

NL Wild Card Series:

Padres vs Cubs

Wednesday, October 1, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Wrigley Field

Chicago Cubs

Craig Counsell

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Craig, when you have the situation of an opener and then a starter who's used to having usually 30 pitches ready, will that be choreographed if you choose to use Imanaga in the second inning?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, we're going to be prepared for whatever happens next. So yeah, we'll have all players prepared for what could happen.

Is it something different if Shota does it? Yes, it's something different, yeah. That's just part of -- we understand that, and it's something -- there's risk in other things, too, so this is the choice we're making.

Q. How sensitive are you to the fact that most starters need the 30 pitches to be --

CRAIG COUNSELL: Well, the warmup is not an issue. He'll be prepared -- the pitcher is going to be put in the game when he's ready to pitch. That's not an issue.

Q. But it's only one warmup as opposed to normal bullpen people who can warm up and not come in, right?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I'm not understanding that one.

Q. Let me explain it better. Starters when they warm up, they come in and pitch, they don't sit down and --

CRAIG COUNSELL: We'll make sure whoever comes in the game is ready to pitch. I can promise you -- that part we'll be prepared for.

Q. What did you like about the matchup with Kittredge in the top of the order?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I think we're just putting one of



our guys in to face their really good hitters. Simple as that.

Q. In the week or so leading up to the postseason, Shota talked about how much he was looking forward to this postseason environment. What is it like for you to see quite a few guys make their postseason debuts yesterday, of guys getting to enjoy what these moments are about and what it can bring out of them?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I think that's definitely a part for me that is a lot of fun. Seiya, the look on Seiya's face as he kind of crossed home plate and headed back to the dugout yesterday, I'm going to remember that look for a while, 100 percent.

Seiya, we talked just a little bit, and he had talked about -- on Monday how excited he was to be a part of this, so then to do something like that, I think, yeah, that's the stuff that I remember, just that look on his face. That's something I'll remember for a long time.

Q. What is the feeling coming in today knowing that you have an opportunity to move on to the next round?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I don't think it's much different than yesterday. You've got a very good baseball team on the other side. You've got to do everything right to win a baseball game. That's all that -- really, that's all that you think about. Nothing else really comes into your head because it's a tall task to win playoff games.

So if you're spending time thinking about other things, it's not going to -- it's not advantageous in any way.

The task ahead is really simple to keep your head on.

Q. I don't think after the game yesterday you were asked about Nico, and I just wanted to bring it up. Just the fact that he added some insurance, just continues to be this guy who just has a knack for the moment and comes through.

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, the at-bat in the eighth was, like, quintessential Nico Hoerner. When you replay that swing -- nobody is going home and teaching that swing to



their kids. No offense to Nico, but nobody is going home and teaching that.

But what you should be teaching is that this player said, I'm going to do my job here, no matter what. That's essentially the mentality that he plays with is I'm going to do my job here. The job will get done. That's what you love about Nico, and that's, like, the mental strength to me in that at-bat and all those conditions and the tough pitcher on the mound and things like that, probably more important than all the mechanics of everything that are going on.

Q. Craig, obviously bullpen usage changes during the postseason. You're very diligent during the season about bullpen availability. How much does that change, the availability of guys in the bullpen in your thinking? Does it change by round? Do you need to think about further rounds, or because it's the playoffs, it's just all systems go?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Well, it still matters. Look, there's going to be times when players are -- pitchers are unavailable. But we'll just go through a process that we normally do and letting them go through their throwing programs and then give us some feedback and us getting together and then making a decision.

I think guys understand the win-or-go-home mentality, and they're more available because of it, and you take that under consideration 100 percent. We're in a good spot today.

Q. I was just wondering when you told Kittredge, and do you have to announce someone yesterday, or could you have taken that to this morning and then told -- is there some courtesy involved or any rules about that in the postseason?

CRAIG COUNSELL: It was going to be a postgame decision kind of no matter what. We talked about it before the game, but it was going to be a postgame decision kind of based on who pitched and things like that and how we got through the game.

We talked to Andrew after the game --

Q. Did he know before the game he might start tomorrow?

CRAIG COUNSELL: No. Just announcing the starters, it is a courtesy, absolutely, but when you know, we'll tell you. Not always with some other things, but... (laughter).

Q. We obviously don't get to watch Dansby every day the way you do. The two plays on the O'Hearn balls

yesterday, that's what you expect out of him most times?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, Dansby has a -- yesterday was a great example of just how you can impact the game in every way, through different ways. Dansby takes a lot of pride in that and knows he can do that and knows he will do that and wants to do it.

He made two brilliant plays. He made two huge game-changing plays for sure. That's, like, they're home run plays. It's like hitting home runs.

That's where defense, sometimes it's hard to see, but you might as well credit him with two RBIs. It's the same thing. And who knows, those innings could even go on further, right? It's at least two RBIs.

Q. Carlton Fisk before a playoff game a number of years ago said that luck is the residue of preparation and hard work. You guys had guys bunting three or four days in a row before the season ended. Yesterday a bunt advanced a runner to a situation where you had the advantage to win. How important, how essential is all that preparation that you guys have done to get here in continuing to win?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Well, you just try to prepare your guys. In the postseason, like, bunting does become a larger part of the game. In a lot of games in which the run-scoring environment because of the pitchers that get used in the game, it goes down. So one run becomes -- especially as games go on, becomes more important.

I think we acknowledge that, and we just try to prepare for it in the best way we could. If you look at the history of the playoffs, you see -- my own personal experiences from watching Matt Williams lay down a bunt in the World Series, a guy who won the MVP. I never forgot it. I never forgot that Matt Williams bunted.

I don't remember how it impacted the game or anything like that, but it just means -- if Matt Williams, MVP, was bunting, we probably all should be prepared to bunt, just in case.

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