

Aaron Judge and a loaded U.S. roster hope to dethrone Ohtani's Japan at World Baseball Classic

NEW YORK (AP) — Aaron Judge is trading pinstripes for a plain jersey with red, white and blue letters. "Getting the chance to wear that across my chest is going to be pretty powerful," the U.S. and New York Yankees captain said of the World Baseball Classic. "I think a lot of people have a lot of pride for their country."

After losing 3-2 in the 2023 final when Japan's Shohei Ohtani ended the game by striking out Mike Trout, the U.S. will be trying for its first championship since 2017 when 20 nations compete for the sixth championship starting today.

Australia plays Taiwan at the Tokyo Dome in the opener, and action starts the next day in Houston, Miami and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The final again will be at Miami, on March 17.

A much-improved pitching staff includes Paul Skenes, Tarik Skubal and Mason Miller, and the batting order likely will include Judge, Cal Raleigh, Kyle Schwarber and Bobby Witt Jr.

Having watched the last two tournaments, Skenes has hoped to receive an invite from U.S. manager Mark DeRosa.

"When DeRo called, it was like, just, 'Yeah, I'm in. You don't need to talk me into this or anything,'" said Skenes, who played two seasons at Air Force Academy before



United States starting pitcher Paul Skenes throws against the San Francisco Giants during the first inning of an exhibition baseball game on Tuesday in Scottsdale, Arizona.

transferring to LSU. "It was a quick yes."

Players have been in contact with each other long before reporting this week.

"The group chat's been firing away for the last couple of months," Philadelphia's Bryce Harper said.

Rotation boost

Logan Webb is slated to start the Americans' Friday opener against Brazil in Houston, followed by Skubal on Saturday against Britain,

Skenes vs. Mexico on Monday and top Mets prospect Nolan McLean against Italy on March 10.

The foursome has a combined 19.8 Baseball Reference WAR last season. The Americans' four starters in 2023, Adam Wainwright, Nick Martinez, Lance Lynn and Merrill Kelly, combined for a 7.8 the previous season.

Skubal intends to make one start, then return to the Tigers.

A pitcher is limited to 65 pitches in first-round games, 80 in a quar-

terfinal and 95 in a semifinal or final. If a player throws more than 50 pitches in an outing, he can't pitch for the next four days. If he throws more than 30, he can't pitch the next day. No one may pitch three days in a row.

"There are obviously guardrails for the tournament to begin with, pitch-count wise, but there's also guardrails for guys having to throw on certain days to get ready for their team's opening day," U.S. manager Mark DeRosa said.

Trying to do it again

Japan is trying to win its fourth title and become only the second repeat champion after the 2006 and 2009 Samurai Warriors.

Shohei Ohtani and Yoshinobu Yamamoto have some experience at consecutive titles after helping last year's Los Angeles Dodgers become the first repeat World Series champion since the 1998-2000 Yankees won three in a row.

"Going back to back, that is our only goal," Yamamoto said through a translator.

Yamamoto, the World Series MVP, is scheduled to start Japan's opener against Taiwan on Friday. Los Angeles is allowing him to pitch for Japan after he threw 211 innings last year, including the postseason.

"The Dodgers understand how big the WBC tournament is, big in

Japan," he said. "The Dodgers and the WBC, they both are very important to me equally."

Japan's pitching staff is missing Ohtani, who won't take the mound, along with Roki Sasaki, who remained at Dodgers camp following an injury-interrupted rookie season, and Yu Darvish, sidelined following elbow surgery.

Star-filled Dominican roster

Seeking its first title since its only previous win in 2013, the Dominican Republic has a roster that includes six players who finished among the top 10 in MVP voting last year: Junior Caminero, Jeremy Peña, Geraldo Perdomo, Julio Rodríguez, Juan Soto and Fernando Tatis Jr.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Manny Machado and Ketel Marte also are on a roster that includes pitchers Sandy Alcantara and Cristopher Sánchez.

"It can be a headache also because you have so much talent. You wish that you can make everybody happy," Dominican manager Albert Pujols said. "The Dominican Republic has been blessed with so many talent."

Venezuela, with the Dominicans in Group D, is led by Ronald Acuña Jr., Jackson Chourio, Eugenio Suárez and William and Willson Contreras.

Holtz

Continued from Page B1

Restoring Notre Dame to greatness

Before Holtz arrived in South Bend, Notre Dame was wallowing in mediocrity — a mere shell of the program built on a foundation of Knute Rockne, Ara Parseghian, the Golden Dome and Touchdown Jesus. Holtz turned things around quickly and had the Irish in the Cotton Bowl in Year 2 and winning the national title the season after that.

