

DeRosa owns 'overly confident' WBC remark

Smith

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HOUSTON (AP) — Manager Mark DeRosa says his premature comment about the United States having already punched its ticket to the World Baseball Classic quarterfinals before facing Italy was just an "overly confident statement" and reiterated Thursday he knew nothing was guaranteed at that point.



MARK DeROSA

DeRosa had made that remark on MLB Network's "Hot Stove" before the 8-6 loss to Italy on Tuesday that caused the U.S. to lose control of its WBC fate. The U.S. still advanced to a Friday quarterfinal matchup with Canada thanks to Italy's 9-1 win over Mexico on Wednesday.

"It's just an overly confident statement on 'Hot Stove,' period, the end," DeRosa said. "And it's my fault. I felt good about where we were after Mexico."

DeRosa also talked about the fresh start the star-studded U.S. team has now that its loss to Italy didn't prove fatal to its title hopes.

"New lease on life for the boys, certainly," he said. "I put ourselves in a tough spot. Tip our hat to Vinnie Pasquantino and Italy, truly. Went into that game a little overly confident and got a huge wake-up call."

DeRosa's comment prior to the Italy game garnered plenty of scrutiny after that loss, particularly since he had

kept usual starters Bryce Harper, Cal Raleigh, Alex Bregman, Bryce Turang and Byron Buxton out of his starting lineup. The U.S. needed to beat Italy to guarantee a spot in the quarterfinals. Losing left it subject to a series of tiebreakers, pending the result of Wednesday's Italy-Mexico game.

He explained those decisions Thursday. DeRosa said he wanted to give starts to Ernie Clement and Paul Goldschmidt because they could end up playing major roles off the bench

at some point. He also said he was limited in which pitchers he could use because of "guardrails" set by MLB teams, who typically restrict how much their players throw at the WBC due to injury concerns.

"When I looked at the lineup, I felt confident going in — bottom line," DeRosa said. "I mean, I also look at it from a player's perspective. Like, Bryce Harper was struggling a little bit. I know it's three games, but from the dugout — I played with him for a long time — so it's like, 'OK, maybe we get him off his feet a day. We get Goldy in there. We allow (Harper) to work with Sean Casey, Matt Holliday, maybe something clicks. And we get him right back in there and going.'"

DeRosa also had mentioned before Tuesday's games that some of the U.S. players were "dragging." The team buses had left later than usual after a Monday night victory over Mexico as players stayed in the locker room celebrating the win.

"Listen, us hanging out in a clubhouse is everything I ever dreamed of creating," DeRosa said. "You've got to buy into this thing super quick and try and create a team. For those players to invite the coaches in and for us to spend time together and enjoy a huge win that we hadn't had in 20 years was something that, I looked

around the room and it was super special to me.

"We did not lose sight of the fact that we had to go out and play well against Italy. They played a hell of a game. They smacked us in the mouth early. They got up big. We went into that game prepared to win it. I think there's a couple false narratives out there. But, no, I was well aware that we had to win that game based on all the scenarios that could take place."

The U.S. is making some changes to its pitching staff heading out of pool play and into the quarterfinals.

Lefty Tim Hill and right-handers Will Vest and Tyler Rogers are stepping in for two-time Cy Young Award winner Tarik Skubal, Michael Wacha and Ryan Yarbrough. DeRosa said left-hander Matthew Boyd also has left the U.S. team to return to the Chicago Cubs' spring-training camp.

"And I completely understand that," DeRosa said. "There's a lot of pressure from the parent clubs to get these guys ramped up for the start of the season."

"If he's going to be the opening day starter for the Cubs, we had to guarantee him innings — the game's got to dictate now. Pool play is a different animal. Trying to weave our way through it from a pitching standpoint, all bets are off now."

Straka part of 4-way tie at top at The Players Championship

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Sepp Straka saved par seven times and chipped in for eagle late in his round Thursday while avoiding big trouble on the TPC Sawgrass for a 5-under 67 that gave him a share of the lead at The Players Championship amid wind, rain, sunshine and darkness.

Whether he remained top the leaderboard with Maverick McNealy, Lee Hodges and Sahith Theegala would not be determined until Friday morning.

Austin Smotherman was at 5 under and had a 15-foot birdie putt on his final hole, the par-5 ninth. It looked as though he might try to finish, but when two players in his group ran into trouble and darkness thickened, he stuck tees in the ground to mark it until the morning.

