

Sports News Roundup March 26



Baseball

The mentor José Luis Rodríguez Pantoja ratified the prevailing faith in victory in the Isla de la Juventud team after the match on Wednesday, when they tied at 1 game apiece the semifinal match against Matanzas in 54th Cuban Baseball Championships.

After struggling for 11 innings, *Los Piratas* islanders got out gracefully by a 4-2 closed margin to recover from the smashing 11-1 rout suffered last Tuesday against Matanzas' *Los Cocodrilos* in the opening game of the post season.

The team never lowered its head and continues struggling and now will use the condition of being hosts to define the semifinal in their favor, and break most forecasts overlooking Matanzas as favorite to reach the final, Pantoja said.

The semifinal now moves to the *Cristóbal Labra Stadium*, in Isla de la Juventud municipality, where locals are very hard to beat as they have won 30 games and lost 12, the best record of a team playing at home during the season.

The designated batter Rigoberto Gomez, veteran Michel Enriquez, and Luis Felipe Rivera led the winning drive, while Leonelkis Escalante, Luis Yander La O, and Yadiel Hernandez did it for the losers.

The pitcher Danny Aguilera --one of the heroes of the winners took the victory--, duly supported by his fellow star and closer Héctor Manuel Mendoza who took the salvage while the failure went to Yasmany Insua.

Lefty starter Darien Núñez will represent Isla de la Juventud in the 3rd semifinal playoff game, while promising Cionel Pérez will do it for Matanzas.

An another from baseball says that the *Rivas* team, of the *Professional League of Nicaragua*, is interested in the recruiting of Cuban players, said Nemesio Porras, president of the *Nicaragua's Federation of Associated Baseball*.

Formerly international with the Nicaraguan national team, an admirer of the Cuban baseball and his history, Mr. Porras explained to Cuban *Prensa Latina* news agency that in the *Rivas* club, there was

always interest to sign Cuban players for several years.

Days behind, the holder of the Cuban Federation, Higinio Vélez, revealed that teams from Nicaragua, Mexico, Venezuela, Canada and Europe show interest to hire Cuban baseball players, under the new regulations prevailing, which authorize the players to play in foreign tournaments since the end of 2013.

The Cuban baseball official also remembered that Cuban manager Germán Mesa directed that club in the Nicaraguan Pro League Professional in 2014 and led them right to the 2nd place after losing in the finals against *Indios del Boer*.

Talking about German Mesa, Porrás said he found that Mesa is a very professional man, with very good ideas, a high baseball level, who knows how to make the team move.

Chess

The ELO average of players in the *Elite Group* of the *50th Capablanca Chess Tournament* to be held at the Habana Libre Hotel from June 14th-26th will surpass the 2700 points.

Five chess players have already confirmed their attendance, and Chinese GM Yu Yangyi (2724) will debut in this tournament. The list is completed by Cuban GMs Leinier Dominguez (2729) and Lazaro Bruzon (2691), as well as Russian GMs Ian Nepomniatchi (2715) and Dmitry Andreikin (2723). There is one spot left to complete a group of 6 players.

Meanwhile, the *Premier Group* (10 GMs, 5 of them are Cubans) could be the strongest in Capablanca tournaments' history. Several +2600 have confirmed their participation.

According to the information given by the International Referee Jose Luis Ramirez, Peruvian Emilio Cordova (2629), Polish Krysztof Duda (2597) and Kamil Miton (he is back after having played in 2005 in the Elite group), German Vitaly Kunin (2568), and Saudi Saleh Salem (2603) will be among the players to fight for the title in the *Premier*. In addition to that, Cuban GMs Yuniesky Quesada (2637), Isan Ortiz (2625), and Yuris Gonzalez (2557) also confirmed their presence but there are still 2 spots still pending.

Indeed, the *Open Group* will be also played at the National Hotel covering more than 150 chess players who will face in a 9 round Swiss system. Cuba's women team, Cuban International Masters, young talents, and all foreign Masters invited to the competition will also play in *Open Group*.

Equestrian

A new equestrian breeding program has been started in Cuba to provide quality showjumpers for overseas buyers.

The country started importing Dutch warmbloods in 2005 as a means of generating foreign currency. The horses were imported aged one-and-a-half and sold on at 3, after being backed and trained.

At an auction held in January at the National Equestrian Club on the outskirts of Havana, 31 horses were sold for a total of \$435,000 to buyers from Brazil, Canada, Guatemala, the Netherlands and Mexico.

"The great advantage is that they are already in the Americas... they have been trained well, are advanced for their age, are very well-behaved and have excellent bloodlines," Cecilia Pedraza, a Mexico City buyer told US press.

The National Equestrian Club is run by *Flora and Fauna*, a state enterprise that promotes Cuba's natural resources and it currently has 117 horses stabled in Lenin Park, near Havana.

Cuba is using its share of the auction proceeds to fund a new program to breed the horses locally rather than import them expensively. There are currently 24 mares in the breeding scheme and the foals born in the country will be used to Cuba's heat and humidity from birth.

"They can adapt to the tropical conditions of our climate so people can have them in all countries in the Americas," a vet at Rancho Azucarero, west of Havana said. An artificial insemination program is currently being developed at the center.

Quality horses for working farms are also being bred at Rancho La Gaubina, in Pinar del Río, a stud farm on the most westerly province on the island.

There are 200 horses on the state-owned property, including 40 prized Appaloosa and Pinto Cubano skewbald stallions and 80 mares.

Cuba has been breeding horses since the 16th century but they were banned after 1959 together with racing, gambling and some professional sports.

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