

Cuba knocks out Argentina in U-23 Pan American Baseball Championship



Naykel Cruz (Photo: GI for JIT)

Havana, June 11 (RHC)-- Naykel Cruz's good pitching and a ferocious 11-run run streak in just two innings gave Cuba its first win in the U-23 Pan American Baseball Championship, hosted by Mexico.

Armando Johnson's students triumphed by knockout against Argentina, with a score of 11x0 and six hits, in a game played at the Gonzalo Villalobos stadium, known as the Ferrocarrilero.

Cruz, from Matanzas, presented himself with good speed, calm and able to solve certain difficulties with control, caused mainly by the prevailing heat at noon and the consequences of the altitude above sea level, above 1,800 meters.

By sticking his arm in again and again, the left-hander kept his rivals' run box at zero, who offered resistance in the first third of the game due to the good work of the Gaucho starter Juan Ignacio Borrás.

Six men were left on the bases by Cuba in that stretch due to the astuteness of the right-hander, gifted with good control and breaking pitches that made the Cubans fan our team over and over again.

However, when the South American manager decided to substitute his starter, the game changed radically and the Island's hitters made the task of concluding it on the fast track.

Eight runs were scored in the bottom of the fourth inning. It all started with a ticket to Andrys Perez, after which Cristian Rodriguez hit a perfect sacrifice fly and the catcher threw a bad throw to first. With men on third and second bases, Carlos Rodríguez hit a hit to center field (1CI), Francisco Venecia followed suit (1CI) and Danys Oramas hit his to the right field (1CI).

With tenants on second and third bases, Alfredo Fadruga received a ticket and his next teammates, Javier Carabeo and Alejandro Escobar, drove in runs on four bad balls each.

With the corners congested, Luis Rojas hit a homer to set the score at 7x0. The eighth of the inning was brought in by Andrys Perez with a sacrifice fly to right field.

The Gauchos' relief staff was struggling at this point of the game, but there was still one more act left until the end of the game...

In the bottom of the fifth inning, Yuri Fernandez stepped in for Oramas and negotiated a ticket. Fadruga tolerated a ball at forearm level and the scene was set for Carabeo to disappear the ball over the right field fence, making the score 11x0 in five innings. Remember that the games in this match are seven innings.

"I went looking for good contact because I have strength in my wrists. We started the game a little sleepy because we are making our debut, but we got into the right gear and it ended with the result we were looking for", said Carabeo shortly after stepping on the home plate.

"The beginning of the game was very violent, but little by little we saw the rhythm and that's how the result came out. The altitude and the fatigue influence the control, but we are going to adjust. The Cuba teams are characterized by defense and pitching, but today we saw how the boys made the adjustments and the connections came out", said pitcher Cruz.

Fadruga, for his part, considered that the game at the beginning was a little cold, since the adaptation to the venue has cost them a little work.

"Then we saw the pitches better and it connected more easily. The Cuban team was superior today and as the games go by we will be better and adapt to the existing conditions," he added.

The Cuban technical director, Johnson, considered that the close start allowed him to appreciate the boys in those game situations. He then considered the match to be strong, with top level teams, and praised the work of Naykel Cruz, despite the difficulties with control.

Regarding the offensive work, the Pinochet mentor acknowledged that "they played a little as expected, because at times the players were a little anxious and could not make the contacts we expected. Then we moved the game a little and the result came out. When we made one, we broke the ice and the rest came against a worthy rival like Argentina".

This Saturday the Cuban team will face Venezuela. The pitcher will be the right-hander Yulián Quintana.

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