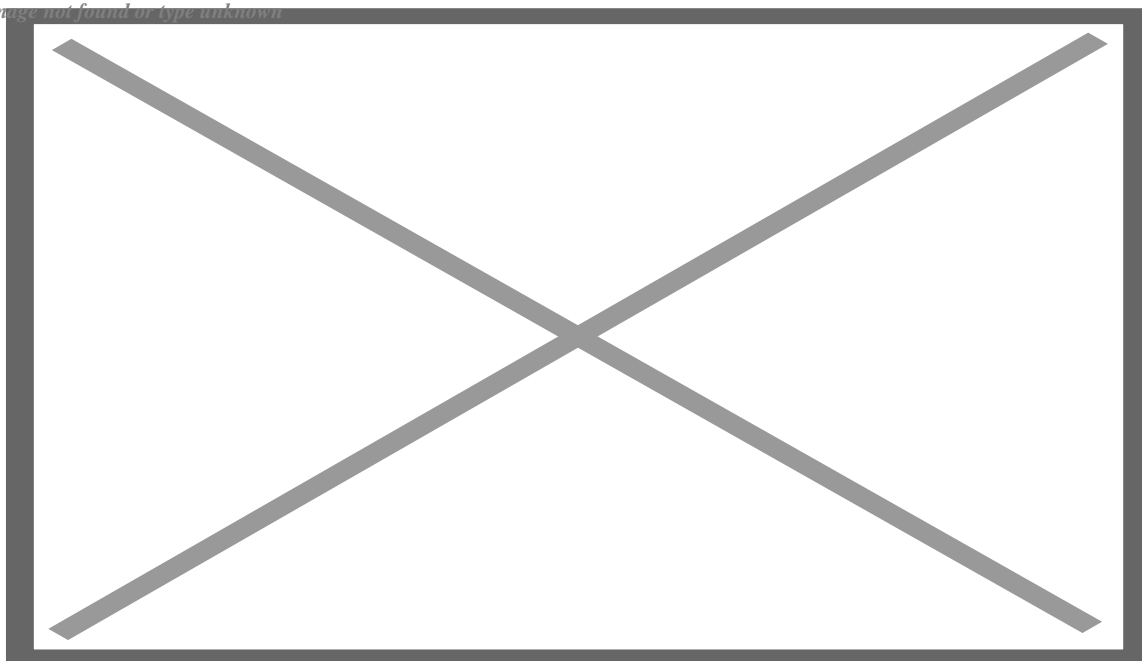


Matanzas: Second semifinalist with record in Cuban baseball

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Nykel Cruz

Havana, July 15 (PL) - The Matanzas team became the second classified after Las Tunas to the semifinals of the National Baseball Series and equaled a record in postseasons.

The Cocodrilos completed the fourth victory against Artemisa with a 4x0 whitewash, which had as protagonist the left-handed pitcher Naykel Cruz, who in nine innings allowed 5 hits with 9 strikeouts for Artemisa.

A member of the last national teams, Nykel Cruz ensured the success with which Matanzas equaled the record of 11 semifinals in 12 consecutive championships, held by Pinar del Rio.

Friday's triumph was consummated in the third inning with a trio of runs scored by Andrys Perez and Yadir Mujica.

Artemisa left a pleasant sensation during the tournament, rewarded with its first postseason in 12 years and the qualification to the II Elite League of Cuban Baseball, scheduled to start in November.

With the victory, Matanzas joined Las Tunas as the only two teams that have so far qualified for the semifinals of Cuban baseball.

In the other game of the day, Industriales blanked Sancti Spíritus 8x0 and took a 3-2 lead in the series.

The Leones will now travel to the headquarters of the Gallos in the center of the island to look for the victory that will include them among the big four of the tournament.

Just as on Thursday, the visitors' defense proved to be erratic and allowed five undeserved runs, which allowed the work of right-hander Raymond Figueredo (6.0 IP, 5H, 3K and 3BB), who got the win.

Rookie Miguel Neyra suffered the loss by allowing the only three clean runs for the Leones in the duel.

Outfielders Yosvani Peñalver (5-2, 2CI), Alberto Calderón (3-1, ICI) and Ariel Hechevarría with a home run stood out in the attack for the Blue Jays of mentor Guillermo Carmona.

This Saturday, Santiago de Cuba will try to finish off Camagüey in a playoff that is also 3-2 in favor of the easterners.

The same duel as last Sunday is expected, when Camagüey international José Ramón Rodríguez and the fifth in effectiveness of the regular campaign, Wilber Reyna, opened for both teams.

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