

AL Wild Card Series: Tigers vs Guardians

Thursday, October 2, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Progressive Field

Detroit Tigers

Manager A.J. Hinch

Dillon Dingler

Postgame Press Conference

Detroit 6, Cleveland 3

Q. You both could take this one. We talk about sweeter for the adversity, sweeter for the grind. Sweeter for all the stuff you went through the last month.

A.J. HINCH: I think just sweet is enough. I don't think it needs to be any sweeter than what it feels like right now because you have to earn these wins. You have to earn the opportunity to play in October. You've got to earn a full series win over a good team, a hot team, a team that we know well.

I'm so proud of Dillon. I'm proud of our team. You've got to fight, and we did, and we have. We have to continue to do that. It gets harder and harder as you go. The series get longer. When you earn it, that's what makes it sweet.

Q. Dillon, the home run obviously broke the tie but also seemed to break the seal. Like it felt like the seventh inning came and it was one hit after another. How big a moment is that for you? What were you feeling circling the bases there?

DILLON DINGLER: It was huge. Obviously, I've been saying this. I was scratching and crawling a little bit. I was able to get a pitch to hit and do a little damage.

Momentum, I feel like the momentum in the series was the biggest thing. The team with the biggest momentum or the most momentum was the one that was going to carry on.

We were able to flip it right there, and we had a huge sixth inning, able to score some runs and be in the driver's seat a little bit. It was a big one.

Q. A.J., what does it say that so many guys that had



been scuffling a little bit, Wenceel, Riley, Tork, were able to come through with big hits?

A.J. HINCH: We were right on the cusp of that the entire series. Obviously, jumped on Tarik's back in the first game.

In the second game, the story about the guys left on base and so many opportunities, if just one hit would break open, whether it's confidence or momentum or just being contagious. And Wenceel did that.

We had some incredible at-bats early that didn't go our way. But as we talked about before the game, you've got stay in the fight for 27 outs. You're going to have to face some adversity, whether it's a bad play or a bad pitch or a bad call or something's going to happen that you've got to fight back from.

We did. So when Wenceel got the hit -- I don't know why, in baseball, it seems like one good thing happens and then two, three, four, five at-bats in a row were exceptional. We wanted to get even more greedy and do more. But it was nice to separate and breathe a little bit. But knowing they weren't going to give in.

Q. A.J., what does Dillon's emergence as the everyday catcher meant to the team this year?

A.J. HINCH: I'm obviously biased because I'm an ex-catcher. I believe in presence. I believe in stability. And what a pitching staff needs is the guy behind the plate that they know what they're going to get regardless of the ups and downs and the offensive side. What he's given us on the offensive side is exceptional.

Our pitchers trust him. You have to earn that. You can't just show up, be a big leaguer, put on a big league uniform and get that. Inevitably, you have to go out and do it.

So Dillon stepped up when Jake got hurt early in the year and just ran with the opportunity. But he never stopped preparing. He never stopped kind of fighting. He never stopped trying to get better. He's emerging as a front line catcher because of all that work that he's doing and the



credibility that he's gaining and the trust that he's already gotten.

And I love that for him. I love that for any catcher that comes up and can get that immediately. It's pretty special.

Q. For both of you. You mentioned the first inning and the at-bats. There was kind of a grind quality to it. I think you forced them to throw 26 pitches. The vibe feel a little bit different? Was that talked about? Did it just kind of happen?

A.J. HINCH: I don't think it was different. I think when you get to these playoff games in general, but then you get to elimination games, like you're on the edge of your seat or on the edge of the bench or you're standing a little bit taller.

Like he came and stood next to me every inning. There's a little extra urgency in the playoffs, and there should be. And you have to embrace it. You can't run from it. You can't be scared of it. You can't deny it. You've got to overcome it a little bit.

They're going to make good defensive plays. They're going to put the ball in play. Every hit does not mean the game is over. Every run doesn't mean the game is over. So we're learning that because of the experience that we're getting now, second year in a row being in the playoffs.

It only gets better from here, and I'm proud of our group for continuing to learn and grow and mature and fight off some of the negative thoughts that come along the way when people doubt you or you start struggling a little bit. You've got to stay in there.

