
Cuba, Gold Medal in World Baseball U15 Tournament

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The USA Baseball 15U National Team fell to Cuba, 6-3, in the gold medal game of the WBSC 'AA' 15U World Cup Sunday night in a heartbreaking conclusion to an otherwise outstanding tournament for Team USA.

In its first 15U World Cup, the U.S. showed the world powerful pitching and dominant hitting, while also giving the fans in Mazatlán two of the tourney's most exciting contests - a 5-4, 10-inning walk-off win over Chinese Taipei and a 10-9, 10-inning walk-off win over Mexico.

The U.S. concluded the tournament with the best record (9-1) and outscored its opponents 107-29. However, Cuba (8-2) had the better team Sunday night as it trailed 3-1 entering the sixth inning, but rallied to score the game's final five runs to claim victory.

With the neutral crowd squarely in Cuba's corner, the talented squad put the finishing touches on the comeback with a three-run eighth inning that was highlighted by an RBI single from Miguel Vargas and an RBI groundout from Adrian Morejon.

That would be all the runs starting pitcher Morejon would need as he turned in a brilliant effort to lead Cuba to gold. Morejon, who threw an inning in relief in Cuba's 2-1 victory over Panama Saturday, went the distance against the U.S. Sunday as he hurled 124 pitches. He struck out 12 U.S. batters, and gave up three runs on seven hits and a walk.

At the plate for Team USA, Brice Turang (Corona, Calif.) finished off a remarkable tournament with two more hits and two runs scored. Turang, who was honored by the IBAF (International Baseball Federation) in a post-game ceremony, batted .553 for the tourney and played in every inning of every game for the U.S. He led the squad in hits (21), runs (19) and RBI (13), while posting a .684 slugging percentage and a .617 on-base percentage.

Also honored postgame were Alejandro Toral (Davie, Fla.) and Thomas Burbank (Beaumont, Texas). Toral batted

.385 for the tournament and had a homer, six RBI and team highs in walks (9) and hit by pitch (7). Burbank, meanwhile, didn't allow an earned run in 7.1 innings of relief while striking out 11 batters. His most impressive outing was against Chinese Taipei, where he went four innings in relief to pick up the win. His maneuvering of the international tiebreaker inning kept Chinese Taipei from scoring a run in the top half of the 10th frame and set the stage for a thrilling walk-off from Austin Martin (Orange Park, Fla.) in the bottom half.

After dozens of practices, several scrimmages and 10 games in Mazatlan, the 2014 version of the USA Baseball 15U National Team is set to go its separate ways Monday morning. However, the memories of three weeks in July and August 2014, the ups and downs and the smiles and the tears, will last a lifetime.

USA - Cuba Scoring Recap

Cuba jumped on top early as a single by Ariel Diaz with one out gave Cuba a base runner for Ernesto Martinez. Martinez knocked an RBI single to left field with two outs to give his squad the early 1-0 advantage.

The U.S. responded in the bottom half of the first with two runs to jump in front. Turang and Noah Campbell (Durham, N.C.) both reached base to start the frame before Royce Lewis (Aliso Viejo, Calif.) bunted them over. Raymond Gil (Miami, Fla.), one of the heroes from the win over Mexico Saturday night, plated the first run as he grounded out to the shortstop to easily score Turang. One batter later, Steven Williams (Albany, Ga.) cracked a single up the middle to score Campbell and give the U.S. its 35th and 36th two-out RBI of the tournament.

Lewis added to Team USA's lead in the fifth inning as his RBI single to right field scored Turang to up the score to 3-1. Turang reached base on his second infield single of the night.

Cuba wouldn't go away, however, as a monster two-run double from Martinez in the top of the sixth inning tied the contest at three and ultimately set it on a path to victory. Martinez couldn't be stopped at the plate all day as he finished with three hits, including two doubles, two RBI and a run scored.
