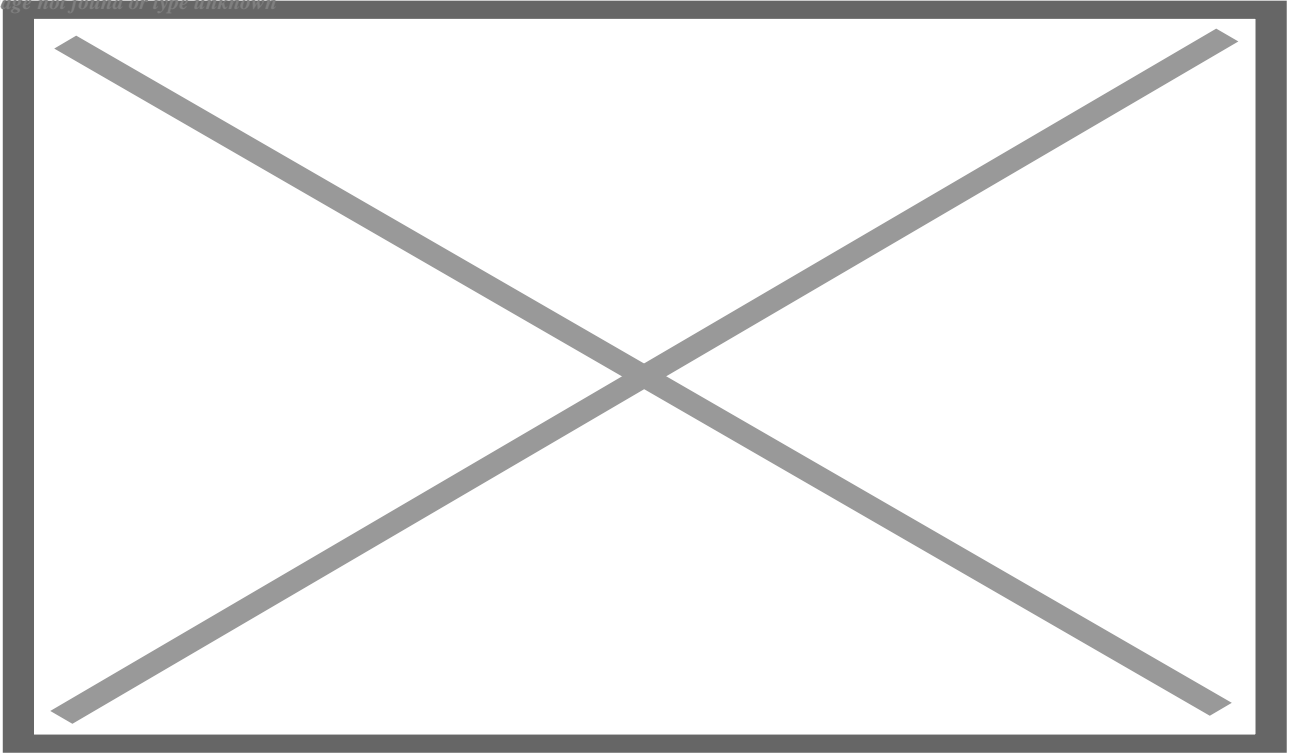


Cuba team on way to World Baseball Classic

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Havana, February 3 (RHC)-- After a declaration of intentions in the face of the challenge of erasing the traces of the last failures, Cuba flagged off its team for the 5th World Baseball Classic, scheduled for March 8 to 21, at the Latin American Stadium in Havana.

Players and coaching staff ratified the desire to materialize a praiseworthy performance in the most significant event between nations in the panorama of balls and strikes, with stops distributed in Taipei cities of China, Japan and the United States.

Ulises Guilarte, general secretary of the Central de Trabajadores of the nation, called on the athletes to fly the flags of heroism and compete for the honor that characterizes those born in this land.

After the protocol ceremony, the manager of the team, Armando Johnson, highlighted the prevailing good vibes, the confidence and the willingness to "give the people the happiness of an excellent result in the difficult competition".

We will go step by step, focused on crossing the first round and determined to change the image of our baseball in previous foreign competitions, said the 64-year-old strategist exclusively to Prensa Latina.

In this regard, Pedro Luis Lazo, head of the pitching area, highlighted the quality of the 30 players that make up the squad, including current major league players Luis Robert, Andy Ibañez and Yoan Moncada, who will join the team as of the first week of next month.

Lazo, considered one of the best pitchers in the history of the country, indicated that "the current roster is superior to the one that, in 2006, reached the second place" in the foundational edition of the fair, when the Caribbean country lost 6-10 to Japan in the dispute for the crown.

On the way to their fourth participation in these programs, slugger Alfredo Despaine, captain of the team, expressed his pride for the new opportunity and predicted close matches against the Netherlands, Panama, Italy and the local Taipei, remaining members of Group A at the Intercontinental Stadium of Taichung.

After 30 days of preparation under the guidance of an expanded working staff, the group training in Cuba will fly next Sunday to Japan to face the last stage of preparation and several friendly matches, with the aim of facing the tournament in the best possible conditions from any angle.

The squad will challenge Nippon Ham Wrestlers (17), Chunichi Dragons (19), Yomiuri Giants (22) and SoftBank Falcons (23) on Japanese soil, while in Taipei, China, they will play other matches in the final stage of training.

For the first time, the World Classic will host 20 teams, with the Czech Republic, double champions Japan, South Korea, Australia and China in the B bracket, while the C bracket is made up of the reigning kings, the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Colombia and Canada.

Classified by specialists as the "group of death", segment D features the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Israel and Nicaragua, with the first three mentioned full of players in the U.S. Major Leagues.

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