

Erislandy and Mijaín, shared throne

By: Lemay Padrón Oliveros / Special for CubaSi

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It has happened before. And I believe that, for the sake of justice, the award to the Best Individual Athlete of the Year 2024 should have been a shared one, between boxer Erislandy Álvarez and wrestler Mijaín López.

The feat of the ebony giant has no point of comparison. With nothing to lose, because whatever happened at the Paris 2024 he was already a legend of world sport, the man from Pinar del Río came out at almost 42 years old as if he were 20, sweeping away whoever was in front of him.

In the City of Light, he became the only athlete in history to win titles in five Olympic Games, the oldest to achieve a gold medal in wrestling and, of course, the only wrestler with five golds.

In the Arena Campo de Marte, he remained dominant on the mat and was never in danger, although he did not win with the superiority of previous tournaments. The Herradura idol simply saved his strength to finish as the best gladiator of all time.

But with all these enormous merits, he just had only five official bouts in the whole year, and that is why I think the only representative of the Cuban boxing squad who took home a gold medal at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games deserves recognition.

The rematch with French Sofiane Oumiha was his highlight, because it was not only about the boxer who had beaten him at the 2023 Tashkent World Cup, but also about the local idol, the one that all the French fans wanted to see finally raise his arm in an Olympic final.

In addition, he was the only boxer on the planet who arrived in Paris showcasing the titles of the two world competitions of the cycle, but none of that impressed Erislandy too much, who went out onto the ring to eat him alive.

The Cienfuegos native was not affected too much by fighting in a six-round duel during the International Boxing Association (IBA) Night of Champions held in Havana, when less than a month earlier he was boxing in three rounds in Paris.

It is true that he lost in his first opportunity to qualify for the summer event, in the pre-Olympic tournament in Italy, but from then on, he went on an undefeated run, including his foray into the recently launched IBA World Cup.

Precisely the same person who beat him in Busto Arzizio, Tajik Bakhodur Usmonov, will be his rival in the semifinals on January 18 in Beijing, China. But as you can see, this will be in 2025, and 2024 ended with that only defeat.

That is why I believed a shared throne should have been fairer as the boxer had a much more prolific activity throughout the year. But I also applaud winner Mijaín López, without a doubt the best Cuban athlete not only in 2024, but ever.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CuabSí Translation Staff