"Do I wish I hit the chip in the morning as well? Went back and forth," Smotherman said. "The fact I was even questioning it, I probably

should have maybe backed off."

The 12 hours of golf was enough time for plenty of theatrics — 38 balls in the water along the three closing holes on the Stadium Course, two eagles from the fairway and a downpour that led to a 21-minute delay. By the afternoon, rain gave way to the sun casting shadows within minutes.

Rory McIlroy said he never doubted he would play after missing the Bay Hill weekend with back spasms on Saturday. He felt no pain except for the putter, failing to make anything longer than 6 feet in his round of 74.

Instead, the back problems fell to Collin Morikawa. He has been among the top players this season and withdrew after one hole. He felt his back seize up during a practice swing. Ryan Fox never made it to the course. The illness he cited upon withdrawing turned out to be kidney stones that had to be surgically re-

moved. The pain for Scottie Scheffler was his fourth opening round in his last five tournaments without breaking par. He struggled to find the fairway and spent more than hour on the range in a downpour after his 72.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was no one — depending on Smotherman's putt Friday morning — was lower than 67. The last time 67 was leading The Players was in 2017.

"No one went really low this afternoon, which I expected them to, just because the conditions were pretty benign," McIlroy said in assessing his score and realizing he's not out of it.

Straka managed to go bogey-free, with some serious scrambling on the back nine. He saved par with a 12-foot putt on No. 10, hit into the water with his second shot on the par-5 11 and escaped with par with another 12-foot putt. He chipped in from 50 feet for his eagle on the par-5 16th,

and then clipped a wedge to tap-in range from 67 yards out in the fairway on the 18th.

"I felt like all day I was playing from the rough, which is not ideal out here," Straka said. "Fortunately my iron play and wedge play was pretty nice today, and I was able to make a lot of putts to save some pars."

Theegala, who made three straight birdies early, ran into trouble from the left bunker for bogey on the par-5 ninth and then turned his fortunes around when his wedge from just under 100 yards rammed into the cup for eagle on No. 12.

"For it to crash into the pin and go in is pretty cool. It's a nice bonus," Theegala said.

The attention on backs were not just for Morikawa and McIlroy. Justin Thomas returned from back surgery in November last week at Bay Hill and shot 79-79. That felt like a distant memory when he opened with three straight birdies and wound

up with a 68.

"Literally every single thing you could imagine I did quite a bit better," Thomas said.

Cameron Young, who contended at Bay Hill last week, Russell Henley and Taylor Moore also were at 68. The group at 69 included Xander Schauffele and Tony Finau, who had four straight birdies and followed that with four straight bogeys.

Henley was lucky to finish his round, and had nothing to do with injury. He played in the morning during the brief delay, and it was raining so hard he dashed to the clubhouse from the nearby second green without realizing players were being held in place for the fast-moving storm.

Ben Griffin saved him by telling him play was starting, and Henley got back to the green.

That delay was enough to keep four players from finishing the round.

THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

NHL STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE															
Atlantic	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	Buffalo	66	40	20	6	86	232	198
Tampa Bay	64	40	20	4	84	229	178	Montreal	64	36	18	10	82	228	212
Detroit	66	36	23	7	79	193	198	Boston	65	36	23	6	78	216	205
Ottawa	64	32	23	9	73	216	201	Florida	65	33	29	3	69	197	214
Toronto	66	28	27	11	67	209	233	Metropolitan	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	65	41	18	6	88	230	190	Carolina	65	41	18	6	88	230	190
Pittsburgh	64	32	17	15	79	217	193	N.Y. Islanders	65	37	23	5	79	192	186
Columbus	65	33	21	11	77	210	207	Philadelphia	65	31	23	11	73	190	203
Washington	67	33	27	7	73	210	200	New Jersey	65	32	31	2	66	170	197
N.Y. Rangers	65	27	30	8	62	185	203	WESTERN CONFERENCE	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	63	43	11	9	95	241	159	Dallas	65	41	14	10	92	229	176
Minnesota	66	38	16	12	88	222	188	Utah	65	34	26	5	73	203	181
Nashville	64	29	28	8	66	191	218	Winnipeg	64	26	27	10	62	182	199
St. Louis	65	26	29	10	62	172	217	Chicago	64	24	29	11	59	172	207
Pacific	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	Anaheim	65	36	26	3	75	219	228
Vegas	65	29	22	14	72	210	207	Edmonton	66	32	26	8	72	233	228
San Jose	63	31	26	6	68	196	220	Seattle	63	29	25	9	67	179	190
Los Angeles	64	26	23	15	67	169	192	Calgary	65	26	32	7	59	163	204
Vancouver	64	19	37	8	46	165	238	NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.							

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

Philadelphia 4, Washington 1
Montreal 3, Ottawa 2

THURSDAY'S GAMES

Washington 2, Buffalo 1
Tampa Bay 4, Detroit 1
Calgary 5, New Jersey 4
St. Louis 3, Carolina 1
San Jose 4, Boston 2
Toronto 6, Anaheim 4
N.Y. Rangers 6, Winnipeg 3
Dallas 7, Edmonton 2
Philadelphia 3, Minnesota 2, SO
Chicago at Utah, late
Colorado at Seattle, late
Nashville at Vancouver, late

FRIDAY'S GAMES

Los Angeles at N.Y. Islanders, 7 p.m.
Edmonton at St. Louis, 8 p.m.

SATURDAY'S GAMES

Anaheim at Ottawa, 1 p.m.
Boston at Washington, 3 p.m.
Colorado at Winnipeg, 4 p.m.
N.Y. Rangers at Minnesota, 6 p.m.
Calgary at N.Y. Islanders, 7 p.m.
Carolina at Tampa Bay, 7 p.m.
Los Angeles at New Jersey, 7 p.m.
San Jose at Montreal, 7 p.m.
Toronto at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
Columbus at Philadelphia, 7:30 p.m.
Detroit at Dallas, 8 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Utah, 9 p.m.
Chicago at Vegas, 10 p.m.
Seattle at Vancouver, 10 p.m.

SUNDAY'S GAMES

St. Louis at Winnipeg, 3 p.m.
San Jose at Ottawa, 5 p.m.
Anaheim at Montreal, 7 p.m.
Toronto at Minnesota, 7:30 p.m.
Florida at Seattle, 8 p.m.
Nashville at Edmonton, 8 p.m.

THIS DATE IN SPORTS

March 13
1894 — J.L. Johnstone of England invents the starting gate for horse racing.

1920 — NYU wins the national amateur basketball championship in Atlanta. The Violets beat Rutgers 49-24 in the final of the AAU tournament.

1961 — Floyd Patterson knocks out Ingemar Johansson in the sixth round to retain the world heavyweight title in Miami Beach.

1982 — Elaine Zayak of the United States wins the world figure skating championship.

1983 — Randy Smith's consecutive game streak ends at 906 games, the longest in NBA history. Smith played for Buffalo, San Diego (twice), Cleveland and New York during the streak.

1998 — Bryce Drew hits a leaping 3-pointer as time expires to give Valparaiso a shocking 70-69 upset of Mississippi in the first round of the NCAA Midwest Regional.

PIRATES BOXSCORE

Pittsburgh 5, Atlanta 2										
Atlanta					Pittsburgh					
ab	r	h	bi		ab	r	h	bi		
Harris cf	2	1	0	0	Horwitz 1b	3	0	0	0	
Hartman cf	1	0	0	0	Polanco rf	0	1	0	1	
Mateo ss	4	0	0	0	O'Heam rf	1	0	0	0	
Gil ss	0	0	0	0	Fletcher rf-1b	2	0	0	0	
Smith 1b	2	0	0	0	Reynolds lf	2	0	0	0	
Compton 1b	1	0	0	0	A. Williams ss	2	1	2	2	
Farmer 3b	3	0	1	1	Ozuna dh	3	0	0	0	
Miller 3b	0	0	0	0	Rivas ph-dh	1	0	1	1	
Gamel rf	3	0	0	0	Triolo ss	2	0	0	0	
Carey rf	1	0	0	0	Jarvis 2b	2	0	0	0	
L. Williams 2b	3	0	0	0	Yorke 2b	2	0	0	0	
Jones 2b	0	0	0	0	Sanchez lf	1	0	0	0	
Leon c-dh	2	0	0	0	Cook cf	2	0	0	0	
Camargo dh-c	3	1	1	1	Rodriguez c	1	1	1	0	
Clohisy lf	2	0	0	0	Valdez 3b	2	0	0	0	
McIntyre lf	1	0	0	0	De Los Santos 3b	1	1	1	0	
					Davis c	2	0	0	0	
					Moss lf	1	1	0	0	
Totals	28	2	2	2	Totals	30	5	4	4	

TRANSACTIONS

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Optioned LHP Hayden Harris to Gwinnett (IL).

CHICAGO CUBS — Optioned LHPs Luke Little and Ryan Rolison and OF Justin Dean to Iowa (IL).

FOOTBALL

National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed LS Casey Kreitzer, QB Gardner Minshew II, OL Matt Pryor, DL Jonah Williams, RB Zvonovan Knight and CB Starling Thomas V to one-year contracts. Signed RB Tyler Algeier and OL Elijah Wilkinson to two-year contracts. Signed WR Kendrick Bourne to a two-year contract.

ATLANTA FALCONS — Re-signed DT LaCale London to a contract.

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed DE Trey Hendrickson to a four-year contract.

CHICAGO BEARS — Re-signed OL Jordan McFadden to a one-year contract.

CINCINNATI BENGALS — Signed DE Boye Mafe to a three-year contract through the 2028 season. Signed OT Orlando Brown Jr. to a two-year contract extension through the 2028 season. Signed S Bryan Cook to a three-year contract through the 2028 season.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Re-sign P Corey Bojorquez to a contract.

DALLAS COWBOYS — Released QB Will Grier.

GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed CB Benjamin St-Juste to a contract.

MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed QB Malik Willis to a contract. Re-signed DL Matthew Butler, ILB Willie Gay Jr. and K Riley Patterson to contracts. Released QB Tua Tagovailoa with a post-June 1 designation. Signed CB Alex Austin, K Zane Gonzalez and S Lonnie Johnson Jr. to contracts. Signed CB Darrell Baker Jr. and EDGE Josh Uche to contracts. Signed EDGE Robert Beal Jr. to a contract.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed QB Kyle Murray to a contract.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed Ss Mike Brown and Kevin Byard III, WR Romeo Doubs, FB Reggie Gilliam, TE Julian Hill, LB Dre'Mont Jones and G Aljahj Vera-Tucker to contracts.

NEW YORK JETS — Re-signed OL Xavier Newman to a contract.

TENNESSEE TITANS — Acquired DE Jermaine Johnson II from the N.Y. Jets in exchange for NT T'Vondre Sweat. Signed WR Wan'Dale Robinson, QB Mitchell Trubisky, DL John Franklin-Myers and Jordan Elliot, CBs Joshua Williams, Cor'Dale Flott and Alontae Taylor, G Cordell Volson, TE Daniel Belling, P Tommy Townsend and C Austin Schlottmann to contracts. Acquired DL Solomon Thomas from Dallas in exchange for a 2026 seventh-round draft pick.

PGA TOUR PAR SCORES

The Players Championship Par Scores Thursday

At TPC Sawgrass — The Players Stadium Course
Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.
Purse: \$25 million
Yardage: 7,352; Par: 72

Partial First Round Suspended for darkness.

Maverick McNealy	32-35-67	-5
Lee Hodges	32-35-67	-5
Sepp Straka	33-34-67	-5
Sahith Theegala	34-33-67	-5
Justin Thomas	33-35-68	-4
Russell Henley	33-35-68	-4
Taylor Moore	32-36-68	-4
Cameron Young	33-35-68	-4
Tony Finau	33-33-69	-3
Ludvig Aberg	35-34-69	-3
Tommy Fleetwood	37-32-69	-3
Viktor Hovland	36-33-69	-3
Xander Schauffele	34-35-69	-3
William Mouw	34-35-69	-3
Cory Connors	33-36-69	-3
Bud Cauley	35-35-70	-2
Lucas Glover	37-33-70	-2
Matt Fitzpatrick	36-34-70	-2
Andrew Putnam	35-35-70	-2
Patrick Rodgers	34-36-70	-2
Alex Smalley	33-37-70	-2
Jacob Bridgeman	34-36-70	-2
Ben Griffin	38-32-70	-2
Rickie Fowler	36-34-70	-2
Hideki Matsuyama	36-34-70	-2
Joe Highsmith	34-37-70	-2
Jason Day	34-36-70	-2
Matti Schmid	34-36-70	-2
Max Homa	33-38-71	-1
Danny Walker	35-36-71	-1
Alex Noren	34-37-71	-1
Ricky Castillo	34-37-71	-1
Akshay Bhatia	36-35-71	-1
Nicolai Hojgaard	36-35-71	-1
Ryo Hisatsune	35-35-71	-1