

# World Baseball Classic: Pool A - Cuba vs Puerto Rico

Monday, 9 March, 2026

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Hiram Bithorn Stadium

## Team Cuba

## German Mesa

## Ariel Martinez

## Pedro Santos

### Pregame Press Conference



**Q. Good afternoon. Two questions. The first is for German. German, you were here in 2006. Last time that Cuba and Puerto Rico faced off in the World Classic was that night that it rained, and Puerto Rico won 4-3. Compare that time that you recall -- I know it's been a while -- and how the team is and what are the conditions of the team, what are the expectations that the team has to come here in the house of the host and playing the best game towards Houston?**

GERMAN MESA: Look, I'm sorry, I don't recall. I mean, too much time has passed. Too much time has passed, and I'm not good remembering.

But it was an excellent game. We won with a difference of one, and I believe that game was the one that gave us the pass -- yeah, the classification. I have a vague recollection of that situation.

Now, in this situation the team is in a good spot, we're playing, the guys are committed 100 percent, which I think is the most important thing. What I always tell them from the beginning, in these tournaments, the best team doesn't always win, rather the one who plays the best is the one who wins. That's what we're working for to play the best and then moving on from there.

**Q. A general comment, from what you've seen from Puerto Rico throughout the tournament -- they won the first day 5-0, they scored them all in one inning, and then they come from behind to beat Panama. A little bit of what you've been able to notice of Puerto Rico?**

GERMAN MESA: Well, Puerto Rico, despite being the host, is an excellent team. We've seen the games, and they've been good games. The general sense, all I can say is that it's a good team. It's a good team.

**Q. It's been years that the Cuba team did not depend on themselves to advance to a second round. You have two games left. How have you lived through that on a team that did not reach the expectations that were had?**

GERMAN MESA: That's the great thing about this. No one counted on us at all. All the surveys and everything, nobody was counting on Cuba. Just to be here, I think we're advancing, and people need to pay a bit more attention to Cuba.

It's a team that doesn't have the superstars, but a team that knows how to play well. They come in and play 100 percent. We play as a team. We're a family. We're having fun. And not depending on anyone is fundamental, but we cannot rely on them. We need to go step by step working to achieve the objective.

**Q. If I may ask you a little bit about the Olympics, that it's not only to qualify for Houston, but also reaching the Olympics. How do you feel that, if you do not advance and you cannot win, you may not have a chance?**

ARIEL MARTINEZ: Well, we're not thinking about any of that really. We're just thinking about day after day giving 100 percent on every play and every situation. Every time you're doing things right on the field, then you get a lot of benefit. Then you get all those things of qualification to the Olympics, and there's awards and even monetary incentives.

But we don't have that in mind. We just want to do our job, and we're doing it right and just giving a show on the field playing ball. That is the goal day after day, game after game, play after play.

**Q. For the two players, what does this tournament mean for the people in Cuba that are following you guys?**

PEDRO SANTOS: That's a really good question. For the



people in Cuba, it should mean a lot, and for the relatives of the people that are here, also it means quite a bit to be able to represent each of our relatives and play with our heart. This is something that's really big for many of those who are here playing for the Cuba team.

ARIEL MARTINEZ: Well, this tournament, especially today's game, 20 years ago I was a kid when Puerto Rico and Cuba played, and I remember the game. It was a super exciting game. That's one of the moments I had as a kid that I dreamt to be here when I grew up, and I think I'm going to join.

I'm enjoying the tournament. Especially games like today's, sometimes you feel fulfilled for being here and to be in a situation like today for us.

**Q. Ariel Martinez, you're a guy who started from the bottom. You had a contract with Japan, and you're setting the pace year after year. How do you feel the process has been, and how do you attribute how far you have reached in your career in baseball?**

ARIEL MARTINEZ: Well, it's been the discipline of trying to get to Japan and trying to adapt to their cultures, the way that they play and the way that they play baseball, I learn a lot from them. I think that discipline and hard work helped me survive there for many years.

Also for the sport I give everything of myself, and I try as much as possible to be in this game for many years.

**Q. After seeing Saturday's game, the fans in that game for Puerto Rico, what have you talked about amongst yourselves to face Puerto Rico, and how are you feeling with those conversations, aside from the coaching staff and all that?**

PEDRO SANTOS: Well, it's going to be a great game. It's going to be a good game. There's going to be a lot of people, a lot of fans on both sides, from Panama, from Colombia. There's a lot of people, trainers. For example, I played here in Puerto Rico, and there are going to be some of my coaches here and against me.

So you have to give everything on the field. There's nothing more.

**Q. For the manager, today's game is the first of two strong games that Cuba is going to have. These are the toughest ones in the group now. I'd like to know whether the pressure goes up a little on the players or the coaching staff and whether this game is just like any other of the previous ones?**

GERMAN MESA: For us, no game has been easy, and no opponent has been easy. We are going to take this game the way we've dealt with the other ones, with the dedication that they have and the concentration that it entails. We're not going to say it's one more game because it's not just one more baseball game. Puerto Rico is the host team.

But there's no pressure, just the goal and the strategy that we have, and we're going to keep on with it. Like in the previous game, we're not looking because many times there's talk that this team is weak, this other team is weak. Nobody's weak here. We're all facing each other with the best, and that's my criteria.

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