

[Speech given by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and President of the State Council and the Council of Ministers, welcoming the Cuban sports delegation returning from Baltimore. University of Havana, May 4, 1999 \[1\]](#)

Date:

04/05/1999

Dear comrades,

I knew that it would be difficult to escape the possibility of saying a few words in this ceremony and, in fact, there are a few things that I would discuss with you.

First of all, that for countless hours nobody here has slept. Nobody has slept --not for a minute-- due to the excitement caused by that match yesterday. It was truly amazing with that cold, the rain, the interruption of the game and the difficulties all that created for the strategy and tactics of our team. Therefore, if you are a bit patient --and if some of you over there could keep quiet, even if you cannot hear well-- then, there are a few things that I should say.

To begin with, that this joy is not common place, that this sporting victory is what we would call a truly historic event. It can be described as a historic event for many reasons; among others, because it is the first time in the history of this hemisphere that an amateur team --made up by young and modest fellow countrymen-- has taken part in a match with a United States Major Leagues team.

For a long time we had wished for the possibility of measuring the advance of our sports; we wanted to know what would happen in case there was the opportunity for such a match.

Saying "The Major Leagues" is saying it all. Saying "The Major Leagues" is to say the best, the cream of the crop in this sport that we call "pelota" here and they call baseball there: the favorite, the most traditional and famous of sports in the United States of America.

When we were students like yourselves, the baseball Major Leagues were the non plus ultra and, even today, "amateurs" in this sport are considered like fans unable to play a professional team.

In many sports --boxing, for example-- we have already played strong non-professional American teams. For many years, we have sustained the World Championship in that sport where we are soundly and increasingly strong.

We had had a lot of contests with the Americans, both here and there, in volleyball, track and field and in many other sports. But some sports have special characteristics that make them big shows, with an enormous following in the world and the possibility of generating large revenues.

It is difficult for a cyclist to obtain a high income. It is difficult to make cycling professional, nor archery or weight-lifting, or track and field in the Olympics.

Other sports have different characteristics for the said reasons; soccer is one of them. Great soccer players are very well paid. Great baseball players --I am going to use the word "baseball"-- are very well paid, and so are others like the boxers. But baseball is the favorite sport in the nation with the largest economic resources, the richest nation in the world and also the one that owns the most important radio and television stations and the press, that is, the predominant nation in terms of the mass media, the one that has all the money and travels the world buying athletes, just like it travels the world buying scientists, researchers, artists, It is very difficult to compete with them.

What can we offer our athletes and what have we offered them throughout the years of the Revolution? Efforts, sacrifices and a modest life. Alongside this, the possibility to be educated, to develop their capabilities and to choose their favorite sports.

I remember that, when sports development began gaining ground it was the factory workers or employees who took part so it was necessary to grant them sports licenses and pay their salaries. Then, every sport started on its own development, including baseball. A few years later, the athletes no longer came basically from the factories but from the schools because sports were massively practiced there, some from very early ages. With the passing of time, the athletes came from the middle-level sports schools or from the sports higher faculty.

We said: What can we offer these youngsters? Well, the opportunity to graduate from the universities in the field of physical education and sports, which would later allow them to make a living decently as sports teachers or researchers into the activity and coaches for new athletes. That is why most of the outstanding athletes in different sports were, at the same time, students at the "Manuel Fajardo" Higher Institute of Physical Education and Sports. Our primary concern was that every one of them could graduate from the university.

The sports schools were multiplied because practicing a sport was not perceived as a profession. As it has often been said, it is the people's right, an achievement of the people. It is the right of all children, youths, adolescents, adults and even the elders to practice a sport or at least to do some physical exercises if only for the sake of health and well-being.

Throughout these years, more than 30,000 physical education and sports teachers have graduated in our country. I do not know how many have graduated from the "Fajardo" Institute but it must be a good few thousand. (He is told 35,000). From the "Fajardo" Institute? From the Higher Institute? (Cuban Olympic Committee Chairman Jose Ramon Fernandez tells him that, at the higher level, in the "Fajardo" Institute it is 25,000). Yes, I see, from the whole country, because it was extended.

Are you including the physical education and sports teachers? (Fernandez tells him that, in the "Fajardo" Institute, counting coaches and physical education teachers, 25,000 have graduated because the new ones graduated and the old ones were given the chance to study) Oh, at higher level --but tens of thousands graduated from the middle-level schools. (He is told that over 30,000).

Over 30,000 then. Thanks to the efforts made on the basis of a concept our country now has, without a doubt, the largest number of physical education and sports teachers per capita among all countries in the world, just as we do grammar school teachers and doctors. And it was done for the people, it was never conceived as a profession.

Actually, at the beginning of the revolution when sports were boosted there really existed amateurism in international competitions and only amateur athletes took part in the Olympic Games, like the old days in Greece. But those ideas were distorted, changed and corrupted by mercantilism and what has happened in the past few years is that, far from protecting the amateur athlete, practically every sport has gone professional.

Now, professional athletes are allowed to take part in the Olympic Games, and that is how the so-called

dream-teams have come into being. It happened in Barcelona, where a team of the best professional basketball players from the United States attended. This often does little other than humiliate the countries with very little resources, those that do not have coaches, teachers or teaching centers or sports facilities or the things our country, for example, has today, despite it being a Third World country.

Those competitions often serve to try to prove the national and even racial superiority of the rich countries and the developed nations and to humiliate other peoples, although some of their best athletes often come from poor countries. It is very difficult for an African people to bring together a soccer team and the resources necessary to make it a really good team, as a result, the African athletes are left only with the chance to join the industrialized countries' teams.

Those countries have the resources, the money and they take away the athletes. For years, we have had to struggle very hard in that ever growing disloyal competition and against that policy of snatching away other countries' athletes.

Cuba has never snatched a single athlete from any country in the world while thousands of our teachers and coaches have worked in many countries. Many athletes have been trained here and coaches sent to other countries but we have never snatched an athlete from any country.

We have trained our sportsmen and women to serve their people, to bring joy to their people, glory to their people, honor to their people. We can say of our athletes, in the first place, that they have brought much glory and honor, great satisfaction and joy to our people. (APPLAUSE)

It was not Omar Linares --or "El Niño" (The Kid) Linares, as you affectionately call him who spoke here. (APPLAUSE) It was a son of this country, somebody who rejected a 40 million dollars contract to join professional baseball. (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS) It could have been [Teofilo] Stevenson speaking on behalf of the old athletes; he also rejected offers of millions (APPLAUSE) and so have many others.

Now, what is it about baseball? It is the major entertainment in this country. Now, being a blockaded country we are denied the possibility to accede to other sources and improve their income at a time when practically everything is professional, as we said. Very soon, the team must begin training for the Olympics or rather for Winnipeg, which is the intermediate step for the right to compete in the Olympic Games.

