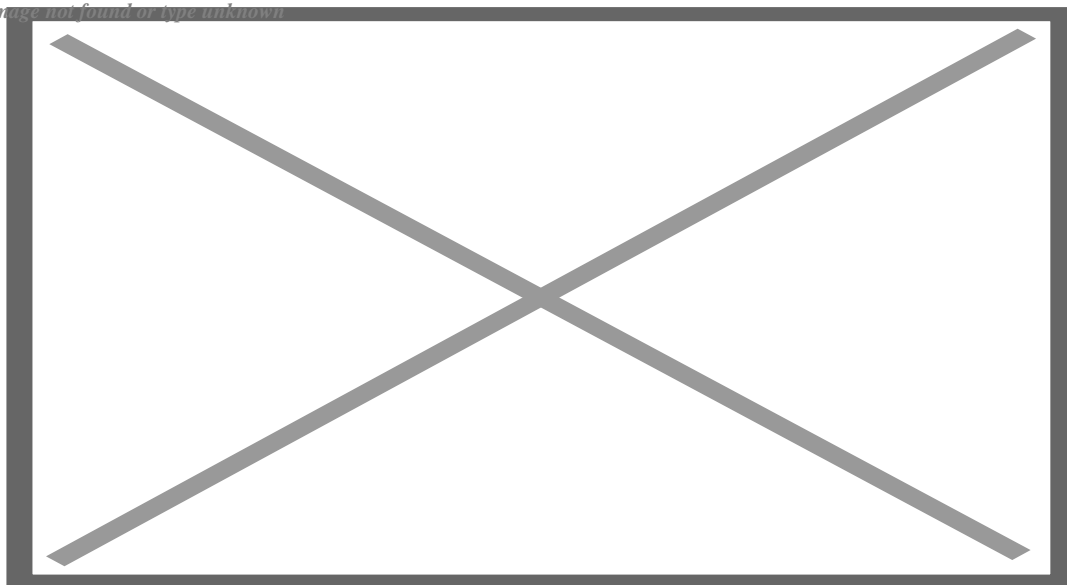


Women runners put the golden ribbon on Pan American athletics

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Havana, November 5 (JIT) -- Describing what happened during the farewell of athletics at the XIX Pan American Games is a challenge. The probability of finding the right adjective to qualify the performance of the women's 4x400-meter relay, just before the curtain fell on the competition, ends up being as scarce as those of their triumph in Chile.

In a National Stadium with the largest of its crowds - the organizers announced 40 thousand people - the four girls came out ready to finish among the winners. Little did they imagine that they would be the best of them all, the ones who would seal the harvest with a golden brooch, applaudable under any circumstances.

Zurian Hechavarría, Rose Mary Almanza, Sahily Diago and Lisneidys Veitía were the fastest, the most courageous, the owners of an unbeatable time of 3:33.15 minutes.

The world champions of Silesia 2021 and Olympic finalists of Tokyo 2020 could not count this Saturday with Roxana Gomez, an important pillar of that feat. An injury left the Cienfuegos native out of the registration and the lineup had to be reconfigured.

The calendar also played against them, because the race was called on the same date of the 800 meters final, in which two members of the relay would be involved, with very little time difference. To top it all off, the Dominican Republic would have none other than the world champion in the 400 meters, the extra-

class Marileidy Paulino, fresh to close her season.

Absolutely nothing limited the Cubans' commitment. Zurian made a supreme effort -she did not arrive here in top form- to complete the initial stretch without giving up too much. Rose Mary started strongly the comeback that Sahily would end up concretizing, minutes before the queen of the double lap of the oval. And with enough advantage, Lisneydi held the pulse of Paulino, who discounted places until entering second at the finish line with a combined time of 3:34.27 minutes, ahead of Brazil (3:34.89) who completed the podium.

"This is a triumph of all, a team and each one is important," said Veitía, responsible for the triumphal entry, a scene that was not enjoyed on the island since the Guadalajara 2011 edition.

For Zurian it was a kind of redemption, after missing out on the podium in the 400m hurdles. But nothing would have been possible without the drive of Rose Mary and Sahily, who did not care about the previous wear and tear to give the rest along with their teammates.

The 800 meters was not an easy race, very well run tactically by both, but closed with more strength by Sahily, the third Cuban to dominate this distance in continental multisport events. Previously only Ana Fidelia Quiros (Indianapolis 1987 and Havana 1991) and Adriana Muñoz (Santo Domingo 2003 and Guadalajara 2011) had achieved it.

"I am proud to have equaled those two good runners. I came for a medal of any color and I leave with two gold medals", confessed the Matanzas native, happy for having achieved the most important result of her career.

Although Rose Mary could not finish better, her bronze medal also ranks as one of the most pleasing results of the Cuban army in this competition.

The rest of the day did not leave more awards, as pole vaulter Eduardo Nápoles finished fifth with a mark of 5.40 meters; hammer thrower Ronald Mencía was eighth with 71.52 meters and Dacsy Brisón missed the mark in the high jump.

Special mention should be made of the two records for these events set in the hammer by universal champion Ethan Katzberg, from Canada, and Argentina's Belén Cassetta, in the 3,000m steeplechase.

Katzberg surpassed the Pan American record three times to set it definitively at 80.96 meters. She took over the reign with 9:39.47 minutes just five and a half months after becoming a mother.

The Cubans ended the athletic competition with seven gold, six silver and five bronze medals, only surpassed by the United States (8-5-12) and Brazil (7-10-6).

It is true that not all the continent's great stars in all specialties were present. Perhaps the throwing area had the highest competitive level. That is one of the variables to be taken into account for any analysis, in any case positive for the Island's athletics.

A remarkable fact was that of the seven gold medals, five were won by women, who also contributed 11 of the 18 medals won.

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