

NL Championship Series: Dodgers vs Brewers

Monday, October 15, 2018

Craig Counsell

Brewers pregame 3

Q. These teams are kind of similar in that they both have a lot of depth. They both seem to leverage every spot on the roster. Just wondering, going against a team like that, that kind of chess match, is that fun for you as a manager, that challenge?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I mean I think the teams that get this far I think they're going to put together a balanced, deep roster. So I think balanced, deep rosters always we're looking for -- you're looking for advantages, and it's harder to find advantages in a series like this. And that's just playing against a good team.

So ultimately it comes down to guys matching up against each other and competing against each other. And you can't capture every advantage or every matchup that you'd exactly like because good teams have answers for them.

So that's part of playing against a good baseball team. So in that sense it is fun, and the fun part is trying to answer all those challenges.

Q. What do you think the future of this bullpening or opener, some teams are doing, you've done in the postseason. Is it a makeup of a roster type thing or is it something that you think will take hold further as we go into next season?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I don't really know. I haven't thought about that. I think for us this was not something that really started to me until September when the rosters expanded and we were able to look at games a lot differently. I think the playoffs are always going to be -- things are going to be taken to the extreme in the playoffs and always going to be looked at a little bit differently. Because it's different. It's not the same game as a regular season game. There's more off days. You're going to ask more from your better pitchers always. So it's different.

There's good starting pitching or good starting pitching that can offer you a number of innings is never going to go out of vogue; it's always going to be incredibly important and valuable. And I do think teams are going to always look for alternative ways to use their talent the best, though. That's the job of every organization. And I think that will probably pick up steam as we go.



There are certainly limitations in the regular season. There are tremendous limitations on how you can do this in the regular season, especially in the National League, I think.

Q. Regarding positional flexibility, what has brought on in recent years the increased desirability of players who can play all over the place?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I mean I think it's really an attempt to gain matchups, platoon matchups for teams is the best way I could answer it. In the age of -- not in the age of, but with most teams are carrying 12 pitchers during the regular season -- I'm sorry, most teams are carrying 13 pitchers during the regular season, that puts four players on your bench, one's the catcher. Oftentimes that's not a position of flexibility. So you have three players on the bench, you can understand how a flexible player and multi-positional players are really important.

So I think it's kind of a function of how rosters are changing and we're using, for the most part, that extra spot as a pitcher really has increased the need for positional versatility.

Q. I know you answered this probably 16, 17 hours ago, are you any closer to knowing who your Game 4 starter might be? If not, what do you have to see from tonight's game before you make the decision?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Well, we'll have to make the decision at some point. But I think, really, we're going to play tonight's game with, you know, for me, everybody available with the exception of Wade Miley in tonight's game.

And then after the game we'll make a decision on what Game 4 looks like. I think Game 5 for us is looking like -- we're going to use Wade Miley in Game 5 on short rest. But for me it was a 75-pitch appearance, it's something that we've been able to do. It's no different than what we did with Chacin. And so he's capable of doing that.

We'll have to make a decision on 4. But 5, that's where we're going to go back to on 5.

Q. Travis was just in here and he said that from a pure stuff standpoint, he feels that Buehler has the

best on this Dodger stuff. At this point do you feel that's true and how does that make that more difficult to plan for when it's a guy that you're less familiar with?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I mean he's got big stuff. There's no question. 98 miles an hour from starters, that's big stuff. We did face him earlier in the season, several guys in our lineup. I think it's not a guy -- he's a young pitcher with not a ton of familiarity. But it's no different than how -- we have to put pressure on him. That's the bottom line. You've got to put pressure on starting pitching and make them make pressure pitches, the mistakes come from men on base, and forcing over and over to make pressure pitches. It's no different from anybody else.

He as a guy with a good arm, and that just means that he's going to throw it harder and hopefully we hit it a little harder.

Q. Travis, another thing he was talking about was how part of what's made his move to second base work is you've put him in the right positions a good portion of the time. Do you feel like you've gotten better at shifting over the last couple of years as they've gone by? Can you sort of shed some light on that process and maybe some of the names of the people who don't get the spotlight a lot but are a big part of those decisions?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, well, from giving the information to the players' perspective, Carlos Subero is at the lead of it, behind him are our advance scouts, and a team of guys upstairs that are doing a lot of work.

I do think, look, it's a process that you never stop getting better at, because there's always places that we can go with it. And I think what Carlos and I have tried to do is keep trying to search out ways that we can become better at this. And should we apply this to our decision-making? Should we apply this to our decision-making? Does that matter at all? Does the pitcher's stuff matter? Does two strikes matter? Does the runners on base matter? So we're trying to get better at applying all those situations.

And I think you do feel like as you go you learn and you weed out your good stuff and your bad stuff, and eventually make your process a little bit better every so often.

Q. Did the day off allow you to enter tonight's game with a fully stocked pen? Where are you at with all your guys following a day?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Like I said, I think with the exception of Wade, I think everybody's good to go today. We do also have to understand we've got three

games in a row here. And that has to factor in our decision-making for these games.

