

World Baseball Classic Championship Final - Venezuela vs USA

Tuesday, 17 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Manager Omar Lopez

Pregame Press Conference

Q. This is the time. Congrats. I would like you to describe what the spirit is in the team. After that, what are the challenges that you could face against the United States?

OMAR LOPEZ: The spirit is high. I think it's okay. I haven't seen any difference from yesterday. The guys flipped the page, and we are positive. We had our meetings. We are prepared. We had the meetings with the coaches last night. And today before coming to the stadium we had a meeting about the United States. We talked to the pitchers. Everything is flowing as business as usual.

So the challenge for tonight, difficult to predict. However, you've got to be ready for the tough things that you could face to be ready for making the moves and hoping for the best. I hope everything goes well in a positive way for Venezuela, and we should be wise enough in order to manage the adversities.

Q. How important is it to have Salvador Perez as a catcher, what he represents in terms of being a veteran, what he has given to the Venezuelan baseball, et cetera?

OMAR LOPEZ: This is part of the planning, how to put together the lineup and the catcher so that we had the authorizations and to be on the same page with both catchers.

I talked to Salvador and the team, "You know, guys, that there is a new rule, regulation for this year? Players with 37 years of age or above that, they are not being insured by the companies." And we don't know whether Salvador will be in the next Classic.

I told him and the team that this could be his last Classic.



In the previous Classic, it was Miguel's last Classic.

And to me, this was another challenge, to take Venezuela as high as possible in 2023 with Miguel Cabrera as the captain. Now I have this opportunity.

And I said, "Damn. This is Salvador's time, and this is a very special moment for him to help Venezuela to be champion and say, well, I can retire now. I can go home. I did what I could for Venezuela."

God has a plan, a purpose, and I think that he gave me that light and gave me wisdom to do that planning. Salvador deserves this for everything he has done and everything he has to do yet.

Q. Three years after that game against the United States, speaking about second opportunities, have you thought about that revenge before?

OMAR LOPEZ: Oh, no, not at all. I flipped the page very fast. Regarding baseball, we have to do that, especially as a manager. Those days, those months were not easy for me. Over two months, I would say, very tough months I was being the coach with the Houston Astros. If I were in a different position, it would be even more difficult.

But something difficult happened to me in my life. I said, if I have to be a coach on the third base or bench coach maybe at that point in time, I could overcome that because it is your country.

However, when my daddy left in March, I had to be the coach on third base the whole year. The most difficult position for you to be in the Major Leagues is to be a third base coach. When you lose someone you love, you realize what love is.

But I was not depressed, and there is no revenge at all. This is just another game. We are ready. We came this far. Everyone is going to pitch, to bat. We are going to leave it all on the field to be champions tonight.

Q. Venezuela has faced the D.R., Japan, and now the U.S. What similarities have you seen between those teams, things that you can use today, differences and



challenges in the lineup that you are going to face?

OMAR LOPEZ: Similarities? Well, they are very similar teams in terms of the talented players they have, but there are deficits or weaknesses and strengths. They are not all the same, but they are great players, all of them.

When I said that we -- when we faced DR, I said, "For us, this is the start of the Classic." You know, the intensity of the tournament, the whole approach of the quarterfinals, the semifinal, and final."

And this has been the case. The guys and myself are seeing the United States just the way we saw the D.R. with this lineup. They did something like winter ball, lefty, righty, lefty, righty. I don't see the splits, I don't see the numbers.

If you focused on that, we would have been beaten by knockout. You have to stop a good offense. We have been doing that, and we will continue doing that tonight.

Q. How difficult is it to manage? Not just to win the game, but also manage your pitching staff based on any restrictions with other teams and their pitching schedules, getting ready for the season, and is there anything to do to alleviate that in future WBCs?

OMAR LOPEZ: I wish I could have the answer for that. I woke this morning, three text messages from different organizations trying not to pitch guys back to back.

That's the difficult part. But I do enjoy that because that's when the -- one of my strengths is talk, and I send my text back fighting for my guys and then set a phone call with everybody.

When you talk and you get an agreement, you negotiate it, everything is going to go well.

And to alleviate that, I don't have the answer, to be honest, because I don't control that. But I can control what I did, and I have my guys tonight to go back to back if I need to, and that's the most important thing.

Q. For the younger players in Venezuela that are watching, what's your message for them?

OMAR LOPEZ: Study, study, study, prepare yourself. Be good children. Be good citizens. Respect and keep the values of the family for the upcoming generations. This is very important.

I'm not telling them to play baseball. I'm telling them to study and to be prepared because this is the best way to

build a better country.

