
Olympic champions herald Judo Grand Prix in Cuba

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Olympic and world champions head the list of athletes from 47 countries and regions to compete in the first Judo Grand Prix in Havana, Cuba, from June 6 to 8, Cuban sports news website Jit said Thursday.

Top athletes from Brazil, the United States and Germany are already confirmed for the event, while other countries with strong judo traditions, such as South Korea, Russia and France, have yet to announce their lineups.

According to the organizers, more than 400 athletes are expected to compete in the event, which will be televised to 135 countries.

Brazil, a judo powerhouse in the Americas, will feature 2012 Olympic gold-medal winner Sarah Menezes, world silver-medal winners Mayra Aguiar, Erika Miranda, and Hugo Pesanha in the event.

The U.S. squad includes Kayla Harrison, the 2010 world gold-medal winner who is returning to the mat after a year's absence to challenge Cuba's own Yalennis Castillo, who came in second at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Germany will field Laura Vargas-Koch, the 2013 world silver medalist, heading a strong team that includes Mareen Krach, Miryam Roper and Francisca Konitz.

Konitz defeated Cuban Olympic and world champion Idalys Ortiz at the Dusseldorf Grand Prix in February.

Other award-winning judo stars confirmed for the event are Austrians Sabrina Filzmoser and Hilde Drexler, the Chinese Wu Shugen Wu and Ma Sisi, Canadians Catherine Roberge and Kelita Zupancic, Romania's Corina Caprioru and Spain's Laura Gomez.

The tournament in Cuba will grant points towards the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

