

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals 4 - Venezuela vs Japan

Sunday, 15 March, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

Team Venezuela

Manager Omar Lopez

Postgame Press Conference

Venezuela 8, Japan 5

Q. Venezuela and the Dominican Republic are qualified for the Olympics. How about your decisions to make the last game against the DR? You said that the bullpen was ready for today, and your pitching coach Johan, can you tell us about that? How did you prepare the team for this team? You put Palencia, Zerpa, De Jesus and other pitchers.

OMAR LOPEZ: That was surgical. They were surgical decisions. That's a very long question, first of all. Thank you because we are with the Dominican Republic, and I have this hat with the No. 58. If you didn't know, No. 58 is the international code to call Venezuela. So if you know someone in Venezuela, call them and tell them that Venezuela is in the Olympics and we are in the semifinal of the WBC.

So we had a meeting two days ago for one and a half hours projecting Japan's lineup. Two days off were positive for us to have the bullpen fresh and to be able to navigate through that lineup.

We decided we had to neutralize the moves Japan did, and that's what we did. It was teamwork. Very briefly, I asked so many questions. I have my own ideas. If something clicked in what I have, perfect, I can add it to my repertoire. And these are healthy decisions, healthy ideas. This is what we did. This is the way we have been working, even to put together our team.

We have to continue working like that. There is no reason not to. We have to be confident in our job internally.

Q. Beating Japan, from your perspective, do you think that Venezuela is a powerhouse in baseball?

OMAR LOPEZ: Venezuela has always been a



powerhouse in baseball. Beating Japan for the first time, and this is the first time that Japan goes home before the semifinal. I mean, we have always been a powerhouse, not because we beat Japan we've become a powerhouse. No way. Today we prayed and we spoke about David and Goliath. For many people who fell today, well, we are the same, and we continue working. We are a global powerhouse just like your country, Japan, the U.S. We all have an importance in the baseball world. But in general, we have had so many players, legends, players that are retired, others that are active. And yes, we can say that we are a global power.

Q. At what point in time did you know that De Jesus was ready for relieving? He had started against Israel. How do you evaluate his job?

OMAR LOPEZ: We realized that as soon as he finished. His appearance against Israel, the manager called me and they asked me when.

And I said, well, depending on the rival, I wanted him to pitch against Korea or Japan because of so many lefty batters they have.

The first appearance was five innings. Maybe this time, three innings. If the things worked different, I would have been so criticized. I have to explain that, you know?

And maybe you want to understand it. As they said, I'm going to explain it to you, but you won't understand it. What else can I do? Butto was already -- he finalized, he made two errors, and then Zerpa was ready, et cetera, et cetera.

Q. What does it mean to you and your team to get a win like this in this city with so many Venezuelans here who can watch you guys personally? A lot of these people maybe can't go back home, can't communicate with their families as much, and they've talked about having a real connection to this team. Is that something that you and the players are kind of conscious of?

OMAR LOPEZ: That's a great question. Not only Miami. I'm doing this for free. I'm not getting paid to manage my



team.

But my country right now is celebrating. It's extremely happy. It's on the streets. They're drinking right now, and that makes me happy than anybody else in this world because that's the only thing that I can do. That's the only thing that I can do for my country.

Trying to manage a team with a lot of people behind me to make my country happy and celebrating. Right now they're celebrating. We've got two more games. They can celebrate the entire country for about a week.

And we want to do our best. We did it today. It's over already. So let's do it. It means a lot for Miami, but it means a lot for my country too. There's a lot of people outside the country too that I hope they're happy right now. That's the only thing that I'm going to take back home.

And 20 years from now, like I said, I made my country happy at least for one or two days. That's all I need.

Q. You said all the time that this version of Venezuela was much better than the previous one. You are right. I know that it was so difficult to put together this team with all the problems.

OMAR LOPEZ: Do you? Do you know?

Q. We all know. But you haven't thrown in the towel.

OMAR LOPEZ: No, I won't.

Q. Give us the surprise. Who comes in the next phases? Any additional players that you can announce?

OMAR LOPEZ: Jose Alvarez will come. Eiberson Castellano pitched yesterday and he's not available. And the other one that was available, Luzardo, he said no. Eduardo Salazar, he was sorry. He spent three weeks in Columbia. He had a visa problem and he's not ready, so he's coming from Orlando.

Q. In the interview two days ago, you wanted to talk about -- I think you studied Japanese relief pitcher studies, and I think you got all the run from those relief pitchers. Can you tell us specifically what type of analysis did you do?

