

The Role of Sports in Cuba's Domestic and International Policy

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We dedicate this paper to Barry Sklar (1939-1997), who appreciated the importance of Cuban sports, as he did many aspects of Cuba, long before most of his contemporaries in North America, and who devoted himself to teaching others about Cuba and sports.

As negotiations over the March 28 exhibition game in Havana neared their end, the *New York Times* speculated that the Baltimore Orioles might not send their best players to compete against the Cuban national baseball team. This notion was nipped in the bud by an observer close to the team, who bluntly commented, “They aren’t interested in losing.”

The high quality of Cuba’s baseball team was hardly news. Even those who are not sports enthusiasts know that U.S. professional teams have sought many of the island’s best players. Cuba’s sports expertise extends far beyond baseball, however. Cuban athletes in boxing, judo, fencing, cross-country, wrestling, and volleyball have won numerous medals in international competitions. Indeed, Cuba ranks first in the world in per capita medals won. Though it has only eleven million people, it is a sports powerhouse whose teams consistently achieve scores as high as those from the world’s most populous countries. This success is hardly accidental. The Cuban Revolution devoted considerable resources to the development of athletes, and this allocation has continued during the “Special Period” of economic crisis in the 1990s.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Prior to 1959, Cuba rarely scored victories in international competitions (see Tables 1-3), except in baseball, where success came earlier. There were Cuban professional teams even in the nineteenth century, and baseball flourished in Cuba—as it did elsewhere in the Caribbean Basin—with the arrival of the U.S. Marines. By the 1920s it was the national sport, and soon after Jackie Robinson broke the color line in 1947, Cuban athletes regularly joined U.S. teams. (Some Cuban players who were deemed to be “white” played for U.S. Major League teams as early as 1911.) In the 1950s, the Havana Sugar Kings were a Triple A International League franchise.

Boxing also was popular in Cuba before the Revolution, especially as a route for talented Afro-Cubans to escape from poverty. Less lucrative sports, such as basketball, swimming, fencing, and volleyball, had widespread participation, although sports often mirrored the society’s class and

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racial divisions. Several sports were associated with private clubs, and racial discrimination kept many of Cuba's best athletes off national teams. This partly accounts for the country's poor showing in international contests before 1959.

The pattern changed quickly with the Revolution. The national sports program initiated in 1961 had two mutually reinforcing goals. International sports triumphs would provide a spotlight on the Cuban Revolution and symbolize its success. In addition to displaying Cuba's leadership to Third World countries, this would give Cubans themselves pride in the Revolution and a sense of nationalism. It was seen as a way of enhancing the revolutionary government's legitimacy, especially in the 1960s during periods of terrible scarcity and deprivation.

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At the same time, the sports program would promote internal development. In order to cultivate internationally competitive athletes, Cuba created an elaborate "farm" system for identifying those with extraordinary talents and funneling them to the highest levels for expert training. It did so by universalizing sports participation and making it an essential component of revolutionary activity. *Masividad*, or mass participation in sports, thus served domestic political goals. As Raudol Ruiz, one of the founders of the Instituto Nacional de Deportes, Educación Física, y Recreación (INDER), explains,

We wanted sports. . . to educate the people and create a new generation. . . . [We] experimented with sports to try to find a method that would permit mass participation in sports, to give everyone the opportunity to practice and play sports. At the same time, we wanted competition, the climax of sports, to have an ideological foundation while serving as a process of collective, accelerated development.

Universal physical education underscored the Revolution's commitment to eradicating class and racial divisions, provided a tangible benefit to everyone, and helped advance the general health of Cubans. The slogan *el deporte es salud* (sport is health) became a theme of the Revolution, and physical education was seen as sup-

*Table 1.
Cuban Success in the Olympic Games*

Date	Location	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Place
1948	London	0	1	0	29
1952	Helsinki	0	0	0	0
1956	Melbourne	0	0	0	0
1960	Rome	0	0	0	0
1964	Tokyo	0	1	0	30
1968	Mexico City	0	4	0	31
1972	Munich	3	1	4	14
1976	Montreal	6	4	3	8
1980	Moscow	8	7	5	4
1984	Los Angeles	Cuba did not participate.			
1988	Seoul	Cuba did not participate.			
1992	Barcelona	14	6	11	5
1996	Atlanta	9	8	8	9

porting the development of the country by making individual Cubans stronger and ultimately better workers.

