

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals 2 - Puerto Rico vs Mexico

Friday, 17 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Mexico

Benji Gil

Pregame Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take some questions.

Q. Benji, as a professional player, how do they deal with a situation like Puerto Rico's when such an important player got injured and they have to play two days later? Do they feel affected by that? Is there a lack of motivation?

BENJI GIL: First of all, it's unfortunate. You think about this player, about his teammates, his health, his well-being. It could be motivating, however. It could be motivating that you, as a sports fan, as a fan of this event, the players are affected. Edwin is a great player, a great human being. We prefer to have a star in the event and not out of the event. He's a rival, okay, but this is not good for the tournament, for the event. It's a pity that happened. And on behalf of myself and the team we are playing, that he has a fast recuperation.

Q. How about the lessons of the first round, the negative and the positive things, in order to avoid those things in this round?

BENJI GIL: Well, negative, bad and ugly moments? No, I don't remember any. We have had some learning, of course. But to be honest, our team did a great job. We have learned from the good things that we have done and we have found a way to repeat them and to be consistent with those good habits, those good moments. We will try to repeat them as much as we can, and I believe that this will lead us to the 21st, God willing.

Q. Arozarena. We are in Miami. He's a very popular player here in Miami. We know what he has done on the field, but emotionally speaking, does he have an impact here?

BENJI GIL: He's a loved player here in Florida, especially Miami, of course. But he's loved now more in Mexico than

in anyplace in the world. He has a contagious personality. He's a star. He's a character. It's like *trava de locho* (phonetic) of the Mexican baseball. He's very popular, very famous. He's the favorite character in Mexico today. Like I said before, he's a character. In the locker room, he's quiet, reserved, relaxed. He has an attitude as well.

But on the field what he does is extraordinary. On the field, you can see his energy and not only on the field, but also in the dugout. It's been a real pleasure to have him with us and to have the opportunity to get to know him deeper. He's a gentleman, and he's a beast on the field.

Q. Of course the Mexican fans in any event, they travel a lot, they support a lot the team. We have seen in all the games in Puerto Rico this has been the team that more fans have brought to the ballpark, even more than Venezuela and Dominican. Is that an important factor here for the atmosphere today in the ballpark?

BENJI GIL: Well, above all, we are so pleased to be in Miami. But if you had me choose Miami or L.A., I would love to play in San Diego, Phoenix, or L.A. because we would be closer to the Mexican communities in those cities and states.

I do know -- or I guess that there will be some Mexican fans, but of course, we understand that we won't have as many as on the West Coast. It is difficult to buy an air ticket to come from far away. Those flights are very expensive, and to buy it overnight, you know, because people are not going to buy a flight expecting result of a game.

I would love, for example, a game to be tomorrow. If our game were tomorrow, I could assure you that we would have double of the fans, Mexican fans, in the ballpark. We know Puerto Rican fans are very enthusiastic, and that's great. We are going to face them. That's good for baseball. Yes, we're going to have a good amount of Mexican fans as well. They travel, yes. It's difficult because they live far from here, but it is what it is, it's part of the show.

Q. I would like to ask you about pitching after Julio for today, Patrick Sandoval, Javier, that has been resting

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for four days now, are they available for today?

BENJI GIL: They're all available except for the starters. We're not going to use the starting pitchers as relievers. Sandoval, well, we have to win today, and Sandoval would be the starting pitcher on Monday versus Japan.

Q. You were asked about Arozarena. In the case of Puerto Rico, we have Stroman. He's defending Puerto Rico. You have Walker. What's been your experience with these kind of pitchers joining the teams?

BENJI GIL: I can say the same about all the players that were not born or raised in Mexico necessarily. They have different backgrounds. It's been a pleasure, you know. I am very proud to see how they have joined the team. We put together a team; however, we were able to have a family with those players, and they have enjoyed this journey.

If we can achieve our goal, it's going to be a great memory for them as family, as brothers, for the rest of their lives.

Q. Of course the goal is to win the tournament, but coming to the quarterfinals for the first time for Mexico, Mexico is now more respected in, for example, the Caribbean Series. We have seen names as Joey Meneses. What does that say about the growth of the Mexican baseball in the last 15 years?

BENJI GIL: Yes, like I said before, we are very proud. We have been players and we have been part of the growth and development of the Mexican baseball. This tournament, in my opinion, is very important. We have attracted the attention of the world. We have Mexican players playing in the U.S., and they are opening doors and gates to younger players, but we also have baseball in Mexico in the summer.

We have high-quality players, such as Alexis Wilson, for example, the catcher. We wouldn't be here if he couldn't have connected those blasts. He played Class A with the St. Louis Cardinals. He's a free agent now. Thank God he connected those hits. I have been telling him that he's a catcher that could be in the Majors or maybe in Triple A league contributing and he can even help a Major League team. Meneses, for example, was unknown until last year. Ramon Urias was not able to come because an injury and he was a Golden Glove, and he started in Mexico, Manny Barreda, and others.

The young prospects, they start in the Mexican baseball and they show what they can do it in the summer and winter baseball until they have the opportunity. To be honest, yes, I would like to raise the trophy for them, but

especially -- and I'm being honest here, is to open gates and to give opportunity to kids and youngsters in Mexico. I hope that more and more kids are willing to play baseball because of what these players are achieving to have new doors open for them to come to the U.S., and the Mexican kids that live in the U.S. could have more opportunities to go to college as part of their education and play professional baseball because they show what they are able to do as Mexicans.

Q. With the slight schedule change, is it an advantage or disadvantage that you're playing tonight and not tomorrow night?

