

Sports News Roundup July 30



Baseball

First, let's have a look at Cuba's first *U-23 National Baseball Series*, which got underway on Tuesday in four provinces, in response to calls by experts for the need to train talented youth in competition.

Some 16 teams are competing in the first-ever event, one for each of Cuba's 15 provinces and the special municipality of the Isle of Youth, Jit sports news website reported.

The teams were divided into four groups and games will be held through Aug. 18th. The semifinal round, set to take place on Aug. 30th-Sept. 9th, will feature the best teams from each group within a *round robin* modality, while the final will see the top 2 teams play 5 games between Sept. 10th to the 16th.

The *54th National Baseball Series*, Cuba's most popular sporting event, will begin on Sept. 21st.

And regarding baseball, the older brother of Cuban baseball star Yulieski Gourriel, Yuniesky Gourriel, signed with the *Québec les Capitales* minor league team for the summer, making him the first Cuban player to become a professional in Canada with the blessing of his country's authorities.

Yunieski, 32, has been in Québec since July 10, according to les Capitales, and is eager to play for his new team, and Cuba's *Escambray* daily reported that the contract was negotiated among Michel Laplante, president of Les Capitales, the Cuban Baseball Federation, and Cuba's INDER sports institute.

Laplane said Gourriel's contract is similar to that of any player in the Can-Am league, to which his team belongs, and according to such rules, the salary cap for a rostered player is \$4,000 per month, depending on the roster size...“Yuniesky will play for us this summer, and then go back to Cuba in September to get ready for the professional Cuban league,” Laplane said.

In 2013, the Cuban government lifted its ban for athletes to play as professionals abroad. Yuniesky follows a trail blazed by his 30-year-old brother Yulieski, who is under contract with the Yokohama DeNA BayStars, in addition to Frederich Cepeda and Hector Mendoza (Yomiuri Giants), Alfredo Despaigne (Chiba Lotte Marines), and Norberto González and Joan Carlos Pedroso, who play in Italy.

Gourriel sets a political precedent that is in contrast to Major League Baseball's restrictive practice regarding Cuba. Citing U.S. sanctions against Cuba, MLB still forces Cuban players to defect before joining its teams.

Les Capitales is a franchise of the Durham, N.C.-based Canadian American Association of Professional Baseball, which operates a 5-team league.

Not only is Can-Am based in the United States, but two of the independent league's teams —the New Jersey Jackals and the Rockland Boulders— are in the United States; in addition, this season the Can-Am is playing an inter-league schedule with 13 teams of the American Association, most of them in the United States.

In a phone call from Québec, Can-Am league Commissioner Miles Wolff said that this is an issue between the club and the Cuban player. Asked about the MLB's restrictive approach to Cuban players, he said he didn't know the details.

“It's silly, that's my first thought,” Wolff said. “I don't know all the reasons, but I'm sure there's politics involved in this. But for the Cuban players to never go home again, that's certainly very difficult for them.”

“From the league's point of view, getting outstanding Cuban players helps us,” Wolff added. “It's an interesting experiment. The interesting thing will be next year. If Yuni's experience is good, maybe the Cuban government will expand the number of players.”

Finally, *Les Capitales* president said he didn't expect any troubles with U.S. authorities, nor does he see any connection with the MLB and its policies... “I don't see any challenges toward MLB — not more than Canada toward United States.”

Judo

Cuban male judoka, Asley Gonzalez, was injured and out of competition for the *World Championship* in Cheliabinsk, Russia, from August 25th to 31st, said Cuban head coach, Justo Noda here in Havana.

Gonzalez, Olympic runner-up in *London 2012* and World Champion in Rio de Janeiro 2013 in 90 kilos, has not been able to recover from his injury despite he followed the right treatment by the doctors, announced his coach Noda.

However, the Cuban judo fighter will travel to France to train in this European country, together with the Cuban team that will take part in the *World Championship*, to study his contenders for future competitions, among them, the *Olympic Games* in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

About the Cuban male judo team, Noda ratified athletes such as Janier Pena (60 kg.), Golberto Solar (66), Magdiel Estrada (73), José Armenteros (100) and Oscar Braysón (over 100).

The program has scheduled the Cuban male judo team will go to France next Saturday, to depart for Cheliabinsk on August 23rd.

Chess

Cuban GM Isam Ortiz returned to the winning path and appears in 14th place at the *Ibero-American Chess Championship*, which takes place in the Spanish town of Linares, when there is only day of competition and Paraguayan GM, Axel Bachmann, leads with tranquility.

Isam, 4th Cuba's GM-ranked with 2592 Elo points, had suffered 2 straight losses, but bounced back on Tuesday against local IM Sabrina Vega (2400).

The Caribbean shows now 5 units of 8 possible in a classification where Bachmann has 7 and is at the gates of the crown after outrunning Spanish FIDE Master José Miguel Fernández (2353).

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