

## *Reflections by Comrade Fidel*

### **THE MORAL IMPORTANCE OF THE BASEBALL CLASSICS**

In the early days of the Revolution, the Olympics were an event for amateurs.

When the concepts of developed capitalism managed to infiltrate the Olympics, sports stopped being a health and education issue, which had been its main goals throughout history.

The only country in the world where that character prevailed was Cuba, which for many years won the highest number of gold medals per inhabitant.

Our best and proudest athletes, those who do not get corrupted, sell out or betray their people and their homeland are the ones who represent us with honor at international competitions.

Countries going through new revolutionary processes such as Venezuela, where the practicing of sports is considered a people's sacred right, can not participate right now in the most prestigious events with their professional athletes because these require the authorization of the private companies that acquired such rights over those athletes. Athletes are bought and sold as if they were some kind of merchandise. Many of them are serious people who love the country where they were born, but they are not allowed to take their own decisions.

Leonel Fernández, the President of the Dominican Republic, was awfully regretting that situation; his baseball team has already been eliminated from the Classics. Chávez speaks with enthusiasm and sympathy about the members of the Venezuelan team, but at the same time he bitterly resents that his stellar Major Leagues Venezuelan pitchers and batters are not allowed to play under the Venezuelan flag.

Cuba has an excellent national team made up by players from all over the Island. Each province feels proud of its contribution to the Cuban Team. On an individual basis, their rivals could be as good as or even better than many of our players, considering the technical and economic resources of countries like the United States, Canada, Japan, among others. What makes Cuban athletes to be different is the strong motivation they feel over the values they represent.

The team that was put up is no doubt the best that has ever represented our country, judging by the records, the qualities and the merits of each and every one of them. The opinion polls show that, based on the high level of satisfaction expressed in the whole country over the team's performance, with few exceptions.

Now we have to stick to facts.

The Baseball Classics have been sponsored by the ones who manage the exploitation of sports in the United States. Those are shrewd, intelligent people,

who can even be as diplomatic as might be necessary. However, they can not dispense with our country in those Classics.

The three best teams in the Classics and the Olympics, namely Japan, Korea and Cuba, were included in the same group so that they had to eliminate each other. Last time we were included in the Latin American group; this time we were included in the Asian group.

That is why in between today and tomorrow in San Diego one of the three teams will be irremissibly eliminated without having to compete first with the team of the United States, the country of the "Big Leagues". That means that, next, two of those three will be left out. We are forced to wage our battle and design a strategy in the face of those vicissitudes.

The Japanese team beat us on March 15 because, no doubt, mistakes were made in the way the team was directed there, thousands of kilometers away, where it is almost impossible for Cuba to influence on its team management.

Today, although our population's opinion is divided, most people believe that the best thing would be for Korea to beat Japan. They understand that the team of that great Asian country is like a clock. Twenty three out of the 28 players play in the Japanese League. Each of them has been programmed and they have analyzed, one by one, the characteristics of our players.

They have, like all Asian players, a high dose of sangfroid. This is how they have beaten us twice: in the last game of the former Classics and in the first game between both teams of the present Classics.

On the other hand, Korea has invested huge resources in facilities and technologies. On the eve of the last Olympics, when we were forced to adapt to the conditions of a totally different time zone, they treated us splendidly and offered to us, at no cost, their facilities, but at the same time they exhaustively studied every one of our athletes, and took pictures and films of them.

They know every pitching from our pitchers and the reaction by every one of our batters to every pitching. They are the main adversary, because they are also methodical and they bat harder than the Japanese.

Neither of them, despite the aforementioned adverse circumstances, is invulnerable to our team. Several Cuban players are new to the team. We have worked more on the weaknesses of our stars. There is a principle, though, that can not be violated: whoever the adversary is tomorrow Wednesday, we can not continue down our traditional well-trodden paths.

We have both a line-up of sluggers –almost any of them could hit a home-run and they have shown they can- as well as a line-up of light, fast and self-confident batters; together combined they can cause great damage to the opposite team, as it was the case yesterday when playing against Mexico.

Almost all pitchers are free to pitch on Wednesday. It is necessary to bear in mind the characteristics of each of them, their ability to control their own

pitching at every concrete situation that may come about. One inviolable principle is that there can be no hesitation whatsoever when a pitcher needs to be immediately replaced after showing signs of wild pitching when playing against the Japanese or the Koreans.

Our seasoned experts who advise INDER should indicate beforehand the priority order in which a southpaw or a right-hander should go to the mound. There could be one starting pitcher or several who could work excellently as a starting pitcher, for we have the necessary raw material for that.

There is something each and every player should bear in mind. They should not feel discouraged not even for a single second. They should not try to desperately swing at any type of pitch, as it happened with some of our batters during the last game with Japan.

Unfortunately, in our country the bad habit was entrenched to wait for the first strike, and old habit that was instilled in all Cuban baseball players, a habit known by the rival teams pitchers; that is why they easily pitch the first strike right through the center of the home plate. They must be forced to engage in hard work from the very start.

In our team we have an example to follow: the incredible peace of mind and self-confidence of Cepeda, whom I would like to pay tribute in this reflection for the feats he has accomplished. He has not changed in the least his athletic proficiency since he was first at bat in the Classics. Four of the 5 runs we scored against Mexico yesterday were driven in by him. That game showed that we can win over the adversary.

I convey my greetings to all members of the excellent team that represents us in San Diego.

Homeland or Death, We Shall Overcome!

Fidel Castro Ruz  
March 17, 2009  
7:21 p.m.