

# World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals 1 - Korea vs Dominican Republic

Friday, 13 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Dominican Republic Manager Albert Pujols General Manager Nelson Cruz

### Pregame Press Conference

NELSON CRUZ: Good afternoon. We're getting Bello on the news that is around because he won't be able to pitch because we only have three starters. He went to Boston for his training. He has to be ready for his season. So starting on Sunday, he will be back at the team. That's the only piece of news that I would like to provide. That's it.

**Q. We talked to Cristopher after his first appearance. He told us that it was complicated to face a team that he doesn't know. The games have to be planned. Can you tell me something about that? And how about your offense or attack plan that he's going to execute? I mean, he didn't know the batters, the hitters, and he couldn't execute properly.**

ALBERT PUJOLS: First of all, we are going to continue with our plan. We want Cristopher to pitch four or five innings, and then to use the bullpen as we have been doing so far.

Of course, it is difficult, like I said yesterday, not to have so much information. But you have to trust the scout team and the information and the report that they have been providing.

And then we have a game plan. If we have to make any adjustments, we can do that during the game. The most important thing is for him to be ready and to leave that possibility open for any adjustments that are required. We just hope Cristopher to have a good performance.

**Q. Albert, we have seen some differences on the games. Some managers have said that these are wars or fights, and then Contreras and Tatis say "hi" during the game. Any difference compared to the times you**



**used to be a player?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: No. You just compete. There are no differences. Many of those guys are friends, some of them are teammates.

And yes, if someone crossed that line, you're going to be focused on the game. But we are not enemies, we are not enemies. So it is common for Tatis and Contreras to say hi to each other. That was a beautiful thing, and it teaches that, yes, we are competing, but we are not enemies.

**Q. Any other update on the Dominican Republic team and for Pujols? From now on, everything is knockout phase. Is there some pressure? What would you say to the guys to manage that kind of situation?**

NELSON CRUZ: For the time being, no new updates, no movements. The team is going to be the same just the way it is now.

ALBERT PUJOLS: What can you tell those guys that scored over 40 runs? Play the same baseball that we have been playing the last week. I mean, they just have to believe in themselves, to wait the best at-bat, pitch. Nothing changes. It is the same game.

But the only thing different is that if you lose, you've got to go home, so we have to win all the games. But pressure? No, there is no pressure at all in our team. Maybe the first at-bat, you know, during the game.

My dad used to tell me, if you don't feel that adrenaline, that pressure, you won't be ready or you are not ready for the battle.

But we are ready. We believe in our lineup and our team, the team that we have put together for one year now, and so far we have been successful. Great results.

**Q. Bello comes back to the team, but is he going to pitch at least one inning? Because I was calculating the time between Saturday and Tuesday, I don't know. Albert, any changes in the lineup today?**

NELSON CRUZ: Like I said, he's going to be training. He



has to be ready for his season. We wanted him to pitch tomorrow, but we have to see the amount of pitches that he will throw back in Boston. It depends on that number and the days off before the next appearance, according to the rules of the Classic.

ALBERT PUJOLS: Our only change is Augustine. He will be the catcher. That's why maybe you don't have the lineup. We are waiting for Korea to send their lineup. I don't want to make my lineup public, you know?

I don't know why the mystery, but they have not sent their lineup. We provided the lineup early in the morning, and it's a mystery with the Japanese and the Korean teams. They don't provide the lineup on time, and that's why we won't send it.

But I don't have a mystery with the lineup or my change. The only change we have for today is Augustine.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Of course. That's what I said.

**Q. Luis Severino and Cristopher Sanchez were available. I would like to understand the decision you made to put Cristopher Sanchez to pitch against Korea. And Korea pushed Japan to the limit. What's the message that you are communicating to avoid to underestimate teams such as Korea?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: You said Severino and Cristopher Sanchez were available, you said?

**Q. Yes. Severino and Suarez were available today, to start today.**

ALBERT PUJOLS: We haven't changed our bullpen. Cristopher Sanchez has been -- we are taking the same steps. Severino will pitch on Sunday, according to his schedule.

No, we haven't changed anything. Cristopher Sanchez was foreseen to pitch this game. If we advance to the next one, Severino will be our starter.

**Q. What do you think about the starter from Korea, Ryu? He is a pitcher. He was in the Majors. Many of the players know this starter. Is that good for the team? Now they can pitch for 80 pitches in this part of the Classic.**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Of course. It's always good to know the pitcher or to face a pitcher that you know already. But at the same time, you have to be ready for the game and

you have to make some adjustments during the game.

In one hour or so, the players will have a meeting with the coaches, and they will try to execute the plan that we have been executing for the last four games. We want our offense to perform the way they have been doing so far.

**Q. Question for both of you. Could you reflect on the differences between playing in the World Baseball Classic and having team roles in the World Baseball Classic?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, I think you have more responsibility. That's it, you know? But for me, it's been an honor and a pleasure to be able to represent my country as a manager.

I have to thank this man. A big part of sitting here is because he chose me and the committee to trust me with this team that we have put together. So I'm honored to be here.

