

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals 4 - Venezuela vs Japan

Saturday, 14 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Manager Omar Lopez

Pregame Press Conference



Venezuela and Japan have faced off, but you guys played in the Premier 12 and Ibañez was the manager then. So I'm curious, are there things that you were able to learn from that game, are there things from that tournament even though very different rosters that you're able to bring today?

Q. Omar, Venezuela against the present champion of this championship. We have been saying that Venezuela has the offense required to beat anyone in this tournament. Are you close to click to see what the lineup is about to do on the field?

OMAR LOPEZ: Of course, Enrique, we're ready for that. That's good that you have mentioned that because with the days and the practices, the training and the games, the swings are much better. They look much better. The timing of the players is much better.

In the last couple of days, we were off, but we had great practicing sessions. I was talking to the players and the coaches about some adjustments to be made, and I told them who was going to play. So mentally, that's very important because they know beforehand who we are going to face.

Q. I don't know if there was a message or a speech from you to the players or anybody inside the team regarding the game today. And if not, what kind of a message would be the best or the right one?

OMAR LOPEZ: No, no speech at all. We just had a meeting today, as usual, before we go to the stadium to speak about the pitcher and the reliever that we might face, and the pitchers for them to get to know better the batters they are going to face.

In the last couple of days, they had several meetings and they have been communicating, sharing their ideas how to attack, how to do things.

We all know what is at stake and what to do tonight. Sometimes those speeches are useless because they know what to do in the game.

Q. This is the first time in the World Baseball Classic

OMAR LOPEZ: Yes, of course. They didn't have Yoshida, they didn't have Murakami. They have, I think Sato was there and some other off the top of my head, and also all the information that I have.

So just basically they play clean baseball, they play clean baseball. We have to play clean. You cannot give them any opportunity because they're going to capitalize. Otherwise you start to pitch backwards and then in trouble.

So simple, we have to work and play with our strength, which is attack our hitters and make themselves out. On our side, just be patient and work with our strength as well. Like I said, we pitch, we play defense, we score a couple runs, we're going to be able to succeed tonight.

Q. A few days ago you spoke about the possibility to be in the Olympics. The scenario is now much more clear. Victory today over Venezuela, if Puerto Rico loses, you could go to the Olympics. Are you talking about that in the clubhouse?

OMAR LOPEZ: As the Bible say, we are getting ready for the battle. We are ready for this battle.

Q. When you put together the lineup that hasn't been announced, by the way, did you consider what you have seen, the information that you have about the pitcher you are going to face or some adjustments that you are willing to make, something that you wanted to improve?

OMAR LOPEZ: The lineup is about to be announced. Just before coming here I had an interview. We received the Japanese lineup. We were waiting for their lineup in order to announce ours.

We took a look at the active roster we have today. Some of the players that have faced Yamamoto, some players



that I wanted them to be in the lineup, and some of them that could share their experience in terms of approach, how to face the pitcher Yamamoto, something that they could share in the group. I just wanted to give more time to the lineup to capitalize on all the possibilities we have.

Q. What does this tournament represent for the people in Venezuela?

OMAR LOPEZ: The best. This is the max. Venezuela is expecting this tournament because we have the top players. All the TV channels are streaming. The social networks are streaming the game.

As a manager of this team, I do know my responsibility that I have and that I will have, so let's go for it.

Q. Is Ranger Suarez the right person for this start? What is your relationship with him like? How much have you seen him throw in person over the years?

OMAR LOPEZ: How much I've seen him throw in person? A lot. Especially eight shutout innings, seven shutout innings I remember one time last year.

Ranger, basically -- I said this before, he wasn't supposed to pitch today. It was supposed to be Pablo Lopez, and then Pablo Lopez got hurt in spring training and we had to call Boston to see if we could push back Ranger to pitch against Netherlands, which is line him up to pitch in the quarterfinals.

So I think he's one of the best pitchers that we have in our country and in baseball too, and he's the perfect fit to face Japan.

And in talking with them, he's a very cool person, cold blood all the time. You know, he's always joking around, always smiling. So that's what makes the difference from Ranger Suarez to probably another pitcher.

If you get to know Ranger Suarez in the clubhouse, you would probably say, I don't know if this guy is going to be able to pitch, but when he gets on the mound, he's really good. He changes his whole approach, his mindset to be able to go out and perform.

Q. Hi, Omar. When you are facing Japan, usually Shohei is the key guy, and he gives that team momentum. So the question is, how are you going to try to neutralize Shohei? Maybe using lefties is the key?

OMAR LOPEZ: Can I answer that question after the game? Because I don't know how the game is going to be.

But in Premier 12 in Japan, there was no Ohtani, but there were some other guys too. I remember I said, this guy cannot kill us, cannot hurt us. Then the guy behind killed us, then the guy after him also hit a double. So it's every single guy.

But Ohtani's different, he's a different name. I don't know. We'll see how the game goes, you know?

At the beginning he's going to face a lefty, you know? And then if Ranger goes all the way to the fourth, fifth, he's going to face another lefty, which is Ranger in the second at-bat. Then after that, I don't know. We'll see where we're at.

But I know that the Japan team knows I have five lefties in my pen, so expect it.

Q. Not only the adjustment that you mentioned in terms of versatility and the players that know Yamamoto knowing that Korea had a great game against Japan. Did that have an impact on your decision about the lineup today?

OMAR LOPEZ: No, not at all. They are totally different games.

Q. The first question is: What part of the Japanese baseball do you respect? The Japanese team is participating in the WBC, and the Team Japan means -- what Team Japan means to you.

OMAR LOPEZ: Not only Japanese baseball, but I respect the whole country not only because of the discipline and their culture, but the way they play the game, so cleanly, and the way they prepare.

I was surprised when I watched their practice last year in Japan, and that's why they are different. They are solid and consistent in their level.

Regarding the Japanese team itself, they have the best of the best. And maybe there was a Team B in Japan, but on this side of the world we are preparing the same way the Latin American countries are preparing, in this case Venezuela and the other teams, to face Japan. Today it is our turn to face them. We are going to do our best to win.

Q. My question is similar to my colleague's, Japanese colleagues. He know that Ohtani is a major challenge, but what other Japanese hitters you have to take care of in order to neutralize them and to have a quiet, relaxed game?

OMAR LOPEZ: We projected the lineup based on the games that they have had before, with Kondo would be the second bat. But they put Sato, a very dangerous hitter, after Ohtani, very strong and powerful. That has vulnerabilities as well. But you have Murakami, we have to take care of Suzuki as well. They are very disciplined hitters.

They have a couple of hitters in the seventh to ninth bat. They are not very powerful, but they can be difficult, and they can make the difference different ways, running the bases, you know? So we have to take care of them as well so that Ohtani comes at bat without anybody on bases.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports)