
Continuing the achievements of yesteryear

09/10/2017



Women's judo is one of the most successful disciplines in the history of Cuban sports. From Estela Rodríguez, Driulis González, Amarilys Savón, Sibelis Veranes, Legna Verdecia, Daima Beltrán to Idalys Ortiz, judo has produced a healthy supply of stellar athletes, who have elevated the country's name in competitions across the world.

Today, a young team is looking to continue the achievements of yesteryear and make its own mark on the sport.

The recently concluded Judo World Championships in Budapest, Hungary, marked the first stop on the road toward the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Although the bronze medal won by Kaliema Antomarchi from Santiago de Cuba in the 78 kilograms division fell short of expectations, it does signify hope for the future of the sport.

Granma International visited the Cerro Pelado National Training Center, where we spoke with Félix Portuondo, technical coach of Cuba's national judo team, about the latest World Championships and upcoming challenges.

“A greater economic incentive than in past competitions meant that this was a World Championship attended by the top figures in almost all divisions.”

“As well as modest, Cuba’s performance in the Women’s Judo Competition in Budapest can be considered positive. Kaliema took home her first world championship medal, a great result for her.

She faced the best judokas in her division, bar double Olympic champion Kayla Harrison from the United States. Her group included Mami Umeki and Ruika Sato from Japan; and Hungary’s Abigel Erdelyi-Joo, ranked sixth in the world. Kaliema faced a tough line-up with two fights going into the Golden Score period.

“The bronze medal fight against Sato was one of the most important of her career. Before, Antomarchi never would have been able to score even a shido against Ruika but, in the moment of truth, beat her by waza-ari.”

How did the rest of the athletes perform?

At just 18 years of age, Melissa Hurtado (48kg), defeated local competitor Eva Csernoviczki - London 2012 bronze medalist - in her opening fight.

They had already faced each other in the lead up to the Budapest championships, in a fight Csernoviczki won. Despite this, the experience served as an opportunity to analyze her and draw-up a strategy which proved to be successful in the end.

However, she lost all focus during her second bout against Melanie Clement of France. We thought that Clement would fight to the right, but she switched her positioning completely. Melissa had to change her strategy on the mat and lost concentration, she didn’t even listen to our instruction and was given a Hansoku make and disqualified.

Maylin del Toro (63kg), an athlete who arrived to the European city in the best form we’d ever seen her in, thanks to her hard work and strong self-confidence, also had problems focusing. I thought she would be the team’s other medal winner. However, she was unable to show this level in her first fight against Junxia Yang of China, losing by ippon.

Anailys Dorvigny was our representative in the 57kg, although we also have another experienced athlete in this division, Aliuska Ojeda.

Anailys is a brave judoka who gives it her all during training and competitions, but has a lot of technical deficiencies which are costly when competing at the highest level. She didn’t make it past the second fight after losing to Chen-Ling Lien from Taipei. Ojeda and Dorvigny are both athletes with great drive and determination, but who just fall short.

Lastly, we also brought along an inexperienced athlete in the 78+ kg division, 20-year old, Eliannis Aguilar. Her nerves and desire to win got the better of her. She was too impulsive and didn't follow the strategy we had devised for her.

During her opening fight she overused the shoulder technique which was supposed to be a surprise element. In order to throw her opponent Gulzhan Issanova of Kazakhstan and shorter than Aguilar, she needed to be taken by surprise. She didn't follow the plan and lost by three shiods.

So, the psychological aspect and concentration were the main problem?

Our athletes need more opportunities to compete at a high level in order to gain confidence. There need to be more competitions and its up to us coaches to instill confidence in our judokas.

Although I've only been leading this team for months, there is a strong drive and good rapport between the girls and the technical team.
