

Sports News Roundup December *08*



Baseball

The *Cuban Baseball Federation* is still exploring the market to raise the number of contracts for more baseball players in professional leagues, stated Higinio Velez, president of the organization.

We are open to all sorts of proposals so Cuban players may play abroad. We ask, however, full security for players as well as their integrity, without giving up to our principles in our sports, Velez pointed out.

The Cuban executive highlighted that self-fulfillment is paramount, but “the development of talented athletes in our national team” is also very important. “We do not give up in trying to increase the level of Cuba’s national series. Nonetheless, we are also trying to motivate athletes with outstanding careers”. From 2013 on, Cuba’s Sports Institute approved the signing of athletes in professional organizations. 13 agreements —12 of them are from baseball— were signed by then.

The first group was composed of Frederich Cepeda and Héctor Mendoza (Yomiuri Giants), Alfredo Despaigne (Chiba Lotte Marines), plus the Gurriel’s brothers (Yokohama DeNa Baystars), all of them signed contracts with the NPB (Nippon Professional Baseball).

Higinio confirmed that Japan is very interested in our baseball players. He also explained that “we have just agreed new terms on Mendoza’s contract to guarantee his development as a pitcher. And we also

want to do the same with the *Chiba* team regarding Despaigne, to avoid extreme fatigue”.

Besides, he noted that high representatives of the Giants want to sign at least one Cuban young talent. The purpose is to start the training immediately. The names of Jose Adolis Garcia and Guillermo Aviles have come up, as well as LHP Livan Moinelo.

The CBF, indeed, managed and achieved great contracts with the *Quebec Capitals* at the *Independent League* with the service of outfielders Alexei Bell, Yuniesky Gurriel, RHP Ismel Jimenez, and infielder Yordan Manduley last April.

More recently, the contracts of Switch-hitter Frederich Cepeda, RHP Miguel Lahera, Alberto Bicet, and Alain Sanchez with the *Cartagena Tigers* —teams from the Colombian Professional League— were all signed.

We are still exploring for new contracts for our players in Colombia and Panama.

Likewise, the Panama Professional League and Nicaragua Professional League are also interested in Cuban players.

Finally, Velez also commented that Cuba is studying the possibility of sending Cuban players to the Australian league.

And talking about baseball, we knew that traditional *Occidentales* and *Orientales* teams to take part in the *XXIX All-Star Cuban Baseball Teams* were officially announced by the Cuban Federation of discipline at a press conference at the *Latinoamericano Stadium* in Havana.

The first one will be led by the excellent debutante manager, Javier Méndez, and will have 2 catchers, 7 infielders, 5 outfielders, 1 designated hitter, and 10 pitchers: 7 starters and 3 relievers; while *Orientales* will be commanded by experienced manager of Ciego de Avila team, Roger Machado, and has 2 catchers, 7 infielders, 5 outfielders, 1 designated hitter, and 10 pitchers: 8 starters and 2 relievers.

The *All-Star Game*, which matched up 14 wins for each squad, will be played next Sunday, December 13th at the *Julio Antonio Mella Stadium* in the eastern city of Las Tunas.

Best Athletes of the Year

The world champions Yarisley Silva (pole-vault), Julio La Cruz (boxing), and gymnast Manrique Larduet were chosen as *Athletes of the Year* in Cuba in a vote in which leaders of the Sports Institute (INDER) and the specialized press took part.

Selected in *team sports* were basketball player Clenia Noblet and baseball player Alfredo Despaigne; as *Rookie of the Year* was chosen boxer Joahnys Argilagos (18) but Denia Caballero (disk thrower), Ismael Borrero (wrestling), Arlén López and Lázaro Álvarez, both in boxing, Mijain López (wrestling) and Pedro Pablo Pichardo (triple jump) also received distinctions. The list of winners was completed with Rafael Alba, taekwondo; Ángel Fournier (rowing), Yusmary Mengana (canoeing) and the star judoka Idalis Ortiz.

Finally, in the area of *athletes with disabilities*, golden palms were for Omara Durand, who represents the *National Association for the Blind (ANCI)*.



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