By 1991, the dual purposes of the sports program—serving Cuba's international and domestic goals—were well established. Then, however, conditions outside and inside Cuba changed. With the departure of Cuban troops from Africa, the failure of revolutionary movements in much of Latin America, and the loss of Soviet support, Cuba needed to reorient its effort as a leader of the Third World. Simultaneously, the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (the Eastern bloc trade organization) wreaked havoc on Cuba's domestic economy and ushered in the "Special Period" of scarcity. The country had to focus on reorganizing its system of industry and commerce, and consequently its social relations of production.

Under these new external and internal circumstances, it would have been expected that Cuba's sports program would also undergo

changes. Nevertheless, that program's dual purpose has survived, so that the international aspects of Cuban sports cannot be neatly segregated from its domestic components. Though we will focus on the international dimension of Cuban sports, Cuba comprehends both dimensions as one totality, and we will try to do so as well.

SPORTS AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Since 1959, sport has served Cuba well. The revolutionary government lost no time in putting sports to use as a political tool, both internally and externally. Over the past forty years, it has shifted its focus from one to the other of these dual goals, and back again, depending on the circumstances in the international, regional, and national political arenas. For the first several decades after the Revolution, both efforts worked in tandem. Given the low level of interest in sports on the part of previous Cuban governments, any emphasis put on sports and health by the revolutionary regime had the potential to produce marked, consistent improvement. Cuban leaders referred to the links between physical culture, health, discipline, and defense, and the achievement of one goal seemed to contribute to the achievement of the others.

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Almost by definition, the most visible focus of sports policy in early revolutionary Cuba was on mass participation in sports. All Cubans, from the *chiquitos* to the *ancianos*, were encouraged to exercise and to practice sport for its health and character benefits. In a 1977 speech, Fidel Castro made it clear that the goal of producing international champions was second to the goal of mass health and fitness:

It is very important that we not be mistaken, that in the search for champions we do not neglect the practice of sports. Everyone should practice sports, not only those in primary schools but also adults and the elderly. The elderly need it even more than the young. The young sometimes need sports to use their excess energy. Moreover, sports is an instrument of discipline, education, health, good man-

ners. Sports is an antidote to vices. . . . You can have the most complete assurance that whatever we spend on sports and physical education we will save in health and we will gain in the well-being and increased longevity of our citizens.

The results within Cuba were seen almost immediately. The first reform measure of the revolutionary government was, in the words of former INDER head Jorge García Bango, "to open to everyone the private sports clubs that abounded on the island." By 1967, all charges for sporting events and participation had been dropped. Sport was seen as a right of the people and it was mentioned four times in the Cuban Constitution of 1976. Indeed, sport merited its own article under "Fundamental rights, duties and guarantees." According to Article 51,

Everyone has the right to physical education, sports and recreation. Enjoyment of this right is assured by including the teaching and practice of physical education and sports in the curricula of the national education system and means placed at the service of the people, which makes possible the practice of sports and recreation on a mass basis.

After several years, this emphasis on *masividad* began to bear fruit in the realm of international competitive sport. The first indication of this burgeoning success came at the 1966 Central American and Caribbean Games in San Juan. The Cuban athletes, forbidden by the U.S. to land by plane, traveled to Puerto Rico by boat and won seventy-eight medals (thirty-five gold, nineteen silver, and twenty-four bronze). The extent of Cuba's international success in sports was revealed to the world at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. Cuba placed eighth overall, winning thirteen medals (six gold, four silver, and three bronze).

