

SPORTS IN CUBA

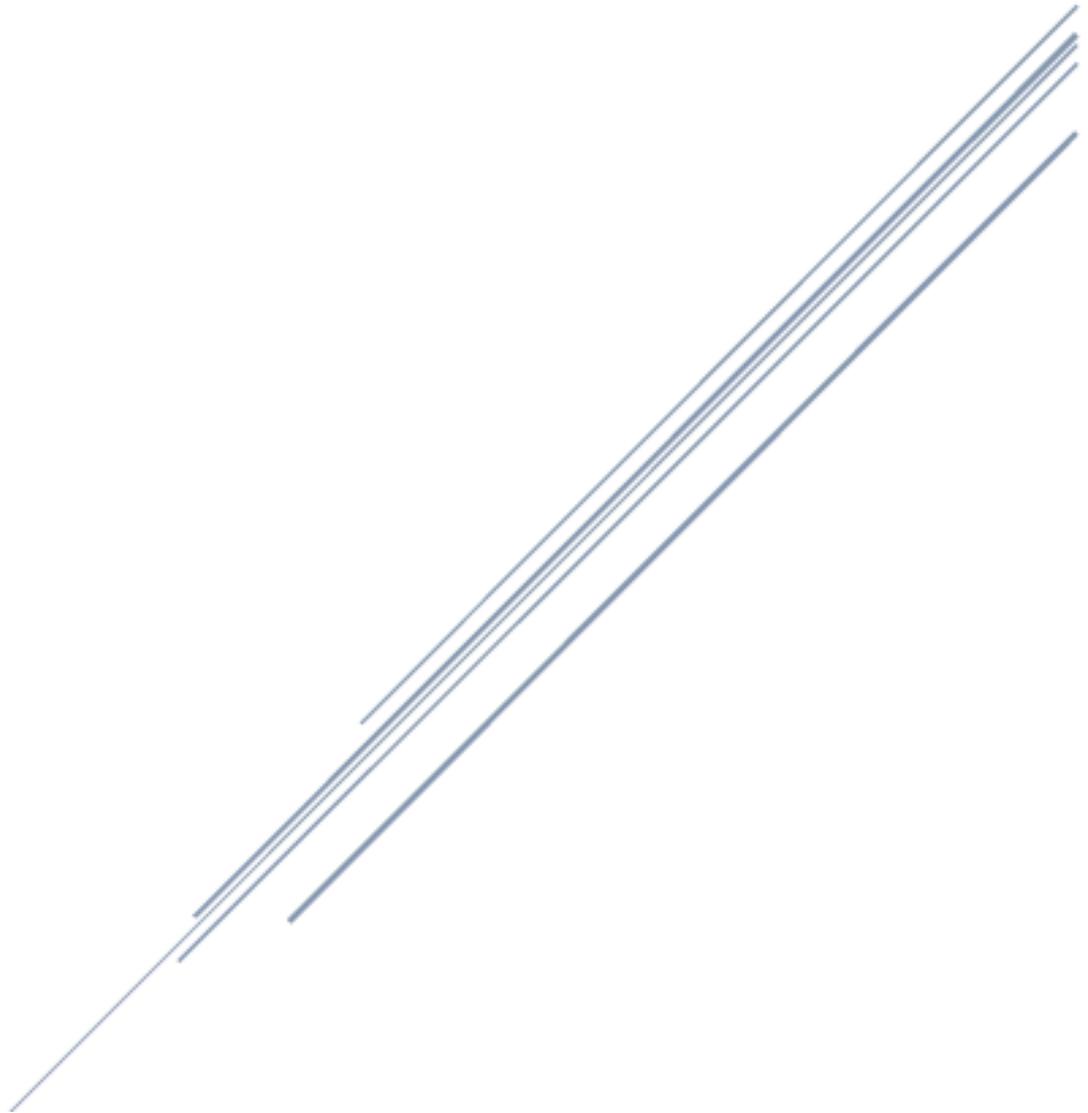
Information

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Sport before the triumph of the Revolution

