

2023-12-03 Jim Leyland Media Availability

Jon Shestakofsky

Well hello and welcome to tonight's media availability with class of 2024 Hall of Fame inductee, Jim Leyland. My name is Jon Shestakofsky, Vice President of Communications and Content at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. And as you know earlier today, Jim was elected to the Hall of Fame by the Contemporary Baseball Era Committee, and he will be inducted into the Hall of Fame on Sunday, July 21st in Cooperstown alongside any electives that may emerge from the ongoing 2024 BBWAA voting process, the results of which will be announced on January 23rd. Please note that this media session is being recorded and transcripts will become available within the next 48 hours at the Hall of Fame's website, baseballhall.org. Jim, we share our congratulations and thank you for joining us on this call. So before we open for questions, would you like to share any opening remarks, Jim?

Jim Leyland

Well, I'd just like to say how flattered I am, how proud I am to be inducted in Cooperstown at the Baseball Hall of Fame. It's the highest honor you can get in our business and I'm just thrilled, excited, surprised, flattered. All those words come into play when you're thinking about this. So very excited about it, and very happy evening for me and my family.

Jon Shestakofsky

Wonderful. Thanks, Jim. And we're now ready to take questions from the call participants. So if you would like to ask a question of Jim Leyland, please click reactions at the bottom of your screen and then click the raise hand button. And the first question will come from David Venn, David, go right ahead. Unmute yourself and you can ask your question.

David Venn

Jim, congratulations.

Jim Leyland

Thank you very much.

David Venn

I wanted to ask you, you had the privilege of managing some pretty big names starting with Barry Bonds and going on with Justin Verlander. Miguel Cabrera. When you reflect on the talent you saw so close-up over the years, what comes to mind?

Jim Leyland

Well, I just marveled, being not a very good player myself, I realized how hard it was to play the game and when you saw guys, like Bonds and Cabrera and Verlander and Scherzer and Sheffield, I can just go on and on with a number of guys, Larry Walker, who's a Hall of Famer, Pudge Rodríguez, you just marvel at how good these guys really are. And to have the privilege of managing against some of the

greatest players to ever play and to manage some of the greatest players to ever play yourself. It just doesn't get any better than that as a manager.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question, Ron Blum, go right ahead.

John Keating

Hey, Jim, congratulations. Over the years, what do you think was your lasting imprint on your players? What did you try to teach them?

Jim Leyland

Well, I tried to teach them how to be a professional. Early on, when I managed in the minor leagues, you try to break guys in and teach them what professional baseball is all about. And you try to take that to the major league level with you, because I really believe no matter how good the players are, and how great they really are, I believe that to this day, I think young people, young players are searching for discipline. Sometimes they might not act like it, but I think they really seek it out. And I think they really appreciate it. So you know, we all have our insecurities. And I think even sometimes players do even though they're great players. And I think that they're always looking for that leadership. So I tried to impress upon what it was to be a professional. And, you know, how tough this game is to play. And I also told them almost every day how good they were. So that's how I kind of went about it.

John Keating

Thank you. Congratulations.

Jim Leyland

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question from Bruce Levine. Bruce, go right ahead.

Bruce Levine

Jim, congratulations, my friend. Very happy for you and Katie and the family. Can you talk a little bit about the fact that there's so many players out there you know, you were asked about the great players but there's, there's so many examples of the Gary Varshos and the Tom Princes out there that you helped with their careers, but that you treated equally, and helped define their roles. How important was that in your success as a manager the way that you communicated with your entire roster and coaching staff?

Jim Leyland

Well, I think all good managers realize it takes 25 good guys and it takes one heartbeat as well, your proxies to stay so you know, I tried to communicate with everybody. I always kind of sometimes people didn't take this right. Sometimes they did. But I thought the veteran players who really respected this, you know, I used to tell them about some players. I love veteran players as much as anybody. But your reward is every two weeks when you get paid, because you've earned that. You've earned that

throughout your career, and you deserve that. But I cannot treat you better than the 25th player on this ballclub. And I actually think that the veteran players liked that. So I tried to communicate, I tried to be fair with everybody. I made my mistakes along the way, like all managers do. But I think communication is obviously a necessity if you're going to be good at what you do.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question, we'll go to Dave Briggs. Go right ahead, Dave.

Dave Briggs

Jim, congratulations. Just just kind of here back in Toledo. And obviously, so many people in Perrysburg proud what is you've talked about this, but what does Perrysburg mean to you? And what is this kind of mean to carry the flag into the Hall for Northwest Ohio?