Q. You talked to the team about Salvador. What has he said to the team during this tournament? How have you seen him as a coach, or as a manager?

OMAR LOPEZ: He's very happy. They are so united. This group of experienced and young players are so united that they don't need a meeting, a team meeting. Just a few minutes.

And the team meetings, you know how long they last? Fifteen to 20 minutes, only that every time. We come to the stadium on the bus. They have their own bus. You wish to have a microphone to record whatever they say there, whatever they communicate, whatever they say, all topics. But that stays there on the bus, and they come out as a group to play baseball.

Q. You were speaking about takeaways. What kind of takeaways did you get from the previous Classic so that Venezuela is today where you are, only one game away to be champions? And if I understood your previous answer, there are no restrictions for today? Those three calls that you made were positive after negotiation? Can I read that answer like that?

OMAR LOPEZ: The takeaways or the lessons is something that you do on your daily basis in baseball.

Baseball is a game of failures. It was built, it was done instructing you mentally, because you are going to make failures on the preparation or on the field.

Takeaways? To be better prepared to evaluate or to study the mistakes, to see what happened in the previous Classic and what to improve for this Classic.

In this Classic we made mistakes, and we continue learning because there could be some misunderstanding. You didn't make it to the semifinal? You were eliminated? Well, maybe you made many mistakes.

But we made it to the final and we made mistakes, things that didn't work. You write it down and you try to improve for the next Classic. Even when you are champion, you make mistakes.

There will be some takeaways. There will always be lessons in the management, in the structure, in putting together the team. And you always have to make adjustments. You have to know how to make those adjustments. You have to be around people that help you for that.

Some teams are concerned because we didn't have a day off in between like the other teams had before a final. And, of course, are pitchers -- in this case pitchers calling to see the possibilities not to be used or if they can be restricted. I mean the organizations call us for that.

I read the messages. I said, oh, my God, here we go once again. I laid down a game. Five minutes, my wife told me, what's going on? The same --

I stood up again and I said, you know what? I'm going to text him back, I'm going to fight for these players. And that's it. That was the case.

Q. Congrats on the game and the result achieved until now as national team. It's a follow-up question. The message for the players that didn't have a career as professional players but that would like to be managers, what's a piece of advice that you would give them to be successful?

OMAR LOPEZ: Where are you from? Caracas, Venezuela? If I met you earlier, I would call one of these Venezuelan journalists because I wanted that question to be asked.

Robinson Chirinos, Robinson Chirinos is my friend and we have a project. So this is my last game as a manager of the World Classic, manager of the World Classic, okay? I will be supporting Venezuela in other areas, and I will go to L.A. if they call me.

We did Premier 12 and we said, "We have to develop this project," and I had to get rid of the winter ball, et cetera, for that project. It's an educational project for Venezuelan managers. We are going to put together a WhatsApp group because we want to provide them with tools, what they need based on our experience.

The managers that are very experienced for 35 years with Cleveland, this is my 29th year as manager. Robinson is an entrepreneur, he's a coach. We have a good balance to have that kind of a project. This is what we are trying to do.

What to do to bring together these coaches and managers to develop ideas, projects, working modules so that they develop themselves as managers.

I'm speaking about this project, and one person approached me and said, "You know what you have to do? You have to study emotional intelligence." I was reading mindset books, psychology books, and he told me, "Emotional intelligence, because you are going to learn how to manage things in different scenarios."

And I started studying that. That helped me. And this is going to be helpful for other managers. How was the start of my career? What to do, what not to do, how to navigate in this country, language, tools, et cetera, and we need a lot of support and help to help those players that are willing to be managers. So thank you for the question.

Q. You said that baseball is very complicated, that you can even win even when you make mistakes. But the fans, especially only Latin fans, only see the final result. No matter what happens today, the Venezuelan people have seen the great job done by the team. Some words before the game, something that they can remember forever?

OMAR LOPEZ: For my country, from the bottom of my heart, from myself and my coaching staff, I hope that this result tonight, no matter if we win or lose, but I'm 100 percent convinced that we are going to win.

I hope this is an example because tonight everyone is going to be together. The whole country is going to be paralyzed to watch the game, and together we are going to have better generations for our country, united with no color, political colors or ideology. We have people with double citizenship. This is the only way.

We have sports. Baseball is one of the best tools or ways to educate a country. Discipline, dedication, determination. If you don't believe in that, you should start believing. You have to believe in that.

Thirty human beings today are going to unite Venezuela through a baseball game. Those who guide us, those who control us, they can do the same. I'm almost sure of that, so that's my message. And we need our vibes. Pray for us because God is with us.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports).