

World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Venezuela vs Nicaragua

Monday, 9 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Manager Omar Lopez

Pregame Press Conference

Q. It's only two games plus the exhibition games but the pitcher has been doing a good job. Can you talk to us about Johan Santana, the work he has done with the pitchers?

OMAR LOPEZ: When we had the response that I had talked to him before, he was in the position of the assistant manager and his responsibility was to assist in that department, pitching. But then we had the vacancy. I talked to him a lot and I realized what I wanted for the world Classic at the point in time.

I mean, someone that could be able to talk to them, people that respected him, a person that he knows how to speak, how to connect with human beings. And that's very important for this kind of short tournament, and that's why I made the decision. I never doubted his capability of this process in this event. He has been talking to the pitchers, speaking about the attack tech plan and how to pitch, how to throw the different balls and that they believe in themselves. Very often they say you have to believe in yourself, you have to believe in yourself, but how can I do that? And the pitcher or the player actually has so many doubts and questions that he's able to transmit that. Something real so that they can go out and compete.

Q. A follow up question. Players have many questions and doubts especially in this kind of short tournament, and to us Venezuelans this event is so important. Managers make decisions. Do you have doubts? Do you have questions yourself? I'm asking you in the context of this tournament?

OMAR LOPEZ: No, in baseball, if you take a look at my history, I say what people see is success; what people don't see, hard work, persistence, dedication, sleepless nights, sacrifice, discipline, criticism, doubt, risks, failures. That's baseball. If you don't doubt. If you don't have any doubts or questions or any of those things you shouldn't be in this business. Of course you always have dedication,



hard work, the doubts, et cetera, but you have to believe in yourself, you have to go through these in order to be confident in your job in this game. People that do not see this sport don't know what we have to do day after day. Even the players, even the players. Because the Coach has to be strong with a firm hand to not fall. But it's more difficult for them. And I could number many other things but you see only the Acuna success, that and that and that, if someone is a champion there. But to reach that, that has been difficult, very difficult.

Q. You have had so many experiences with Dusty Baker, the manager or the coach that you are going to face in the rival team. What does he mean to you in your life, his legacy for you?

OMAR LOPEZ: I have to thank God, as simple as that, that in my 29 years of professional career, God put in my way people that I never thought that they would be there. He's a wise man, he's a Bible in baseball, especially where he came from, his history, how he grew up. That's priceless to know his principles. And then in the final years of the career, which is not over yet by the way because Dusty is still active working in baseball, many people believe that because he's kind of old, he's going to quit. No, he's brilliant. He has a brilliant mind, sharp mind. And having him as a mentor -- because to me he was a mentor in the first four years in the majors and he was in the Houston Astros -- was an honor for me. I was pleased to be around him and to learn with him in terms of baseball and considering his perspective all the time.

Q. A few minutes ago we saw Pablo Lopez in the hallway. How do you think the guys are going to receive or welcome Pablo even under his conditions because he was recently operated?

OMAR LOPEZ: I saw him for a minute. I saw the reactions of so many players around him, welcoming him. They were all happy because he was with us. He's going to support us. Motivating them, giving strength mentally. We spoke for a little while, but he means a lot to us. This is what you see, just like I said. But before being physically here, he was always present in the WhatsApp group, paying



attention helping during the preparation of the games, et cetera.

Q. Omar, the Dominican Republic and Venezuelans are just qualified for the next round. How have you seen the other teams such as rivalry, Netherlands. Generally speaking the tournament and other teams, DR and Venezuelan are qualifying in the way other groups are very interesting. I would like to know your opinion on that.

OMAR LOPEZ: I haven't paid much attention to the other groups, to be honest. There's so many games in one day and I try to stay focused on my game, on my routine and I don't pay much attention to other things because they're not connected to what I have to do the next day.

We are in a better position than others. It doesn't mean, however, that if the game was tied, difficult or not, some teams have better outcomes than the others. But the level at least in our pool, in our group, the level has been good even when the outcomes are different and we have to recognize that there are some teams that are more solid in terms of the roster. That makes the difference even when it doesn't guarantee the success or the victory.

But you have more possibilities, flexibility than other teams. Why I like this kind of tournament is to have a team that never quits no matter the talent you have on the team. You could have the worst talent of the world in a team, or average talent, but if you do the right thing, if you prepare yourself the best possible way, you are going to go out, compete and you are going to make a good impression on the field.

Q. Did you see the guideline for what this tournament means as a 2028 Olympics qualifier and if so did you have any thoughts in the fairness of that process?

OMAR LOPEZ: Yes, that's part of our goal, that's part of our goal. That's our main goal actually right now, the first one, and then the second one's win the whole thing. If we have to get to the finals to win or to get to the finals to be in the Olympics, we have to do it. But we might get to the semifinals and we're in the Olympics, that's the main goal, then after that we're going to focus on win the whole thing.

Q. Sounds like there are only two spots for other teams from the Americas. Is that a problem at all?

OMAR LOPEZ: I don't know if it's a problem. The problem is going to be for the team that's going to compete against Venezuelan and Dominican. The problem is not ours. We have everything in our hands and we have to do our best to be able to get to the finals and win the whole thing. Then

after that it's going to be double celebration.

Q. Speaking about the game tomorrow, you have another game today but the Dominican Republic has qualified for the next round, and trying Venezuelan to be in the first place. You will be facing Japan or Korea. The fans are thinking about that, the revenge of the Dominicans against Venezuelan.

OMAR LOPEZ: Let's speak about fans first. It's so nice to see that rivalry in the social networks between both fans and I would like to be a fan some day to play drums and to chant, we want our DR, we want the DR, something like that. From our perspective, everyone is expecting the game, but they have to think about the next attempt in quarterfinals, semifinals. What about if we beat the Dominican Republic the day after tomorrow and I lose in the quarterfinals, what about if I lose to DR and then the DR loses the quarterfinals? It's not worth it.

No matter who you are going to face, Korea, Japan, they are very tough rifles for both the DR and Venezuelan will have to be prepared to continue advancing. Why do I want to continue advancing with the DR, both teams in the next round and then to face again the moment of truth.

Q. How do you assess his first two games and how important of a role did he play with Chourio out and where do you see his role kind of moving forward in this tournament?

OMAR LOPEZ: He's fine, he's ready, he's going to start today, he's going to play today and hopefully he feels well. We'll see how he feels tomorrow. We're going to have an off day tomorrow, but we're going to have a workout and I hope he feels fine. I think his role is going to be every day in the lineup. He missed two games and it's time for him to get back in the lineup.

Q. How do you assess Sanoja?

OMAR LOPEZ: Sanoja is going to be our guy and I think he's going to come in the game if we need him for any type of defensive role and then also he might pinch hit as well, too.

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