

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Mexico vs Japan

Monday, 20 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Japan

Lars Nootbaar

Masataka Yoshida

Munetaka Murakami

Postgame Press Conference

Japan - 6, Mexico - 5

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll get started with questions. Who has the first question?

Q. Can you describe your swing on the home run and what were you expecting on that pitch?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: Well, I was really worn down. So I think we're going to have to grab on to it, and before the changeup, I think I was able to hit that. So I thought it was pretty tough calls I was able to -- I was able to put the bat underneath the ball, and I'm glad I was able to hit it out.

Q. What was your guys' reaction when you saw the ball come off of Murakami's bat there at the end?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: Well, it was the best, the best, epic. I think it was really fast, and so I know he will be back, so I had to believe in him.

LARS NOOTBAAR: For me, it was kind of like an out-of-body experience. I didn't really know what to expect. As soon as he hit it, I saw it was going to split the gap, and I looked at Shuto, and he was almost passing up Ohtani, so I knew he had a good chance that he was going to be scoring. I don't think any third base coach was going to stop him from scoring there. Pure joy. I've said it before, but I didn't want to get a penalty for too many men on the field. We had the whole team kind of waving him in, so it was pretty exciting.

Q. Lars, with the baseball world getting to experience tomorrow Team Japan against Team USA, it seems like it's going to be one of the most watched games of all time and the anticipation of Trout against Ohtani, what



can you tell us about that and the feelings that you have of the magnitude of this game?

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, anytime you get to play against a lineup like they have and a team that they have, it's going to draw a crowd, but for it to be Team USA versus Japan and then, obviously, Trout versus Ohtani, I think that's special. It's two countries that love baseball that are all going to be watching. So we're looking forward to it. We've got a resilient bunch, so we just can't wait for that opportunity.

Q. For Lars first, you must have had expectations for what this tournament would be like. Now that you've gotten all the way to the finals and so many incredible games, what has it been like for you? How has it matched or exceeded your expectations?

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, it's kind of been a disappointing experience so far (laughing.) No, it's been unbelievable. From the time that I touched down in Japan, the video crew and fans and -- it was 5:30 in the morning over there and they were going kind of crazy. So I kind of had an idea right then that it was going to be a wild ride.

But I said it before, the fans, the way that they have accepted me as one of their own and the team, for them to be so accepting and welcoming of me, it's exceeded all expectations. These guys -- I love these guys in this clubhouse, and I'm just so thankful for the opportunity that I have been able to play with these guys.

Q. For Masataka, can you describe for us what you -- how much this means to the people back home in Japan, how much the WBC, a championship, would mean to Japanese people?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: I think we can prove how good the Japanese baseball world is in the world. So I think that will be the -- I think we can prove that in the world. I think it's a great opportunity for us to prove that.

Q. Lars, you guys were trailing for most of the game. Can you sort of talk about how you guys continued to stay in the fight, continued to battle both mentally and physically to sort of stay in the game to finally get that



last run in the 9th to walk it off?

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, that's something that I've been saying, but these guys, there's just no quit in this team. There's always positive energy. Everyone's always picking each other up. Whether it's a good swing or an out, people are picking each other up. I think that stuff is contagious. And, obviously, when Masa comes up big right there and ties it up for us, that lifts everybody's spirits. I would be lying if I didn't say that we needed that jolt and we got it from him. He kind of uplifted everybody with that swing, and from that point on, I think there was a true, true belief that we can win this game even though we went down later.

We were down against Korea, we were down today, but I think we have proven time and time again that there's no reason why we can't be in every single game.

Q. You've played against Murakami the last two Japan series, you've had very tight battles, you know what kind of player he is. How did it feel for you to see him break out with that big hit today after he struggled so much?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: I believe this is the -- I think he's much better than this and his career is much better. All of us really know him and I think he himself believes in himself too.

Q. For both of you, after playing multiple games in the Tokyo Dome in what looked like the wildest environment, can you compare and contrast like how today was?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: Well, I think the coronavirus has been settled down, so I think it's great. And I think in Japan, we can't really hear the fans, but I know that here all the fans for the Mexico team is really loud and the people are probably surprised by it. So what do I say? I think it's very refreshing to us in this environment. It will be a good memory. It was a lot of fun for me.

LARS NOOTBAAR: I second that. It's a different kind of environment. The Tokyo Dome is crazy, obviously, and I think that prepped us well for this. But it was dominated by Japanese fans there in the Tokyo Dome and for it to be split 50/50, maybe even a little bit more, it was loud, and you kind of felt your back up against the wall a little bit. But that's what makes it fun.

Q. As baseball fans, is this the matchup tomorrow that you were most excited to see?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: Well, yes, we hope it's really -- I

really respect the Major League Baseball and there are quite a few very famous players in the lineup, and I'm really looking forward to playing, and I'm very proud and honored to be able to play this.

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, I think just like he said, proud to be wearing Japan across my chest, proud to be playing against the U.S., and I think it's good for baseball. I think it's good that Japan versus the U.S. is going to be in the finals. And personally, I've got some friends and got some teammates over there too, so it make it's even more special and more exciting.

Q. What do you think was critical important and the component that you were able to win after being behind? I know you've hit a lot of home runs, but do you think this home run will be the most memorable one in your memory?

MASATAKA YOSHIDA: I know my hand was a little shivering, but I know that there was a good connection, so I know -- I really appreciate it. I believe in myself, and I remember I stepped into the box with a belief in myself.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take questions for Munetaka Murakami. Who has the first question?

Q. You have been hitting 56 times in Japan and you drove in over 100 runs. At the beginning, you started very bad, but then you made some adjustments and you ended up hitting a lot.

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: I know. I was really depressed when I had to do that, and so I made an adjustment and I was able to hit, yes.

Q. You mentioned you had gotten off to the slow start. When that ball came off your bat and you realized what it likely meant, what emotions were you feeling and just what was going through your mind as you rounded the bases and saw the runners come in to score the winning runs?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: Well, so Shohei is on the base, and then Yoshida was a walk and so we had to make a connection. So I know I was thinking about the bunting, but I think that the coach, he just told us just to do what you can. So I just made my mind, and then so when I hit the ball, I was hoping it was going to go into the back stands, but I guess I didn't have enough power to hit the ball out of the stadium. But I know that Shuto was a really fast runner, so I figured we will win.

Q. I know that Coach Kuriyama mentioned that he believed in all the players, that they are believing they



are going to win. So what do you think about his feelings?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: I know starting from -- Coach Kuriyama has been coaching us since last November and this is very important in the game. I think he has paid special attention to me in the previous games and stuff, and I really appreciated his concern and I was glad I was able to repay him.

Q. When Ohtani gets that double to lead off the inning, pulls into second base and goes like that to the bench (indicating), what did that do to the team? What was it like to see that emotional display from him? And what was the team's emotions after the double?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: Well, of course, that was the last inning, bottom of the 9th. Of course he hit the first ball and made it to the second base. I think he gave us all the power and emotion. So I think the reason why we were able to win this game of the battle. There are so many -- we lost so many bases, but many players were able to score and, finally, it came to my turn.

So I think all the batting lineup really worked and everything really worked well. So I'm really appreciative of the people surrounding me.

Q. I know you mentioned that you made some adjustments. What did you change? What kind of mindset were you going through in your mind?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: When I hit the fly ball on the 3rd, I had a very good feeling, so that's why I stood there. And when I hit the first ball, I thought -- I was thinking about I'm kind of swinging to the floor or something like that area. A lot of things are going through my mind. So I just adjusted -- I made a minor adjustment.

Q. The last batting position, I know the last one, and also, how did you get over your fear to get into the last box?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: I don't know. I know this, I had to do it, and that's all I'm thinking. I knew that so many times that I had a chance to do it, but I couldn't hit in those opportunities, but of course, just bunting kind of crossed my mind, but Coach Kuriyama had told me that I just have to hit.

Q. You had already some massive hits in your very young career, but how different does it feel to have this hit wearing Japan on your chest?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: Well, I was able to -- so when I

was smaller and of course I was feeling from Ichiro's playing in the WBC, I wanted to play in the WBC sometime in the future. So that was very memorable for me.

Q. I think that was a very great hit under all the pressure. So I don't know how much pressure you had in the past, so how do you feel about going to the finals tomorrow after getting over the pressure?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: Well, of course during the season I know I had to swing a lot and made many errors too during the season. So I think it came up a lot in the WBC. So just myself, I think I was in really in the low period during that time. So I think that the team, everybody, all the team members really supported me and the kind words were really good. We are a unified team and that was excellent on the team, so...

Q. While you were waiting in the batting box, I just wanted to ask you one thing. So in the 7th, and Yoshida, just before Yoshida hit the ball, I could see, I was wondering if Murakami, I saw him swinging the bat. I don't know if you saw it or not. If you did, what did you think about that?

MUNETAKA MURAKAMI: Well I just wondered, because of how I was doing, I thought that would be the substitute batter. I was thinking about that. Of course, finally it came around to my batting position. So I think that's how it flows.

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