

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Venezuela vs Italy

Monday, 16 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Italy

Vinnie Pasquantino

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Vinnie, you've talked a lot about how this team is not scared, particularly the younger players who haven't even been in the Major Leagues. What else has impressed you about that group of players, Antonacci, Fischer, Nori and so on, for players who have never played in the Major Leagues?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Yeah, I think that's the biggest thing is not being intimidated by the moment because these moments have been big, especially once we got to the U.S., Mexico, Puerto Rico games with the crowds and everything like that.

And it wasn't that the other games weren't big. Honestly, those were just as big. The Israel and the Great Britain game because it is the toe-in-the-water game of what's this going to look like.

So for them to be able to perform under the pressure that this tournament provides has been incredible for me to see just as a teammate, just how unfazed they are about anything.

Like the little things about Fischer having at-bats, about him singing his walk-up song or he fouls a ball off and it's like he's looking up into the third deck of where that ball should have gone. And Antonacci not being afraid to chirp back. Things that ballplayers do, but things that you don't see 21-year-olds playing Major Leaguers. So it's been really neat to see that.

Q. What's it been like to play for Francisco as a manager? And what was the message that he gave you guys that you bought into really early on? And do you think he can have a future as a Major League manager, especially what's going on right now?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Yeah, he's been incredible. From practice one -- really, it started with practice calls last year of what do we want this to look like, what do we want



this team to play like, and he's given us the freedom to play how we want. That's all you can ask for in a manager, in a structure. That's what we like, just the freedom to go and play, go have good at-bats. There's not too much scrutiny. If you mess up, we talk about it and we move on.

He's got some things to work on, like just making sure he puts his hand up for replays. We went through that the other day. But those were little things that you probably don't even -- they don't teach you that for the WBC.

So it's been really special. I don't see why he doesn't have a future as a manager assuming he wants to do it. He's just been really special. He's surrounded himself by some really good baseball people on the coaching staff that have helped him a lot. I guess this is his first real big tournament as manager on the international, worldwide stage, so it's been incredible to watch him just get better in the short span.

Q. And I also wanted to ask about Maikel Garcia, who you're going to face tonight. You guys basically came up together in the Royals system and he obviously had a breakout year last season and a big night the other day. So what's it like to play with Maikel tonight?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: It's incredible. We've talked a little bit about playing against each other because this will be the first time.

It's really special. Back in 2019 is when him and I started playing together. He was my shortstop in Burlington, North Carolina, for the Burlington Royals. Then we played in Instructs in 2019, 2020. In 2021 we played together in Quad Cities.

He's just incredible. He's a great teammate. He's an unbelievable player.

You call it a breakout. I just call it Maikel being Maikel. So we've all seen it coming for years. It was amazing to see him put it all together this year. I hope he doesn't do it to us tonight.

So I'm rooting against him tonight, but I never really root against Maikel.



But he's the best, and it's awesome to see what he's doing on this stage.

Q. My first one is similar to the previous one. Have you talked with Salvador, Maikel, your Royals teammates about tonight's game? And do you already have a special place to put the bat you hit three home runs already?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Well, so the hat is going to go to the Hall of Fame, which is really cool. So at some point here over the next few days, I will give that bat up.

I've talked to Salvy a little bit. As soon as I saw him yesterday, he just gave me one of these from across the field, which is fun. So we got to talk for a little bit.

Yeah, it's really exciting to play against the guys that you played with for so long. I'm glad I'm going to be playing with them again in a week and a half, but this will be pretty special tonight to be able to go up against those guys.

Q. What message does Vinnie Pasquantino send to the Italy people that this sport has given more joy than football, that it's the original sport of Italy?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: I think my message is just that baseball's a fun game, and this tournament has been able to bring a lot of people together.

I mean, the game last night was incredible. The Venezuela-Japan game the other night was amazing. So I would just say if you're in Italy, think about what baseball could be, with how the game is growing the way that it is and this tournament giving us a showcase to get to televisions and to newspapers and to radio in Italy.

Just keep paying attention. We're going to come over there. We've already been talking about plans as individuals we can do as players of what we can do to help even more. This kind of feels like the first step. And just keep paying attention because we're going to be here.

Q. Hi, Vinnie.

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Hi, Jake. Why are you guys separated?

Q. It's okay, everyone's separated. It's all good.

Has there been a moment over the last week-and-a-half -- I know it's been a whirlwind for you -- where the scale of all this dawned on you, maybe a text that you got from someone or a video you saw online where the impact that

this Italy team has had where you're like, whoa.

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: I got to do some shows that I haven't done before, especially some shows like McAfee, who doesn't really talk about baseball that much. Really, no show talks about baseball that much.

I think Stephen A. Smith, I think he called me a -- I think he said I was betraying the country or something. I thought that was amazing. He kept saying how I was from Richmond, Virginia.

And he said my name right. I thought that was incredible. That's great for the game right there.

He was live tweeting the game last night, which was really funny because some of the takes he had were just wrong. But that's the fun of it, right?

So I don't take anything he said personally because I think it's great for the game just to be talked about on that stage.

That was probably the one where I got sent a clip of him saying I'm betraying everybody. So I'm sorry to those that I've betrayed in this tournament.

