

World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Dominican Republic vs Venezuela

Wednesday, 11 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Dominican Republic Manager Albert Pujols

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Greetings, Albert. Can you tell us the impressions and the expectations about this game? This might be like an anticipated final. I mean, at least for the Dominican fans. Another question. Omar Lopez said that to me this is not an event that is going to give me anything professionally. I do this for my country. In your case, what does it mean to you to represent your country and to win this event?

ALBERT PUJOLS: To me, it's an honor, and I support Omar. I'm doing this for my country, for my homeland. Every time that I had a chance to wear this uniform, as I did in 2006 and now as a manager, I'm always representing my homeland as well as the other players. We're very proud to be Dominicans and to make it to the United States and to be successful.

Not only that, but to represent our flag, our country. This has always been my goal. For 23 years I wore the St. Louis jersey, Anaheim jerseys, and then back to St. Louis, but I always represented my country in my heart, the Dominican. So I support what Omar said.

This is not for my name to be in the top. Thank God I am already there. God did it -- I did this as a professional during my professional career. Now I'm doing this for my country. I'm very proud, honored to have this opportunity given by God and by Nelson and the management of the Federation.

Regarding the game, yeah. The fans have been expecting this game, but to us it is just another game, another game that we are going to try to win. And as a manager, we are going to move the best possible pieces to win tonight.

Q. Omar Lopez was speaking about the importance of this game and the Classic, but also to guarantee a spot for the Olympics 2028. Do you agree with him? Is that important, to represent the Dominican Republic in the



L.A. Olympics?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Every time we have a chance to play in Olympics, you have to do your best as a manager, and the players will do their best to have that opportunity.

You can control whatever you can control. The rest is in God's hands. As a manager, this is what I'm going to do, and that's what I have been doing for almost two weeks. So it's only five or six days left, and we want to be champions.

Q. Two questions for you. First off, what do you remember from the 2006 game when you went up against Venezuela and Miguel Cabrera, who's obviously in the other dugout tonight?

ALBERT PUJOLS: It was fun, man. It was the first World Baseball Classic and I think everybody has just the same high probably that we all have about this game tonight, that's the same high that you had back then in 2006.

Everybody was excited about playing, about representing the country. And, man, I remember that first game playing against Venezuela. It was awesome. I was like, wow, this is fun.

And it just got so much better over the last 20 years. People want to participate more. Their countries are getting better. Because of that, MLB have taken baseball all over, you know, just playing, you know -- I mean, in the last -- two years ago, I think, we were in London and I was part of that. I think, you know, Korea, Japan. I mean, just -- I felt like over the last 20 years, because of this tournament, baseball has meant so much.

So it was fun, it was fun. It was great memories, and now I got to do it as a manager once again.

Q. And then I also wanted to ask you about Junior Lake. You spent a lot of time with Junior back in winter ball. What does it mean to you and to the country and to Dominican baseball to have him here on this team?



A Junior has been a guy that has so much to say, you know, down in the Dominican Republic. He had a great year. I had a chance to be his manager, you know, a year and a half ago. Just a great leader, great player, great attitude.

And I think when we were looking to add another player, he was out there in the mix with the three players that we were looking, and I think Nelson and I chose to go with Junior because it fit, that right player that we wanted to have here in this tournament, you know? And just the attitude and what he brings with the experience.

Q. What's the key to beat a team such as Venezuela? We know that this is not the final qualification, but is everyone available, including all the pitchers in the bullpen?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Not everyone is available. Christopher Sanchez is not. But all the rest, they're all available. We would like Sandy not to pitch -- actually, Sandy to pitch three or four innings, and then we're going to use the bullpen as we have been during the last three games and try to win the game.

Now, what's the key for beating the Dominican Republic? That depends on the game. We are going to stay focused on the defense, try to pitch not only the opener or starter, but also the relievers. And we hope that the offense responds the way they have been doing that. That would be the key.

Q. Can you tell us the approach of the national team considering what happened to the U.S.? They are not qualified for the second round yet. How to avoid that kind of situation?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, brother, for that, you have a staff that supports you. It's my brother. I don't know what happened. He's a baseball guy, he knows a lot, and he has so many coaches that know about baseball. That's why you have your coaching staff there, your eyes and ears. I cannot see and hear everything. That's why I have Borbon, Flavor (phonetic), Polanco, Wellington, Joel, Jose, experienced people that could see many things in order to help me. This is not just "Albert Pujols, what can you do to ask the coaching staff to prepare all those players and win this tournament?"

And this is what I told them on day one in the first minute we had, and thank God we have been doing a great job.