- About 15 thousand people regularly practiced sports.
- There were 951 sports facilities.
- Only 2 percent of students receiving physical education services by 609 professionals in the field, 1 per 100 000 inhabitants.
- Cuba participated in seven Olympic Games with 114 athletes and winning 14 medals, five of these gold.
- During this period of more than 50 years, the island registered only one woman.
- Professional boxing, baseball and athletics were the most popular sports and therefore the most important ones, both nationally and internationally. Many of the athletes, saw in the practice of these disciplines, a way out for solving their precarious economic situations and, this way, to also help their loved ones although, in many cases, the reality of professionalism dealt them a bad hand and they ended their active athletic lives finding themselves in the same poverty they had started from.
- Other modalities such as basketball, volleyball, boating, soccer and swimming were practiced at club level and therefore most of the population had no access to them.
- There was no official support for sporting activities.

The beginning of sport as a legitimate right of the people

From the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, Cuban sports experienced a complete turnaround. The new government sees physical activity, recreation and the wide practice of sports, as a legitimate right of the people. The government began to establish a complete infrastructure for the Cuban sports movement, in order to first achieve that its practice be made available throughout the country and, consequently, to reach satisfactory results internationally.

The General Directorate of Sports (DGD) was created on January 14th, 1959. Two years later, on February 23rd, 1961, the governing body of the Cuban sports movement is formed, the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER).

During these years, the INDER has encouraged the construction of new sports facilities throughout the entire country, thus providing the possibility for millions of Cubans to widely practice any sport either recreationally or as high-performance activity. Also, in this same year, the School of Physical Education "Comandante Manuel Fajardo" is established, graduating the first sports instructors and teachers and four years later, in 1965, the National Sports Industry is created and the Institute of Sports Medicine is founded in 1966. Some other initiatives consisted of the establishment of the Sports Initiation Schools (EIDE) and the creation of the National School Sports Games (August 22nd, 1963).

Cuban sport is synonymous with education, culture, patriotism, raising the standard of life and health, in other words, it is one of the fundamental activities for social development.

The creation of the system of participation in sport enables thousands of people to join in practicing sports.

In sports, despite the economic war, the persecution of talents and aggressions, Cuba has managed to establish itself and to appear in categories that, today, are only reached by first world nations. The reason is that the sports movement is also the result of a process that has viewed human capital as its main asset.

Sports

After 1959, the System of Physical Culture and Sports in Cuba was born, which seeks to increase the standards of health and recreation and to achieve sports participation since the early childhood years in order to promote the talents who stand out as future athletes who guarantee and raise the standards achieved by Cuba in the international sports stage. This system consists of four main subsystems:

Physical Culture; Sports; Pedagogical training and upgrading of cadres; Science and Technology

On each November 19th, the Day of Physical Culture and Sport is celebrated throughout Cuba, based on the satisfaction of having a sport system in which the main concept is the human being as a bearer of values, rather than as a medal-making machine, as is the case in most countries worldwide.

Cuba has developed a model for teaching sports known as the High Performance Pyramid.

Sports are grouped into 4 categories:

Sports based on Time and Disciplines; Ball Sports; Combat Sports; Art and Precision Sports

Cuban sports in the 1990's

Last century's decade of the 1990s, was one of the most difficult periods faced by the island of Cuba, officially referred to as the Special Period, which was characterized by a profound lack of resources, raw materials, products of all kinds, in short, Cuba became virtually one against the U.S. empire overnight.

Despite these problems, the INDER was given the task to continue developing on sports, not only from a competitive standpoint, but as an expression of the way of life of a people, of the struggle for the ideas it defends therefore, in this decade, this activity was extended to the masses even more and it culminated by reaffirming Cuba as the first Latin American sports power and the second worldwide, among those belonging to underdeveloped countries.