We are aware that several countries are recruiting professionals left and right with the idea to knock Cuba from its place to compete in the Olympics. I hope that idea went up in smoke last night. They may get together whoever they want, still they will not be able to bring together everybody they want. There is no doubt that the American team can be very, very strong. (SOMEBODY SAYS SOMETHING TO HIM) Well, other teams --even from countries in the Caribbean Basin-- are clawing their way up with plans to use professionals to take one of the two places assigned this hemisphere for the next Olympics and have us fall by the wayside.

As I was saying, for a good part of the year our baseball players are the focus of attention of sports fans in this country. That is the truth. Baseball is to this country what soccer is to many others; it is as important as soccer is in many other countries. So, we need them here, in our country.

We do not know what lies ahead for sports in the future. But, at the present time, we need to struggle against all the attempts to deprive the country of its athletes. The first competition is the fight against those bandits called scouts. I do not mean that all scouts are bandits but we do know a number of bandits who are involved in the mercantile and political task of trying to buy Cuban athletes. That is the first battle. The United States supports them for obvious reasons of harassment and counter-revolutionary propaganda.

However, why do we have so many and such good athletes in this sport? Because, fortunately, we have many young people of extraordinary dignity and patriotism (APPLAUSE) and they deserve our people's

recognition.

That is why, on the occasion of this historic match, one of the first things was to remember many of those great baseball players who brought glory, much glory to our country. Thus, over 100 former athletes were part of the delegation that cheered for our team in the Baltimore stadium. You cannot imagine their joy when they realized that they had not been forgotten, that they would attend a match that they had not been able to see, a match in which they could not take part because they could never confront their strength with that of those teams.

The years went by, a new generation of athletes sprang up and they had the pleasure of being there, in the front row, alongside the new great athletes, present at that historic event. They do not have material wealth but they are the owners of a homeland without masters which admires them and will never forget them.

We have said: those former athletes can never be forgotten. We cannot give them the millions that the scouts offered them but we can give them all the recognition in the world, all the honors they deserve and meet all their material needs --all they might need, which does not mean ambition for wealth, absolutely not. But they will always be remembered and, as the country improves its economic situation, the lives of those athletes will also be improved --and this as a priority, since they did so much for their country and did not sell for any money. (APPLAUSE)

Sports have given our country great prestige and the country must compensate those athletes, whether or not they are involved in the best paid sports. All those athletes, who so many times gave proof of their loyalty and selflessness to their homeland, will occupy the rightful place that befits them in our society and will be affectionately remembered by their people even when they have passed away.

We attach major importance to this historic match because it shows the prominence of human and moral values. They have set a very great example. I wonder if there are such examples in the world as I have mentioned here or if those values can bloom in a country that is not patriotic, truly honorable and revolutionary. Because the flag cannot be bought! The homeland cannot be bought! Loyalty to the people cannot be bought! And the greatest glory of our greatest and most admired athletes is that they cannot be bought! (APPLAUSE) So let that be the first cause for recognition.

We have been able to confront the strength of these men, the capacity of these men, with the strength and capacity of a great team from a country where this sport, as I said, is the favorite and has infinite resources.

The payroll of each Major Leagues team comes to tens and tens of millions of dollars a year and, in some cases, it is over 40, 50, 60 or more millions. It is a matter of concepts. Let's say it was a match between two conceptions: our concept of sports and the concept of professional sports. The concept of sports as the people's right, as a privilege and a source of health and well-being for all, and sports as a market commodity, a source of income and personal wealth. Those two ideas were contending in last night's match.

From now on, amateur athletes will no longer be looked at condescendingly, they will not be underestimated again.

We will have to follow the evolution of world sports. Nobody knows where they are going to end up --as it is, for the time being, irreversible-- with the sad transformation of amateur sports and the Olympics into a competition among professionals. I wonder what is left to poor countries, that is, to the vast majority of countries.

Cuba, with its revolutionary sports concept, has the honor of being the only Latin American country which managed to beat the United States in a Pan-American competition held precisely in our homeland; it was the only time in history. This is proof of the efforts made, the quality of our athletes

and of our sports system.

Despite its small size and the blockade, Cuba is indisputably today the only sporting rival that the United States of America has in this hemisphere, (APPLAUSE) and its prestige is such that that stadium in Baltimore was completely full; all the seats had been sold several days before the competition. Why? Because millions of Americans also wanted to see a Major Leagues team compete with a team from the country that is the world amateur champion and has been so for many years.

The first surprise was the result of the first match in Havana. But, as you all know, we were in the middle of our national series, an excellent series which attracted masses of people. It had been a long time since that Latin American Stadium had been completely full. And, on the day of the last match between the Industriales team and the team from Santiago de Cuba, despite the current difficulties with transportation, there were perhaps more people --and there were a lot-- than in the first match with the Orioles.

We could not interrupt our series but the match had been agreed on. It was necessary to change plans. What could we do?

In that first match, we had to use the wood bat. For 20 years, only the aluminum bat had been used here and a lot of tactics and strategies are determined by the use of the aluminum or the wood bat. Here, we had lost the habit of hitting a bunt. I say this to our own athletes: You still do not know how to hit bunts. [Team director Alfonso] Urquiola argues with me that they do, they do, they know a lot about bunts. And I know very well that they have to train a lot in the bunt. Sometimes, it is necessary, although it is much better with those liners in which we rejoiced so much last night. But it is essential to know how to do it because there are times when they are necessary.

The aluminum did away with the bunt as it did with a lot of plays and now those who call the tune in these matters of sports have re-established the wood bat and, therefore, we have to go with the wood bat.

How many days did we have to get used to it? It was in the middle of the series! We had to call on the best athletes from the eight teams that were already out of the competition and organize them to begin training with some wood bats that we had while we hurried to get more. Then, when four teams were left from the eight that had continued the competition other athletes were summoned to begin training. Later, when two teams were left --those two from the group of four that did not take part in the finals-- we called on other athletes and so we kept bringing in little bits from the teams that were been knocked out the contest. But the series went on.

It must have been a source of great satisfaction for all the fans that the series was not interrupted here, despite the importance of that match. The series continued until the end and when it was over --and they were already using the wood bat in the finals-- a group of athletes from those two teams that had been in the top two places was incorporated to the training team, I mean, those who had not been able to take part in the first match. How much time did we have? Three weeks training to adapt to the wood bat. Just three weeks! But there had already been a great match with the first team members about whom the world press reported a lot, and about whom the American press reported a lot. Every newspaper published reports about the previous match; none failed to express admiration for the strength of our team.

