

# *CUBA / OLYMPICS UPDATE / Sunday, July 25*

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**Here's a summary of Cuban athletes participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games**

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The Olympic final of the 10-meter air pistol was far from the reach of Cuban Laina Perez, Pan American champion in Lima 2019 in this same modality.

The matancera rounded off a 567-point shoot at the Asaka Shooting Range, as a result of heats of 96, 95, 90, 95, 95, 94 and 97 that left her in 32nd place.

Although she was not able to start with high scores, 98 points upwards, the experienced shooter was trying to improve in the competition when a "lap" of 90 units condemned her almost definitively.

Laina had the mental strength to improve after that fateful trance, even to close with the highest score of her performance, that 97 that looks more like what is required under the five rings. No other Latin American athlete surpassed her.

This was her first appearance at the Olympic Games, after qualifying in Lima two years ago, in a dream event in which she triumphed individually and together with Jorge Grau in the mixed 10-meter air pistol.

Precisely together with Grau, who on Saturday finished this same modality in 19th place, the best of Cuban shooting so far, he will go out again to the shooting line on July 27.

Back to today's competition, the qualifying stage was dominated by China's Ranxing Jiang with a score of 587 units, which qualifies as a new Olympic record. The last qualifier came in with 577, ten more than the score achieved by our girl.

The final was dominated by Russia's Vitalina Atsarashkina with an Olympic record of 240.3, escorted by Bulgaria's Antoaneta Kostadinova (239.4) and China's Ranxing Jiang (218.0).

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Cuban Milena Venega could not continue in the single sculls, finishing fifth on Sunday in her quarterfinal regatta held in the Sea Forest Channel, adjacent to the city's bay.

On the third day of rowing at the Games of the XXXII Olympiad, the Spiritan saw her times deteriorate and will now seek her final place in the competition through the C-D semifinals.

Immersed in her third day of racing, Venega crossed the finish line in the fifth position with a time of 8:25.26 minutes, only ahead of Korea's Hyejeong Jeong, last with 8:38.70.

Russia's Hanna Prakatsen (7:49.64), Canada's Carling Zeeman (7:57.58) and Great Britain's Victoria Thornley (7:59.93) dominated the event and are still in the medal hunt.

Milena covered her qualifying heat on Friday, July 23 in 8:03.00 minutes, which she admitted to feeling pressured in her Olympic debut, which was the third major event of her career.

On Saturday, Milena dominated her repechage heat with a time of 8:17.30 minutes, thanks to which she continued on her way to the quarterfinals. The time raised concerns, although her rivals offered room for some economy of resources.

This Sunday she has not been able to advance with the worst of her times, in a performance that could betray exhaustion, especially in the midst of an embracing heat.

The Cuban has achieved times of up to 7:43 minutes, according to statements of her coach José Luis León, hence the results are striking.

Needless to say, if she approaches those margins, she would be included in the semifinals and finals that begin on July 27.

In any case, the goals set for the athlete are to place from 12th to 20th place, which is still possible.

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Two jumps that did not come off, two moments that gymnast Marcia Vidiaux and her coach Osniel Blanco will never forget, because in just a few seconds their dreams, woven during many months with these Olympic Games as inspiration, vanished.

The little Marcia did not achieve the expected fall in the first execution and in the second, the twist that ends her vault was interrupted. A score of 13.499 points... the sadness reflected on her face.

Marcia, who was already eighteenth also in the jumping horse in Rio de Janeiro 2016, wanted now more and could not. Without justifications, her trainer confessed afterwards that what she saw today was nothing like her Podium training two days ago.

"I think the pressure of two years without competing could have influenced. But I can assure that everything was done well, the planned work was accomplished. Everything was done looking to reach the final, that was the goal and she worked in training with fluency, with good technique," he said.

He does not want his words to sound like a justification. Simply, this is part of the sport: years of work and in just a few moments dreams do not come true.

According to the plan, it was the only and best opportunity for the Cuban gymnast, who brought two jumps of high degree of difficulty (5.40 and 5.60) , very similar to those that earned her a seventh place in the Pan American Games of Lima 2019. The strategy was designed to try to reach a final that just slipped away.

At the Ariake Gymnastics Center, everything is blue. Lighter or darker tones are combined between the stands and the center of the action, but the ambient music and the emulation of the few with access to the venue were insufficient to create the magic of a sporting event of this level.

There was a lack of public, we know that it was impossible and that the measure responds to preserve health before everything else... but it was not the same and the competition at times seemed more like a training.

After finishing the first subdivision among women, the Italian Alice de Amato is the best overall score with 54.199 units, but the best will come at night when, among others, the American Simone Biles, one of the most followed stars of this event, will appear.

Maybe then her talent will make us feel that we are watching gymnastics at the Olympic Games...

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The quintet of canoeists who will represent Cuba at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games traveled today from Poland to the Asian nation.

For nearly 90 days they trained in the European country the C2 excellents in the planet Serguey Torres and Fernando Dayán Jorge, the Olympic promise of the C1, José Ramón Pelier, and the girls Yarisleidis Cirilo and Katherin Nuevo in the C2, and in the C1 the first one.

"This training in Europe prior to the Olympic Games has been very good," highlighted to JIT via WhatsApp the boys' coach Yosniel Dominguez.

"Everyone has gained in concentration and the multidisciplinary team has been able to carry out its work efficiently," the coach noted.

"We have prepared boats, of high level, of which we hope in the coming days to respond to the high demands of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games," he concluded.

The competitions in the speed canoe of the summer event will take place in the Sea Forest Canal from August 2 to 7.

