

# *Granma-Matanzas: A life or death challenge in Cuban baseball*

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**Matanzas-Granma**

Bayamo, Cuba, June 27 (PL) - The desire of Matanzas to be crowned and the longing of Granma for a comeback multiply expectations and create a jumble of doubts around the sixth game of the Cuban baseball final today.

The designs of each team are well defined: the Matanzas Crocodiles dominate 3-2 and aspire to settle the playoff, while the Granma Alazanes feed the media show with the determination to force the seventh and final game, also at the Martyrs of Barbados stadium.

The current staging leaves mentor Armando Ferrer's team in an unbeatable position, which will try to give the "coup de grâce" through the pitching of left-hander Dariel Góngora, one of its main men in the art of pitching.

Góngora has two hits and an equal number of setbacks in the current postseason, with an effectiveness of 4.55, 12 strikeouts and eight innings of work in 27.2 innings, while his opponents are hitting .319 (113 at-bats/36 hits).

In addition to seeking the lethal blow, a thirst for revenge moves the pitcher, after his negative performance on Tuesday, June 21, when he barely lasted 1.2 innings and allowed four runs and an equal number of hits at the Victoria Park in Girón.

However, not everything is rosy for Ferrer: his first baseman and starting second baseman, Yadir Mujica, is still on the sidelines after being injured in the epilogue of the last game and the medical team is evaluating his inclusion in the line-up.

In declarations to Prensa Latina, the flamethrower Naykel Cruz stated: "The objective is to finish them off in the sixth game. It will not be an easy task, but our team has grown and we believe we have the potential to secure the championship.

Meanwhile, Carlos Martí, manager of the reigning champions, will place on the mound the right-hander Joel Mojena, owner of an exquisite precision in his pitches and capable of constantly varying the starting angles, although he does not stand out for his speed.

According to the numbers of statistician Arnelio Álvarez, Mojena is 2-0 since the quarterfinals, with a 3.60 ERA (nine clean sheets), a .296 opponents' average (81-24), two retirements on strikes and six free passes in 15 episodes.

Contrary to his opponent, the right-hander contributed a win to the Granma cause in the third game of the battle for the crown (5.0, 3C, 6H, 0K, 0BB), and was master of the situation until he exploded in the sixth chapter, with three hits and six hits allowed.

Despite falling in the last game, Granma does not foresee significant changes in the lineup, and will only introduce Darien Palma for Pedro Almeida, who had to be admitted due to chest pains and vomiting at the end of the fifth game.

The kings of the island will try to stay alive with Yosvani Millán (2B), Osvaldo Abreu (3B), Guillermo Avilés (1B), Carlos Benítez (BD), Iván Prieto (R), Alexquemer Sánchez (RF), Darián Palma (LF), Yulián Milián (SS) and Franciso Venezia (CF), although the manager could change the order.

History tells that Matanzas is facing its third consecutive final and won in 2020 for the first time under that name, although the territory achieved several trophies under the denominations of Henequeneros (1970, 1990 and 1991) and Citricultores (1977 and 1984) in the 20th century.

Granma, meanwhile, is considered the best team of the last five years on the island, after being crowned in 2017, 2018 and 2021, becoming the tenth three-time champion of Cuban baseball.

The 61st National Baseball Series kicked off on January 23 with the competition of 16 teams in a regular phase of 75 games and eight tickets to the first round of direct eliminations.



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