

Five Things to Know About the Cuba U-17 MNT

05/05/2017



After sweeping the group stage and winning its opening classification stage match at the 2017 CONCACAF U-17 Championship, the U.S. Under-17 Men's National Team is set to square off against Cuba on Friday with the goal of earning a berth to the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup this October in India. Before settling in to watch the game (6:30 p.m. ET on Univision Deportes and [CONCACAF's YouTube page](#)), here are five things you should know about Cuba.

CUBA'S ROAD TO THE CLASSIFICATION STAGE

After finishing second in the Caribbean Zone's qualification tournament for the CONCACAF U-17 Championship, Cuba was drawn into Group B with eventual group winner Costa Rica, Canada and Suriname. After drawing Suriname 1-1 in their opening game, Cuba defeated Canada 2-1. The win proved crucial, propelling Cuba to the classification stage as Group B runner up after dropping its final group game to Costa Rica 3-1.

THE ROSTER

The Cuba U-17 roster is made up of domestic-based players. FC La Habana of the Cuban first division, Campeonato Nacional de Fútbol de Cuba, contributed a team-high seven players.

Cuba U-17 Men's National Team Roster by Position:

GOALKEEPERS (3): Danny Echevarría Díaz (Villa Clara/CUB), Antuan Obregon Medina (Mayabueque/CUB), Arturo Héctor Godoy (La Habana/CUB)

DEFENDERS (7): Miguel Ignacio Coll Tamayo (Holguín/CUB), Christopher Yoel Llorente Fernández (Cienfuegos/CUB), Pedro Paulo Piñeiro Sarduy (La Habana/CUB), Bruno Manuel Rendón Cardoso (Matanzas/CUB), Cristhian Turca Pijuan (La Habana/CUB), Karel Aldair Espino Contreras (Artemisa/CUB), Roy Luis López (Camaguey/CUB)

MIDFIELDERS (6): Carlos Alberto Molina López (Matanzas/CUB), Carlos Elián Ibarra Molina (Santiago de Cuba/CUB), Josue Vega Alvares (La Habana/CUB), Omar Pérez Ramírez (Villa Clara/CUB), Ronaldo Rosette García (La Habana/CUB), Jhan Marcos Rodriguez Licea (Camaguey/CUB)

FORWARDS (4): Manuel Ignacio Cruz Ledesma (Camaguey/CUB), Brian Savigne Polanco (Santiago de Cuba/CUB), Ribaldo Roldan Moreno (La Habana/CUB), Yandry Romero Clark (La Habana/CUB)

WHAT'S IN A (NICK)NAME?

Cuba is commonly known as "*Los Leones del Caribe*", which means, "The Caribbean Lions."

THE COACH

A former player for Cuban first division team FC Pinar del Río from 1976 to 1989, Rufino Sotolongo is in his second year as head coach of the Cuba U-17 men's national team. As a player, Sotolongo twice won the league championship in 1987 and 1989. As coach of FC Pinar from 1995-1996, Sotolongo once again claimed the hardware from a league title.

Before he coached the Cuba U-17 Men's National Team, Sotolongo led the Cuba and Dominican Republic women's national teams from 2004-2010 and 2011-2015, respectively.

CONCACAF U-17 CHAMPIONSHIP HISTORY

Since the inaugural CONCACAF U-17 Championship in 1983, *Los Leones del Caribe* have participated in 10 CONCACAF U-17 tournaments. The current edition marks Cuba's fifth appearance in a row, dating back to 2009.

Of the 10 CONCACAF tournaments that they have qualified for and participated in, Cuba has won once (1988) and qualified for the FIFA U-17 World Cup (formerly FIFA World Championship) twice (1989, 1991).

CUBA VS USA TODAY

The last game of Group D of the Classification Stage of the [2017 CONCACAF Men's U-17 Championship](#) technically has something in it for both teams, but realistically only the USA will truly benefit from this game.

Cuba can throw the group into a three-way tie with a win, but it needs to win by at least five goals to give itself the necessary goal-difference advantage to qualify for the U-17 World Cup as one of the top two teams in this Classification Stage group. Cuba has scored in every game it has played so far in this tournament, but it has only scored more than once in 90 minutes on one occasion, and its last outing brought a 7-1 loss to Honduras - the team the USA just beat 3-0.

So this is probably the end of the World Cup qualifying cycle for this Cuba U-17 cohort.

Since all the USA has to do is not lose by five goals to achieve World Cup qualification, it is likely the team will rest a few players against what looks like a much weaker opponent. But there is the slight chance of slipping up: the reason Cuba is in this round of the tournament is it beat a Canada side that was expected to handle the Cuban challenge a lot better than it did. A loss of any sort would cost the USA a place in the final of this Championship, and this team surely wants to win this year's CONCACAF U-17 title - so don't expect the Americans to take this game too lightly. They will want to just enough to secure their place in the final, without costing any individual player a shot at playing in the title match.
