

Cuba Still Hopes for 3rd Place at Pan Am Games -- Toronto 2015



Toronto 2015

With just 3 days to go before the end of the *XVII Pan-American Games Toronto 2015*, Cuba still aspires to achieve the 3rd place in the medals table, driven primarily by its boxing staff.

The Caribbean delegation now occupies the 4th seat with 25 gold medals, 20 silver and 30 bronze, and has in the force of its boxers the opportunity to move out to Brazil, owner of the 3rd step with 32 gold, 32 silver and 50 bronze medals. But let's see what is happening today:

Cuban boxers today will be able to expand their medal harvest when the last quintet of its men take the 2nd semifinal round.

The group looking for their final passports consists of Yosbany Veitia, in the 52 kg; Lazaro Alvarez (60), Roniel Iglñesias (69), Julio Cesar la Cruz (81) and Leinier Peró (over 91); however, yesterday was especially marked by Rafael Alba's gold medal in taekwondo, which placed Cuba in 4th place.

Baseball

The Cuban baseball team taking part in the Rotterdam tournament, the Netherlands, defeated Curacao 11-7, to ensure the 2nd place in the qualifying stage.

In 4 matches, the Cuban players managed to hit a record of 3 wins and 1 defeat, suffered the day with a score of 7-12 with the local team, which will present its unbeaten condition later against Japan.

The team led by Victor Mesa opened the score in the very 1st inning thanks to hits by Lourdes Gourriel and Yasiel Santoya, and grounded into a double play of Yurisbel Gracial that allowed Gourriel to step on the home.

Two innings later, Cuba improved the score 3-0 when Gourriel hit a double, 2 walks, a pass ball, a single hit by Yordanis Samon and took advantage of an error by the defense of Curacao.

So the game continued until the end of the 5th when Curacao scored 2 and added 5 more runs in the next chapter with 4 hits, 2 doubles, and a pair of Cuban errors.

With the 3-7 against the Cuban team, the Cuban players turned the scoreboard and sealed the match in the 8th inning after stepping 5 times on the home, with an attack of 5 hits.

Finally, during the last chance at bat, the Cubans, who had relief pitcher Danny Aguilera as the winner of the match, produced 3 more runs and now have their eyes on their next match against the Netherlands on Thursday.

And regarding the performance of Cuban athletes and sportive delegation in *Toronto 2015* and just few days before closing the regional event, Antonio Becali, president of the Cuban Sports Institute (INDER) said Cuba continues to be committed to going home with the best of results.

Without any athletes that have been bought or given citizenship based on their medal-winning potential, our delegation has faced every day with the fighting spirit that characterizes Cuban sports, Becali said in response to questions from journalists.

“Over and above any disappointment with our performance, which, in truth, is there, the decorum with which our athletes have pursued every medal is acknowledged,” he said. Becali also recognized the significant achievements of Canadian athletes, which he said put the country in a good position to hold on to the second place position it currently occupies.

“It has been a very demanding competition, with Canada showing it has been able to take full advantage of its status as host country, beginning with a well-prepared team that led the U.S. in number of medals earned for over a week,” he added.

“And then there is the demonstrated strength of Brazil, which is using these Games to assess everything they have put in place to produce high level performances when they host the Olympics next year. For this they have a whole strategy that includes contracting some fifty high level foreign trainers.”

“We have always insisted that the battle we face is a tough one. But the most important thing is that losing some expected title or obvious judging errors that go against us have not been able to dampen the fighting spirit of the Cuban athletes,” he pointed out.

“We will do our assessment when the competition is over, always from the standpoint of identifying how to do better in the future; but the event has not even ended yet, and there are still many happy moments to come,” Becali concluded.

World Summer Games of the Special Olympics

And in other sports news we knew that a Cuban delegation participates in the *World Summer Games of the Special Olympics* underway since July 21st till August 3rd in the city of Los Angeles, California.

The 17 athletes making up the Cuban delegation, which left for the States last Monday, were bid farewell at the capital's José Martí International Airport by Education Minister Ana Elsa Velázquez and Osvaldo Vento, vice-president of the National Sports Institute.

The Cuban athletes will compete in athletics, gymnastics, badminton, swimming and beach volleyball.

Cuba participates in the International Program of Special Olympics since 1983, the mission of which is to provide sports training and athletic competition to people with intellectual disabilities and provide a space for them to develop their physical possibilities.

Another Gold Cup Scandal: CONCACAF IS But A Shame

Andres Guardado scored twice on penalty kicks Wednesday to give Mexico a 2-1 extra-time triumph over 10-man Panama and a berth against Jamaica in the Gold Cup final.

The Mexican captain had to wait through a melee at the end of regulation time before netting the equalizer, then scored again from the spot in stoppage time of the first of two extra 15-minute periods to finally subdue a Panama side that was a man down after only 25 minutes but still managed to nearly win.

Panama striker Luis Tejada was issued a red card by U.S. referee Mark Geiger for a rough foul, but Panama took the lead on a header by captain Roman Torres in the 57th minute and was on the verge of an emotional victory.

But in the 89th minute, Torres was whistled for a hand ball violation in the penalty area, falling onto the ball after contact with a Mexico forward.

A two-team confrontation followed as Panama players argued Geiger's call. Both teams followed him to the sidelines to plead their cases and tensions reached a boiling point with shoving and grabbing as spectators hurled food and garbage at players and officials.

Calm was eventually restored, but the extended mess took so long that by the time Guardado left-footed his first penalty kick into the bottom right corner to equalize, it was the 10th minute of stoppage time.

Just three days earlier, Mexico had needed a Guardado stoppage time penalty kick after a controversial foul call beyond the 120th minute to defeat Costa Rica 1-0 in the quarter-finals.

This time, Guardado advanced El Tricolores into 30 minutes of extra time and once again made himself the hero after Panama's Herold Cummings fouled Mexico's Javier Orozco in the penalty area.

Guardado stepped to the spot and left-footed a blast into the left corner to put Mexico ahead to stay.

At the final whistle, two Panama players raced from the sidelines onto the field, chasing referee Geiger, before being restrained by teammates. The referee exited the field surrounded by a tight ring of police and security guards.

The Mexicans will try to extend their record to seven Gold Cup titles on Sunday in Philadelphia by taking their third crown in four events with a triumph over the first Caribbean side to reach the Gold Cup championship match.

Jamaica's "Reggae Boyz" shocked the United States 2-1 in the day's other semi-final surprise.

Panama had beaten Mexico 2-1 in the 2013 Gold Cup semi-finals before losing 1-0 to the U.S. squad.

The biggest first-half headache came when Tejada was issued a red card. Tejada complained and argued as teammates steered him slowly off the pitch, where he yelled back as he was walking off, sparking fans to hurl items at him. Only after Mexican goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa escorted him to the tunnel did the barrage cease.

That set the stage for Panama captain Torres to open the scoring. The veteran defender received a corner kick at the far post, headed the ball to the ground and watched as it bounced in just inside the post and to the right of Ochoa.

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