

[Excerpts from the speech given by Dr.Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, related to the Pan American Games in Winnipeg. Cienfuegos, Cuba. July 26th, 1999 \[1\]](#)

**Date:**

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Actually, I was very moved to receive that first gold medal won by Cuba at the Pan American Games in Winnipeg. Perhaps somebody took it because I do not see it here. (LAUGHTER) I will give it back to the athletes who won it but it shall keep us company during this rally.

This first gold medal is full of merit because never before had we seen such abusive and trickery actions in a Pan American sport competition. The whole purpose was to harass Cuba, to displace Cuba from the second position in order to benefit the host country and to discredit our sport.

Many traps were laid. The Organizing Committee proposed to withdraw a number of medals. Could it really be chance! It would be perfectly understandable, of course, if Canada and the United States had traditionally won those medals. But, according to reports by experts on the subject, scores of gold medals have been withdrawn in seven sports where, as an average, Cuba won 60 percent of them (APPLAUSES) while the United States and Canada together only won 30 percent.

Who is hurt? Cuba is. Who benefits? The United States and Canada do. Particularly Canada, which as the host country is anxious to displace Cuba from the second position and whose Organizing Committee proposed such withdrawals. All that, comrades, was done at the last minute.

Dishonesty has prevailed in many other things, too. There, the perennial criminals and frustrated enemies of the Revolution and sports' merchants have been tolerated and allowed to create all the conditions and possibilities to harass our delegation and urge defections offering The Arabian Nights. The place is full of scouts seeking athletes, advertising in the press --either subtly or openly, directly or indirectly, on television and other media-- exhorting people to defect and if there is any case, you know beforehand all the noise they make. It is in such an adverse and hostile environment that our teams are competing there.

They also came up with schemes in the case of baseball. They are very keen on defeating us in that sport because they know that it is the national pastime and that for a number of years our team has been winning the first place with an impressive record of victories in international competitions.

Just like practically every other among the most important or attractive sports, baseball is now full of professionals due to the fact that, unfortunately, commercialization and greediness in sport activities have been gaining ground lately.

Amateur sport, as we see it, is the people's right to healthy activities free of commercialization creating possibilities for entertainment and health for all; that is practically non existent anymore. That humane sense of sports has been mythicized, totally distorted and perverted.

The wealthy countries are the only ones that constantly host major contests, organize Olympic games and buy out athletes. However, on a closer look you can see that in many wealthy countries the athletes come from the Antilles or they are imported from Latin America. In the case of Europe, they come from

Africa and other Third World nations. That is, they do not even produce their own athletes to compete in many sports, then they deprive all those countries from the medals they could win. And, of course, they have all the economic resources, all the facilities and trained personnel the others do not have. That is the humiliating privilege that sports have become worldwide.

I know of countries like the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico --also a country although it is treated like a colony there-- (APPLAUSE) which were claiming their Major Leagues' baseball players to represent them in these Pan American games. They did so because today professionals are allowed to take part in amateur competitions but they were turned down. Some of them, like Puerto Rico, could not attend and the Dominican Republic, of course, is also affected because it has very good athletes who are professionals and were not given permission. That is, the countries are losing the right to be represented by their own people --those they educated and trained-- in major international contests.

In addition to all this other traps and tricks were laid.

As I said, in the case of baseball a strange new thing was invented or rather imposed. We protested but they imposed it. We protested again when the well- known technical meeting was held, but they sustained it. They argued that all the seats had been sold, that all the TV programs had been arranged and that it could not be changed.

What is it all about? Well, ten teams were to take part but now there are only nine because Puerto Rico could not make it. We are in a group of five teams; the other has four. Now, such matches like the one played yesterday are worth nothing, absolutely! You win one game and that is enough for classification even if you lose all the others. They are a simple exercise, that is the way they should be perceived; those matches will eliminate from the competition only one of the nine teams.

What will happen after taking part in a number of meaningless matches? It will happen that if our team won all the matches against the other four teams in its group that will still be useless; it will not mean a thing. It would not raise its prospects for the first place nor would it ensure its participation in the Olympic games. It is only for the benefit of professional sport and to discredit amateurism.

They would like to displace us from the second position there and to prevent our participation in the Olympics. How did they do it? Like this: following those first four matches where we must participate there will be a second round, which they call crossed-games. What is that? The number one in a group plays the number four in another; then, number two plays number three, and so on. There are several crossed-games and if our team loses only one of them the so-called sudden death is applied. Therefore, we can win all those matches, that is, four of them and it would be useless. When the crossed-games begin, the losing teams are automatically out of the competition.

Any team can lose a match. On the other hand, this is a violation of all the rules and precedents since there are only nine teams. The Organizing Committee imposed such schemes with the support of the Yankees. They were moved by commercial reasons although not only that. They also wanted to have greater possibilities to remove the ghost of Cuba. Losing one of the crossed-games would be enough to leave us out of the fight for the first place and for participation in Sidney. Such have been their schemes.

They do not seem too have enough professionals. In the United States they are all professionals and so are they in Canada. Mexico has been forced to follow the same line, they are all professionals there and so are they in the Dominican Republic. But, that is not enough for the United States and Canada; they are afraid of our team and its performance in Baltimore so they want it removed from the competitions. That is the way that practically everything has been organized.

I talked for a few minutes to the canoeing athletes who brought here the first gold medal won by Cuba and they told me that they were ill-treated there, that they were given the worst lane through shallow waters. Those are the conditions in which our athletes are competing there. That is the reward for a

small nation that has known the glory of defeating the US teams in Pan American contests. We won the first place in 1991 with the ten and a half million population that we had then, something that no other country in the hemisphere has ever been able to do and has never done.

It is a source of pleasure that our sport teachers help in the development of sports all over Latin America. Those countries are part of our family; the family we will one day be rejoined with. They do their job and we do not mind if Latin American athletes trained by the good coach sent by Cuba win the medals; we are happy of that and I say it in all sincerity. Our competition is with the rich and the powerful.

It is in that spirit that our athletes have been competing in the face of hostility, seduction and traps, on a field that has been turned into enemy ground. So, be it. The same has happened in other places where the authorities from the North have been present. But, there are two in that North now; the one that was already there and another one further North.

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