Wenceel Perez didn't have a hit this series until the biggest hit of the series. Dillon not necessarily executing all of his at-bats until we really needed it. Javy Baez, toward the tail end of the season, you know, scuffling to find his way. Gets a pull-side homer in Fenway and all of a sudden takes off in the playoffs.

We're one good swing away from impacting games that matter the most because we're one of the few teams still standing. And we need to embrace that.

Q. Dillon, how are you processing not only being able to come through with such an important home run, but also doing it in northeast Ohio of all places?

DILLON DINGLER: It's obviously cool. I grew up coming to a few games up here. I was always a long-time Guardians fan growing up. It was special. It was special. Every time we come here, a lot of family, a lot of friends cheering on, and it's kind of cool because all of them are

Guardians fans.

Whenever we'd come into town, they're supporting me. Ultimately, it was very special. Kind of closing the door, winning this series.

Q. How many people did you have here tonight?

DILLON DINGLER: Today, only four, which is the low of the season. The low of the season. The most --

A.J. HINCH: Yet he was still the only player who didn't get booed. It's amazing.

DILLON DINGLER: The most was 16 this year.

Q. Who were they?

DILLON DINGLER: Mom, Dad -- actually, three today. Mom, Dad, and wife.

Q. When I saw you playing with Erie when I was covering the Patriots, was there something with your development that helped you? Were there times you had to bow to adversity to make sure you make it this far?

DILLON DINGLER: You learn a lot about yourself going through the ranks. To me, I spent my fair share in Double-A. You know, I hit well -- hit well up until I got to Double-A. Struggled a little bit. Learned a lot about myself as a hitter. And then you kind of turn the page. You find a little bit of success and you kind of roll with it.

I feel like that's what I've been doing the past three or so years. Obviously, I scuffled last year when I came up. But able to get the opportunity this year and find that comfort level, and I was able to let me excel a little bit.

Q. I think you guys can both speak to this. In these type of elimination games these days, you don't necessarily expect to see the starting pitchers for very long. How big was it for you guys to set up the rest of the game for Jack to keep things calm in the middle there?

A.J. HINCH: The thing with the playoffs -- specifically the Wild Card series -- it's the second year in a row doing this. It's the second year in a row Tarik Skubal set us up for the second game. We won the second game last year. Way easier to win the series when you win the second game.

When the third game comes around, we're still feeling the effects of how Tarik was able to get us deep into the game. We didn't have a guy that threw three days in a row. They



did. I think at some point, it just catches up to you, the intensity of the pitches, the magnitude of the moment, and we capitalized.

And so it's taking nothing away from them. It's just the way these series are shaped. And so for us, having Tyler Holton be able to come out and get a really big inning after an efficient yet longer outing yesterday than maybe we anticipated, that was huge.

Will Vest being a one-plus. Something we talk about all the time. Every reliever on our team needs to be a one-plus. I told Finnegan when we traded for you, you knew we'd throw you in the fifth and sixth inning. That was the target.

Things like that that this team embraces that makes my job really easy, but also sets us up to win the next day's game. Like that is part of playoff baseball that's a little underrated.

Q. I wanted to ask you about some of the subtle decisions that you made today with the lineup first of all, which forced the early decision from Stephen and also the decision to go to Finnegan against what seemed like Rocchio, Kwan, top of the order.

A.J. HINCH: Because every out matters. Like Dillon was saying about momentum, that matters. When they flipped the lineup -- there's a lot of good top of the orders. 30 out of 30 are pretty good, right? But whether you get Kwan and you get it to whoever they put in the 2-hole -- Valera was really good against us this series. José Ramírez, we circle that guy every time we play the Guardians.

When you're bridging the game, every inning matters to give our offense enough time to break through. So the goal for getting Finnegan in was to keep the game exactly where it was or improved on our side. So going one-plus was the goal for him.

We have our targets. We knew what we wanted to do going into the game. If the game leads us that way, we go one way or the other. I had Holton up the previous inning in case things got crazy around Manzardo and DeLauter and the lefties they had. Every out matters. Every game. I preach this to these guys all the time.

Specifically in the playoffs, things can turn on a dime. And so we weren't going to allow the game in the middle part of the game cost us.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Thanks for coming in.