Despite the Cubans' admirable successes in popular sport, several problems remain. Although no formal limitation exists on participation because of race, class, or gender, some groups continue to be underrepresented. Women, especially older women, participate in sports less frequently than do other groups. In addition, there appears to be more emphasis on sports in the urban rather than in the rural areas. In the cities, sport is more organized and receives more staff, more facilities, and more equipment. Notably, the specialized sports secondary schools are located mainly at urban

sites, although they are distributed so that there is one in each province. Still, the general growth of participation in all programs is impressive, especially when compared with the pre-1959 situation.

This success is attributable in large part to the organizational structure of the sports system that has been put into place by the revolutionary government. Although the Cuban system is modeled after that which existed in the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries, the system has remained uniquely Cuban. For example, according to a former sprinter, even though intensive training is necessary for top-level athletes, care is taken so that athletes are not burned out by boring training sessions. Swimmers, for instance, play water polo to break the monotony. Runners play soccer, which naturally includes distance work and speed work all within the rhythm of the game. Presumably, if running or swimming is more enjoyable within the context of a game, then the athletes will do more of it and thereby derive more benefit from it than if it were just sprint intervals. In addition, there has been a continuing emphasis in Cuba on egalitarianism and mass participation for the benefit of the overall populace, not only to produce champions. Although all of the socialist countries asserted that healthy bodies were a necessary component of productive labor, Cuba maintained facilities for recreational sports that are not included in international competitions.

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The sports system tried to ensure that no talented athletes would be missed. In the Cuban system of competition, every person with talent is given the opportunity to be discovered and to develop that talent. At every level, beginning with the individual schools, a championship team emerges. At the same time, another team, called a *selección*, is chosen from the best players from all the losing teams at that level. For example, if ten teams competed for the municipal title, a *selección* would be chosen from the remaining nine teams. In this manner, two teams actually move on to the championship. This process is repeated at every level up to the national, and there have been times when the *selección* has beaten the original champion. And with the *selección*, sports help to achieve a greater degree of integration.

Table 2.
Cuban Success in the Pan American Games

Date	Location	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1951	Buenos Aires	9	9	10
1955	Mexico City	1	10	8
1959	Chicago	2	4	4
1963	São Paulo	4	6	4
1967	Winnipeg	8	14	26
1971	Gali	30	49	26
1975	Mexico City	57	45	32
1979	San Juan	64	47	34
1983	Caracas	78	51	45
1987	Indianapolis	75	52	48
1991	Havana	140	62	63
1995	Mar del Plata	112	66	60

Athletes no longer identify with the old unit of school or factory. They begin to identify with the nation. This process supports Ruiz's contention that "when the athlete goes abroad to compete, he competes for powerful reasons. People don't understand this. The force of ideology is much more powerful than any steroid or artificial drug that is given to an athlete."

Early efforts to encourage greater participation were formalized in February 1961, when Law 936 began the process of developing a single unified administrative structure for Cuban sports and physical culture. This law established INDER, under the direction of José Llanusa Gobel, the former mayor of Havana, a member of the 1948 Cuban Olympic basketball team, and a friend of Castro's from the University of Havana. At the same time, Voluntary Sports Councils (CVDs Consejo Voluntario Deportes) were set up to form the grassroots base of Cuban physical culture.

INDER is responsible for everything connected with sports: physical education, competitive athletics at all levels, as well as recreation and use of free time. It is also responsible for the national athletes and their training and for sports research. Central INDER offices are

located in Ciudad Deportiva (Sports City), a huge complex of sports facilities on the outskirts of Havana. Also in the same complex are the Instituto Superior de Cultura Física (ISCF), the Instituto de Medicina Deportiva, the National Training Center, and the Industria Deportiva (Sports Industry), where most of the athletic equipment for the country and for export is manufactured. INDER also controls all national coaches, the specialized sports schools, the Voluntary Sports Councils, and its own provincial branches. INDER reports directly to the Cuban Olympic Committee, which is headed by José Ramón Fernández, a vice president of the Council of Ministers and the Politburo member responsible for sports.

