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Cuban Weightlifting in 2019: Milestones and Challenges...

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Cuban weightlifting ended the 2019 season with some milestones and setbacks, but there are plenty of reasons to feel optimistic with regard to the Olympic Games next year and the upcoming four-year period.

The peak of the season was starred by Cuban women weightlifters who won the first medals ever for the country in a World Championship. Stellar performances such as Ludia Montero's in Pattaya, Thailand, proved me right.

The young woman won two silver medals (snatch and biathlon) in the 45 kg division, a performance that will be always remembered and certainly ranked as one of the most important sports achievements of the year in Cuba.

Then, we shall praise the silver medal won by Luis Manuel Lauret (109+ kg) at the Pan American Games held in Lima, which became the only Pan American medal earned by Cuba in this sports discipline at Mariscal Caceres Coliseum.

The performance of Cuban weightlifters in Lima was *grosso modo* disappointing. Several athletes did not meet their expectations and other young competitors showed they are not quite ready for first-level competitions just yet.

This situation, in the words of Jorge Luis Barcelan, National Commissioner and President of Cuban Weightlifting Federation, requires a different approach with regard to the next Olympiad.

Nonetheless, the season showed that there is a new generation of weightlifters coming with a promising future. The number of young weightlifters registered at the ESFAAR Cerro Pelado as well as the results achieved in continental competitions prove it.

Important to highlight the organization of the Pan American Junior Weightlifting Championship held in Havana alongside the Memorial Suarez. Cuba achieved positive results in both events.

Women weightlifters stood out in the Pan American Junior Championship as they topped the ranking in total points. The excellent performance carried out by Ludia Montero in the 49 kg division with an absolute win; the bronze medal earned by Andrea Gonzalez (59 kg, jerk and clean); the silver medals earned by Melisa Aguilera (76 kg); two gold medals and one bronze medal by Talia Hurtado (81 kg), Ana Maria Milian's (87 kg) two silver medals, and the bronze medal by Eyurkenia Duverger (87+ kg) were some of the top performances of the Cuban delegation.

But men did not trail behind. Arley Calderon (2-0-1) and Otto Oñate (0-1-0) in the 61 kg division; Miguel Castro (0-2-0) and Edisnel Corrales (0-0-1) in 67 kg; Ariolvis Begue (0-2-1) in 81 kg; and Juan Carlos Zaldivar (1-2-0) in 96 kg performed pretty well.

These and other athletes make up the reserve team from where this sports discipline — aiming at the Olympic Games Paris 2024 — will certainly nourish from in the future.

AS of the Pan American event, Calderon (bronze medal, jerk and clean) and Oñate (bronze medal, snatch) got their medals in 61 kg, as well as Juan Columbié (0-1-2) in 109 kg, while Lauret's results were (1-2-0) in 109+ kg.

The girls, on the other hand, boasted the bronze medal earned by Melisa Aguilera in snatch, 76 kg and Talia Hurtado's bronze medals in 81 kg. Marina Rodriguez (64 kg) and Ludia Montero (49 kg) ended 5<sup>th</sup> in their respective divisions.

Finally, it is paramount to highlight the work done to reach the Olympic tickets. Therefore, there are several athletes with real chances to be eligible according to the ranking.

The trainers' idea is to qualify two athletes of different gender per division for Tokyo 2020, but luckily this number may potentially increase.

This will be the first goal of the upcoming season. In this line, Cuba is getting ready to participate in the Pan American tournament and take advantage of the 2020 Memorial Suarez to be held in March.

There is a lot of weight to lift, but optimism reigns.

**Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff**