
Mijaín López: With the flag in his heart

By: Lemay Padrón Oliveros / Special for CubaSi
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Although he was not Cuba's flagbearer in the trip across the waters of the Seine on July 26, no one has defended the flag of the lone star better than Mijaín López in the last 15 years.

With nothing to lose —whatever happened in Paris he was already a legend of world sport—, the man from Pinar del Río —soon to turn 42— competed as if he were a boy of 20, sweeping every opponent on the mat.

The absence of his great rival in recent years, Türkiye's Rıza Kayaalp, did not mean a path of roses in his quest to conquer his fifth Olympic title, since there were others world class wrestlers in his division. But everyone knew that if the Ebony Giant met the weight, the opponents must look to fight for the silver and bronze medals.

In Beijing, I wanted to take a photo with Russian Alexander Karelin thinking that I was immortalizing myself with the best wrestler of all time, without knowing that right there, the legacy of the best wrestler ever

was being born.

I did not want to get mad about that prediction from Sport Illustrated, because besides the fact that wrestling is not the strong sport of that prestigious sports magazine when it comes to guessing the top 3 of each event under the five rings, the idol from Herradura had lost the whole four-year cycle. At home, I do not have a bronze medal at home, he answered back when someone wanted to upset him with that question.

As fate would have it, the final bout was something like a sparring match, with the man with whom he trained for over a decade at Cerro Pelado Training Facility (Yasmany Acosta seemed as happy as he was to witness first-hand one of the most impressive events in Olympic history), but only he knows all the sacrifices he had to make, especially in recent months, to successfully complete the feat in front of none other than the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), German Thomas Bach, who ordered the final to be delayed so he could arrive on time, because he did not want to miss that historic moment.

He is none other than the only athlete in history to win titles in five Olympic Games, the oldest to climb the podium in wrestling at almost 42 years old and of course, the only wrestler with five gold medals.

Every medal is supported by a lot of people behind that result, from Yasmany himself to all the others who sweated with him while training, from late Pedro Val and Gustavo Rollé, who confessed to me that this dark-skinned man would make history back in 2000, from the doctors and physiotherapists who have worked with him throughout his career, from his current trainer Raúl Trujillo and, of course, from his family members, who have been his support for over 30 years, since he first stepped on a mat.

Those shoes left in the center of the mat of the Camp do Mars Arena represent much more than a retirement, an ascent to the eternal Olympus of the Gods.

From heaven, old Bartolo smiles, filled with satisfaction at the new feat of his son.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
