
Team Cuba World Baseball Classic: some thoughts

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28/01/2023



There is no doubt this is the strongest Cuban baseball team to compete in any international event in recent years.

In the last decade, it may just be compared to the national team that competed in the World Baseball Classic in 2017. Anyway, the task will be very complicated in the most important event of this sports discipline.

First, I believe manager Armando Johnson just trusted the men he had around during the training sessions and somehow ignored those players who were fighting in the Cuban Elite Baseball finals.

Names such as Yosvany Alarcón, Rafael Viñales, Guillermo Avilés, Dennis Laza, Yadián Martínez, and Oscar Valdes, for instance, might well be part of that final list. But, in my opinion, Johnson rather chose those he could count on in order to release the list promptly due to the travel formalities.

Having said that, I do not believe that the inclusion of all these players could have granted Cuba greater chances to really fight for the crown.

The ones called, in addition to the sporting condition those playing abroad may show, and our own national players who do not play for a long time, I am worried about Yoennis Céspedes, whose health status was not optimal. I wish I am wrong and the Granma native show the best shape possible, as we will need his offense to advance in the tournament.

The leap in quality compared to previous rosters is evident, but given what other teams bring to the tournament, it seems really very difficult to reach the final stage.

It will not be easy to advance to the second round, not at all. And to do so, we need to defeat our bane in the most recent events, the Netherlands, in addition to Panama, Italy, and the host nation Taiwan.

No one else has yet announced their roster, but the Netherlands cast boasts pitchers such as Kenley Jansen and

Pedro Strop on their provisional roster, as well as infielders Xander Bogaerts, Jonathan Schoop, Didi Gregorius, Jurickson Profar and Andrelton Simmons, all with huge experience at the highest level of baseball.

Italy, meanwhile, may have in its rosters Brandon Nimmo, former New York Mets' outfielder, Trey Mancini, DH for the world series champions Houston Astros, and Yankees' first baseman Anthony Rizzo, all waiting to sign a new contract. This fact may put in jeopardy their presence in the World Baseball Classic, which would certainly be a relief for our pitchers.

In the case of Taiwan, although they have no players playing for any MLB team, we know first-hand they are tough to beat, especially if they are playing at home.

Panama looks like the weakest team. But we should not ignore the fact that one good day of any pitcher could mess the strongest lineup.

I still believe the first goal is achievable. And once the first games are played, we will clearer vision of our real level. Things must be assessed step by step.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
