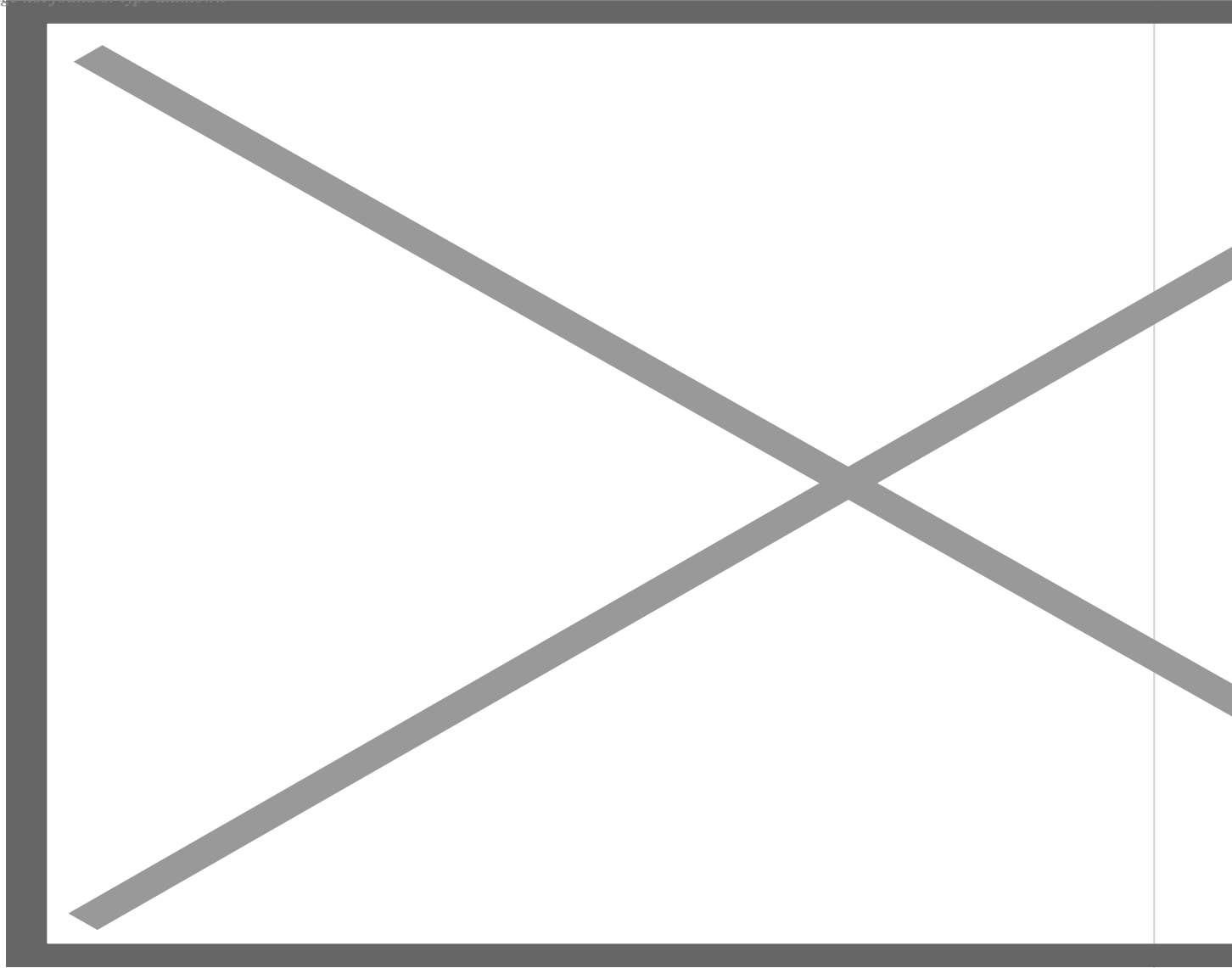


Young Parada and reappeared Zurian give first gold medals to athletics in San Salvador

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Zurian Hechavarría

Havana, July 5 (RHC) - Zurian Hechavarría and young debutant Alejandro Parada gave the first gold medals to Cuban athletics in San Salvador-2023, on a day in which the island lamented the injury of star jumper Maykel Massó in the middle of the competition.

After some time away from the track due to injuries and adversities, Hechavarría (27 years old) has recovered her form and grew in the 400m hurdles final, beating the favorite Olympic and world finalist Gianna Woodruff, second with 56.15.

Under a stubborn rain and a waterlogged track, the Barranquilla-2018 bronze medalist came out determined to prove that she is still to be reckoned with and dominated the race with her best performance of the campaign (55.52 sec), to the amazement of her own supporters.

"I went through several adversities and was able to overcome them. I set out to repeat the bronze of Barranquilla-2018 or better it and I am very happy with the result," Ricardo Molina's student and world champion with the 4x400 relay told reporters.

Molina told Radio Habana Cuba that he was always confident that Zurian could take the gold and said that the key was that, despite the rain stoppage, he always kept his pupils exercising and without getting wet in a warm-up area that they themselves had to improvise.

For his part, the young Alejandro Parada had to put on his best clothes and overcome not only the rivals, but also the terrible weather conditions at the Jorge "El Mágico" González stadium and the pressure represented by the early injury of his teammate Massó, the pre-competition favorite.

Runner-up in the U-20 world championship last year in Cali, Iván Izaguirre's student dominated the competition from the second jump (7.70), but when the rain subsided, he put his "heart" into the fifth attempt and flew to 7.88m, which was enough to surpass Turner (Jamaica) and James (Dominica), second and third with the same 7.65 record.

Considered one of the emerging talents of athletics on the island, the native of Santiago de Cuba gave himself his own birthday present - this Wednesday he is turning 19 years old - and gave Cuba its second title in athletics and the eighth in its history in the long jump in regional events.

In other finals with Cuban presence, Yoao Illas was eighth in the 400 hurdles, but improved his personal record and set it at 50 flat, Yancarlos Hernandez was fifth in decathlon with a personal best in several events, but a closing in 1500 to forget, and in javelin Marianailys Silva was fifth with 54.00m.

Rose Almanza and Sahily Diago dominated their semifinal heats of the 800 and are emerging as main candidates to dispute the gold, and Greysis Robles won her semifinal heat of the 100m hurdles with an acceptable 13.02 seconds, in a race where one of the stars of the competition, Puerto Rican Jasmine Camacho set a record for the games with 12.60 seconds.

On Wednesday, several Cubans will be in action, among them Olympic finalists Leyanis Perez and Liadagmis Povea in the expected triple jump final, one of the main focuses of the Games due to the presence of superstar Yulimar Rojas (Venezuela), one of the best athletes in the world.

Other Cubans with podium potential are Almanza and Diago (800m), Mario Díaz and Jorge Fernández (discus), Ronald Mencías (hammer) and Greisys Roble (100m hurdles), while Adriana Rodríguez and Marys Patterson will be in the first events of the heptathlon, and Shainer Reginfo in the semifinals of the 200m.

With Tuesday's two crowns, Cuba climbed to fifth place in the athletics medals table, with 6 medals (2-3-1). Mexico leads with 12 medals (3-5-4), followed by Puerto Rico (3-0-2), Venezuela (3-0-0) and Colombia (2-3-4).

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