

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals 4 - Venezuela vs Japan

Sunday, 15 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Japan

Manager Hirokazu Iбата

Postgame Press Conference

Venezuela 8, Japan 5

Q. In the situation of Yamamoto, he had only thrown 69 pitches, so he still had 11 pitches, and he had concluded efficiently the third and fourth inning. He was substituted by Sumida, who was punished by the Venezuela team. When was the decision to remove Yamamoto in the fifth inning?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Of course changing in the middle of the innings is -- well, it is -- I just thought it was a little bit too much for the relieving pitchers, and we were just thinking about somewhere around 60 pitches. So I thought that was pretty much the limit. That's how I decided.

Q. Can you give us your impressions? What was the key so that Venezuela was able to beat this powerful team which is Japan?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, it was very strong batters. Many batters are there. And most of the Japanese pitchers, straight balls were bounced off, so I felt they were very powerful pitchers. That's how I felt.

Q. When you put together this team and you left out relievers such as Matsuyama, Iwazaki and the starting pitcher, there was some criticism in the media. Do you think that this was the best possible roster for Japan in this WBC?

HIROKAZU IBATA: I think all the players who came here, we have great pitchers and great batters, I believe.

Q. Ahead 5-2 in the fifth inning, were you feeling pretty confident about winning and advancing?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, it was a very powerful team, so I know we couldn't relieve. But we just felt they were a very powerful team. That's how I felt.



Q. Three years ago your pitching was very dominant in this tournament. What do you think went wrong with the pitching this time around?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, I don't think anything wrong with those, and some of the pitchers were in three years ago as well. So I think many countries are getting better, I believe. So I know we lost this time, but Team Japan -- I would hope Japan would get better next time. I will hope Team Japan will win next time.

Q. This to date -- it seems like there was something you could see, very difficult pitchers, but I believe the pitchers had issues.

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, the pitchers I sent out were very great pitchers, but the results were what it was. But the pitchers that threw innings were great pitchers.

Q. Did you say anything to the players? Let us know.

HIROKAZU IBATA: That is true that we lost the game, so we have to work on that better. And also for the pitcher, I think we need to throw straight balls and not rely on the curveballs. And three years later we're going to come back again, and I believe it will connect to the development of Japanese baseball.

Q. From 2023, you became a manager, and I think you have some stories that you can tell us. You finished one of the milestones, but is there something that you gained from the experience?

HIROKAZU IBATA: Well, it is very difficult to form a team in a very short term, and all the players who came here are very considerate and they are trying to work on what they can do for the team. So I know it was a very short term to create the team.

But it was easier for me because of the players' contributions. So all the teams -- some players could not make it over here, but we really appreciate -- I mean, that's all full of appreciation to those players.

Q. Do you think that today there was a situation if you



could have Ohtani as a pitcher, you could have used him, do you think that he could have helped you to keep the lead of Japan?

HIROKAZU IBATA: I don't know. We didn't have an option for Ohtani to pitch from the middle of the game, so I don't think I would have known what would have happened. But, of course, I would have wanted him to play, but I didn't have a choice.

Q. I think he had struck out twice and I think the environment has really changed. What did you feel about it from the bench when you were there?

HIROKAZU IBATA: So, of course the pitcher on the opposing team are playing really great balls, and the sliders -- it's a really great position that they were throwing the ball to.

And so of course, after we lost one run and then he hit a home run to catch up to one run, so that was great.

(FastScripts by ASAP Sports)