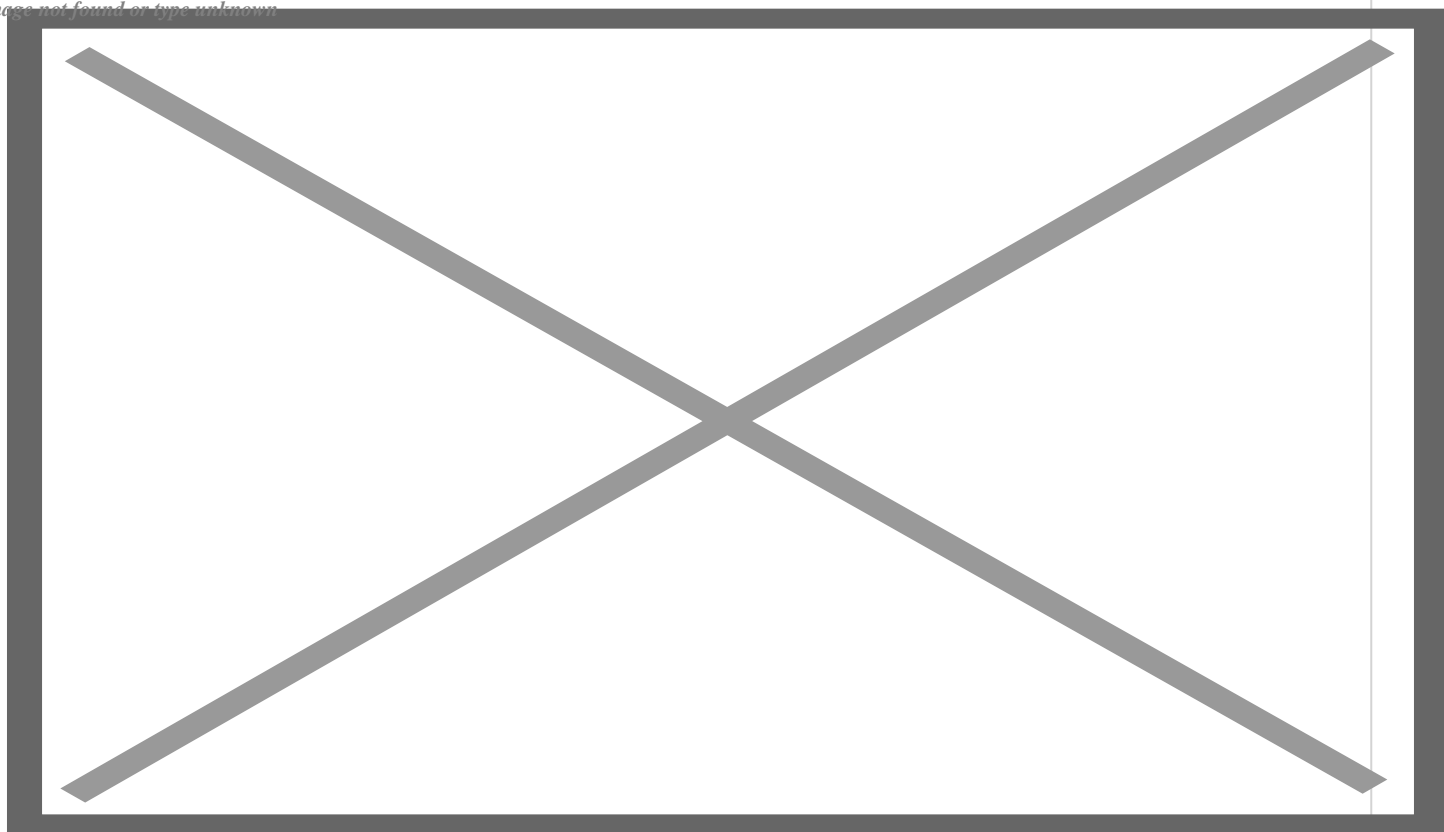


# *Baseball: Cuba with five major leaguers and several migrants to the World Baseball Classic*

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## **World Baseball Classic**

Havana, January 26 (RHC) - Cuba announced on Wednesday its final selection to the V World Baseball Classic (March 8-21), which includes for the first time in history players from major leagues and other emigrated players, along with its star signings from Japan and some figures from its Elite League.

"It's a complete team. We're going straight to win," pitching coach Pedro Luis Lazo told Cuban television cameras, while slugger Alfredo Despaigne described the team as "excellent", with a mix of young players and some veterans.

Despaigne, 36 years old and who will be playing in his fourth classic, asked the fans for their support and said that they will "go out to give everything on the field and try to recover the level that Cuban baseball needs".

Two catchers, eight infielders, six outfielders and 14 pitchers make up the cast of 30 baseball players, which includes five active in Major League Baseball (MLB), 5 others who emigrated and play on a personal basis in leagues in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, and 7 signed in Japan with the endorsement of the Cuban Baseball Federation (FCB).

The big leaguers are Chicago White Sox star Luis Robert (CF and 2020 Gold Glove) and infielder Yoan Moncada, infielder Andy Ibañez (Detroit Tigers), and pitchers Ronald Bolaños (Kansas City) and Luis Miguel Romero (Oakland Athletics).

Yoennis Céspedes, Roennis Elías and Onelkis García (Águilas Cibaeñas, Dominican Republic), Lorenzo Quintana (Tigres del Licey, Dominican Republic), and Elián Leyva (Naranjeros de Hermosillo, Mexico) complete the list of foreign-based players called up to the national team.

The roster also includes stellar Japanese signees Raidel Martínez, Liván Moinelo and Yariel Rodríguez, considered by Lazo as a trio of luxury relievers, as well as young Frank Abel Alvarez, Ariel Martínez, Alfredo Despaigne and Yurisbel Gracial, the latter two now free agents.

Of the 30 selected, 9 have experience in previous classics.

#### MOTIVATION THROUGH THE ROOF

The group of players who began their preparation on the 9th at the Latin American Stadium in Havana, said they are excited about playing a good role in the Classic, which will be played by 20 teams in Japan, Taiwan and the United States.

"I am very motivated, I have just had a very good season in Japan, which has helped me a lot. I was resting, but I'm here getting ready to face the Classic and help the team as much as I can," said the fast right-hander Yariel Rodríguez (Yomiuri Giants), selected as the best reliever in Japan and leader in hold points, to Radio Habana Cuba after finishing a training session.

He revealed that, unlike his role in Japan (pitching the eighth inning), in the Classic he would like to be one of the starters.

"I have advanced a lot (in Japan) because it is a baseball where there is a lot of discipline. With discipline I have improved in control, in stable speed, I have become a pitcher with a little experience," he added.

#### TRIO OF ASES

In addition to having several pitchers with experience in the major leagues and stars of the Big League such as Robert and Moncada, the trio of relievers of the ninth is a luxury, to the point that the former star Pedro Luis Lazo considers it "the best in the world", the three with deliveries that are around 97 miles and with outstanding numbers in the Japan League (NPB).

"Relievers Yariel Rodríguez (Chunichi Dragons), Liván Moinelo (SoftBank Falcons, and Raidel Martínez (Dragons), for me are the best in the world right now," opined Lazo, one of the heroes of Cuba's runner-up finish in the I Classic (2006) and current pitching coach of the team.

Winner of the NPB Latin of the Year award, the giant Raidel, 26 years old and born in Pinar del Rio, had another dream campaign, leading the section of games saved (39), with an amazing effectiveness of 0.97 PCL in 55.2 innings pitched, while Yariel (25 years old and native of Camaguey) took the distinction of Best Reliever of the season, by leading the section of hold points, - preserving the lead -, besides

reaching 6 wins with an excellent average effectiveness of 1.15.

In his sixth season in Japan, the 27-year-old left-hander Moinelo, a native of Pinar del Río, saved 24 games, with a 1.03 ERA and an impressive strikeout average (87 in 52.2 innings pitched).

After pointing out pitching as the team's "strong point", Lazo advanced as possible starters Elián Leyva (Naranjeros de Hermosillo, Mexico), Roennis Elías (Aguilas Cibaeñas, Dominican Republic) and Luis Miguel Romero, with a fourth yet to be defined.

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