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From First Pitch to Final Out: Lessons in Sustainability from the World Baseball Classic

What fans don't see—and why it matters on game day

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When the World Baseball Classic brought fans from around the world to Miami, most eyes were on the field at loanDepot park, home of the Miami Marlins. Behind the scenes, the event offered a real-time look at what goes into supporting recycling efforts at a large, fast-moving sporting event.

WM's Advisory Services team supported the World Baseball Classic throughout the tournament, working alongside Miami Marlins staff and local WM employees to help plan, guide and assess waste diversion efforts. The hands-on role provided practical insights that continue to help support the Marlins and MLB's sustainability-related efforts as WM enters its third season as MLB's first Official Sustainability Partner.

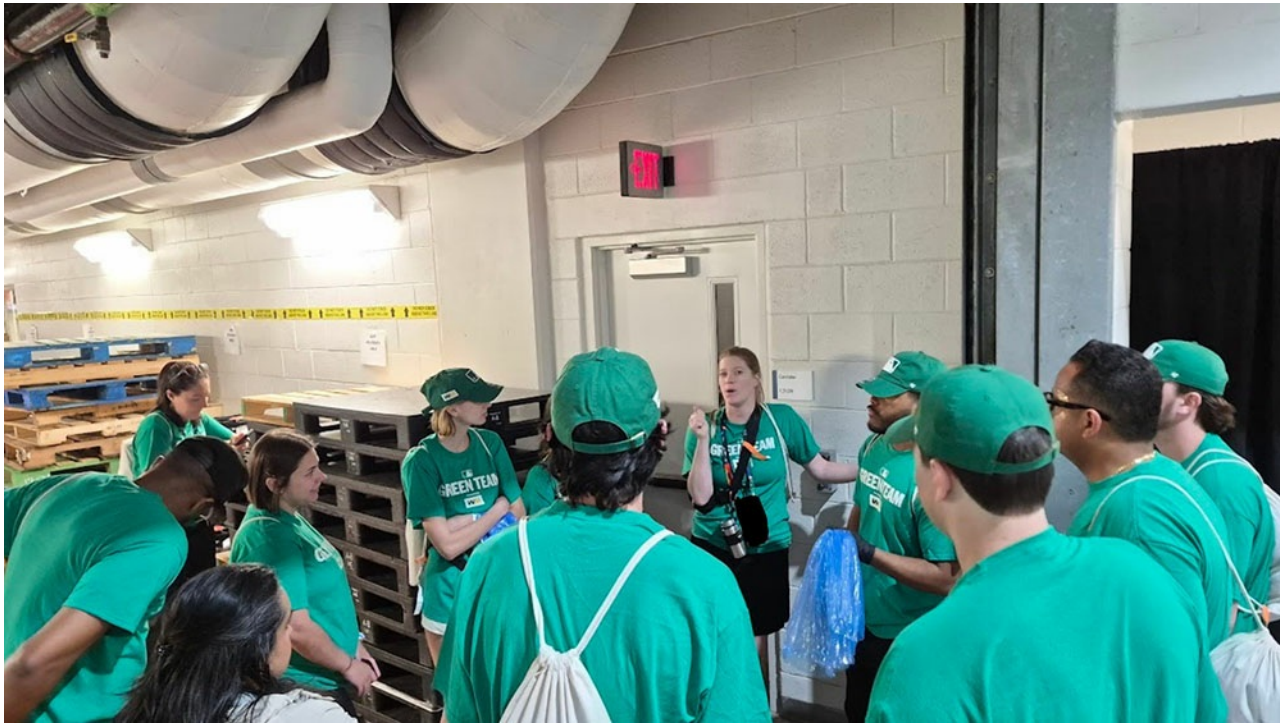
"While events like the World Baseball Classic highlight what's possible, our focus is on consistency," said Robert Gelman, Vice President of Partnership Development and Marketing for the Miami Marlins. "Through our partnership with WM, we've built a program that operates every day, every game, and every season, creating measurable impact across our entire operation."



Learning happens onsite

One of the biggest takeaways was simple: sustainability planning only goes so far without boots on the ground. Some challenges only emerge once tens of thousands of fans arrive.

“You can plan extensively ahead of time, but being onsite shows you where systems aren’t aligning with expectations,” said Lauren Lichterman, a WM advisor who supports MLB’s sustainability-related efforts across major events. “Seeing operations firsthand allows you to respond in ways that aren’t possible from a distance.”



For this event, WM Advisory Services managed a group of Green Team volunteers—community members, college students and local WM employees—who help fans with recycling between innings.

By spending time alongside Green Team volunteers, housekeeping crews and facility operators, WM gained visibility into how materials are collected, moved through the building and eventually disposed of during live operations. That perspective helped inform suggested real-time adjustments and highlighted opportunities that could carry into the regular season. Layering this operational perspective with advisory services, on top of typical materials management operations, can help illustrate how advisory support may add value.

Turning insight into action

Almost 24 tons of material was recovered from the event at loanDepot park. This included cardboard, aluminum, plastic bottles and polypropylene plastic cups as well as some food recovered for donation and composted organics.

On a typical gameday at loanDepot park, mixed recycling volumes usually fill a small recycling container. During the 15 World Baseball Classic games hosted in Miami, multiple 20-yard recycling containers were filled — reflecting both increased material volume and an expanded range of materials recovered during one of the most demanding events on the MLB calendar.

That increase was driven by a combination of infrastructure improvements and event-specific operational support. Expanded compost capacity, clearer sorting guidance and improved material flow all contributed, alongside additional staffing and oversight during the tournament. The World Baseball Classic created a valuable opportunity for onsite collaboration, allowing WM Advisory Services to work closely with venue staff and Green Team volunteers throughout the event.

Together, teams reinforced how common gameday materials—such as polypropylene cold cups, clean cardboard and other food-service items – move through the diversion system. The added focus helped identify materials sometimes missed during operations, resulting in more material reaching recycling containers.

The role of infrastructure

Local recycling infrastructure also proved important. A newly opened WM recycling facility in Pembroke Pines, Fla.,

WM Recycling South Florida, expanded what could be recovered — particularly for materials that often lack simple recycling outlets. And, most materials were source-separated at the facility following the event.

During event teardown, dedicated collection efforts enabled a range of durable goods, excess materials and event signage to be diverted through specialized handling on site and processing at the new facility. Combined with additional staffing and heightened attention during the tournament, these capabilities helped capture materials that might not typically be recovered during a regular-season game. The experience is already shaping how similar materials could be managed at future MLB events.

Progress depends on people

“The most meaningful change happens when there’s shared ownership,” said Laura Sivels, who is on WM’s Advisory Services team and works closely with the Miami Marlins. “When people understand why the work matters and how their actions play a role in the success of a program, that momentum can continue.”

By spending extended time onsite and coordinating diversion operations and Green Team volunteers—who were recruited to help engage fans on how to **Recycle Right®**—WM not only deepened its understanding of MLB and large-event operations, but also worked to expand the host venue’s relationships with vendors that can help contribute to more sustainable materials management. Through this collaborative effort, WM helped foster greater alignment and buy-in among vendors, reinforcing shared sustainability-focused priorities, and potentially supporting more consistent practices beyond the tournament.



Looking ahead

As WM and MLB enter the third year of their partnership, the focus is shifting from learning to execution — turning onsite insight into clearer MLB goals, stronger data tracking and improvements that can scale across the league.

“In the early stages, there’s a lot of listening and learning,” said Kristin Hanczor, who manages WM’s Advisory Services relationship with MLB. “Now we’re using that foundation to help drive measurable progress.”

While WM has supported sustainability-related efforts across multiple major MLB events, the World Baseball Classic underscored a consistent truth: no two venues operate the same, and every event can offer new insight. As

the partnership evolves, these lessons are becoming building blocks for a more intentional, scalable approach to supporting sustainability across MLB.

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