

World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Nicaragua vs Venezuela

Tuesday, 14 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Omar Lopez

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Good morning. You have the chance to win two games. You have experience in Caribbean baseball and in other leagues. What has been the most important challenge in this World Classic being a manager of the team in this kind of tournament?

OMAR LOPEZ: During my day off yesterday I was called by a Big League manager, a very good friend of mine. He told me, Omar, I think it is more difficult managing your team from Venezuela than a team in the Majors.

I hadn't thought about that, and to me when I started thinking, I don't see a difference. The most important thing is that you look to build cohesion of the guys, unity. You have to be true with them, transparent with them.

On a Major League team it's a little different because have you to deal with the front office and the transmission of information to the players. We are speaking here about a country. The manager has the power, decisions about who plays, who doesn't play. There are no suggestions from the top, from the office. And if there are any suggestions, you are try to deal with that in a professional way. You have to find a way to pass on that information to the players. That's key, when you design your plan, when you have your own identity and you tell your players, for example, this is my way.

I have three leaders in terms of hierarchy: Altuve, Salvador Perez, and Miguel Cabrera. They should all be on the same page with me. Because they are the owners of the clubhouse. They run the clubhouse. I don't have to do anything else. And if there is any situation in there and if I make a mistake, I will be the first to take responsibility, but I will always be for them. To me that's the main difference.

Q. Quick question, why aren't you going to practice today? Are you feeling overconfident or what?



OMAR LOPEZ: It's very early. None of these players are used to waking up at 7:00 a.m. to practice. They can do more things in the cage to prepare the best possible way. We wanted to wait until yesterday to collect more information about Nicaragua. We are training pitchers and catchers and hitters separately. We just have to make some adjustments, and that's it.

Q. Thinking about the three leaders and their job in the clubhouse and the communication that you have with these three players specifically, what's your job, or what do you do so that the team does not lose the focus and the intensity after beating the supposed favorites, the strongest opponents of Venezuela in this group?

OMAR LOPEZ: Just to emphasize that the past is in the past. We have to live in the present. There are no easy games. We cannot underestimate any other teams. We are all playing for giving some joy to our countries, and that's why we have to be focused. We are preparing ourselves. We did that for the game today against Nicaragua. They have the information, and we have to keep the intensity.

We spoke about that. Rodriguez, Martin Perez. Rodriguez, who is pitching today, and Alvarado is basically the captain in the bullpen, we told them we have to keep our heads up and remain focused. We cannot underestimate the other teams.

Q. Good morning, Omar. You just spoke about the possibility of Miguel Cabrera playing in the lineup, but you were not sure if he would be playing today or not. Why did you decide to start him today and not tomorrow against Israel?

OMAR LOPEZ: Yesterday, like I said, I had a conversation with a couple of people of his organization, and we are trying to negotiate the possibility of Miguel Cabrera to participate in the second round. If they were flexible to give him two games in a row or today, and they told me how to deal with that, and that's why I made the decision to put him in the lineup today. He will have two days off, and then he will be playing in the quarterfinals.

Q. Obviously, Omar, Salvador Perez is key behind home plate. If he is not in the lineup, some people could see this as a concern. Salvador Perez normally in preseason he would be playing in a game. Maybe he would leave in the fifth inning, and he would have the following day off. Now Narvaez and Robinson have this opportunity. Can you explain the need for Salvador Perez to rest?

OMAR LOPEZ: Not only Salvador, everyone. Salvador has been doing what he knows how to do, which is hitting, just like the others, but we have to take into consideration all of them. We are playing here in a historic moment for our country, but they have a season going forward. They have a family, they have a career, and we need to be cautious to protect their health, their well-being today.

Maybe 15 years ago it wouldn't happen, but there are sensors measuring the fatigue of the players. It could get to a point that the sensor indicates how close the player is to have an injury, especially in the legs.

We in Venezuela, we don't have that system, but we don't need to have that. You just realize that with the intensity of the games. Salvador's hitting, I mean, was very intense, and we have to give him some rest. After these couple of games starting today, there will be no consecutive games. Only one day in the middle, and he will be ready to play back to back, but we have to protect, to preserve the health of all of them.

To me they should go to Spring Training in shape, totally healthy.

