

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Wednesday, October 1, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

Manager A.J. Hinch

Pregame Press Conference

Q. A.J., Casey talked a lot yesterday about being off the postseason roster. What were those conversations like both then and I think you might have talked after the season as well?

A.J. HINCH: It's always hard. As a player, I never really understood either what goes into rosters and decisions. It's not a fairness exercise. It's a competitive one.

So when I had the conversation with him last year, you just try to shoot it straight with him and let him know why. I don't expect players to understand in the moment. Everybody is a good teammate that we have on our team. Casey is a tremendous one. He took the news professionally.

But it did instill sort of a burn for him in his stomach in the off-season and into this spring, having to make our team and then throughout the season. So it's ironic how baseball will bring right you back to the same spot. And here we are. We're giving him the ball in game 2 in a much clearer picture on where he fits in the team and the expectation for him to come out and do well.

He's been awesome for us. All-Star season. He's been a staple in our rotation. He's answered a ton of challenges. He's pitched through duress and has made a few adjustments and he's come out of it pitching at his best at the biggest time of the year.

So super proud of him. I know how much work he puts into it and I know how much it matters to him. And there's always an edge with Case in general around pitching, the day he pitches. Today is probably a little extra special.

Q. We're going to talk to Jack here in a minute. He came here last year, one-year deal with the idea of getting his value back up for free agency before he hits 30. This year, he comes back, has got a little different



deal. Do you feel like he's kind of less a mercenary player now and more of a Tiger now? Do you think he's settled into --

A.J. HINCH: I don't think of him any differently. I've always thought of Jack as coming to Detroit for a couple of reasons. One, I think he thought he was joining a good team and a good organization. He trusted us with some adjustments last year, some adjustments this year to try to make him the best pitcher he can be.

Second reason that he shows up to work every day is to win. He got to taste that at the highest level last year, on the team that was the last team standing. And that type of experience, I think, is incredible for our group now. We got to watch him get his ring. We got to watch him battle through a few things of his own this year.

One thing I know about Jack is he's going to be crazy prepared. He's very routine oriented, and he's another guy that I keep mentioning leaving everything out on the field in the competition. He's good at it. He knows what that feeling's like to have your season on the line.

So anytime I hand him the ball, I think he pitches with that mentality. I appreciate that about him throughout the season.

Q. Do you feel like -- you just mentioned having to watch him get his ring and your players having to experience that as well. It's a good thing for them because they get to see that. But do you think it lit a fire under them to be, like, I want to get one with him now as a teammate?

A.J. HINCH: I don't think a fire was ever out so I don't think we had to light it. If anything, experiencing the postseason last year resonated with our guys that you want to be in all these postseasons and give yourself a puncher's chance to advance to the next round and the next round.

There are a few guys in our clubhouse who have run the whole race, all the way to the final game of the season. And that experience is unlike any other one in this sport, and so I think our guys have always been driven. I think



they're starting to understand what's at stake.

Last year, when we made the playoffs, I sensed sort of a light bulb going off for all of our guys as to how incredibly cool it is to play at this time of the year.

This year, playoff questions started, like, in June when we had the best record in baseball. So we got to talk about it for a long time, and then we also got to talk about the threat of losing it.

Now that we're here and we've come through a playoff game yesterday and we have a great opportunity today, again, I think our players are well educated on what's at stake and how much fun this is and how much of an opportunity that you have to earn to play.

Q. I wanted to ask about Will Vest. What has impressed you about the type of season he's had, but then culminating with yesterday?

A.J. HINCH: He is a consistent guy, both in his work, in his personal life, as a teammate. The mood and vibe around him is always the same, and he's done all this without being stamped the closer. Yet he's closed the most games. He's done it without an assurance that -- of anything of what's ahead.

I think his consistency, for me, really feeds into that role as a back-end reliever, leverage reliever, closing-type reliever, whatever you want to call him. Every day, good or bad, he's going to come out and have a chance to perform well for us.

So his strike throwing has been really good. It hasn't been a perfect ride for him. He's had to make adjustments along the way. It's important for all players to realize that. When you look on the score board, those numbers are built by successes and also built by a few challenges.

So Will hasn't got distracted by anything this year. I think he's been very, very good about dealing with what's in front of him that day, whether he's pitching the 7th, 8th, 9th, inheriting a number, getting bad luck, not executing pitches and getting beat. All that's fed into Will's season and our reliance on him to pitch important outs.

Q. A.J., we don't normally see the same lineup from you. What do you like about this group? You don't normally roll the same lineup out, but you have more this year than in years past.

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, a little bit more. I think the balance on this roster, including Wenceel as a switch-hitter and where to put him in the order. We're also going up against the

exact bullpen as yesterday with pretty much everybody on deck. I can't imagine anybody on their side not being available.

