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**OPINION: Alayo-Díaz at Their Best**

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By: Lemay Padrón Oliveros / Special for CubaSi

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The Cuban duo of Jorge Luis Alayo and Noslén Díaz showed their best form this weekend at the Elite 16 tournament in Quintana Roo, Mexico.

They didn't have a good debut in the first phase of 2025 Beach Volleyball World Pro Tour, the Yucatán Challenger, where they were the favorites to win the title and finished fifth, but on Mexican soil they showed some recovery.

However, the event didn't start well for the Cubans, as they lost in their first outing in just two sets (20-22 and 11-21) to Germans Paul Henning and Lui Wüst, a duo that came from the qualifying phase.

However, from then on, they improved their game and defeated Sweden's Jacob Hölting Nilsson-Elmer Andersson and Germany's Lukas Pfretzschner-Sven Winter by identical scores of 2-0 (23-21 and 21-17) to advance to the next round, where they defeated renowned Danes Hendrik Mol-Anders Berntsen 2-0 (21-19 and 21-17).

Probably their most significant victory was their come-from-behind victory over Czech world champions Ondrej Perusic and David Schweiner in the quarterfinals (16-21, 21-14, and 15-11), as this was a significant boost for their mind set.

The ninth-place finishers at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games had already defeated the Czech duo in the group stage of the 2023 World Cup, the Europeans' only defeat at that event, and in the elite tournament at Tépíc 2024, also in Mexico.

However, Perusic and Schweiner were coming off a victory in Playa Progreso, Mérida, and had also taken revenge against our team in the final of the Challenger in Poland.

In the semifinals, the Caribbean team also had to work hard to overcome the Dutch pair Steven Van de Velde and Alexander Brouwer in straight sets (21-13, 25-23).

In the final, the Cubans defeated the Argentine brothers Nicolás and Tomás Capogrosso in straight sets (21-13,

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24-22), completely dominating the sands of Playa del Carmen. It's worth noting that in the second set, they had to overcome a four-point lead, losing 12-16, and then came close to elimination, trailing 18-20.

Fortunately, Alayo's left knee discomfort from the first tournament wasn't serious, and they were able to take on this challenge in good shape.

This was the first time Alayo-Díaz reached the final of an elite tournament on the World Pro Tour, and they did so in style, surpassing their best result in this type of competition, the bronze medal in 2024 in Tepic.

Most importantly, they have added 1,200 points to their world rankings, which have now moved up to fifth and sixth. They will now have a short break before heading to Brazil, where they will defend this title in the elite rounds to be held in Saquarema (9-13) and Brasilia (16-20).

**Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff**

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