This could happen. That kind of situation could happen, but that's why you have your coaches, bench coach, and

assistants to help you. If you don't know the rules, if you are not aware of the rules.

Q. You have talked about managing players like Junior Caminero and Junior Lake in winter ball. In your time as a manager, what have you learned about the best ways you can share your knowledge and expertise with players?

A I would say communication. The player wants to know what their role is to communicate when is a day off, to communicate when they are in the lineup.

And then from there, you just start building a great relationship. I mean, I knew Junior from playing against him in Chicago and playing against him in the Dominican Republic, the amount that I play.

But, you know, I think that when I got a chance to be his manager in the DR, I built a great relationship because more than the talent and the ability that these players have, man, they're human beings, and you want to create a great relationship.

Like this experience that I'm creating with these guys probably going to be on the top of my career, you know, to be able to have this talent and this great team. So I think having a great relationship and talk to them about anything, man, that they feel comfortable.

And I'm a big believer that when you allow that to a player, they feel comfortable, and you get the best out of it.

Q. Good afternoon, Albert. You are a baseball man. You have been there for many years. When you manage a machine, a powerhouse such as the one you have, do you think that Albert Pujols is ready to manage in the Majors no matter the result of this Classic? And then how did you choose Sandy Alcantara for tonight?

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, for me, the experience that I have had in baseball, God gave me that experience for 23 years as a professional.

But I started playing baseball since I was 6 following my dad, my uncle, my family, ever since I came back from school. And I had managers such as La Russa, Dave Roberts, Joe Maddon, Ollie Marmol, Hall of Famers. You learn a lot with them, and the talent that God gives you. Talent is different than a gift, you know? And I think that God gave me that gift because I have learned a lot. And this is something that I have been developing, and I have the chance to get to the stadium every day and learn something new every day.

I don't think that just because I have been here for 23 years, I know everything. Every time I come to the stadium, I have this open mindset to learn, and I will learn with every play and going to go back to the hotel thinking, well, I could have done this a different way, et cetera, or any move, any decisions.

So the credit, I give it to God because of this blessing, this gift of learning. I make those adjustments.

And how did I select Alcantara for today? Well, this is the preparation that we have been doing for months with Wellington Cepeda and he's the best option.

You may be speaking about revenge, but no, it's not revenge. He's the best matchup as a pitcher to face Venezuela tonight.

Q. Your offense has scored a ton of runs this tournament so far, but you've faced only two active Major League pitchers and two others that have Major League experience. Tonight you are going to be facing a number of Major League caliber pitchers. How do you expect that to affect your offense?

All I think our offense can hit against anybody. You can see that lineup from the top to the bottom. They have that in the big league their whole career, but they can throw anybody.

Hey, we may be off today, but that doesn't mean that we're not going to hit. Our offense can handle anybody. And I trust in that, that they're going to have a great quality at-bats.

I mean, obviously they're pitching against -- I mean, they're facing a great pitcher today in Rodriguez, but we're going to have our plan that we're going to go out there and try to execute.

But when you look at the lineup, you can tell that all the guys on the other side, you might want to go one around, but second time around, this lineup can be tough.

And I look at it like an all-star game, you know? When you go through an all-star game and you see guys like Josh and all those guys, Caminero, everybody in the same, I'm, like, how can I face these guys?

But that doesn't mean anything. We still have to go out there and perform. And I think those guys are ready for it. We're trained for this, we're built for this, and we're going to try and go out there and perform once again no matter who we're facing.

You can talk to me after the game. You can talk to me after the game. You can grab me after the game. That sounds bad.

Q. A follow-up question you answered in English. How can you separate the one that played? As a manager, you learn from the players, the players learn from you. This is the reflection that we can see in the team, arriving early to train, et cetera. How does that work with all the players?

ALBERT PUJOLS: I think leadership, the staff, the manager or management and what -- and Nelson did the previous have seen that for one year now. And I expect that from them and they expect that from me.

We have a great communication. I will -- I always tell them, "This is your game, this is your show. Play your game." I'm not here to teach them how to play ball because they know how to play baseball. We are just here to prepare them for any situation that they might face and to win the games.

And once again, tonight we expect -- we hope to be successful. When you have this group with Vladdy, Machado, Soto, Junior, Tatis Jr., Sandy, it's like a punch, you know? When you want to dry something over here that is wet, you know, everyone follows you.

I'm very, very proud of those players, about their behavior and how hungry they are to win this World Classic. And this is going to help us to continue being successful as -- until now. Thank you.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports).