
Freestyle Wrestling: Three aces within range

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The perfect performance of six titles achieved by the free-style wrestling team at the recently concluded qualifier towards the Central American and Caribbean Games in Barranquilla gives the measure of the power of our gladiators in the region.

With the complete squad secured, and after the four golds and one silver picked by the freestylers in the previous edition of the Central American and Caribbean Games “Veracruz 2014”, head coach Julio Mendieta said that his pupils would go to Barranquilla to sweep with the six crowns. Cubasi talked to the coach and two of his pupils exclusively.

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“A demanding and sports passionate people like ours is always awaiting a good result, but they often ignore what lies behind a performance or medal”, asserted Mendieta.

With a transition to the leadership of the national team from the grassroots, he explained that fighting spirit is one of the main qualities owned by our fighters.

"They are fiery, they have an excellent physical preparation and special technique (work on the mat). They always come out to fight with the desire to win and that has been a strong component in the historical results, together with discipline. Crucial is also their follow-up in the educational part and relations with their families ", added Julio, who said that the saddest moment in his life was to go medaless at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

"Heaven and earth joins together, a whole cycle of arduous work that crumbles in a moment. A wrong arbitration decision that hits considerably ... That was the worst night of my life, when the competition was over.

The greatest joys were the World Cup in Russia in 2010, when we were third by teams in Moscow. We won three bronzes and strived for a fourth one, but Ivan Fundora finished in fifth place. That opened my path of the elite in the adult category. The second was the bronze of Livan Lopez in London 2012, who won his match with a spectacular suppley with 35 seconds left and reversed the scoreboard coming from behind", stated the coach, whose favorite color and number are brown and seven, respectively, and who cannot explain with certainty the vast significance of representing Cuban sports and defending the colors of our flag.

Alejandro Valdes: perseverance and concentration, successful standards.

He had not turned seven yet and his mother had already enrolled him in wrestling without his father knew it. She wanted to surprise him and according to Alejandro Valdes himself wrestling was bequeathed to him, because his father was a member of the national team for several years.

The funny thing is that father and son were coach and pupil in different categories, until the two reached the national pre-team.

"It was a difficult path for both. He demanded me as much as a coach as a father. After being world junior runner-up in 2008, the great result did not fall until the world championship in Paris last year and I think in a great extend due to anxiety. I used to think so much about my combats before facing a competition, that I held them and entered the mat too anxious and little focused on the strategy or tactics that I should use against every adversary. That happened to me more than once.

Since I joined the national team I always had to give more than 100 percent. I did not have easy rivals. In those beginnings I had sparrings at the level of Yowllys and Maikel Pérez. Then there came the years of the 65kg, from the first category of 2014. It suit to a tee, because I do not have to lose a lot of weight and do not lose power", said Valdes.

A pioneer in entering the German Bundesliga as part of the policy of hiring Cuban

sportspeople abroad, he stated that:

“The Bundesliga has helped me gain confidence a lot, see things clearer and get involved in positions and techniques I previously believed I couldn’t come through with flying colors”. With a three-season experience in a competition in which combats are held on weekends, Valdes admits he does not think much about competitions. His psyche has lowered that extreme anxiety and he reaches zero hour more relaxed nowadays. He focuses on his daily routine and on shaping every little detail in his training sessions.

Reinieris Andreu: the gem that looks for other lights

He was proclaimed world champion in the 57kg division among U-23 gladiators and since then his life changed. He breathes ambitions and considers that his preparation ahead of Barranquilla is going splendidly.

"In the daily sessions the rope is one of the exercises that I prioritize the most, I combine it with weightlifting circuits and races to mix solid grips with good strength resistance. Grips are vital in the execution of any technical movement. In the sparrings I take advantage of Yowlys Bonne and Alejandro very much. The first has an amazing technical arsenal and the latter is extremely intelligent, observer of details and errors"... His promotion to the pre-team came true after the 2015 national championship in Camagüey and blue is his favorite color, since he considers that the sea and the sky are the greatest things that exist. He always has number one in mind and admits he has to control his passion for sweets a little more.

He has already set his eyes on the possible podium in London 2020, but claims it is about going step by step. The first one is well defined: to win all his matches at the World Cup and then to contribute his gold in Barranquilla.

Admirer of several Cuban wrestlers since his childhood, because of the sacrifice and ability to prevail in adverse situations, this gladiator from Sancti Spiritus knows what it is to recover from a bad start, because in the U-23 World Cup, he began behind on the scoreboard, both in the semifinals and the final.

Three aces within range in search of new golden horizons for the men’s freestyle wrestling.

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