Various sports practiced in Cuba

Aerobics, Chess, Athletics, Basketball, Boxing, Baseball, Cycling, Fencing, Football, Go, Judo, Swimming, Rowing, Tae Kwon Do, Volleyball, Sailing, Diving.

Women in sports

The most encouraging physical activity in the female sector in Cuba came with the gender revolution marked by the triumph of January 1st, 1959.

In the history of the Cuban sports movement, women have played a major role, not only in reference to the scale of demanding competitive standards, but also in their performance and interpretation of the tasks entrusted to them by INDER's direction. Some examples of famous Cuban women in sports are: Teresa Oliva Pérez, Xiomara Rojas de la Orden and Mayra Vila Machado.

Moving away a little from the actual competitive sphere, it's worth mentioning how transcendental the work of women in the Circles of Grandparents has been. They make the daily slogan "Sport is Health" a reality.

The women of the island have also provided sports cooperation to countries in Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

Sports results International Events

When we take a note of all the medals Cuba won in international sporting events, from the Central American and Caribbean Games, the Pan American Games, the ALBA Sports Games, the World Games, the Paralympic Games to the Olympic Games, we may perceive the immense development achieved by the Cuban sports movement, not only looking at the number of awards but also at the great variety of sport disciplines for which it has achieved top rankings, thus proving that it has followed the correct strategy over the years, putting the athlete, his person, culture and integrity, first.

Cuba has become the leading sports power in Latin America, having gone from being a country with scarce sports results before 1959, to becoming an example of what a small state can realize, when placing its most genuine, authentic and trained knowledge in the hands of the people.

The Current Situation of Sports in Cuba

The Cuban practice of sports, its achievements and results, have led Cuba to become a real power in this field but also something to be admired throughout the world, considering the fact that many experts and non-experts in the field, cannot understand how an island of only 11 million people, has been able to achieved such feats as it has.

Sport Gains after the Triumph of the Revolution

As in all spheres of social life, our president was the top driver of the changes that needed to take place in Cuba, in the area of sports.

Paragraph (b) of Article 38 in Cuba's Constitution of the Republic, indicates that the State guides, fosters and promotes physical culture and sport in all its forms, as a means of education and contribution to its citizens' integral formation.

On February 23rd, 1961, the Council of Ministers issued Act 636, creating the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER) as an entity under the Government Central Administration, rector of physical culture and sports in the country, to work in close coordination with the Cuban Olympic Committee (COC).

The main reason for creating the INDER, was to incorporate the broad masses of the people to take part in physical education, sport and healthy recreation, in order to ensure the harmonious development of new generations, by making physical exercise a part of the curriculum of classroom education.

At the grassroots level, the Voluntary Sports Councils were created, which administered the facilities, tools and other material and human resources provided to them by the INDER or by their own means.

Physical Education was established as a mandatory subject at all levels of the educational process.

In addition to these resolutions, we must also make a reference to others such as the prohibition of professional sports in Cuba and the elimination of any admissions fees to all national and international sports competitions.

The most significant step taken by the INDER in order to achieve its goals, was the creation of the Voluntary Sports Councils and of the Social Circles, since it was through these, that the population's participation, resulted in a decisive step toward the development of physical culture and sport activities.

The creation of the Workers' Social Circles, along with the eradication of racial discrimination, led to the boom of sports in Cuba. Workers, and especially black workers, (who are now the majority ethnic group of our great champions and high performance sports), had access to sports and recreation facilities that had been properties of the bourgeoisie, which had been forbidden to them due to the color of their skin or due to their social background.

From the beginning, taking care of our athletes was a main concern of our Comandante: "[...] I think that we should help athletes who are in this difficult situation." Not just giving them a bottle, but instead giving them work. Use their knowledge [...] I don't think it's fair for our sports heroes, our champions, to end up living in misery [...]. The best stimulus that could be created for athletes is ensuring their retirement and knowing how to reward those who become champions."