But yeah, this week's been phenomenal. It's been long but it's been phenomenal. I'm just super grateful for everything that's been talked about with this team in this tournament, because that's the goal of this game, or this tournament specifically, is to grow the game and to bring all these guys together to have country versus country. It's amazing. So it's just been incredible.

Q. So this is a silly question, but can you describe what the dugout espresso tastes like, and would you ever consider letting media taste test it?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Are you going to hit a home run or -- you can't just get in the espresso machine. I'm sure we can maybe it for you, but if we make it for you right then, we've learned it's too hot.

To be honest, I have no idea what it tastes like because when I hit homers, I black out. I'm just so excited that I actually made contact and the ball went over the fence that I have no idea what's going on. Sometimes I just start screaming. I see the video back. I'm like, what am I doing? That happened the other night big time.

So I have no idea what it tastes like, just that it tastes like a home run, which is a good feeling.

Q. So I have a question about your culture. How do you feel the joy of blending baseball with Italian



culture, like drinking espresso after a home run?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Like, how do we feel about it?

Q. The joy blending your culture and the baseball.

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: It's amazing. There's a lot of stereotypical Italians on this team. As I've read a lot this week, there's a lot of guys from New Jersey.

But a lot of that is pride in your family and it starts with -- for a lot of guys, it's their grandparents. Even simple things of Sunday dinner when you're just around your family. That's kind of what this clubhouse feels like. It feels like a gigantic Sunday dinner, and that's why we're having so much fun, because we're doing what we love around people that we love.

In this clubhouse where -- I just met most of these guys 10, 14 days ago, but we all have shared experiences from our childhood. I think that's one of the coolest things. So I think that's where the joy comes from, of just having these shared experiences that we can call back to and just be able to celebrate as teammates.

Guys talking about their families talking about this tournament has been the coolest part, so that's the joy piece for us.

Q. I wanted to ask you about one of your younger teammates. Jakob Marsee made a pretty big impression in his MLB debut last season. Francisco sung his praises about what he's done for you in the tournament.

What have been your impressions of what he brings to the team and on the field?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Yeah, it's kind of funny with Mars, he's also really young but he doesn't get talked about as like one of the super young guys because I think that's because of how quietly a professional he is. He just does his job. He shows up, he does his job, he goes home. Like, exactly what you want in a cornerstone player.

He's been just amazing for us. The at-bats that he has, he's never out of an at-bat. He can get down 0-2 and you have no idea because of the way he conducts himself.

He's been doing a great job in center field for us. He set the tone. I think he hit leadoff the first two games, and then he's been hitting third since. I love hitting behind him. He just puts together professional at-bats, and he's just a great guy in the clubhouse.

So he's keeping things light, but he gets here and he does his work and everybody knows he's prepared, so it's been awesome to be a teammate with him.

Q. It seems that you realize how big this is for Italy, but have you taken a moment to think that you guys are now like ambassadors of baseball in Italy? So I would like to see if you can send a message to a kid in Italy that is probably watching this interview right now. He just found out baseball because of you guys, and now he's probably dreaming to become a player. What would you say to that kid in Italy that probably only knows soccer, and the only thing he knows and sees on TV is soccer, but now he found you guys.

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: Yeah. It kind of just gives me chills, you asking that question, just because it's extremely humbling to know that the position we've been able to put the Federation, like for Italy baseball and softball, where we've been. We felt pretty good in 2023 about getting to the quarterfinals, but this is a whole new experience.

So the message I would send to those kids is just, "Look how much fun we're having." That's what this game is about. In soccer you've got the nine guy -- or is it 11? Sorry. 11. My bad. Sorry.

You celebrate with the guys on the field, but if you watch baseball, one guy will do something, and all 26 or 30, however many are here, are celebrating at one time. And I think that's one of the special things about the game, is you're all watching one person succeed, and then you celebrate as a team around him.

And for the kids in Italy, just know that we're doing this for you guys. We want in 20 years for the World Baseball Classic Italian team to be full of Italians, like Italian speakers from Italy. That's the goal of this.

To be an ambassador of that is extremely humbling for me, and I hope that we get to see this through one day, and I hope you guys are enjoying watching us as much fun as we're having representing you.

Q. A couple players have talked about one of the cool parts of this tournament is getting to see the different styles of play on the field from different countries. How would you describe the Italian style of baseball?

VINNIE PASQUANTINO: I think we're still developing what that style is, which is kind of cool to think about.

But I think the biggest distinct styles you see are with the American style and the Asian style of baseball, with the different styles of pitching. I think that's the most distinct

way to think about it.

But if you just -- I would have to talk about the style of team that we have, which is apparently a lot of home runs like the Dominican Republic. When we kind of came up with this team, it was, hey, we're going to be able to run. We're going to be able to steal bases. I think I'm leading the team in stolen bases.

But I think the Italian brand of baseball is just take some espresso shots and get after it right now. So I think that's the brand that we've created right now, and we're still trying to figure out -- I think as you build development cultures in different spots, you learn what players are good at, what they adapt to well.

So I would think, with looking at more of a soccer culture now, you're probably looking at faster, more athletic baseball players. You probably go from there to then start building out the skills of baseball. I'd imagine that's how we're going to try to figure that out. It's a good question. I just don't really have a great answer for it.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports)