

Cuba offers resistance to the U.S. in Norceca Championship

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Havana, September 8 (JIT) -- Cuba offered resistance to the United States to the point of reducing a two-set deficit and extending the duel to a tie-break, but the 3-2 victory went to the rival to advance directly to the semifinals of the Norceca Men's Volleyball Championship 2023.

At the Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center, the capital of the state of West Virginia, the northern team won by scores of 25-22, 25-17, 24-26, 22-25, 15-12 and finished undefeated in three outings in Group B, as was expected due to their status as favorites.

The team from the Greater Antilles finished the qualifying round with two wins -against Puerto Rico and Suriname- and one setback.

This Friday, starting at 5:00 p.m., they will have to face Mexico in the quarterfinals, who could not score a victory in their two outings after losing to the Dominican Republic and Canada, the latter being the undefeated winner of the A group.

The Cubans were superior to the favorites in attack (59-57), while the home team was more efficient in blocking (17-7) and slightly in serves (6-5).

Both sealed the match with 31 unforced errors, but in the decisive fifth set the Antilleans made four errors to two for their opponent, who was forced to put in the extra to erase the four-goal difference at the midpoint of the set, tie the score at 9 and maintain control until the success.

For Cuba, the offense was led by corner player Marlon Yant with 22 points (18 spikes and 4 walls), followed with double digits by opposite Jesús Herrera with 14 (13 A-1 S), the auxiliary attacker Miguel Ángel López, who accumulated 13 (10 A-3 S) and Javier Concepción, with 11 goals.

Meanwhile corner player Torey Defalco was the top scorer with 26 points (19-6-1); the other auxiliary, Aaron Russell added 20 (17-2-1) and center Max Holt contributed 12 (7-3-2).

"It was a tremendous volleyball game, USA knew how to do better at the end of the sets, because in almost all of them we were on top, at least in the beginnings. I think our concentration failed us in the fifth set and we didn't know how to close it, you can't give a break to an opponent of this level because they know how to take advantage of all the loopholes we leave them during the match," our technical director Jesús Cruz told JIT.

As a team, he pointed out, this match allows us to have a better vision of the level of play we are reaching, which is our main objective. I believe we will meet again in the final.

"The service worked for us, in blocking we managed to stop many balls and make several counterattacks, and fundamentally the United States was coming from playing a match in the Nations League, where they literally swept us and it was very easy for them.

"In this tournament they know that they are no longer the same opponent and it is not the same Cuba team, and we showed ourselves to be on equal terms with the team that is currently in second place in the world ranking," he said.

Yant considered that "we missed the victory by a few points, but we are going to make it to the final again. I think they kept their tactical plan and they fulfilled it 99 percent, but I think we can beat them, we only have two or three details to iron out and we are in the fight.

U.S. coach John Speraw said, "If we want to be the best team we can be this summer, it's going to take some stress. We certainly had some stress tonight. We'll learn from this so we can be better. Cuba played very well. They were down 0-2, had a good game and got better and better. Credit to them.

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