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## Cuban Soccer To The Test in Managua

By: Lemay Padrón Oliveros / Special for CubaSi

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Before facing the main test of the year, the qualifiers of the Confederation of North, Central America and the Caribbean Football (Concacaf) towards the upcoming World Cup, the Cuban football team will face an interesting test in Managua, where it will play a friendly this Tuesday against the local team and will also complete a training base.

The coach Yunielys Castillo will not be able to enjoy the debut of defender Fabián Gloor due to an injury, and the goalkeeper Raiko Arozarena will not be on the field either, in his case because he preferred to remain in his club by having an important match on the same date.

It would have been interesting to see Gloor adapt to the tactical dynamics and collective functioning, but the test against the Nicaraguans should be profitable in any case.

The nonattendances of Modesto Méndez and Jorge Luis Corrales, both players from the Lixington club in the United States, are sensitive, especially because they respond to personal differences with the new management, which indicates that they will be definitive, at least while this process lasts.

Positive will be the returns of Karel Espino and Maykel Reyes, who will surely start the match.

As is known, the draw for the second round for the World Cup to be co-organized by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in 2026 revealed that the Caribbean Lions were placed in group A, where their rivals will be Honduras (the clear favorite of the quartet), Antigua and Barbuda, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands.

This month the first qualifying round will be held, but only the four lowest-placed teams in the world ranking will compete, in direct round-trip playoffs, and in June it will be the debut of our team in a phase that consists of six groups and they will play a single game against each of the rivals in their group, two as home and two away matches, a system similar to the one we experienced in the last Nations League in terms of home and away.

Thinking on the long run, Cuba's options involve achieving the return of its best players who play abroad, absent in the most recent calls, including this one in Nicaragua.

That's why it was important to grease the machinery on this FIFA date (the only one before the World Cup qualifiers), especially taking into account that it's a fairly recent technical group taking over.

Unlike the recent friendlies played almost all against teams of a much higher level than ours, against the Nicas you can better see the idea of the new coach and how his pupils assimilate it, especially the offensive transitions, which were the necessary aspect in the most recent games.

So far in the 21st century, Cuban and Nicaraguans have faced each other 11 times, with a balance of four wins per side and three draws, but the Caribbeans have recorded two wins, one draw and only one defeat in the most recent ones.

The players we will have for the important phase remain unknown, but obviously if we do not have the best it will be very difficult to survive even against the Caribbean teams, assuming that Hondurans will lead this key.

**Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff**

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