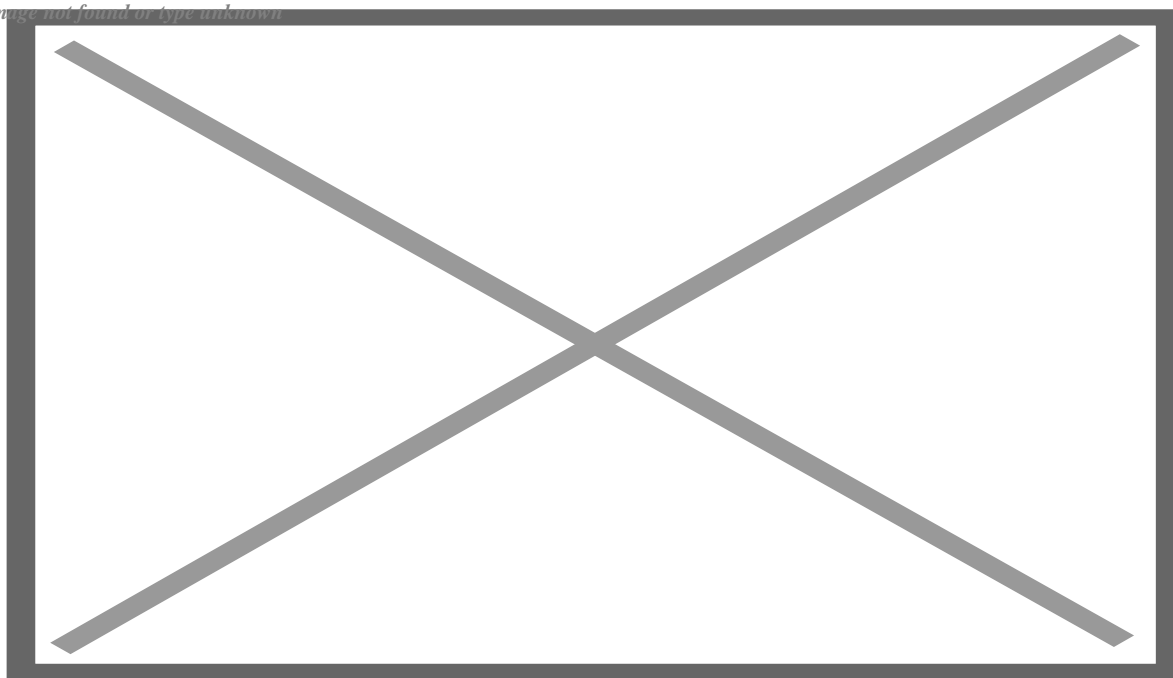


Pinar catches up with Ciego at the top of the Cuban baseball tournament

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Havana, April 8 (PL) - The embrace at the top between Pinar del Río and Ciego de Avila together with the rivalry for the lead in home runs mark the Cuban baseball season which is having a rest day today.

The combination of four straight wins by the Vegueros of Pinar against Camagüey and four losses by the Tigres of Avila in their visit to the Latin American stadium, home of Industriales, produced the tie and put the capital's Leones one game behind both leaders.

Despite the absence of Erlis Casanova and Frank Luis Medina, two of their best pitchers, due to their contracts in foreign leagues, the Pinar del Río Tigres dominated the sub-series against the Toros de Camagüey by 4-1.

The offensive trident, made up of former major leaguers Alexei Ramirez, Yaser Julio Gonzalez and William Saavedra, who leads in batting average (.538), home runs (10) and runs batted in (30), was key in the rise of Vegueros de Pinar this week.

Industriales also won by 4-1 against Ciego de Avila, the only team that dominates it in the historical match-up in national series (103-100).

It was the first sub-series lost by the Avila Tigers, who arrived in Havana with only two defeats in 17 games and only signed a 1-0 victory last Tuesday.

A total of six games ended with one of the contenders winning four of the five games, including Sancti Spíritus, Las Tunas, Santiago de Cuba and Holguín.

Only Artemisa and Granma managed to come out on top by a tight 3-2 score, in a week in which no team completed the broom pass.

On Sunday, the Espiritu Roosters and the Tunero Leñadores lost the possibility of a clean sweep when they lost to last-place Guantánamo and Cienfuegos, respectively.

The Eastern Wasps of Santiago surprised Mayabeque equally 4-1 and on Sunday the 2004 Athens Olympic champion Danny Betancourt remained undefeated in three decisions and reached 165 lifetime wins, leader among active pitchers.

Cachorros de Holguín also lost only once to La Isla, in a sub-series marked by the historical fact that father and son, Yordan Manduley Escalona and Yordan Manduley Leyva, played together, one at shortstop and the other at second base.

In his return to the Alazanes lineup, Alfredo Despaigne hit his ninth home run, just one less than the leader Saavedra, while Alexquémer Sánchez, Dennis Laza and Yaser Julio González, who decided Pinar del Río's Sunday victory with a grand slam, accumulated eight home runs.

The leaderboard is headed by Ciego de Avila and Pinar Pinar del Rio (16-6) and Industriales (15-7).

Then come Granma (13-9), Las Tunas (10-7), Camagüey (12-10), Matanzas and Artemisa (11-11), Santiago de Cuba (10-12), in the first positions.

Completing the table are La Isla (7-10), Sancti Spíritus, Mayabeque, Villa Clara and Holguín (9-13) and Cienfuegos and Guantánamo (7-15).

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