Jim Leyland

Well, obviously, it was my hometown. Growing up, I was there till I was 40 years old and took the job in Pittsburgh. So it means a lot to me. We're fortunate, very fortunate. I'm still working with the Tigers. So we're very fortunate to have our AAA club there. So I get in there a few times a year to see the Mud Hens and get to visit with my family. So it's a special place. It's where I was born and raised and you never forget that. So you know, I'm very proud of it. I'm very, very proud to be from Northwest Ohio, and very proud to be from Perrysburg.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question from John Perrotto. John, you can unmute yourself.

John Perrotto

Hey, Jim, congratulations. I'm so happy for you.

Jim Leyland

Thank you so much, John.

John Perrotto

Yeah. hey, when you got hired in Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh press ran a headline that said, "Jim Who?". Would you ever dream that you would go from "Jim Who?" to the Hall of Fame?

Jim Leyland

No, I didn't really think about that. In fact, all those years in the minor leagues, I never really thought about coaching in big leagues. I was just a minor league manager and I never really thought that I was ever going to get that opportunity later on in my career. When I got out to Triple-A I thought I might end up having a chance to coach someday in the big leagues, but not really manage. But yeah, it was "Jim Who?" when I got here, and you know, I'm still here. So at least people know me a little better than they did when I first got here. You know, the Pittsburgh Pirates will always be a special place in my heart because they gave me my first opportunity to manage a major league team. Syd Thrift, the general manager, Mac Prine, the president, Carl Barger, they gave me that first opportunity. So there's a special place for a special place for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

John Perrotto

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next up, Chris McCosky, go right ahead.

Chris McCosky

Thank you. Way to go, Jim. Big day, man.

Jim Leyland

Thank you.

Chris McCosky

Hey, what's the lead up to this been like for you? What, have you been kind of grinding on this a little bit? Or did you kind of do a good job of compartmentalizing and keeping it, you know, if it happened, it happened kind of thing.

Jim Leyland

I'm almost ashamed to say that I didn't really take it that serious to start with, because I didn't really think I had a chance. And then as it started to get a little bit closer, I did get a little excited about it. A little nervous about it. And it seemed like today, it seemed like time passed so fast until about the last half hour or the last hour before they were going to make an announcement. And then everything just slowed down. So it was, you know, it was exciting. You know, I was nervous about it. But to be honest with you, I really didn't think I was gonna get in. So I really wasn't that upset about it or that concerned about it. But the heart did start beating about 6:30 When I didn't get a call and I finally got the call. 10 minutes to seven. It was racing pretty good.

Chris McCosky

Thank you.

Jim Leyland

Sure.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question, Marc Topkin. Go ahead, Mark.

Marc Topkin

Jim, congratulations.

Jim Leyland

Thank you.

Marc Topkin

You obviously appreciate how tough it is to get into the Hall of Fame as you just said, you didn't even think you had a chance. Do you feel a little bit for Lou missing out, Lou Piniella missing out by one vote for the second time?

Jim Leyland

I do. You know, I felt for all the managers that didn't get in. I assume, assume that all four of us weren't gonna get it. I know they can only put three in so I knew that all four of us weren't gonna get in. Lou's been close. I assume that's certainly going to happen. Davey Johnson was, obviously he's a great manager. Cito Gaston with two World Series. I, you know, I didn't really get into a situation myself personally, where I ever was comparing myself to anybody. I just thought this is a committee that votes, they're going to make a decision on who they think should get in, and at what time they should get in. So, you know, hope, hoping that their day comes. Today I was the fortunate one.

Marc Topkin

Thank you.

Jim Leyland

Sure.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question comes from Scott Merkin.

Scott Merkin

Jim, congratulations. I was just going to ask you, how did your time coaching with the White Sox kind of shape your career? What did it mean to be part of that staff back in the early 80s?

Jim Leyland

That was a huge, huge part of my career, to be honest with you, because in 1983, we had a great ballclub in Chicago, we won the western division, we ended up getting beat by Baltimore, when I was a third base coach for that team in 83. And it had a lot of stars on it, Tom Paciorek, Greg Luzinski. Two young guys (Ron) Kittle and (Greg) Walker, Jerry Koosman, Carlton Fisk, and we had such a good year that I got noticed a little bit, I believe, by some of the baseball people. And I think that was my first stepping stone as far as maybe getting a major league manager's job. Because we got a lot of exposure that year, we were around the media a lot, the White Sox were getting very good publicity. So I think that was a real big stepping stone for my career.

Scott Merkin

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question from Bill Madden. Bill. Go right ahead.

Jon Shestakofsky

Bill, did you have a question here?

Bill Madden

Can you hear me?

Jon Shestakofsky

Yep, go right ahead.

Bill Madden

Hi, Jimmy. Congratulations.

Jim Leyland

Bill. Thank you very much.

Bill Madden

I'm just curious, you know, in your long, and now Hall of Fame career, some of the people who are most influential on this career to you? I'm sure there's maybe 100 of them, but just some off the top of your head who have been most influential to you?