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The easiest way for INDER to reach all Cuban children is through the school system and the program of physical education. Yet the development of champion athletes is too important to be left to chance. For that effort, the Cubans have developed a parallel structure of specialized sports schools that follow the regular curriculum at the same time as they intensively train top-quality athletes for national and international competition. At the first level are the specialized sports secondary schools called *Escuelas de las Iniciación de Deportivas Escolares* (EIDES). At the next level are the *Escuelas Superior de Perfeccionamiento Atlético* (ESPAs), and at the highest level are the two *Centros de Alto Rendimiento* (CEARs), at which athletes prepare for international competitions. Both CEARs are in Havana.

In the Cuban system, as soon as a child shows a particular talent, he is given every opportunity to develop it. Participation in the “competitive track” brings with it access to special facilities, special training, a more balanced diet, and the resources of specialized sports science. Despite this inequality, compatibility between the dual goals of sports is believed to be possible as long as the aim of sport for the masses is never abandoned once top-level talent is found. “The more people practicing [sport],” the manager of the Cuban delegation to the Central American and Caribbean Games observed in 1975, “the more people

from which to choose.”

One criticism of the Cuban sports system has been that sports were opened up to all Cubans only as a guarantee against passing over a potential champion at the lower levels. This may well be an added benefit to the expansion of the system; however, it is unlikely that a high-level athlete will be found in gymnastics and exercise classes for such groups as the elderly.

SPORTS IN THE 1990S

The rapid decline in the Cuban economy in the first half of the 1990s—due to the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the loss of Soviet subsidies, and the intensification of the U.S. embargo—impacted all aspects of Cuban society, including sports. Soon after the pace of victories on sports battlefields began to slow, however, Cuban officials began to take a long, hard, realistic look at the “system.” As they recognized the shortfalls and pinpointed the causes of problems, they began to change the system, and the efforts seem to have paid off.

The decade began on a high note. At the 1991 Pan American Games held in Havana, the United States won the most medals (352 to Cuba’s 265), but Cuba took home more gold (140 to the United States’ 130) and did so in the sports that “really matter”: basketball, baseball, boxing, and track and field. At the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992, Cuba again did well, placing fifth overall in the tally of medals, with fourteen gold, of which seven were in boxing, two in athletics, one in judo, one in wrestling, one in Greek-style wrestling, one in baseball, and one in women’s volleyball. Cuba accounted for 93 percent of the medals won by Latin Americans and 50 percent of those won by the Third World.

At the turn of the decade, the sports system actually was paying for itself. Self-financing came from prize money won in international competitions, from the export of sports equipment, from the contracting of Cuban coaches to rival athletic programs, and from charges for interviews with athletes and officials. In addition, other countries have helped to finance Cuban sports. The Italian government paid for the Cuban baseball team to go to Barcelona in 1996. Likewise, the Australians are footing the bill for the largest Cuban contingent ever (300 athletes versus 190 in Atlanta) in Sydney in

2000. The Australian Olympic Committee has agreed to pay for a large part of the airfare for the Cuban athletes and will not charge them for lodging. Further, Australia has proposed that Cuban athletes help to train Australian athletes and that the Cuban Sports Federation be compensated accordingly.

Soon after the 1991 Pan American Games, however, the “Special Period” began to take its toll. In 1993, at the Central American and Caribbean Games in Puerto Rico, approximately fifty Cuban athletes—from a delegation of 667—sought asylum and chose not to return to Cuba.

Baseball defections have received the greatest attention in the U.S. media because of the visibility of players leaving for the riches of the U.S. Major Leagues. Perhaps the most famous (and likely the most embarrassing) departures are those of brothers Livan and Orlando “El Duque” Hernandez. The former signed a multi-million-dollar contract with the Florida Marlins and helped them win the 1997 World Series, gaining the Most Valuable Player Award. El Duque signed the next year with the New York Yankees, and they proceeded to win the 1998 World Series. In the last five years, more than fifty high-quality players left the Cuban Major League either to play in the United States or to play on “loan” in other countries, especially Japan.

Cuban officials also found that they had to tighten their belts as a result of the economic crisis. To conserve electricity, night baseball games were canceled. A shortage of newsprint resulted in a reduction in sports coverage. Early in the 1990s, INDER moved all of its computers into one room to save on air-conditioning costs. And a foul ball is never kept by the fan who catches one, but rather thrown virtuously back onto the field.