His 1988 and 1989 teams won a school-record 23 consecutive games and he beat three teams ranked No. 1 — Miami in 1988, Colorado in 1989 and Florida State in 1993.

The Irish finished No. 2 in the AP poll in 1993. Holtz left South Bend after the 1996 season with a record of 100-30-2.

"Lou and I shared a very special relationship," said current Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman, who led the Irish back to the national title game in 2025 — a contest Holtz attended and spiced up with some trolling of the Ohio State program that beat the Irish that day. "Our re-

lationship meant a lot to me as I admired the values he used to build the foundation of his coaching career: love, trust and commitment."

A fast start, then a detour to the NFL

Notre Dame was the highlight of a head-coaching career that began at William & Mary and North Carolina State and also included a one-year stop in the NFL.

Like so many who mastered the college game in his profession, he failed up there, resigning with one game left in a 3-10 campaign with the New York Jets in 1976 and proclaiming "God did not put Lou Holtz on this earth to coach in the pros."

That opened the door at Arkansas, which was one of the four schools he led into the AP Top 25. His teams made 18 appearances there; eight of those were in the top 10.

After Notre Dame, Holtz transitioned into the TV booth with CBS, promising he would never coach again.

"I said, 'You could put it in granite.' I've got the granite stone," Holtz said. "It wasn't very good granite."

He took an open job at South Carolina, where he had once served as an assistant coach. Despite posting

a career-worst 0-11 mark in his first season with the Gamecocks, Holtz went 17-7 over the next two seasons, beat then No. 9 Georgia in the second game of 2000 and also beat Ohio State twice in the Outback Bowl.

He left the sideline for good following the 2004 season and returned to the airwaves, working 11 more seasons with ESPN.

Core values of trust and getting the best out of players

On the field, each program he led reached new heights in part because he never wavered from his core values of trust, a commitment to excellence and caring for others.

"I think you have to go in there with a vision of where you want to go and a plan of how you're going to get there," Holtz once said. "You have to hold people accountable, and you have to believe it can be done."

The results were impressive, even if he sometimes used unconventional methods.

He once tackled quarterback Tony Rice following a failed play in practice and was widely critiqued in 1991 when he grabbed a player by the facemask, pulling him to the sideline and yelling at him the en-

tire way after the player committed a personal foul. Holtz later apologized.

Holtz suspended his leading rusher, Tony Brooks, and leading receiver, Ricky Watters, in 1988 because they were 40 minutes late to a team meal the night before Notre Dame faced then No. 2 Southern California. The Irish still won 27-10.

At Arkansas, he once suspended three starting offensive players for disciplinary reasons before facing then No. 2 Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl. Arkansas, an 18-point underdog, still won 31-6.

As demanding as Holtz could be, though, he used his charm and eye for good players to recruit top talent. Notre Dame's 1990 recruiting class included five future first-round NFL draft picks, and he found unique ways to motivate his team.

"The first thing I said at every practice was, 'Boy, what a great day to work,'" Holtz recounted. "It could be raining. It could be whatever. I'd be, 'Boy, am I glad to be here. No place I'd rather be than here.' I used to say to them, 'I travel all over the world speaking to every major corporation and they'd pay me money. I speak to you for free and you don't have to take notes.'"

Born in West Virginia, dreamed of coaching high school

Louis Leo Holtz was born Jan. 6, 1937, in Follansbee, West Virginia, and aspired to be a high school football coach. His future wife broke off their engagement in 1960. That's when Holtz, a 150-pound linebacker at Kent State, took a graduate-assistant job at Iowa. A year later, he married Beth Barcus, and they were together more than 50 years.

She inspired him again in 1966 when, eight months pregnant with their third child, Holtz was jobless. Beth bought him a book about setting goals, and Holtz created a wish-list of what he wanted to do: attend a White House dinner, appear on "The Tonight Show" and see the Pope.

Holtz said there were 107 entries on the list: "She said, 'Gee, that's nice. Why don't you add get a job.' So we made it 108," he said.

In 2008, Holtz was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame and Notre Dame placed a statue of him outside its home stadium.

He said numerous times that his plan to be buried on that campus, as well. He figured it was only fitting because, as he said in 2015: "The alumni buried me here every Saturday."

THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

YMCA GYMNASTICS

YMCA Starbursts
"Wild West Tumble Fest" Corry Invitational
February 28th — March 1st
Level 2

Avery Case- 3rd vault
Maxine Tantilinger- 3rd vault
Alexis Amsler- 2nd bars, 1st beam, 1st floor, 1st all-around
Penny Simon- 2nd beam

Level 3
Quinn Riddle- 3rd vault, 3rd bars, 3rd all-around
Paisley Gravatt- 2nd vault, 2nd bars
Leah Polito- 3rd bars
Bowie Carroll- 2nd beam
Kinsley Sandieson- 1st beam

Xcel Silver
Aubrie Brinkley- 1st vault, 3rd bars
Peggy Rose Sommer- 2nd bars
Xcel Gold

Gaby Hicks- 3rd beam
Level 4
Avery Preston- 2nd vault, 1st bars, 2nd beam, 2nd all-around
Avery Beightol- 2nd vault
Natalie Rodriguez- 2nd bars, 2nd floor, 3rd all around
Iris Foy- 2nd beam
Kennedy leach- 3rd beam, 3rd floor

Level 5
Carly Seivers- 3rd bars
Maye Wilkinson- 1st beam

Level 7
Aliza foy- 1st vault, 2nd floor, 3rd all around

Level 8
Anna Rodgers- 3rd vault, 1st bars, 1st floor, 1st all around

MLB SPRING TRAINING GLANCE

AMERICAN LEAGUE			
	W	L	Pct
New York	10	2	.833
Texas	8	5	.615
Kansas City	6	5	.545
Boston	7	6	.538
Chicago	7	6	.538
Los Angeles	6	7	.462
Baltimore	5	6	.455
Cleveland	5	8	.385
Tampa Bay	5	8	.385
Athletics	4	7	.364
Minnesota	4	8	.333
Houston	3	6	.333
Detroit	3	7	.300
Seattle	3	7	.300
Toronto	3	7	.300
NATIONAL LEAGUE			
	W	L	Pct
Pittsburgh	10	2	.833
Atlanta	9	2	.818
Los Angeles	10	3	.769
San Francisco	8	3	.727
New York	7	3	.700
Washington	6	3	.667
Cincinnati	6	4	.600
Arizona	7	5	.585
St. Louis	6	5	.545
Colorado	6	6	.500
San Diego	5	7	.417
Chicago	5	8	.385
Miami	4	7	.364
Milwaukee	4	8	.333
Phila.	3	8	.273
Wednesday's Games			
Houston 4, Baltimore 2			
N.Y. Yankees 4, Boston 0			
Atlanta 9, Colombia 1			
Canada 5, Philadelphia 3			
Detroit (ss) 2, Panama 1			
Minnesota 6, Puerto Rico 3			
Netherlands 11, Tampa Bay 8			
Nicaragua 2, St. Louis 1			
N.Y. Mets 5, Israel 2			
Detroit (ss) 4, Dominican Republic 4			
Arizona 3, Athletics 1			
Cincinnati 19, Cuba 2, 8 innings			
L.A. Dodgers 7, Mexico 5			
Texas 13, Brazil 2, 7 innings			



The Franklin YMCA Starbursts gymnastics team competed in the Wild West Tumble Fest Corry Invitational last weekend. Finishing in first place for the Starbursts were (back row): Aliza Foy (Level 7 vault), Maye Wilkinson (Level 5 beam), Aubrie Brinkley (Xcel Silver vault) and Anna Rodgers (Level 8 bars); middle, Kinsley Sandieson (Level 3 beam) and Avery Preston (Level 4 bars); front, Alexis Amsler (Level 2 beam, floor, all-around).

WORLD BASEBALL CLASSIC GLANCE			
Wednesday, March 4		Monday, March 9	
Taiwan at Australia, 10 p.m.		South Korea at Australia, 6 a.m.	
Thursday, March 5		Colombia at Panama, 12 p.m.	
Czech Republic at South Korea, 5 a.m.		Dominican Republic at Israel, 12 p.m.	
Australia at Czech Republic, 10 p.m.		Brazil at Britain, 1 p.m.	
Friday, March 6		Venezuela at Nicaragua, 7 p.m.	
Japan at Taiwan, 5 a.m.		Cuba at Puerto Rico, 7 p.m.	
Cuba at Panama, 11 a.m.		Mexico at United States, 8 p.m.	
Netherlands at Venezuela, 12 p.m.		Tuesday, March 10	
Mexico at Britain, 1 p.m.		Czech Republic at Japan, 6 a.m.	
Puerto Rico at Colombia, 6 p.m.		Canada at Puerto Rico, 7 p.m.	
Nicaragua at Dominican Republic, 7 p.m.		Israel at Netherlands, 7 p.m.	
United States at Brazil, 8 p.m.		Italy at United States, 9 p.m.	
Taiwan at Czech Republic, 10 p.m.		Wednesday, March 11	
Saturday, March 7		Canada at Cuba, 3 p.m.	
South Korea at Japan, 5 a.m.		Italy at Mexico, 7 p.m.	
Colombia at Canada, 11 a.m.		Dominican Republic at Venezuela, 8 p.m.	
Nicaragua at Netherlands, 12 p.m.		Friday, March 13	
Brazil at Italy, 1 p.m.		Pool C Runner-Up at Pool D Winner, 6:30 p.m.	
Israel at Venezuela, 7 p.m.		Pool A Runner-Up at Pool B Winner, 8 p.m.	
Britain at United States, 8 p.m.		Saturday, March 14	
Taiwan at South Korea, 10 p.m.		Pool D Runner-Up at Pool A Winner, 3 p.m.	
Sunday, March 8		Pool B Runner-Up at Pool C Winner, 9 p.m.	
Australia at Japan, 6 a.m.		Sunday, March 15	
Colombia at Cuba, 12 p.m.		Semifinalist 2 at Semifinalist 1, 8 p.m.	
Netherlands at Dominican Republic, 12 p.m.		Monday, March 16	
Britain at Italy, 1 p.m.		Semifinalist 4 at Semifinalist 3, 8 p.m.	

SPORTS ON TV

Thursday, March 5	
AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL (MEN'S)	4 a.m. (Friday)
FS2 — AFL: Geelong at Gold Coast	AUTO RACING
	6 p.m.
FS1 — ARCA Menards Series: General Tire 150, Phoenix Raceway, Avondale, Ariz.	BASEBALL
	5 a.m.
FS1 — 2026 World Baseball Classic Pool Stage: Czech Republic vs. South Korea, Pool C, Tokyo	10 a.m.
FS1 — 2026 World Baseball Classic Pool Stage: Australia vs. Czech Republic, Pool C, Tokyo	5 a.m. (Friday)
FS1 — 2026 World Baseball Classic Pool Stage: Japan vs. China, Pool C, Tokyo	COLLEGE BASKETBALL (MEN'S)
	5 p.m.
ESPNU — SC State at NC Central	7 p.m.
CBSSN — Sam Houston St. at Delaware	ESPNU — Tulane at Temple
ESPNU — Tulane at Temple	8 p.m.
ESPNU — Tulsa at East Carolina	FS1 — Rutgers at Michigan St.
	NBCSN — Michigan at Iowa
	PEACOCK — Michigan at Iowa
	9 p.m.
CBSSN — Kennesaw St. at UTEP	ESPNU — South Florida at Memphis
ESPNU — South Florida at Memphis	GOLF
	5:30 a.m.
GOLF — DP World Tour: Joburg Open, First Round, Houghton GC, Johannesburg, South Africa	10 a.m.
GOLF — PGA Tour: Puerto Rico Open, First Round, Grand Reserve Golf Club, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico	2 p.m.
GOLF — PGA Tour: Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard, First Round, Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club & Lodge, Orlando, Fla.	11 p.m.
FS2 — LIV Golf League: Second Round, Hong Kong Golf Club at Fanling, Hong Kong	GOLF — LPGA Tour: Blue Bay LPGA, Second Round, Jian Lake Blue Bay Golf Course, Hainan, China
	1 a.m. (Friday)
FS1 — LIV Golf League: Second Round, Hong Kong Golf Club at Fanling, Hong Kong	
SPORTS SCENE	
THURSDAY, MARCH 5	
SCHOLASTIC WRESTLING	
PIAA Championships at Hershey	FRIDAY, MARCH 6
	BOYS BASKETBALL
	PIAA Class 1A Playoffs
North Clarion vs. Turkeyfoot Valley at Somerset H.S. (7 p.m.)	GIRLS BASKETBALL
	PIAA Class 2A Playoffs
Aliquippa at Keystone (6 p.m.)	PIAA Class 3A Playoffs
	PIAA Class 3A Playoffs
Cranberry vs. Greensburg Central Catholic at Hampton H.S. (7:30 p.m.)	SCHOLASTIC WRESTLING
	PIAA Championship at Hershey
	SATURDAY, MARCH 7
	BOYS BASKETBALL
	PIAA Class 2A Playoffs
Clairton at Cochranton (1 p.m.)	PIAA Class 3A Playoffs
	PIAA Class 3A Playoffs
Cranberry at Aliquippa (1 p.m.)	SCHOLASTIC WRESTLING
	PIAA Championship at Hershey
	FRIDAY, MARCH 13
	SCHOLASTIC SWIMMING
	PIAA Championships at Bucknell University
	SATURDAY, MARCH 14
	SCHOLASTIC SWIMMING
	PIAA Championships at Bucknell University