AL Championship Series: 
Astros vs Red Sox 
Sunday, October 14, 2018

A.J. Hinch 
Astros pregame 2


Q. Just wondering what your team's approach is against Mookie Betts and what was going through your mind last night when he was up at bat with the bases loaded?
A.J. HINCH: Our approach is to keep him out of the batter’s box with any opportunity to do damage. He's one of the most dynamic hitters in baseball. And so you can imagine my thought was panic and fear whenever he comes up to bat with no escape area.

He can cover every pitch. He's a threat to do a lot of different things. So I'm not really going to go over what our pitch approach is going to be to him, but the less of those at-bats that we can get, the better, because he’s a ticking time bomb to do some kind of damage.

Q. Part of the magic last year was the bottom third of the order helping you out. I feel like the past couple of series, the last month it’s really been a benefit to you guys as well.
A.J. HINCH: Yeah, it's because a lot of the guys at the bottom used to be some the middle of somebody else's order even our own order. You look at Carlos in the 7 hole and Reddick at 9. At some point during this year and last year they hit 3, 4, 5, somewhere in the middle.

It does help to have really good hitters at the bottom. This team -- one of my favorite parts of our team is they don't care where they hit. And so that allows me a lot of freedom to move guys around when they’re going well; when they’re not going well, to put them in some situations where there’s some tandem at-bats, where I like Reddick up to bat right before it rolls over with Springer and Altuve and Bregman. We don’t care where the hits come from. Any part of the order is good.

Q. Having McCullers in the bullpen is a byproduct of him getting injured. But how has that dynamic changed your bullpen? And what makes him so great for that role?
A.J. HINCH: His stuff is what makes it so great. He can get anybody out in the league. And he was a real -- he was a really good starter for us. Made the All-Star team last year. Was really effective this year.

And you put that -- he’s got the “it” factor mentality-wise to go in and let it go, let it (indiscernible) for the hole, whatever inning I ask him to pitch. And his breaking ball is dynamic. His fastball is good when he throws it. I know he didn't throw any last night, which is rare, even for him. And a good changeup, and he’s an adrenalin junkie, so to speak, he feeds off that.

The back end of the game, the game on the line, the big at-bats, he feeds off that adrenalin and that anxiousness that comes with that time.

Q. McCullers’ floating rule notwithstanding, do you feel there's more structure with this year's bullpen than last year's postseason?
A.J. HINCH: A little bit. A little bit. Obviously even -- I'll name Keuchel to Game 3 and Morton to Game 4 today, and even being able to do that nowadays is rare, just not have the feeling that I'm going to have to have those guys up and available.

Now, they'll be available if Armageddon hits and we play a historically long playoff game. I don't want to jinx that. Sorry in advance. (Laughter).

But the structure that we have with the back end, it's made the middle relief that we have really, really good. We left off relievers that had World Series experience. We have middle relief guys that pitch at the back end of games throughout the season. So that structure is nice. It's rare nowadays.

It doesn't mean I won't use Pressly or Lance or even Osuna in a creative way. I don't want to be boring. But having that map out with high-end starting pitching, getting to the latter third of the game has led us to some wins.

Q. How necessary do you think it was to part ways with Ken Giles to get this bullpen --
A.J. HINCH: It was nothing against Kenny. Ken served us very well. He had some ups and some downs. And in a lot of ways what we tried to do with him is what a lot of managers are doing with a lot of relievers, where they call it the Andrew Miller role nowadays, or what I'm doing with Pressly, or what you see some of the other teams that are still playing do with their primary relievers, and it just didn't work.

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So, necessary? I don't know how necessary it was. It opened up opportunities for us to add really good relievers to balance things out a little bit.

Q. You mentioned your bullpen, but what about Alex’s bullpen and your job to predict -- or is it dangerous to try to predict what Alex is going to do with his bullpen? Do you have to just read and react?

A.J. HINCH: I go by the phrase “manage your own team.” I have hard enough time managing my own team; I don’t want to manage his team. And we’ll pay attention to what he does. We know what he’s done in the past series and all bets are off in the postseason. You see some unpredictable things in the postseason.

So when you get too caught up into making predictions you can get yourself in trouble. But focus on our guys. When he gets a guy up we’re well aware with who’s warming up with the video technology, and we’ve got our scouting reports and we’ll go with it.

Even last night, when he was thinking about Rick Porcello in the ninth inning, those are his guys that he’s going to go to and we’ll react accordingly.

Q. By record alone, you and the Red Sox probably responded to adversity this year better than any other teams. What are you expecting out of Alex and his team how they'll respond with their backs against the wall?

A.J. HINCH: Well, it’s just Game 2. I don’t know that their backs are against the wall as much as they had a tough game last night. I expect them to come out and be really good.

I always talk about myself in the sense that I don’t panic and you’re not going to see anything different whether we’re up or down or elimination game or not.

You can probably multiply that with Alex, in what I know about him. So there’s going to be no real change. There’s always a sense of urgency with him. There’s always going to be quality play with this group. These guys didn’t win this many games by accident.

What I also noticed and I appreciate you saying it, it wasn’t a magic carpet ride for them or us. We both had sets of adversity, having to fight through some things. We just made it look a little bit easier than some teams because we won so many games. But I expect them to be good, and they’re going to come out ready to play.

Q. I know you guys do a lot of prep work for each game with the staff and map out every possible scenario that can come up during the game. But can you get better as a playoff manager? And if so in what ways do you get better? Does the game slow down for you the more you’ve done it?

A.J. HINCH: I think we can all get better. And I think experience helps with that. I’ve managed a lot of games in the playoffs now and there is -- you get a little bit more calm and you feel a little bit more prepared, and there’s some things you look back on -- like anything you experience multiple times you look back and, man, why did I do it that way then, and I can do it this way now. There’s a great comfort level with how you read and react to situations and your team is different.

You can’t just have one way to manage in the postseason. You’ve got to manage your pieces and your players and your opportunities and the game changes so fast. And I think any experience managing helps future managing.

And I felt that a little bit from the first time in 2015 we made the playoffs into the World Series and into this year. And if you’re not in this game to get a little bit better at your job then how can I ask my players to do it or the front office to do it or anybody else. We all need to get better.

Q. What’s the difference in your feeling going to these postseason games now compared to a year ago because of the bullpen difference?

A.J. HINCH: Yeah, I certainly feel like we don’t have to be as perfect as I felt like we had to be last season. It was hard to map out the scenarios that come into play, when a case in point being, you look at the lineup today that we’re going to be facing -- they’ve got an incredible middle of the order. When you look -- you can start at Betts or Martinez or start at Bogaerts and wherever you go, these pockets of players.

The fact that we’re having debates on which right-handed reliever that we feel matches up best with these guys means we have multiple guys to go to.

Last year, there’s a little more sense of urgency and a little bit more desire to have it be one guy. It was going to be Charlie Morton. It was going to be Lance McCullers. It was going to be Devenski for this particular guy only, or Brad Peacock for Puig in the World Series.

I don’t feel we have to be so perfect with that because we have a lot of different weapons we can use that match up differently. And that’s a little bit of a comfortable feeling with the exception of it’s not comfortable when those guys hit.

Q. One bullpen question: As deep as your pen is, you brought Verlander back out in the sixth inning.
yesterday. How important do you think it is to try to extract those extra two or three outs from the starting pitcher?
A.J. Hinch: You can't just do that for everybody. I think you have to know your players and know which guy that you can go back to.

With JV, in particular, you'll see it today with Cole, those are hard guys to take out of the game because they're really good at the end of their outings. It's not that way across the board for every starting pitcher. If you have the right matchup and you have the player that can come back from a tough inning, some guys can handle it mentally, some guys can't. Some guys can handle it physically, some guys can't. JV, the reason I went back to him yesterday is he might be the best at it in postseason.

Every situation is different. I don't think you can have one philosophy on doing it every single time, but I felt really good about it yesterday because of the way the inning ended. I know my players. I watch them. I see their facial reactions. I know how they operate in the dugout and I was worried about two innings from now and not the next inning. The next inning I thought he was going to be great. He was. Get him out when I was convicted to do it and move on to the bullpen.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.