

World Baseball Classic: Final - USA vs Japan

Tuesday, 21 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Japan

Hideki Kuriyama

Pregame Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Who has the first question for Hideki?

Q. Since you started managing the Nippon-Ham Fighters, one of your trademarks has been having the players take responsibility and owning their own development. One, how proud are you of the work the players have put in to get to this point? And two, what was the biggest factor, in your mind, that Yu Darvish had in helping the team be what it is now?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Well, first of all, about Darvish, of course when I was making my team from the beginning, of course all the young pitchers, you know, I was always -- I have seen what he was doing and really practicing English and practicing, and I know he was going to be a great pitcher and a person. So, of course, I had to compose -- I had to make up a team in order to win, but of course, he will be the very critical person to become an important person for the Japanese baseball world.

He's been a great young pitcher for the Japanese baseball world. Even though he may not have a result right now, but three years later, five years later, I'm sure he will be a huge contribution to us.

And to answer the second question, of course, how do we come here? I didn't do anything. All our players have done it, so I really respect each and every player.

Q. If you decide to use Darvish or Ohtani as a reliever tonight, is that a decision that you need to consult first or do you have the okay of the Padres and the Angels?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Of course. Well, you know, it's not directly myself, but I know I am borrowing from the team, including all the Japanese pitchers, so I will just confirm that. So if we have to, of course, I know I will have permission, so I will include that. So I say that myself, of course, I will ask the players. Of course, the players already discussed with their team, so...

Q. Coming to the U.S., can you tell us a little more about what do you think about the Team USA now?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Of course, really, as I said earlier, I love Major League Baseball teams. So I've come to the U.S. over a hundred times. So that's the reason why. After being here, I really want Japanese players to come to the U.S. and win the game. So of course we seriously came here to win the game, so I think we can find out what the obstacle or the challenges for the Japanese baseball world.

So of course we are very competitive, and I think we have a very good chance of winning this game. I don't think we have to be negative. I think we have to keep positive. I'm really looking forward to it. I'm really excited.

Q. Of course, Imanaga, the pitcher that you selected, can you tell me why you chose him? This is the first time we face the Team USA in WBC, so in the final place, in this stage, what do you think about the Japanese baseball world?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: You can see Imanaga's ball is very good. Anybody would agree with that. So I have no hesitation to choose him. This is something, of course, I have to start thinking about what is the baseball world is going to be. So for the Japanese baseball world and the Japanese team is playing in the United States, it's something I think that we're hoping the Japanese young people will think, yes, I definitely want to play in this environment.

So I just wanted to create the environment where all the young people will be attracted to play in the U.S. in the WBC.

Q. Let's just go from the beginning, just fight from the beginning, so maybe I should just step back.

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: I don't know. Of course all the players, what are you talking about? Of course we know that.

Q. Do you think it is possible in the future to see more

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opportunities of having Samurai Japan and Team USA play on the same field outside of the WBC and would you like to see that?

THE MODERATOR: All right. Good luck tonight.

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HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Well, you know, I don't know specifically, but of course, when you talk about the sport of baseball, particularly in Japan, not only are limited to sports, but I believe this is the sport that you can learn a lot of things. I think you can play the game in different places, regardless of the area, so I think that would be great.

So I'm very, very interested in -- when I was very young, I was always thinking about that, so that's why I was visiting the Major League Baseball, because of that.

Q. In your own words, can you tell us what the sport of baseball means so much to the people of Japan, especially above other sports, and especially to people like me from the Caribbean or people from the States that maybe we are not that associated with the Japanese sport culture.

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Of course this is my personal feeling, but I don't know if I can speak for everybody in Japan, but when baseball first came in and this is the way of forget about yourself, this is something you have to dedicate to other people. That's how the sport was introduced to Japan. So how you deal with the people and you have to respect the elderly and this is the culture that you do through playing the baseball.

I believe the baseball has that kind of a culture. And by playing in the professional baseball, of course everybody is having a good time. But it is a sport, after all, and that is a very important thing. Also the people can learn something like that. Of course, the kids, the young people are looking at the athletes as their role model. So inside the baseball, inside of Japan, something like that, that's my understanding. I don't know, the press people here might have a different opinion, but...

Q. Before you said of course you have to be patient, patient, patient. And you told us before the plan. And I think that's exactly how it played out. What do you think about the mindset for before the U.S. game?

HIDEKI KURIYAMA: Of course, the Team USA has very many players and of course they might get ahead of us beforehand. So I don't know how many deficits we can recover. So I think that we just need to expand those capacities. So I think we're trying to return, if we have a deficit, just return one point at a time, not at the same time. So I think that we are, I don't know if it's patience, I think we need to look at a more macro area.

