

Cuban women's volleyball team denied U.S. visa to compete in Puerto Rico

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Havana, July 3 (RHC)-- The Cuban women's national volleyball team has been denied a chance to play in a tournament in Puerto Rico following the new visa restrictions imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

The Cuban Volleyball Federation announced that the team, comprising 12 athletes, a referee, and several coaches, had their visa request denied and will be unable to attend the tournament later this month.

"The disappointment is huge because I train every day, every hour of training is leading up to this and dedicate myself to it," national team player Laura Suarez told The Associated Press. "It's really disappointing not to be able to participate in the competition, which is what I've been preparing myself for.(asterisk)

Cuba was scheduled to play in the NORCECA Women's Final Four tournament in Manatí, Puerto Rico. The tournament includes the host nation, Mexico and Costa Rica and it awards ranking points toward qualification for the Volleyball Nations League.

"We were focused on the competition because it's right there," said Dayana Martínez, another player. "Arriving at the embassy and being denied the visa affects us a lot because that competition gives us points to improve our ranking."

The Cuban team's coach, Wilfredo Robinson, said the decision means his team is likely to miss out on the Nations League. "The competition grants points for each match and at the end it all adds up," Robinson said. "In September we have another tournament and if we get there needing to achieve 80 or 100 points we are not going to be able to do it."

The United States added Cuba to a list of 12 countries with restrictions for entering the U.S. or its territories, effective from early June. It includes nationals from Afghanistan, the Republic of Congo, Iran, Venezuela, and other nations.

"Denial of visas is part of a racist and xenophobic list of visa restrictions," Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez wrote on his X account.

In a message sent to The Associated Press, the U.S. Embassy in Cuba stated that, according to its privacy policies, it could not comment on specific cases but that directives were being implemented to secure the borders and protect U.S. communities and citizens.

The Cuban women's national team won back-to-back world championships in 1994 and 1998. It also won three Olympic golds in a row in Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000.

The U.S. measures are likely to impact many more Cuban athletes who depend on international competitions, including some on American soil to qualify for major championships and the next Olympics scheduled to be played in Los Angeles in 2028.

[SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS]

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