"The most profitable thing was the concentration we achieved here, a place that for some years has become our home when we are in Europe," said Serguey Torres, the leader of the canoe in Cuba, who is going to his fourth Olympic Games, while he was packing his suitcases.

Torres and Jorge are aiming to climb the podium in Tokyo in the 1000 m C2 canoe, while there is potential with the same intention in the men's C1 at the same distance and the girls could place fourth to sixth in the C2, although there may be improvements in the 200 m C1.

They had the support of Nelson Perales, coach of the girls, Alejandro Hamze, president of the Cuban Federation, and the triad integrated by Dachel Rodriguez (doctor), Lazaro Perez, (physiotherapist) and Idalis Perez (psychologist).

In the only major competitions held this year, the Cubans won 14 medals (6-5-3) in the I and II World Cups of speed canoeing, held in Szeged, Hungary, and Barnaul, Russia.

Cuba has three silver medals in the Olympics, with Ibrahim Rojas and Ledi Frank Balceiro as protagonists.

Rojas is Olympic runner-up in the C2 1000 and 500 meters together with Leobaldo Pereira (Sydney 2000) and Balceiro (Athens 2004), in that order.

Balceiro was also silver medalist in the Australian city, but in the 1000m single sculls.

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Not much could show the Cubans in the second day of beach volleyball of the Games of the XXXII Olympiad, as they fell in the fast track (21-15, 21-14) against their similar of Australia in the main court of the Shiokaze Park.

Leila Martinez and Lidiannys Echevarria showed flashes of their quality, but only that, and a victory does not emanate from good moments but from consistency in performance.

Let's say that there was pressure due to the debut, let's say that they did not enjoy the game thinking more about the victory, and also that all this ended up affecting the technical-tactical performance on an impressive field that was burning with heat at noon.

The big problem was in the concretion of the complex one of the game (receiving, passing, attacking), as a consequence of the good service of the Australian representatives Mariafe Artacho del Solar (Peruvian) and Taliqua Clancy, plus evident difficulties of ours.

Among the latter, I cite the errors in possession of the ball, both in setting and attacking, and also the poor blocking and defense.

Without taking their foot off the accelerator, especially after the eighth point in each set, the Oceania resolved their debut in a group that also includes duos from Russia and Italy.

Artacho and Clancy served with intent towards Lidianny, above all, rescued balls repeatedly and attacked tactically towards the empty spaces. In such a way, and without a powerful reaction from the Caribbeans, they reached victory in 40 minutes.

Artacho declared in perfect Spanish that their rivals have quality, so they tried not to allow them any freedom to react vigorously.

He described the match as difficult, although it did not seem so, and assured that they will go game by game without formulating great aspirations.

Leila, calm and affable, told the press that "we should have been much more relaxed going into the game, we have nothing to lose and a lot to enjoy. The training is there, the physical and mental conditions are there, so we just have to concentrate and enjoy what we know how to do".

When detailing the keys to the defeat, the experienced athlete said that "we could not fail so much. This is a high level competition and those who fail the least will get the best result. We just have to go in with much more concentration and intelligence, with a much more tactical game. The potentialities were seen in many aspects and we just have to put the ball in the empty spaces or uncomfortable for the defense".

Looking ahead to the rest of the elimination group, Leila commented that "we have the same objectives as at the beginning and we have all the confidence to advance in this competition. We have two games left and if we do the right things we will stay in the competition. We are not worried at all. We will analyze and focus on the next match to win and stay in the competition. We will fight for every opportunity.

Their coach, Alain Hernandez, considered that the Australians are medal favorites and recalled that in the phases of the world series in Cancun, a few weeks ago, they divided honors.

"They did not enjoy, there is nothing to lose and a lot to enjoy. Many unforced errors and lack of concentration caused the defeat", deepened the professor before affirming that by not controlling the complex one it became impossible to dominate the match.

Leila and Lidianny's next matches are against Russia and Italy. At least one victory is required to advance to the next phase.

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Cuban Luis Vega dived into the pool today for his second consecutive Olympic Games. It happened in the brand new and lavish aquatic center of this city.

He did it in the heat of the 400 meters combined that meant the starting pistol of swimming, one of the great vedettes of these events and that will live its first experience without public in the stands.

She had four rivals and could not beat any of them, but that does not keep her from dreaming because her focus is on the 200 butterfly, the event in which she has improved the most in recent years.

His personal best was set at 4:25.05 minutes, and there he will remain for a while longer, as this Saturday he stopped the clocks at 4:27.65.

Just out of the pools, the Cuban newcomer offered statements to JIT in an organized and very operative mixed zone, the first one we enjoyed with such attributes.

"The experience here has been incredible, although I already had the experience of Rio de Janeiro 2016. I was preparing for the 200 butterfly, but I was unexpectedly invited for the 400 combined and I accepted. It was good to swim them to feel already in competition mode," he commented at first with a towel over his shoulders.

"My main event is the 200 butterfly, but it helps to know what the competition process is like here," he assured with total serenity.

"All my preparation has been focused on that modality, I had the B qualifying mark and an always clear objective: to come here to beat my personal record of 1:58 minutes, achieved in Kazan during the scholarship received from the International Swimming Federation (Fina)," he added.

As for the experience on Russian soil, Vega described it as very positive, having been able to train with top-level teachers from several countries, attend international competitions and measure herself against rivals of proven rank.

Her next appearance at the Games will take place on July 26 in the 200 butterfly.

Swimming lives this Saturday a totally preliminary date, but from Sunday will begin to deliver the medals.

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