
Caribbean Series might be canceled after move from Venezuela

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ORLANDO, Fla. -- The member leagues of the Caribbean Professional Baseball Leagues Confederation voted on Thursday to halt plans for the 2019 Caribbean Series in Venezuela and left open a period of 24 hours to find an emergency alternate venue or cancel the event this year, a source told ESPN Deportes.

Political unrest is rocking the country, with president Nicolas Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaido both claiming leadership. At least a dozen people have been killed since demonstrations began Wednesday.

The Confederation postponed until Friday the announcement of the immediate future of the 61st edition of the Caribbean classic, which was originally scheduled to be held Feb. 2-8 in Barquisimeto, in northwestern Venezuela. The Series, also called the Caribbean World Series, is held each February and pits the champions of the winter tournaments of Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Panama are some of the options that were considered to organize the event as emergency venues, although according to the president of the Mexican Pacific League, his counterparts from Puerto Rico, the

Dominican Republic and his league would have declined to organize.

Meanwhile, the Mayor of Barranquilla, Colombia, Alejandro Char, told ESPN Deportes that he informed the Confederation of his willingness to assume the responsibility to organize the tournament at the Edgar Rentería Stadium in Barranquilla.

"All the options are being studied, but the possibility that the series will not be held this year, taking into account how late it is to move the tournament, is also very big. During [Thursday's] conversation, everyone agreed that right now there are no conditions in Venezuela to carry planes loaded with players and fans," said a source, who had a direct and active role in the conversation.



Plans for the 2019 Caribbean Series are in doubt after it was announced the series will not be played in Venezuela next month. A decision on whether it will be canceled, or played in another host country, is expected on Friday. AP Photo/Luis Gutierrez

Moving an event that costs close to \$3 million dollars to a new host country within a week of starting is not an easy task. While Panama and Colombia would have the disadvantage of not having participating teams, the Dominican Republic would only host the event if each participant agrees to cover their expenses, said the source.

That leaves Mexico as the most logical option, although it has organized the last two editions. Omar Cañizales, the president of the Mexican Pacific League, said early Thursday that he is not interested in hosting for a third consecutive year.

Meanwhile, Ana Gabriela Guevara, director of Mexico's National Commission of Physical Culture and Sports (CONADE), said that Mexico has the conditions to host the Caribbean Series if it cannot be held in Venezuela.

"There are conditions for this, but we would have to see the cost issue and if it continues for the same dates or we would have to extend the time; I have not spoken with Omar, I hope to do it [soon], but Mexico has possibilities to bring it," said Guevara during the flag ceremony of the Mexican baseball team that will seek a spot in the Pan American Games.

Cañizales thought otherwise.

"It's not Mexico, it's not Dominican [Republic] or Puerto Rico [the possible venues], the three of us said that we are not in position [to do this], but something is evaluated so that it can be done. We look for guarantees of total security for the delegations and everyone who goes," said Cañizales before the third match of the final series of the Mexican Pacific League between Obregón and Jalisco.

"We do not believe that it is healthy for our country to bring such a beautiful series for three consecutive years. We do not want to wear out the series. We like to do things well in Mexico, and we run the risk that seven or eight days after starting a Caribbean Series, we had to start working on it," Cañizales told ESPN's SC5 on Thursday.

"We are always willing to collaborate with our sister leagues, but on a personal basis, I do not think it would be convenient," Cañizales added.

The recent political events in Venezuela forced the Confederation to schedule an emergency meeting on Thursday to discuss the different options available to try to rescue the event. Last year, when it was also scheduled to be played in Barquisimeto for the first time, the Caribbean Series had to move to Guadalajara, Mexico, although on that occasion the decision was made several months in advance.

After the meeting on Thursday, the president of Puerto Rico's Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League, Juan A. Flores Galarza, reported details of the teleconference between the Caribbean directors.

"We spent an hour-and-a-half discussing the issue, and the decision was made to have a deadline to evaluate the possible scenarios, and at the meeting, we were given a report on the situation by the organizing committee. Within 24 hours, the final decision will be made," Flores Galarza said.

"We are preparing the team to compete in the Caribbean Series," said José Mallén Calac, general manager of the Estrellas Orientales team, which was crowned champion of the Dominican Republic league on Wednesday for the first time in 51 years.

When ESPN asked the GM if he would have any problems taking his team to Venezuela, he chose a diplomatic answer.

"That's not a decision of the teams, but of the leagues, we'll see what they decide," Calac said.

The second game of the final of the Venezuelan league between the Leones del

Caracas and the Cardenales de Lara in Barquisimeto was about to be suspended, after the Caracas players left for the hotel. Later they returned and it was played after the start was delayed two hours.

Due to the uncertainty, Caracas' American pitchers Craig Stem and Logan Darnell left the country on Thursday, the club said. Other foreign players and at least one Leones coach also requested to be allowed to leave.

Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred recommended the personnel of the 30 MLB teams, including those from the minor leagues, refrain from traveling to Venezuela at this time.
