

Cuban volleyball team travels on Wednesday to the Pre-Olympic Games in Brazil

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Havana, September 26 (RHC)-- With the hopes of returning to the Olympic Games in Paris-2024, the Cuban men's volleyball team will travel on Wednesday to the Pre-Olympic in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The 14-player squad led by Jesús Cruz has a double training session this Tuesday and tomorrow will make the trip Havana-Panama-Rio de Janeiro, where it should arrive in the early hours of Thursday.

The team's goal is to reach the highest number of points for the world ranking, said Cruz in statements to colleague Carlos Alberto Gonzalez, of Cuban TV.

"The Pre-Olympic has a much higher level than the recent Norceca (in the U.S.), with quality teams like Ukraine, Czech Republic, Germany, who beat us in the VNL, and they are coming to get the most points," Cruz said.

He pointed out that after Norceca the team has trained "very well, with a different impetus, eager to achieve a result".

Cruz, who recently replaced the previous coach, Nicolás Vives, considered the first four games "key", since the island's national team will face teams that are "even with us in the world ranking.

Cuba, ranked 12th in the world, will debut in the Pre-Olympic on September 30 against Ukraine (16), and then face Germany (17 in the ranking), Czech Republic (22), Qatar (25), Brazil (4), Italy (2) and Iran (10).

"I tell the boys that every game must be played as if it were a final," said Cruz and said that he is keeping almost the same roster of Norceca, with the only inclusion of José Massó for José Carlos Romero.

He felt satisfied with the performance of the sextet in the Norceca, despite the fact that they were able to win the matches against the United States and Canada, considering that "we trained for only three weeks".

"We are going to the Pre-Olympic thinking positive," Cruz warned and acknowledged that there is talent in Cuban volleyball to "keep us stuck in the ranking and opt for an Olympic ticket".

The strategist made no allusion in his statements to the other members of the group, world champion Italy, bronze medalist and host Brazil, nor to Iran, in theory the main teams of the group and favorites to fight for the two direct tickets to Paris-2024.

The Cuban men's volleyball team was in Rio-2016, but failed to qualify for Tokyo-2020 (2021).

Star players Miguel Angel Lopez, Jesus Herrera, Marlon Yant and captain Osniel Mergarejo lead the Cuban team, which in recent days has remained united both on and off the court.

"If for some reason we do not reach our goals, know that we fell as a family," wrote on Facebook the specialized portal Cubansp1ke, accompanying a snapshot in which the team is seen smiling and animated, sharing dinner at a restaurant in Havana.

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