When the other athletes had joined --since they had all been joining by groups-- and they had three weeks of training, they were ready and we saw the results yesterday. Never before had there been a training so rigorous and polished, and in such a short time!

There, we could appreciate the value of those university graduate coaches from that school that we were describing a while ago. You may be sure that their knowledge and experience make them an extraordinary asset for the country. I can assure you that we can have not one but two, three or four

teams that could match the Major Leagues teams.

Maybe, one day there will be peace, there will be normal relations with our neighbor up North and then there might be the possibility to take part in those competitions and, to the extent that this is possible, we could improve considerably our athletes' incomes which are very modest today.

Well, not all sports are so appealing, in the sense of the number of fans and economic possibilities. It also happens with the arts. Not all the arts' expressions and products of intellectual work can earn large incomes. There are a lot of writers in our country, and very good ones; however, it is very difficult for a good writer in our country to earn a relatively high income. Some do, but it is much more difficult.

A good painter can succeed in having a high income but, generally speaking, they become really famous later when a long time has passed.

Musicians have more immediate possibilities than writers due to the immense power of the current media, which have turn music into a big industry. Some good composers and musicians can obtain very, very high incomes, and in a short time. In our country, there are some who obtain very high incomes from their productions. They get their incomes and pay part of them in taxes as a contribution to the country.

Let's hope that the day will come when we can somehow also offer our most outstanding athletes incomes that are much higher than what they receive today. I am sure that, one way or another, that day will come, simply as a result of the great quality of our sports. If they would let our country live in peace, different formulae would be possible to stimulate the talent, the dedication and the exploits of which they are capable.

There is volleyball, for example, which for part of the year our athletes play abroad. They compete, they play with different teams and improve their personal incomes but they continue to be Cuban athletes and when the time comes for tournaments, they are with us. Here, the national contests in that sport last for a very short time but baseball, due to tradition and its growing quality, is the number one entertainment of the people, for months and months. Fans at local and national level want to see them and enjoy their game. If we add to this the constant hostility and the lack of international regulations, it becomes more difficult to find practical formulae.

We have analyzed it and we think that we will start improving their income with the country's own resources because due to their characteristics, their virtues, their dedication and their discipline they deserve a higher income than they are presently receiving. Of course, under the blockade all that becomes difficult, therefore, unscrupulous people --brain and athlete hunters-- are constantly trying to tempt, to corrupt and buy out our athletes.

I am explaining this to you so that it is understood why, in many respects, we consider last night's match a historic one.

Many Americans will be surprised today after seen our team's performance there, in an American stadium, in the presence of almost 50,000 fans. For many days there will be many press dispatches and reports to read. They did well under difficult conditions. Three weeks' training with the wood bat forced us to be very creative! How to resolve that situation: get ready for the match in such a short time and then find ourselves in a rainy and cold day, uncertain about a game it had taken so much work to organize and arrange.

Worse still: the US Weather Bureau had announced that there would be no rain that evening, however, the game had hardly started when it began to rain and the television was reporting a temperature of 12 degrees [Centigrade]. We could see our people there shivering with cold. What would happen with our athletes? An excellent opening pitcher started to play in those conditions of cold and rain. Then the game was interrupted for an hour and we very well know, from what we have learned from the trainers,

what the rules are today. We know how long a pitcher needs to rest his arm, how many balls he should throw and what they do after a pitcher throws three or four innings; how they use ice, different forms of care, massage, rest... and there you had a star pitcher who had to hold up the game for an hour and go back there, with the rain and the cold, to work against a team of really formidable hitters.

Difficulties came up at that moment. Certainly, everybody there must have thought that if our great opening pitcher --who won glory in the match held here in the capital-- had problems, the Cubans would be eliminated. What they did not know was that, even before they had time to think of it, all the possibilities had been foreseen.

I recall that, in a meeting with instructors, coaches and managers, I asked them: And what would you all do if in the second inning [Jose A.] Contreras has any problem, loses control and they give him some hits? Really, I asked the technical people, coaches and instructors a lot of questions. I am not a professor in this sport, or any other, but at least I know the art of asking questions and paying attention to details. When they answered: "We would do this", I asked them: "Why?" They said: "Because of this and that. We have a lot of other good stars in the team..." They listed the characteristics of each of them.

Some analysts were discussing whether or not Contreras should open because they already knew him. We have seen Contreras in training and, at a certain moment he was able to cut short the good performance of that whole group of our hitters who know him well. You cannot imagine the number of good pitchers that we have, their qualities. Some new ones can reach up a speed of 97 miles [per hour] easily and they never throw a ball at less than 90 miles speed unless they do it intentionally to mislead the hitter.

But the team leaders had foreseen everything --what to do in every case-- and everything resulted as foreseen for each situation. The opponent was already two runs ahead in the low part of the second inning. We knew what those people could hit. We had seen it, really.

What impressed me most was the way they reacted, as lions or tigers. It seems that they leapt for victory and in that same second inning when we were two runs behind, the tigers leapt up and made four. That reaction, that spirit was truly impressive. (APPLAUSE) And it went like that throughout the whole match.

I am just sorry, really, that with such a tremendous cold and rain they did not do with their good reserve what they did with Contreras in the match in Havana. They only had three hits and the exhausting effort was already obvious due to the amount of balls thrown by [Norge L.] Vera, the comrade who brought the flag and who earned that right just like those who escorted him, and others still, like Linares, who spoke here and who was not put out even once. (APPLAUSE)

I was saying that we would have liked them to have done with Vera as they did with Contreras, I mean, he had pitched such a brilliant game in Havana that it was painful, after all that effort of more than 100 throws when it was clear that he did not have exactly the same control and some balls were rising a bit more --he said it himself-- that he was relieved. Later, some people criticized the manager for that replacement but it would have been really sad in those circumstances if that brilliant role that he played had been tarnished because the opponents had taken advantage of those circumstances.

Some people feel that the comrade should stay until the end of the game. Really, with that advantage, we would not have liked for him to leave in the last inning, especially after two consecutive hits in that last inning. The score was 12 to 3 and we had excellent reserves. You cannot imagine the pitching reserve available. Vera was giving the Orioles team a no-hit, no-run, from the first out in the second inning until the first out in the ninth. No hits and no runs; that must be registered in the books. But we were well aware of all the resources we had there and it grieved us, sincerely, that his incredible deed was not fully preserved.

Listen, --I mean Urquiola, the coaches and managers-- do not take this as a criticism. I am actually expressing my feelings. This day of well deserved gratitude and honor is not a day for criticism. Is that all right?

