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Cuban Invented “High Five”

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He started coaching right after his last boxing match in 1952. That makes him one of the most senior boxing coaches in the world. With 62 years of boxing experience, coach Alcides Sagarra is Cuba’s premier boxing coach. Under Sagarra’s leadership Cuban boxers have won a countless number of medals in international boxing competitions for Cuba’s second most popular sport after baseball.

His record is 32 Olympic Gold medals, 63 (senior) World championships, and 64 junior/cadet World titles. However, there is another accomplishment that is much more popular in the United States that I believe he is responsible for. I believed that Mr. Sagarra was the source, the origin of the “Hive Five” hand salute. Let me explain. If you go back and look at all the films of when the Cuban boxing team was fighting as far back as the 1972 Summer Olympics you always saw Mr. Sagarra give “Hive Five’s” to his boxers when they returned to their corners. As a young Latino growing up in the South Bronx I had never seen that type of salute with hand motions.

I have always admired Mr. Sagarra, but never had a chance to meet, well until...

I was in Havana at the offices of the Cuban sports ministry, INDER waiting to meet our sports liaison that is working to guide us through a series of meetings that will eventually allow Latino Sports and INDER to have a closer working relationship. Our goal of is to expand our sports news coverage from the island. While waiting for our meeting, in walks this boxing legend to drop off something.

Mr. Sagarra who is in his eighties (80's) and though technically retired as national coach is still very much involved in all aspects of Cuban boxing told me that he is looking forward to Cuba's participation in the next Olympics in 2016.

I told Mr. Sagarra that I believe that he was the one that also invented something that is practiced a lot throughout our Barrios back home. He was a bit puzzled, smiled and asked what was that? I told him that growing up in the South Bronx I had always been part of all the street customs. One was giving friends and each other's what we called, “Five” (slapping each others hand in a downward motion). That has changed to what is still popular today of giving each other a, “High Five.”

He laughed as if I was telling him a joke. I told him I was serious. I explained that I had never seen anyone giving “High Five's” in our Barrio's until the late 1970's, but that I had seen him doing “High Fives” while coaching in the 1972 Summer Olympic games. That was Mr. Sagarra's trademark of always giving his boxers, “High Fives,” with both hands.

There are stories of baseball players, Dusty Baker and Glenn Burke of the Los Angeles Dodgers being the first to be seen giving each other High Five on October 2, 1977. However, I challenge that origin and ask any doubters to “go to the video's.”

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