

Baseball star Tony Oliva throws out ceremonial pitch at game in Cuba

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Tony Oliva

Havana, January 10 (RHC).- Cuban Tony Oliva, 85 years old and a member of the Cooperstown Hall of Fame, made the pitch of honor in a baseball game on the island, in an unprecedented event in the championships of that sport in Cuba.

Oliva emigrated from Cuba in the early 1960s, although he always kept abreast of baseball on the island, especially because of his brother, Juan Carlos Oliva, whom he considered "one of the best pitchers" in the country.

Wearing a tricolor suit of the Cuba team with his historic number 6, which read Tony-0 - nickname with which he was baptized in the Big Tent - Oliva was accompanied Wednesday night by Vice Chancellor Carlos Fernández de Cosío, the president of Inder Osvaldo Vento, the head of the Cuban Baseball Federation, Juan Reinaldo Pérez, and baseball glories on the island as Rodolfo Puente and Pedro Medina.

Smiling, visibly excited, and with some difficulty walking due to his advanced age, Oliva walked around the diamond of the Latinoamericano, exchanged with players and managers, was photographed with fans and sang the national anthem with his cap on his chest.

During his presentation the stadium announcer detailed his brilliant 15-year career with the Minnesota Twins and asked for "a round of applause for our distinguished compatriot."

"The pleasure is mine that you gave me this opportunity and I am very grateful that I was invited here today by the president. It is a tremendous honor for me," he told Cuban television minutes later.

"I never had the opportunity to play here in Cuba. It was a dream to be here today, in a playoff game, baseball is a special thing," he added and said he always followed Cuban baseball, especially because his brother Juan Carlos was "one of the best pitchers in Cuba."

Regarding the Cubans who today shine in the Major Leagues, he praised José Abreu for his "elegance and class" and Yordan Alvarez, whom he considered "a batting "beast".

A native of Pinar del Río (Cuba's westernmost province), Oliva has been on a private visit to Cuba since last weekend, where he was also received by Juan Reinaldo Pérez.

For his brilliant career with the Twins he was exalted in 2021 to the Cooperstown Hall of Fame. Among his greatest achievements are three batting crowns (1964 - he was Rookie of the Year - 65 and 71), he participated in eight All-Star Games, he was the leader in hits five times and doubles four times.

It is the first time that a Cuban émigré baseball player participates in the opening ceremony of a Cuban championship game, although there are similar antecedents on the island.

In March 2016 Luis Tiant threw the first ball in the exhibition game between Tampa and Cuba, witnessed in the Latin American itself by then Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro, and in 1992 the also Hall of Fame member, American Hank Aaron, made the first delivery in a game played at the Capitán San Luis stadium in Pinar del Río.

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