Cubans take bronze in Norceca Championship

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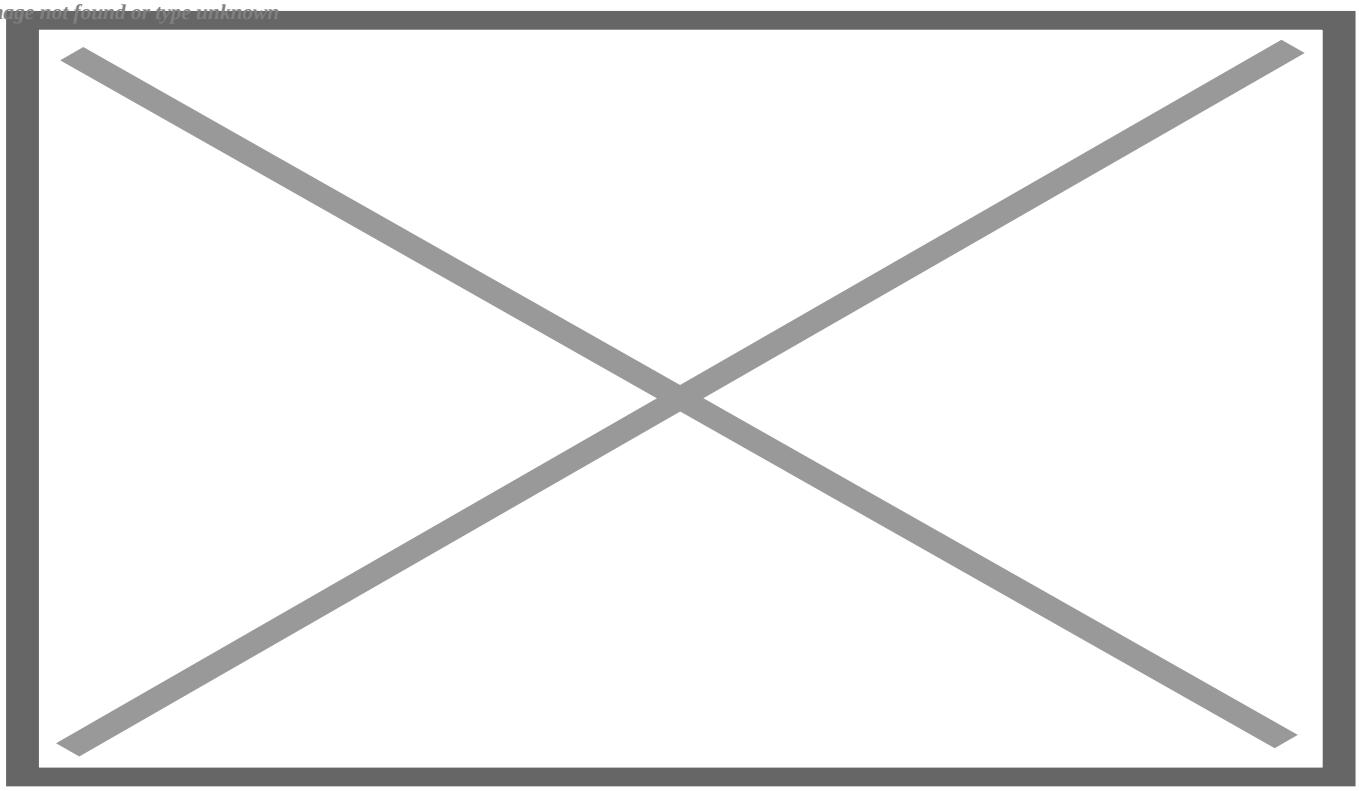

Havana, September 11 (JIT)-- The Cuban national team defeated the Dominican Republic in three sets and won the bronze medal at the Norceca 2023 Men's Championship, held in Virginia, United States.

Although the main objective was to fight for the title, which was disputed by the hosts and the Canadians, the Cubans earned points for the world ranking and had a week of practice for the pre-Olympic tournament in Brazil at the end of the month.

The Cuban team dominated with scores of 25-15, 25-14 and 25-16 in 56 minutes of play. The starters opened the challenge and after the second set almost all the substitutes took the court.

The Dominican Republic, who had achieved their goal of defeating Mexico and Puerto Rico, and to reach the discussion of the medals, could do no more against the Cubans, who dominated openly in attack (44-28), blocking (11-0) and service (6-1). Only in errors of their own were they almost even (16-14).

Corner player Miguel Angel Lopez was the top scorer and the only one in double digits for his team with 16 points. Middle blocker Javier Concepcion contributed nine, opposite Jesus Herrera seven and six for setter Christian Thondike and outside hitter Marlon Yant.

For the Quisqueyans, the only one in double figures was outside hitter Hector Alexis Cruz, with 10 points.

"With this game we accomplished our goal of being medalists. We would have liked to dispute the final to achieve more points in the world ranking and keep the current 12th place," coach Jesus Cruz told JIT.

"Maybe in other moments they would have been closer matches against Dominican Republic, but our boys have shown the necessary momentum in this kind of competition. We made the difference that gives the bronze medal match," he added.

"There wasn't the rivalry we would have liked. However, we played our game with the category and performance that we needed," he said.

Cruz, who made his debut in this tournament as head coach of the national team, referred to the fact that the tournament served as preparation for the pre-Olympic competition in Brazil.

"Six games were played, perhaps not all with the same intensity. Only the United States and Canada showed the level we will face in Brazil. There we will have seven challenges against top-level opponents," he said.

The Cuban team will return to Havana for about 15 days to complete its preparation. They will include the analysis of videos of this tournament, especially to observe the imperfections against the United States and Canada.

"There our mistakes and problems in the lines came to light. We will analyze that and try to correct what can be corrected to enter the pre-Olympic with the momentum and desire to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games."

United States champion:

The host team lived up to pre-competition predictions by beating the Canadians with straight sets of 25-20, 25-14 and 25-22.

The locals were superior in attack (44-31) and blocking (5-3), while their rivals were only one point behind in service (4-3) and committed more unforced errors (23-18).

In another result of the final day, Puerto Rico defeated Suriname 3-1 (25-11, 21-25, 25-19, 25-14) to secure the sixth place. Fifth place went to Mexico, who one day earlier beat the Puerto Ricans 3-1.

Lopez on the honor roll:

Cuba's Miguel Angel Lopez was included in the honor roll as the most outstanding server.

Also included in the select group were Americans Micah Christenson (Most Valuable Player) and Erik Shoji (receiving); Mexico's Hiram Bravo (defense and libero) and Lawrence Vidal of Puerto Rico (top scorer and first in attack).

The four Canadians included were Luke Herr (passing), Arthur Szwarc (opposite), Stephen Maar (second in attack) and Danny Demyanenko (second in blocking), as well as Puerto Rico's Elias Rodríguez (best middle blocker).

Radio Habana Cuba