

MLB World Series: Dodgers vs Blue Jays

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Rogers Centre

Toronto Blue Jays

Ross Atkins

Pregame 1 Press Conference

Q. I'm wondering what went into the roster decisions as far as getting Bo Bichette on, first off, and then putting Ty France on with Loperfido and Yariel coming off?

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah, I mean, the Bo one, relatively straightforward, just based on talent and health and felt like he was in a good enough position to help our team and make us better. Ty's been working tirelessly since his injury. He's gotten back to an incredible position physically, has looked really good in all of his live at-bats and is a good matchup against this team, and that contributed to the decision to keep the extra pitcher off.

Q. How is George doing physically right now?

ROSS ATKINS: Great. He's battled through a lot all year, and I think he could articulate better, but we feel like he's in a strong enough position to continue to be an incredible contributor.

Q. Obviously, MLSE moved the start times of the Leafs and Raptors games this weekend as well as Monday and Tuesday's games. Were there conversations with MLSE or was that, like, a nice surprise for you?

ROSS ATKINS: Not with me. I'm sure there were with Mark Shapiro and Marnie Starkman and others. I didn't have those.

Q. Also, since you became GM of the Blue Jays, you've often spoken about the importance of bringing in personnel who are high character, good values kind of folks. This year's Blue Jays, a lot has been made about their resilience and their togetherness. Do you see that as a payoff of that policy of putting an emphasis on high-character people?



ROSS ATKINS: I've always been taught and learned and believed strongly that hiring and identification of -- whether it be players, coaches, scouts, anyone that's helping support the organization, that hiring's the most important thing we do. And if you do that with values that are important to you, then over time, that's going to pay off for you.

Q. John Schneider's talked about the last year with Max Scherzer and kind of the ups and downs of that and the payoff in the last round. What has your perspective been watching Max be a part of this team from when you first signed him to having that moment in the last round?

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah, I'm not sure that I could describe it better than what happened on the field. Seeing that competitive nature come out the way it did, I can't describe it better than what we saw on TV. But it has been incredible to be around him under the hood, in our clubhouse, and to see how he prepares, how he helps others prepare, how he processes information and as it relates to getting ready for winning a baseball game. And then just how important that is to him at this level in his career and how real that is has a massive impact on our environment.

Q. Can you describe some of the conversations that you guys had, factors you considered, in deciding to use Bo at second base coming back from this -- challenges he faces in that transition, what got you guys to the comfort level to make that choice.

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah, I mean, it was more about what we were seeing and then talking about upside, downside. And then I think the most important interactions were those with Bo and just how he was responding and feeling, his confidence level in hitting that top gear and what that could mean once adrenaline factors in. Ultimately, our confidence in his hands, his athleticism, his instincts, that was the easy part.

Q. From a bigger picture offensively the past couple of off-seasons we've had conversations about how you guys were going to look at different elements of the offense. You guys have obviously put an emphasis on

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contact. What are some of the factors in taking some of the contact that you guys have had and this year turning that into contact with damage that's led to a productive offense?

ROSS ATKINS: It's interesting, the most damage that we added in the off-season wasn't as integral into our season, was a piece of the equation in the playoffs in Anthony Santander. But we always have believed in this group. We have said that a long time. And the players that are here, Alejandro Kirk and obviously Vladdy and obviously George, they have continued to get better, they have continued to make adjustments with the league, and we have always felt that contact would turn into more damage, and this year it did.

Q. You haven't been shown in games on the TV that much in your time here, but they have cut to you in the front office a couple times during this run after the DS, after the CS, showing you celebrating. What has this run and kind of those moments been like for you?

ROSS ATKINS: It's obviously very powerful. John Schneider and I were just talking about it. The thing that I think about the most is the relationships, the people that we have hired and the people that we have grown with together, and I've always felt there's a big group of people here that I'm working with that will, for sure, be lifelong relationships and lifelong friendships. And this success, albeit not done with work to do -- not just this year, but well beyond, I think just emboldens that feeling of how powerful these relationships will be.

Q. What was it like from your perspective watching Trey's climb up the system this year? And at what point did you kind of feel like he was a realistic shot at being a part of all this?

ROSS ATKINS: Pretty early. I would say probably in that transition from Vancouver to New Hampshire. That A-ball Double-A transition, as you could see, he was moving pretty quickly. The strikeout rate is just undeniable, the weapons and the unique nature of them was undeniable, and he just made the decision for us.

Q. A couple of your deals brought in everyday guys who were known for defense, Andrés Giménez and Daulton Varsho, and you took on a lot of money with Giménez and you gave up a lot of talent for Varsho. What was the driving force behind defense-oriented players and those deals?

