

World Baseball Classic: Pool A - Panama vs Puerto Rico

Saturday, 7 March, 2026

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Hiram Bithorn Stadium

Team Panama

José Mayorga

Paolo Espino

Pregame Press Conference



Q. Hello, José. We want to know the adjustments you have contemplated for today, if there's any adjustment as to Panama's lineup to know that. What do you think about what you saw yesterday at Puerto Rico? And for Paolo, to get to know how you're living through this moment because you announced your retirement from the Panama team, and get to know how you are living through these days in such a tight group?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: Yes, definitely there are some adjustments in the lineup. Obviously you are going to see it. I did see a close game up to the fifth inning, and they did a great job, both teams.

Puerto Rico's offense took advantage of that fifth inning when they were able to start their runs and their hits, and they were able to make runs and stay ahead of the game.

PAOLO ESPINO: On my part, first of all, I feel very happy to be here. The chance that I've been given of being with this special group and a chance that I've been given at representing my country, as we said, for the last time as an active ballplayer.

I'm living this at the max and taking advantage of every opportunity for the field and off the field and taking advantage of it as much as we can with a positive mentality.

We are still here playing, and I'm going to give my 100 percent when I get the ball, and I'll keep on taking advantage of my time here.

Q. Puerto Rico is the most difficult team in the group because of they're in their own home. What are your thoughts? And how to improve the offense? What message are you giving to a player who's had a large trajectory to start against Puerto Rico?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: Obviously we have not scored enough runs, and I believe that is the main goal. I think we have to stay short with the swings and stay in the line and try to get that hit, and try to manufacture runs in the best way today.

PAOLO ESPINO: Yes. Ariel has a lot of experience. We can tell you we have the same experience. He's pitched on big stages. He knows what way to attack the batters. What little I can say, we tell any player like we're all recommending because when you get on the field you have to give 100 percent. You need to attack the zone.

And trust yourself. That's the main thing. As long as you trust yourself, good things can happen. That's what I've been able to tell them.

Q. The question is for José Mayorga. Who is tomorrow's starter? And have you taken into account the restrictions with how many pitches they can pitch? And Panama have never beaten Cuba, and now you're playing Puerto Rico and have not beat them. How are you going to take that challenge? Also, we can't be blind to the media. There's criticism to you, the Panama manager. What can you tell them right now?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: You asked like three questions, but that's fine. You're going to have to repeat them. Just kidding.

The truth is from the criticism everyone can give their own opinion. That's expected at the end of the day. On my part, I try not to look at that, to be honest. There's a lot of people that write.

At the end of the day, we're here trying to do a job. I don't think anybody who's on the field, players as well as coaches, want to do anything that will hurt the game, right? We have to understand that. We're all human at the end of the day, and we're going to do -- answering your challenge question, we're going to do the best that we can. This is a very important thing to take one game at a time, knowing how important and how quick and short this tournament is.



I don't know if you had any other questions that I missed. Tomorrow's pitcher, we'll let you know when we're done with today's game. Let's play today's game. We announced two starters. Thank God they're all available due to the pitching restrictions. Logan Allen is not, but we're going to play that game, and then after that game, we know we have 90 minutes to inform who will be the starter, and we will.

Q. José, my question to you, if you have a change today as to the lineup because I know that Bernal had two hits, and he looked really good.

Paolo for you, you've had two full careers and staying and playing at a level like you have hasn't been easy.

JOSÉ MAYORGA: There will be other players that weren't in the lineup yesterday.

PAOLO ESPINO: To my part, I believe the main key is I never gave up. I never gave up, and it's not easy, and it won't be easy. In my mind, I always had a goal, and that was to reach the Big Leagues, number one. I think that's what kept me positive.

I always had a lot of people who were next to me, gave me support, and pushing me. The coaches, they always tell me, you're getting there. You will get a chance. Those little things are the ones that gave me that push of never giving up. I think that was really what helped me a lot.

Q. To the manager, after seeing Puerto Rico's game last night, is there anything that caught your eye, particularly anything that surprised you that you did not expect to see in yesterday's game, Puerto Rico against Colombia?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: No, I don't think it was a surprise. We know the level of quality. We know the players. We know the pitching staff that they have. They did a great job to keep everyone available and to be available for today. It's no surprise. We know the level that they have, and we know it's going to be a great game today also.

Q. José, how do you strike the balance between playing your own game with the sense of urgency, because tonight is key, given the way the rest of the pool has been playing?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: Yeah, I think we've got to have a balance. I think the biggest thing is the strength of all of our players. That was a big part of our meeting today. Use your strength. I know we've got a different type of players here. So we're trying to stay with our strengths. I know we haven't been that much offensive like usually we

can, but I think we were trying to do too much at times.

That was a big part of the meeting, just trying to stay within our strengths and trying to balance out in this tournament.

Q. Just wanted to confirm that Paolo is going to start tomorrow against Canada?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: No, we haven't said that. Good try (laughter).

Q. What do you like about Paolo as a pitcher? What do you appreciate about him?

JOSÉ MAYORGA: I like the confidence that he has with all his pitches, strike thrower, and he's not afraid to be on the mound.

Q. Paolo, when we last saw you in Toronto in 2024, you're still kicking around. Was getting to pitch in the Classic something that motivated you to keep going?

PAOLO ESPINO: Yeah, definitely. In '24 my mind wasn't anything about retiring, but pitching the Classic was one of the things that I'm like, man, if I'm ever going to retire, I think it has to be after WBC representing my country, first of all.

I think in my mind that was one of the things that, if I'm ever going to do it, I was going to do it after the WBC. Yes, I think -- definitely, I think this is what gave me the strength to finally do it.

Q. Do you have plans beyond this, or will this be it for you?

PAOLO ESPINO: As an active player, yes, this will be it. I don't have plans right now. I don't have any other jobs that I can do right after this, but of course I definitely want to stay in baseball.

I will be reaching out to see what's going to be next. I'm going to be open to do anything related to baseball. So I'm excited. I'm excited after this.

Q. Paolo, what happened with the idea of playing in the national baseball tournament? I think it was in your plans in to play for Liga Provincial de Los Santos. What happened? Because it's not going to happen anymore.

PAOLO ESPINO: Look, in my mind, I knew this was going to be the last one. I did not want to shut the door from the beginning. I wanted to maybe have a chance that, if I did not make up my mind to finish after this, maybe go play for

Panama.

After thinking this through, I believe the world Classic representing Panama in a big way, I think that to me in my career it was something that was super special to stop playing after a World Baseball Classic on behalf of Panama. It was something iconic to me. It's something that I will always remember.

And I mentioned it later on, talking with Max, that at some point in time I would like to maybe contribute another way, maybe not as a player, but I did mention that to him because de Los Santos is really special. My whole family is from de Los Santos. I would do it because my parents are from there.

So I don't want to put it aside completely. I want to help and do my part for provincia de Los Santos at some time.

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