

Sport News Roundup Feb 28



Baseball

The 12 teams that will participate later this year in the *XXVII World Baseball Cup*, youth category (*U-18*), were announced by the *International Baseball Federation* on Friday.

The baseball cup, to be held at *Koshien Stadium*, home of the *Hanshin Tigers* in Japan from August 28th to September 6th, will feature 5 teams of the Americas, 3 from Asia, 2 from Europe, 1 from Africa and 1 from Oceania.

Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, and the current world champion, the United States, represent the American continent; meanwhile, the hosts Japan, Korea and Taipei, go for the Asian region, while Italy and Holland will go in the name of Europe, Australia by Oceania, and South Africa for the African continent.

Cuba, with 11 titles, leads these global youth baseball games, although Cuba hasn't won since 2004; the United States, with 7 crowns, has won the last 2 tops, 2012 and 2013, while, Korea has been victorious 5 times, Taipei, on 2 opportunities, and Canada on 1 occasion.

Chess

The Cuban Grandmaster (GM), Leinier Dominguez, advanced from the 27th to 26th position in the world ranking of chess, according to the latest announcement made by the *Chess International Federation* this Saturday, which released the list of the world, in force until March 31st.

The Antillean, who was ranked 5th in the III phase of *World Grand Prix* concluded yesterday in Tbilisi, Georgia, won 3 points for his Elo, by winning 1 game, losing another, and tied the remaining 9, and now appears with 2729 units.

Meanwhile, the other Cuban in the *Top 100* of world chess, GM Lázaro Bruzón, fell from 52nd to 55th place with 2691 points, to keep him as the 2nd player in Latin America, behind Leinier Domínguez.

The 3rd ladder of 2013 world chess list is led by the Norwegian GM Magnus Carlsen with 2863 points, followed by his Italian counterpart Fabiano Caruana (2802), the American, Hikaru Nakamura (2798), the Bulgarian Veselin Topalov (2798), and Russian, Alexander Grischuk (2794).

The recent winner of the *World Grand Prix*, Russian GM, Eugeny Tomashevsky, was the player who made the biggest jump in the last month, after adding 29 points to his rating, after moving from place 31st to the 16th.

Football

Cuba lost 5-0 to the United States in its 1st stage at the *World Qualifying CONCACAF U17* category, which began on Friday in the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula.

Joe Gallardo and Diego Raymundo with 3 and 2 goals, each, commanded the northern offensive, which won 3-0 the 1st half and then added 2 goals in the supplementary period.

Cuban and U.S. soccer teams compete in *Group A* along with Jamaica, Honduras and local Guatemala, who defeated Trinidad and Tobago 4-1.

Now, Cuba bumps into Honduras on Monday, while US clashes Trinidad and Tobago, and Guatemala will take on Jamaica.

This *World Qualifying CONCACAF* lid grants 4 seats to the *World Cup* in Chile at the end of the year.

Wrestling Cup in USA

Cuba will compete at the *World Wrestling Cup* in the U.S. city of Los Angeles, with its best fighters.

The *Cuban Wrestling Federation* announced the team to take part in the World Cup is headed by Reineris Salas (86 kilogram category), silver medal in *Budapest 2013* and *Tashkent 2014*.

Another member of the Cuban national team will be Livan Lopez (74), coming back, after an absence of 4 years to competition. Lopez was the winner of a bronze medal in *London 2012*.

Together with them, there will be Maikel Pérez (61) and Andy Moreno (70), 3rd place in the *World Cup Baku 2007*, Franklyn Marén (65) and Eduardo Mesa (125), a winner of the gold medal in *Veracruz 2014*.

Joining them, there will be Javier Cortina (97) and Yowlis Bonne (61), who now will compete in the 57 kilos to suit the Olympic category.

The team, coached and trained by Julio Mendieta, will be competing in *Pool A*, together with World Champion, Russia, Mongolia and the US, this time the host of the competition, in Los Angeles, California, while *Pool B* is comprised by Iran, Turkey, Azerbaidzhan and Belarus.

