

Sports News Roundup March 12



Baseball

Pinar del Rio completed the sweep of Matanzas to win 8-2 on Wednesday to stay alive in the 54th Cuban Baseball Championships.

The current champions are now three games away from the *Zone of Classification* missing the playoffs for only 6 days.

William Saavedra hit 5-3 with 1 double and 3 RBIs to lead the winning drive, while reliever Isbel Hernández took the success by disseminating 3 hits in 4 and 1 third innings.

Industriales also swept Holguín and remained immovable in the 4th seat. The blue team liquidated 8-4 to Holguin's *Los Sabuesos* with offensive role of its outfielder Yunieski Gourriel, 3-3, with 3 trailers and effective performance of starter Danny Betancourt, although the success corresponded to Yohandri Portal.

Also, the teams of Ciego de Avila and Granma gave almost decisive steps in their aspirations to advance to the post season, to emerge unscathed in their respective commitments.

Ismel Jiménez reached 11 wins in Avilansians *Los Tigres'* victory over Artemisa by 8-4, with offensive stand out of 1st baseman Yeniet Perez, who hit 5-4 with 1 double and 4 trailers by the winners.

In turn, Granma escaped the sweep by beating 13-8 to Isla de la Juventud, with credit for Ciro Silvino Licea veteran reliever and batting performance of outfielder Guillermo Avilés, 4-3, with 1 homer and 4

RBI.

So, Matanzas, the only team classified for the playoffs, continues to lead the Table with 51 wins and 30 losses, followed by Ciego de Avila and Granma (48-33). Industriales (46-35) is seen as front runner to 4th spot in the playoffs, with 3 games ahead of Pinar del Rio and Isla de la Juventud (43-38), when only 6 games remain, while Artemisa (38-43) and Holguin (35-46) closed without any options.

Weightlifting

Cuba won 3 of the 5 divisions in the 2nd date of the *34th International Weightlifting Tournament Manuel Suárez in Memoriam* based in the city of Cienfuegos.

Sahily Valdespino was 1st champion of the day by winning the 58 kilos with 177 kg in biathlon to surpass the Guatemalan Eida Magdalena who scored 138 kilos.

Another Cuban, Mariela Almaguer, was the only registered in the 69 kg and harvested 3 crowns with a total of 172 kg (76-96), while the fledgling Yaneysi Meriño won bronze in the 63 kg with 178 kg (78-100).

In the men's field, the young, 20-year-old Cuban Yuri Félix Ugarte had no rivals and improved all his personal records in 69 kilos, where he was escorted by American Luis Rafael Verdinales and Honduran Jorge Naphtali.

Meanwhile, the winner in the 62 kg category was Salvadoran Julio César Salamanca, followed by Chilean Julio César Acosta and the Cuban promise Dariel Villareal, who is only 18 years old, anchored the 3rd with 257 kg (115-142).

Tomorrow the discussion of the medals will continue in 75 and +75 kg (f) and 77 kg (m).

Volleyball

Kiyotaka Ota, a member of the *Japanese Volleyball Federation*, is still in the evaluation of the current generation of Cuban volleyball players for signing them up to play in Japan.

In statements to local *Granma* newspaper, Ota pointed out that after a first look to the Cuban national pre-teams in both sexes, he saw more potential in the male team as female players are too much young and lacked experience.

The Japanese league spreads from November up to the 1st or 2nd week of May where each team can only sign 1 foreign player up at a time, said the Japanese sports official.

Cuba opened the way to leases for volleyball players to play abroad, with the insertion of Javier Jimenez, a man playing for Greek *PAOK Club*, a team from which he will return to play for Cuba, at the World League.

Last month, well-known former director of the national team of Russia Nikolai Karpol also visited Cuba, interested in establishing contacts with the National Federation of Volleyball and managers of the sport.

In addition, Cuba has several players hired precisely in Japan, where soon will play Yulieski and Lourdes Gourriel, Alfredo Despaigne, Frederick Cepeda and Hector Manuel Mendoza from baseball.

At the last meeting of the Cuban Institute of Sports with the local press, it was revealed that Cuba was visited by the Asian federation interested in establishing contacts with the national baseball players as well.

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