

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals 2 - USA vs Canada

Friday, 13 March, 2026

Houston, Texas, USA

Daikin Park

Team Canada

Manager Ernie Whitt

Pregame Press Conference

Q. Before that game against, I believe, Cuba, I asked you if you had a message for your squad. It was Justin Morneau that provided the inspirational, quote/unquote, speech. This is a do-or-die game. You could be going home or you could be heading to Miami. Do you plan on speaking with your group? If so, what kind of message would you like to send to them?

ERNIE WHITT: I think the same message that we had the other day, is what is on the board. Everyone is still remembering that.

I don't think they need to be talked to. They all know. They're all professionals. The writing's on the board. We come out, we play a clean game, we throw strikes and we make the plays, anything can happen. We're very confident.

Q. I understand you got a message from the boys at Hockey Canada. What do you know of the video that was shown, and if you could share with us what was said?

ERNIE WHITT: Well, it was a lot of -- some of the players voiced their congratulations, number one, to advancing, but reinforcing the fact that the job's not done yet. It was a great surprise. It was nice to see, and I think the boys got a kick out of it.

Q. As you guys get deeper and deeper into the tournament, how do you find maybe the pitching restrictions change? Obviously, in the first round everything gets sort of scripted out. Do you have more flexibility from teams? Are teams similarly restrictive with how they can use their pitchers? How does that change as you get deeper?

ERNIE WHITT: Nothing has changed with any of our pitchers because we've gone on. I mean, other than MLB's



restrictions, but they don't even come close to what our restrictions are.

But I'm sure we're not the only team. I'm sure the other teams have restrictions also. We just play by what we have with the players we have and what the organization tells us they want.

Q. Lineup-wise, I imagine maybe some changes because it's not a lefty starter. Any big changes in the lineup today?

ERNIE WHITT: No. The only one we have is Tyler Black is going to DH for us and Josh will be playing first base.

Q. For American fans who may not understand the magnitude of hockey and baseball in Canada, what would a win today do as far as avenging the gold medal game?

ERNIE WHITT: Well, it would make me very happy. I think not only myself, but I think the entire country of Canada would be extremely happy. I think we've got a pretty good following.

Again, I just hope our players show up, which I think they will, and play a good, clean game. And we'll see what happens.

Q. Did you guys have any advance scouts for the first round here?

A. Yes, we do. We have advance scouts. We have knowledge of what other teams have done, and we've been having meetings and explaining and expressing ourselves to our players. So there should be no surprises to us.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about what a deep run in this tournament and a win over the U.S. would do for the sport of baseball, kind of on a grassroots level in Canada?

ERNIE WHITT: I guess I have to go back a little bit to last year with the Blue Jays. You know, their run that they had had the whole country excited, and everyone was rooting



for the Blue Jays.

And it seems like whenever there's success with the Blue Jays and success with Baseball Canada, it gets people a little bit more excited to go to the ball fields and pick up a ball and a bat and play ball. And we see growth in our baseball academies that are going on, different camps and clinics. The growth is there.

So I think as we grow, I think the players will also grow. I mean, we've got a lot of Canadian players that are playing in college, and they're chasing their dream of trying to become a big league player.

But again, it starts at the grassroots, getting them the proper training, the techniques and the understanding of how difficult it is to play this game.

Q. At the end of the 2017 Classic, you had said for the program to move forward, you had to get more of the guys coming out to the tournament, and you had better attendance in '23. You obviously have better attendance this time out. What are you hoping that the players who, for whatever reason, weren't able to come this time might take from this experience and think about when it's '29 or '30, whenever the next one happens?

ERNIE WHITT: Well, all we can do is hope that they want to be a part of it. I think the message that the players that are playing in it this year, I think it's a very positive message that they'll take back to their peers.

I don't see any reason why, unless there's injuries involved, that they wouldn't want to participate in the next one. And that's what we're hoping for. We're hoping to get the best players available.

Again, they've got that decision and that's what they have to live with, and I respect it. The one thing that I've always asked, if you have any doubt in your mind, I don't want you. And that's the bottom line.

If you're going to make a commitment to come and play, I want 100 percent in.

Q. What has having Paul Quantrill and Russell Martin and Justin Morneau, guys that have had experience in this tournament, what has their presence done for your players?

ERNIE WHITT: Well, I think every coach that we have is very important. They've all got things that they do to make our team better. And everyone of them, as you said, Morneau and Stubby Clapp, they played for me. So they

know what the system is like and how we go forward. They're just as committed to win as the players are.

And the efforts that they're putting in as coaches, it really helps me out. And the players respect them.

It's nice to have them around, nice to have them around because they're very knowledgeable and they can express themselves to where the players will understand it.

Q. With Tyler Rogers now on the U.S. team, do you think a great awkwardness for him? I mean, he's a new guy on the Blue Jays, and now he's pitching against Team Canada, and the Blue Jay fans don't want him to do well.

ERNIE WHITT: I guess he's in a tough situation. But I'm with the Blue Jays fans. I don't want him to do well in this tournament or tonight, especially, if he gets in.

So, like I said, we met this morning and we looked at all of the new pitchers that they had, the three new pitchers they brought in -- we've seen the old ones. We'll be prepared. If he plays, hopefully we get a few hits off of them.

Q. It was interesting hearing Michael Soroka talking about how Baseball Canada events every year, a highlight reel from 2006 Classic, plays, how it fires him up every time. Is there anything from that game, from that win, that you can take and bring to today and replicate to try and do it one more time? Or is every baseball game just its own unique beast?

ERNIE WHITT: I think it's a unique beast. There's always a rivalry between the U.S. and Canada. It's just the way it is. I guess it stems from hockey a little bit, I would think. But there's no question that the players in that locker room, they want to beat the U.S. tonight just to revenge the loss that the hockey team had. That was part of the message we had from Hockey Night in Canada.

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