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Most important, while the Cuban sports system continued to receive funding, the resources that were available were directed toward the higher level of competitive sports. Sports facilities and equipment for the masses were relatively neglected. This short-term solution to the economic crisis, however, soon

Table 3.
Cuban Success in the Central American and Caribbean Games

Date	Location	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1926	Mexico City	14	15	15
1930	Havana	30	21	22
1935	El Salvador	31	30	23
1938	Panama	24	17	19
1946	Barraquilla	29	26	23
1950	Guatemala City	24	27	28
1954	Mexico City	29	19	20
1959	Caracas	0	0	0
1962	Kingston	12	11	13
1966	San Juan	35	19	24
1970	Panama	98	61	51
1974	Santo Domingo	101	55	35
1978	Medellín	120	44	18
1982	Havana	173	71	38
1986	S. Caballeros	174	81	44
1990	Mexico City	180	90	52
1993	Ponce	227	76	61

led to a slump in performance at international competitions and a general decline in morale within the athletic community, according to one knowledgeable Cuban official.

As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, the Cubans have experienced setbacks at the most recent Olympic and Pan American competitions. In the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the total number of medals dropped to twenty-five and the team came in ninth overall. And whereas the Cubans won 265 medals, 140 of them gold, at the 1991 Pan American Games in Havana, they received only 238 medals total (112 of them gold) at Mar del Plata in 1995.

The Cuban team still won so many medals that they could “overlook” the fact that the numbers did indeed show a decline in performance at the very top levels. However, other negative indicators became increasingly hard to ignore. Enthusiasm for baseball throughout the country began to wane in the middle of the decade. The cancelation of night games to

save electricity helped to dampen fan interest, as did a reduction in the quality of play.

“Dollarization” of the Cuban economy also exacerbated the problem. Some of the best baseball players were allowed to “retire” early, to play in other countries such as Colombia, Japan, Italy, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. More than fifty players, most still at the top of their game, left to take advantage of what the *New York Times*’ Larry Rohter described as a “new, Government-authorized plan that allowed them to earn hard currency by playing abroad.” Although as much as eighty percent of their earnings had to go to the Cuban government, their salaries still exceeded the twenty dollars per month that they would have earned in Cuba. More often than not, they were replaced by players with more “revolutionary spirit” than baseball talent. “Stadiums were empty a few years ago,” Cuba’s National Director of Baseball said in a recent interview. The decline resulting from this export of talent was aggravated by the policy of suspending some outstanding players who were thought to be likely candidates to defect.

The wake-up call came in August 1997, when Cuban baseball’s ten-year string of victories in the Intercontinental Cup was broken.

The wake-up call came in August 1997, when Cuban baseball’s ten-year string of victories in the Intercontinental Cup was broken, with an 11-2 loss to Japan. Another tournament in Spain saw Cuba lose 16-6. The Cuban sports bureaucracy quickly moved to address these growing concerns, and it began by purging itself. The first step was to fire the manager of the Cuban National Team, Jorge Fuentes. Next to go was Miguel Valdés, the national team’s general manager, farm chief, and scouting director for the previous twenty-nine years. Valdés was followed out of the door by Domingo Zabala, head of the Cuban Baseball Commission. By the end of October 1997, Reynaldo Gonzalez Lopez had also been fired from his position as director of the National Sports Institute and president of the Cuban National Baseball Federation. INDER also ended the policy of permitting good players to “retire” to play in other countries.

According to an anonymous Cuban sports official interviewed by one of the authors in Havana in February 1999, the government now

provides “material incentives” to the nominally amateur national baseball team players, who receive a car, a home, and the right to earn hard currency, commensurate with their record. All players now receive personal items such as uniforms, equipment bags, all necessary equipment, including batting gloves, and toiletries such as toothpaste. Further, the national team was strengthened by removing the *sembrados*, those who seemed “planted” in their place on the team only by prior reputation. Beginning in 1998, players earned a place only by virtue of their actual record.

But the need for reforms seemed to go even deeper. “The talent is still out there, just waiting to be developed, and it always will be there, because we are Cubans and baseball is in our blood,” according to one Cuban fan. “What needs to change is the entire system. But that is a much more difficult task.” In addition to changes at the top and increased incentives for players, Cuban officials have gone back to the original season format. They scrapped the recent system of playing two seasons a year and returned to the single, longer season. There is now a new ninety-two game season beginning November 15 and ending March 26. Two eight-team leagues are divided into two groups of four. Each team plays fifty-two games in its own league and forty games against teams of the other league. In addition, night games are being played again in the larger cities. “Officials hope the new system will stimulate greater competition domestically and ease conflicts with international tournaments. It will also produce a clear national champion each year.” To avoid conflict with the regular season, baseball teams are not sent to other countries to play, as are other Cuban teams. Another reason given for this policy is that such continual play is too intensive and weakens the players’ ability.

As in the past, equipment still comes from the *Industria Deportiva*, except for bats and spikes, which have been imported from Japan. Aluminum bats were used to save money because they last longer; however, next year the national teams will begin to use wooden bats, which are required in international competition. They will be made in Cuba with wood from Russia and some Cuban mahogany.

In general, the factories at the *Industria Deportiva* appear to be grossly underutilized. Only about 65 percent of production capacity is in use. The main obstacles to further produc-

tion are poor technological quality of manufacturing techniques and a shortage of primary materials. There are 7,500 different raw materials used in producing sports equipment, some of which must be imported. There are no joint ventures or foreign investment in the sports industry. Exports include baseball equipment (only ten thousand baseballs last year), boxing equipment (mainly through contracts between Caribbean countries and the Cuban Sports Federation), and some kayaks (to Central America). Last year, the industry produced seventy thousand baseballs, with sixty thousand reserved for domestic consumption. Overall, the industry produces equipment for thirty-eight sports, and 95 percent of the equipment used in Cuba comes from the domestic sports industry. At the start of this decade, the industry was producing 12 million pesos worth of products. The figure had dropped to 2 million by the mid-1990s. Last year, it was back up to 4 million pesos. However, there seems to be only a modest effort to sell equipment commercially. With only a few stores around the country, most of the products are sold at the stadiums.

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The budget for sports this year is 120 million pesos, which is unchanged from last year. The steady state is seen as evidence of support for sports even though costs have gone up. Of this amount, about 17 percent is directed to INDER, with the remainder going to territorial organs of Poder Popular for use in mass physical education and recreation.

The system is able to earn some hard currency by "renting out" teams, trainers, and individual players. There are five hundred Cuban trainers and coaches in thirty-eight foreign countries, including Venezuela, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Spain, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, Hungary, and Iran. This includes sports such as boxing, tai kwando, handball, volleyball, wrestling, and fencing. Almost like members of a religious order, Cuban sports experts go out, earn hard currency, and return approximately 80 percent or more of their earnings to the Cuban government. (Each team negotiates with INDER for

Table 4.
Participation of the Athletes
Who Started in the JEN
(Juegos Escolares Nacionales)

Central American and Caribbean Games

Date	Cuban Delegation	JEN Participants
1970	315	126
1974	286	166
1978	325	235
1982	462	317
1986	468	340
1990	476	386
1993	667	473
1998	490	449
TOTALS	3,489	2,492

Pan American Games

Date	Cuban Delegation	JEN Participants
1971	270	108
1975	310	159
1979	328	231
1983	410	296
1987	385	296
1991	633	564
1995	485	373
TOTALS	2,821	2,027

Olympic Games

Date	Cuban Delegation	JEN Participants
1972	140	69
1976	167	90
1980	216	146
1992	190	166
1996	170	158
TOTALS	883	629

Source: José Llanusa, "En Cuba hubo atletas pero no había deportes," *Bohemia*, December 1998.

the amount that its members are able to retain, and the teams that have greater earning power have the greater bargaining leverage.) However, sending trainers abroad negatively affects Cuban sports in two ways: the quality of training available to Cuban athletes declines, and the quality of the competition improves. In Barcelona, for example, Cuban boxers lost to several from Ireland who had been trained by Cuban coaches.

