

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Mexico vs Japan

Monday, 20 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Mexico

Benji Gil

Pregame Press Conference

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

Q. First of all, congrats. Best of luck for today. Do you think that the factor of playing in Miami could be an advantage for the team in terms of the support by the fans?

BENJI GIL: I think so. It could be motivating. But bottom line, you know, both teams have many talented players. We both are focused and we know our goals and the players know what to do, they know what they are here for.

I hadn't thought about that, but, no, I don't think so, that would be a key factor, because in the previous editions, Japan has played in this atmosphere. The Japanese team has played semifinals and finals in the U.S., and they were the champions in the first two installments of the WBC.

So in our case, we had more support in Arizona than here. The other day when we played in Miami versus Puerto Rico, I would say that 80 percent of the crowd was Puerto Ricans, so obviously none of the teams were affected by the crowd.

Q. (No microphone.)

BENJI GIL: They played a great team. Team USA played great yesterday. Maybe Cuba didn't play their best game. We are focused on Japan. We know who the rival of the final will be. We know them very well and we would love to play Team USA. We would love to play Team USA again, but first we have to be 100 percent focused in this major rival, who is Japan.

Q. Two quick questions: The fans have responded to the call you made. Many Mexico fans came to Miami. Why in the history of Mexican baseball it is so difficult to play teams from Asia?



BENJI GIL: Well, first of all, it's a pleasure to know that more Mexican fans came to Miami to support their players. They will have the opportunity to see a great event.

Now about the history of Mexican baseball against Asian teams. Like I said before, that's in the past. It is not important anymore to me. If something happened six months ago, it is the same that if it had happened 600 years ago. It is not important at all. What really matters is today's game, our team versus the Japanese team.

Q. It's almost spring. It starts tomorrow. Two questions, if you allow me. It is difficult to scout a 21-year-old pitcher who is a wonder in Japan. I don't know if you know him, if you scouted him. How can you prepare yourself to face this guy who pitched the first perfect game in 30 years in Japan? If you don't win today, if you don't go to the final, is that mission accomplished for Mexico or it's going to be a bitter taste for Mexico?

BENJI GIL: Even when your performance so far is historic, it's difficult to face these young players. They have a successful but short career. I assure you that we have scouted him the best possible way. We have videos. We had a meeting with the hitters. They watched videos of last year and this WBC. So we're very well prepared and focused and we know what we're going to face, the opponent we're going to face.

What was your other question? Oh. Well, it would be not a mission accomplished, actually. Bitter taste? I don't think that one thing excludes the other. It could be a good taste, but it's not a mission accomplished. We are focused on winning. That's our goal, and I haven't thought what the taste will be because I'm not thinking about anything else but today's game. I'm convinced that we're going to play an excellent game and that we are going to win.

Q. Do you know Joey Meneses for many years? You know him for many years. What have you learned from him in this tournament?

BENJI GIL: I think that the baseball world has learned a lot from Meneses in the last six to seven months. I know what the rest of the world is learning now about Joey Meneses.



I know him since 2014 when he was a younger player playing with Culiacán. I'm trying to be brief, but I'm going to tell you this story and I hope not to get emotional.

Joey Meneses was a player, I saw in him great potential. Unfortunately, for you to have a little background of this history, Giménez was born in Culiacán. He was raised there. His favorite team were not the Yankees or the Dodgers, it was the Culiacán Tomateros. He was playing with that team. He was in the lineup. He was playing and the fourth bat of the team the night before a semifinal had a fracture in the hand. The next day there was some panic in the team because of that injury. He was the fourth at bat, the beast of the team. There was some panic in the management. So what to do now? We don't have the fourth bat.

And I said, We can put Joey Meneses in the fourth spot. And they said, You are crazy. He's not prepared for that. And I said, No, he will be the fourth bat tomorrow and the future fourth bat of Culiacán. In one game, he connected three hits. In the other one, he connected four hits. He was very important in the semifinals. And in the finals and in the Caribbean Series and ever since, when I'm the manager, he always has been the fourth bat, and he's the face of the Culiacán Tomateros organization, the team he loves. And now he has the opportunity to play in the Majors. So you have seen already what he's capable of versus the best teams of the world.

Q. So yesterday you talked a little bit about how if this tournament was three years ago, the team wouldn't be where they are, and you're so excited for where they're going to be three years from now. What is the importance of this game, and if you win tomorrow's game, for the future of Mexican baseball? And if you could talk to like a young Mexican ball player who is inspired by this team, do you have a message that you would like to give them?

BENJI GIL: Yeah, absolutely. I think three years ago our team would have been still very worthy, right? I just don't think that people -- kind of like the story I just said about Joey, nobody knew how good he was or they downplayed how good he was. Like I said, he was the MVP of Triple A, and he didn't get called up. So for some way, shape, or form it was downplayed.

Some of the guys are young, right? I'll give you an example. Like, Luis Urías was just a rookie. So there was a lot of guys that would have been just beginning their ascent to the Big Leagues, where I think three years from now, most of 'em will be well-established stars or very productive players at the Major League level.

What this victory or victories would mean to Mexico baseball? It's hard to say because it's going to be so important, it's going to be so great for the sport of baseball in Mexico. To really say how much it's going to affect, because the affect is -- I don't believe the affect is going to be three days from now, the affect is going to be long-term. Baseball will -- and honestly, if it surpasses soccer, I don't know, if it does, great. If it doesn't, that's okay. The most important thing is there's going to be great growth, right?

For young kids in Mexico that are inspired by this family, this group of Aztec warriors that are playing their butts off and doing everything they can to make all the Mexicans all over the world proud is -- you know, more than anything is follow your dreams, because if your dream is to be not a baseball player, if your dream is to be a great doctor or be a great lawyer or an engineer, these kids, their dream was to be great baseball players and they have been able to accomplish great things on the biggest stage.

Some of these guys in our clubhouse have never stepped on a Big League field and if you go in there and you see them and you see them practicing and you see the way they go about their work, you would think they have been in the Big Leagues for 10 years. So some of these guys are living out their dream, some of these guys are taking advantage of the bright lights and at the end of the day, they're making their dreams come true. Dream big and know that anything can be accomplished if you put your best foot forward and you're disciplined in accomplishing that dream and that goal.

Q. Is it difficult to prepare versus a team that has won two World Baseball Classics, that has won three times the third place, and is deep in this World Baseball Classic?

BENJI GIL: Yes, but it's the country, but not this team. That country was able to achieve that. That's what I meant before. It's like, hey -- like saying, ah, you are going to play the Yankees where Babe Ruth played and not worry about Babe Ruth or Gehrig, no. What I do know is that we have a very good Japanese team to play today and we prepared ourselves for the players of this team. Yes, they have great stars. We respect them. It's an honor to share the field with them and to play them to get to the final.

And how we prepared ourselves? Well, just the same we did the with other teams. We did a working plan, we watched videos, and we tried to execute that working plan against the opponent. Whatever the opponent is, we're going to prepare for the guy who is in front of us. It doesn't matter where he was born, when he was born, or what time he was born, no. What we know is that we're going to face a great team with great players and we are going to do

what we know what to do. If we play our baseball, if we execute our working plan, I'm sure that we are going to win.

Q. A question about the Mexican performance in this WBC. It's been not only for getting for these semifinals, but also for the opponents you had to face compared to Japan. Do you think that for the upcoming editions the groups should be differently structured so that they are more equitable?

BENJI GIL: Well, but we have to understand -- yes, but we have to understand, we are trying to develop the sport. Japan is very important for the sport. In my opinion, there should be a pool in Japan, there should be another group in the U.S. I think that in one edition there was a pool in San Juan, Puerto Rico, if I'm not mistaken. And in Mexico twice, one in Mexico City and once in Guadalajara. Yes, I would like to see that. And I think that at some point in time we are going to get this development. I don't know if it's three years, in six years or in 20 years, but at some point in time we will be able to develop baseball.

With the WBC I'm fan No. 1 of WBC. It's very important. Maybe we could have an international championship in Mexico, in the Dominican Republic, in Japan, or other countries that have the right structure to host that kind of event. As other countries have done in soccer, for example. In soccer, different countries host the World Cup.

In baseball, I like the format, you know, baseball played in different countries. But the final, I don't know how soon the case will be, but the WBC organizers could be thinking in having the semifinal or finals in Mexico, Korea, Puerto Rico, Japan, and other countries that really love baseball. We have to take into account -- and I haven't thought about this by the way -- but we have to take into account the distance, you know, between the host countries. Because the players have to go back immediately and join their Major League organizations to start their seasons. Yeah, that should be taken into account as well.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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