

World Baseball Classic: Pool C - Australia vs Japan

Sunday, 8 March, 2026

Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Dome

Team Japan

Hirokazu Iбата

Postgame Press Conference

Japan 4, Australia 3

THE MODERATOR: Next is Hirokazu Iбата, the manager.

Q. First of all, congratulations on today's winning. When you look back at the game, what's in your mind right now?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, first of all, we are so pleased that we won. When we face against Australian pitchers, they have a very angle. The first impression of the opponent starter, he has an angle, and the relievers are also tough to face off. And, also, we were behind, but we are so pleased that later in the game we came back from behind.

Q. After you are running the first run, bottom 7, Yoshida hit a two-run jack and came back from behind.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes. Once he came back here in Japan and we played couple of inner-squad games and Game 1, 2, 3, he has been hot, especially for the clutch situation. He's a guy to put the numbers, so I'm so proud of him.

Q. Looking back, yesterday's game, you guys hit four home runs last night, but today you go zero until during the 7th inning. Was it something in the atmosphere and a difficulty of the international matches?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, yes, every day we have to face a different type of pitchers. Korean's pitchers are similar to the Japanese pitchers, so we might get used to it, but today's contest against Australian, they are like (indiscernible) type of pitchers, so we don't have that much opportunity. These are the things, the differences.

After we going to the quarterfinal, I think we're going to face a lot of these kind of pitchers, so we have to get



prepared for that.

Q. Looking back at today's offense, you pulled down to the Kondoh from second to the third spot. If you could describe the reason why you changed the lineup, second hole and third hole?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, I was expecting the Kondoh to get any kind of a result, and in case Shohei walk, that's why we changed the lineup.

Q. Next game is going to be the game against Czechia, and do you have any thoughts on your lineup for Game 4?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, I don't quite for sure yet. We have time to think about, but some of the player who do not play much, I am going to rethink, and I'm going to have a meeting with the team with the coaches.

Q. Let me ask you about the starting pitcher for tonight, Sugano. How did you see him outing?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yeah, he gave up some runners on bases, but he never gave up a run. Even behind the count, he has a variety of pitches, and he attacks strikes. His blocking pitches is a good balance with fastball, and he's a great combination. That's how I felt.

Q. Next probable starting opportunity for the pitching opportunity for Sugano is after the team flying to Miami. Do you decide yet?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, if he could give us solid pitching like he did tonight, even though the runners in on base, I'm expecting him to shut out innings like he did today.

Q. Congratulations on clinching the berth, as in first place. You'll have a day off tomorrow. Then on Tuesday you're going to have the last game of the pool. What's your expectation for your teammates?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, we just finished the three consecutive games without day off, so tomorrow is going to



be a complete day off. Let's get recovered, and we'll have Tuesday game. Then after that, let's be ready for the Miami round.

Q. Tonight's game was the first-ever game in 60 years with the Emperor's family. Did you feel any special emotion or special feeling, pressure on it?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, it was such a first game in 60 years. It was a must-win game for me. No matter how we play, and the score was just so close, but the result, we won, so we are so pleased to get a win.

I am guessing that all my players also satisfied about today's win in front of the Emperor's family.

Q. Congratulations on the win. Mr. Sugano talked about your team's unflappable confidence in victory, but how was that going in the 6th inning after Maki was picked off second?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, that was two down bases are loaded, and Shohei were at bat, and Sugano got picked off. I was going to challenge to claim to the umpires, but our communication were missed. So after that, every single play I'm trying to raise my hand, Hey, umpire, hey, umpire.

Back in Japan the runners can saying, Appeal, but the umpires judge were kind of late to claim. These are the things that I explain -- I mean, that we learned from the games. So one thing my regret is I should have claimed to the umpire a little faster so that we could have a video challenge for Maki's pick-off.

Q. You have one game left yet, but you clinch the berth, and congrats on your first place pool seed. At the quarterfinal you don't know yet who is going to be the opponent, but if you have any specific thought on your quarterfinal games?

HIROKAZU IBATA: So we don't know who is going to be play against, and all I can say is we clinched the berth. All I know is we are going to have a quarterfinal at the second place of another pool, so we are going to prepare. This is the starting point for the quarterfinal.

We have an advanced report with the coaches, so then these are the things we have to work out to prepare quarterfinal.

Q. Let's say you play with Sugano, the starting pitcher. When Sugano was ace pitcher and you were the coach tonight, do you feel any special feeling with play with Sugano and Sugano pitch for you? How do

you feel about?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yes, at the first beginning I think in such international matches no matter who pitched, it's always difficult, but I never see Sugano than to show his fighting spirit at the very beginning of the first frame. So I'm so pleased what he did without earning any run.

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