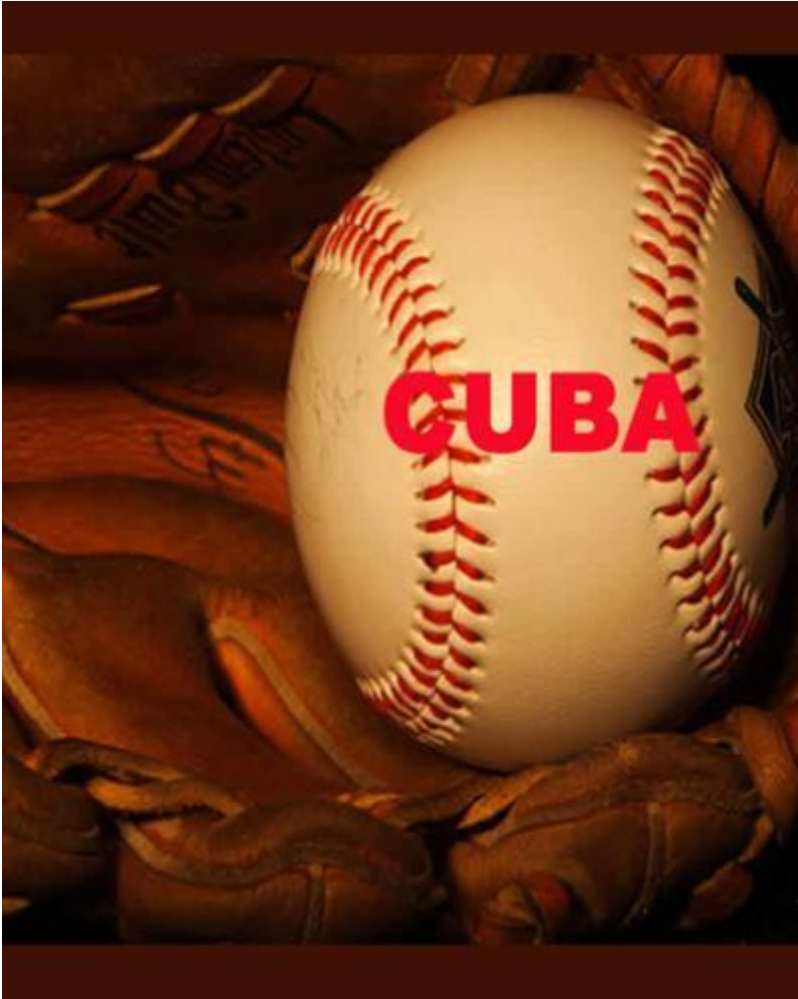


Sports News Roundup Jan. 05



Baseball

Matanzas dawned today on top of *Cuban Baseball Championship*, 3 games ahead of Granma, after defeating it by a tight 5x4 margin, corresponding to the 2nd phase of the tournament.

From 2nd to 4th place are now located Granma (29-17), Isla de la Juventud (27-19), which also fell in the 1st day of the 2nd stage, and Industriales (26-20), who won their game against Artemisa.

The remaining teams survivors of the preliminary schedule were the current champion Pinar del Río, as well as Ciego de Ávila, Artemisa, and Holguin.

On Monday, in the 2nd game of a subset of 3 which concludes tomorrow, will face again Matanzas-Granma, Pinar del Río-Isla de la Juventud, Artemisa-Industriales and Ciego de Ávila vs. Holguin.

In addition to the success of Matanzas, also triumphed on Sunday, Pinar del Río beat 9x0 vs. Isla de la Juventud; Industriales, 10x0 in 7 innings against Artemisa, and Ciego de Ávila, 9x6 against Holguin.

Together with these results to the preliminary phase, Matanzas leads with 32-14, followed by Granma at 3 games, Isla de la Juventud, at 5, and Industriales, at 6.

Boxing

Venezuela's Caciques team will arrive on this Monday to Cuba to begin the preparatory cycle ahead of the *V World Series of Boxing (WSB)*, in this month.

According to the *Venezuelan Olympic Committee*, is the first time that Venezuela is involved in this type of competition with 23 fighters, led by world bronze Gabriel Maestre, in 69 kg.

Venezuelan boxers will then travel to Kazakhstan to compete next January 17th against the local *Astana Arlans* team.

16 teams will compete in the World Series, including Cuba's *Domadores de Cuba*, champion of the 4th edition.

Maradona in Cuba

The soccer star Diego Armando Maradona arrived this Monday in Cuba to begin the 2nd Season of *De Zurda* program, led and starred with journalist Victor Hugo Morales and broadcast by *teleSUR* TV during the *2014 Brazil World Cup*.

Maradona traveled with Morales and will stay about a week in Cuba, because the TV programs are scheduled for Saturday and Sunday.

"Hi, this is Diego Armando Maradona and want to invite you on the 10th and 11th (of January) to all Latin Americans as *De Zurda* program returns with Victor Hugo Morales Zurda and Diego Maradona. We are going to do it from Havana, Cuba. The beautiful Cuba of Fidel Castro" said the star of international football on Friday by announcing his trip to Cuba.

