

Leonardo Castillo gives Cuba back hope in the return to the oval



Leonardo Castillo in Cali-Valle 2021

Havana, December 9 (RHC) - At 20 years of age, Leonardo Castillo has launched his candidacy as an athlete of projection in Cuban athletics. The native of Palmira (Cienfuegos) smashed a few days ago in the Pascual Guerrero stadium, in Cali, his personal best in the 400 m and set it at 45.79 during the First Junior Pan American Games in Cali-Valle (Colombia).

Two years ago, before the pandemic arrived, he had shown his credentials at the age of 18, when he ran the lap around the oval in 46.44 seconds at the Pan American Stadium in Havana, to win the Barrientos Memorial title in front of more experienced athletes such as Adrián Chacón and Raydel Rojas -already out of the national team- and some foreigners.

With his unexpected performance in Cali, he took an honorable silver medal and climbed to 23rd place in Cuba's historical ranking in the round the oval, in an event in which the island has had stars such as Alberto Juantorena and Roberto Hernandez and has won medals at Olympic and world level.

When he was only 16 years old, he made the national athletics team in the long jump, but the teacher Eloína Kerr had her eye on him and soon the boy from the Pearl of the South "swapped" for the 400 meters.

The Barrientos-2019 victory opened a space for him in the Cuban long pole to the Pan American Games in Lima and in his first international test he had the responsibility of opening for the young Cuban quartet, placed fifth in the final.

Then he could hardly show himself for a year and a half because of the pandemic, although with Eloína's help he never neglected his training, until his surprising return with the hopeful performance in Cali.

"He is a boy who stands out for being technical, strong and has good resistance to speed. We have to keep working especially on improving his speed parameters," Eloína, with whom Castillo has such a close relationship of respect and admiration that she considers her like a mother, told Radio Habana Cuba.

Castillo, meanwhile, hopes that this result will open the doors to bigger competitions and is confident that she will not disappoint.

Remembering what happened last December 2 in the Pascual Guerrero he insists that it was a surprise for him, especially because of the 45.79.

"When I saw that time even I didn't believe it myself. But I had a lot of mental strength after the semifinal, where I did a bad race tactically. I had the advice of my coach Eloína Kerr and my friend Yoandys Lescay. I am very grateful to both of them," Castillo said.

"I got desperate in the semifinal because I knew I had strong rivals. I went through the 200 at 21.21, almost a second less than what I should do. But you learn from setbacks and that same day I told myself that in the final I was going for a medal," he recalled.

The current Olympic cycle could bring joy for the fibrous athlete. If he maintains the expected progression, the Cienfuegos native could enter the select club of Cubans with 45 flats or less, and with those times he can aspire to level results in the regional context.

Most of the Cuban runners who precede him in the historical ranking of the 400 m according to world athletics have achieved their personal bests between 21 and 23 years of age. Castillo will turn 21 next February 16.

CUBAN RANKING OF ALL TIME 400 M.

Ranking Mark Athlete City Date Age

32 44.14 Roberto Hernández Sevilla May 30, 1990 (23 years old)

45 44.26 Alberto Juantorena Montreal 29 July 1976 (25 years old)

191 44.77 Félix Stevens Santiago de Cuba 21 Feb 1986 (21 years)

274 44.93 William Collazo Berlin 19 Aug 2009 (22 years old)

314 45.00 Yoandys Lescay Rio de Janeiro 13 Aug 2016 (22 years old)

The remaining Cubans ahead of Leonardo Castillo in the 400 m.

Yeimer Lopez 45.11 (21 years old)

Raidel Acea 45.18 (25 years old)

Jorge Valentín 45.19 (22 years old)

Norberto Tellez 45.27 (21 years old)

Leandro Peñalver 45.35 (23 years old)

Lázaro Martínez 45.37 (20 years old)

Omar Cisneros 45.47 (22 years old)

Glauder Garzón 45.48 (19 years old)

Carlos Reyté 45.50 (29 years old)

Noel Ruiz 45.53 (23 years)

Alianni Echevarría 45.58 (19 years)

Omar Mena 45.65 (29 years old)

Jorge Crusellas 45.65 (29 years old)

Agustin Pavó 45.71 (19 years old)

Héctor Herrera 45.77 (30 years old)

Edel Hevia 45.77 (21 years old)

Mariano Mesa 45.78 (21 years old)

LEONARDO CASTILLO 45.79 (20 YEARS OLD)

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