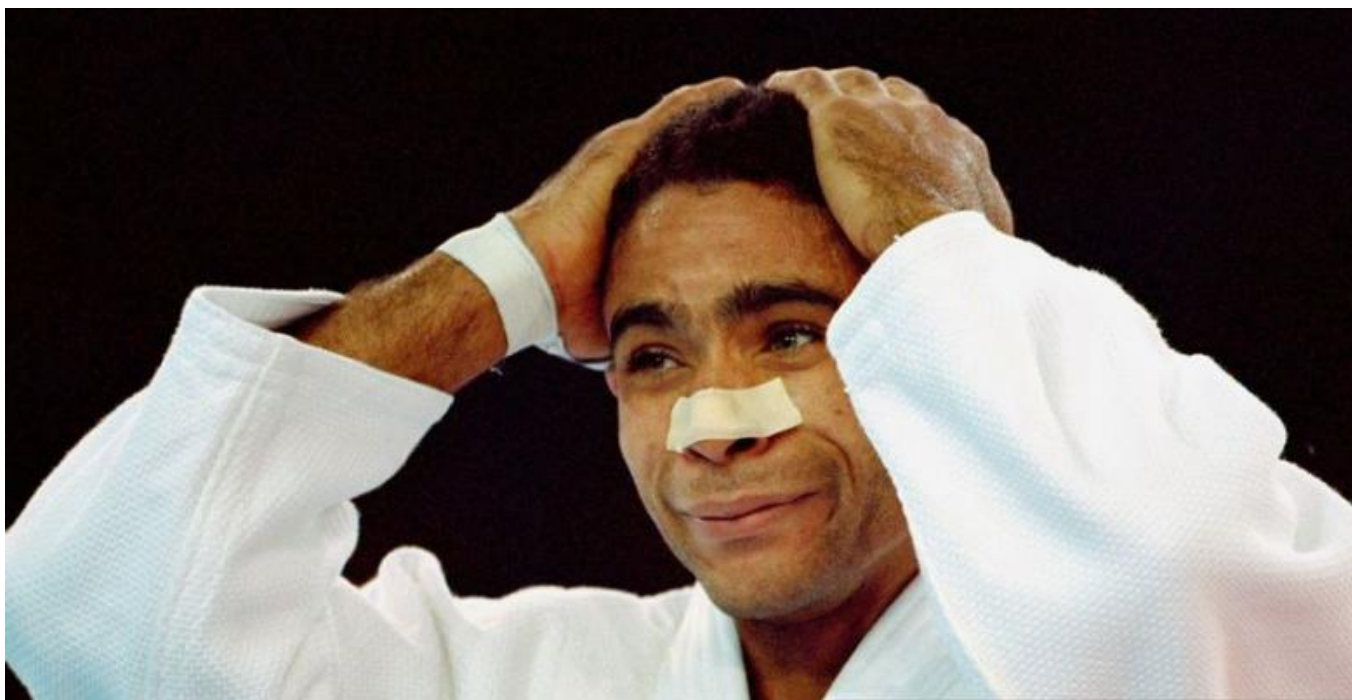

Poulot: First World Champion of Cuban Judo

By: Lemay Padrón Oliveros / Special for CubaSi

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Born in Guantanamo, but adopted by Santiago de Cuba, the judoka Manolo Poulot turned 46 years old last Sunday, with the pride of being the first Cuban to win a gold medal in World Championships of that sport.

For years he was the star figure of the Cuban team, he was forced into retirement from the team after a persistent injury on one of his knees in late 2002, when he still had a lot to offer in judo.

When he was barely seven years old, he started training, because he was always attracted to combat sports, back in Santiago de Cuba. He began his career in the discipline with a gold medal and two silver in the National School Games, the first step in a successful career that would later include seven gold medals, a silver one and a third place in the first-class national tournaments.

Since he made to the national team, he had Israel Hernández, twice Olympic bronze medalist, as an idol and little by little he made his own way to become the captain of the team.

Undoubtedly, his moment of greatest splendor is bound to the British city of Birmingham, where he became world champion after defeating the Japanese Kazuhiko Tokuno in the 60 kg final.

He reached the Sydney 2000 Olympics with great expectations, because he had undergone a great training. A few months ago he had won the gold medal in the prestigious Tri Torri tournament, defeating Japanese Masato Ushisiba, one of the greats of this discipline, and he also won the Città di Roma.

However, in the capital of New South Wales, he only won the bronze, falling in the semifinals against the Japanese Tadahiro Nomura by Yuko (Seoi-nage), therefore he was sent to repechage, and he defeated for the bronze medal by Waza-ari awasete Ippon the Kazakh Bazarbek Donbay, wearing a bandage over his nose from a previous blow.

He had previously won by Ippon (Seoi-nage technique) over the Russian Evgueny "<http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/st/yevgeny-stanev-1.html> or "Yevgeny Stanev" Stanev and over the Moldovan Gheorghe Kurgheleasvili, and in the quarterfinals by Ippon (O-uchi-gari) Kyrgyz Aydin Smagulov.

However, he was pleased to have brought the first medal of the Cuban delegation to this summer event, where judo had its best performance in history by dominating the women competition. Many considered his match with the Asian athlete as an advanced final, and even reviewing the video some referees appreciated a yuko in favor of the Cuban that would have given him the victory over the Olympic champion in Atlanta-1996 and the World Cup in Paris-1997.

His most difficult moment in sport, contrary to what some might think considering what happened in Sydney, was the Atlanta Games, where he lost in his first presentation against South Korean Jong-Wong Kim, and could not even go to repechage.

That puts him even above March 2002, when in the Città tournament in Rome, he stayed flat on the floor in the second match after projecting with legs technique his rival after making a too sharp movement and relapsing from his old injury. He had to be operated on and the recovery time was thought to be a month, but it became three, and then the final goodbye.

His record sheet shows two medals in the Central American and the Caribbean Games (Ponce-1993 and Maracaibo-1998), one gold (Winnipeg-1999) and one silver (Mar del Plata-1995) in the Pan American Games, four gold medals in the Pan American Sports Championships , in addition to many others in Open tournaments and European Grand Prix.