In 1963, the National School Sports Games came about, resulting from the great sports boom that took place in our schools and the participants were the top provincial winners of base competitions.

Due to the increasing quality of School Games participants, the idea of creating a center to bring together the best sports talents in each province arose and the School of Sports Initiation (EIDE) was created in order to polish the competitive quality of the School Games participants.

The insufficient foreign currency resources for importing sports equipment for the country's multiplied demand, intensified by the impossibility of obtaining many of them because of the brutal blockade that the Yankee imperialism has subjected us to since the early years of the revolutionary process, led to the implementation of INDER's June 25th, 1965 resolution #696 to create the Sports Industry Company in order to meet the needs that were required by the sports sector from an industrial point. This industry quickly undertook the advancement of science and technology in this branch and fixed the national problem faced at the time, currently many of the implements, equipment and clothing, among other things, produced by this company, are used in various countries where Cuba lends its assistance.

We have to acknowledge the solidarity and assistance extended to our country, especially in its first stage, by coaches, trainers and specialists of the highest level from the former European Socialist countries, led by the former Soviet Union. The Cuban people remember the numerous technicians who contributed to the formation of many figures and national teams with gratefulness. The first Cuban sports experts, who were trained in great part thanks to the generous assistance provided to Cuba by hundreds of foreign coaches, and who subsequently graduated from the Manuel Fajardo Physical Culture Higher Institute, today are paying back this solidarity in other countries throughout Latin America and the third world, and even in some of the most developed nations, suffice it to say that Cuba has more than 500 technicians working in over 50 countries.

The General Directorate of Sports' medical department, went on to become INDER's medical department since its establishment and the Sports Medicine Institute's nucleus. On July 20th, 1966, as per resolution 276 of the Ministry of Public Health, Sports Medicine was ranked as a specialty within the national health system. Resulting from the importance given to the activity, at INDER's request, the Institute of Sports Medicine was created on December 1st, 1966 as per Public Health Ministry's resolution #500.

Cuban sport's growing success are not the product of chance or of isolated athletes, instead they are the product of a scientifically structured system in which the socialist State offers equal opportunities to all for the massive practice of physical culture and sports activities.

To summarize, let's look at Cuba's main results obtained in the international stage, after the triumph of the Revolution:

- Central American and Caribbean Games - from 1962-1998 (10 games): 1,311 gold medals, 737 silver medals and 554 bronze medals.
- Pan American Games - from 1963-1999 (10 games): 568 gold medals, 393 silver medals and 337 bronze medals.
- Olympic Games - from 1960-2000 (9 games): 51 gold medals, 42 silver medals and 38 bronze medals.

With these results, Cuba became the top medal holder of the Central American Games, in second place in the Pan American games (a historical first place in the 1991 Pan American Games in Havana) and, in the Olympics, it garnered eighth place in Montreal in 1976, fourth place in Moscow in 1980, fifth place in Barcelona in 1992, eighth place in Atlanta in 1996 and ninth place in Sydney in 2000.

But it's not only about the successes achieved internationally, as it should be noted that part of the successes of Cuban sport include having a Physical Education teacher for every 183 people and a Sports teacher for every 348 people, Sports Initiation Schools (EIDE) in all of the country's provinces, school competition systems with more than 10,000 student-athletes in 30 disciplines. Participatory games, organized by the schools, achieve top participation, such as the more than 1,000 people that take part in the Mountain School Games and the more than 8,000 seniors in the mountainside, who are cared for by a technical force consisting of 405 top-level graduates in 1,222 facilities, all linked to the National Program of the Family Doctor. Across the various health promotion programs, there are over 1.2 million people who practice physical exercise.

ALL THAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED BY SOCIALIST CUBA IN THE SPORTS FIELDS HAS BEEN IN SPITE OF THE CRIMINAL ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND TRADE BLOCKADE IMPOSED ON CUBA SINCE THE BEGINNING OF ITS REVOLUTION PERIOD.

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athletes' performances and more