Some people did not understand well the composition of the team. There were those who said: They are taking four third basemen and a shortstop. Yes, there were four third basemen but one of them was the designated hitter and he was the one who shot the tremendous home run of about 400 feet. (APPLAUSE) He did an excellent job as a designated hitter. (APPLAUSE) Among those third basemen was a really great reserve player, his name is Pierre. (APPLAUSE) Among those third basemen was Michel Enriquez, who could play the shortstop if need be and another one, and even Linares who has done it sometimes when the selected shortstop has been injured and who, during training proved to be a steady, self-contained and fearsome hitter.

The basic idea for that match was to be strong on the defensive but, above all, to be very strong on the offensive. That game had to be won by hitting with great strength and infallible touch hits, doubles, triples and home runs, anything there. And that team was a factory of hits, doubles, triples and everything.

Speed was considered. A comrade was included whose fundamental characteristic is speed, in order to decide, even if it was by base running. There were other unfavorable factors, not just the cold, the rain or the wood bat but the fact that when the ground became heavy, we lost one of our advantages, which is speed. Everything was analyzed rigorously by the comrades who were responsible and had the experience for choosing the team, and they did so meticulously. We then had to wait for the results which were the fruit of new concepts and new training methods and the men had to strive until the very end for a position in the team. It was not easy.

It was only on Saturday, at noon time, that the players learned who were in the team. Forty-eight athletes had been training. It was not at all easy for the team manager to choose but he did so on the basis of rules, criteria and principles.

We knew that that team was capable of batting as many hits as necessary and that it would rise to the challenge; that is how it won a victory that we might call spectacular. And this team, I tell you, is just beginning. We will see at the games in Winnipeg and at the Olympics. No matter how many super-professionals they put together, you can have an absolute, blind confidence in our team.

The number-one principle is discipline, dedication, total commitment. (Someone in the public shouts, "and what about the umpire's attitude?") We can leave that topic for later. There are more interesting things now.

I wanted to explain to you about the prospects. Sometimes we thought: It would be good if the public could see the training sessions. But public and training are not always compatible. We would have liked for the nation to be able to see on television their athletes training. Yes, the nation would have seen them but so would our opponents. They would have found out about all the pitchers and each one of the hitters, who was hitting this or that. So, we said: baseball discretion.

The journalists wanted to know. They were there, they observed. They understood the strategy. But we could not have public matches although they would have been really interesting.

On the eve of important events, we must give priority to training over the show. Perhaps, in the two coming months of training --just perhaps, it is not a promise-- the public will be allowed in on some occasions or some matches will be shown on television because it is necessary to combine art and science to mislead the opponent. That was a key question.

A number of ideas came up while working in the preparation of the team for a match that would take place in such an adverse environment. Because, it would be in another country, another public --tens of

thousands of fans supporting the other team-- with provocative elements who are known only too well; the cold and also the rain; the wood bat which, as I said, had not been seen in this country for 20 years. Do our athletes have merit, or not, for having successfully passed that test?

I said that the match here did not matter. Here, we had to be the best possible hosts, show the civility of our people, their knowledge of sports, their respect. In fact, a good number of Americans and journalists who attended the match were impressed by that. Because this is not a country of savages as some would imagine, misled by the Yankees' lies. This is, no doubt, one of the best educated, most civilized and best informed people in the world; also lively, intelligent, honorable and respectful.

We were absolutely certain that, in our stadium, not a single offensive word would be said against the visiting athletes. That has never happened. Absolute and conscientious respect for the visitors, the ability to applaud their good plays, to listen respectfully to their national anthem, to respectfully salute their flag: these are characteristics of civilized and cultured peoples. It is not only sports that our people know about! A recently conducted research showed that the knowledge of children in the third, fourth and fifth grade in our country is incomparably higher than that of their peers in the other countries of Latin America.

As for the excellence of its education, Cuba is the absolute first. Cuba is also the first in a lot of other things: in sports, more medals per capita in the Olympics; in health, the lowest infant mortality rate in the hemisphere --including the United States-- with the exception, perhaps, of Canada. But it is not just that. This country has built an awareness, a general and a political culture, a sense of dignity, of respect.

That is why, in our country, nobody has ever offended an American. This Revolution was made and developed not on the basis of bigotry or dogmatism, much less on hatred and prejudice, but rather on ideas, consciousness and culture. Our people learned to think by themselves. We carry the revolutionary spirit in our soul and a revolutionary is not someone who insults but someone who knows that he or she bears the truth and is capable of sustaining it and defending it. That is our people. No country in the world can give the example that Cuba can give its visitors, an example of hospitality and respect.

We have never sown hatred against the American people or any American at that. We have always laid the responsibility on the system, first of all, on the system. It is very difficult for such a system to produce good governments, except for some brilliant statesmen like [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt, at the time of one of capitalism's deep crisis, the peak of fascism in Europe and the serious risk of a world conflict. Some have been more scrupulous than others; some have been more ethical than others; some have been more intelligent than others; some have been more aware of history and have had a greater sense of responsibility, others have had less or none of those two things.

The very system set up in that country with its power, its wealth, its economic and social foundations begets selfishness, arrogance, conceit and it fashions governments almost exclusively to sustain and expand a great empire. But we have never blamed the American people either for the system or for their governments. The fact is that these often cannot do anything and, yet, they have the power to do a lot of other things. That is the truth.

That sport match in Havana, on the 28th of March, was useful to provide a lot of people in that country with a direct view of Cuba. On that same night, there were two receptions --because they were leaving on Monday-- one for all those who came with the Orioles team, hundreds of people, at 7:30 p.m. and another at 1:00 in the morning for a large number of American artists and musicians who had been performing with Cuban musicians and artists. You would not believe how much praise of Cuba I heard that day! While greeting the team and all those associated with sports, I heard nothing but praise. They were full of admiration for our athletes, for the fans, for our people. And they were not lying just for the sake of complimenting, as it is often the case. On the contrary, when you can feel such warmth in the expression of such ideas it is because they have been agreeably and, perhaps most of them, astonishingly impressed by the reality of our people.

Then, it was the turn for artists and musicians and exactly the same thing happened. I had to shake hands with I do not know how many people that night, and each one stopped for a minute to talk to me about the musicians. They attended the reception together with the Cuban musicians. It was impressive! The former had admired the sports and the latter the culture and art in our country, the development of music in our country. It is not in vain to have also a Higher School of Art and numerous art schools.

Our country has made extraordinary progress in many fields and what is most praiseworthy is that, even in such difficult years as these, none of that has collapsed. Even that famous theater destroyed by a fire [the Amadeo Roldan theater in Havana] was rebuilt and recently re-dedicated. Old museums are being rebuilt and new ones created. We will have two other excellent museums. Our country possesses a great number of works of art which will be at the service of the people so that they will be better connoisseurs and more cultivated.

Much has been done in many fields. In all these years, not one school was closed, and thousands and thousands of new graduate teachers have joined grammar school teaching. Not one polyclinic was closed and in these years of the special period, around 30,000 new doctors have joined our health services. What other country could have done that while blockaded and after the collapse of the USSR and the socialist bloc? These are the great merits of our people. I think that, on a day like this, we should emphasize it because it is everybody's work.

Now then, we have to be fair. We won a victory, a great victory over the Orioles. Some news agencies described it as a crushing victory. We would not describe it like that. I would say that it was a historic victory, a good victory, but we would never use the word "crushing". We do not want to crush anybody, much less a team that gave us the possibility to hold such a match between two sports' conceptions, between a great team from the Major Leagues and a team from tiny Cuba, (APPLAUSE) a non professional team. This match was possible thanks to the efforts of the team's leaders, of the main shareholder and director of the Orioles team. He had to strive for years before he succeeded in holding this match.

There was a lot of discussion. You should not believe it was easy because there were those who opposed the match. I do not mean, in this case, the traditional trouble-makers but important politicians who opposed this match. Others supported it. In that situation, it was difficult to agree on the match here. The proceeds --their destination and final use-- were the source of a lot of discussion, not because of the amount but because of the blockade regulations, to which some whimsical demands were added --and not exactly by the Orioles team. Those who wanted to set obstacles demanded certain unacceptable conditions.

The leaders of the Orioles team and other leaders from the Major Leagues supported the match. There was quite a lot of discussion and it was only around the 10th of March --some two-and-a-half weeks before the first match-- that an agreement was finally concluded on the basics although some things remained pending. All the difficulties were overcome and the match was held. Still, the second match became difficult due to different details. It was necessary to overcome significant obstacles.

One of the first real obstacles was that we had agreed with the Orioles team --and the US authorities had accepted it-- that for those two matches each team would travel to the other country in their own airlines. Therefore, it was to be assumed that the Cubans would fly in our own planes, in our airline planes.

A problem suddenly arose which they apparently had not foreseen. It is that they have passed so many legislation, amendments and more amendments that they have created a truly absurd situation. The problem was the risk that upon arrival, the two Cuban planes --which was what we would be sending with our athletes and other members of the delegation-- could be the subject of claims by any bandit, any of those notorious individuals who were Cuban citizens owners of sugar mills, of big landed estates,

of industries and various properties, who left for the United States thinking that the Revolution was going to last a few short months. It happens that they can do that thanks to that ill-famous Helms-Burton Act which has turned them into affected United States owners.

There are other regulations too, plus an amendment surreptitiously included in an Act recently. Unfortunately, many laws such as the budget law each year --and [Ricardo] Alarcon knows this well-- have 4,000 or 5,000 pages and nobody reads them. On the other hand, they do not care about anything added that might reek of something against Cuba, and so, one more amendment and another one are passed every so often. We are now seeing the consequences of the mess that they themselves have created in that country.

Recently, [telephone] communications were cut. Oh, yes, it was the decision of a judge who complied with the demands of a group of lawyers and relatives of three persons who died as a result of a provoked incident, the notorious aircraft incident which did not happen off the coasts of Washington or Florida or Key West but a few miles off our coasts. They never tired of violating the country's airspace and, at times, they flew over the territory, something that no country in the world would tolerate --it cannot be tolerated-- and which was the reason for countless warnings we made that there could be an incident as, in fact, there was. The plaintiffs were demanding almost 200 million dollars in compensation --more than 60 million for each of them.

Oh, but it is not just that case. Any of those individuals who left properties here later seized by the Revolution can now retain a lawyer and sue to freeze, seize or confiscate any property of Cuba. This is how they filed a claim to confiscate the funds due us from telephone communications. Of course, each country receives its share from the telephone communication services provided and in this case they assumed we would provide the telephone services for free just because a bandit judge, who is a known accomplice in provocations against Cuba --in the face of a powerless government and based on all those insane laws and amendments-- decided to file a claim and confiscate, or try to confiscate, the funds. And so, the funds are blocked while the lawsuit takes its course, and the months go by and by while nobody knows what will be the end of all this.

They did not pay their obligations due on December and we warned: You cannot block those funds; you must pay or else we will take measures. In fact, there was no choice but to take the relevant measures and telephone communications were cut with the American companies that provided this service pursuant to agreements reached with Cuba and approved by the United States government. Only one company continued to honor its obligations, apparently forgotten by that judge or the lawyers, it is still not very clear; but that company has continued to honor its obligations and thus to operate its business. Calls from the United States now have to be made via Spain, via Italy, via Portugal or other third countries. They have to go through a number of countries but the fact is that the calls continue although the services are not as efficient and they cost a lot more to those American companies.

We have a joint venture --where, of course, the Cuban state retains most of the stocks-- that manages the country's telephone facilities. That company had signed contracts with several American companies. Then, the judge ordered these companies not to pay, what did they expect? That we continued providing the services for free? The services were cut. The situation was unacceptable. I do not know if there is any fool who believed that was incorrect. It would have certainly been stupid and incorrect to keep providing a service which takes a lot of work, energy and resources while a judge up there blocked the funds. No, sir, no. We shall see how that problem is solved.

But it is not only that, there is a new policy to confiscate practically all our patents, the most prestigious trademarks, for example, Havana Club rum, pursuant to a lawsuit filed precisely by those who contributed the most money for the passing of the Helms-Burton Act, namely, the Bacardi company. Because they felt like it --simply because they felt like it!-- they have appropriated the Havana Club rum trademark, one of the most prestigious in the world, and have engaged in a litigation with the French company that is Cuba's partner in the marketing of that rum. As you may well understand we have not the slightest possibility to file lawsuits in the United States, let alone find a judge who rules in our favor.

That would be illusory, it has never happened!

Now they are trying in court a group of friends of the U.S. government, members of the notorious Cuban-American National Foundation, for an attempt on my life they were planning to realize at Margarita Island. They happened to be caught by American coastguards looking for drug traffickers. They are in jail and they are being tried. We will see how it all ends up because, on the one hand, you see these guys in court, and on the other, you see them in photographs with senior political personalities linked to the US government.

No, no judge in that country has ever admitted we were right. The French are litigating but they even ruled against the French recently, and the French company is appealing.

Well, the trademark is no longer recognized. It is a brazen violation of international law, a violation of an acknowledged right. They do the same thing, or can do the same thing, with other trademarks. I hope no one complains if we start producing Coca-Cola --who knows, we might even make it better-- and write on those cans "Cuban Coca-Cola", perhaps out of curiosity someone would sell it. Look, there is this Italian fellow who has a business partnership with a Cuban company to produce wine, and he is already producing wine of rather good quality.