ROSS ATKINS: We talk about both sides of the ball all the time. We also felt that those guys are good offensive players, really good base runners. So the complete nature

of those players, what was so attractive -- you know, yes, is defense exceptionally important to us? Absolutely. But for us, it's always about the complete player, and maybe we have hedged a little bit more into -- or just placing more value in defense subconsciously, but for us, it's always been about the whole player and what that means and how it impacts our ability to win.

Q. You mentioned Schneider, and he was part of the deal when you guys got here, but you obviously saw something in him to progress him up through the ranks. Is it significant to have a Blue Jays lifer like that in the seat that he's in?

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah. Beyond the obvious reasons of the relationships and what it means to him to be a Blue Jay, that has an impact, an impact for others coming into the organization that sense and feel that. But I also think it's exceptionally powerful for all of those coming behind him. It's really important to us that people that we are developing from within, we have to be open to hiring from other organizations and other fields as well, but that is very powerful to us and we feel it's powerful to others in the organization.

Q. Just to follow up on the question about Bo, what was the equation that made it more palatable for you guys to use Bo at second over putting Springer in the outfield?

ROSS ATKINS: Well, that's one game, so we'll see how the other six unfold or however many we play.

Q. It's taken you some time to have the type of sustained playoff run that you had hoped for and always expected with some near misses and some disappointments along the way. How gratifying is it for you personally and for your staff to get to this point?

ROSS ATKINS: The things I talked about, the relationships and this -- I've had this conversation with our players, that this group has won a ton together. So over the last five years, they have won more than anyone in the AL East other than the Yankees, and it's very close -- you know, very high up in the American League and how much this group has won over the last five years.

We have had some crash landings that have been very difficult for us all, the fans, us in the organizations, to stomach. But I'm exceptionally happy for our players and our staff to be sitting where we are today.

Q. Where you're concerned personally, as you walk the streets of this city, are you finding people a little more friendly than in past years?

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ROSS ATKINS: It's always been great. I've never had anything but positive interactions. I mean, I've had a couple of entertaining interactions that maybe they were throwing some jabs, but I've never had anything but just respect. I think people love the Blue Jays so much and I feel that and sometimes I feel maybe that they're wanting a little bit more. But it's always been very respectful.

Q. Another question about Trey. A lot has been made about his confidence and poise on the mound. Curious, back to when you guys were looking at him in the draft, what kind of reports were you getting from scouts about his makeup and how much did that play a factor into where you decided to take him?

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah, it's interesting, you never take a player where that's a concern. Guys that are being taken in the first round usually are dominating, usually are performing at such high levels that the makeup reports are always pretty good. You know, it's going to be, yeah, this guy's a bulldog, he's a warrior, he works his tail off and never backs down from a challenge.

But then the game gets faster and the talent gets higher and the stages are bigger and that exposes some things. So if we had the magic formula to tell you that Trey Yesavage was going to be able to handle this when we acquired him, we probably would have had a lot more success prior to today (laughing). You know, there's just -- you never know and it's a very -- it's the hardest thing to evaluate, in my opinion.

So you evaluate process and work, preparation, how they deal with failure, but handling an environment like he's handled the way he has, I don't think anyone can determine.

Q. Understanding you may not want to necessarily praise a team you're going to go up against in the World Series, but what are some of the things that the Dodgers do organizationally that you look at and think that's driving their success and I'm interested in learning how they got about to that.

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah, I mean, there's an open minded nature. Andrew has also kept a lot of staff members around. There is a commitment to his people. Obviously it starts with their ownership. They have continued to build upon really good resources. Those are all things I would say the Blue Jays are trying to do as well. I do think the continuity is exceptionally powerful for organizations like Cleveland, like Milwaukee, like Tampa, even when a leader is lost, they're usually building from within, so that you can build upon the good decision-making tools that you have,

you can build upon the values that you have. It's the big changes where it gets hard to repeat success.

Q. The contact hitting that you have, the lack of strikeouts, how conscious of a decision was it to go after players who make contact, and how much was a philosophy put in place of in the day-to-day training of them?

ROSS ATKINS: Yeah, very. Yeah, it's something we felt played in the playoffs against really good pitching.

Q. What was the impetus, and when did you as an organization make a decision to concentrate on that?

ROSS ATKINS: Discussion turns into research, and research turns into decisions.

Q. How many years ago?

ROSS ATKINS: Four, probably, five.

Q. You extended Alejandro Kirk to a five-year deal this season, how important has he become to this organization?

ROSS ATKINS: I mean, I can't say enough about Alejandro. And to say how important, you know, it's incredible. Very. Very important. The way that he is handling our pitching staff, that position, controlling the running game, game calling. Not just receiving, but keeping the ball in front of him. The decision making. And then to be hitting fourth or fifth in our lineup, and very effectively, I mean, yeah, that is a massive, massive impact on our ability to win.

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