

# World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Venezuela vs Italy

Monday, 16 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Venezuela

## Manager Omar Lopez

### Pregame Press Conference

**Q. Knowing that tomorrow, if you guys make it, the final is going to be against the United States, is there added motivation to win tonight, especially with everything that's gone on politically in the world?**

OMAR LOPEZ: Politically? I'm not going to answer that question because I said this early on, that I'm not going to answer anything about political situation, because I work in baseball.

I think for us it's more important to win tonight to keep our country happy, celebrating, and keep making noise that for the first time we're going to be in a final, you know? I think that's the goal tonight.

**Q. This is the most important game in history for Venezuela since 2009. Tell us your impressions and how you are facing this game.**

OMAR LOPEZ: I am very happy to be in this position, in this semifinal. We are ready. We are going to do our best just the way we did against Japan.

We prepared ourselves the best possible way. We had one day off.

Very impressive what they did -- what the players did after arriving at the hotel at 2:00 a.m., and they said, no, we are going to try tomorrow, we have to work. We have to be united, we have to be together.

We are ready. We are going to do our best to make it to the final.

**Q. From Puerto Rico, your second home, I would like you to send a message. In Venezuela many people watch the game on TV, but there are other people that will follow the game on the radio. What can you tell these fans that will see or hear this team making history?**



OMAR LOPEZ: We could be here for a long time speaking about that, and I have said that before. I was anticipating a moment like this to manage a team where our country could celebrate, to be together with the same slogan or with the same goal to support us, to pray for us so that we are wise and we can win.

Everyone should know that the whole country of Venezuela will be paying attention to a team of 30 players, 10 to 12 coaches, 12 people working in the operational part. We are ready so that we are all together win. They who are watching on the screen can celebrate together.

God willing, we want to give that joy to the people. That would make us very happy because that way, we would be contributing to the mental health, life of our people in Venezuela.

**Q. Ranger pitched in the quarterfinals. Is there a pitch count?**

OMAR LOPEZ: Yes, only three innings, no more than 50 pitches.

**Q. Please tell us how important would it be to make it to a final with your team the same year when you won the championship with Los Congueros, and tell us about the love that you feel for the Boricua people.**

OMAR LOPEZ: The only thing that I can say is that I'm grateful with God and with life for these opportunities. I have been successful, thank God.

This season in Puerto Rico was unique, a very solid team, a very united team. Defense in Santurce that was supporting us from day one, especially during the playoffs. They came with us to Ponce. The amount of fans that traveled with us to Ponce, the coaches, the players, especially my brother Luis Matos, my bench coach in Puerto Rico.

We built new relationships, new friendships for myself and for my family, and I have to thank God for that.

Being tomorrow in a final, those things happened the same



year. Once again, I have to thank God because he has control over everything that I do. He guided me to have the staff that I have around to guide me and help me with the players. He guided so that the players that are available could be with us today, and he continued protecting us.

So if that's the case, glory to God, and Venezuela will celebrate, thank God.

**Q. You've had a chance to watch Wilyer Abreau for a while. How would you describe the player that you're seeing? Obviously you saw beyond just that one swing.**

But then additionally, what can it do for a young player to have a moment of success like that in the elevated -- in an elevated level of competition?

OMAR LOPEZ: When I saw Abreu for the first time, that was maybe three years ago, one game that Dusty Baker brought him to spring training.

I was coaching first base, and the first swing that he put it on, that was a rocket, a laser.

Right away I said, Paisano, where are you coming from? I didn't even know that he was in the organization because I was in the big leagues. We're on one side, minor league's on other side.

Then at the end of the year we traded him, so I was like, what's going on here?

It was a good trade because Christian Vazquez came in to help us win the World Series. That was 2022. But right away I knew that Wilyer was going to be a really good player not only because he put good swings, just because he's as a person I got to know him a little bit, and then I saw him a couple years later.

Now that I have him here, and how good he is in his work ethic, the way that he goes about his business, that tells me that this kid is going to be really good.

The only thing that we need to pray is to stay healthy, and God help it in that way. And I don't have any doubt that Wilyer is going to be really good because of that. That's why he's going to be in another level, because of his work ethic.

**Q. And just what would be the significance for him of a moment like the other day?**

OMAR LOPEZ: It's like if you saw the first four games,

probably he was trying to do too much, trying to put the ball in the other side of the field.

And listening to Victor Martinez for three, four days in a row in BP, having a different way to prepare himself in BP, that's what helped him a lot, to react to it in that fastball opening.

Because he was trying to do that, and I remember Victor told him, let the ball travel and stay up the middle, and then when you see him inside, your body is going to react automatically and the ball is going to be out.

But at the beginning you're trying to do that, and all pitches all way middle of way are not -- you're not doing anything about it and you kind of fly open.

So I heard that, and then he start to work in three days, and right at that moment Wilyer clicked. And we were talking about at the end of the game. That's thanks to Victor and all of the coaches that we have here that always give the best advice at the moment to help the kid improve.

**Q. You've talked a lot about bringing happiness to the people in Venezuela, but I want to ask you about some of the joy in the dugout. How important is the Tambor celebration to the team, the pregame dances, the postgame dances? I'm curious, do you ever mix it up in there? I've heard Luis Arraez might be the best dancer on the team.**

OMAR LOPEZ: I think there's a couple better. There's more dancers, they're just shy a little bit. I will not step in because I don't know how to dance tambor. I know a little bit, but I don't know if I'm going to step up one of those days.

But it's very simple. What you see right there, that's us. That's our country. That's us. That's winter ball. That's how we enjoy our baseball.

And we understand everybody has a different culture. You go to Puerto Rico, they have a different way. La Plena in Puerto Rico, that's amazing. It's kind of same, but in a different type of music.

But in Dominican, it's Merengue, Ripiao, it's Bachata, Dembow. There's a lot of ways prior to the game they get loose and we identify who they are and who we are.

**Q. With victory today, you will move to the final, and the final will be tomorrow. You could face a U.S. team that had a day off. That's very important in this kind of a tournament, which is very short. So the reliever that you use today, maybe you couldn't use them**



**tomorrow. In that regard, the format is just as fair? Maybe you could have the day off, but do you believe that at least it would be one day off for each team?**

OMAR LOPEZ: I don't have control of the format or the rules of this tournament. I don't have control over that. I have to be focused on the internal part.

What I cannot control, I just cannot control. But if we win today, tomorrow we'll do our best no matter if we have to use all the pitchers back to back. We are going out with all we have. If we go to the final, they will be feeling as if they had two days off.

**Q. A few minutes ago Francisco Cervelli tried to explain, when asked about why he changed the pitcher today, he said that it was his gut. He used that word, his gut. Even when he knows that you are a manager that studies a lot, et cetera, have you made that kind of decision, intuition or gut or something like that not because of method or study?**

OMAR LOPEZ: Of course. Many, many decisions I made during the game.

Do you remember one special against the Dominican Republic when Senzatela didn't come back to the game and I said to myself, I am going to use the bullpen to stop the offense in order to get back to the game, come back to the game. We almost did it. That was one of those decisions.

The other one, the hit-and-run against Japan. It was 1-0 and I put the sign and then I deleted, and I thought to myself, what did you do? It was 1-1. I thought to myself, okay, I'm going to put it back and put that sign back. My gut told me to do that. That's a gut decision.

Why making a decision? Because of the sequence of the pitchers. Sometimes you are mentally exhausted. I have to follow the sequence, especially of the hitters and the innings, how the pitchers are doing, what are they throwing.

Sometimes a pitcher starts the first round of the lineup. A pitcher won't wait. When they start the second round, they change, and I have to follow that strategy and make the required changes.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports).