

World Baseball Classic Championship Final - Venezuela vs USA

Tuesday, 17 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Manager Omar Lopez

Pitching Coach Johan

Santana

Assistant Manager Victor

Martinez

Postgame Press Conference

Venezuela 3, USA 2

Q. Omar and the coaching staff, congrats on the victory. How important is it to count on each person on this coaching staff to chase your dream? Legends for the Venezuelan baseball, and now they are writing in a different way this history, for Venezuela. People that are so relevant, how important is it for you to bring them all to this press conference?

OMAR LOPEZ: As a rookie manager in 2023, I was criticized a lot, and I was dreaming about this moment. I swear to God, I was visualizing myself as a champion in this press conference.

Andreina, operations manager. If she had a belt, she could beat us up. She was tough.

I was dreaming about this moment, that we were champions. I said I am going to the press conference with all the coaching staff.

It didn't happen in 2023. Behind me there is this group of people that do a great job, surgical job, every one of them. And I would like to start in -- Eduardo, Venezuela, and Carlos Mendoza. Today he is a manager with the New York Mets. Borrego, he is not with us in this coaching staff. Luis Ramirez is not in this coaching staff. And many other people that are not in this coaching staff for many different reasons.



But most importantly is that we kept the identity, we kept the process to see when, in which Classic we would give this joy to our country.

I put together a different coaching staff for this Classic, and you don't know what could happen.

With all due respect I am saying this. Many people admire me, Johan Santana. We know each other for many years. Victor Martinez, Miguel Cabrera, Gerardo Parra. It was key for the Premier 12 because I needed a coach to work with the outfielders, a coach that kept the clubhouse in -- we wanted a personality in the clubhouse.

When I took him to Guadalajara and Japan, I thought this is the guy for the World Classic to be the first base coach. I wanted him to give me that balance.

I dreamt about this moment to have this great group of people behind me, and I would like to -- Miguel, Rolando, this scouting team wearing blue, they are tough. They are tough because they are not working only for the Classic. They have been working for the Federation For so many years. And the main goal of the Federation was to build an identity, who are we as Venezuelans.

And in baseball there is no secret that there is a lot of envy, a lot of envy. We have to watch our back because everyone wants the other people's job. And if I see someone like that, I don't want him or her because this is not going to work like that. You have to work to be in my position or Miguel's position or Victor Martinez's position or Parro's position. Be a good citizen.

These people behind me deserve the credit much more than myself. They are huge in Venezuela. They worked so that Venezuela is, for the very first time, champion of the World Classic.

Q. There were many moments -- very often on the table you said, yes, we are going to be champions. You were convinced that you were champions. Is that a view with everything that you know with that group, why were you convinced all the time that this could happen?



OMAR LOPEZ: 2023, I had a vision. And overnight I started to think, no, let's go step by step, this is the first round, and this and that.

I went to Puerto Rico, and I talked to a coach and he told me, no you have to be convinced. You shouldn't think like that, step by step. No, no, you have to be convinced that you will be champion, and the people around you will have to listen to you like that. You have to be genuine.

And I had to believe myself, you know, with all the obstacles that we had to overcome, insurance company, agents, managers, organizations, you name it. So many things that no one has. I could give you a whole list of obstacles.

And our sports manager, Chato Robinson, a very good friend. Andreina, please, emergency meeting. In the last couple of weeks, we had so many emergency meetings because someone could leave.

And I said to myself, my God. We have no values? We have no love for our country or for baseball? What the heck is going on? And I said to myself, well, as long as I'm here, I will try to rescue those values with the people around me. If we are able to unite the country in a couple of weeks so that they feel well, and for them to understand that together we can do things, maybe I can make it.

But nothing like this could have been achieved like that. And in a few words, you could have the best staff behind me, but you won't have the right people for this puzzle, you won't be able to achieve your goal. And mainly you have to be with God because he helps you win the spiritual war in this void, empty world like today's.

