

# World Baseball Classic: Pool B - Great Britain vs Mexico

Friday, 6 March, 2026

Houston, Texas, USA

Daikin Park

## Team Mexico

## Manager Benji Gil

## Taijuan Walker

## Rowdy Tellez

## Pregame Press Conference



It finally happened in 2006. And what the WBC has done, if you just look only at major league baseball in the last, call it, 25, 30 years, the way it has grown globally, there are players that have been there from Europe, players that have been from Africa, players from Australia, there's more Korean players, players from Taiwan. Obviously the Japanese player is way more available in the big leagues.

It has grown by leaps and bounds. And because of that, so now there's fans in Europe because of baseball. Baseball has done a great job of playing games in Europe, playing games in Australia, playing games in Korea, all over the world, right?

And I think as much as the big league games, for the players from those countries and continents to be in the big leagues representing their people day in and day out, I think that's grown it as much as anything.

And what has made that possible is the WBC. So I think that's why everybody takes so much pride in playing for their country, but also knowing that you are growing the game globally.

### Q. For you as players?

TAIJUAN WALKER: Yeah, I mean I think just in the last WBC you see how many players are playing in this one, more superstars. And just how much the game has grown in the last three years the attendance is up, I think, across all 30 teams.

For this WBC you have a lot of superstars, more guys playing for Team USA, more for us and Japan.

This is our Olympics. We don't get to play the Olympics. This is our Olympics. I think everyone takes pride in representing their country.

ROWDY TELLEZ: I think, like Benji said, just growing the game, seeing kids wanting to play baseball more, seeing more kids wanting gloves and bats. I know after what we did in the last Classic how much it grew baseball in Mexico.

### Q. What were some of the emotions like in the dugout and the feeling that this tournament is finally going to start?

ROWDY TELLEZ: I know for a lot of us this is our second time around. What we did last time, just being 30 outs short of winning the championship kind of weighed on us. Coming back, a lot of us wanted to avenge that and represent Mexico better and bring a championship there.

TAIJUAN WALKER: Excited to get going again. The exhibition games are fun getting to know the guys. Feel like we are ready. The team is close. Excited to get it going.

BENJI GIL: On my behalf, honestly I wish it would never have stopped, right? I think it was -- the team three years ago was really special. They bonded incredibly. And I think we picked up right where we left off.

Like Rowdy said, most of these guys, it's their second time around. And some guys with more important roles. I think guys have been excited since '23 to get back on the field, put on the national jersey and represent our people.

### Q. How do you think the support helped to have more fans? The team can see they are important so you can get more fans and baseball can grow globally. What's the mindset that you have for this?

BENJI GIL: I tell you what, I -- when I was still a player, I remember, I think the rumor started that there would be an event like this like in the maybe late '90s, early 2000s. And I remember a lot of Latin players, even though we played the Caribbean Series, were still really excited to have a team with all of the players that were in the big leagues or close to the big leagues.



It was an honor to represent, you know, our country and bring baseball back to Mexico, and the pride that they have just playing the sport.

**Q. Taijuan and Rowdy, have you picked up more Spanish since the last WBC?**

TAIJUAN WALKER: I haven't. I keep telling myself I am going to learn.

ROWDY TELLEZ: Maybe a word or two here and there.

(Laughter)

**Q. Any words?**

ROWDY TELLEZ: Those you can't mention. I know some of them. I can understand them when they talk about my having no hair and how big my head is, but other than that, not a ton.

**Q. Taijuan, this is for you. What's the expectation going on to the mound, trying to go set the tone for Team Mexico going against a great team like Great Britain?**

TAIJUAN WALKER: Assad is pitching today. He's setting the tone for us today. He's a good pitcher. The last Classic he was really breaking out of his shell and really showing what type of pitcher he is. Having the three extra years for him under his belt, he is going to set the tone for us really big.

Our lineup is really strong, too. We have a really strong lineup and our bullpen is really strong, too. They will set the tone for us and set the tone for Game 1. And after that I will look forward to Sunday.

**Q. Benji, this roster blends guys from coming up in the U.S., raised in the U.S. system, in the big leagues with some players coming up in the Mexico league system. How do you navigate the clubhouse and day-to-day to keep them motivated and connected with that biculturalism.**

BENJI GIL: I think it is two things. It is real simple. We have a goal, and whether you say it in Spanish or in English, if you say "championship," the guys in Spanish understand. You say "campeonato," the guys in English understand, and the love for our country.

Whether the guys born in the states or the guys who were born in Mexico, we love Mexico and we love being Mexican. And we love representing our people -- with

extreme passion, right.

And then you get in the clubhouse and you realize that we have a lot of things in common, and that -- I don't know if other teams can say this, we have great players. We have great human beings. They love being around each other.

Even if they are around each other for just a couple weeks, they know they have each other's backs. They would do anything for each other.

It makes it easy that way, when you have good people and they have common goals and they have the same passion.

**Q. This is more for Benji, but get input from the other two. Last World Classic, Benji, you mentioned that after Mexico's disappoint in the World Cup, you had a chance to kind of bring that Mexican spirit up with athletics. And you had a deep run. That's a few months after the World Cup. Now you are playing a few months before the World Cup. So how can the tournament serve as a spring board for Mexico playing in the World Cup?**

BENJI GIL: Absolutely. We know the main sport in Mexico is, today as we stand here, is soccer. Right? We hope to make big strides in the next two weeks to where Mexico becomes an important sport, or more of an important sport in Mexico.