OMAR LOPEZ: When they started, the Japanese relievers, we wanted to see how the manager managed his bullpen. It was a surprise for us today. A couple of times I realized he didn't use analytics, you know, lefty against lefty, right-handed against right-handed. We realized that,

and we put together a lineup. If he was to use the lefty pitchers, I would put my right-handed batters. That's what we did, and that's why we achieved that outcome.

Q. Venezuela didn't win just any game, you wrote another page in baseball history. The last inning, the last out with Ohtani, can you describe that moment, how the players celebrated? And what personally do you represent to qualify our team to the Olympic games for the very first time?

OMAR LOPEZ: I think it's the first sport that qualifies for the Olympics. I didn't know that. I don't know if you heard me, Michelle. I said that we would celebrate that we are going to the Olympics, but I'm doing this for free. I said that before.

I'm just happy. Mario Sota, the president of the Venezuelan Olympic Committee, for giving this opportunity to my country. That is celebrating not only me, but everyone that has been working with me for seven or eight months. This is the very first goal, and this is very rewarding for me as Venezuelan.

I always wanted to get involved in these problems, you know? I always wanted to be in trouble. I asked God to give me wisdom to do something for my country so they could celebrate for a couple of days or three.

So taking this game to L.A. 2028, whoever is the manager, whoever are the players, I am proud that I helped the team for that. And why not win a gold medal in L.A.?

Q. Tell us about the offense of the team. We were speaking about the offense against Yamamoto and Tovar. Tovar's hit as well as Abreu's homer. How can you describe that?

OMAR LOPEZ: I believe in God. I believe in my faith. In the first games and the game against the Dominican Republic, something was bothering me. Something was going wrong because I was not feeling the same, you know? Something was not working.

And suddenly I said to me, don't think that because you are in a short tournament, you cannot be yourself. You've got to take time to be yourself.

So I came early week, early, and I wrote it down on the agenda. I did five individual meetings with the pitchers about the job to do, and I told Robinson, "I am going to say, Tovar, you are going to play against Japan. You are going to be playing against Japan. You are not going to be playing against Japan. So be ready for that."

And I think they were more relaxed, you know? They were able to control their emotions. Well, if they are not playing, they were relaxed. If the other were playing, they could be able to process that decision.

So for two days, we had the practicing. We communicated that decision, and it was incredible what I saw. In my opinion -- you know, I am emotional. When we spoke about Yamamoto, you could see that connection between the players, and we were all so confident because we knew that something good could be done against Yamamoto.

Q. What you were saying, once the game was over, from the strategic point of view, out of the many positions that you had to make from the lineup all the way to the rotation of the pitchers, what was the most important decision you made for the win? Now, after the game, now knowing everything that happened, if you could choose one decision?

OMAR LOPEZ: Maybe the most important decision that I made was when we started that rally, it was a hit-and-run that we were able to do with Tovar and Torres. It was 5-4, Maikel Garcia from La Sabana put us ahead in the score. I think that was the most important decision that started that rally with Wilyer.

Someone told me, Do you want to squeeze?

No, no. He is going to hit a line drive. You have seen that in the BP. You can ask who maracucho is. He's in the coaching staff. No Gerardo, no Rouglas because they were coaching on the bases. But he spoke to me as maracucho.

And he said, no, he is going to hit a line drive.

And to me, that was the most important decision, you know? Ranger is Ranger, you know? He is our very best pitcher. He is our horse.

He had some troubles that inning. He failed some pitches, which is normal. Suzuki is out of the game and someone from the bench came and hit the homer. For Christ's sake, those things only happen to me.

So Yoshida -- maybe you can question why not walk him? But that was my pitcher, Yoshida, seven and eight pitches, and then Bazardo to minimize the situation.

But to me, after that 5-4 that I had already, De Jesus on the mound and De Jesus was great, very effective. But they just gave me 50 pitches. Otherwise, he could have been able to pitch all the way to the seventh inning. Zerpa

was designed for pitching Ohtani no matter what.

Q. You had a meeting with Cervelli in West Palm Beach when he started scouting players for Italy. Did you think that at some point in time you would be in that position that you were going to face on Monday? Do you have an idea of who the starting pitcher is?

OMAR LOPEZ: No, I couldn't imagine that situation, but it was possible because he was a great pitcher, a great human being. He knows the game. He was a catcher, has a very good and wide division of the game. So facing this Italian-Venezuelan next game -- that's going to be a very interesting game for both.

But we want to give a great show because that's the point, right? And, of course, I have a plan to start against Italy. You want to know the name? No. Montero is going to be the starting pitcher against Italy.

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