The first teams in each pool, will be disputing the gold medal, while the teams finishing in 2nd place will match for the bronze.

Sports Science and Medicine: Key to Performance Improvement

There is absolutely no doubt that Africa possesses an abundance of sporting talent. This talent if harnessed properly can be the ultimate driver of professionalization of sport on the continent thereby contributing to employment creation and poverty eradication in Africa.

The areas of sports science and medicine are not being fully exploited on the African continent in order to develop world class competitors who can hold their own in world championships as well as at the Olympic and Commonwealth Games.

A good example of doing things in the right way is Cuba. With its meager resources, Cuba has developed some of the world's finest athletes and sports teams. Cuba is able to compete favorably with countries who have far greater resources than the small Caribbean nation.

Cuba's success can be attributed mainly to the utilization of sports science and medicine to improve the performances of athletes and teams. Cuban athletes and teams are always on the medals podium in almost all the major competitions they enter. It is not about having vast amounts of money for preparations. It is about utilizing the limited resources at your disposal to the best of your ability.

However, when one talks to sports leaders, especially in Southern Africa there is persistent and perennial lamenting about shortage of resources. You never hear of sports leaders talking of paradigm shifts, of innovations, to achieve more and better results with less inputs. That is the whole essence of performance improvement.

When one looks at the economies of Southern Africa, there will never be a time when Governments will be investing colossal amounts of money into sport development. If sports leaders are waiting for a time when they will get bucket loads of cash from Ministries responsible for sport, then they will wait for eternity. They will be having fantastic plans which are not backed by realistic understanding of resources available to improve athlete and team performances.

However, a greater focus on sports science and medicine will reveal how Southern African sports authorities can best prepare athletes in order to win medals at the Olympic and Paralympics Games. Sports science and medicine will reveal which sports the majority of the people are genetically and physically tuned to perform better in followed by the necessary prioritization in terms of resource allocation.

For example, it is not by mistake or sheer good fortune that Ethiopians and Kenyans outrun almost everybody in middle and long distance athletics and events. There is an environmental and scientific explanation for their success. These are issues that deserve greater investigations and research by sports science professionals.

Sports leaders must work with academics at various universities with a view to see how sport performance can be improved. Of course, other developed countries have done more research and investigations on these matters and Southern African countries can always learn from them. However, time has come for sports leaders to facilitate collaboration with academics to ensure that knowledge and information which is relevant to the region is generated by Southern Africans.

Sports leaders of Southern Africa have everything to gain and nothing to lose by encouraging scientific research and collaboration amongst universities in the region on sports matters.

There is no doubt that funds will be needed, of course but this is not rocket science. It will not require an arm to and a leg to start serious national and regional projects. It is just a question of political will –power to do things differently and in the right way.

One cannot throw money at problems. Even if millions of dollars were to be allocated to organizations that do not have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, it will be like flushing money down the drain.

Sports organizations need to start somewhere in terms of utilization of sports science and sports medicine.

There might be modest starts across the region but at least it is better than continuing to do things the old fashioned way. Albert Einstein posited that the definition of insanity is continuing to do the same thing over and over again but expecting different results. Southern Africans cannot continue on the same path they have been for the 30-40 years in terms of sports science and medicine and expect to reap medals at world championships and at the Olympic Games.

Perhaps a good example of colossal investments in sport development is the Gulf State of Qatar. The country has realized the power of sport and are utilizing sport as a vehicle for developing the Qatari Nation.

The Aspire Sports Academy in Qatar and other initiatives by the Qatar National Olympic Committee (QNOC) speak volumes about the country's ambition in so far as the issue of developing sport through science is concerned. However, not all countries have the kind of money that the State of Qatar has got. There have to be other ways of achieving the same goals.

As some wise elders have said, "The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be your only competitive advantage."

The big question, therefore, is Southern Africa learning fast or taking the business as usual route? Only time will tell!

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