

World Baseball Classic: Semifinals - Venezuela vs Italy

Monday, 16 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Manager Omar Lopez

Postgame Press Conference

Venezuela 4, Italy 2

Q. Congrats on the win. What does it mean to you to be in the final, to give this joy, happiness to Venezuela? Your impressions about the potential starter for tomorrow?

OMAR LOPEZ: Eduardo Rodriguez is going to be the starter tomorrow. And I think I said that to my brother a little nervous, you know, because this is a dream come true for me, "What could I do to give some joy to my country?"

And this is not just my job, my work. There are too many people involved and cooperating so that we are here present today.

Of course, managing this, this is the responsibility that I take to give joy to my country. But it was my dream. It was the dream that I shared with everyone, to be in this situation, in this position.

And let me tell you a story, by the way. When we beat Japan, I went to the bath and my wife told me, "Congrats, honey. You don't deserve that much hatred. I'm the witness, the only witness of everything you have done to put Venezuela at the top."

And I told her, "No worry, darling, because I can bear all of this." It's my family suffering, you know?

And I told her, "Relax, I can bear this. I can stand this." In Venezuela we have over 30 million people that are willing to see Venezuela winning, and I'll find a way to do that together with my people.

She told me that, and it hurt. After the previous Classic in 2023, she told me -- I mean, after a year or so after the Classic, I managed Premier 12 and then my wife told me, "If I were you, I couldn't take that responsibility, because what you created, what you achieved, it's very difficult to be



achieved again."

And that intuition of women, you know, in all the processes as a marriage, I kept thinking because women are very wise. We have been together for many years now.

At some point in time she told me the same, and I told her, "Don't repeat that because I don't want to be challenged." And I said, "You know what? Yes, I'm going to take this responsibility. It's going to be my last Classic, and I'm going to try to take Venezuela to the final. I'm going to dedicate myself double, triple overtime. I'm going to look for the people. I don't know what the heck I am going to do."

But today we are proud because as Venezuelans, what we have seen until now has been successful. So criticism is always criticism. Hatred is always hatred. Sometimes they come with threats.

But it doesn't matter. I am going to try to help people to transform that in positive energy. My goal is to educate, try to educate. The idea is to keep the values of Venezuela people. I understand passion, but sometimes passion puts us at a different level.

That's why I want to say these or dad, I said, no, as long as I am with my family, as long as my family loves me, I am going to go with them all the way. And of course, this is going to have some impact on my country. Tomorrow I will cry because it's another game we have to win.

Q. There is criticism and there are strong messages, et cetera. How did you process that internally with the team in order to transform that in good vibes and to see the reaction by the players? It happened with the Dominican Republic and Japan. You always try to come back, and that has been the identity of that team.

OMAR LOPEZ: I try to be as honest as possible. Two, three days ago I was receiving support, a message from people that have my direct personal number, and the people were telling me, "Well, forget about that. Forget about what they are saying."

And I thought, oh, my God. I didn't read not even one comment on the social networks. I understand what



happens from here to there, but I cannot control that. I can control my decisions.

If I make a mistake, I'll come here and say, "I'm sorry. That was BS, that was BS. I made a mistake. I'm a guy who takes responsibility."

But if I'm convinced about something, I'm going to keep my decision knowing that there will be millions of different ideas, but I cannot control that. I learned that with the time; okay? Five, six years ago I was different. Now I say, "Relax, Omar." Otherwise I'm going to be disoriented, I'm going to lose my way.

But the players, the players see that. They see the social networks, and my job is to tell them that today you are going to be criticized, but if you win tomorrow, you can confirm that in joy and applause. But don't pay attention to that the same because you cannot -- I cannot control that.

And this is no self-motivation. I motivate myself with my people, my players, people that supports me.

And I understand the other positions, you know? I accept criticism. I'm a man, you know? I'm not saying anything to the fans. I understand them.

I have my Venezuelan ID, and it would hurt me if I won't make it to the final or if I lose against the United States, and I said, "It was not Chirino's. It was my mistake and I learned from that."

But God gave me the opportunity to be here again, and I accepted the challenge and here I am. I am humble. I'm a person that wants the very best for my country from the baseball players or, in this case, manager perspective.

I don't want you to be upset. I don't want you to offend me. Just live the passion, smile, and I'll try to achieve that. Let's do it together. And I need you, as Venezuelan journalists. We need you in there.

Q. Is everyone available in the bullpen?

OMAR LOPEZ: Even Johan Santana is going to pitch.

Q. Omar, a few days ago you quoted a legend of the TV, call your friends, call them -- with a hat with a 58 number, call your friends and tell them that we are in the final.

Omar Lopez, who would you like us to call in Venezuela to give the news, the message?

OMAR LOPEZ: Venezuela was awake the whole night, paralyzed watching this game. But there is an engineer or someone that doesn't know anything about baseball, but maybe he was with friends at a barbecue and he tell them Venezuela for the very first time is in the final of the WBC, and maybe Venezuela is going to do the best to give the first title of the World Baseball Classic.

Yesterday I received so many calls, and I'm going to call back.

Q. Question on the sequence of the relievers. What did you consider to call every pitcher in each situation throughout the game?

OMAR LOPEZ: I tried to tell you something. I don't know if you are going to believe me. If I tell you something, are you going to believe me?

Q. Okay.

OMAR LOPEZ: When I saw that Montero started to fail with the lefty batters, that was a red flag to me. I started to move the pieces and worked with Ricardo Sanchez.

But there was a statement on the third inning, and we bring -- we brought Avila, and I said to Johan, "Ricardo was pitching very well, Butto has 23 pitches. If he goes to 30, he won't be able to pitch tomorrow, and I want him available for tomorrow."

And I told Ricardo, "You are done." But he was like this, you know, under stress. He hasn't pitched since Nicaragua, so for many days. And that's another red flag for me, and it's time to remove him.

He had thrown 23 pitches and I wanted him for tomorrow. If he threw more than 30 pitches, he won't be able to be in the final.

And Johan said like this, "He's throwing okay." No, no, no, bring the winner, and he was perfect for two innings.

And this is the statement. When he goes out to the third inning, someone gets on the base or he was behind in the count. At that point in time, someone told me -- someone told me, I don't know, call Zerpa because he will be in trouble, he will be in trouble.

I don't know, I don't know, don't ask me who told me that. I said, "Johan, prepare Zerpa for this batter." And then the bench told me, I told Robinson, "This is a right-handed catcher. He played AA and he killed lefty pitchers. He doesn't harm the right-handed."

When I saw the numbers of Zerpa, the numbers against the right-handed batters are not good and I said, screw that, screw that, I'm going to walk this guy and then he's going to face two lefties. There was a lot of gut feeling at that point in time, and someone told me that it was going to be like that.

And when I brought Zerpa, the whole thing was okay. I can bring Machado and Palencia to keep the game to one. When we came back, I said, "Okay, we haven't used Bazardo, and Machado will be ready for four outs." We were synced. It's a game plan, Carlos.

And by the way, let me tell you, I told you that we would come far without the big name of pitchers, something like that that you asked. I told you I'm going to prove you, and we made it to the final. We made it to the final.

I don't know if we are going to win tomorrow, but those pitchers, those players are valuable. The ones that are not here, okay, but we have these ones and we count on these players.

Q. In the game against the D.R., I told you that the way you used the bullpen prepared you for Japan. The starter comes today and you were able to put together the whole thing. The execution is done by the pitchers, but the planning is your job. Can you explain a little bit more?

OMAR LOPEZ: It's very fun to speak about the game, yes. I love this. This is fascinating for me.

I watch videos and I try to visualize the lefty batters from Italy, the right-handed. I visualize my staff, my pitchers, who's the best match up for those batters, who is not in my job, et cetera.

I had Butto as my last card because if I had to go to the top part with the first bat, the second was Butto, then Antonacci, the first one, right? He had a very good uppercut swing and he's not good at high balls.

So Berti, four seams, he's going to damage you but he's not very good at sinkers. Butto has those two pitches to dominate the batters, and then the lefty Pasquantino and the other and the other, and then it's the same, upper cut swing, high ball, pitches similar to the Japanese pitchers.

So when we put together that information, I start managing where I am going to put my pitchers accord to the game. Otherwise I try to finalize and I bring the other pitchers. It's like a pocket. You know, first option, second option, third option, et cetera.

Q. A couple of questions. Maikel Garcia, no matter the results he has achieved in these three games, what have you seen how he works at every at-bat? Maybe he reminds you of a good batter?

OMAR LOPEZ: Maikel is a great player. He reminds me of Jordan Alvarez, the Cuban when he was in Class A when he was 20 or 21. He was a huge player. He's placed by God.

How to retain, how to manage everything that happens in the game. He's a manager, and the best thing about him is he is cold blooded.

There could be 70,000 fans and his brain doesn't stop working. He's at bat, but he's paying attention to his teammates. He helps his teammates. I have seen that. That's a gift given by God to the human being, especially in this sport. He's a great player because that's a tool you're born with, you know? And when you're on the field, the tool gets better and better and better. That's why he's going to be bigger and bigger.

Q. Another question. We used to speak about batting, pitching, but we don't speak much about defense. How important has been the defense of your team now that you are in the final for the first time?

OMAR LOPEZ: The evaluation was to put together a team based on defense and pitching. Good defense players that we have in Venezuela are very good batters. So that's a plus that we had. We tried to put together a good defense.

When we realized that we wouldn't have striking out pitchers, it is important to have a very good defense. We have some Golden Gloves on our team, but they know how to play baseball and they know how to locate themselves, position themselves on the field.

Speaking about Tovar and Gimenez and others, you can put them in a position, but then they move to a different position, and they say, "Well, I realized this or that," and they ground out. They ground out. They can make it, and that's why we are in this position today.

Q. How would you describe the seventh inning, those long drives, the hits, et cetera? How did you manage the anxiety? The Italian pitchers were doing a great job. How to stay focused on the goal to be champions tomorrow?

OMAR LOPEZ: I'm very honest. I stay focused like the horses, you know? I don't pay attention to the fans, to the stadium. I'm focused on what's going on at that point in time to try to anticipate the play, if we are going to connect

a hit or not.

I didn't have anxiety, you know? From the third inning on, when I saw the red flags, to start to work with the bullpen. I was sure that we would come back or at least we would fight to come back.

Francisco -- by the way, I would like to say something about Francisco after the PC.

And then we saw the bullpen, and I said, my God, we have to react and we have to react now because this team might have been underestimated by many people.

But when I put together their roster, I made this comment. I saw the Italian roster, and in the last couple of years I have seen Francisco in spring training and during the seasons, and he was scouting some players of Italian background, you know? He had been working on that for two years.

He did a great job, and I saw that roster and thought, be careful. I saw Nola, I saw Berti, I saw Lorenzen. When I saw the bullpen, Cagilanone, Pasquantino and the other young players of AA or AAA, I thought, we have to be careful with this team. They have nothing to lose. They played very well, and they made it to a semifinal for the first time.

That credit to Francisco and what he's willing to do in Italy. Not because we won, I'm going to say, oh, we're better. No, it is not easy. It is not easy.

Thank God we won, but the result could have been totally different. And the credit is for the Italian team, Cervelli and his coaching staff that made his result possible for Italy and Italian baseball.

Your second question, how to flip the page? They already flipped the page. We should leave in five or six minutes to the hotel, but we're willing to review some players and then we have to leave. They are already focused on tomorrow's game. We are going to do our best for our country.

Q. I find myself tearing up at your words. They're so inspiring and moving. When did you realize -- how old were you when you realized that you would be someone that would do such big things?

OMAR LOPEZ: Wow, that's a great question. How old I was? I don't know, to be honest. I don't know. It was in my dream. It was in my dream maybe -- oh, no, yes, yes, I have an answer. 2017. 2017 I was one of the coaches in the WBC in Mexico. We went to Guadalajara and we went to the second round, I think it was in San Diego, right?

I didn't like the way that everything was in that team, the way that it was organized, the communication. I was managing by then already in winter ball.

And the bench coach, I mean the hitting coach for that team, Venezuelan team in WBC, was Rouglas Odor. Right now he's my third base coach. I was supposed to be the first base coach. Omar Vizquel called me to interview myself and he told me, Omar, you're going to be my first base coach. Fine.

Until today, Omar Vizquel was the only one -- when we got to Arizona, we went to a dinner and he apologized to me because the front office or the GMs in that time make a different decision. They change it up and they said, Omar is not going to coach first base now. They put somebody else.

But from the whole committee of the front office until today, I haven't got any call. I haven't got any direct communication to say, Omar, you're not coaching first base. So right away, I write it down.

My bench coach in Venezuela, which it was the hitting coach and now he's my third base coach, Rouglas Odor, he got close to me, next to me, and I was watching the game in San Diego and he said, "Caballo, you know you can manage this team, right?"

And I look to him, and I say, "Yes, and I will, but I have to make some notes because I would like to do stuff differently. I have to do stuff differently in order to put Venezuela in a better spot."

And I'm not afraid to say this. That was a bad, bad experience. I'm an intense cat. To be part of that bad experience because they give me all the stuff that I need to write it down and said what not to do and what I should do in order to put a good team and good environment to represent our country, and that's when I noticed that I'm going to do this.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports).