

# World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Venezuela vs Italy

Monday, 16 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Italy

## Manager Francisco Cervelli

### Pregame Press Conference

**Q. What do you like about Jakob and what he has done with you in the first round? And how important is it to have him today?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Jakob is one of my first players. I knew it from the very beginning. He wants to play every day. He wants to be in the center field. I tried to give him one day as a designated hitter, and he doesn't want. I'm impressed. I think that Marlins have a big star looking forward.

**Q. Two questions. In Houston, it was very important for you, the role of the fans in terms of pressure. Did you talk to the team about what to expect from the Venezuelan fans? And this Francisco Cervelli, what would he tell that little guy that was with his father that worked as a bus collector?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: We learned that in Houston, 39 fans, very noisy. After that stage, I told them, "Miami's going to be worse." And this is where we have to take our time, pitch after pitch, because I was here in 2023 as a fan. I came to see Venezuela. It's very noisy, the noisiest thing that I have heard. But it's nice to play baseball like that.

What would I say to that kid? Thank you. Thank you for being so curious, for being such a pain in the neck to my dad. I'm here for that.

**Q. What can you tell us about the recruitment of Posada for the team, his importance, what he can do for the team, and how was it for him to eliminate Puerto Rico, because he's from Puerto Rico?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I just called him one year ago, and he said yes. I think that he was the first coach that I elected, that I chose, because Jorge means baseball. He came here, a different country he didn't know. He just knows a lot about wine and pasta.



But he knows baseball. He was my mentor, one of the toughest guys I've been around. He is a winner. In his DNA he has winning. Five rings that he deserved. I needed a guy like him here, a guy who speaks baseball, to be fair, help the guys.

He's having lots of fun. Probably against Puerto Rico, he had some conflicting feelings, but he defends what advocates is baseball. We are more than a country, we are baseball players, and we have to support the new generation so that they know baseball, especially that they don't forget the history. Because of them, we are here.

**Q. Tell us a little bit, what have you learned, Francisco Cervelli, as a manager. A couple of years we spoke and I asked you about your future, about coach or now as a manager. And you made this last-minute change for today's game.**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I learn every day. I started this in Europe one year ago. You can be bold. You are going to make mistakes, but you keep going, keep going, keep going.

And now I have a great coaching staff. That's my blessing. That's the best I can ask for, 22 World Series rings in total, guys with over 30 years' experience, cold-blooded. I always try to learn with them because I don't know what the future has for me.

This has been a beautiful window for me, and I have been humbled because I love listening to everyone. I need to know what my coaches think. And no matter what they think, I want to learn, learn, and learn.

And yes, I made the decision to change the pitcher. Nola was available for today, and I chose him. That's the way things are going to be.

**Q. Throughout the Classic, Italy and Venezuela have faced several times. Venezuela has always won. In 2017 the games were very tight. You were playing for Italy. Now, this Italian team has a different roster, more solid, and that is why you are a finalist here in the semifinal. You have followed up the process in Italy. How has that development happened so that**

## **Italy for the very first time is in the semifinal for the WBC challenging the Venezuelan team?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I have faced Venezuela four times, and I lost every time. The first couple of times, it was almost impossible, and the last game, that was painful for me because we played great baseball. But we had a guy here -- there was a guy there, Miguel Cabrera, who hurt my plan.

And the development or the growth of baseball in Italy, well, it's been planned. I fell in love with baseball. I started working with small kids on a field. At that point in time, my life had no direction. I found the passion on a field with kids that wanted to play and learn how to play baseball.

And we were playing with rubber balls on a basketball court. We took them from that basketball court to the stadium.

You cannot do otherwise. "How come you don't go to the field," you ask the kids. This is a lot of planning with Mazzieri, Natale. I have not done this by myself. I cannot do this by myself.

We started to rebuild. Baseball was forgotten, the guys were hopeless. We started to learn and understand what was needed to improve. What I failed in my first tournament, I learned. In my second tournament, it was better. We are going to continue failing. We make some adjustments, and we move on.

But first of all, you have to sell that idea to the kids, especially in Europe, that baseball could be a way of life.

**Q. You were speaking about the four games against Venezuela. Now you are going to be in a different role. Out of the four games you mentioned, what did you learn? And now how can you implement or apply those takeaways in this game? You have very young players. Now you have Brayan Rocchio on this roster for this game and for this stage; right? What can you tell us about that?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Being a player and being a manager are two totally different things. It's a totally different perspective. The responsibility of the manager is to make decisions fast. If you have a good coaching staff, things are better. As a player, you have to improvise.

We made many mistakes. We paid for that. We are facing the best players on the planet, you know? This team lives, eats and drinks baseball. You have to minimize the errors, and you have to see that on the field.

This is a very complicated game. It's like chess. You have to move pieces. I can give you something I concede went wrong. I'm going to make one out.

I mean, you have to win the war, not the battle. It's a very strategic game. And when you face the best players on the planet, you cannot make mistakes.

Brayan Rocchio, I have been speaking with him for a year. I thought he would be my starter. For some reasons, it was not possible. He was not available. We called him again because there was an injury and he said yes.

He was born in Venezuela, but Brayan Rocchio is baseball. He just wants to play baseball.

**Q. What was your reasoning for making the pitching change and starting Nola tonight? And if you win, who would be your starting pitcher tomorrow?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, my reason was my gut, I think. It was me. Everyone is available, but I think Nola is the right person. That's my opinion, and I'm taking responsibility for my decisions.

**Q. When did you feel it in your gut? Last night? You woke up in the middle of the night? This morning?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: No, it was yesterday. The thing is after I announced that, before I talked to them and then I changed my opinion.

**Q. You are drinking lots of coffee. Is it difficult for you to sleep? And number two, you are having a great moment. How important is it to arrive here at the right point in time and the pace that you have had considering today's game?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I drink coffee as a good Venezuelan since I was 8 or something like that. When you drink coffee and milk and bread and butter, that's no problem at all. And in Italy, I drank coffee eight times a day. That's normal.

And I want the team to have that, to have an identity. Italy means coffee. Coffee is not to be energetic. It's a way of life, it is socializing. Speaking with the guys, drinking coffee, and speaking with the others.

Yeah, we have a great moment, 5-0. We expect to be 6-0. It's going to be difficult, and I told that to the guys. I talked to the guys after the game against Mexico. I said, "It's going to be worse and worse, and the defense will be impactful."

I know that these fans can be hostile. Latins are Latins. They are spectacular, and they are going to make noise. They are going to bother us. This is part of the game, and that is why it's so beautiful.

**Q. You spent part of your playing career under Clint Hurdle in Pittsburgh. What did those years teach you, and have you been able to use any of those lessons during Team Italy's run?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: What I learned from him was the communication, the truth. I always like the truth.

And then he identified that very early when I got there. He brought me to the office and he told me the truth, to relax and to enjoy the game and to play my game.

That's what I'm doing with my players. This is a short tournament. There are not that many options to change players and to coach a lot of things. The one thing I can do is give them confidence and the way I learned with those guys.

**Q. You played with John Berney when you were with the Marlins back in 2020. First of all, what do you remember about him back then, and what sort of impact does he have on your roster, his skill set and versatility and all of that?**

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I think his brain. He's a veteran player. He knows how to play the game. He's calm. He was a great player, speed, power. He did amazing things, and he make himself as a player, because he was a backup and then he became a starting player. I've got a lot of respect for him. That's why he's playing second base today.

I just want to say one thing. Thank you guys for making this noise for me. It means a lot. We're doing something real in Italy. It is very hard to do in Europe, and you guys have been helping me. Thank you very much. And I'll see you later.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports).