

Cuban baseball postseason: Pinar del Rio-Sancti Spiritus duel



Havana, Jun 25 (PL) Pinar del Río and Sancti Spiritus are preparing to face each other on Thursday in the quarterfinals of the Cuban baseball championship, in a best-of-seven game duel.

The Vegueros from the westernmost of the Cuban provinces finished in first place in the qualifying phase in a dream season where they recorded 50 wins in 74 games and are the overwhelming favorites for a ticket to the semifinals.

Led by Alexander Urquiola, the green troop literally swept their opponents by winning in their 15 particular sub-series, a championship record of 75 games,

In all the fundamental departments of the game they were superior to their rivals from Sancti Spiritus, occupants of the eighth place in the general ranking.

In addition to setting a record in home runs hit with 87, this team, which has 10 National Series championship trophies, nine silver medals and three bronze medals, was second in offensive average with .329 and in effectiveness from the mound, as their pitchers accepted 4.33 clean runs every nine innings.

Although they were not up to par on defense with 98 errors and an average of .965 (eleventh) they also outperformed their challengers from Yayabo, who placed last with a whopping 121 errors and a .957 fielding average.

There are several individuals with similar numbers but the trident of William Saavedra, Alexei Ramirez and Yaser Julio Gonzalez was the inspirational spark plug that moved this machine, which inexplicably was left out of last season.

Saavedra was the leading hitter of the campaign with a .411 offensive average, hit 14 homers (ninth) and ranked second in slugging (.680) and OPS (1.135).

Ramirez, who played nine years in the Major Leagues, also hit 14 home runs, was second in runs batted in (70) and third in bases run (156), while Gonzalez finished fifth in hits (17), fourth in total bases (153) and second in driving in the tying run or lead (21).

It would be a surprise if the Gallos de Sancti Spiritus managed to defeat this team, but in sports there is nothing written, much less in this one where the majority of a victory depends on one man: the pitcher.

The bad news for them is the departure in the next few days to the Canadian Inter-County League of the rescuing Yankiel Mauris, who took the lead in games saved (12) and was eighth in strikeouts (55).

This team, which in its history has only won one championship in the distant year of 1979, has players of the stature of Yunier Mendoza, fifth in batting (.385 Ave) and Rodoleisis Moreno, leader in hits in the tournament (107).

The legend named Frederich Cepeda has a separate chapter. This hard hitter, who once again had a good game as he has done throughout 26 seasons, is a source of inspiration and can change the decoration of a game in just a few seconds.

The all-time leader in doubles (471), extra-base hits (896) and bases on balls (2,197), is second in hits (2,487) and runs batted in (1,460), fourth in home runs (371) and eighth in batting average (.337).

In the Gallos' favor is the way they finished the series, winning 19 of their last 25 games to earn a seat in this instance when most of their starters had given up hope.

In the history of the playoffs these two teams have faced each other six times and the Pinar del Río team won four of them, with a balance in their favor of 20 wins and 14 setbacks.

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