Baseball wanted us to fail, to fall down, but we didn't put our egos before -- we put God and Venezuela before us. When you do that, you put aside your individuality and you are going to achieve those results.

At some point in time, God is going to give you a testimony of a positive result, and today we saw that. And we said to Venezuela today, "This is for you. This is for you. Enjoy it." This is a great way to end this World Classic.

Q. Johan, it was impressive the way you put together the strategy for the bullpen. Today we saw a class of pitching management. The question is for everyone, but Johan is very important for that part. Today you removed Rodriguez, but the plan was executed as planned with all the bullpen pitchers. That was a key weapon for this team throughout the tournament. Omar said that he received three different calls from organizations. Were those calls related to those

pitchers? Can you say that after the tournament?

JOHAN SANTANA: No, no. The answer is no. This is not my problem. This was Omar's problem. My problem, my job, our job was to make sure that all the pitchers were prepared and understood the different scenarios during the game. It is not only my job. Many people like Jorge Cordoba, who works with pitching, and all the scouts here, that was planned from the very beginning. And with Omar, we planned exactly how to work and when each pitcher had to work, and we knew exactly, depending on the scenario, what to do.

Bottom line, when you are well-planned, when you understand things, and when you have a clear communication, good things can happen, and that happened today.

There were a couple of things there, but we were ready for that. But we had a good planning and a good execution for the plan, and that's why we are champions today.

Q. Congratulations. So in Japan -- because we lost to Venezuela and the manager is being criticized -- when you hit the ninth inning and Suarez was not hitting well, did you think of putting pinch hitters in there, and were you thinking about trying to get the score at the time?

OMAR LOPEZ: Hold on a second. The translation was in English, but I couldn't understand a lot about Suarez.

Q. Sure. That Suarez was not hitting very well, so were you thinking about -- did you think of -- cross your mind about possibly bring in a pinch hitter instead of him?

OMAR LOPEZ: We are speaking about today's game, but the question is about the game against Japan or the game today? Your question was today I didn't put a pinch hitter for Suarez or against Japan?

Q. Today, today.

OMAR LOPEZ: Today? No, because I already used -- I already used Gimenez. I already replaced Gimenez at second base, and I already used Sanoja, and the other two guys were supposed to play first base, and the only one left behind was William, and William is not that fast compared to Suarez.

Q. Congrats to you and all the coaching staff. I'm speaking as Venezuelan. Are you aware of the level of excellence that you showed in this World Classic as being the new standard for all the Venezuelans that are

willing to achieve something? Because you sacrificed many things in your life to be in the position that you are today, as many of you as well. This victory is a symbol of that excellence for the upcoming generations. Are you aware of the importance of this for Venezuela?

OMAR LOPEZ: This is something that we lived on a daily basis because we are dedicated. Not us, but our families. They are the people that are really dedicated, away from home. We miss dinners or celebrations because we have meetings.

They are our heroes. They are the most important part of this, and it's important to honor them because this victory belongs to them because of the unconditional support that they give us and always with positive vibes. They read many things outside, things that inspire us to continue fighting for our goals.

And to Venezuela, yes. You should know that we have a group of people, our families who are part of this so that Venezuela -- today, the day before, two days before and during the Olympics, et cetera, we wanted to be in Valencia or (indiscernible) to be welcomed by our country.

But it is important that they know that they were together for two or three hours to celebrate and to live this beautiful moment.

Q. Congrats, Victor, Johan. In 2006, you were part of the first team in the World Classic. You were players, and you made it to the second round. Twenty years later you are now in a different role within the champion team of Venezuela. What does this mean to you? If possible, can you both answer? And to Omar, why did you put Miguel, Victor, and Johan in the coaching staff?