I said: That Italian must have gone mad! The grapes were not even planted yet when the factory was ready and it was commissioned. He is using imported grape juice concentrate while he develops the plantations and he is producing a good quality grape wine. He said one day he was going to sell the wine for I do not know how much, I think it was 100 dollars a bottle, and recently, in an exhibition he organized he sold some bottles for 80 dollars.

Some people say that if Cuba produces such good quality rum and is so famous for its rum and tobacco, this wine must be good. Actually, the wine was not bad at all, but the fact is that he sold it. The fact is that prestige is a very important thing, and so is a country's fame.

Someone might say: Let's try the Cuban Coca-Cola! Or it might be toiletry with brand names or other articles to sell in what they call the border markets. They should not complain if we start using American trademarks to produce and sell products. It goes without saying that we are not going to watch idly by.

But worse yet: the last straw was that our team could not travel in Cuban planes and that really put the game in jeopardy. It was a source of concern for the American authorities because in that mess they have made, the spider web they have been weaving for years, they find themselves powerless to prevent any ragamuffin from filing a claim against the Cuban planes.

That is how far things have gone, and if it keeps on this way not even the luggage of a Cuban business executive or government official traveling to the United States will be safe. One of these days, comrade Alarcón, Speaker of the National Assembly who must travel to the United States to discuss issues related to the migratory agreements and other matters, will have his suitcase confiscated. It is incredible, it is something ridiculous and unheard-of.

Now, just imagine what it would mean that the team with the whole delegation, with the former and present-day athletes, the outstanding workers, students, youths had their plane confiscated. Can you really imagine such a worldwide scandal? Well, they would be confined to the hotel. Yes, they would be confined there since they would not have a plane to return and they probably would have insisted on returning in their own plane. They would be offered shelter, lodging --I do not know who would pay for it-- and maybe food. Maybe they would not be hungry, they would not have any appetite or would refuse to accept that food. Can you imagine such a scandal?

I think the U.S. government was sincerely concerned about the problem because it did not have a solution for it.

There are many reasons why we preferred our own airlines: we have great confidence in our Spanish speaking pilots, in those who work on the plane, flight attendants and other airline workers. We prefer our own workers, who speak Spanish. I think that traveling in an airplane of your own country is psychologically positive, it builds confidence. Especially if it is a country like ours which has had to suffer such bitter experiences as the brutal and monstrous sabotage in mid flight of an aircraft carrying civilian passengers, where our entire juvenile fencing team was killed while returning to Cuba full of medals from an international competition where they had been declared champions. Actually, we feel safer when it is our own crew; greater care is taken in every respect and there are better possibilities to guarantee the safety of the planes.

So a serious problem was created. What to do? It was humiliating and unfair for us to have to charter one or two airplanes from a foreign company to fly our delegation so the arrangement was in serious jeopardy. They let us know that the risk was for real, that it was practically certain to occur and that they could do nothing about it. Actually, they told us a few days before the trip.

We had to make a decision. We felt it was really very important that that game should take place. Many people had worked in good faith to bring about this match; only the most obstinate enemies of Cuba were against it. We pondered the problem. Even if it was hard for us, very hard to renounce that right agreed upon in advance, to exercise it would have inevitably brought about a serious conflict for the reasons I have explained. It would have been very sad if what had been conceived as a friendly exchange, or a friendly sports match --even if it was not the first, there have been many-- should turn into a conflict, into a problem which would only please those who so rabidly opposed the match. Acting very calmly and with the necessary sense of responsibility, we accepted the idea of not traveling in our own planes and chartering one from a foreign --a Canadian-- airline to make the trip. We quickly chartered the aircraft.

It turned out to be a large aircraft carrying over 300 passengers instead of two smaller aircraft. Personally, I would have preferred two smaller planes. It makes you shudder to think of the human cargo that plane was carrying: besides the baseball team, more than 100 outstanding former athletes and numerous other comrades, outstanding award-winning workers, outstanding students and youths. Actually, when I saw that airplane take off, I again felt that I would have preferred two smaller ones.

Well, that problem was solved. But let's take a look at the situation. We cannot accept that group of measures that have been taken against our country; we are not helpless. Our country knows how to defend itself. They are establishing precedents that one day may turn against them. We also have talented lawyers, a very high morale, many moral and legal resources to confront that ferocious offensive against our country's interests.

We must honestly say that the authorities --let us say the government, although no one knows how many governments, how many conflicting interests and policies there are in that country-- acted in good faith on this matter.

Opinions in the United States were divided but we know for sure that they tried to find a solution to these problems; we, in turn, cooperated with that solution.

Actually, there were some last minute problems with the visas. Another obstacle was almost created which, this time, would have been insurmountable. More than one third of the delegation had still not received their visas and this was really something we could not accept because there were no grounds for it, there was no reason, there was nothing whatsoever that could justify that. The decision was then made that if the requested visas were not granted the delegation would not travel.

Among other things, they gave as an excuse the time needed to process the visa applications. The last visa applications had been submitted about 72 hours before the game while for the match in Havana we had authorized, just a few hours in advance, the landing of planes carrying people who only at the last minute decided to come. We had granted visas requested only six hours before so they could not use

processing time as an excuse.

Our delegation was going to be dismantled before leaving for Baltimore, when all the comrades had been notified, when all the conditions including clothes and all that is required for a short trip had been arranged; but, above all, it was the enthusiasm of numberless comrades, former athletes, youths, students and workers who were happy to have been given the opportunity to be there.

We wondered, what is the matter? Are these by any chance people who have committed any offenses, crimes, wrongdoings? Is there a single one of them who can be blamed for an immoral or illegal action that justifies the denial of a visa? And something really incredible --well, we had to strive-- they finally said that there were objections to some comrades. We asked: Which comrade do you object to? Oh! No. They said that [Doctor] Ordaz could not travel. That Ordaz cannot travel? What has he done?

I know [Doctor] Ordaz too well. I saw him building hospitals way back during the war. He worked with his own hands in the construction of wood and thatched-roofs hospitals where many lives were saved and after the triumph of the Revolution, he has worked for forty years in that hospital which, under capitalism, was a scaring storehouse of mental patients, where the patients died en masse and which is today one of the most prestigious mental hospitals in the world --mark my words, one of the most prestigious and renowned mental hospitals in the world-- admired by many people.

The man who has been at the head of that hospital for four decades is one of the most humane, respected persons and one of the most beloved by the population. He has restored health to countless people. He is characterized by his flawless conduct and his total and absolute dedication to his noble work. What has Dr. Ordaz done to warrant such an exclusion? Could it be because a wretch, the daughter of one of Batista's henchmen who murdered dozens of youths before he was exiled in the United States, has slanderously said that his hospital was a place of torture? Such slanders are disgusting and revolting but it is still more disgusting that some people believe them, or yield to them or feel intimidated by such assertions, even when they are known to be totally false. That exclusion was so irritating that it could not be accepted.

It would have been our moral duty to immediately exclude anybody who could be accused of committing a crime, of being a drug trafficker, a corrupt or an immoral person; but it was impossible to accept that a comrade like he who has headed that hospital for 40 years is not allowed to travel. I asked myself: Could it be because the people have elected him a member of the National Assembly? But then, Fernández is also a member. So are Linares and Pacheco, who are team members. That could not be the reason.

The first difficulties came up with Alarcón: "Please, it would be better if his application for visa were withdrawn", they said. They were also concerned about Fernández but more about Alarcón because of his position. All right. Alarcón? No problem, we said. He is in London now but when he returns we will raise the matter with him. He was not traveling because he wanted to, he had been invited by several senior officials with the Major Leagues. We will persuade him that it is convenient to decline the invitation, we thought. So the problem with Alarcón was solved. There was still that of Fernández, the Chairman of the Cuban Olympic Committee. But then the problem of the airplanes came up, which was a lot more complicated than Fernández's. We had this gesture when we solved the problem of the airplanes but the worst problem of all was the one they raised at the last minute with the visas. It was obvious that someone wishing to do harm was at work.

I had a meeting with all the delegation members and it was really exciting. The athletes had already been chosen. This was on Saturday, on May Day, after that great parade which was an expression of our people and our workers feelings, the growing fighting spirit of our people; after that parade, we spent most of our time on the delicate issue of the visas. This problem came up around 3:30 in the afternoon and the delegation was supposed to leave the next morning. We had already called a meeting with the delegation at 6:00 p.m. I decided to present the problem to the athletes and all the members of the delegation.

So, I said: I come to bid farewell to a delegation which I still do not know if it will travel. There are such and such problems. I explained clearly what was happening with the visas. I said: Either everyone goes or nobody goes. (APPLAUSE) They did the same thing you are doing now, all the members of the delegation and all the athletes applauded heavily. Thus, we had reached a point where we did not know when they would be leaving, hoping that they would be able to, for our position was so reasonable that we expected a solution.

Well, the original plan was to leave at 10:00 on Sunday morning. It was no longer possible to leave at 10:00 a.m. that day. It was impossible to know that at the time we were meeting with the delegation the previous evening. The team was supposed to have a drilling session in Baltimore on Sunday afternoon. If the pending visas were not issued before 10:00 a.m. we could miss drilling here and there. Therefore, it was decided to have a drilling session on Sunday morning in Cuba.

While our meeting lasted, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. on Saturday evening, there was still no solution. We then made a plan: If we did not get an answer by midnight we would suspend the 10:00 a.m. trip. If we did not get an answer by 12:00 noon on Sunday, we would suspend the evening trip and wait until Monday at 10:00 a.m. I asked the athletes, especially the pitchers: "If you were to leave at 1:00 p.m. on the day of the game and arrive at the hotel at 5:00 p.m. after the trip, and if it were necessary to go from the hotel to have a look at the baseball field and get ready for the game, do you think you could still be as efficient and keep control? Would not this do you any harm?" They all said: "We can do it. Even if we have to begin a long trip at 1:00 p.m., we are ready to go directly to the stadium and be there."

So we reserved the possibility of waiting until Monday at 10 a.m. which would leave us only three hours to get to the airport, go through the indispensable arrangements there and board the plane. There was a possibility that our team, on top of all the problems I have listed, would have to go from the airport directly to the stadium. We were willing to honor our commitment if there was a reasonable response, and we hoped that they would ponder the problem. We could wait.

Actually, the only real consequence was that instead of leaving in the morning we left on Sunday afternoon, at 5:00 --I say we because I left with them, in spirit, right? (A member of the delegation shouts: "We wish you had!") I could do more for you from here.

They left at 5:00 p.m. and arrived at the hotel at 9:00, directly to bed. I know they slept about 12 hours, and that was of utmost importance. They had their drill in the morning, went back to the accommodations and had lunch, rested for a while, left for the airport, boarded the plane, arrived at the hotel at the foreseen time, had dinner, and went to sleep, for at least 12 hours --you could see that in their slugs yesterday. After lunch they also rested, and then off to the stadium.

There were all these problems. Fortunately, around 10:30 p.m. on Saturday, while we were in the ceremony with the Cuban Workers' Union, we received the news that the pending visas would be granted.

It just so happened that [Doctor] Ordaz had been in Washington last year to receive an award from the Pan-American Health Organization, and there was not the slightest problem with his visa. What a terrible thing might Ordaz have done to prevent him from going to Baltimore when the Pan-American Health Organization had awarded him a prize in Washington. Undoubtedly, this whole thing made no sense.

We were told that a great effort would be made during the night so that the visas would be ready by 10:00 a.m. next morning. That forced us to go ahead with the drilling in Cuba in the morning for, as I have said, if we moved the people to the airport in the early morning and the visas were not ready in time, we would not be able to drill here nor there. So we said: Drilling here in the morning, traveling in the afternoon. But the others actually kept their promise, they granted all the visas.

I am under the impression that someone made an absurd decision but not in the high government echelons, and as soon as some people there --legislators and influential people, even senior Major Leagues officials-- heard of it, they took steps and explained. The truth is that it took them six hours to answer, still in those ambiguous terms, that an effort would be made so they would be ready on time. That is the story.

It is still not known where the absurd idea came from to leave out one third of our delegation lacking any arguments to justify it. It was at that moment that, all of them together, made the decision not to accept any unjustifiable exclusions. It was not the government's decision, it was discussed and approved by all of them.

Before they went to bed by midnight, they were informed that the problem had been solved but that it was not advisable to leave in the morning due to the risks posed by any delay there might be in the granting of the visas. That was the last obstacle to overcome.

It is fair to admit that the top American authorities, who for one reason or another were involved in these difficulties, stood firm in their purpose to hold the match and were determined to respect, to the extent possible, what had been previously agreed. The issue of the planes was what became impossible for them to solve.

It must be said that the customs authorities in Baltimore streamlined and speeded up the procedures so that our athletes could be at the hotel by 9:00 p.m., and the authorities in charge of security were most cooperatives. Many scaring things had been announced which no one even remembered. It was absolutely impossible to scare an athlete or a member of this delegation.

The mayor of Baltimore --he has been mayor for several years now, an excellent person who has visited our country and was with us the day of the first match-- was one of the people who also went to great lengths to find solutions to the problems. He was very cooperative.

The people in Baltimore were hospitable, respectful and very interested in the game and its peaceful development. They were interested in the sport, not in the small groups involved in politicking and bent on creating disturbances and who, in fact, tried to more than once. It was about that subject that the comrade was asking a while ago.

