

World Baseball Classic: Pool D

Thursday, 5 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Dominican Republic General Manager Nelson Cruz

Manager Albert Pujols

Workout Day Press Conference

NELSON CRUZ: As you know, Jeremy left because he had an injury in the finger. The image was not clear enough. Today we did an MRI. He went to a finger specialist, and he had a fracture in the finger. He's going to be out for two weeks. So we'll have to make a replacement. Later on we'll tell you who's going to replace Jeremy.

Q. Albert, after the Jeremy injury, how comfortable do you feel knowing now that you need another shortstop to give more rest to Geraldo? You have Rosario, but are you confident enough with the roster?

ALBERT PUJOLS: First of all, we are not feeling comfortable. This team has a mission, has a task, which is winning this championship. I am not comfortable. No one is comfortable. The manager is not comfortable.

So we have a great team. Jeremy was part of this team. We have been preparing ourselves. Unfortunately, he won't be able to be with us.

Later on I will share the option that we are going to choose. We are talking with the management, and we are going to make the best possible decision.

Q. Everywhere the Dominican team goes, you have incredible support. But in south Florida, Miami in particular, what is that atmosphere like as a player and just to see all the Dominican people come together to root for your team here?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, obviously the energy is going to come along. I think the last couple times we played in the DR, people were really excited, and that's going to come over here and transfer to that. I think people love baseball here, especially all the Latin community. To have this opportunity to have it around here and the finals is pretty



amazing.

I'm really excited. I've never had the opportunity to have it around here in Miami. But I was in Puerto Rico in 2006, in San Diego, and it was pretty electric. I'm blessed to have the opportunity now to be the manager of this ballclub, and I'll try and have a great time.

Q. Nelson, it's been a challenge for you to be the manager at this WBC where you saw the excitement at the DR with the fans and the support that you had. Now you are playing for the first time outside of the country. How do you feel? And how important was it for you to see those fans enjoy the best team? If the Dominican Republic goes to the next round, who will be the teams that you are thinking of?

NELSON CRUZ: We had beautiful days because of the welcome that we received from the fans from the very moment we arrived at the airport and the journey up to the hotel, to see the kids during their trainings, and then during the first game. Yeah, it's just very exciting.

I always dreamt about something like that in our country. And to be honored to see that firsthand was very rewarding. Not only the number of fans at the stadium -- it was totally packed -- but I had a chance to go out and see that there was a great number of fans that didn't have tickets. The atmosphere was very unique. We hope to repeat that at some point in time.

The Dominican people were thirsty to experience something like that.

We have two options. For example, Luis Castillo, we talked to him a couple of weeks ago. It was not certain, but yeah, it depends on the injuries.

Q. You obviously have so many players that you can choose from, really big talented players. Do you try to put together the best team that makes sense? Do you look for the best player at each position? How do you go about putting together a roster like this?



NELSON CRUZ: Yeah, both sides. We obviously want the best talent on the field. We want players that can be flexible. But in the first message and the way we saw the message clear to the players was the roles, what they're going to have done, how we're going to use it. In that message, it was very clear, and we want to have players to be able to perform. And we created a team where no matter the situation, I would feel free to take the best from those players in any scenario that we can find.

Q. Albert, when you look at this team, you have so many players who are used to hitting second, third, fourth. How do you go about putting together a lineup with a bunch of guys who could be in the middle of every lineup?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Yeah, I think it's a good problem to have as a manager. It's a dream team. I think there's no ego in the clubhouse, and everybody knows where they can hit. I think at the end of the day, it's really to represent the Dominican Republic, that jersey that they're wearing, and not the last name that they represent.

I think for the next two weeks, it's fun. It's like a dream. Everybody dreams to have a lineup like this. But I think everybody can produce from top to bottom, and it gives me flexibility to play with it. I'm really excited about the lineup that we're going to put in the field tomorrow and hopefully the rest of the tournament.

Q. Was it like that when you played, as well, in the event?

ALBERT PUJOLS: We had a pretty good lineup, but I don't think the talent -- we had guys like Adrián, myself, Beltré, David. We had some good lineups. But I think this lineup that we have in 2026 is probably the best lineup that the Dominican Republic has had.

Q. Nelson, I'm sorry to go back, but the Classic is starting on Friday. Do you think that the replacement of Jeremy will be here on time? Maybe someone from the majors, Erik González? Are you considering him to be a replacement for Jeremy?

NELSON CRUZ: Well, I have been calling different players for different hours. We want that player to be here tomorrow. Yes, González is one of the options. We'll have to take different steps for him to be approved, but yes, he's one of the options that we are considering.

Q. Albert, you were at the Classic in 2006 with a lineup including two players, Beltré, Ortiz, and the DR manager that is going to be the next at Cooperstown. Would you compare that team and the team that you

are managing today in terms of the offense?

ALBERT PUJOLS: No, there's no point in comparing. The best lineup was the one in 2013 when we won. If we win the next Classic, they are going to say that we had the best lineup.

No, there's no point in comparing in 2013. We as a country and the manager and the team, they did their job. It is my job now to face this challenge now, to write our own history in that book that was written in 2013, and we want to add our names on it.

I don't like comparing. I'm very happy and excited with the roster we have today, and it's a thrill as a manager to have this kind of roster with this talent that we have in the team.

Q. Albert, I have the impression that you didn't underestimate Nicaragua. It is the first game. What characteristics did you identify in this team with that leadership for this first game in this WBC?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Playing against Dusty, I have learned that he's been a very successful manager throughout his career, and he's going to try to do that, to be successful at WBC. He's been preparing the Nicaragua team.

Part of my job is to be ready to try to win the games no matter what. He's going to be aggressive. He's been a very aggressive manager, and he's very firm in making plays. We're going to be paying attention to that.

Q. The experience of playing on the Dominican Republic, you wore that uniform at some point in time, and you know the game. How important is it for you to play in this kind of atmosphere that you saw in the Dominican Republic? Is that important for the players, as well, at this Classic?

NELSON CRUZ: Of course. Even before the game was official, we always thought that this would be very rewarding for the players, most of them would like to have this kind of experience, and I was pleased to be in those games that were so important for the players. It is an extra energy, an extra power for them.

We had those exhibition games, and we played as if they were the last games of the World Series. The energy will be seen in this round in Miami.

Q. Albert, you played in the Dominican Republic, and it was wonderful, but it was exhibition games. Now the tournament is starting. You didn't have a very good time in 2023. As a leader, as a manager, you have a team full of talented players. How are you going to

deal with these players?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, I am not focused on the previous Classic. That's in history. That's in the past. We are focused on this Classic. It was a bitter experience as a fan in the previous edition of the WBC. But that's history. Now we are focused on this team.

We talked to each player last week, and they all said that this is a different Classic, this is a new page of the history and they are ready. As a staff, myself as a manager, we're here to support those players to prepare themselves for the game.

They are professionals. They know how to play baseball. This is their show. I told them, play aggressive baseball as you have been doing and represent our country, our homeland. We want to be respected as tough. And the vibes and the energy that we have in the clubhouse, I haven't seen this for a long time.

So thank you, Nelson, for this opportunity to lead and to manage this team. I have to thank God, Nelson, and the staff for this opportunity to lead these young players and try to enjoy and try to win this tournament.

Q. How about the chemistry, the preparation and the motivation of these guys? They look so excited. Is that confidence?

ALBERT PUJOLS: I'm not going to use the word "overconfidence." They are professional from the top down. I talk to Nelson every day. We have been preparing and choosing these players. It's been a wonderful experience for me, and we have great chemistry, not only as manager and coach, but also within the coaching staff, and we can transmit that to the players. We are enjoying it.

Some of you may be thinking about the egos, et cetera. Now, the ego can be created by the player and the people around him. But we haven't seen that. We haven't seen that so far. We have a very good group. This is what you are seeing. Whatever you have seen in the last couple of days during the games, you will see the same energy, harmony, good vibes. It's going to be a great tournament.

Q. Speaking about Nicaragua, the Dominican team can be studied by everyone. We have videos of the pitchers, the hitters, et cetera. The same goes for the U.S. and Japan teams. But there are some players in the Nicaraguan team that are not very professional and there are not enough videos for that. How are you preparing to face that team where you don't know so many players?

ALBERT PUJOLS: That's a very good question. We have a team that were watching the games of the Nicaragua team, and we have a good idea of how to attack Nicaragua tomorrow. Just like you said, it's very difficult, but we have to believe in our instinct and to give the merit and the credit to that team of scouts that followed Nicaragua.

Now the team that plays the best is going to win tomorrow.

Q. Nelson, speaking with Roman, he said that it was your idea to play those two games, and he okayed that request. What do you think about that personally speaking? He said that part of the Classic could be played in the Dominican Republic. That's for you. And what are you expecting from Martinez tomorrow?

NELSON CRUZ: Omar Minaya gave me those ideas to take one or two games to the Dominican Republic. We represented that idea to Rob, and he said, wow, that's a wonderful idea; let's go for it. We had to work a lot, especially because we have this Classic.

Now, we had to prepare the stadium, the field. We had to put together the teams here in Miami. The first training was done here in West Palm Beach as planned. Because of the logistics we couldn't do it. But it was a wonderful experience.

He told me that he was very excited about those two games, and like you said, if we have a good stadium looking forward, we will have the possibility to bring this type of event officially to the Dominican Republic.

ALBERT PUJOLS: We expect that Cristopher Sanchez, he can pitch for three or four good innings. We have a good bullpen. We put together our game plan. We want to execute that plan tomorrow.

NELSON CRUZ: Let me highlight something about Cristopher. He's wishing to do a good job. He didn't go to the Dominican Republic to visit his family because he wanted to be part of the preparation phase. He's very professional, and he's very committed to the game tomorrow.

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