

# World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Israel vs Puerto Rico

Monday, 13 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Puerto Rico

## Jose De Leon

## Martin Maldonado

### Postgame Press Conference



Puerto Rico 10, Israel 0

**Q. Hey, Martin, congrats. José, Yadi said that he gave you the game ball. What are you going to do with it? What does this mean for you? And tell me a little bit about the communication with Machete. And the same for you, Machete, can you confirm, is this your second no-hitter?**

JOSE DE LEON: I forgot the question. Of course, I'm going to put the ball in my house. Four pitchers, Machete signed the ball already. Having a moment like this after all the obstacles that I had overcome in my career, playing with my family here in the crowd, playing for Puerto Rico, and wearing the Puerto Rican jersey makes this 100 times more special.

I still don't believe it. This is a dream I'm living. A very special one.

MARTIN MALDONADO: This is my third no-hitter. My first perfect game. That's the best thing for Puerto Rico, right? This is what we can do. We know about the importance of these games, and having the opportunity to play as a catcher is an honor for me. When you have the chance to represent Puerto Rico, with that name on the chest, it's great.

I have one World Series, and to me this is one of the best tournaments that I have played in my career.

**Q. Yadi came up earlier and spoke to your performance. He said you guys go back, but thinking about you pitching for Puerto Rico's winter team and being here, being part of history, how much fun did you both have in being part of this game and reflecting back on everything that you have gone through to perform today in this game?**

JOSE DE LEON: Yeah, it's crazy to think about it. In 2017 when I represented Puerto Rico for the first time, that was the highlight of my career. I always said that there was only one way to top that, and it was doing it again on the next one.

I'm here, so I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity, but I never saw a moment like this coming. So I'm going to enjoy it. It's definitely going to be fun.

**Q. José, how important is it for you to pitch in Puerto Rico with the Criollos as a preparation for the World Classic?**

JOSE DE LEON: It was extremely important. It's the first time I pitched so many innings in Puerto Rico and keep pitching without having a gap, a long gap, before going to Spring Training helped me to recognize things about my arm, about my recovery and many things.

Today I'm feeling in great shape, and my arm is very strong.

**Q. How are you able to keep a calm mindset and concentration with this atmosphere, it's so loud, so noisy, wearing the jersey of your country?**

JOSE DE LEON: Once I start warming up, you forget about everything. Of course, the day before, the night before you are anxious because we have to respect the opponent. But I believe that Martin -- having Martin and Christian behind home plate and Yadi as our manager, it's very important. You feel confident because it makes your job easier.

This has to do with keeping yourself calm, but, of course, I cannot deny that you feel anxious before playing.

**Q. José, when did you realize that you were perfect? Martin, before going to the last inning, knowing the number of pitches, did he tell you anything that motivated you?**

JOSE DE LEON: I was not paying attention to that. I was so focused following his signs, and I didn't say no to any



pitch that he called. When you have that kind of concentration, that kind of focus when you believe in your catcher, when you trust your catcher, the innings are faster, the outs are faster. I was paying more attention to the strikeouts than the perfect innings.

**Q. But you knew that you were perfect?**

JOSE DE LEON: Of course. Of course, yes.

**Q. José, what can you tell the Puerto Rican fans that were following you and the Criollos? How important is it for you to write this history, and there is also a record for you -- you tied the record for strikeouts in World Baseball Classics?**

JOSE DE LEON: Well, I'm super honored. To the fans that have been following my career, this is for you guys. I know it's not easy to follow a player with many injuries and not many opportunities to play on the field. Some people stop believing in you, you know, but I dedicate this to my fans, those people that never lost faith in me.

I didn't lose my faith in myself. You should know that. This is a big moment, and I dedicate this to them.

**Q. Martin, you're a great catcher and also a leader for the team. On Wednesday it's a big game versus the Dominican Republic. How do you analyze this game, which is key for you?**

MARTIN MALDONADO: No details. I'm not going to give any details. We are going to go out to the field and fight. We have to control what we can control.

The game was key. It was very important to us. We have to be focused. We are going to capitalize on all the opportunities and to play the good baseball that we have played in the last games.

**Q. What did your family tell you?**

JOSE DE LEON: I haven't seen them yet.

**Q. A message for them maybe.**

JOSE DE LEON: I have over 300 messages and texts. I haven't seen them all.

**Q. We are super proud for what you did. You are the second pitcher to throw a no-hitter in a Classic. Today a perfect game. When you left the mound, when you saw all these fans supporting you, what did you feel?**

JOSE DE LEON: Brother, I dreamt of a time like this. I

have to be honest. Because of everything that I had to deal with in my life, I needed this moment to let the Puerto Ricans know that I'm here to stay, and I want to show the whole world that there is still José De León.

It was a very special moment. I was thinking what would do if I had a standing ovation. There is no way to train for that. There is no way to practice that. You have to be spontaneous, and this was the best time in my life I would say.

**Q. Martin, José said that he respected and accepted your signs. What was the game plan that you had with those breaking balls and changeups and fastballs. Maybe versus the Dominican Republic you are going start Hamel, a young pitcher. How will you work with him in such an important game?**

MARTIN MALDONADO: The preparation is key to the success. I'm prepared. I live this, and José knows that the pitchers can trust me. When we have our meetings in the morning, the way I talk to them, they realize that I am well-prepared.

It's just a matter of executing the pitches that was planned. And for Wednesday's game, like you said, it's a young pitcher. I will try to calm him down. It's going to be an extremely important game for both teams, and, of course, the fans will be involved as well.

I'll try to calm him down, and that's it. Stick to the plan.

**Q. Martin, you caught a no-hitter with Javier at Yankee Stadium last year. How difficult is it for the relief pitchers who come in knowing there are no hits, and in this case no walks, to continue it? And, José, did anyone say anything to you on the bench as this was going on, or were they just staying away from you?**

JOSE DE LEON: Absolutely not. They didn't say a word. That's when I knew something was happening (laughter).

MARTIN MALDONADO: It's always hard with a relief pitcher coming in like that. Funny because Yacksel Ríos when he came in to relieve José, I told him keep pitching like it's a 0-0 ballgame. He didn't understand. After the game he was like, Oh, that's why you told me that (laughter).

At the end of the day we believe in our pitchers. We know what kind of bullpen we have. We were more than happy with what José did early in the game, just keeping us on the ball game. We executed our plan as a team and with the plan we had good results today.

**Q. So Yacksel didn't know?**

MARTIN MALDONADO: He had no idea until after the game. Funny.

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