

U.S. blockade: Constant attack on Cuban sports movement



by Adrián Mengana Martínez

The U.S. government's economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba is hitting hard the growth and strength of the island's sports movement, and it goes beyond its borders.

That siege imposed on the Antillean nation more than six decades ago and intensified with hundreds of additional measures approved by former President Donald Trump -maintained by current President Joe Biden-, attacks every achievement of an athletic system developed since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

In the midst of a country facing the Covid-19, the global economic crisis and the political and media subversion, managers, workers, coaches and athletes wisely overcome all difficulties to maintain the main achievements at national and international level.

The absurd siege limits financing for development by prohibiting Cuba's access to the U.S. market and the International Monetary Fund, as well as to the World Bank and all kinds of soft credit sources, which prevent it from operating dollar accounts in its economic relations.

That is why it is difficult for the Caribbean nation to purchase medicines, vitamins, materials for biochemical tests, recovering agents, equipment and means necessary for the preparation of athletes, nor to acquire in the market sports equipment with U.S. components.

Add to this the withholding of millions of dollars earned by Cuban exponents and teams, the limitation of access to U.S. soil to compete and the opposition to granting licenses to coaches and managers of both countries to participate in events, congresses and academic exchanges.

Also, the undeniable theft of talent encouraged and stimulated by Washington's policies.

One of the most mediatic examples was the cancellation of the agreement signed in December 2018 between the Major League of Baseball and the Cuban Baseball Federation (FCB), with the allegation that current U.S. laws prohibit trade with entities associated with the government of the largest of the Antilles.

Along these lines, the treasurer of the FCB, Luis Daniel del Risco, affirmed that among the serious consequences for the sport most followed by the fans of the Caribbean country, are the lack of raw materials to manufacture balls and other implements, with its consequent effect on the development from an early age.

In addition, the exclusion of the Cuban baseball team from the Caribbean Series due to the U.S. opposition to accept it as a full member of the regional baseball Confederation.

One of the most prestigious centers on the island, the Havana Anti-Doping Laboratory, has also been impacted by the blockade as it has been unable on several occasions to collect funds for services rendered and to comply with payments to different international organizations such as the World Anti-Doping Agency.

All this because it cannot find the means to transfer the money directly from the island, nor is it easy to access most of the equipment, reagents and supplies of U.S. origin.

In spite of the difficult context, the director of the institution, Rodny Montes de Oca, highlighted the intense work of the institution and the search for technological alternatives in Japan and other countries to maintain the accreditation of the center for 18 consecutive years.

The fact is that the laboratory has to spend 40 to 50 percent more than the costs of its similar accredited laboratories in the world, while it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain the most advanced technology in anti-doping and the possibility of maintaining an exchange of knowledge and personnel with other specialists.

The company Cubadeportes S.A. has been added to the long list of affectations, with the blocking or cancellation of banking channels for transfers, and the exhortation to desertions and the signing of individual contracts, which reduces the number of Cuban specialists processed by the entity.

The president of the group, Yadira Gonzalez, does not hide the strong impact of that policy in the eagerness to prevent the country's access to the money obtained from the negotiations carried out with clients.

The tightening of the blockade caused a decrease in the number of Cuban collaborators processed by Cubadeportes S.A. and adversely affected the company's commercial management, said González.

The national project for the training of athletes has not escaped the effects of the blockade by trying to curb the development of skills and aptitudes in an integral manner, since it restricts access to implements, clothing and sufficient resources in each school, area and sports teams.

* Sports reporter with Prensa Latina

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