On occasion, Cuban teams are sent to other countries as a team, and then are divided up to play on various teams there. They also come together to practice as a team and sometimes even compete as a team. The volleyball team goes to Italy and Greece; handball to Hungary and France; basketball to Argentina; and track and field to Spain. Each country signs a contract with the Cuban Sports Federation, not INDER or individual players. The hard currency goes to the Cuban Sports Federation, and the players earn some of it. The volleyball team earned prize money worth more than \$1 million in hard currency last year. The money covers the team's expenses first, and then some goes to each player (about one thousand dollars each).

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The system of specialized sports schools continues to operate. There is still one EIDE in each province and every province but Sancti Spíritus has an ESPA. There are two CEARs, each of which has about seven hundred athletes and which also train some foreign athletes. One of the CEARs also has facilities for teaching regular academic subjects, because many of the swimmers and tennis players there are young teenagers. There are twenty-five thousand students in the EIDEs and ESPAs, and fifty-four thousand teachers of sports throughout the country.

Female athletes have made significant progress. Internationally, there are more opportunities for women athletes. Cuban has increased its emphasis on sports for women, which now include water polo, volleyball, badminton, beach volleyball, and soccer. Ten years ago, 30 percent of the students in EIDEs, ESPAs, and CEARs were women. Today, the number stands at 45 percent.

Perhaps the most important component of

the entire sports system is the physical education program within the Cuban school system. School sports seem to bridge the gap between the dual goals of Cuba's sports program: *masividad* and high-level competitive sports. All Cuban children go to school and participate in sports there. Some of those school athletes of today become the national athletes of tomorrow.

Indeed, most athletes who go on to compete at the national and international levels are veterans of the *Juegos Escolares Nacionales* (JEN) or National School Games. Overall, in the Central American and Caribbean Games from 1970 to 1998, 71 percent of the Cuban athletes had participated in the JEN. In the Pan American Games from 1971 to 1995, the figure was 72 percent. In the Olympic Games from 1972 to 1996, the figure was 71 percent (see Table 4).

In addition, there is a campaign to repair sports facilities throughout the country and to maintain centers for recreation. Table 5 outlines the extensive network of these facilities.

One of the most significant developments in the Cuban sports system is the establishment of a marketing firm named Cuba Deportes, S.A. Cuba's sports bureaucracy now refers foreign journalists making requests to INDER to Cuba Deportes. Cash is required to obtain interviews with top athletes and functionaries. In the words of the *Chicago Tribune's* Bonnie DeSimone, "Non-Cuban reporters are barred from talking to team personnel on the field before or after games without having gained clearance and paid the fee." Indeed, the fifty dollar fee that INDER requests is about what most Cubans earn in three months.

DIPLIOMATIC APPLICATIONS

The difficulties in arranging this year's exhibition games between the Cuban national team and the Baltimore Orioles underscore the fact that, like a cigar, a baseball game may not be just a baseball game. Negotiations for the games had begun three years earlier, when Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke visited Havana. By January 1999 the teams were prepared to initiate final negotiations over complex details such as rules and logistics. President Bill Clinton had agreed to grant a license to the Orioles to travel to Cuba for the negotiations, and Cuban officials had invited them to do so. But when Secretary of State Madeleine Albright added to the announcement that any profits

from the games would need to be distributed to the Cuban people through Caritas, the Cuban Catholic charitable organization, the discussions were thrown into a tailspin.

From the State Department's point of view, the United States did not want to signal that the games would lead to a warming of relations between the two countries, as so-called "ping-pong" diplomacy had led to improved links between China and the United States. Cuba viewed Albright's remarks to mean that the baseball games had become part of the U.S. "people-to-people" campaign, which they viewed as a version of Track II and tantamount to a new war on Cuba. This led to a stalemate of nearly two months, and a desperate eleven-hour negotiating session lasting until 4 A.M., to enable the games to go forward. (The denouement came when all parties recognized that there would be no profits to distribute from the games.)

