

World Baseball Classic: Quarterfinals - Puerto Rico vs Italy

Saturday, 14 March, 2026

Houston, Texas, USA

Daikin Park

Team Italy

Manager Francisco Cervelli

Postgame Press Conference

Italy - 8, Puerto Rico - 6

Q. Once more, great job. Your pitching came on top. You made some adjustments with a pitcher that didn't have much experience, and he still had the calmness to stay in the game and stay focused. And Ryan Rocchio, to be with you now, in the next round, which is the semifinal, what would you like to say about that?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: This team has been building character in the last couple of days. If someone can't do their job for some reason, the person coming after them will do it, will get it done.

And, so, Jacob came and then DeLucia, and so those are things that happen. Sometimes I gotta be here for a little while, leave and then someone else will come, seventh and eighth inning, Weissert came in and turned the fire off.

So there are moments like that in the game of baseball. It can be your night. It may not. You can win well. You can barely win and that's okay. Weissert will be replaced in the semifinal.

Q. What does it mean to be undefeated amongst all the accomplishments that you are piling up?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Imagine doing this for the first time and arrive to the semifinal. It's amazing. This is great. This is one of the best chapters of my life. It's incredible. This group is phenomenal.

Q. Is that an Armani suit you're wearing?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: No, Armani, another brand. But things are changing. I'm not going to say the brand.

Q. What was your offensive strategy in regards to their pitchers? How could you resist whenever they



were coming near in the scoreboard only up by two?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: The plan was to attack Lugo because we knew they had four lefties. We also have a bunch of lefties. So the guys followed the plan the way they should.

There was a lefty, a very complicated lefty, but they tried and tried, and they got him out. And that's how we were able to win the game.

That was the plan -- attack Lugo, put a bunch of lefties in the lineup, and that helped.

But Puerto Rico is a great team. The crowd was incredible. That influences like crazy. I remember in the sixth inning, I was telling our team, yo, we've got to keep these people quiet, just like we did with Mexico, because the fans, in these sorts of tournaments, is a huge factor when it comes to doing comebacks and even winning.

Q. Now taking this team to the semifinals, which is something that they never accomplished before, how do you feel about that?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: It's amazing. Now we're in the semifinals. We're going to play against the very best. But we have the same mission, which is to continue until the last day of the tournament.

Q. When you played in the playoffs with the big market teams, the Yankees, and then the one of the smallest markets with the Pirates, and this is an underdog team, what is it like when you are the underdog and kind of nobody expects you to do what you've done compared to being the big dog?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Playing in the World Series was great, playoffs many times. It was incredible. But this is winter ball in March.

I don't know if you've been to a game in Venezuela or in the Dominican Republic. You put 15,000 people, and the noise is incredible. You are here, another 30,000. And this is winter ball.



It's loud. It's Latin baseball. What we experienced today, every day we play, we're never going to be a home team. And it's great. The feeling, it's unbelievable, and I love these kind of games, no matter what the result.

And it's a nice experience for those young guys because they play in the minor leagues some, and they experience this. So that means they're going to know how to control their emotions when they get there.

Q. You've called this baseball night in Italy, given the start time. Were you thinking at all about how this must have been perceived over there as it's going on? And what was it like to basically put on a show for those folks?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I've gotta ask. I heard that the last out, the people there in Italian screaming, and it was amazing. I've got to ask, because this is the first time. I believe it was incredible, but I'm going to have more news later.

Q. You mentioned after beating the U.S. that you have to believe it to do it. But could you believe the way you guys beat these three teams in a row? You're undefeated, but the U.S., Mexico and Puerto Rico, and as you mentioned with the crowd the way it was?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, I think the key was the victory against USA. Those guys beat one of the best teams in the world, best players in the world. Now they're going to believe. They're going to believe. I believe.

We beat Mexico and now Puerto Rico and now we don't know who we're going to face, but it doesn't matter. Whoever we face is going to be tough.

But the level of confidence, it's growing and growing. We've got to stay humble, concentrate and do what we know. That's it. Play our game.

Q. How is the team in regards to health-wise? Any injuries for the next match? Do you know who will be your next pitcher?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: They're all good. As you know, we're too soon in March right now. A few soreness here and there, but nothing worrisome. We made a change -- well, two changes because one of our catchers got injured. Winfield played left, but we're going to get a new player in which he's going to help us a whole lot in the next couple of days.

A pitcher will be announced tomorrow but you might know already since everything's lined up for that. But I will

confirm it tomorrow, hopefully.

Q. How did you scout Rocchio? Was it easy to speak to him, to reach out to him, and his answer to you?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, Rocchio, I've been speaking with him for about a year now. He was going to be a starter for me in my mind, but then it happened because of the situation with Cleveland.

But with everything that's going on, they all want to come. The doors have always been open. It makes him very proud that he will be in this position to do so, even if it's for one game. Hopefully it's better to have two. So, yeah, it's incredible now.

We're about to head out, too. We're about to take our flight.

Q. At the beginning of this tournament, clearly you guys had confidence. But when you win games, you can see a team evolve in real time. How has this team changed in your eyes from the beginning of this tournament to right now?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: Well, in the beginning, it was tough. This tournament, they only give you three days together. I didn't know -- I knew a couple guys.

And to put the group and build chemistry, we did so many things inside the clubhouse to get to know personalities, because that's what the important part is, is in this kind of tournament, it's a short tournament.

And then Brazil was a little uncomfortable, and the guys didn't know exactly what was the role. And then Great Britain, and then everything started. They were bonding together.

And we beat the United States, and now it's a different team. It's a different team. They played -- they know who is behind, who's in front. They know the pitchers now. They're going to miss this tournament after they go back to their teams because it's been really fun.

Q. Going back to the players, where you were mentioning Rocchio. Do you think with everything that's going on, will Italy be a dream team later on in the future, like a powerhouse, with Moribito, Roman Anthony is with the U.S., probably they may want to come and play for Italy right now?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: I really don't know. I think for the next WBC things might change, but our scouting, I'm not sure.



This is the team we have now. The ones we have now, they're the most important ones. I don't know what can happen in the future. The future is very uncertain. There are guys that make it, there are guys that don't.

I hope I can have the same team, or part of the same core in the next three years. I don't know if I'll be here in three years either. Not sure what's going to happen.

But after this spectacle that they're displaying, I know a lot of people are going to want to play for this organization. That's what we want. This tournament should be to help us find players that will want to play for each country.

Q. What are your feelings of probably having a potential game against Venezuela?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: It's very emotional. I imagine facing Venezuela -- I'm not sure what could happen tonight with them -- but whoever wins, they're, like, really tough teams. And if it happens, it happens.

I'm Italian. There's no other way around it. This is my job. This is a jersey I'm wearing.

Q. You spoke briefly about Greg Weissert earlier. Could you go into a little more detail about him stopping the bleeding in the eighth and then slamming the door in the ninth the way he did?

FRANCISCO CERVELLI: He's the guy, because he played at Yankee Stadium and Fenway Park. He played against Toronto. So that's the guy. He knows what is a hostile environment. He knows. And he was the guy.

That was the last hitter. And Marinaccio was warming up because the other part is I've got to protect my guys, I've got to protect for their career. But that's the guy. He knows how to do it.

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