

# World Baseball Classic: Pool A - Colombia vs Panama

Monday, 9 March, 2026

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Hiram Bithorn Stadium

## Team Panama

**José Mayorga**

**Paolo Espino**

Postgame Press Conference

Colombia 4, Panama 3

**Q. Two questions for Paolo. Paolo, after an enormous career, why are you making the decision in the middle of this tournament?**

PAOLO ESPINO: Well, yes, the decision has been because, well, physically the last few years have been a lot more complicated. It's not the same as when I was 20 years old.

Now from everything that I've been going through, I know that retiring after a World Baseball Classic is something very special. It was a chance, if I was going to do it, it was the perfect chance to do so, and it happened. So I made the decision finally.

**Q. In those minutes when you got substituted, tell us what went through your head, all of the hugs. Tell us how you felt about that. Talk about that special moment.**

PAOLO ESPINO: Yeah, of course, very special. I felt more excited than anything. If anything, when I came out, the last time was a strikeout, I was very proud of myself. I feel really happy with everything I've done throughout my career. There's been highs and lows, but I'm really happy at the end.

Those moments were very special. The way the players approached me and came to me, and then Bethancourt has the initiative, when they came to ask for the ball, he was the one who had the initiative to say, hey, ask for another one, so he can keep that one. It's those little details that you realize the importance of the other players around you have towards you.

It was really nice. I did tear up. I did choke up a little, but we ended well. We ended physically healthy. Let's move



forward.

**Q. Skip, you took out Cienfuegos with 25 pitches. I thought you were going to use him as a substitute. Do you another plan to use for Cienfuegos. In the other game, it looked like there was going to be a little scuffle. Can you tell us what happened at the end with that fight?**

JOSÉ MAYORGA: There are things that happen in the clubhouse, it stays in the clubhouse.

Cienfuegos, he plays with San Diego Padres, and he has his limitations. It's early in the season, and he has to be healthy and safe also.

**Q. First, congratulations for the career that you had. I know perfectly Paolo Espino. I remember the Little Leagues. We even played together with Vasquez and Ramos. You started as a shortstop, but then you started with speed, and you marked the cycle before and after and how you ended up with this World Classic in good form. All of Panama is proud of your career, that's successful. That's an example of those who are coming and followed Paolo Espino. Thank you for this World Classic.**

PAOLO ESPINO: Thank you so much. I'm very proud of what I've achieved, and at the same time, I want to advise the younger guys coming up that, when you come into this sport, it's not easy. It's really not easy. You need a lot of discipline, a lot of perseverance, which is what I believe helped me a lot. I never gave up.

Over 20 years of a career, I feel happy with everything. I feel happy with all my fellow players, the staff that have been ahead of the team, and many of my family. My family has been number one. They've always been with me up until the last day. So I'm happy so much.

**Q. José, the question to you, I know that you sacrificed a lot of things to coach Panama. What words can you find to evaluate yourself? Because like ballplayers evaluate themselves how they did the**

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**at-bat, and I know that you have other sacrifices. How do you define what this World Classic was for Panama and for you?**

JOSÉ MAYORGA: Obviously we did not reach the objective, which was to qualify for the next round. I believe that we should have more victories. Obviously we had one, but at the end of the day, it's a moment of learning. Everything we have here is to keep on learning. I know that I have a long career on my own, and this simply will help us grow more.

**Q. Paolo, can you tell me what was the most rewarding thing about your career pitching in the WBC, and how great it felt to go out on top with a great performance like that?**

PAOLO ESPINO: A great experience. I love the competition. First of all, you get to learn so much also about the culture. You get to spend time with a lot of people that are not from your country. You get to learn a lot from them too.

Luckily, I had the opportunity to play against a lot of the players that were playing against us. What I would take home is all the knowledge, all the experience, all the good moments, all the memories for me are always going to be there. That's pretty much -- I think that would be the best.

Also, ending my career representing my country, for me it's always going to be in my heart and in my memories.

**Q. Paolo, just as far as the World Baseball Classic, you're there 2006, an original, to 2026, how much has the tournament itself changed in your mind and gotten bigger and more famous? Can you describe that kind of over the last 20 years?**

PAOLO ESPINO: I think it's going to be a little hard for me. I do remember in '06 when I came here, I mean, I was 19 years old. Me playing -- actually, what I was saying earlier, spending time in the hotel with other teams, I remember being in the hotel with like Pedro Martinez, David Ortiz, and all those guys.

Now I am pretty much one of the -- I mean, I don't have the most Big League time around the hotels or the clubhouse, but I think experience-wise I'm up there.

But the tournament itself, hopefully one day all the stuff about the insurance and stuff, hopefully they get to fix that and put it in -- I don't even know how to say it, but hopefully they get to put it in a way where everybody at their highest level can compete at 100 percent. I think that would bring baseball even bigger and stronger.

But from '06 to 2026, the only thing that I guess -- I mean, the stadium looks similar. Everything is beautiful. I don't know, I think it's just different times. Baseball is the same. I just loved it. I love the time. I love the experience. Hopefully this keeps growing and gets better and better year by year.

**Q. Paolo, what are the immediate plans if the retirement is only for the national team? Are you going to lean to baseball or thinking of going into the coaching area? For Mayorga, even though you say what happens in the clubhouse stays in the clubhouse, but it was in the dugout, and it was visible on the broadcast. We as reporters need to look for the official version. There's a lot of speculation as to what happened. We would like you to give us a version of what happened.**

JORGE MERLOS: This is something we've talked about. So that's the only thing we're going to say about it right now.

PAOLO ESPINO: For my part, I don't have an immediate plan. I don't know exactly what I'm going to do. Tomorrow I might know what I'm going to do. Yes, I do want to stay with baseball. I've had a few conversations, but there's nothing defined. I want to go out and explore some options.

But I am going to stay with baseball one way or another -- coaching, office. I want to explore a little bit and see what options I have.

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