

# World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Nicaragua vs Dominican Republic

Friday, 6 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Dominican Republic

### Manager Albert Pujols

#### Postgame Press Conference



Dominican Republic 12, Nicaragua 3

**Q. Cristopher Sanchez didn't have a good performance today, considering that he allowed two runs and six hits. You have reserved him for a possible game against the United States or Japan. Did his performance today hurt your confidence in him for a more important game?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: No, not really. Maybe he didn't have the best performance he wanted to have. At the same time, he wrote history today. He struck out four hitters. So you have to look at the positives. The sinker was not good, but the curve was perfect.

So these are the emotions of the first game in this kind of tournament. That first inning I was looking at Cristopher; he never lost his calm, and he was able to strike out four players.

This is not going to change anything. Tomorrow we are going to focus on Sunday's game. That's it. We are not going to look ahead.

**Q. The second half of the game was great for the team. You used the bench players very well. Can you tell us about that process, because you are going to be off tomorrow?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: I'm not afraid of moving the players on the bench. All the players on the bench needs a chance and they are ready, especially in this kind of game. We can take advantage of these opportunities to make those moves.

The offense was great. The bullpen came and did a great job, as expected. Then in the seventh inning our offense actually was excellent.

**Q. Talk about what Junior Caminero is doing at his age. How hard is it to be that young and put up these kinds of numbers and come up in these kinds of spots?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: It's really hard, but I think the best thing about Junior Caminero is he's not afraid of this moment. He loves this spot. He's willing to open up and get better. And I think when this kid figures it out and gets better, heads up, because there's a lot of little things, especially in his swing, that he can get better at.

But at 22, I think right now you don't touch it because he's doing what he's doing, putting big numbers.

But having the opportunity for me and the Dominican Republic being his manager was a privilege, and seeing the things that he was able to do there, there was no doubt in my mind to put him in this roster, knowing that he loves this spot, that he was going to come huge for us.

This is just a glimpse of the things that he's going to hopefully continue to do in this tournament.

**Q. Given how tight the game was at that point, what was that dugout like when he hit that home run?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: I think everybody is loose. They know that's just one pitch, one at-bat before that often clicks in. I think it happens after Junior's at-bat right there, starting off with our captain Manny Machado with a double. It was pretty impressive the quality of at-bats.

You have to give credit especially early in the game to Nicaragua pitching. They were keeping our guys off balance and we made the adjustment that we had to make to score some runs later on.

**Q. (On the management of the bullpen.)**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Just like I said, we have great offense, but our bullpen is great. Any team in the majors would like to have our pitchers. That's why I'm honored to be the coach and to manage this bullpen. Not only the lineup, but



also the pitchers and the bullpen we have. This is a Dream Team, and the work and dedication of Wellington, myself, José, Peralta, this worked. That's why we are prepared for this.

**Q. At some point in time were you concerned about the pace of the game the first half of the game? Did you have to give extra motivation to the players?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: My brother, this is the best motivation (indicating his shirt), what we are representing. I didn't say a word. Just representing our homeland today, and to wear this uniform, this is enough motivation. Otherwise you will be in the wrong team.

They don't need extra motivation. I believe that if I am ready, the coaching staff is ready and does the job, there is no concern. Of course we are going to win games, we can lose games. But you can control the preparation and the job that you are going to do for a game. This is something that we have been doing very well.

Bottom line, the show belongs to them. It is important to move the pieces from the bench and to give opportunity to Cruz and others. Actually he was great with the home run that he was able to hit. Of course we are going to give them all this opportunity because they are ready for this tournament.

**Q. Is it important to win the first game, to move on in this kind of tournament that is so short and difficult?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Yes, in this kind of short tournament, the first game is extremely important. We had the chance to win today. Tomorrow we are off. We are going to continue working to prepare ourselves. This is super important, today's game. All the teams that are going to play against the Dominican Republic, they are going to bring the very best they have. They are going to bring their very best.

What happened in the first three innings, I was not surprised by Nicaragua. When you have a coach like Dusty Baker with his history and his mindset, not only as a player but also as a manager, I knew that those players were ready to face us.

**Q. Your first victory with the team, the first game of the Classic, Junior Lake came from the bench, he ran the bases. You spoke about Junior. Now you have him on this stage. Maybe he didn't think he would be here.**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Not only for Junior but for Erik González. He joined the team five hours ago. To have the

opportunity to have both players in my team, this is a pleasure, an honor for me. I was able to coach them before. In the last three days, he just came, and I didn't think twice, and I told Nelson to bring him to the roster. He will be able to help us a lot. He knows his role. But the energy, the winning energy that he brings to the clubhouse, this is something unprecedented.

The same for Erik. In 24 hours we called him, he was active, he said yes, and here he is with us. It's a pleasure for me to count on both players. Our country is very happy for having those two baseball players representing us. Maybe they didn't believe, they didn't think about it, but God is great, and they had this chance to represent our country.

I'm very proud and grateful, first with God, for having this kind of players in our roster.

**Q. Everyone speaks about the offense, but we have to speak about the defense, by the minister of defense, Manny Machado. It was very polemic to know who was going to play third base. Your words for him?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: He's a great player. I experienced that for so many years in the majors. He defends a lot. I mean, and the leadership that he brings to the clubhouse. To me, once again -- and I will say that many, many times, having players like Manny, Vlady, the whole roster is a dream come true, and he showed that. He proved that because he's like a vacuum cleaner on the third base. If he catches a ball, he will make you out at first base. That was very important. I'm very, very happy.

**Q. Can you just talk about Cruz? He gets in the pinch-hit situation there. How tough is that to do, especially warming up maybe a little bit before?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: It's funny because when I walked with him, he was just talking to Santana and the group, and I was like, if Marte, our bat, comes in, do you want to pinch-hit for him. He's like, are you serious? I'm like, no, I'm not serious, you are coming. I wanted you to hit.

I told Tatis, I remember Placido told me about it. He's going to hit for Marte. It's going to be only Cruz and he's going to hit that Corona sign over there in right field. It wasn't quite that close, but having an opportunity to get those guys at-bat, him and Santana, Junior. I'm going to give them some at-bats. Those guys are guys that are going to come huge off the bench and get one huge at-bat for us to win a game.

So it was Cruz that hit the big home runs for us, but at the end of the day, just giving everybody an opportunity. And

I'm going to try my best to do that.

**Q. We all hear that the fan environment in the stadium and you've lived it, but do you remember at what age did you really realize the faithful animated fandom of the Dominicans in baseball?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: I had the privilege of working in this stadium, on the Escogido side in the Dominican Republic, selling frikitaki, which is pan with huevos with pollo. I was with my mom doing that, I grew up in that environment, seeing Aguilas-Escogido, Aguilas-Licey, their rival. I think my last game that I watched in the Dominican Republic, I think Stanley Javier hit for the cycle. That was back when they used to wear those yellow uniforms, which they were ugly, but he had a great game. That was my last game that I watched in the DR.

And then later on I had the honor to play for our team a year and a half ago, two years ago, and we had the opportunity to be the manager of the Escogido and play in that big series against Licey. It was pretty amazing.

I played World Series, playoff, a lot of places, but there was no place louder than Game 6 and Game 7 in the Dominican Republic. I lived that, and being part now of this World Baseball Classic, this is something that you're going to see. Our fans love baseball. We breathe, we eat, we lead baseball, and that's something you're going to see here in the next couple of weeks in Miami.

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