

# *Sports News Roundup Dec. 23*

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## **The Five Cuban Heroes Present Awards to Best Athletes in 2004**

Havana's International Convention Center hosted an awards ceremony, with the presence of the five anti-terrorist fighters, to recognize the most outstanding Cuban athletes in 2014 and the Cuban sports delegation to the 22nd Central American and Caribbean Games in Veracruz, Mexico.

Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando and René also presented trophies and certificates to several athletes chosen for their outstanding results in a poll by the Cuban Sports Institute (INDER for its acronym in Spanish) and a group of sports journalists in a ceremony on Monday.

The Five, dressed in sports gear with the Cuban national flag's colors, also received the "Seal of Dignity" given by INDER in an act of fidelity, commitment and honorable attitude in international events.

INDER President Antonio Becali thanked all those who helped raise the Cuban flag in different events, mainly the five, who committed themselves to the truth in the most difficult conditions, are Olympic champions of altruism and winning will.

Judo world champ Idalys Ortiz and wrestling world and Olympic winner Mijaín López were awarded the best individual female and male best athletes of the year in a poll sponsored by INDER and sports journalists.

Basketball player Yamara Amargo and baseball player Yuliesky Gourriel received a prize as the best athletes in team disciplines. Cuba's boxing team 'Domadores' was the best team because of boxers'

merits in the world boxing series.

Boxing was the best individual sports and baseball the best sports team. Pitcher Vladimir Gutiérrez was the best beginner of 2014.

## **Cuban volleyball players to join foreign leagues**

Cuban volleyball players will be able to play in foreign leagues beginning next year.

"In January, it's quite possible that Cuban players will play in international leagues," said the President of the Cuban Volleyball Federation, Ariel Sainz.

"We want to begin working to adapt to a system that is totally new for them," said Sainz, adding that Cuban players have better chances playing in leagues in Japan, Indonesia and Turkey.

In September 2013, the Cuban government approved a new payment policy to benefit top athletes so the island can regain its competitive strength.

The new policy allows athletes to sign with foreign teams, so far though only a small group of baseball players have signed contracts in Mexico and Japan.

More than 40 Cuban volleyball players have abandoned the national teams in the last 15 years and some of them, as Osmany Juantorena, Robertlandy Simon, Osvaldo Hernandez, Rosir Calderon and Taismaris Aguero, have largely succeeded in the world's top leagues.

Cuba banned professional sports after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959.

### **Ibargüen and Messi: Best Latin American Athletes in 2014**

The Colombian triple jumper Caterine Ibargüen, and the Argentinian soccer player Lionel Messi hoarded awards to the best athletes in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2014, according to the traditional survey by Prensa Latina news agency.

Ibargüen, winner of the Diamond League and the Central American and Caribbean Games in Veracruz, received 59 votes to lead the women's standings.

Ibargüen was followed by Cuban judoka Idalys Ortiz, World Champ in Chelyabinsk and Guayaquil Pan American Games winner, with 22 votes, and Brazilian soccer player Marta Vieira da Silva, with 15 votes.

Messi, awarded the Golden Ball in the Brazil 2014 World Cup and current record holder for goals in the Spanish Liga and the Champions League, won 27 votes as Colombian soccer player James Rodriguez, Golden Boot from the last world contest and best player in the group division, came second with 22 votes.

Colombian cyclist Nairo Quintana, winner of Giro d'Italia 2014, one of the three big tours of the world circuit and the first cyclist in Latin America and his country to win the famous competition, was third.

In Prensa Latina's 51st poll, encouraged by the votes of 137 media in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Ibargüen and Messi repeated the award they obtained in

2011.

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