I believe, really believe -- and I've thought about this a lot -- I believe when, right, when we win the championship, it is going to be one of the greatest moments in the history of Mexico, I think the greatest sports moment in Mexican history. I believe that will inspire our soccer team to believe that they can do it, too.

A lot of people in Mexico use the saying "si se puede." I believe after we win, our soccer team is, like, if they could do it, why can't we?

Being that some games are going to be played in Mexico, I think it is just going to be an explosion of just nationalism and patriotism in Mexico.

Having said that, once we win, if they are able to have a great showing, I can honestly say it will be the greatest year of at least athletics in Mexico and maybe one of the greatest years ever in Mexico. We have a great responsibility and we're excited to be a part of it.

**Q. I was checking or looking over the list of every national team and captains. There are no captains in Mexico. I just want -- a lot of people were wondering why Mexico does not have an established captain?**

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BENJI GIL: Oh, yes. The reason is very simple. I have a captain here. I have another one here. I have six, seven or eight captains. We have one that -- Kick. They call him captain but because of his nickname. He could be captain as well. Randy could be one as well.

I would rather have that tranquillity for them to be a spokesperson whenever the time comes instead of waiting for someone specific to do it all of the time. We are a team. We are a group. We are family.

I don't see how we should name someone and then put that pressure on that individual. Even at a certain point, look down upon someone else.

I do believe we have a group of many leaders. He is a tremendous leader. He also is a tremendous leader. Randy, the ones that were in the last Classic -- Muñoz is a leader in the bullpen. Robert is also a leader in the bullpen.

We have many different areas. And that's the reason why we thought and we actually agreed, all of us agreed that we don't need to have an established captain when you have so many leaders.

**Q. Two questions, first one in English for Taijuan. You pitch a lot in the stadium at the beginning of your career when you were in Seattle. How much do you tell your team that that helped you in this game? The second question, we have a lot of players born in Mexico or like you guys were not born in Mexico but you have Mexican heritage, like Randy, and they have Mexican descendants, and also the labor of a coach, manager like yourself. The fact that you brought that team together make it a family how did you do that?**

TAIJUAN WALKER: For me, it makes me comfortable because I know what the mound is like. I know how high the mound is. And also how to approach hitters. We have the short porch in left field. So knowing which guys like to go oppo, I know how to pitch them.

I think really being comfortable on the mound. A lot of guys haven't pitched on this mound. For me I like it. It's a higher mound. And just knowing how the dirt is and just the feel of the stadium and the atmosphere, just playing here a lot.

BENJI GIL: Like I was saying earlier, the Mexican is born wherever they are from. We all have this charisma, this love for our flag, for Mexico. There are Mexicans all over the world. And one of the things that I told the players and I shared with the players is that if we are winning to win or

playing to win. But we are also winning for the people that have sacrificed that came to the U.S., your parents, your grandparents, your great grandparents. They made a huge sacrifice to come to this country and give you a better life, a better opportunity in life.

So now you have the opportunity to represent them, to represent those that sacrificed for you, or for your parents, so now you have a way to showcase what you love, and at the same time represent them with passion, love, and be proud in that -- and bring pride in that.

And I also believe that the ones that were not born in Mexico or the ones that were born in Mexico, it is easy for you to surrender and give it 100%. Those that have been born in Mexico, they have done an extraordinary job, just as it happened in 2023 and now, to welcome their teammates with their arms wide open.

And at the end of the day the ones that were born in Mexico speak really good English, and the ones that were born here, they try to, you know, communicate as well. They joke on each other like they were buddies. And they are joking, right? It is something that can probably unify a locker room.

One of the things that surprised me is that within our locker room, I remember, I was talking to Taijuan about this, Mexican players, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, U.S., Japan, most of them I have already met, right, before the tournament, even like on the Mexican team -- well, actually on the Mexican team some of them have not met each other until they get to the preseason.

One of the things that unify us and what makes it very special is that some of them just met, but they respect each other. And that passion, that pride that they have to wear the Mexican jersey will bring them closer, bring them together and fight for a common goal.

**Q. Benji, this is for you. The guys if you can. How important it is to set the tone in this tournament, get the team a win for your team and rally to keep on going for the rest of the play?**

ROWDY TELLEZ: Every game is important. You want to win every single one. One loss can define everything. For us we want to get out and get a good start early. We have four games in the pool, and obviously one in advance, so that's seven total. So ideally you want to go 7-0 and win the whole thing. So you want win them all unless you win the first one. So I think ideally all of us are just looking at Game 1 and moving on to the next one.

TAIJUAN WALKER: Yeah, I mean, just getting the

momentum off early. Us being the first game in our pool kind of set the tone for our team and just how the tournament is going to go. Hopefully from pitch 1 and first at-bat we can get out early and strike first.

BENJI GIL: Yeah, like they both just said, we want to get off with the right foot and put ourselves in a great position, and the way to do that is with a victory. Our mentality is we attack. We attack with the at-bats. We attack on the base, we attack on the mound. Full steam ahead. We are not going to look past anybody, but we know where the end goal is. We have known this since we got here, and once we got here we confirmed it. Now it's -- the bell is about to ring.

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