emotion. You always see him interacting with the crowd or interacting with his teammates or being -- when he wins the big moments, you get to pump fists and all the things that come with Luis.

So I've seen him from the other side a lot. I don't know him. He seems to thrive to big moments. We're going to have to beat him at his strength. He's not going to concede and cave and give in. We've had a hard time with the knockout punch, so to speak, against him. Been able to piece a few things together when we need somebody to deliver a big blow.

Q. Late last night Ding and Jake were sitting together, and Jake was literally patting him on the back. And Jake could be bitter right now, but I wonder how much has he helped Ding develop, and what does Jake do for the vibe of everything?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah. It would be outside of Jake's DNA to be anything other than Ding's biggest supporter and a great teammate, you know?

It was a year ago this week where Ding was watching from the sidelines and in the dugout. Jake catch every pitch of every playoff game.

So I know roles have changed a little bit, and Jake's not getting near as much playing time as his ability deserves or even his impact deserves, but man, it's hard to take Ding out of the lineup. And he knows it. I know it. Dillon knows we trust him a ton.

Jake is a great support system for Ding because of the growth that he's helped him step by step along the way. When Jake came back off the injured list months ago, he was first to help, you know, Dillon learn the league, learn the responsibility, learn how to play, you know, when you're sore, when you're beat up, when you win, because the pitchers deserve a catcher who's all in.

We have two of them. I wish I could play them both because they're equally impactful on the presence of our team, but having Jake's, you know, understanding yet still competitiveness -- like, this guy wants to play and deserves to play, but he's not going to let that get in the

way of being a good teammate.

Q. You've mentioned the bullpen a couple times along the way lately. But for those people who are maybe first getting a look at this whole pitching concept, the pitching chaos concept, what is it about your relievers that gives you the confidence to be able to experiment a little bit with the starters?

A.J. HINCH: I think our -- it starts with the character of our players, you know? The culture on this team is to be -- is to offer something every day to a win and not get caught up in perceived roles or expectations or even the reasons why we do what we do. Like, we want to use our whole roster and make it really difficult on the other side.

So when you have players that buy in under the same umbrella, common goal, common -- you know, common desire to be a winner, we get to do a lot of creative things.

Now, it's all about putting players in a position to be successful, and they have to go out and do it. It's not a magic potion. It doesn't automatically happen. It does take some getting used to to pitch the fifth inning one day and the eighth inning the next or pitch one inning this day and two and a third the next, but over time we've been able to establish that as our norm.

So the players know coming to the field today they're going to be called upon at some point to contribute to a win. Sometimes I call their numbers. Sometimes I don't. Sometimes I need a lot out of them, and sometimes we need a little small contribution. And we've got to be okay with all of those outcomes when we all get on the line for the national anthem or we all come out for the first inning.

And we have a group of players that will do that. It starts with the buy-in.

You follow that up with extreme throwing and immense confidence amongst the pitching department and me, and I think you find that you can accomplish maybe more than you think you can. You can pitch the ninth inning when you haven't been a closer your whole life. You can get traded over here and find yourself in the fifth inning of a playoff game and be relied upon to go one plus. That does absorb some of the newness and pressure off the players and makes it part of the team concept that's made us thrive.

Q. As someone who appreciates a little bit of unpredictability, what was your reaction when you saw Kahnle go to the fastball there?

A.J. HINCH: No. It's a good reminder that's a number one

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

pitch. We have to put a fastball down at some point.

And it was a sneak attack fastball. I don't know when he's going to deploy it. We have a pretty good idea of who we're going to attack with it. But he and Dillon or he and Jake have to read the game and read the situation and read the appropriate time to throw the fastball.

So it doesn't look like we're going to have the same streak of 50 plus changeups in a row when you sprinkle in a fastball. It's going to take a lot of outings, and I hope he has a lot of outings to reach last year's -- it's got to be a near record, if it's not a record.

But it's part of his arsenal and sneak attack and surprise. And when he executes it and it's a strike, it makes it really hard on the hitter to distinguish the difference.

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