

World Baseball Classic: Pool C - Japan vs Chinese Taipei

Wednesday, 4 March, 2026

Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Dome

Team Japan

Hirokazu Ibata

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Your team got back to Tokyo. How do you feel about having an opening game in two days?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, tomorrow we have an off-day. So I am feeling we are going to get loose and relaxed but maybe for tomorrow the atmosphere is going to be changed to be tight for the game.

Q. So overall, how do you manage the Tokyo round? You are going to play four games.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, all four games are going to be important, especially the first game. Winning first game makes us momentum, so it's very important.

Q. Regarding our opening games, you are expecting Yoshinobu Yamamoto as the starting pitcher; what do you expect of him as a starter?

HIROKAZU IBATA: It's true that Yoshinobu is going to start. Yes, whoever pitch, all I expect is keep the momentum. That's all I can say.

Q. If you could name the probable starting pitcher for Game 2, Game 3, if you can, please.

HIROKAZU IBATA: No. Not today. Sorry.

Q. In two days you are going to have 2026 WBC tournament go. Overall, what do you feel right now?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, it is going to be a very tough series, tough tournament. So we need all 30 players' effort to get the victory.

Q. Regarding Ohtani, the previous two games, you put him batting first or batting second. Which do you feel more comfortable, if you could share with us?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we already decided but I haven't



mentioned to him yet if he's going to be leadoff or the second spot. So not for today. I cannot say for you guys today because I did not mention to Shohei yet.

Q. For today, your field players, Seiya Suzuki is doing to play center field. When did you decide is going to be your center fielder?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, last season, about a year ago, when I visited to spring training. At that time he was playing DH spot but I had conversation with Seiya person-to-person that I'm going to put him as center fielder. And that's how we approached to communicate with him, and he gained day-by-day in the process.

Q. When you were an active player, you also represented Team Japan as an infielder. How important and how great is it to be part of a national team?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, when I was a player, I had a huge tension. I was very nervous, as well. But once the game start, all I can say is just let go, just play hard, and if I was a player or if I was a manager, it's not a huge difference. All I can do right now is to let my players play well. So there's no by differences whether if I was back in the day previous.

Q. Just wondering about your younger players. What kind of messaging are you giving them ahead of this tournament for guys who are making their debuts and especially players who have been with you from the start, especially players like Kozono and Morishita?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, through the tournament, no one knows what's going to happen. They have a great potential for future. Looking back to my career, when I first was selected to the national team, I was the backup player. All I did was stay well-prepared.

So what I'm sending a message to them, is just stay well-prepared.

Q. You played the Korean team in two games last year



here. They have got a slightly different team this time. What do you see from this group of players as far as their results earlier this week and what have you noticed from their lineup, especially?

HIROKAZU IBATA: First of all, the Team Korea has a very great offensive lineup. They have great left and right hitters combined. Their defense, it's very tight defense, and it's not easy to earn a lot of runs. So I'm expecting my pitchers to minimize the runs.

Q. Looking back to -- when we look at the roster for the Chinese Taipei and Korea, there's some English -- he mean, American players who have relation with Chinese Taipei and Korea. Do you have any specific impression? Both countries have American players.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, I was watching previous couple games. Both of them, the players were very great hitters, and some of them hit home runs. So we had attention for them.

Tomorrow, we will have an opportunity by watching them, so market share that we have a great scouting report.

Q. Regarding the pitcher, who made a post by making a tea, as a manager, when you look at that, how did you feel about it?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, as one united team, this is a very bonding nice way to communicate with. Yesterday we had only 60, so in tomorrow, during the game, I wish we could drink ten or 20 teas per game.

Q. Throughout the team ceremony, do you think the team will unite tightly?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, some of the players are shy, so if they get through it, yes, it is going to be more better momentum.

Q. You mentioned previously that Chinese Taipei is probably the toughest Game in Pool C. If you can name some of the players who you have to pay attention to the most?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, our first game is the game against the Chinese Taipei. It's very important. I don't know who is going to be a starter, their starter, and I don't know who is going to pitch second or third. We were defeated at the Premier12, and the pitcher Lin, if he pitches against us, it's going to be a tough game.

And also, they have some pitchers playing in the NPB recently, so these pitchers are very talented. So it's going

to be a tough game.

Q. In the previous WBC tournament, the first game of each tournament is very tight, low score during the middle of the game. Throughout your experience previously, what did you learn for the first game of the international match?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, something we should not do is just pay attention and play. So as soon as the game starts, I am expecting all my players to play a hundred percent and try to be positive and try to be aggressive, not to wait until something happens. So as soon as the game starts, to play together and be aggressive.

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