

# World Baseball Classic: Final - USA vs Japan

Tuesday, 21 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Japan

## Lars Nootbaar

## Kazuma Okamoto

### Postgame Press Conference

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

**Q. Lars, when you joined the team, did you have any idea how good the pitching staff was? And what do you think of the job those guys did tonight?**

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, I actually did know how good this pitching staff was. I didn't really know the depth of the bullpen, but obviously Darvish, obviously Shohei, and I knew of Sasaki and Yamamoto prior to coming out here. Didn't really know exactly how deep the bullpen was, like I said, but I knew we had a good chance to win it all based off of that starting pitching. Having pitching and having that depth that obviously we showed today proved to ultimately win it for us.

**Q. Playing with Ohtani these last few weeks, I mean, everybody in baseball -- everybody in the world knows how good he is, but what insights do you have now to how he's able to be this good? What have you learned about him that you wouldn't have known before?**

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, all you got to do is just be born to be able to throw a hundred and hit the ball 500 feet. There's really not that much going into it. But, no, he's exceeded all of my expectations. He's able to do stuff that I can't even dream of doing. But not to mention, he's so diligent and he works so hard and he's so meticulous about how he goes about his business that it's not a surprise that he's obviously extremely talented, but he kind of gets the most out of his ability too with how he works.

I couldn't be more -- I guess he exceeded all expectations for me on the field and off the field as a person and how he works.



**Q. For both of you, what does it mean to be part of your team's third WBC championship?**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: I mean, this is what I've always wanted. So I came from Miyazaki, and I'm just extremely happy. I'm on top of the world.

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, as a nine-year-old, I said I wanted to be able to represent Japan and to be able to be a part of the third one and play against guys that some of 'em I looked up to growing up and are current teammates of mine, I mean, it feels like I'm living in a dream right now. It's pretty unbelievable. To be able to win the third one for Japan makes it even sweeter.

**Q. You were undefeated. Is this most important to you?**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: Would you repeat question? Sorry.

THE MODERATOR: Is the fact that Japan was undefeated important to you?

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: Yes, it is. It was a very important thing and we were able to prove how good we are.

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, I think the same. Obviously winning the championship, winning today, is obviously the most important, but the fact that we were able to go undefeated through the whole time, beat a great Mexico team yesterday, come back today and then play against, obviously, maybe the greatest lineup that's ever been assembled in baseball history makes it sweet that we did it undefeated, for sure.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, when they push you up in the air, it looked like you were -- didn't look like you were very used to being lifted up, so how did you feel about that when they lifted you up in the air?**

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, when we were on the stage, I was asking around to see if we were going to lift up Kuriyama because I knew that was kind of the Japanese style celebration. And then that's the first time I've ever been lifted up like that before. So, yeah, I was pretty

surprised, but, man, it was one of the greatest moments ever. I hope I got a picture of it because that's something that I want to remember forever.

**Q. They mentioned on the radio that you took the time to learn parts of the Japanese National Anthem. How much does it mean to you just to be part of that team, to go into your heritage, and to just have Japan across your chest?**

LARS NOOTBAAR: Yeah, people have asked me, like, what's been the greatest part, and obviously, prior to today, we hadn't won the championship yet, and for me personally, it was just -- it meant so much to me to be able to go back there to Japan, dive into the culture, live the lifestyle for two weeks, meet these guys, and really get an understanding of where my mom grew up.

I had been there before, but never really -- the last time I was there was 18 years ago, so I don't really remember too much about it. For me to be able to wear Japan, kind of honor my mom, she sacrificed everything for me. I kind of understand some of her tendencies now after being there for a couple weeks, and so a special moment, for sure. I said it before, but that gold medal is probably going to her.

**Q. Two things: This team, of course I think this team will be go separate ways tomorrow, so how do you feel about that? The other question is, I wanted to ask you, tell me, how did you feel when you hit the home run?**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: Honestly speaking, starting from this year it was much longer. I think I spent more time with this team, so I'll be very sad that we have to break up.

**Q. For both of you, during the Trout versus Ohtani at-bat, what are you looking at, what do you see, and what are you going to remember?**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: I thought it was like a Manga, like a comic book. (Laughing.)

LARS NOOTBAAR: I mean, I was wondering if you wrote that script. I didn't know exactly what was going on there. When we got that double play, I saw Kondo kind of celebrating, and I was sitting in left field going, listen, good double play, but we got Mike Trout coming up it to the plate right now. Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

And so I think -- Benji Gil said it last night, that, you know, baseball won last night, and I think with Shohei Ohtani and Mike Trout kind of ending that game the way they did, I think baseball won again. I just think this WBC as a whole kind of elevated the game, and I hope the exposure that it got creates baseball fans all over the world.

**Q. What does Ohtani's success in the Major Leagues and on a stage like this mean for Japan and for all of you guys, that example that he sets?**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: Truly, he's great at hitting and pitching and he's excellent and he's doing something nobody has done in the past. So I don't know how to say this, but we think something -- he's somebody we need to chase, go after, but he's doing something impossible, you know? So he just keeps us motivated to catch up with him. So I think maybe that's the reason why we're just concentrating on playing baseball every day.

**Q. Murakami and you hit home runs and of course the Japanese baseball is really small baseball, that's what the nickname is, but I think the Japanese players are very powerful.**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: We both are known for hitting home runs, so we were able to hit the home runs and we were very happy. So both of us being able to hit home runs together may not happen again in the future, but...

**Q. I wanted to ask you a question. On the Mexico team the Togo Giants, the pitcher was great and what do you think about your hit?**

KAZUMA OKAMOTO: So the ball went into the stands. I ate a lot of food today, so I thought I would hit a little harder today. And of course we are in the same team and he's the junior. So I was hoping he would go work hard. But, anyway, at least I definitely wanted to win this game, so I'm glad that we did win.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Great run by you guys. Very happy for you and congratulations.

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