

César: The “miraculous” owner of hits in Cuba

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When César Prieto took his Cienfuegos’ jersey off late Thursday, after playing a series of three games against Holguin, he also took a huge weight off his mind. And then, in less than 48 hours, he embraced it again. He is not afraid of being the baseball player with the second longest hitting streak ever, but every step in the way, every new hit, every time he is in the batter box, make him mull over and over again that mythical number: 56, which is the absolute record set by legend Joe DiMaggio.

Joe’s record dates back to 1941. César’s most recent hit was number 45 and sent Willie Keeler (44, in 1897) to the third place.

Back to César, we are talking about one of the top prospects in Cuban baseball with only 21 years old. And he has showed a performance exceeding expectations since he debuted in the 57th National Baseball Series, despite going 1 for 17.

But, hitting the ball safely is the job of every batter, you may think.

And that is true. And it is also true that hitting safely is not easy at all. Let’s see, a baseball game needs 27 outs each team to end, in this 60th baseball series, where the offense way over pitching (301 batting average), the average of hits-per-game is 10,50.

So, even though it seems natural and necessary, it is not usually easy for many reasons.

Internal stuff and the record

In the case of César Prieto (May 10th, 1999, 6’2, 68kg) started his hitting streak on September 19th vs. Las Tunas, which means he has hit safely for two months now, 68 days.

Indeed, he is leading batters in batting average (408), hit (87), which are added to his 256 hit in three previous

seasons.

Another important element is that previous record holder, Santiago's Rey Isaac (37 games) did it with aluminum bats.

Earlier, another prodigious hitter in Cuban baseball, Lázaro Vargas, owned a 31-games hitting streak in the 1986 season.

Other remarkable numbers were posted by Isaac Martínez (32 games in 2001) and José Dariel Abreu (31 games in 2004).

These statistics only confirm that César has been the youngest player to achieve it, which speaks well of his sacrifice and determination in trainings, especially in a very complex year 2020, with coronavirus, the long training period at home without proper equipment to do it, and then the delayed start of the season.

It proves a profound sense of professionalism, strong mindset and an unbelievable ability to succeed in clutch situations, something unusual in young, rookie players.

Another key element: César owns an exquisite swing. He has added power to his contact skills. He bunts very well, speedy athlete, and with a great strike zone.

He is also a lefty hitter and has the ability to put the ball in play with his foot at mid-height, like Japanese superstar Ichiro Suzuki.

So much so that 27 of his 45-game hitting streak are multi-hit games, including 29 extra base hits, 12 doubles, 3 triples, and 5 homers.

13 of these games have ended in seven innings, which makes the deed tougher.

Here are two clutch moments where he succeeded. One of them was in inning seven:

He was facing Guantánamo and was 0-2. Fortunately, he hit the ball safely to right field.

The most stressful moment, he confessed, was against righty Carlos Font at Guillermón Moncada. He was 0 and 2 in the count in his third at-bat and he bunted the ball perfectly.

About some great contact hitters...

César, with only 21 years old, has made a name of himself in the books of records of the Cuban baseball. He looks superior in our domestic baseball. He makes everything look easy.

It is true that the pitching quality in our baseball is low, and has nothing to do with the one Vargas and Isaac and many other contact hitters had to face in previous National Baseball Series. Even Isaac Martínez and Abreu faced better pitchers in 2001 and 2004, respectively.

But it does not trivialize the great Cienfuegos' player, especially after his mix of natural talent, youth, and sacrifice in his personal training.

Therefore, he looks superior to most of pitchers he has faced.

Well, superstars like Antonio Pacheco, Omar Linares, Fernando Sánchez, Wilfredo Sánchez, Vargas and Osmany Urrutia failed to break the record for 26 years.

And then, we will close this article with the list of players in our National Series with most career hits:

Enrique Díaz (2 378 hits).

Antonio Pacheco (2 356).

Fernando Sánchez (2215).

Omar Linares (2 195).

Luis Ulacia (2 186).

Wilfredo Sánchez (2 174).

Víctor Mesa (2 171).

Lázaro Vargas (2 132).

Víctor Bejerano (2 126).

Javier Méndez (2 101).

Eduardo Cárdenas (2 077).

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