Jim Leyland

Well, there's so many of them. I started in the minor leagues with people like Ed Katalinas with the Tigers and Don Lund and Bill Lajoie, Hoot Evers. Just, you know, in the minor leagues is where it really started. They had a great deal of influence on me. And then of course, Roland Hemond, Jerry Reinsdorf, Tony La Russa, you go on and on and on. Syd Thrift hired me here, give me an opportunity. You know, Wayne Huizenga. These people, they believed in me. Jerry McMorris in Colorado. They gave me an opportunity to manage their club. It's a thrill to be one of the 30 managers in the major leagues, it's a tough job. And to get one of those jobs, it's very difficult to get and it's very difficult to keep so there were so many people. And a lot of the players were big influences on me too. You know, I learned how to handle the players by listening to them and talking to them and keeping one ear open and one eye open. And one ear, you know, where I could hear them and, and I listened to those guys a lot. And they were a big influence on me. So there's so many people I know, my speech, I'm probably not going to be able to thank everybody. I'm going to leave somebody out by mistake, but there's just so many people, Bill, when you've been around the game this long that have had a significant influence on you.

Bill Madden

Thanks Jimmy. Again, congratulations.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question, we'll go to John Keating.

John Keating

Hey, Skip, congratulations, we know you to be emotional. What was your reaction? And did you cry?

Jim Leyland

Well, I had a few tears. My son was with me upstairs. I went up to actually lay in a bed, because I didn't get the call till about 10 minutes to seven. And they told us it would be between 6:30 and 7:15. But I thought when I didn't get it by quarter to seven, that it wasn't going to happen. So I went up just to rest a minute, kind of get my thoughts together. And when my son came up, the phone rang. And it was the Hall of Fame. I couldn't believe it. And there was definitely a tear in my eye. Yes.

John Keating

Congrats.

Jim Leyland

Thank you.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question, Bill Francis. They'll go right ahead.

Bill Francis

Hey, Jim, congratulations. I'm wondering if you've ever been in the Hall of Fame, Cooperstown before. Have you been to Cooperstown in your life?

Jim Leyland

I have. I've been to Cooperstown. I went obviously when Tony La Russa was inducted into the Hall of Fame. I coached for Tony. And a little bit deeper than that, my son played at the Field of Dreams up there at Cooperstown when he was 12 years old. So I was up there quite a bit. I've been to Cooperstown quite a bit. I got to play golf with Tony when he was inducted, they have a day where I guess the Hall of Famer can take somebody golfing. He took me with him. So I've been around a little bit but I've tried to stay away from it as much as I could. I just didn't think it was a place to hang around. At you know, possibly someday possibly being a candidate. I didn't want to do that. So I've only been there a couple of times, but I was there with my son a couple of summers when he played for 12 and 13 year old team Cooperstown.

Bill Francis

So, Jim, you having been there and having spent your whole life in baseball, what does the Hall of Fame represent to you? The Baseball Hall of Fame?

Jim Leyland

Well, it's a final stop, really, as far as your baseball career goes, and to end up there, to land there in Cooperstown? It doesn't get any better than that. I mean, that's the ultimate. I certainly never thought it was gonna happen. Most people probably don't. But it did. And I'm sure I'm gonna enjoy it.

Bill Francis

Thanks, Jim.

Jon Shestakofsky

We have time for a few more questions. Next up, Jordan McPherson, go right ahead.

Jordan McPherson

Hey, Jim, congratulations. I wanted to ask you about that 1997 Marlins team, for making it to the World Series with them just that year in general, what stands out to you about that group and what you guys were able to accomplish?

Jim Leyland

Well, that team came together, you know, they had gone out that winter and they brought a few players in, a few new players in. I was kind of a stranger to the team and so were some of the new players. But for whatever reason, and I can tell you this story, you might want to check it for sure to make sure I'm accurate. But I think we were something like 25-6 in spring training. And I was scared to death because I thought oh my god, these expectations are going to be unbelievable. We couldn't lose a game. I mean, we'd be behind three runs in the ninth inning of a spring training game, I'd put some kid in from A ball, he'd hit a grand slam to win the game. And it was just crazy. I think we went like 26-5 or something like that. Maybe 24-6. But we got off to a good start. It was a great team. It was the best team in baseball that year. And I think we ended up proving that. So you know what a team that was, Edgar Renteria's hit is something that will live with me forever. But all those guys on that team, it was a close group of guys. And it was a tough bunch of guys. They played the game the right way. And we had a lot of stars on that team. A lot of people could have managed that team.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next question from Bob Nightengale.

Bob Nightengale

Hey, Jim, congratulations. So well deserved. I think Tony La Russa has been more nervous about this, then you and your family were. Have you had a chance to talk to him since you got in?

Jim Leyland

I did. I spoke with him briefly. You know, I've had so many calls and everything. It's hard to stay on the line too long with somebody but I have had a conversation with him. Had a conversation with Gene Lamont, had a conversation with Joe Torre. You know, some of the people that I responded to, I've spoken with the Commissioner. So you know, a lot of wonderful, wonderful phone calls today.

Bob Nightengale

Thank you.

Jim Leyland

Sure.

Jon Shestakofsky

Next up, Robert Grayson, go right ahead.

Robert Grayson

Yes, congratulations, Jim. I wanted to ask you two things. First, when you knew you wanted to manage, and your feelings about winning the championship with the United States, the championship?

Jim Leyland

Well, like I said, you know, I, I really didn't want to be a manager, I wanted to be a player. So when somebody said, well, you fulfilled your dream, not quite, I really wanted to be a player. As a young kid, that's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a major league player. Obviously wasn't good enough. So I got the next best thing. As far as managing for the United States in a (World Baseball) Classic it was, like I said, it was probably the worst best job I've ever had. Because you're asking players to amp up real early in spring training, maybe when they're not ready. You're dealing with other teams' players, other organization's player, so you're just you know, paranoid about getting somebody hurt. You got to be very careful. There's a lot of instructions. It's a very tough job, because you're getting calls from general managers, pitching coaches, constantly about 'Hey, my guy can throw 15 pitches tonight or pitch one inning at the most.' So it's a very trying job to be honest with you. But it was so rewarding because I don't think I've ever seen a group of guys get closer together in a two-week period than that 2017 United States team. For whatever reason, from day one, it just clicked. And I told the coaches and when we were working out we had a workout. We had a couple exhibition games. I said, you know, I have no idea how tough this competition is going to be. I know it's going to be tough. I know it's gonna be strenuous. But these guys are all on the on the same page. It was one for everybody. They got together they pulled for one another. They were opponents during the regular season, but all of a sudden they were teammates, and you'd have thought they were teammates all their life.

Jon Shestakofsky

Last two questions. First, we'll go to Patrick Lyons.

Patrick Lyons

Hey Jim, congratulations.

Jim Leyland

Thank you.

Patrick Lyons

You mentioned that, you know, managers will make mistakes over the course of their career. I'm just curious, what were some of the lessons that you took away from your season in Colorado that allowed, led you to, you know, be spurred on to the final part of your career and the success you had with the Tigers?

Jim Leyland

Well, I just, I just didn't get comfortable. I was always a pitchers manager. And I just didn't feel comfortable. I didn't think I could make a difference there. And I didn't think it was best to stay because I just didn't think I can make a difference. As a manager, you know the game is about the players. It's basically almost totally about the players. But you want to feel that you have an impact, and you can be at your best, and I just didn't feel I could be at my best there handling the pitching staff. So I always took pride in that. And I just didn't do a good job there. It's that simple. I did a bad job.

Jon Shestakofsky

And last but not least, our final question will go to Alex Krutchik. Alex, go right ahead.

Alex Krutchik

Hi, Jim. Congratulations again. Going back to that 1997 team with Florida. Another guy who was on the ballot this year is Gary Sheffield. What made him the kind of player that he was? And if he does get into the Hall, what is it that makes him a Hall of Fame player?

Jim Leyland

Well, this, this is a pretty simple one. For me, it's my opinion. I think there was a long period quite a long period of time that Gary Sheffield was the most feared right-handed hitter in baseball, probably until Albert Pujols came along. And so I think you know, he's got the 500 homeruns. He's got the RBIs. He, he was just he was a great player. I'm obviously pulling for him this year. I know he went to 55% last year. But once again, this is up to the people that vote. I'm not gonna all of a sudden be one of those guys that says this guy should be in, this guy should be in. That's really, you know, not my business. That's for somebody else to make that decision. I'm going to be pulling hard for him as I was for Larry Walker and Pudge Rodriguez, and some other fellows, but that's up to the people that make this decision and vote on the Hall of Fame and hopefully, Sheff's time is going to come.

Jon Shestakofsky

Well, thanks to all the media members for joining us on this call and a big thanks for joining us today, Jim. We look forward to celebrating your exceptional career at the 2024 Induction Ceremony, which will take place July 21st in Cooperstown. As a final note, Jim Leyland will be available to credentialed media in person here in Nashville, Tennessee tomorrow at 2pm. Central time. That's 2pm local time in Nashville at the Gaylord Opryland Resort in the MLB Winter Meetings' media work room, which is the Delta Ballroom and we hope to see you all here tomorrow with Jim on site. Thanks, everyone. And congratulations again. Jim.

Jim Leyland

Thank you very much.