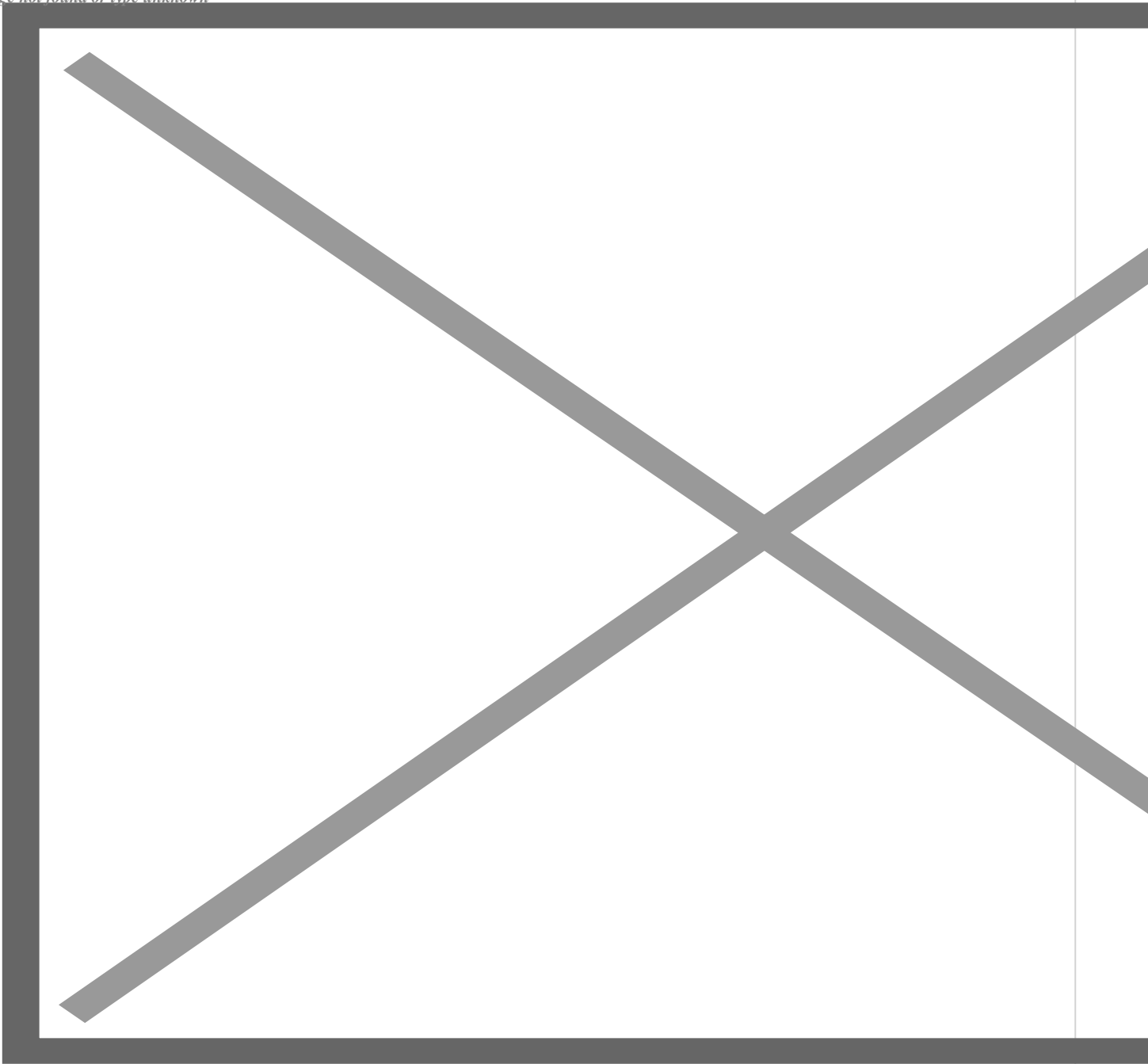


# *Cuba closes friendly baseball games in Japan with a defeat*

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Havana, February 23 (RHC)-- With a balance of three defeats and two victories, the Cuban baseball team concluded today the friendly games against Japanese professional clubs, falling five runs to two against SoftBank Falcons.

Raúl Fornés, first vice-president of the island's National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation, threw out the first pitch of the game, preparatory to the upcoming V World Baseball Classic.

The offense of both teams had eight hits on each side, although, unlike the locals, the Antilleans missed opportunities for men on bases and committed two defensive errors.

The Cuban lineup was led by Roel Santos (4-2, a triple and an RBI), Erisbel Arruebarrena (4-2) and Yoelkis Guibert (2-2 with two tickets).

A moment awaited by the island's fans was the debut as starter of Elián Leyva, however, the pitcher of the Mexican professional club Naranjeros de Hermosillo allowed three dirty runs in the second chapter.

About his first outing with the national team Leyva stated that he felt comfortable and highlighted how the Japanese make their quick adjustments "that is a type of baseball to which we must get used to", he said.

The other two scores of the Fukuoka franchise went to the account of Villaclareño Javier Mirabal in the sixth episode, while the impeccable relievers Onelki García, Liván Moinelo and Naykel Cruz stood out.

"I like the team's atmosphere, the boys are always cheerful and if that keeps up we will have a good result in the Classic", said García, who plays in Mexican professional baseball with Leones de Yucatán.

For the Japanese ninth, the submarine pitcher Rei Takahashi opened the game, defeating the Caribbean line-up for three complete innings.

The game held at the Ivy Stadium of the Ikimenomori Sports Park concluded with an affectionate greeting between the two teams, during which the Falcons bid farewell to their league mates Alfredo Despaigne and Yurisbel Gracial.

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