BENJI GIL: Oh, it's a disadvantage a hundred percent, 100 percent. But it's not going to matter. I mean, we're going to do everything that we can. We're not looking for excuses. We're not going to make an excuse if we win and we're not going to make an excuse if we lose. But before it's played, it's a hundred percent a disadvantage.

And I'm not saying it's a disadvantage because Puerto Rico didn't travel. They were here, and that's fine, that's the way it should be. But at the end of the day, before the tournament happened, the 1 seed was playing on Saturday, and then when stuff got complicated, it became the U.S. plays on Saturday no matter what.

And by all means -- and like I said, I'm not -- it's nothing against the U.S., all right? If it's because of TV, I'm telling you right now, if I'm not here, if I'm not at the tournament, I would be watching the game, and I'm not going to say, oh, well, I'm not going to watch the U.S. game because it's on Friday and FS1, instead of Saturday on Fox, you know, the main channel.

I'm a baseball fan. I love the players the U.S. has. They're All Stars. I would be watching that game if it was Friday, if it was Saturday, if it was Sunday. I wouldn't be watching at noon because I would probably be at Spring Training. But if I had -- it's prime time. It's a 7 o'clock game, 7 o'clock Eastern Time. People, fans, baseball fans, and fans of this tournament and fans that we're bringing to the sport are not going to watch the U.S. game just because it's on the main channel and not FS1.

I mean, you put the U.S. playing against Venezuela, like I say, on ESPN The Ocho, like, the dodgeball, people would be watching. I would be watching, right? I mean, it's not going to change nothing. But what it did do is it took away a day off. We got in last night -- sorry, yesterday, at 8 a.m. by the time we got to the hotel. And then we should have practiced today at noon and gotten ready to play tomorrow. It should have also let Puerto Rico enjoy their tremendous victory over the Dominican for one more day as well.



So it's not just us. The only difference between us and Puerto Rico, and it has nothing -- that is 100 percent fair, is we had to travel across country, but we should have 100 percent had the extra day off.

Q. You navigated probably masterfully one of the toughest lineups in the WBC against Team USA. But when you have to face Puerto Rico, how dangerous -- you know, on paper, probably not as tough, right, just on paper, but how dangerous is a motivated team? They're talking all about how they want to win for Edwin, not only for Puerto Rico. How dangerous can that be to face?

BENJI GIL: I'll be honest with you, I mean, we're motivated. I mean, they're motivated for Edwin, we're motivated for Ramon, they're motivated for the whole island, we're motivated for all of Mexico. I mean, we can -- I mean, the motivation is within, right? I mean, I'm not going to tell the guys, hey, let's win this one for Benito Juarez, you know? I'm just not, right? They don't need extra motivation. They don't need extra motivation. They know what it's about.

Facing Puerto Rico, it's a tremendous team. We're not looking past 'em. Not at all. I mean, the most important game of most of those guys' lives, mine included, is tonight. God willing we win tonight, then after the game, more than likely a few tequilas, maybe a beer, then we'll start focusing on Japan.

But right now 100 percent. The only reason I mention Japan is because we already know who is waiting in the wings for the semi-final. That's already locked in. But 100 percent we have the utmost respect for Yadi and the coaching staff and every single one of the players. They're a tremendous team and they're motivated. I think the motivation is -- me personally, I think the motivation is more that they came out of probably the toughest bracket. For me, that was the toughest bracket. For me, it's more motivating that they had the win-or-go-home game against the tournament favorite. For me, I would say that was more motivating than, unfortunately, losing their closer and a big star.

Q. To me, this is one of the best teams from Mexico in the WBC. You always have had great teams. But to you they are very important names, well-known names. That's not guaranteed. Thank you. I forgot the word. It's not a guarantee for success. That was the case of the Dominican Republic with so many superstars and they're out of the tournament. What was the secret of Mexico to be in the quarterfinals and trying to get to the semi-finals for the very first time?

BENJI GIL: You're absolutely right, there have been other Mexican teams. I participated in 2006 and I can tell you that that installment of the WBC, the players at that point in time -- I'm not going to get into detail, considering the baseball at that time, the stars were playing in winter in Latin American countries and we knew each other. Sometimes we play with, sometimes we play against those players. There was more brotherhood. I feel this with this team, with this group, there is a brotherhood. They treat each other as a family. They make jokes.

But in the other years, when I was not involved, it's difficult to speak about that, but I have heard some comments from people that were involved in the second, third, and fourth editions, and they said that they didn't feel the atmosphere as it was the case in 2006 and this year. I don't want to underestimate anybody involved in those editions, but in terms of talent playing in the Majors, the edition of 2006 and this one, these are the editions where Mexico brought the most important talents.

Q. How could you assess the performance of the Mexican team coming to the quarterfinals? If you guessed that you could be here, would you have like to have faced the Dominican Republic?

BENJI GIL: Well, well, if I tell you that I would have loved facing Puerto Rico with the tremendous team they have, or they had, Colombia almost beat the United States, and that could have been a shock for the baseball world if the Team USA and Team DR would be out of the tournament. Before the tournament and because of the stars they have on their teams, the quality of their roster, in all of them, all the players, I could say that most of the people believed they were the favorites, and maybe Japan, but this side of the world in North America we don't know their stars a lot.

But we have to say that they faced Venezuela, they faced Puerto Rico, both teams full of superstars. But we know that this group would be very difficult for those teams. Well, it's a pity that they left, but that's sports, that's what the game is like, especially in this kind of short tournament. Maybe we are the least favorite team, but we just have to play one game against a tremendous team, and personally speaking, our team, our group, we are able to beat any team.

Q. (No microphone.)

BENJI GIL: It's been a pleasure, we are very happy. Many experiences, good experiences. God willing we're going to win today, we'll be able to rest and we're going to be focused on the goal, which is to raise the trophy on the 21st. Thank you.



