

World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Venezuela vs Puerto Rico

Sunday, 12 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Omar Lopez

Pregame Press Conference

Q. There are some changes in the lineup, but I wanted to ask you about the one you made between the second and third spots in the lineup. You made a change there.

OMAR LOPEZ: There was a switch, Arraez and Acuña, maybe taking some pressure off Acuña. I have to talk to him today, by the way, so that he understands that he doesn't have to do a lot. Just let get Altuve on base and do what he does when he is with the Braves.

I want him to be calm so that he understands he has two players ahead him that make contact, and somehow he can get a pitch and make good contact and to get the pitcher to more mistakes.

Q. What other players have you noticed that are anxious as you said about Acuña? And after beating the favorites, are you confident about today against Puerto Rico?

OMAR LOPEZ: We are confident, but not overconfident. I think that anxiety covers a lot. There is positive and negative anxiety. The positive one is when you can control your emotions. I have seen that in most of our players. Maybe Ronald and maybe some others were a little anxious in the first at-bats, but then they were calmer.

When you have Altuve and Salvador Perez and others, this is contagious, for example. Perez working in the dugout, Narvaez, Chirinos. There is a lot of experience around that helps the younger players to control the emotions.

But that happens in the first game, and yesterday we saw a Latin American World Series. Great vibes in the stadium. We will never forget that.

Q. Yesterday the lower part of lineup for Venezuela drove in all the runs. Are you including Miguel, Eduardo in the ninth spot? What's the plan for that



lower part of the lineup?

OMAR LOPEZ: The lower part of the lineup could be the upper part of the lineup for Major League teams. That's why Venezuela is so powerful. So it could happen yesterday. Maybe they are more worried about the upper part and not the lower part of the lineup, and that's why we have to make some adjustments.

They have to understand that they are now playing for Venezuela and this lower part of the lineup could be an upper part of the lineup in the Majors.

Q. What kind of conversation do you have with the team after this important victory versus the Dominican Republic and the game versus Puerto Rico today? Another solid team in the pool of death.

OMAR LOPEZ: They can qualify if they win. Yes, yesterday it was important, and today it's even more important. Yesterday we had some meetings with the coaches, with the catchers, the pitchers, and the other players. I told them, we celebrated yesterday. That's past. Now we have to move forward. Now we have to forget the game yesterday. It is in history. Now it is time to continue making history.

Q. Two questions: You have spoken a lot about the scouting reports, the coaching staff about the Dominican Republic. Did you study the same way about Puerto Rico and since when? Question number two, I wanted to know your opinion on this: Puerto Rico has a great bullpen with the Diaz brothers, Lopez, that didn't pitch yesterday. How important is it to try to attack Berrios from the very beginning?

OMAR LOPEZ: It is not only Dominican Republic. We have some people in Arizona checking Mexico, the U.S., et cetera, that could qualify to the quarterfinals. We want to know what the managers and what the teams do, and the guidelines that I provided to the scouts, what we need from them. Then we're going to have information and data. We have access to get that information.

And concerning your second question was about what? Puerto Rico's bullpen. We can say that they have very



important arms. It was the case of the Dominican Republic. If you don't want to face those bullpens, you have to capitalize on mistakes from the very beginning.

With Berrios, we have a game plan. We shared that with the hitters. We want them to be focused on that in order to take advantage of that situation.

Q. Quick question: You spoke about the scouts you have in Arizona watching the other teams. Have you seen Israel in this pool, and you have seen the other teams of Pool D? Can you now announce the starting pitcher that is going to face Israel in the last game for Venezuela? And the other question, who had the brilliant idea that Venezuela celebrated with a drum? It was yours or the team's idea?

OMAR LOPEZ: Celebration, that's with the guys. I organized a structure. Not only myself, but we put together that structure. There's some point in time when I don't have to tell the guys anything.

Just like I said today, we have to play game after game, to have fun, to enjoy the moment, but then turn the page. Then I have meetings with the coaching staff to work with them.

And they celebrate by themselves. They do the celebration the way they want.

Jesus Luzardo will be the starter versus Israel.

Q. Speaking about Acuña, do you think that the pressure he had is because of the situation, whether he was going to play or not? The same happened in the Caribbean Series. Maybe he hasn't processed that.

OMAR LOPEZ: No, I don't think so, actually. He is still a young player. He is very young, you know, and he is living this great moment in his career. After a couple of years he is going to find a balance. He will be able to control that anxiety. That's normal when you try to do more than what you expect. It's difficult, and now he is trying to do it double. Why? Because he is playing for Venezuela, for his country.

We spoke about that in the morning. I told him just to enjoy his game, as the other guys are enjoying their game. Yesterday I said that we came here to enjoy, to have fun. Some people misread what I said. What I meant is having fun with the game, enjoying the game. Not going to the beach.

Q. In this pool of death Venezuela had the most complicated journey because you are facing the

toughest teams in the first two games - Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico. Martin Pérez, Luis García were great. Do you think all the arms, all the pitchers are available today, considering who you are playing today? All the pitchers are ready to pitch versus Puerto Rico?

OMAR LOPEZ: Yes. All the pitchers are available except for Martin Pérez, of course and Luis García. Fortunately, they are all available. Because of the restrictions of the Classic, many of them cannot pitch for two days in a row. These are the rules of the tournament, and we have to adjust to that. It is the World Classic.

And when you speak about the pool of death, when you say that Venezuela had the most complicated journey, we Venezuelans are used to that, right? We are used to complications, tough moments, adversities. Somehow we overcome those obstacles, and this is the same way we are going to play here.

Q. Omar, all the runs driven were with two outs. Is that coincidence or is there a reason for that?

OMAR LOPEZ: No, that's baseball. You can have one out, two outs, but the inning is not finished, and the players had the opportunity. They were calm, controlled the emotions. They were not in despair. They were able to hit, and we were able to capitalize on the mistakes made by Sandy.

Q. Taking into account yesterday's victory, it was celebrated by the Venezuelans all around the world. Seeing Pool A where the team that started winning didn't qualify and vice versa, what does that represent for Venezuela, not having won yet, just beating the strongest team in the pool?

OMAR LOPEZ: Well, I haven't paid attention to the other pools, but since you mentioned that, that was yesterday. That's the past. We are 1-0, and that's in the standings. Today a new day, and we have to go out and try to win, try to control the pressure. We have a good balance in terms of personalities, professionalism, and characters in the clubhouse. That is from a top-down vice versa, and we are going to keep ourselves balanced that way, you know, no matter the results. This is what I wanted from the very beginning before arriving in Miami. We need this balance to try to get these results, and then we are going to feel proud because of the results we have achieved. We as Venezuelans are going to be proud.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports