

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals - Puerto Rico vs Italy

Saturday, 14 March, 2026

Houston, Texas, USA

Daikin Park

Team Italy

Manager Francisco Cervelli

Pregame Press Conference

Q. You've now seen multiple articles about Italian baseball on the back stages of the Gazzetta and all those Italian major newspapers. How does that feel that your team has managed to do this?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: This is a great time, especially in Italy. It never happened before. People are talking about baseball. It never happened. They are excited. They love what's happening, and we've got to continue doing this, creating an impact. That was what we were looking for, make noise, and the guys they've been making noise. It's been amazing.

Q. How has this team grown and changed the most over the course of the tournament?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, growth and, you know, chemistry. I think the first two games, they didn't know exactly how -- they didn't know each other. So now they know what everybody's capable to do.

It's a fun group. They are professionals. They play hard. And it's been great.

Q. Being in the quarterfinals, lots of success to you. Could you speak more about the dynamic of the espresso machine in the dugout, and every time you celebrate, you take a shot of coffee?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: The guys were looking to find ways to celebrate. I spoke to them since the beginning of the tournament, that let's make Italy, this Italian baseball team, known for its identity.

And now no one else can do exactly the same thing. Obviously, this is a tradition in Italy to drink coffee. It's not because you need caffeine, it's just because that's the way it is.



And Vinnie is the one that did all this. That's his dugout. That's his office. I'm in my office. I'm with my coaches, but he takes care of the rest. And it's been really good so far.

Q. So you played 13 years in the Major Leagues and you went to the postseason in four of them. You also won in '09. Jorge, which is now on your coaching staff, knows a lot about that, won four World Series. What can you transmit to your guys, especially those that have never played in the postseason so far -- the day-to-day, the hard things in this tournament, and how difficult it is to face, a win-or-go-home game today? And hopefully you can win it all.

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I mentioned this since the beginning of the tournament, between our coaching staff, we have about 21 rings, including the general manager. But what we want to do is be able to transmit this to the players, what it is to win.

There's no manuscript for this. There are no rules to get there. It's just about being professional, doing the small things, doing different things. Also think a lot about the game, not your personal life, but think about how to be collective with the team.

And those are things done outside of the field. That's honestly my opinion. No one has to agree with me on this, but it's the way you dress as well, the way that you act outside of the game. All these things add up, and it allows you to win a championship.

My motive on bringing Jorge is because of that same thing. He knows how to win. He sees the game differently from everyone else. He has no patience for what's mediocre or normal. He sees that the way to win is the way to win. And that's why he's here. He's a great coach, a great human being and great mentor. And that's what we need.

Q. When you have on-field success, combined with it being a new frontier for Italian baseball, and all the outpouring of support in Italy, how do you balance celebrating all that with staying focused on the fact that you still have games to win?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, this is a new thing for me,



being a manager. It's only one year. A lot of things are happening in a short period of time.

But I had a long career, and we play in the playoffs. And everything was, you know, you celebrate small victories, but you've got to keep moving, keep moving. You cannot let your ego to grow too much. You've got to stay humble and stay focused. That was the goal.

The goal is the most important thing. But how we get there? To get there, you need to stay calm and focus pitch by pitch and day by day.

But we have to celebrate small victories. Everything that's been happening, we celebrate for 30 minutes, and then we move on and we think about tomorrow.

Q. After the inertia that your team had from winning Tuesday and Wednesday to one of the toughest teams in the pool, how were the upcoming days after that, mentally speaking?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, we just needed a break. We needed to rest. I'm not sure if one or two days were enough. But it is what it is. We needed to rest because we to know. We cannot forget that we're in March -- what, March 13, 14 -- I don't even know.

It's too soon to be thinking like that for many of the players -- actually, it's too soon for the players itself. Because up to this point in the year, you're not playing nine innings. So since everyone plays at such a high level, these breaks are really good. After those two wins against those monsters, we needed this.

Q. While you were in the group stage preparing for games against Mexico, the U.S. and the rest of the teams, how attentive were you guys in regards to Puerto Rico or the other pool? Were you waiting last minute to see who you were going to be facing in the quarterfinals?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Honestly, we were not trying to see what the other teams were doing and what the other groups were doing, because we couldn't actually watch the games at the same time.

I did watch Colombia because there were two screens at the place we were at. I think it was Mexico against the U.S. And we saw part of the other group, and we saw a little bit of their baseball.

But we already know what Puerto Rico is about. They're a baseball country. They know how to play. They're aggressive. There's no secret in them. There's nothing

new in them. They're one of the best of the world playing ball, and we need to stand strong because they're a good team.

Q. You have the opportunity to be just the second European nation to make it to the WBC semifinals. What would that run and what has this run already done for the growth of the game in Europe?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: First, it was a privilege to be the second one. And this is going to help to grow the game, not only in Italy, in Europe.

You find good players over there. We need to put the eyes on Europe a little bit.

Baseball is getting harder. The minor league is less teams now. It's getting harder. So we've got to find a way to keep growing, growing, growing, growing.

But, yeah, whoever gets there from Europe or from America, it's going to elevate the level of the game.

Q. Baseball can be classified as a sport in Asia, Japan, Latin America, but in Europe they're still trying to make it grow more. So being in this stage in the tournament, do you think it will help Italy and the rest of Europe?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, look, Italy is known to be a football/soccer country, but north of Italy is where a lot of baseball is played. They actually love baseball. They're very passionate about this sport.

That's something that actually surprised me when I was getting to know the whole country. There are things that we forget.

Sports are the one thing that takes us out of what's going on in society. That's one of the things that I know for sure, that sports bring people together, no matter who you are or what you do, just cheering for the same team, wearing the same jersey. And that's what's going on in Italy.

These past couple of days in Congress, they celebrated us, like, the whole team. It doesn't matter who won for what.

So we need to keep pushing this sport to be some sort of reconciliation for the rest of society as a fan, as a people, as a country because that's what sports represent. It's for us to allow ourselves to deviate from everything that's going on.

So what's going on in Italy, it's the first time ever people

that don't even know about the sport, people that don't even know about the rules of the game, but it doesn't matter. They're cheering us on. They're going to be cheering us on whenever we have runs and whatnot.

Q. You were mentioning talking about these things. First question is about how is the pride on your team? Are they proud about what they hear Giorgia Meloni saying, things in the Congress, even joking about you have reached so far in this tournament?

And also Mark DeRosa, the U.S. coach, said that this is like a second opportunity in life to play at this stage. Did someone reach out to you from the USA team, like Mark DeRosa or anyone else?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I honestly don't like to talk about politics or get too involved. But that's what I was mentioning earlier that, this is what sports do to humanity. It doesn't matter what you like, what you go for. If it's black or white or gray, it doesn't matter.

This is one thing, and it's a privilege to have seen or heard that. It doesn't matter who said it; we're becoming collective about one country, one jersey. That is happening for the first time ever.

In regards to the U.S., the game against them was amazing. I didn't hear much about Mark DeRosa. He's a friend. He was my co-worker. The U.S. is a great team, and for them to have gone through that, doesn't mean that they're going to have their heads down now.

They're dangerous. They're one of -- they're the best players in the world. I say that because the Dominicans are also great, Japan is great. I include all of them.

But for them to go through that, that's part of the sport, that happens.

Most of them have won the whole thing after losing their first game, which is baseball, soccer, whichever. And now they're in the semifinals. They're going to cause us a lot of headache.

Q. What do you think, besides what represents to you as a former player, as a coach now and in regards to my question about Europe, how will Italy's accomplishment impact Europe as a whole? Because this is very beneficial for the MLB because baseball could gain more interest in Europe.

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, personally speaking, this is incredible. I had no clue something like this would happen. When it comes to the impact due to our

performance, I came here thinking we had a great roster and could do special things, but everything that's happening was something I couldn't even imagine. Things are shared so fast on social media nowadays. People can find out about something happening a minute after. We can use this in a positive way. This positivity has caused a lot of noise in Italy and the rest of Europe like a revolution, and so what happens is that when someone is doing things well and getting good results, makes everyone want to know how we are getting it done.

I've said this since last year, I cannot do this on my own. I need people that will want to jump on the ship with me and put in the work. I have a great relationship with the Czech Republic coach. We are even talking about playing against each other during summer through exhibition matches.

We're growing as an organization, and they also have a really good organization, the way they take care of their stadium is something we want to learn from as Italians as well.

The Czech organize their games well, just do things right. They enjoy playing ball and have great fans. They do things that we want to imitate, and therefore we ask them questions, like, how are they getting this done? Because we just don't know.

So that's the idea, for each and every national team to help one another so the skill level can increase and make tournaments like the WBC much tougher, making it a better spectacle. That's what we want, for the skill level to grow.

Q. Who would you want to face, Japan or Venezuela?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: At this point in the competition, whoever. At this point, whoever. If it's Venezuela, obviously I'm Venezuelan. I'm from there. I have played them four times. And I have lost four times.

But good luck for both teams, and at this point it makes no difference. Just to get to Miami will be a dream come true and it doesn't matter who comes the other way. We're going to keep playing ball as we know how to do it and that's it.

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