

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals

Thursday, 12 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Japan

Manager Hirokazu Ibatata

Workout Day Press Conference

Q. Good afternoon. Can you hear me? The adjustments that you're going to make against the pitchers, such as Suarez, most of your hitters are left-handed, and Suarez has been doing a great job. Can you tell me about that process?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, in the games, I think if I have left hitters and four of them are right hitters, I think it's well-balanced. So the left batters -- I think we have quite a few players, somebody that can get long hitters. I think we need really long hitters to play against the world level players, so that's why I think we raised left batters pretty well.

Q. What are the greatest challenges of Venezuela, who is the rival that you are going to face on Saturday?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, of course we have played four games, and we have some break. I think -- I don't know. Just getting into the play, And I think as soon as play ball start, I hope it will help the team to just kind of get into it. Just kind of training the team and just mental training to get into it.

So if we can do that, I think we can play Japanese baseball.

Q. Could you confirm whether Yamamoto is going to be the starting pitcher on Saturday and then Kikuchi will be the reliever? Is that your plan? And how are you going to prepare to face Venezuela where there are so many Major League players?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Yeah. I think I'm going to go with Yamamoto Saturday. So after that is -- I have not thought of it. Well, that's the end of it. We'll have to put every pitcher that we have.

So yesterday, of course, I know fairly decided Venezuela and Dominican Republic, so I started making plans. We



have a great staff. So pitchers and batters, we have plenty of information, and so I think I'm going to start training the players.

Q. Hi. Last time I saw that some of the Samurai Japan players were at the ballpark. I'm not sure if you were here as well. I'm just curious what your thoughts on the game between DM and Venezuela was, and if you were here, your response to the atmosphere in the ballpark. Thank you.

HIROKAZU IBATA: I think the data is just data. I think I'm going to have to use that very effectively, of course. But, of course, I just want players to play as they feel on the field. So I think that data is just, it's important for prep stage.

Q. I think Ohtani is a play in the highlight TV, and I think you're trying to use younger players every chance?

HIROKAZU IBATA: I don't really have any particular purpose, but I think any players -- young players, I want to give them a chance. I think I know the number of pitches that Ohtani can play, so I was thinking he will play -- I think he will throw really good balls today.

Q. I wanted to know about the -- this is the best eight. I think the last time it was the Tokyo Dome, that was played in Miami this time, so I wanted to know how you feel about it.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Of course. Either play in Japan or play here, there is no difference. It is a very important game.

But if you push me, when we play in Japan -- if we play in Japan and pitcher have some room to play, and here it's -- I don't know. Pitcher Yamamoto may not be able to get to the finals. So that will be the only concern.

Q. Not using Ohtani as a pitcher in this WBC, how has that's affected your planning? You had to use different pitchers and not Ohtani in this tournament.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Not really. I think I know there was no plan of using him, so I think that's just the way it is. We just



don't have that option. So I have all the pitchers that I need.

Q. This is the top eight. If you have any particular player that you want to point out?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Of course, our upper hitters and I think we need to have all the players on the upper side, they need to play pretty well. So of course it's critical, and batters need to do their job.

Q. This player Yamamoto is limited to a certain number of pitches. So, of course, all those things are -- I don't know how many pitches you think you are hoping to catch.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Of course, I want him to be able to pitch as many as he can. But, of course, each pitcher has their rules and target, so that's what I'm hoping for.

Q. I believe you watched the game yesterday. And what do you think about the mood in this WBC?

HIROKAZU IBATA: I didn't come to the field. It was easier to watch from TV, so I did watch it on TV. I could feel all the mood or excitement on the scene. Of course, good teams are playing against each other, so I know that's going to be a very difficult game to play. So I think tough games will continue from this point on.

Q. What is the Sera pitcher, and what is the -- please tell me about the pitcher that he is going to play first in Venezuela?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Okay. I think I'm looking for a combination of pitchers, and I think he will do the changeup for the right hitters. I was hoping that he will do his best ball to the batter.

Q. You said that each pitcher has their own rules, but is there a limit or a number of innings or pitches that Yamamoto can perform on Saturday?

HIROKAZU IBATA: I don't really -- there is no limit, but I think he's going to just do full throttle from the beginning. That's what I believe. So I think I might have to decide what to do, but I hope I don't have to put the different pitcher in the middle of the inning. I hope the pitcher will complete the innings.