I think as a player in the first round and the only one that I've played, it was fun, but there's been a lot of change over the last 20 years. The man sitting next to me, Nelson, has done four, so he's seen all the changes.

As a manager, the only thing that I feel right now is just more responsibility, looking for a different place to move pieces to help the team to win at the end of the day, and that's it, you know? I wish I was out there playing, but my time is over, so now I am enjoying as a manager.

NELSON CRUZ: Yeah, definitely. I would mention -- good points. When you play, you only focus on whatever you can control, getting ready for the games, and everything else is set.

Now my responsibility and Albert's responsibility is to make sure the players are ready in any situation that comes up before the game, during the game, so they don't have to worry about it. So we take care of all the stuff and they focus on just to get there and play the game.

Obviously when you play, you know you can control what you're doing out there. As a coach and GM, you know, you kind of pray for them to do good. But yeah, definitely harder to be out than to be on the field.

**Q. You mentioned that Korea is a team of a small ball and small error. What is your coping strategy against South Korea, and what are the most impressive players against Korean teams?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: I really haven't followed them much.

Like I say, I've been too busy preparing myself, preparing our team.

I mean, we have our scouting doing the homework and trusting them with every information that they have given me. Obviously my job is not sitting here and tell you how we're going to attack them, you know, how we're going to play.

I think we have a strategy of how we're going to go about this game, and you guys are going to see it in the next three hours.

**Q. Albert and our dear GM, we know that Luis Castillo is in your reserve. Have you considered to use one of those guys in your reserve to help you as pitchers?**

NELSON CRUZ: Well, I said a couple of days ago that we had two options for this second stage, Framer and Luis Castillo. Castillo came later to the training camp, so the process is different now. We have to protect his health and his arm so the team and he understand it's better for him to stay with his organization.

In the other case, Framer, Luis Castillo, who had a personal problem, and he came late to the training camp.

**Q. Real quick, the Dominican teams are just having so much fun here. You guys are bringing baseball back to the kids' game. Tell us about that energy that you guys are bringing. How can Major Leagues baseball maybe implement some of that moving forward? Even people that are not from the Dominican are rooting for you guys because of how much fun you're having.**

ALBERT PUJOLS: I just don't think you can. That's in our blood, that's in our DNA. That's how we play baseball. That responsibility that we have wearing this jersey, especially representing our country -- the culture, the attitude, the way the guys go about it -- I mean, you're born with that, and sometimes, you know, that's even harder to teach.

But for these players, I mean, they have performed on this level, and I think for us the difference is that we enjoy. And when we wear this jersey, we wear it really proud not just because we're representing God, our country, but also our family. And so many millions and millions of Dominican people, they are watching and care about it.

So to tell you the truth, I don't have really an answer to tell you how can we apply that here to the United States. We're just different, the way we go about it.

And I can say that when you turn one, the first thing that

you get is a bat and a ball and a glove down there in the DR for Christmas or New Year's. So that's how it is.

And you see it, you see it. You don't see it only in the player, but you see it in our fans. I mean, they have traveled from the DR and from all over the place to come and support it because they know how important. And I'm not saying it's not important to other country, but that's how we look at it.

**Q. Japan and the United States will play in the final according to the rule. People have been speaking of that since the 13th or 14th of March. For you guys, from the perspective of the manager and the GM, maybe you know that from the very beginning. How do you deal with that? How could this impact in the result of the World Classic and the participation of DR?**

NELSON CRUZ: We're focused on the day-by-day, and we are focused on the next rival. When it is the time to face those things, we'll be focusing on that.

The next rival is Korea. And we have a great responsibility. As Albert said, when we have to face the other teams, we'll think about it. But today our focus is Korea.

**Q. Nelson, 13 years ago you were in this Classic. The Dominican Republic won this Classic defeatless. Any recollections from that time? And Albert, what happened in 2013? Have you thought about winning this championship?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: We have to win this championship defeatless. There is no option for that.

As Nelson just said, we are going to live day after day and try to prepare the guys for the game today against Korea. And then, God willing, we advance to the next stage or round. We are going to think about the game on Sunday and then the final. So our goal when we put together this team to win this tournament, as simple as that. This is our goal, and this is what we are doing.

We had a great first round. There is no tomorrow. We'll continue preparing these guys, myself, and the coaching staff so that they too are best on the field. And we have to win three games in a row to be champions.

**Q. When people see Dominican baseball, what should they think about?**

ALBERT PUJOLS: Well, the talent, the gift that God has given us, the blessing, the talent. We have been a blessed country, a blessed people by God, and the talent of our

players, the Hall of Famers and the examples given by those former players, you know? And to be honest, we were players, and we are very proud to represent our country.

Nelson played for different teams. So did I. At the same time, we had our flag and our homeland in our heart. This is something you are born with, and we are super proud to be able to participate.

NELSON CRUZ: Yeah. To us, baseball is like a religion. It's a way of life to escape poverty, to have fun. In the Dominican Republic there are no political issues or economic issues. The whole country is focused on one thing. They are united to support this team, and this is what we are, as a country. We love the game. And the game is not just a game, it is a way of life.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports)