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## Cuban Baseball Beyond Domestic Stadiums

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The magic of Cuban baseball keeps gaining ground in the world's major leagues as Cuba has allowed its players to take part in top foreign tournaments under a policy that is being improved constantly.

Cuban players and coaches are enhancing the prestige of championships in Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Canada and the major leagues in the U.S.. In the case of the latter, they are compelled to give up their Cuban nationality to be able to play in that country as part of an exclusive and mean policy criticized worldwide.

This latest episode of the history of Cubans playing in other major baseball leagues began two years ago with a sort of pilot project when third baseman Michel Enríquez, first baseman Yordanis Samón and slugger Alfredo Despaigne were allowed to play in Mexico's professional league.

That marked a milestone in the history of this country's baseball as, except for a very few cases, Cuban players had never been allowed to show their talent and skills in foreign professional leagues ever since professional sports were banned here more than 50 years ago.

Thanks to this new policy, Cuban players can add quality to tournaments in other nations and gain personal and professional benefits, among others.

They all have the chance to be signed by a foreign club, a goal which compels them to show their skills to the fullest and shine with their respective provincial teams in the domestic championships.

Among the recent players signed by foreign clubs are third baseman Yulieski Gourriel, outfielder Frederich Cepeda and reliever Héctor Mendoza, all of them on Japanese squads at present. Meanwhile, center-fielder Yunieski Gourriel has joined Canada's Quebec Capitales, which is not affiliated to the U.S. major leagues.

In case I'm successful here, that may allow for other Cubans to play in Canada legally, said Gourriel, who has played 14 national championships at home.

Needless to say other players are likely to be signed in the face of the Cubans' inborn skills to play baseball which they have shown for more than a century in the world's major leagues.

There's no doubt the decision to allow Cuban baseball players to show their top class at foreign leagues will also add to the good quality of the sports back home and its results will be seen at major tournaments like the 2017 World Classic.

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