

Mijaín López and the certainty to wave our flag in Tokyo

By: Harold Iglesias Manresa / CubaSi

25/12/2020



Have you pictured yourself counting the minutes for nine months to resume your activities in what you like the most? Do you know how much does a year gap affect athletes? Only super-star athletes may overcome such state of leisure and succeed.

Mijaín López is one of those athletes. He is certain that he will go to Tokyo 2021 looking for his fourth Olympic crown in a row and the happiness entailed by being our delegation's flagbearer at both, the opening and closing ceremony. In case he achieves the feat, he would become the greatest Greco-Roman wrestler of all times in the 130 kg division.

Many would say there is nothing left to add regarding Mijaín López. Each chat with this giant (6'5, 135 kg) gives light on new elements. In this opportunity, Mijaín shares his views on self-confidence, strong will of victory, and his physical shape:

A very tough year, several months without competing despite you have been training in this Olympic cycle without demanding too mucho of yourself in great competitions. How have you faced 2020 and the idea of extending that time frame to pursue your dream of a fourth Olympic crown?

This year has been tough for athletes qualified for the Olympic Games after waiting for four years to participate in the biggest sports competition in the world. This has always been my goal and it keeps me focused on my daily routine. Since the emergence of Covid-19, I trained at home and it was awesome because I shared my training time along with my family, my kids.

I have experience in training alone. But this time I shared with my teammates via social networks. Sharing time with my wife and kids helped me to keep a positive mindset for Tokyo. Instead of affecting me, it has triggered up my motivation in my quest to achieve my fourth crown, so much longed by the Cuban people and myself, and thus give a grand finale to my sports career.

From the training sessions in Camaguey to Cerro Pelado, what did you focus your training on?

In Camaguey, we first went back to the technical moves, spatial distribution and the direction all over the mat after

so much time without competing. Training on the mat is quite different from doing so at home. Another of my goal was to keep my weight since it is fundamental for me to be in shape for great competitions. I will be focused on these efforts until January, where some variations will take place and perhaps I may participate in some events in order to be ready for the Olympic Games.

Is it hard the training in this regard?

Yes, indeed. But my body, once I start training hard, steady, without injuries, flows perfectly. My 20-year experience on the mat is paramount.

You train with a three-times medalist in world championships like Oscar Pino, who may be seen as your pupil because he trains by your side every day, what is your opinion on him?

It has been a wonderful experience. I did not enjoy a similar one as I shared time with Milián only a few months in the national team. Oscar has had the opportunity to grow with me and his results prove me right. It has a lot of merit because I have shared my knowledge with him and Oscar has developed a lot as a wrestler, which has contributed hugely with my training. He has gained top experience and I fight with him, he helps me, resulting in a mutual contribution. We have four very good athletes in the 130 kg division. Ángel Pacheco was bestowed with the Rookie of the Year award as he won the Pan American tournament in Ottawa. He has experienced a substantial growth and his contribution is also essential in my development.

Do you think this is one the best times for the 130 kg division of the Greco-Roman wrestling?

Yes, athletes have almost the same age, boasting excellent level of competition. There are big hopes with the future, especially with those in charge to replace Milián and me. In fact, Oscar has been doing so for a while now.

Can we say Mijaín is already in his optimal physical-mental shape?

I feel very good in every sense. I just have to stick to my training plan and wait for the moment of truth.

What does it mean for Mijaín to have contributed with the development of athletes with excellent results like Oscar Pino and the also Cuban Yasmani Acosta?

It is something emotional. I can say that Cuba has been a power in the heavy weights of Greco-Roman wrestling throughout the years. We have several athletes fighting for medals in elite events worldwide and that is the case of Yasmani Acosta. And this is a result of training for hours, the joint effort, the determination and sacrifice, that things have been done correctly, and our trainers have played a huge role as well.

The expectation to become the best wrestler ever, how much does it affect your motivation to put Cuba on top?

It is really encouraging. Putting Cuba and the rest of athletes on top is of great satisfaction to me. That is why we fight, for our flag and our people. This will be a pivotal year after the pandemic. I ask the people to trust me. I am ready and I ask my rivals to take care. I repeat, I am ready to fight. Our flag will wave high on the mat and in the opening ceremony.

Encouraging words embracing the certainty of victory. His impeccable career makes him look super natural. He has only lost to Russian Kazhan Baroev in Olympic Games, back in Athens 2004 and the world championship finals in Guangzhou in 2006; and against Turkish Ryza Kayaalp in Istanbul 2011 and Las Vegas 2015. Such defeats have been "avenged" by far.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSi Translation Staff