

World Baseball Classic: Pool C - Korea vs Japan

Saturday, 7 March, 2026

Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Dome

Team Japan

Hirokazu Ibata

Postgame Press Conference

Japan 8, Korea 6

Q. It's a close game. What's in your mind right now?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, I didn't expect to give up a run early in the inning, but a very happy later we score couple runs that's big runs.

Later in the game we ahead finally. Yeah, that's also the key of the game.

Q. Looking back at the bottom first, two run jack by Seiya Suzuki; how big it was to you?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we gave up three run. If we didn't score any run at the bottom of the first, yeah, the momentum of the game is strongly going to the opponent.

So although we were still behind, we run two. That was huge at the bottom of the first.

Q. Bottom third, Ohtani hit a slam back-to-back games. How big it was to you?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, Shohei's solid homerun made the game tied. Such great player. I appreciate his homerun.

Q. Seiya and Ohtani, the combined of Ohtani and Suzuki are currently very hit hard. Yoshida also.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, right after Suzuki hit homerun Yoshida did it again, and also Yoshida had his fourth at-bat at bottom seventh. After Seiya got RBI walk and he's got a base hit -- and RBI single to the centerfield, that was also huge to give us insurance run.

Q. Regarding your pitching staff, seventh inning, Taneichi, eighth inning Taisei. Is this your winning game plan?



HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we can say that we have options available as a reliever. And Taneichi WBBC debut he did a great job to us.

Q. Lastly, how do you go for it? How you are in 2-0. What's in your mind for the next two games?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, same as today for tomorrow. Trying to play hard. Some players may be got tired because we just played two games, but I want all the players to be good condition for tomorrow's game.

Q. Looking back the seventh inning, Taneichi, he originally is your starter. Then I thought Taneichi can go for the second inning or the third inning even because he is a starter. Why do you let him pitch one inning?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Throughout our exhibition games I called him and I let him pitch one inning previous game. He got a great one inning, very solid. His flight is very effective. So as on national teams I'm expecting him as short reliever.

Also or pitching coaches so highly evaluated him so I'm so highly pleased with what Taneichi did for tonight.

Q. Looking back Seiya and Yoshida's back-to-back homerun, they were very hot. Are you going to keep the lineup the same order or you might going to change lineup a little bit?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Let me please think for tomorrow's plan from now. I don't decide yet. I am start thinking a plan for tomorrow's game tonight.

Q. Bottom seventh when Yoshida walk with RBI, that really -- because you put right hand hitter, left hand hitter, right hand hitter, left hand hitter, because of the rules the pitcher has to pitch like three innings, so does it affect you you think?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we have a rule of the pitcher minimize three hitters they have to face, so having Seiya



Yoshida, Okamoto, Murakami right, left, right left, is, yes some meaning to us.

That's how we put the lineups. Overall, all of the national teams member are very high quality hitters so...

Q. Starting pitcher Yusei Kikuchi and Hiromi Itoh, both of them pitched three innings. Some pitch were dislocated. How do you looking back to these two pitchers?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, Kikuchi and Itoh were WBBC debut. I guess both of them have pressure on it, but he pitched very effective way. I'm looking forward both of them for the next opportunity.

Q. WBBC 2026 not only Japan, all the teams are scored by homerun. Do you think any opinion scoring run by homerun percentage is high?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, this is part of our game plan. Not only the Tokyo pool, but also we are guessing even though -- even if we go for American round, Miami round, the score will be by homerun.

But I am not saying we are going to change the lineups because of that.

Q. Top ninth you let Taisei close the game. Last year squad game Taisei gave up a homerun. Still, you trusted Taisei. What is the reason why you put Taisei as a closer?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, he's always be himself and I'm trusting him very fully. He has a very effective fast ball command and the more pitch he pitch, his condition is getting better and better.

So for the next opportunity as well I'm going use probably to close the game for him.

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