They've got to make decisions hopefully quickly today if we can put pressure on their starter. Our balance in our lineup, I think, allows me to run out the same lineup with the unknown of how they're going to try to build their 27 outs against us.

It is a little bit unique. I think postseason baseball lends itself to maybe a little more consistency when it comes to lineups. Particularly with how our strengths are built and you're facing all the same-sided -- or same-handed pitcher. That can lead to it. If there's a left-handed pitcher today, I assure you it would have been different.

But I think our game plan to attack their starters and the options they have in the pen balancing out the lineup the way that I did was important.

Q. Javy's been a lot more content to take that ball the other way and shoot that hole the last couple weeks. What maybe sparked that? Was that a conversation that the hitting department had? Is he just -- he wants to contribute?

A.J. HINCH: I think Javy is underrated in playing the game. I think when we think of Javy, I think a lot of people think of the big swing. Some of the big connections and some of the big misses. It's the el mago mystique. We think a lot of things about Javy.

One thing, Javy does play the game. Whether it's subtle base running things, whether it's kind of governing the middle of the field, tags, the small things turn into really a big deal with Javy.

It doesn't surprise me in these environments and the playoffs and his concentration. He was one of the few guys yesterday who didn't take a big swing off Gavin Williams. That's smart baseball because it's really hard to take your big monster swing and connect. You might if he makes a mistake. But I love that he's toned it down to the point of taking what the game's giving him. Got the pull side homer in Boston the other day. Also had some big swings in Boston, but yet also can play the game that's in front of him.

Pretty remarkable head on his shoulders when it comes to doing the little things.

Q. How did you react to seeing Chase DeLauter in their lineup today?

A.J. HINCH: I was curious how they were going to use him. Short series, the decision is always the extra position player versus the extra pitcher. And when they added the extra position player, specifically him, I knew it was for his bat.

That could have come yesterday in a pinch-hit with the game on the line. It comes today with starting. It made me look back to see all the different players who have done it. We've gone through Mondesí and McClanahan and inside just talking about Weathers, these guys that debuted in the playoffs before. It's kind of a great baseball lesson for all of us. It's rare to do it in the playoffs like this.

So obviously, yesterday, we spent a lot of time on him with our players who have played him, our advance team. It doesn't surprise me, given the quality of prospect that he is. Pretty remarkable note, I guess, to know that someone's making their debut in the biggest game of the year.

Q. We saw Colt throwing earlier today. Your group has eyes on him. How do you feel about his health moving forward?

A.J. HINCH: He took a step forward over the last 24 hours, which is good. I don't know what it means yet. The activity levels have increased. The intensity of swings have increased. The confidence, I think, with certain things, that he hasn't swung and missed because you don't swing and miss off a tee off flips. You haven't dove awkwardly fielding a the ball.

For what he's being asked to do, we're able to put more on his plate over the last 24 hours and challenge him more so if we have a decision to make, we have the most information available to us.

So good signs, but I don't know that anything can be drawn from it quite yet.

Q. Last few weeks, we've gotten to talk to you. You've talked about controlling your destiny and controlling what's the ability for you. You look at game 2, you have the opportunity to win and go on to the next series, what is the feeling for you for that after having the stretch of September?

A.J. HINCH: Urgency is the feeling because I wish the game started at 11:30. I'm ready to go, and so is our team.

We were in this exact spot last year, and that's what gives me a ton of confidence about how we're going to come out into this game. We know the other side is going to be fighting for their season. We've been in this spot before.

We know that it can't be decided until you get your 27 outs. You play your nine innings and a lot's going to happen between now and then.

But there's a sense of excitement and urgency to get to the game. It's probably the only time I want to thank MLB for the 1:00 game so we can get to it and compete. It's rare you get in this position to continue to have an opportunity to control what's going on with your team. And everybody knows what's at stake on both sides.

I expect the same amount of urgency that comes in an elimination game if it was the other way. Because, you know, you're -- if you look too much into kind of having the lead in this series, you're going to be caught in an elimination game the next day when you have a short series like this.

Q. When a team executes plays like yesterday, like the rundown, like bunt plays, like plays that we all watch endlessly in spring training and then you might not see for a while, how encouraging is it for a manager that A, the message stuck and, B, I have things I can point to next spring training.

A.J. HINCH: Sure. That's going to be sent to the PD system. Everybody's going to show everything that went right. I'm reminded that those are winning plays and it's winning moments. And we are a winning team.

I think so many times in our sport, because we play every day, what we see last is what we expect all the time, right? And it's easy to say that coming out of yesterday. Big win. Big emotional debut -- or outing by Skubal. Excellent job by Vest. Huge bunt by McKinstry. We're a winning team, and we're great.

We're also that good team whenever things aren't going well. So we're a winning team because we can do things like that and execute when the game's on the line. I love that it comes to the center point of the game when you talk about it behind the scenes, when you prepare like our guys do. Obviously, very rewarding because everything matters when you get to October baseball.

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