

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - USA vs Dominican Republic

Sunday, 15 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Dominican Republic Manager Albert Pujols

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Albert, there is a great expectation around the Dominican Republic, not only here but the social networks. Everyone is anticipating this game between the DR and the U.S. Do you have the lineup for today?

ALBERT PUJOLS: I do have the lineup, of course. You will see it as soon as it is announced officially. There is a lot of expectation regarding our games, and the whole country has been supporting us in all the games. This is not just because we are facing the United States. We have been preparing ourselves for this tournament, and you will see that today.

Q. How important was it for you the day of? You qualified as the first of the pool, and you are playing one day off in the middle for a potential final on Tuesday.

ALBERT PUJOLS: This is part of the rules of this tournament. We have taken advantage of that by preparing the guys for the next game. And then when they report back to their organizations, they should be ready for the season.

So yes, especially the game on Wednesday. It was too late, and the guys went to bed at 1:00, 2:00 a.m. And the day of, the next day, was great for us, for us to practice training and to do whatever we had to do to prepare for the next game against Korea.

Q. The experience today is totally different. Today you are facing another guy. Your impression on the game that you will be facing today?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Skenes is one of the best pitchers today in the Major League, but we also have one of the best offenses in this tournament, so it's going to be power versus power. We'll try to win.



Q. A follow-up question. You played in the Majors in major stages. You faced important pitchers. What did you tell your team? I know that they are professional, but especially the younger players of the team, what did you tell them when you are going to face a pitcher such as Skenes, one of the best pitchers today?

ALBERT PUJOLS: All these players are super professionals, you know? If they want my opinion, I could tell them, but we are ready. We know who we are facing today, but he knows who he is facing as well. So we'll try to do our best, try to score runs early in the game, and then to execute our game plan.

I believe that we have a good game plan, that we will execute it tonight. If it doesn't work, we will make some adjustments as we have been doing.

The leadership in that clubhouse -- I mean, my voice is nothing compared with the leadership that we have in the clubhouse. Like I said a few weeks ago, this is their show. I played for 23 years. I'm a manager now. My job is to move the different positions, to put the key guys that are going to help us win today and to help us make decisions during the game.

Q. Albert, you had Junior Caminero in winter ball. You have seen what he can do in this tournament. What makes him so good and how good can he be?

ALBERT PUJOLS: How good? We'll get to see. I think the best thing about him is he loves to get better, and he loves to listen. He wants to get better.

At 22, he's so mature for his age. And I was really honored and blessed to have the opportunity to have him for those six weeks that I had in him in the Dominican and kind of built a really good relationship with him where I still tried to call him once or twice a month just to check up and just to let him know that I'm watching, and if I see something, just to help him out.

But I think he still can get better, just like all of us. We were young and we got better. When he starts making those little adjustments that I know that he's going to make soon, he's going to be having a monster year like he did



last year.

So last year was just a little glimpse of the things that was to come from him, and hopefully he can stay healthy and really have an amazing career.

Q. This game has been described with these two lineups as perhaps the best matchup of lineups that we've ever seen in this tournament.

How does that add to your appreciation to be the manager in a game like this?

ALBERT PUJOLS: I'm really honored, really honored and blessed to have this opportunity. I said it last week. I've been in really good ball clubs. Being part of this Dominican team and this group of guys is really special.

And you said it. This is two powerhouses that are coming in, playing well with good lineups, and at the end it's going to come down to obviously the bullpen and the strategy, how can we move the pieces to get three outs every inning.

So obviously I'm looking forward to it. We had a little glimpse with Venezuela on Wednesday, which, to me, it was a fun game. And hopefully we have the opportunity again to win tonight and be in the finals. We'll see what happens from there.

Q. Paul Skenes is 23 years old and throwing the ball at a level that most pitchers never reach in their careers. What is it actually like to stand in the box against someone like that, and how different does this feel knowing it's an elimination game?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, it's hard for me to describe because I'm not playing. I can tell you if I would have a chance to face him.

But from outside, working with MLB now looking, he is one of the best pitchers, if not the best in the game. Probably hard to hit, but he's not invincible. I think you'll be able to make some adjustment and hopefully the guys can do that tonight.

I believe in our team too, as well. He's probably facing a lineup that may be at the All-Star Game for one inning, but when you go for a couple of innings, I don't think there is lineup that he ever faced like this before, for a couple of innings.

So it will be a fun game. I think this is what's so good about the World Baseball Classic. You're bringing the best player representing your country, and tonight is going to be

another great game. Hopefully the fans can get to enjoy it.

Q. Two games to go. But I would like to know until so far, now that you are talking to us, what has been the most beautiful, the most exciting about leading or managing this team?

ALBERT PUJOLS: This, representing my country. Once again wearing this uniform.

First of all, I have to thank God, Nelson Cruz, the general manager, and the management for this opportunity to be in the Classic one more time, to represent my country.

And I'm very proud of all the guys on the team and creating new relationships with them. I faced many of them by the end of my career, but I respect them and they respect me. This is the most beautiful thing that has happened maybe throughout my career.

Q. You spoke about leadership in the clubhouse, the professionalism of the players. After the long career that you had, how can you control the emotion for this game today? How can you transmit this calm to the guys?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Just like you said, experience. Thank God I played for 23 years as a professional. Maybe that helped me to control my emotions, to be calm just like I was when I played. Every pitcher, every game, I took it very seriously as if it was my last game as a professional, and I continue doing the same now as a manager. I try to pass that on to all of the players.

I tell them, "Take advantage of this opportunity. We don't know whether we are going to be here in the next Classic." So I'm very proud of all the guys, and I expect to achieve our goal, which is winning this tournament.

Q. Albert, as a player, you were fairly reserved. Like, you weren't like a big bat flip guy or anything like that. I guess what I'm wondering is when you watch the sort of energy and enthusiasm your team has, does any part of you wish you had been able to express yourself as a player in that way?

ALBERT PUJOLS: No, because everybody's different. I enjoy it now, being a manager. I enjoy from the other side also playing. I think everybody reacts different, prepares different, has a routine that's different.

I mean, I can't have the same routine that Juan Soto have or Vladdy or Machado. Everybody's different. But I think what brings together, representing your country every three years through this tournament, it means a lot.

And, you know, you see it. You see it from the energy, so positive. Guys really pushing each other up and helping each other out. They only get to see that for two weeks here, and after Tuesday, everybody goes to their team.

And yes, we stay together. We send texts and we check on each other, but it's no different -- it's different than being in this tournament. That's what I love about our players. That's what I admire the most, the way our team is handling each other and helping each other out. We are a family representing the Dominican Republic with a mission of winning this tournament.

Q. Albert, kind of along those same lines, Juan Soto has always had a businesslike reputation, very focused in the batter's box obviously. What have you seen from him in his interaction with his teammates here and maybe some sides of him that maybe other people haven't seen?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Yeah. I mean, a great leader. It's fun to be a manager and have Juan Soto on the team. Great communicator. A guy that wants to get better and wants to make sure that everybody around him gets better.

It's just fun. It's kind of like taking me back to who I was. I wanted to get better, but the only way I can get better is making my team around me better because they make me better.

He knows the talent and the ability that he has, and he uses it. It's just been fun. It's just been fun to see the way he communicates. And every time he gets a base hit or a strikeout or a walk, telling the guys what the pitcher -- it's just fun to see that, especially from a superstar.

And I think that's what separates superstars from guys that take it to the next level. Like I would say talent and then a gift from God is different, you know? The talent, you're able to do a lot of things, but when you have that gift, you do things extra special in this game.

Juan Soto is one of those guys that can make a difference obviously in the lineup.

Q. 1 question that you don't like to answer because of your philosophy, you always try to be focused on the game after game after game, pitch after pitch. The next game is the most important one, the United States. Your goal, your focus is there. But if you move to the final, would you change the plan of the Dominican Republic in terms of the starter depending on who the rival is, Italy or Venezuela, knowing Contreras' history?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Contreras will be our pitcher no matter what. If God gives us that opportunity, if we move to the final, Contreras will be the starter. The plan is like that. I'm not going to change it no matter what, no matter if it is Italy or Venezuela.

Even I will pitch from the dugout if we are in the final game. I trust Sandy, and I hope to be here talking with you on Tuesday.

Q. What do you want history to say about this team?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, it's hard. Actually, it's very difficult. It's hard to think about that. After the mission is accomplished, which is winning the championship, I could tell you, but right now it is difficult to answer your question because we still have two games to win in order to achieve our goal of winning this championship.

If you ask me that question on Tuesday after the game, and if we are champion, I could answer it.

Q. How was it for you to have Juan Marichal on the team? How has he helped the guys?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Dom Juan, to us Dom Juan is like Clemente for the Puerto Ricans or Jackie Robinson for the Americans. Dom Juan has been a blessing and a blessing for himself, being with those guys. And I always tell the players, especially the pitchers, to take advantage of that opportunity because you don't see Juan Marichal in a clubhouse every day. I was one of the players that, when I had that chance of having top players such as Dom Juan around me, I always wanted to learn and ask questions.

So when he enters the clubhouse, it's like a light, an extra light in the clubhouse. His smile, his charisma, the blessing of his words every time he speaks with the players, that's an extra motivation for us to try to achieve the goal of winning the championship.

Q. We all know the significance of today's game, but we know that this is not your end goal. Pitchers that are not available for today because of recommendation of their organizations?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Christopher Sanchez and Brayan Bello are not available. Brayan was with us. He came today, so they're not available for today's game.

The other pitchers are ready in the bullpen. We want to keep those guys healthy. Different organizations have called us. Wellington and Jose and myself have done the best job to keep them healthy, but it's been tough, it's been

a challenge in this tournament not only competing, but that has been a challenge for us, for the coaches. Sometimes we feel that we cannot do anything, or many things because the organizations put pressure on us. And I understand that. The organizations should understand that we are not going to abuse them. There is a commitment that we have with the country and with the organizations.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports).