Q. Erasmo Ramirez is a reliever with an ERA under 3.00. Why is he so effective with the repertoire he has?

OMAR LOPEZ: Erasmo ever since he was pitching in Venezuela many years ago, he locates his pitches well in the lower zone. If he has to pitch high in the zone, he does that as well. He just has to do his job, and he will be supported and backed up by the team.

The pool knows that we have a solid lineup from the first to the ninth spot in the lineup, and they have to find a way to make some adjustments in their pitching. We have to make adjustments based on our strengths and not on weaknesses.

Q. Omar, you have said that both Eduardo and Luzardo are starting today and tomorrow. Then they'll go off of the roster, but maybe they can come back, right?

OMAR LOPEZ: I don't like to say names. We are in the process of negotiation with organizations, with both organizations, to see if there is a way to receive some help without affecting the present and the future of those players. We'll try to have success. Otherwise, we'll continue making adjustments, as we say, in baseball.

Q. How do you see the possibility if you win today, you will qualify for the next round? The possibility is very close. Venezuela could be the first team in the pool to qualify. Being in the first position, you could avoid the U.S. and even Japan before the Finals. Are the players aware of that? Are they motivated for that? Because it is not only winning today, but also allows you to plan going forward.

OMAR LOPEZ: That's why I like these press conferences because you make all these projections, and I don't do that. We are playing in a couple of hours. After the game I will be focused on the lineup versus Israel.

So I don't think about that projection. If they think about that, I don't know. I haven't felt that in the clubhouse. We are playing one game at a time.

I told them when we met in West Palm Beach, I told them that we couldn't lose a game. I wanted to be among of the first teams to qualify. Now we could lose one, but the deadline is today or tomorrow. This is the only margin of error we have. They are prepared to play with the same enthusiasm, with the same excitement.

Something that I liked against Puerto Rico is that in tense moments, they tried to control the game. They calmed down. Pablo went to the mound. The Puerto Rican fans continued making noise, but the guys stayed calm and we were successful.

Then that's what we want to have in the clubhouse, and this is the way we're going to behave every day.

Q. You were talking about the role of the manager and what you were doing as a manager on a daily basis, but you have to negotiate with the Big League teams. You have to manage a pitching staff with very special characteristics because of the restrictions. Who does that job? Just yourself? How do you share that kind of job?

OMAR LOPEZ: Well, myself, I have to recognize the people that deserve it. I like inclusion, and I like to listen to other people, and then I make the decision thinking about the team.

I talk to the coaches and the players. I let them know

because this is not personal, but it's my way to work. Brizuela, Mendoza, Arteaga and Luis Ramirez. We are a coaching staff. When we speak about pitching, I listen to them. I listen to you. I listen to you. I listen to you.

And if there is something that doesn't add up, if something doesn't make sense, I ask them questions about the pitcher, about the player, whatever, about the game plan. We have three or four plans for the game.

The other day versus Puerto Rico we had two or three plans, and we executed the one that was not plan A, and we had to think. We have to analyze, and Carlos told me, what are you thinking about? I was thinking, I was analyzing. He was analyzing beforehand. He was anticipating.

I told him, I need a pitcher that locates pitches, someone that can throw strikes. That was not the plan we had in mind, but I need someone with experience, someone that comes to the mound fearlessly at the right time and to get some outs. That's what he did.

Q. You mentioned the leaders in the clubhouse, Miguel, Salvador, Altuve. You also mentioned the patience of the team in tense moments versus Puerto Rico. What was the motivation? What did you do in the game? How did you calm them down?

OMAR LOPEZ: Look, the players are very, very experienced, even when those that are very young and even don't have experience in a Classic, they are living that now.

It was very good for us to start playing versus Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico because they were aware of this kind of tournament regardless of the fans. So they now took off in the World Classic. There is nothing much we have to do.

In a couple of days they've lived the experience that maybe other players, such as Miguel Cabrera, lived in previous Classics. All of the advice and experiences of the people that were in previous Classics, that faced situations and played in games such as the one versus Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, because the game versus the Dominican Republic was intense from the first inning to the ninth inning.

The rhythm of the game versus Puerto Rico was different. They neutralized us. Then we scored a couple of runs. These are the ups and downs they have to deal with during the game. They did a great job because with the experience of the first game, they were able to manage the second one.