

# *Cuba starts engines for the 5th World Baseball Classic*



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Havana, January 16 (RHC) - The Cuban pre-selection for the V World Baseball Classic began training on Monday at the Latino Stadium in Havana ahead of the tournament, scheduled for March 8-23.

Of the 50 pre-selected players, around 29 started their practices at the Latino, under the baton of manager Armando Johnson and the rest of the management team, among which are included stars of the past as the maximum home run hitter of Cuban baseball, Orestes Kindelán, the leader in games won, Pedro Luis Lazo, one of the heroes in the subtitle of team Cuba in the I edition (2006), and one of the best

bullpen players of the country, Germán Mesa.

In the Latin American Stadium, players such as Ariel Martínez and Yurisbel Gracial, both with experience in the Japanese League and with great possibilities of making the roster, were quite successful in the batting cage.

Also on Monday, most of Cuba's star signings in the Japan League (NPB), led by last season's best reliever Raidel Martínez (Chunichi Dragons), as well as Yariel Rodríguez, Frank Abel Álvarez, Ariel Martínez and SoftBank Falcons champion Yurisbel Gracial, joined the training sessions.

Among the participants in the First Elite League of Cuba, Pavel Quesada, Andrys Pérez, Naykel Cruz and Luis Vicente Mateo, whose teams have already been eliminated, were seen. Then the Portuarios and Agricultores teams will join them, who are in the grand finale.

By regulations of their clubs, the five major leaguers called up, led by Chicago White Sox stars Luis Robert and Yoan Moncada, and the other 7 who play in foreign leagues, will join the team at the beginning of March in Asia.

The final team of 30 players will be announced on January 24 and about 10 days later they are scheduled to leave for Asia.

Johnson was very happy with the disposition shown by the squad on this first day of preparation and said that in Japan they expect to hold about 10 scrimmages with professional and university clubs, as well as others that can be arranged with the mediation of the MLB.

"I am very motivated and ready to help the team. I was resting at home after a long season in Japan, but as soon as they called me I came," said pitcher Yariel Rodríguez, who had a remarkable performance last season with the Chunichi Dragons, with whom he won six games with only one loss and was the best middle reliever in the league with 45 hold points.

So far there are fixed dates to face the Chunichi Dragons (February 19), the Yomiuri Giants (22) and the SoftBank Falcons (23), all from the Japan Professional League (NPB).

The team must then travel around February 24 to Taichung, Taipei, China, where it will play the first round of the Classic against host Taiwan, Italy, Panama and the Netherlands.

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