SPORTS HISTORY: Celebrating Alejandrina Herrera’s outstanding 98 birth anniversary

By: Victor Joaquín Ortega / Special for CubaSí
18/06/2022



The time was cruel to her ambitions, but Alejandrina Herrera, who had just moved to Havana along with her family, dreaming with new goals, never quitted. She faced insurmountable obstacles regarding her sports dreams, basketball and fencing. In basketball, she managed to play for Union Fraternal, a society for black and mixed-race people: tournaments and national teams, no way. It was even worse in fencing. A trainer told her the true: *“Forget it. People of your color are not welcomed here, not even to look after the weapons.”*

She was born on April 21, 1924 in Artemisa. She had to find other ways to show her love for sports. She found it

in discus throwing. It was not easy, though. Being a colored woman was an obstacle. She was also of peasant origin, humble, and was member of *Juventud Socialista*. The latter turned into a big blow to her dreams and her rights to attend the I Pan American Games held in Buenos Aires, in 1951.

Despite being the runner-up in the Central American and the Caribbean Games held in Guatemala, in 1950, when she threw 31.78m, and met the demanded result to attend the continental games, she was excluded from the national delegation. An officer replied with fury and disdain at her when she complained: *"Your case is not under consideration since the very beginning: that color of your skin and your ideals, black and red."* It would not be the only time. She was not invited to competitions held in the United States as she was not of the likes of most of the sports executives. Thus, she was ignored most of the time.

She kept fighting. As a citizen and as an athlete. And she reaped the rewards. With 37.18 m, she won the Central American and the Caribbean Games held in Mexico, in 1954, and she broke the area record. She was rewarded with the most outstanding athlete of the year award, beating brilliant baseball players and boxers and despite the efforts of the Big Five, a discriminatory group with strong influence in the industry. To the greater pain of

mean people, she won the bronze medal with 38m in Mexico, again, the following year.

The Revolution triumphed. She broke the Cuban record in shot put. In the Central American and the Caribbean Games held in Kingston in 1962, she was only outperformed by the next star of Cuba's discus throwing: Caridad Aguero, 43.75m. After her retirement from active sports, she continued to be attached to the sports world as a professor of physical education and trainer. She had her own views. In some meetings and interviews, she criticized the decrease of people's participation in sports. *"We must improve physical education sessions as well…,"* she used to say. She passed away in 1986. But her legacy is still alive, especially in the multiple successes of our athletes in track and field.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff