

# World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Dominican Republic vs Venezuela

Saturday, 11 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Venezuela

### Omar Lopez

#### Pregame Press Conference

**Q. Good afternoon, Omar. We see Acuña leading off, and second Altuve, Eugenio. What was the decision to put together that lineup against Dominican Republic?**

OMAR LOPEZ: We are playing in a ballpark where the grass is artificial. We tried to put the best players with the highest percentage of contact. So the free swingers can hit with men on base. Especially versus a very difficult pitcher, such as Alcántara. So we are going to try to fight in each inning and to capitalize on the errors he might make.

Eugenio is going to be lower in the lineup and will have a chance to see some more of Sandy's pitches and have come to bat with some runners on the bases.

**Q. It is the first time in history that Venezuela is playing in the WBC and Cabrera is not in the lineup. Was that an easy decision to bench Miguel Cabrera? Did you have some discussions with him?**

OMAR LOPEZ: I'm going to tell you the history of Miguel Cabrera. Miguel Cabrera has some restrictions. He can only play two games out of four. We made these plans according to the teams we are going to face and the pitchers we are going to face. That's the reason number one.

It is not easy to bench Miguel Cabrera, but I have some guidelines not only with him, some restrictions not only with him, but with other players because of the conditions of the tournament. We worked a lot with the League's office, Detroit, their management. So MLB could approve his participation in the World Baseball Classic.

He didn't play the second game versus the Mets. He can only play two of the four games that we have to play. I told him beforehand in which games he was going to play, and he can come off the bench as a pinch-hitter. He will be



ready to play like that.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, first of all, about the situation of Erick Leal. He posted that he went back to Venezuela. What happened with him? We want to know that. Is there a substitution for him? It's been several months that you have been working to get here. How are you feeling before this game? You saw the atmosphere against Puerto Rico.**

OMAR LOPEZ: Well, I couldn't see the game of Puerto Rico because in the hotel you have 130 channels, and nobody was transmitting the game. I was able to see the last four or five innings. The coaches had a meeting before coming here.

Regarding Erick Leal, first of all, we wanted to try out those players, him and Vizcaya, and Rivero. And we couldn't bring Briceno because he signed with Arizona, and he was in Spring Training. Escobar is in Japan. We told him what was our goal to bring them here. The same players afterwards talked to me, and with Eduardo Brizuela they wanted to stay here for the rest of the Classic. We would cover their expenses, et cetera. They're off the roster of 30.

In the case of Erick and the others, we asked them what they want to do, and he wanted to go back to Venezuela. We offered them because we have a free day on Monday, we are going to practice that day. We want to do that practice, training with them, but he decided to go back to Venezuela. We told him that if there was another opportunity in the second round, we would invite him to come back.

**Q. I would like to ask you about Germán Márquez. How did you manage that with his injury? What plans do you have with him?**

OMAR LOPEZ: Well, I can tell you about the plan later on, but the idea is that Germán, when he was injured, we removed him from the roster.

We waited a while. We wanted him to go to Spring Training, and we wanted to negotiate with the organization, but they wouldn't let him come back to that pool round



because they didn't know about the injury.

Now he is okay, and he is not in the pool round. Maybe if we go to the semifinals or to the finals and he might help us as a starting pitcher.

**Q. What are the players with restrictions, and what are the games where Miguel Cabrera is going to play?**

OMAR LOPEZ: Restrictions, well, all the pitchers have restrictions. Not only in Venezuela. Most of the pitchers of the other teams have restrictions. There is a working plan that they have to follow. Many things that we have to negotiate.

When I say "negotiate," by the way, it's conversations, discussions between ourselves and the organizations because the players are willing to play, but we have to understand that a team has to take care of the players.

Regarding Miguel Cabrera he will be playing tomorrow against Puerto Rico. I don't know the other game.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, what's the game plan to face Alcantara?**

OMAR LOPEZ: As you said, he is a very important, very good pitcher, and it is important to have good at-bats. I could tell them a lot of things, but they wouldn't listen to me. But the coaches are great. It's very simple, very easy to tell you, but apply that, it's difficult.

Sandy, Alcantara has a great sinker. The four-seam fastball, change-ups against left-hand batters. We are going to try to look for the best pitches and try to capitalize if he makes a mistake. I hope that he makes many mistakes tonight.

**Q. First question, Omar. The confidence in Martin may be a player that does not know this game in this city, this country. And a message for the Venezuelans. Not only those in Venezuela, but also those that are in any country with eyes on this team.**

OMAR LOPEZ: I remember when I went to the final in the Caribbean Series, the Cardenales, that final is just like Dominican Republic. There were 20,000 people there, and I needed in a ballpark with a lot of excitement with many Latinos, many Dominicans, a lot of excitement, I needed to have someone on the mound, someone with experience to face that situation. Someone who is able to control that kind of emotion in that kind of situations.

I could say Pablo Lopez pitches today or tomorrow. We could have made some adjustments in the rotation, but we

couldn't do that. But we are happy. We are happy. Martin Perez today. Pablo Lopez tomorrow, and versus Nicaragua Eduardo Rodriguez.

It was like a puzzle. We were worried whether they had to pitch the same day, and that would have been a problem because of their restrictions. They cannot come from the bullpen as relievers because they are starters. So we have four starters and the rest are relievers. That's why Martin is great. He has experience. He has all the repertoire that he needs in order to neutralize the Dominican offense.

Oh, the message to Venezuela. I have sent so many messages to the Venezuelans on social media. No matter the experience that I might have, some people that have doubts about myself and the team, but I can tell you something. When you work on a team, when you put together a team, when you are authentic, when you have a purpose, no matter what and you put aside your personal interests, things are going to be all right. We are going to do our best. We are committed.

I don't know how we made it, but we made it. We are engaged as a team because of the purpose we have: Venezuela. And we are going to fight for ourselves, for us because we are the ones fighting for Venezuela. Support us, pray for us because we are going to do our best for our country.

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