

World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Venezuela vs Israel

Wednesday, 15 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Omar Lopez

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Two questions: Number one, Venezuela has officially qualified as the pool winner, how was it for you? And is it relevant or not for you the fact of knowing if you are going to play Friday or Saturday in the middle of this short tournament with so many restrictions?

OMAR LOPEZ: First of all, I'm very happy for qualifying to the quarter finals. We achieved the first goal, that is to qualify for the next round and then continue playing, playing good baseball, to be focused.

We delivered this team to God so that He guides us in this Classic, and that's why we are so happy. People ask me, are you feeling okay? Are you guys okay? You are flowing. You are so natural.

And, yes, I think that peace was provided by God. With all the people that we have in the clubhouse, we've been able to control the emotions, the decisions. We have the wisdom we need to make the best possible decisions.

If we are going to play on Friday or Saturday, that's not relevant for us. We just have to make some adjustments. We are here to face the challenges. We don't want to be emotionally affected by those. We had a meeting with the coaching staff for over two hours to speak about the game today versus Israel and to speak about some hypothetical scenarios that we might face. We are going to do something with the lineup today.

We were expecting the result of the game with the Dominican Republic yesterday, and we are going to work. If we play on Saturday, we have two days to train. We are going to have good training with the pitchers as well.

Q. 24 hours ago you were speaking about the possibilities of Cabrera, Rodriguez, and Ramirez to continue playing. In the last 24 hours anything has changed?



OMAR LOPEZ: Eduardo Rodrigo is not able to continue with us. I talked to the manager of the Detroit Tigers. I was trying to negotiate with them in order to bring him back. I wanted to negotiate again with them, but he said, you are very welcome, but this was our agreement, and we have to respect that.

We had that agreement in terms of Luzardo. This is what we have, only one game. Maybe things could change, but we cannot be very optimistic in that sense. It is his career. It is another agreement that we have with the Miami Marlins, but we're trying to negotiate. Maybe we can, maybe we cannot. We'll make the necessary adjustments. By that his turn in the pitching rotation comes.

With Miguel, no, there are no restrictions, but he cannot play at first base, but he cannot play in any game that I decide. Maybe as a DH, for example. There is no problem with him.

Q. Two questions: Number one, we have spoken a little about José Ruiz and the job that he did versus the Dominican Republic, and yesterday he pitched two innings. What have you seen in him?

OMAR LOPEZ: It is better not to speak about those guys that are quiet and doing a good job. But, anyway, I'm just going to give you a couple of examples. The commitment José Ruiz acquired being a catcher that became a pitcher, and when I saw him last year pitching for the White Sox and seeing his repertoire, I liked him.

I asked Altuve and Bregman that faced him, I asked them, what did you see in his repertoire, and both of them told me, it is nasty. So the guy joined us on the team.

I talked to him, and José Ruiz, lives one hour away from me in Orlando. In January he was already training, and he already knew that he would be on the team. That's what I told him. He had to be prepared. He was throwing BP. I wanted him to be ready to be prepared at 100 percent in his conditions, and that's what he is doing. That's reality.

You can see in some pitchers that it's still difficult for them to locate the pitches. They don't have control. They are



not effective enough, but they have a powerful repertoire. When you see José Ruiz locating his pitches, that is doing his job, it's because he was prepared, and he got himself in the very best condition in terms of pitching at the highest level.

Q. Is the pitching plan is going to change depending on the opponent, Canada, Mexico, U.S., or you already have a plan or maybe you will change the way the pitchers are going to be prepared? And another question about German Marquez, do you have a plan for him for the next round?

OMAR LOPEZ: No, the pitching plan cannot change. Going back, all the pitchers have to be in the rotation in their organizations when their season starts. I cannot announce some pitchers, but they will be pitching opening day in their organizations. Some other pitchers will be pitching game No. 2 and No. 3, so they have to have those days of rest, so that when the season starts, they'll be ready to pitch.

We cannot make any changes strategically. It is what it is. Like they say in English, it is what it is, and we're going to play like that.

And question number two was about German Marquez. We have to wait. We have to wait. He pitched yesterday. We are going to continue evaluating him to see the possibilities. Maybe he will be able to pitch in later games. Maybe yes, maybe no. We have to wait a little.

Q. You have a coaching staff that is quite experienced. Of course, you make the final decision. How does that coaching staff impact your decision when you decide strategy for the game and so far you have been very positive?

OMAR LOPEZ: I have to be brave. This is like a puzzle, you know. When you are going to put a puzzle together, it's very complicated, but you have to start on the foundation, you know? Who is going to be there? When things are complicated, it's when you need solid personalities and experience.

You could have experience as a coach, but to me the most important thing was to have coaches with a human quality, humble, with good communication and connection with players. We've evaluated some coaches in each area. We've interviewed, what would you consider to select a runner or a pitcher or a batter? We talked to them a lot.

Plus, the interaction that we have had during the seasons in Venezuela. To me that's very important. The capability to work. They all have their families here, and then the

memories and the recognition that they might have individually is that we haven't had time to share a lot with our families because we are here to work, but also to have a good time, of course.

To me the most important thing was to select the human quality. I'm sure because I'm here I don't need to be worried for anything. I'm not worried about anything because they are doing a great job, and I trust them. I believe in them, and I empower them in their functions.

Q. We were speaking about the replay. Have they made any adjustments about their replay and the delay? You complained about that, and Yadier was upset about that as well.

OMAR LOPEZ: It was not a complaint, actually, but it was the first game when we needed a replay. When we were trying to see the plays, we realized there was a ten-second delay, and we have 20 seconds to challenge the play.

I talked to the organizers. We have heard in a meeting that if anything happened during the game, we could talk to them. We had a meeting yesterday. They explained what is going on, how is that working, et cetera. I said, no worries, we are going to make the adjustments. We don't want to make the situations more complicated that might be complicated already.

Q. (No microphone).

OMAR LOPEZ: These are the adjustments that we have to do, and we will do so.

Q. Yesterday you said that you would be speaking with Acuña. What are you expecting from him? You put him in a lower spot in the lineup. What would you like to see?

OMAR LOPEZ: He is now batting fifth. Not because of an emotional strategy, but for a strategy for the game today. So that some of them can get to the plate more often. With Ronald, I'm going to speak right after this press conference, but I just wanted to make clear, I'm not putting him in another position because he is not producing. Some of them have had some ups and downs.

This is a very complicated, difficult tournament. Those batters that are doing well, okay, but some of them are having some ups and downs. After Ramirez, we didn't know the other pitchers. We didn't have videos of those pitchers. Only two or three exhibition games. There was no information. There was nothing in the computer to know those pitchers, and they go there. You don't know absolutely anything about your opponent.

Is it going to be a fastball or do they throw a slider or a sinker, something you were not expecting? So we have a lot of information, right, in the system, but in a kind of game like that, we are, like, at a disadvantage because we don't know anything about the pitcher.

So you have to become more Caribbean in your play. Carlos Mendoza was next to me, and he said, Omar, the defense, we don't know what to do with these guys. We don't know what to pitch. I said, Papa, just watch the pitcher, try to take a look at the swings, and you use your instinct, like if you were playing in the second base or as a shortstop.

Q. You answered part of my question already, but can you go deeper? Omar, since this game for Venezuela doesn't mean anything in terms of standings, are they all going to play? Are you going to change positions? How is the game going to be today?

OMAR LOPEZ: We are going to get to most of the players in the game, if possible. I have to leave some people on the bench. We made the plan yesterday because we don't know what is going to happen with Team U.S. We don't know if we are going to play on Friday or Saturday. If we play on Saturday, that would be too many days off.

For example, Altuve and Santander, that would be three days without playing. That's too much. We could have made a plan such as live BP, things like that, but it's not the same, you know? So, they are going to get at least two at-bat, so they can keep the pace, the rhythm, and then they can be replaced. So that Chirinos, Perez that haven't played will have that opportunity, and they are part of this team, and I'm being honest.

I asked for this to God that I wanted 3-0 to give the opportunity to these players that have a role on this team, but I want them to participate, and they feel happier to be with us on this team.

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