Baseball and other sports continue to be important vehicles for Cuba to realize its international objectives. Although Cuba's ambition to be the leader of the Third World has diminished, Havana sees sport as a way of demonstrating to other poor countries that it is still a significant world actor. Especially since the passage of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, sports achievement is one way that Cuba visibly indicates that it is weathering continued U.S. hostility. Its export of trainers, coaches, and athletes provides it with a source of ambassadors to athletes who are revered in their own countries. As these Cuban emissaries work with European teams, they attempt to build goodwill in a region that is important to Cuba economically.

[L]ike a cigar, a baseball game may not be just a baseball game.

Success in international competition also strengthens Cuban nationalism and contributes needed support to the government during a period of economic scarcity. Cuba's sports victories thus serve domestic purposes in a period of declining morale. Mass sports participation can provide an outlet for frustrations that young Cubans are experiencing and demonstrates a continuing government commitment to dispensing services universally. To be sure, in a period when medicine and medical sup-

Table 5.
Sports *Combinados* and *Centros* by Province

Province	Combinados	Centros
Pinar del Río	58	
Habana	31	
Ciudad de la Habana	50	37
Matanzas	29	2
Villa Clara	45	7
Cienfuegos	20	19
Sancti Spiritus	20	3
Ciego de Avila	18	
Camagüey	30	
Las Tunas	6	
Holguín	25	24
Granma	42	1
Santiago de Cuba	25	24
Guantánamo	26	1
Isla de la Juventud	5	2
TOTALS	430	120

plies are scarce, recreation and physical activities also contribute to the preventive care of the population.

Thus, Cuba continues to see sports in a dual manner: *masividad* domestically and high-level competition internationally go hand in hand and reinforce one another. The government has made accommodations to Cuba's changed circumstances by sending more athletes abroad. The authors expect to see further efforts to develop Cuba's sports industry through foreign investment, so that it can contribute to hard currency earnings that will enable sports to be self-financing. Early in the year there were already billboards announcing the hope of victories at the summer Pan American games in Canada, and Cuba thus continues its emphasis on international sports achievement. Cuban officials clearly believe that sports have served the Revolution well and will remain important in the future.

Paula Pettavino is an assistant professor of political science at American University and coauthor of *Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

Philip Brenner, a Brooklyn Dodgers fan, is a professor of international relations at American University and is completing a book on Soviet-Cuban relations in the aftermath of the Missile Crisis.

In Memory of Barry Sklar (1939-1997)

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, this paper is dedicated to Barry Sklar, a sportsman and scholar whose separate endeavors in the areas of sports and international relations led him to develop a particularly strong interest in Cuban sports diplomacy. He had just been commissioned to author an issue of the *Georgetown University Cuba Briefing Paper Series* on the topic when he passed away unexpectedly in June 1997.

Barry was a much-valued and long-time member of the Cuba Study Group (CSG) of the Georgetown University Caribbean Project, and served for several years on the CSG Steering Committee. His balanced, good-humored, and well-informed advice is deeply missed by Project staff and fellow Steering Committee members.

From 1980 to 1991, Barry worked as a member of the Professional Staff of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, serving as principal advisor on Latin America to Committee Chairman Senator Claiborne Pell. He also advised Committee members on Central America, Cuba, human rights, international narcotics, and economic and military assistance.

After leaving his Senate job, Barry served as Director of the Washington office of the International Center for Economic Growth (ICEG), which seeks to assist economic reform in the developing world.

As an international consultant for Sklar Associates, Barry also worked with the Institute for International Sport, serving as Director of its Washington office. The Institute's goals include promoting and improving relations among nations, particularly in nations experiencing international conflict.

Barry's formal education included an M.A. in political science and international relations from Georgetown University in 1963 and a B.A. in history and political science in 1959. He had completed his Ph.D. coursework at American University and was in the process of researching his dissertation (also on Cuban sports diplomacy) at the time of his passing.

He was loved and respected by his family, friends, and colleagues, and will continue to be missed by all who had the good fortune of knowing him.

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