

VNL: The dream is over, but they played hard

By: Lemay Padrón Oliveros / Special for CubaSi
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Everybody knew the key game was that one versus Serbia on day 1, week 3. And we had it so close after winning the first two sets. But when we were enjoying and embracing that dream, it turned into a nightmare. Then, the goal became virtually impossible after that first loss on Wednesday.

From then on, it happened what it was supposed to happen. But the damage was already done, and in the worst way. After two magnificent sets where the Cuban block was great, we went back to that losing dynamic and the Olympic ticket for Paris 2024 slipped through our hands.

It is obvious that this team needs a much deeper psychological work. And it is mandatory that such specialist travels with the team, as it was proven that our players have the skill and they are able to play as equals against anyone. But doubts hover around in every set clutch time.

I said so because it is not the first time it happens. It happened last season when we lost a huge number of points in the world ranking that led us to be in this situation now. It was clear that the mental aspect had a lot of room to improve.

This and the serve. Serving well is only achievable with hours of training. Of course, your service cannot be a piece of cake, but an elite player should not lose 80% of his serves. And we noticed that on our players.

It is actually fixable, hours and hours of training sessions. It is a sort of routine that only the player can train. It is like free throws in basketball. Then, nerves may pop up, but here comes again the importance of the psychological work.

In this last stage in Slovenia, our team slowed the speed of the serves and results were positive at times. But normally, your serve needs to be aggressive. But to do so, you need to place it on the opposite court.

The injury of opposite Jesús Herrera was a huge blow. Michael Sánchez did his best, but he is not physically fit to play three days in a row at such a demanding level.

What happened in Ljubljana was a real shame. These were probably the last games played by Robertlandy Simón and his sporting career deserved a last opportunity to play in Paris 2024.

I still believe that the rest of the team was in its prime. And I do not think that they will play better in four years. Hence, it is time to draw a strategy to build a new core around Marlon Yant, Christian Thondike, Javier Concepción and the rest of the young core.

Coach Jesús Cruz did a wonderful job, but concentration in clutch segments of every sets is imperative. Serve must be trained until exhaustion. Our team cannot give free points if we want to be part of the volleyball elite.

There is a lot of work to do.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