Toronto 2015

Four years ago, the Cuban delegation that attended the Pan-American Games of Guadalajara almost lost the historical 2nd place in the standings. Since 1971, Cuba had only been beaten by the United States, but in the Mexican city, not very few feared that Mexico and Canada obtained more gold medals; however Cuba rose at the end, thanks to track and field athletes, because this sport gave them 18 out of the 58 titles that Cubans obtained.

With a year until the XVII edition of the Pan American Games in Toronto, Cuban coaches and athletes focus on keeping their best physical shape in order to perform better than they did in Guadalajara.

The heat is intense in Havana and temperature doesn't go below 30 degrees Celsius and if we add to this the relative humidity that exceeds 70%, then it becomes easy to understand why athletes in the track of the Pan-American stadium in the outskirts of the city sweat so much, they are making a huge effort to keep up with what their coaches tell them to do.

The schedule is intense and they start at six in the morning, to avoid the sun when they begin. Conditions for preparation are not entirely adequate; but the athletes –all very young- know that they can't afford to lose even one minute if they want to improve their times and records, so that they can conquer the classifying round to the Pan-American Games.

Speed seems to be the only subject missing in Cuban athletics. While Caribbean runners such as Usain Bolt as the main referent, have impressed the world, Cubans don't even dream about participating in an Olympic final. The times where Rafael Fortún, Enrique Figuerola or Silvio Leonard "flew" on the tracks seem more and more far away every time. However, talent is there, unless that is what Leonard says, the coach in charge of training the runners.

Talking to PanamericanWorld, Leonard ensured that young runners such as Reinier Mena, Yaniel Carrero and César Ruiz could be finalists in Toronto. "They are improving their times. I think that for 2015 they should be making about 10,10 and 10,15 seconds. Since to the Pan-Americans, the United States and the Caribbean don't take their best athletes we can be in the final," he says. The same happens with Arialys Ganulla that a year from today could be running 100 meters in 11,15 and 11,20 seconds; with this she could have a chance to get a medal. Once there, anything can happen," said Leonard, the twice Pan-American champion in 100 meters in 1975 and 1979.

Reynier Mena listens carefully to the advice Leonard gives him. His physique is amazing (1,74 meters tall, and 76 Kg of weight) only 17 years old and he already knows what it feels like to win in foreign tracks. In the World Championship for children under 16 celebrated in Donetsk, in 2013, this runner won the Bronze medal in 100 meters (10,37 seconds) and in the 200 meters (20,79 seconds). "This would be my first Pan-American Games. We still have a year, but I think I can make it with my current times. Getting to the final,

I believe would be very good taking my age into account. As for the 4x100 relays, I think we are OK. Our performance in the World Relays Championship was good and I think in the Pan Americans we can make it to the podium” the talented runner stated.

The biggest hope in speed among the women is Arialis Gandulla, 19 years old, who runs in the 100, 200, and in the 4X100 relay. “Next year I will become a senior runner. My first goal is to make it to the Pan Americans in Toronto, because it is the biggest competition that year. I plan to get to the event with good times and try to make it to the final, so that I can fight for a medal afterwards.”

Faustino Hernández coaches the women’s team for the 400s. He hopes his pupils shine in Toronto, although his eyes are set in Veracruz. “The cycle starts now, Being in the Centro American Games is part of the preparation for the Pan Americans. An athlete that is not ready for the Centro Americans will have a hard time making the times required to get to the pan Americans. I have athletes that run 400s in 52 seconds and one that runs in in 51 and a fraction. This represents a strong pillar for Gold in the Pan Americans in Toronto, taking into account that the classification will be closer to the games and that there is still time to improve those times”, Hernández explained, who trusts that Lismeidy Veitía, one of the promises he works with, makes him famous in the next events.

Veitía also dreams about Toronto. “We still have a year. The plan is to get well prepared, because these would be my first Pan Americans and I want to make a good time and win a medal. The training sessions are tough; but everything has a reason to be, and right now I feel good, I feel prepared to participate in all the international competitions.”

Close to Veitía in the track, is Gilda Casanova. She also runs 400 meters and she wishes to compete in Toronto, because it would be her first time in Canada. “There is still time. We need to think about this later on, for now we have to think about this year. The closest goals I have are the World Juniors, where I plan to make it to the final and give everything I have.”

Far from the runners Leonel Suárez trains, the best Cuban decathlon athlete of all times. An injury set him apart from the stadium this year and took him to the OR; but despite the medical problems, and despite the fact he lives as a guest, because he doesn’t have a house in Havana, and despite the fact that a theft of poles has left him without a chance of training this tough modality, the Cuban trusts himself and believes he can win the Pan Americans in Toronto. “It would be the most important event of 2015 and would set my comeback after my injuries. Training sessions are thought of, so that they can get me in the best shape and that way I can train to be a Pan-American champion again”, concludes this talented athlete, Olympic, world, medalist and record holder of the Pan-Americans in Guadalajara, where he scored 8373 points.

After noon, the shining sun ends our conversation with the athletes and also the first part of their training. Fatigue is visible in all of them. They will get some hours off, before they come back to the track and improve their techniques and improve their physical condition, an essential combination that allows them to keep dreaming about climbing to the highest of the podium in the next Pan-American Games.



Radio Habana Cuba