

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Mexico vs Japan

Sunday, 19 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Japan

Hideki Kuriyama

Workout Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Who has the first question for Hideki?

Q. You practice today, what is the atmosphere and from your point of view the athletes are playing, players face, and the environment and stuff?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Well, I have said, it's an excellent environment and I came here -- the players and myself came here to see the beautiful stadium. So everybody looks very happy and at the same time they're very intense and I felt they had a very good expression on their faces.

Q. Who will the pitcher tomorrow? Who are you thinking, if you don't mind?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Tomorrow it will be Roki Sasaki will be the starting pitcher. He is one of the pitchers that Japan is proud of, and so in this situation really expecting -- I'm not really expecting what type of pitching that I want him to do, but I just want him to do the pitching that he's thinking of and I want him to contribute to the WBC.

Q. You've talked a lot about how important Genda's spirit is to the team, but he can also do things defensively that nobody else can do. How important is his defense to how you line up and to the young pitchers?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Who are you referring to?

Q. Genda, the shortstop.

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Yes, of course, he has some minor injuries, but I think I'm just watching him to make sure he can play. After he plays, I make sure he's okay. That's the determining decision that I'm trying to make. But I don't think there is anything that I need to talk about the injury. But in order for us to win, I think he's definitely a critical shortstop player. That's the reason why I'm asking him to be playing. So I think he'll be okay.

Q. The game against Mexico, I think they are very good. They have beaten a lot of teams and they are a very aggressive team. What kind of things will be important for the Japan team to win?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Well, it's really, today, I think we've talked about with the head coach's meetings and we discussed an audience from the point of baseball fans, I think that they are making every game to be better and better. I think they have great hitters and pitchers as well.

As you know, the pitcher is well known in Japan as well as myself. But this is what we planned. I think what we can do, something that we have to do, what we can do, and we don't destroy ourselves. That's the strategy. We have to do what we have to do. Then if we're patient, we will be able to win. So I think it will be a very good game tomorrow.

Q. This may be related to the same question, but these players, most players, the first time for them to play, but I think it will become very important and this is a stadium that they have never played in before. So what do you think about this?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: It is, but it's true. I know when the team came into the stadium, I think the scene changes quite a bit. The scene from the field, and the scene from the audience side is very different. So of course there's spraying water and so forth. It appears a little bit different.

But I was watching the bounce of the ball, but just looking at the entire environment. I'm repeating myself, but we came here to the U.S. and we are trying to beat the U.S., not just myself. I think I'm representing all my players from the past and the coaches. So I think we're all in the mind of coming to the U.S. and we will beat the U.S. I think -- I don't think we can use -- if it was a different environment, that would be a very good excuse for a loss.

Q. What is it about Sasaki that allows him to be so poised and seemingly mature at a young age, especially after the celebrity of the games against Orix and Nippon-Ham Fighters last spring?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Yes, I think that he's very young, if you look at the age, but he's a very talented pitcher, and as his body grows, that his body -- so as his body grows and in the pitching and adjusting and so forth. The pitching coach, both as soon as they came into the team and they worked together and experienced a number of games. They're small, but however, this year and then next year is going to be a very critical year for him. So I think that's a very critical reason why he's very famous.

Q. You were surprised that Mexico beat Puerto Rico, a team that you know better in the history of this tournament? And also how is Shohei Otonari feeling? A lot of people are coming here to see Otonari, also. And if you play against Mexico, is Otonari going to start in the final?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Are you asking if he will be the pitching in the final? Is that your question? I'm sorry.

Of course I wasn't exactly surprised, but I think this is a game anybody can win, but Puerto Rico and Mexico have very many players that are playing in the Major Leagues. So I think I was just looking at the game and either one will be very difficult to win.

For the question to the pitcher, I can't really say if he's going to play or not, his adjustment and so forth, so...

Q. So far you've been playing in the Tokyo Dome, it's home grounds. But we play, this is an away feeling in the environment. So what will be the most important things playing away environment? So of course that was the game against Italy, Murakami came and he was a great hitter then. Do you think he's going to be the fifth or is he going to be brought up to the fourth, I just wanted to know.

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: I was asked from many people about the hitters, so I'm not sure, I don't know who is going to be dropped and moved up. I think that I have a feeling, sometimes a gut feeling that comes in. Sorry about that answer, I'll think about it.

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