VICTOR MARTINEZ: To me, as a player, I couldn't win a championship. I represented Venezuela with two very good teams. I just have to thank God for this opportunity to achieve this victory, the biggest in my career. I'm so proud, Omar, for taking me into consideration to bring me into this special group. These two weeks I will never forget. To me, I was lucky enough to start the first open to Venezuela to hear the national anthem in this country. And that was one of the most beautiful experiences that I lived.

Twenty years later in a different role, now I am representing my country, hearing the national anthem, this time as a champion. One of the most beautiful experiences that I have lived during this tournament.

Two totally different things. The organization that we had

in this World Classic, in my role as a coach, what I can tell you is that the organization was clear, was precise from the very beginning, clear communication, and I think that that made the difference. The job that you didn't see, as Omar said, that's very important. We didn't have that in the first World Classic.

We had to study different World Classics to understand how it worked. Today the unit that we have, after so many years, we understood. But this is great. I'm very proud to be part of this, and we hope that this is the start of many more things for Venezuela.

OMAR LOPEZ: And to answer your questions, great questions. 2017, I was a coach at the World Classic, and I witnessed the dedication, the commitment. Miguel was on that team, of the whole team.

But people that I saw, that I really saw very closely how he worked, how he was upset with the things that were not managed was Victor Martinez. I saw this human being suffering. And Martin Prado was there too, but he retired and he didn't want anything to do with baseball after that.

And I wanted to have a victory in 2023, but then Victor was not able. He didn't want to even take baseball.

Oh, my God. I know that he knows about baseball, but no, he only wanted to know about horses after this, and I had this vision of what I wanted to do.

They sent a regulation or the rules of the World Classic, and they added two coaches, the travel party or something like that they call it.

I said, well, now I can have Victor and Johan Santana to see how they can be my assistants. As mentors, I wanted to work with people that know about baseball in this kind of a short tournament.

I made a couple of changes, and I called Johan. "Do you want to be the pitching coach of the team?"

Well, I put some of them because I wanted such as Victor, et cetera, in his department? No, he had to be interviewed. He has to deserve or earn the position, and he had to compete with other five people.

The most important thing is that Johan was away of the field. He was working in Minnesota. But I didn't care for him to know about that. Our 20 inches of fastball. No. To me, it was important that he was able to connect with the pitchers in this short tournament. I wanted the team to connect with these young pitchers. This was the best choice in terms of pitching.



Then Jorge, he's updated. I worked with him in the Premier 12. He's not a nerd, okay? He's not a young guy, he's old. Right, Miguel? Miguel? He left? Miguel was tired.

And this guy, he was the perfect combination to help Johan to learn some new stuff, and at the same time he was aware of what we wanted to do in the team.

So this was a challenge, and we were able to face it.

Q. You are a winner with the Houston Astros, with Los Cangrejeros in Puerto Rico, with Luis Matos and the rest of the team. The coaching staff is great. Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico. I mean, you all did a great job, but there is something that I have to applaud.

Robinson, thank you. The message that you gave two days ago was huge, the David and Goliath message. People do not understand that. Because you did a great work, and you were in God's hands. Maybe we don't have the talent that others have. But thank you for those words that you said. And for people who are hearing, when you put everything in God's hand, beautiful things happen. Thank you. Thank you.

OMAR LOPEZ: You know what, Carlos? I heard the Venezuelan journalist who asked me, Omar, we are working for Robinson Chirinos. What does it mean to you, Robinson Chirinos? How would you describe him in a few words in his role?

And my answer was, Robinson's role towards my person is he is one of the best friends that I have had in my life. I brought to this team the most important thing, which is spiritual peace, believing in God, and that's why we are so united.

When you are a manager and you earn this title, this is beautiful, but it's important that you work with someone like Robinson. He helps you on and off the field. I have the title, but there are many, many, many leaders here that are able to manage this team. They are beasts, and maybe one of these guys could be the manager of Venezuela in the World Classic.

And I will say the same to the Federation. I can give them two or three names. Look to my left. Look to my right. There are several potential managers.

Thank you all. Long live Venezuela.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports)

