

Cuban sports close 2022 and get ready for active 2023



By Orlando González Cruz.

Havana, December 28 (RHC)-- The year 2022 is coming to an end and, right around this time, the moment is ideal to analyze the main successes and failures of Cuban sports during the year, as well as the events that left their mark in the history books.

Several disciplines experienced events with special significance in the twelve months that are coming to an end. Canoeing and judo saw two of their practitioners climb to the top in the traditional voting that chooses the athletes of the year in Cuba.

Yarisleidis Cirilo emerged as the best athlete of 2022 and Andy Granda emulated her among men.

Judoka Granda was consecrated as absolute world champion in the +100 kg division, in addition to being crowned Pan American champion.

Meanwhile, Cirilo and her partner Katherin Nuevo became the first Cuban women to win a gold medal at the World Canoeing Championship in Canada. Meanwhile, the Olympic champion in Tokyo, Serguey Torres, once again climbed the podium in a top-level event. Nuevo and Torres were also included among the ten outstanding athletes of 2022.

Overall, canoeing totaled gold and silver medals and places four and five at the world championships; six gold, two silver and one bronze medals at world cups and one gold and three silver medals at the Pan American championships.

Boxing, the "flagship of Cuban sports", had a season without multiple games or world championships, but two events marked a before and after. We refer to the professional debut of the "Domadores" in May and the incorporation in recent days of women to its practice in an official way in our country. The first poster for women was held this month and left very good impressions among fans and specialists.

Speaking to Radio Habana Cuba (RHC), the Head of the National Technical Collective, Rolando Acebal, told us about these novelties:

"Hardly has the practice been officially opened and in their first competition it seemed that they had been training for quite some time. It is true that of Cuban women nothing can be doubted! We are sure that some medal can be obtained in the coming Central American Games."

As for the traditional "engine" of the national sport, which constitutes the men's sector and the novelty of professionalism, the executive told us:

"A milestone in history has been marked, we have done quite well. A total of 17 bouts have taken place and we have only lost two. The athletes are very motivated, they are already in good places in the ranking and next year they should have options to fight for the title".

Baseball experienced a new Cuban title for the Alazanes de Granma in the 61st National Series (SNB) and the premiere of a tournament destined to raise the ceiling of this sport on the island, the Elite League of Cuban Baseball (LEBC).

Its genesis was exciting for more than one, but the truth is that from the organizational point of view there were many gaps that harmed the championship, even before the first ball was thrown. It is urgent for the next edition of this tournament to guarantee everything with enough time to honor the name of a necessary event that hopefully is here to stay.

Internationally, encouraging results were achieved in lower categories and the news that baseball players who play in the U.S. Major Leagues could represent the island in the upcoming World Classic was a pleasant taste for the fans, but the greatest joy would not come from baseball, but from two "cousins" belonging to the same federation.

The leading roles would be played by softball, one of the best team sports of the year, reaching an outstanding fifth place in the World Cup, and baseball 5, a very young specialty in the foreign context and which has its roots in Cuba with the so-called four-corner or handball.

The modality lived its first World Cup and the Cubans conquered the crown in a fabulous competition. This achievement was enough to ensure them as the most outstanding team of the year in Cuba.

In the last 365 days, Volleyball was recognized as the best team sport, after reaching the top in the Final Four, the Final Six, the Pan American Cup and the FIVB Challenger Cup, and 14th place in the world indoor championship, with Jesús Herrera (M) as the best team sport athlete. To these fabulous results

must be added places one, two and three in Norceca stops, and 17th place in the world beach championship.

Handball won the Caribbean Cup and qualified for the next Central American Games in San Salvador. Niurkis Moras was chosen as the best female in collective disciplines.

Shooting was another of the specialties that remained among the highlights of the athletic activity in Cuba, despite the logistical limitations imposed by the U.S. blockade on the acquisition of indispensable implements for its development.

Its maximum historical exponent, Leuris Pupo, from Holguín, once again stood out, winning the Pan American of the modality and becoming the first Cuban to secure his ticket to the Olympic Games in Paris 2024. Once again, the island's only Olympic champion in this sport ranked among the top ten athletes of the year in Cuba.

Chess had an excellent season, with its climax in the Chennai Olympiad in India. Both teams coincidentally placed 19th in their rankings. The men scored creditable victories over Hungary and Azerbaijan, as well as draws against Ukraine and Spain.

All the members of the squad added points to their Elo, with Yasser Quesada and Carlos Daniel Albornoz as main referents; the latter's performance contributed to his election among the ten best athletes of the year in Cuba. For the women, Lisandra Ordaz worthily defended the first board, while Yarisbel Miranda and the national queen Yanielia Forgás signed an excellent tournament.

Another sport that maintained good results was diving. The synchronized platform duo, formed by Luis Gustavo Cañabate and Carlos Daniel Ramos, placed sixth in the world championship.

Basque Pelota, a discipline without a large media following in the country, but with a respected track record, this year won the bronze medal at world level in the frontenis modality. This achievement allowed Daniela Darriba to place herself among the leading sportswomen on the island.

Cycling made headlines again in 2022 through its main figure Arlenis Sierra. The "Sierra de Cuba" came sixth in the Road World Championship and was Pan American champion. She also had outstanding performances as a member of the Movistar Club, in prestigious European circuits, such as the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France and the Vuelta a España.

Athletics had its ups and downs in planetary events. In the World Indoor Championships, Lázaro Martínez won gold in the triple jump. Meanwhile, the outdoor competition left the disappointment of not achieving podiums, being below the historical performances in this type of events. However, it is worth mentioning the praiseworthy performances of Leyanis Pérez and Maykel Massó, who came very close to the medals with their fourth places.

As for sports for people with disabilities, Suslaidy Girat (paratriathlete of the year) with two gold medals and a silver medal in the Deaflympics 2022, and Robiel Yanquiel Sol (outstanding male paratriathlete), both in parathletics, and Sheyla Hernández in parajudo, who won the silver medal in the IBSA world championship, stood out.

We have made a review of some of the main events in the Cuban athletic panorama in the year that is ending, which leaves as a balance 98 Pan American tickets, 322 Central American tickets and one Olympic quota.

The coming 2023 will be full of competitions with the presence of our sports movement. Special mention should be made of the World Baseball Classic (March 8 to 21), the Central American and Caribbean

Games in San Salvador (June 23 to July 8), the Pan American Games in Santiago de Chile (October 20 to November 5) and the fifth edition of the ALBA Sports Games.

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