

World Baseball Classic: Pool C - Australia vs Japan

Sunday, 8 March, 2026

Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Dome

Team Japan

Hirokazu Ibata

Pregame Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Let's start the pregame interview with Mr. Ibata, the Skipper of Team Japan.

Q. Last night's game against Korea, it was a seesaw game. How do you evaluate Team Japan's effort so far? You go 2-0 right now.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we are in very good momentum. The first game we score first and we run a lot. Yesterday's game we give up a run earlier, but we came up. So the momentum of Team Japan is very good.

Q. Playing after the first game, you mentioned that your body felt some sore. How is your condition when you wake up this morning?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, I still have a little sore.

Q. This is going to be the night that Emperor of Japan is attending and watching you playing.

HIROKAZU IBATA: It is such an opportunity, and I'd like to play until the final out and try to be who we are.

Q. Team Japan advanced to the quarterfinal to Miami already. How do you feel about?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, we don't think yet, because we still have two games remaining, a game against Australia and game against Czechia.

Q. Tonight's contest is undefeated match against Team Australia. How do you evaluate Team Australia?

HIROKAZU IBATA: They have good pitchers, and also, they have power with long distance extra bases. Because the season is difference from Japan, most of the players just finished the Australian League, which is differences. So I think the condition seems to be very good.



Q. If you could mention some key players, some key opponent players, can you name, please?

HIROKAZU IBATA: The last Premier12 where we faced against, I think lead-off guy, Bazzana, we gave up two base hit, so try to get him out and score first. That's how I hope for tonight's game.

Q. Starting pitcher for tonight, Sugano, what's your year expectation?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, I want him to be as himself with a great command and put a lot of outs as much as he can one hitter by one hitter.

Q. So any general impression, comment on today's game against Australia.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we play together as one unite, and we are focusing until the last final out of the game.

Q. Regarding the starting pitcher Sugano, I think you met him at the Spring Training last year. When did you designate him and ask him to be a part of Team Japan? If you could express us the reason why you choose Sugano as a starter.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, that was probably the end of the last years. When he flew back to Japan, there was a timing I contact him and let him know, asked him.

Also, we have a lot of rules. This is something he has great experience with. These are the things why I choose him on my roster.

Q. Regarding offense, batting order, you put some different names at the clean-up hitters. Do you think you're going to change day by day, or are you going to sit on one player for clean-up hitter?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, it seems like Yoshida has been swinging hard and hitting hot, so I think I'm going to put him, Yoshida, as a clean-up hitters, but not only the fourth slot. Making lineup is not something that designated fourth



hitters.

Q. Looking back yesterday's game when Shohei hit a game-tying home run and after he came home, he goes, Calm down, calm down, cool down. According to his press conference, he just mentioned to us the rhythm of the dugout were not as great as he was expected. He was kind of the cool guy, and he was so calm to manage the Team Japan's dugout. How do you feel about having Shohei?

HIROKAZU IBATA: At that moment I didn't see that things. That was still early in the game, and that was still the tied game. I figured out that Shohei is such a high-level athlete.

Q. Congratulations on going towards the quarterfinals. What's the main goal to try eyeing the 4-0 score, even though you already qualified to the semifinal?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, I never mentioned on that before. Well, anyway, keeping the team's condition better is a key. Of course, it is better for us to clinch all four games than losing any games. That's how I figured out.

Q. Previously you mentioned about how great Shohei Ohtani's routine. If you could share with us, describe you felt about Shohei's routine.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, he understands what his body conditions daily basis, and behind the scenes he's always treat himself well.

Usually I guess that he is having a BP indoor. Then the only differences I see Shohei, since he joined Team Japan, he always having BP outside instead of indoor cage.

Also, the time after the BP until the game start, these routine things are so impressed. Also, behind the scenes he always motivate the team to the higher energy. These are the things I am so impressed of Shohei.

Q. Going to the quarterfinal to Miami, do you have any plan to substitute players? Do you have any game plan to change lineup, not only today's game, but also the game after, game against Czechia, if you have a specific game plan?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Not really for today's game. This is a Game 3. Three consecutive games will be done by tonight. Tomorrow we're going to have a day off. So then if we figured out some player needs a rest, then I might going to change the lineup, but not for tonight.

Q. Looking back last night's contest, you send Sato

for Sakamoto. Then after that, Sato was straight into the game. Having such great hitter like Sato in front of Shohei, is this something changing the lineups, or if you have any intention to having a big name like Sato in front of Shohei?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, yesterday I send Sato to Sakamoto. Also, we sent Morishita as well previous game. We have a lot of potential players in the dugout. So as catchers, we have a very well-depth catchers as well. It's all combined. This was part of our original game plan.

Regarding Sato, he can play both infielder and outfielders. That is very useful to us, so if we could have another opportunity, yeah, we would like to put him again.

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