

World Baseball Classic: Finals

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Robert Manfred Tony Clark

THE MODERATOR: Commissioner, would you like to make a comment?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: Maybe if you turn those lights up a little brighter, I won't be able to see anybody (laughter). But I can't tell you how pleased I am, and I'm sure Tony feels the same way, about the way this event has gone. I was thinking about it on the way over here. You have rosters literally overflowing with the best players in the world. We've had crowds that not only were record number crowds, but had passion that it's hard to think where you saw something that good the last time. I mean, just really amazing.

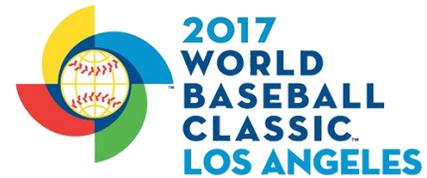
The WBC has been a phenomenal property for the MLB Network. We've set ratings records and broken them for non-playoff games. We broadcast WBC games, I think it was to 182 countries around the world. And best of all, the games on the field have been absolutely unbelievable, compelling, our players at their best, combined with a little nationalism, has really been a great thing.

It's been a great tournament. Really looking forward to tonight.

TONY CLARK: I would echo that last point. Very rarely do you have an opportunity in the middle of March to appreciate the quality of play that we've seen during the course of this tournament. So even as a fan, myself, as I'm sure a number of you are as well, being able to see what we've seen, not just in the U.S. venues but in all the international venues as well, the quality of play has been off the charts.

As a player, unfortunately when we had our first WBC while I was still playing, my phone didn't ring to fill out one of the rosters, so I never had an opportunity to play. I'm reminded every four years now that it was something that I missed out on.

As I talked to the guys that are playing now and even the guys that have played before, you truly appreciate the opportunity you have to represent your country on this stage at this time for our game in an effort to continue to move our game forward and achieve something that very few have had an opportunity to



achieve on behalf of your country. It's been an exciting ride, all culminating tonight. Hopefully everything settles in and we're dry this evening and enjoy some fantastic baseball.

Q. For both of you, there's been a lot of attention around the US Team about who has not been here. Is there anything that you see in this tournament that you think might change that in four years?

TONY CLARK: I think there are challenges inherent with any tournament at any point in time. I think what we've seen, however, is a tremendous grouping of players who wanted to be here, excited to be here. As I offered a little while ago, have performed remarkably well on behalf of Team USA. So we'll have to see in four years where the roster lends itself.

But we've been excited and have been very happy with the group of guys that have been here performing.

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: Look, the only thing I'd add, I said at the beginning of Spring Training, we were thrilled with the US roster. We think it's the best one we've ever had. I think, Tony's 100% correct, the way they've played supports that view. And I think when you have a tournament that gets the kind of traction that the 2017 addition did, it will make it easier to get players the next time around. Not only for the U.S., but for all the countries.

Q. To follow up on that, have you heard from any American players, in particular, saying: You know what? Next time I want in?

TONY CLARK: I won't offer you names, but I will suggest that as soon as the lights come on and the guys get on the field, even in the first round your phone starts to buzz a little bit where guys start to second-guess whether or not they should have or could have participated. It's not a surprise. It actually happened in 2013 as well.

It's just different. It's just different. You see the country name on your chest, and, yes, you're preparing for your season and you have visions of grandeur to be that last team standing.

But the opportunity to wear your country across your chest is something, particularly if you haven't experienced it before, that when you see it, whether it's

in person, because we've actually had some guys when we were down in Miami come out to the field and experience those games there, or whether they're watching on TV domestically or internationally, they get very excited very quickly about the opportunity that they see, that they hope to see is on perhaps the next time the lights come on.

Q. There was a suggestion a lot of places before this tournament started that if the US Team could just get to the championship game that that would have a great impact on the tournament, its popularity and people receiving it in the United States. Now that the United States is in the championship game, what have you seen in terms of interest in this country?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: Look, I think the interest in this country has been really strong going back to Miami. I mean, we had a sellout crowd for the U.S.-Dominican game. I was there for that game. Fantastic atmosphere in the stadium. We had some great crowds down in San Diego. We're going to be above 50,000 here tonight.

I think that the event as a whole, the event as a whole, not just because of the U.S., but because of the way the teams, in general, have played, the quality of play has attracted a lot of attention here.

I like to use the analogy of the Ryder Cup. It took time for the Ryder Cup to become what the Ryder Cup is today, and it is going to take time with this tournament. But each and every time, it's been better. There's been more traction, more interest. I think we're kind of at a watershed with 2017 with how good it's been. But I really do firmly believe we will continue to build momentum with this event.

TONY CLARK: I would agree. This is one of the first tournaments where in walking the street I've actually had people yelling positively at me as I walked, where you have one country starting to chant their name as you walk down the street only to have another country hear it and start chanting theirs. And that hasn't happened before.

So as Rob had mentioned, the idea of this tournament moving forward in the fashion that it has, I think, gives us all a chance to appreciate what it might look like in four years.

Q. Where in particular did that happen?

TONY CLARK: In Miami. In Miami.

Q. Rob, to your point, the enthusiasm and atmosphere in the stands are pretty commonplace in countries like Japan with the horns and Mexico

with salsa, and down in the Dominican with the timbales and all the other stuff. Would you like to see more of that at games in the U.S.?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: Well, you know, it's interesting. I went to Seoul, saw a game there, saw a game in Tokyo, and we did actually go out and walk in the crowd. I don't do it all that much here. But we went just to see exactly what's going on. Yet you have to actually go out in the crowd to fully understand the enthusiasm. I think that's wonderful. I think it's a great thing.

I think the enthusiasm we've seen in the crowds here in the U.S. are great. But it's up to the fans. What we want to do is provide a product that moves our fans. How they express their interest in what's going on on the field, that's up to them. It is exciting. It is different. But like I said, it's going to vary, locale to locale, and our job is to make sure that we get a product out there that makes people passionate.

TONY CLARK: I would echo his sentiments again. Getting out in the crowd is really a remarkable experience, it has been throughout this tournament, where I was often communicating back and forth with my wife and explaining to her that I'm going to have to go down and underneath because at this point in time I can't hear anything she's saying.

So it's very excitable, and it is something that I'm hopeful that, as everyone in this room has had a chance to experience, more and more the fans come out to the ballpark the next time and enjoy that experience as well.

Q. For both of you, does the return of baseball to the Olympics in 2020 affect the timing of the next WBC? Will it definitely be 2021?

TONY CLARK: We'll have to see. I think as much as anything, and this has kind of been the theme that you heard today and throughout the tournament, that we're already looking to the next opportunity to put this event together. What we've seen so far, even going back from 2006 to 2009, and what we experienced in '13, suggests the momentum we have here is a huge benefit. And we think the opportunity for baseball to be in the Olympics in 2020 is another stepping stone to continue to growing and developing our game globally.

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: You know, going back to the very first WBC, and if you'll recall, we went three years instead of four at the beginning, really was designed to get into a cycle where you weren't in an Olympic year. 2021 is not an Olympic year. I personally and I do believe the clubs are excited about keeping this event going. I think 2021 is probably a pretty good bet.



Q. We all got a crash course in the tie-breaking procedure protocol a couple weeks ago. I'm wondering if you have any inclination to tweak the protocol, runs allowed per innings, specifically, or at least clarify that so that at the next WBC there isn't a repeat of some of the confusion that occurred there in that game in Guadalajara?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: It's clear having spent a lot of time on what went on in Guadalajara that our communication on that topic could have been a little better. I think that things like that occasionally happen. I think the rule itself, technical committee was absolutely clear what it meant. There was no debate, no ambiguity in the rule. It was really nothing more than a communication issue. And those of you who work in stadiums know that sometimes, when you get close to game time, it's not easy to get exactly the person you want at the time you want them.

I do think, as we always do, we'll sit down with the MLBPA and the other people that are on the WBCI board and talk about the event, talk about the way we broke ties, talk about the format, see if there's something you can do with the format that avoids tiebreaker rules that are not often used in our game, and that will be a conversation that will take place over the next four years.

Q. First, it's striking the difference between, first, the percentage of the best players from each country, other than the U.S., that showed up, and the percentage of the best American players that are in the tournament, and also the ratio of the best hitters that showed up to the tournament to the best pitchers. Is there anything that MLB can do to try to get the likes of, I don't know, Mike Trout, Clayton Kershaw, or really more elite starters into this event?

TONY CLARK: I think, as we discussed a little while ago, the realization is that there are guys that are going to want to participate and guys that may make decisions not to participate. I understand or appreciate the analytics in what they're suggesting. But to the extent that we have an outstanding group of guys here that are in the championship game and have performed admirably, as well as the other teams that have had guys participate and perform well, we'll have to see how the rosters shake out in 2021. But it's been fantastic this go-around with the guys that have been here and have participated.

Q. How satisfying with the designated pitchers' pool that you've implemented for this tournament? And the second question, will there be any changes for the pitchers' pool in the next tournament?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: Look, the pitchers' pool,

I think, was an improvement in the rules in terms of putting countries in a position, federations in a position to make adjustments as they move round to round. I also think it helps in terms of participation.

Look, one of the things that's happened in our game is players get ready for Opening Day. Their schedules are rigid. And if we can have a little flexibility from round to round, it makes it a lot easier for the federations and the field managers to make adjustments and allow us to have more of the very best players and very best pitchers in the game available.

TONY CLARK: Agreed. Agreed.

Q. I'm curious, you're talking about the momentum gained by the past two or three weeks and beyond. It's been a couple years, I think, since Australia. Do you feel like you can help push this momentum through games, whether it be in London or -- or what is the plan there?

TONY CLARK: Well, yes, I think would be the short answer. The longer answer is this is a global and international event and, as we've discussed with the commissioner and commissioner's office about how to continue to grow the game, realizing the passion that we all have for the industry's growth, it's another opportunity; that if we can take the momentum that we've built here and it manifests itself in games in Spring Training, international games and other times throughout the course of the season and the off-season, that it provides some value and benefit for everyone.

So we're hopeful. We're hopeful that exactly what you just described happens moving forward.

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: To me, you've got great momentum off the WBC. If you think back in the period between Australia and now, a lot of change at the top of both of our organizations. We've kind of worked through that transition period. I really -- we've got a new basic agreement done, which is always helpful in terms of having certainty. And when you put those three things together, I think it really does create an opportunity for us to do more internationally, which I know is a shared goal between the commissioner's office and Tony's office.

Q. Nothing specific yet, though?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: Nothing specific that we're going to talk about tonight. How about that? Is that a good answer (laughter)?

Q. When you have one of the star players in the tournament, to go back to the tiebreaker situation, that comes out and says they're trying to become



the World Cup, but this is not even the Little League World Series, and your fans hear that, what do you tell your fans in response to that? And also, have you talked to Adrian about that?

TONY CLARK: There are passions in this game, in this tournament, unlike very few other times during the course of the season. So when you are battling to get to the next round, when you're looking to situate yourself and your country into that next round and into the final conversation, and something doesn't work out in the fashion that you had anticipated or you hoped or you understood it to work out, there's going to be agitations there. So it's understandable. We appreciate, as much as anything, Adrian and what he brings to the table, not just for his country, but for our game.

So, again, we understood the comments that Adrian made and did have dialogue with Adrian understanding where those comments came from and why they came in the fashion that they did and are confident that as the tournament moves forward and that as our game moves forward, that Adrian's support and his place in the game are in a good place.

Q. Do you personally (off microphone)?

TONY CLARK: Yes.

Q. Going back to the Olympics, it's probably a little early for this, but where do you guys stand on putting Major League players in this tournament? And it really kind of sets up with 2021 that you could have a Team USA that would carry over into the World Baseball Classic. So there are a lot of elements here that I think would be in play.

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: We have been careful about making comments about the Olympics pending a full conversation with the baseball and softball federation about timing, format, qualifiers. That conversation moved a little bit forward while we were here. We had a chance to sit with President Fraccari. But we're still not at a point where things are concrete enough that I could give you a really firm -- I couldn't give you a really firm answer as to where the clubs are going to be. Because neither of us know exactly what we're dealing with, we haven't had any conversation.

TONY CLARK: Right.

Q. I would like to ask if that situation of tiebreaker could affect Mexico because of how uncomfortable they were when they were at a press conference at 4 a.m. Will that affect in the future the regular season games and the Spring Training?

COMMISSIONER MANFRED: From my perspective, Mexico is an important opportunity for Major League Baseball. We are very interested in playing in Mexico,

having more Mexican players come here and play in the Major Leagues. I don't see why what I regard to be a communication issue at one event should have any impact on our view of doing business in Mexico or how interested we are in doing that business.

TONY CLARK: Agreed.

