

Bach and Juantorena recall Olympic feats, exchange gifts in Havana



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Havana, March 4 (RHC) - German Thomas Bach, head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), met with Alberto Juantorena in Havana on Friday in an emotional meeting shortly before concluding a lightning visit to Cuba.

On a sunny morning at the Pan American Stadium in eastern Havana, Bach inaugurated a modern track and watched an exhibition of young athletes from the island, along with the head of Panam Sports, Neven Ilic, the president of the Cuban Olympic Committee, Roberto Leon Richards and other executives.

During the event, Juantorena, two-time Olympic champion in Montreal 76 and president of the Cuban Athletics Federation, presented Bach with an autographed jersey and then the two men spoke for several minutes.

Bach made clear his admiration for Juantorena, reminded him of his races in 1976, which he considered "unique", was interested in his state of health and also gave him a gift on behalf of the IOC.

The reunion between the Olympic kings of Montreal-76 - Bach in team foil and Juantorena in 400 and 800 meters - marked the visit of Bach and the delegation accompanying him to the Pan American Stadium in eastern Havana.

In a brief meeting with the press, the Olympics leader was full of praise for Cuban sport and described his two-day stay in Havana as exciting.

"With a population of 11 million, Cuba has 135 Olympic medals. That's an Olympic record, it's on the podium in that sense and almost certainly a gold medal," he said.

He considered it a "great experience" to be with the athletes, noting that "they are the heart of the Olympic Games. It makes me feel very good to meet with these successful athletes who are committed to their future and the future of Olympic sport," he added.

He stressed that Cuba is "a great country of sport and said he was impressed by the conditions that the COC and Inder offer to Cuban athletes for Paris-2024 and Los Angeles-2028 and said that "it is a system with very good logistics for the preparation of sport, because it is not only sport, it is education, health, Olympic values".

"Cuba is also an example of solidarity, because Cuban sport sends many coaches and doctors to other countries. We are very happy about this visit. They can be proud of their successes", he asserted.

Questioned about the Russian and Belarusian athletes, the Olympic hierarch said that the IOC is working on initiatives to explore ways and is consulting on how to address the situation.

"We are on the path of consultations to be very clear (what to do), these consultations are about international competitions. It's not the time to talk about the Paris Olympics, it's too early," Bach told reporters.

On Thursday, shortly after his arrival in Havana, the Olympic leader took part in an extraordinary Assembly of the Cuban Olympic Committee, inaugurated a multifunctional sports board in the Sports City, watched a sports-cultural show and then exchanged with Cuban sports stars such as Mijaín López, Julio César La Cruz and Arlen López, who also gave him autographed outfits as gifts.

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