

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Mexico vs Japan

Sunday, 19 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Mexico

Benji Gil

Workout Day Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. Who has the first question?

Q. I wanted to ask you, maybe what are you thinking in a possible game on Tuesday, Luis Cessa left the roster. Can that affect you tomorrow? You could use many, many relief pitchers.

BENJI GIL: Of course we would love to count on Luis in our roster, but we still have the same amount of pitchers. Julio, César, Urías leaves, that was foreseen. According to the restrictions, he could pitch in the semifinals or not. Ramírez joins. He's another relief pitcher. Bottom line, we are going to have 29 players instead of 30 in the roster.

But, yes, he is one pitcher less, but we are okay. They're rested. We have had two days off, so the whole bullpen is available for tomorrow except for Javier.

Q. When the tournament started or even before, many people thought about the Pool D, the powerhouses, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, and you in the Phoenix pool eliminated those teams. Do you think that Pool C was underestimated with Mexico and Team USA, but especially Mexico?

BENJI GIL: I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't hope so. No one could underestimate Team USA. It's a team full of superstars playing in the Majors, MVPs in the roster, so I don't think no one could underestimate Team USA.

I don't think that anyone is underestimating us, and if someone does, they are wrong because in this tournament, we have seen that teams that were not among the favorites could reach further. We have seen Curaçao, Italy, Israel. In the first year or three Classics ago when Puerto Rico made it to the finals, some people were surprised and I couldn't understand why.

I have been saying this before the tournament, Team



Mexico -- more and more people would agree with me, three years ago I would say, or maybe four years ago, if the Classic would have been played in 2020, most of the players that we have today were not in the Majors or they were too young to participate in this tournament. Three or four years ago the same roster we have today most of the players were unknown.

This team is a very good team with young players, not in terms of age. For example, Joey Meneses, he's a very young player in terms of playing in the Majors, but in a very short time, he's considered a solid player in the Majors. I hope he continues like that. This team, this very team in the Classic in 2026, people will say this team is full of superstars or very solid players in the Majors.

Q. Japan has been a superpower in this event. It's the only team with five semifinals in five editions of the WBC. What do you know in terms of scouting about tomorrow's pitcher, the hitters, the Japanese hitters? Do you have any reports from the scouts? Because we don't see these players very often because usually they play in Japan.

BENJI GIL: We have many videos, we have a lot of information, we're very well prepared for tomorrow's game. We still have today and tomorrow to continue studying and preparing for the semifinals tomorrow.

There are great stars on the team. Unfortunately, we don't know them as much of those stars playing in the MLB, and that's why I love this kind of event because we have the opportunity that stars in their regions or in their countries become global stars. Randy Arozarena, for example, is now a star in the baseball world. Korea, for example. Korea, they love baseball. Unfortunately, for them they didn't make it to the quarterfinals, but many people in Korea are still watching the games and they will see the stars from Mexico, from Japan, from Team USA, and from Cuba.

The stars from Cuba, they have a great history, but even people in the United States do not know the Cuban stars. Now they will see the Cuban stars playing with the best players of the MLB. We wish them the best of luck for both teams, Team USA and Team Cuba, so that people know



their abilities as individuals and also the abilities of each country.

Q. What are the challenges of facing Sasaki and how do you think his stuff would play in the Major Leagues right now?

BENJI GIL: I think he's going to be a tremendous star in the Big Leagues whenever he gets here. I think any fan of baseball would be wishing, like I wish, right, that he stays healthy and he's able to get to the Big Leagues when he's still at his best. He's a tremendous talent. I saw through Twitter last year when I think he threw a perfect game, and then his next outing he had 18 or 19 strikeouts and almost had another perfect game or a no-hitter.

I've never seen him pitch live. I honestly wish I had not seen him pitch live, right? But I'm excited, man. I'm excited. I think he's a tremendous talent. I think he's awesome for baseball. He's awesome for Japanese baseball. I think he would be great at the Big League level right now, and we're looking forward to the challenge. We're definitely excited about the opportunity to play against the best, right? When you're trying to win this event, you're excited to play against the best, and Roki is one of the best pitchers in the world.

Unfortunately, we haven't seen him at the Big League level yet because he has to pitch in Japan for a little while longer before he comes to the states. But I'm excited to see him tomorrow, and I'm excited to see him when he reaches the Major Leagues and see what he can do. I mean, 101 and 102 miles per hour plays anywhere. Mand then he has great secondary pitches as well.

Q. I think this is the number one so far. Arozarena, what will be the power to the Mexican team from your point of view? So far, Arozarena is number one. What do you think is the impact that he is giving to the Team Mexico? What do you think from the head coach's point of view?

BENJI GIL: Randy Arozarena has been a great player at the Major League level. We saw him do this before. We saw this when he got hot in the postseason a few years ago with Tampa Bay. I think now because this is a global event, I think before he was a Major League star, he was a star. After that, he was a star in Tampa and maybe South Florida -- not just South Florida, but all of Florida, and then the Latin American communities.

Now he's become a global star. I mean, he's the biggest star, baseball star, right now in Mexico, and I think it's wonderful. That's why I love this event, like I said. I think people in Japan have become fans, right, because he's a

great character. He's doing stuff with his base running, his defense, obviously great hitting. And his personality, I mean, he's infectious, he has great energy. It's just fun to watch somebody that looks like he just loves to play baseball. He loves to play baseball. I guarantee you if you ask him if there's anything that he could be doing, nothing outside of maybe being with his family, he would rather be playing baseball than doing anything else. He just is in love with baseball.

Q. What's it been like for you and the players, just your reaction and everybody going crazy in Mexico since this tournament has started?

BENJI GIL: It's been awesome. It's been awesome. I mean, when this event was proposed, it was to grow baseball globally, and I tell you what, I'll go out and say it: Anybody that has a negative opinion about this event, they are absolutely crazy. They don't know what the hell they're talking about. I'll give you an example. I describe it that people, when they clap, they just even though it's just as loud, it's just a different clap, right. Here, the noise, you hear it like you do everywhere else, but you feel it. You feel the noise. I tried -- I was trying to say, okay, well, how can you equate this. And I had a conversation with Andy Pettitte today and I said, the only thing I can kind of equate it is maybe Yankees-Red Sox. And he said, Benji, I've been a part of a lot of games when both teams are really good. I've never been at any game, Boston Red Sox, that was as loud as last night's game. That's from coming from Hall of Famer that's played in some of the biggest games that we have seen in recent history. So for our players it's an opportunity for them to be noticed. They have become stars in Mexico. A lot of people in Mexico maybe didn't know some of the players, right. Now they're all stars. And I am incredibly happy for them to be noticed and I think this is going to open doors for kids in Mexico. For even the stars that aren't here, the players that play baseball in Mexico in the summer and the winter, you don't have to be a part of this team, you're a part of Mexican baseball. So hopefully those stars will get more recognition and get more opportunities. I'm grateful for the team, I'm grateful for this event, and it's been a blast. It's been a blast. God willing, we play a great game tomorrow and we're able to win tomorrow night's game and then show up on Tuesday completely focused on lifting that trophy.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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