

# World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Cuba vs USA

Sunday, 19 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Cuba

## Armando Johnson

## Livan Moinelo

### Pregame Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: If you have a question, please raise your hand.

**Q. Good afternoon. I have a question for Professor Johnson and another one for Moinelo. You are managing for the first time the national team. You have faced MLB players. How can you evaluate the potential of the Cuban baseball to be inserted in the Majors? You had a great performance in Japan, Moinelo. Would you like to pitch in a Major League team?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: I think that the insertion of these players in national teams, Cuba, I think that could be great. It can make the championship better. We would like that these players that dream on playing in the Major Leagues are able to do that, and we haven't been able to do that for reasons that it is not our job to explain. They could come here without leaving their families behind. They could come here, play, and go back to Cuba, etcetera. I think that's a dream for many Cuban players.

**Q. A question for both, if possible.**

LIVAN MOINELO: Just to answer your question before that. I think so. I feel very well in Japan. But I think that in the Majors, it's a dream for Cuban players to play here, and I hope this door is open for us. I think it stands to leave politics aside and to do like the Dominican and Puerto Ricans do, they leave their country, come here to play without going back to their homelands.

**Q. A question for both. This is a year of Central American games and Pan-American games, not only WBC. Puerto Rico dominated both championships in the past. The preparation of Cuba for those tournaments and to get back the power you had in the continent and in the region, would you be able to count**



**on these professional players playing in other countries, in the United States, for those competitions?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: It's a dream for us to mix these players. We want it to be the case, we're open to this possibility, we want these players to join us in any championship. We think that our players are ready for anything. But the injection of these players has been very useful for us.

**Q. Moinelo, can you answer the question that I asked?**

LIVAN MOINELO: Can you repeat it?

**Q. This year we'll have the not only the WBC, but also the Central American and Pan-American games. Would you like to have professional players play in other countries also for those championships?**

LIVAN MOINELO: Cuban baseball has been preparing very well and evidence of that is the performance we have had in this Classic. We have great expectations. Cuban baseball, you know, like I said before, it is time for it to grow, to look for the tools to make it bigger, and this is going to happen little by little, in my opinion.

**Q. Speaking about today's game, is there any changes in the lineup for today?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: We still have a few hours to make some adjustments. We will announce those changes later on. We should have a meeting with the coaches, etcetera. If we make a change, it's going to be a small one, no big deal, maybe one player, maybe no, or we can make those changes in the middle of the game.

**Q. Livan, you have gone so far in this Classic. Since you don't have anything to lose in today's game, do you think that you are going to be more aggressive, more dangerous? Can you share with us about your friendship with Randy and what have you seen about him in this Classic?**

LIVAN MOINELO: Like I said, we are going to be aggressive, we are going to fight. Not that we have



nothing to lose, but we want to play with, joy. We have great energy in the dugout, and we haven't seen that in the Cuban baseball for awhile. This has been our formula. Randy is not only my friend, he's my brother, and now he's playing here in the MLB, and he's having a great performance. We played together at school and he's already a beast in the Majors.

**Q. The Cuban talk is that there is some politicization on one side, but they also politicized baseball. There are some protests organized on the streets, in the ballpark, and outside. Are you prepared for that?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: No, we are focused for the game. It's going to be a tough game. We are playing Team USA, a very good team. We don't think about what they say out there or possible aggression. No, we are prepared for everything, both physically and mentally. The players are focused on their job, and the rest is not our job.

**Q. Armando, many people say that you have come here because of good luck, that this is going to be the first game you're going to have with a high-level team. What do you think about that? And how do you prepare mentally to face maybe the most powerful lineup in the World Classic?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: Well, luck or fortunate could happen in any sport and any team. In my opinion, we did our job. We lost the first two games. We could have been out of the tournament, but then we won, we won, and then we won again, and we are well engaged, and we were able to come to Miami. Good luck or not, we are here.

We're going to play a very difficult game, a very powerful lineup. We're going to face them. We are excited about that. The players are excited. Good discipline. I'm very well impressed. We thought that those players could have a different behavior, but, no, the engagement between two groups are great. They have come together with our players. It's been very special.

**Q. Armando, Team USA versus team Cuba, a classic in intercontinental championships, Olympic games, etcetera. This game in the WBC has created many expectations. Are you ready for that?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: Yes, we have been ready all the time. Even when we lost the first two games, the team is ready. No pressure, we don't feel no pressure. We have to play with joy, happy, and the victory or the loss will depend on the game on the field. We are trying to give a great show to these fans, to this crowd. Whatever they say, we will need it, because if they do not support us, this could feed us. It's going to be an experience. We can

even learn some lessons to move on.

**Q. My question is the following: Mr. Johnson, with the participation of professional players on Team Cuba, which is history for you, could this continue in the next tournaments? And confirming the opener would be Roenis Elías, is he opening versus the Team USA?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: I think so. These players that have joined the team coming from MLB, we wanted this to continue looking forward for many years, we have been trying that. For reasons that are out of our control, we haven't been able to do that. I don't know who is to be blamed for this, and other people are supposed to defend this, not us.

**Q. We know the historic rivalry between Cuba and the U.S. in baseball. Did you imagine to get to this semifinal facing the United States, a historic rival, like I said before? Is this a game special because of this rivalry?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: Team USA has always been a very important rival, no matter politics or not. I don't see that part now. In terms of sports we have had a beautiful rivalry. The one who wins today goes to the final. To us, it's going to be a tough game. We have to be precise. They are a great team, but on the field, anything could happen and anyone could win a game.

**Q. Moineo, you saw the Team USA's victory on extra bases, home runs, etcetera. Maybe you have to pitch today because this is a knockout stage. Are you under pressure knowing that you are going to face high-level hitters such as Team USA's?**

LIVAN MOINELO: My respect to that team. They are a great team. I think so. Pressure always exists, you know? It is something that all pitchers have inside. They are good, but so am I. We have quality. We are going to fight out there on the field.

**Q. You spoke about your friendship with Randy. Randy told the press -- or told a colleague to face Cuba, he's ready. So you're brothers, and Randy wants to play Cuba, to beat Cuba. And for Mr. Johnson, if you ask the players if they want to come to MLB, would you like to coach in the Majors?**

ARMANDO JOHNSON: Playing in the Majors is a dream for everyone who plays baseball. Playing in the MLB is the highest in the world. Everyone would love to be here.

LIVAN MOINELO: Randy is a very competitive player. Very aggressive. Of course it's crazy about playing Cuba.

He's telling me that he's going to hit a home run and I tell him I'm going to strike you out and we joke like that. First we have to win against Team USA and they have to win over Japan to face each other in the final.

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