

Mr Money: Protagonist at the final of the 7th World Series of Boxing (WSB)

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The history of world sports has been riddled with scandals of the most diverse nature. It happens that there are always variables linked to “Mr Money”, which distort the ludic essences and the clean exchange or confrontation promoted by Baron Pierre de Coubertin.

From doping phenomena, corruption, sold games, aggressions, attacks, to sums of money on the basis of changes of venue, are included among the countless examples.

Lance Armstrong, Barry Bonds, Chinese gymnast Dong Fangxiao, Ben Jhonson, FIFA, East Germany’s female swimming team at Montreal 1976 and Moscow 1980 Olympics, Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, the boxing referees suspended after questionable decisions in Rio 2016, in the end....

Without reaching those stratospherical levels of cheats, but actually, violating the regulations of the 7th World Series of Boxing, which stated that all levels would be disputed with home-and-away matches, the top organizing executives of the tournament decided that the final between Kazakhstan’s Astana Arlans and Cuba’s Domadores (Wranglers) would be held at the Sports Palace in the Kazakh capital.

In fact, Friday, June 23 was the day to open the match at the Sports City Coliseum with the C-1 squad, before the sudden change.

So, the ten bouts agreed for next Saturday, July 15, will begin at 15:25 (local time), 6:25 am (Cuba time).

It is about the headquarters of one of the most powerful franchises in the world, like ours, in the

current boxing scene. Moreover, they have been the only squads able to win two consecutive crowns, since the competition emerged, a sort of intermediate step or bridge between AIBA's amateur and professional boxing, as boxers fight five rounds of three minutes each.

Returning to the last-minute decision, we can say that although controversial, it's worth highlighting that no solid arguments have been provided to support it, hence the Cuban Federation has stated its full disagreement.

In advance, Kazakhstan seemed an adverse scenario, not only because our boxers would face such a rigorous match in a rival venue, but also because of the fact that local fans would be against them, and the judges, although their possible margin of error has been reduced by placing three in this edition to deliver justice rather than the previous five, may become more vulnerable when deciding their verdicts.

The key of such decision lies in the fact that Kazakhstan moves more capital and contributes more dividends to AIBA's coffers, in addition that being the venue, the show will attract more people coming from other European and Asian nations involved in the event or not, to witness the ending. Unquestionably, they are the main reasons for the change. Like in other dissimilar times, conflict of interests in which Mr Money becomes the winner.

So, our main figures must climb the ring to "kill", with more convincing demonstrations, should they want to win their third crown. That will happen in the middle of a campaign that has not been their most dazzling one with the fists: in the preliminary stage they achieved 24 wins and 6 defeats, besides losing a match vs. Colombia's Heroicos.

Then, in quarter-finals and semi-finals, they attained similar 7-3 balances, versus Uzbekistan's Tigers and the squad from Colombia. In both cases, the boxers from the C-1 format bent their knees 2-3, before the C-2 redeemed them with a sweep.

A historical brushstroke of rivalry in the World Series between Domadores and Lobos shows that just the Astana Sports Palace was the first scenario where both squads faced up (December 13, 2013), during the 4th World Series, which finished with a 3-2 win for our boxers.

These two franchises, which will seek their third WSB crown, have clashed twice and the balance favors the Antilleans 12-8.

In the qualifying stage of the 4th Series in 2013-2014, the Antilleans won 8-2, and in 2015 the Eurasians defeated them 6-4 in the final of the 4th World Series.

Ahead of the third match, the major options of the squad led by Rolando Acebal are centered on Lázaro Álvarez (60kg), Andy Cruz (64kg), Roniel Iglesias (69kg), Julio César La Cruz (81kg).

We mention that the Kazakhs placed six of their men in the top 5 in the division-by-division boxing rankings, including the leaders in the 60 and 91kg, in tune with their respective performances in the qualifying stage. However, our squad placed seven men with three leaders.

Regarding the other fighters from the Antillean Island, it will be necessary to see whether Robeisy joins the squad in the 56kg division, because Javier Ibáñez finished injured at the continental world qualifier. Argilagos (49kg) has not been seen solid, and has had Colombian Yuberjen Martínez, as his black beast; Veitía must show all his arsenal, as well as Erislandy Savón (91kg), and Arlen López (75kg), if he is finally recovered and resumed his usual boxing and the path of success.

I close with super heavyweight Jose Angel Larduet, who surely will clash a rival who surpasses him in size and body weight. We will have to see how he handles these two adversities on the ring.

From my perspective, this is the toughest of all matches held between Cuba's Domadores and Kazakhstan's Astana Arlans. And above all, their status as visitors. We will know it on July 15, when the final gong sounds.

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