Q. How much old school coaching did Travis get at second base between games? And how much should we be weighing that as far as a contributor to his success in the field that we see?

CRAIG COUNSELL: The bulk of the old school coaching was: Don't worry about the balls that you can't get to, and just understand the double plays will turn themselves. The time is the time. You get the ball, you throw it to second or catch the ball and throw it to first. If they beat it, they beat it. You can't be faster than you are. You can't try to be quicker than you normally are. "Smooth, not quick" is the phrase I like to use in the infield.

So I think Travis, he plays with a very good clock in his head. You don't see him rushed, which I think is a very good trait for a defensive player. And he hasn't sped himself up because he's playing a new position. He's still playing at the same pace, and the clock has not changed for him, which is a great trait. I think that's probably one of the things I had the most faith in him doing is kind of transferring the pace of the clock at which he plays with in the infield is very stable for him and steady for him.

Q. Two other things about the defensive positioning topic. How much is having an infielder with a lot of range like Arcia helped to simplify the process of positioning the other guys? And how important of a component is it to have the pitchers pitching to the game plan successfully?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Well, I think what I would say is that like, when you're shifting it's a team effort. You have to play as a team when you're shifting. And that's probably the most challenging part of it. It's a very team-oriented defense. And so all of our guys have to contribute to that. Orlando is our best defender in the infield. And so we certainly rely on him.

But I'd say more than just the ground balls, it's all the other stuff around defense that he is so good at, from tags to turning double plays to pop-ups to relay throws. Those are all the separators for him.

The second part of your question was -- yeah, I think one of the things about defensive shifting is that pitchers make mistakes, and you have to realize they make mistakes. They're not perfect. Of course there's a game plan that we're all aware of and we all know what their stuff is. But the balls that get hit hard are the balls that are mistakes, right? So I think it's more you kind of plan where the guys are hitting it. And there's an overlay certainly of the kind of contact that our pitchers give off, for sure.

Q. You've eschewed the term "starter" at some point this offseason. Would you say you also moved away from a traditional closer role, as well? Do you have a closer?

CRAIG COUNSELL: We don't have one player. I mean I guess whoever gets the last three outs, and if you put an S by his name, he gets to be called the closer.

And I think for us our season has been -- just the way our season has went has put different guys in that role.

And the second thing is when one guy is left-handed and the other two guys are right-handed, there's going to be different times to me where they fit in different spots of the game. So that's changed the order with which we use our guys. But we've just chosen instead of, You pitch this inning and you pitch this inning, who are the hitters and what's the best chance to have success against which hitters. I think that's a more question to answer than saying, You have to pitch this inning.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about the LA connections with Yelich, Moustakas and Braun. You actually wore a Dodger uniform. Do you have a single-most memory of that time and what it did or didn't do to further your career?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I'm not sure, but I think I wore No. 30, which is what Dave Roberts is wearing. I'm not positive on that, but for a while I might have.

Yeah, look, I was traded here or -- actually it was kind of -- maybe I was released, I don't know. And I spent four months here and played with some very talented players, enjoyed playing here. It was a fun place -- it's fun to put on the Dodger uniform. It was an honor certainly to put on the Dodger uniform. And so I do have some memories, I had to tell Mike Vassallo where the media room was and how fast we could get here today. I still have some local knowledge of the stadium, as well (laughter).

Yeah, it's a place that I've spent considerable time at. And I enjoyed my short time here.

Q. Where did you live and how did you handle the traffic?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I lived in -- I lived with Mark Grudzielanek, stayed with him. Lived in Manhattan Beach. It was a beautiful place to live. We left early and got home late. But in the meantime we had the beach in the morning so it was worth it.

Q. I imagine you probably sleep better at night knowing who your Game 4 starter is. At the same time is there some upside not being locked into a

particular guy and having the ability to adjust based on what the Dodgers might show you today?

CRAIG COUNSELL: Yeah, I don't think this is as much about what the Dodgers show us as really how we get through the game today. So I want to keep our options open for the game as to how we feel like is the best way to win the game. And that's how we manage the game and that's how we choose who goes out there.

But we have some decisions and I think there's a short list of guys that it's going to be. But it's really about making sure we put all our resources in and the right decisions into tonight's game and don't limit ourselves.

Q. Just to follow up on the questions about playing three days in a row now. In Game 1 you were able to use Josh for three innings, knowing you'd have to shut him down a couple of days. If you use him three innings today, and have to shut him down a couple days, that takes you through 4 and 5. Is it safe to say you probably don't want to use him for 3 today?

CRAIG COUNSELL: I mean if -- can I get three scoreless? (Laughter).

Look, I think those are decisions we have to make during a game. And we'll read the game and see how it goes. But the longer you use a guy, there's a cost for when he's going to be available to pitch next. And I think ultimately one thing we're trying to do is get Josh as many outs in this series as we can with keeping him healthy and keeping him effective. But there's tradeoff there. There's no question. And we have to evaluate that.