

Cubans learning quickly on World Tour

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Diaz Nivaldo and Sergio Gonzalez are slowly making their mark on the FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour and the pair are aiming to continue their progression all the way to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

The Cuban duo had no World Tour experience before they announced themselves to the beach volleyball world at the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games where they reached the quarterfinals.

A year earlier they had finished ninth at the Netherlands 2015 FIVB Beach Volleyball World Championships, but in Rio they topped their pool and in doing so helped knock out World Tour regulars Janis Smedins and Aleksandrs Samoilovs of Latvia.

In 2017 they took their first steps on the World Tour and won gold at the 1-Star Langkawi event and bronze at the Qinzhou 3-Star tournament. They also recorded another ninth-place finish at the Vienna 2017 FIVB Beach Volleyball World Championships.

“After the Olympics we started on the World Tour because we wanted to play a higher level than we do on the NORCECA Tour,” Nivaldo said. “Our federation

gave us the chance to play on the World Tour. They supported us and gave us the money to cover us so we can give our best in these tournaments.

“It is good to be involved. We are taking on the best players in the world and have the opportunity to get to know them and share information and knowledge with them. When other teams say you are good and talk about your skills it is good for our confidence.”

Russia’s Konstantin Semenov and Viacheslav Krasilnikov ended Nivaldo and Gonzalez’s pursuit of an Olympic medal, but it gave them a taste of what the Olympics are all about.

They are currently competing at the Mersin 3-Star and are set to meet Qatar’s Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijian in the second elimination round. The Qatari’s are on a similar path to Tokyo 2020 and recently won bronze at the Doha 4-Star tournament to underline their credentials.

For Nivaldo and Gonzalez it is the latest test on their on-going development pathway.

“The Olympics is the big tournament and every player wants to win it, including us,” Nivaldo said. “So we are making changes so we adapt to the beach volleyball on the World Tour and learn, develop and improve.

“We feel very proud of what we did in Rio and we had a lot of support from the Cuban people because Cuban teams haven’t done very well in Olympic volleyball recently.

“We played our best volleyball and our best level. We showed our best skills, our best service, good defence and I thought I was the best player in attack. So we were very proud.”

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