Mr. Peter Angelos, main shareholder and rector of the Orioles was particularly gentle and courageous. Both, in the preceding period and during the years he had worked intensively for this match, to overcome difficulties to hold the game in Havana. Although their championship was almost about to begin and this game was going to take place in the middle of the season, he did his best, he did all he could. He left our country feeling really grateful, very obliged by all the attentions and the hospitality he was accorded here. He was number one in the efforts for this match.

I remember he was sitting beside me, to my right, during the game here in Havana, and when the game was not going well for his team I could see he was really tense. No one could tell who was going to win that game, and finally I said: "Well, after all the efforts you have made, it would be a real pity if..." I jokingly told them: "the company stocks will drop if you lose the game." We wanted to win, but we lost. I tried to comfort myself thinking: "It is better that they win this game, it is almost a well-deserved prize for those who did so much, a lot more than us, for that game. The other one over there, that one, we must win." He conducted himself superbly, as did other members, personalities and senior officials of the Major Leagues.

The fans there were respectful and enthusiastic. Our people also took trumpets, cymbals and all that, but following a principle: not do anything that might upset the athletes or hinder their performance. If there is a home run, all those instruments can be played while the players are running the bases; or they can all be played in between innings, and we could hear trumpets and everything from here. I think

they had something over there that sounded like reveille. (He is told it was a trumpet) Oh, the trumpets. Armandito, the dry cleaner, was there; another very important member of the delegation, leading the orchestra. (APPLAUSE)

But above all, they should be courteous; above all, be courteous; not do anything that might offend the others' habits. If it were customary there to keep quiet while the ball is in play, everyone should keep quiet, and I recommended that they cheered and made all the possible noise at a moment when it was not at all disturbing. I mean, they should not do anything that might hurt the sensibility of that public. That was the first thing.

The second thing was not to give in to provocation, not to give those the possibility of dragging our people into acts of force. We said: if they pass you by, you keep quiet; if they speak nonsense, you keep quiet; you should keep your countenance and stay calm. You know very well that our people do not like to be insulted so I even told them that: Even if they insult you, keep going, turn a deaf ear unless they attack you physically; if they attack you physically, then defend yourselves with all the necessary energy, and that is how it was done. (APPLAUSE)

Let the trumpet sound, let's see, we have not heard it well (The trumpet is sounded) (APPLAUSE) It sounds like a train, a locomotive (The trumpet is sounded again) But, we are not in between innings now, we are batting here. (LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE) I only asked you once, do not sound it anymore.

They behaved with the adequate civility. They cheered the team on. They were 300 and it seemed like there were thousands. Besides, around 3,000 U.S. residents, people of different nationalities including Cubans, went to the stadium to give their support.

I have already said that the fans were very respectful; and on the various occasions when certain individuals jumped into the field to carry out their provocation, the fans there booed them and condemned their actions. As usual, it was a stupid action by those individuals who thought they would gain something by it and what they really gained was the rejection of all the fans.

The case this comrade was referring to was when one of these crazy individuals ran toward the second base umpire. The TV images have been shown. On the TV broadcast we were watching we could not see the beginning of the trouble but we did see it later broadcast by CNN, which had taken some shots of the moment when this individual was approaching the umpire.

We analyzed it later when we saw the exact place where the incident occurred, the aggressive attitude of that individual when he approached the umpire from behind. He rushed to him carrying a sign. That is the way we saw it. The images are there, I recommended that they be played. I was talking to him [the umpire] about them, and I think the television already broadcast them, that is, that part when he arrived and a sort of Greek-Roman wrestling match followed between the umpire and that guy. The heckler must have known some sort of martial art because there was a moment when he tried to artfully immobilize the umpire. But the umpire, a fast man, and perhaps a true prospect in judo or Greek-Roman wrestling --I do not know what it might be-- (APPLAUSE) managed to get him off his back, control him, although the guy was heavy, and "delicately" put him on the "turf". It was truly elegant. He had him there, not a punch, not a kick, a true champion of equanimity, although one could tell he was really angry.

It is hard to conceive that someone could jump into the field and walk all the way to second base, where the umpire was, to attack him there. If he had only been carrying a piece of paper... but no, he practically went to rub the sign on the umpire's face, that you can see clearly in the picture. Now, he really kept his countenance, therefore, he overpowered the intruder and then delicately handed over to the police the paper the guy was carrying. That was the incident.

He felt that the police did not do what it was supposed to do. I told him he had to put himself in the police's place and understand how used to tolerance these hecklers have always been. They jumped

from any place and took the police by surprise, and the police could not prevent them from doing those stupid things because, well, the man got to the second base. What did the fans there do? They booed that fellow.

I hope some good pictures are taken of the martial art employed by our umpire to restore discipline there against the aggressor. I think the police thanked him afterwards for his cooperation.

The players were watching but calmly. They behaved exactly as they should. The Orioles have confidence in our umpires and that we take as an honor because they saw our home umpire here and they asked that he be the home umpire there. Why? Because of his righteousness and his impartial decisions. They have great confidence in our umpires because of their impartiality which is a principle of our sports.

This was the only visible incident where the hecklers made fools of themselves. They cannot blame us at all because that umpire was assaulted right on the base where he had to work. It was not on first base, or third base, or the right-field or left-field boundary lines; it was right in the center of the infield.

That is what happened. You should see what the TV shot, although what you see is the moment when he gets there, it is too short, too brief. However, the whole fight is on film. It must have lasted a minute. To me, at least a minute passed before everything went back to normal and the umpire could go back to his place.

I understand the police arrested a group of those who had jumped into the field more than once. They will probably be let loose soon, that is not so important. After all, a gesture is a gesture, that is, to arrest four of those hooligans who were breaking all the rules and putting the authorities and senior officials in a tough spot. But these ruffians do not care about that.

The fans there wanted the match to be a success, they wanted to see a sports show although they saw a wrestling match for free right in the middle of the game. (APPLAUSE) That is the story.

I would like to add something else. You saw that it was a large delegation. You will probably think: what a lot of money the country has spent to send such a big delegation! In the talks with Mr. Peter Angelos, who always offered his cooperation, a lot was discussed about where the proceeds would go to. It was finally decided that each side would decide about their own proceeds. Ours were small because there an admission ticket is very expensive. The cheapest is 10 dollars, from 10 to 35 dollars the 48,000 seats. So, from that alone, they collected around a million dollars. Then they also earn from publicity, from the numerous television networks, commercials, everything. We did not have any of that here, there was no time to prepare it. What was earned from a television network here barely covered the costs, but the proceeds there were big and we agreed that part of them would be used to pay for the travelling expenses of our team and delegation. In other words, the Orioles paid for the aircraft chartered, the round-trip airfares, and the expenses of our delegation for the time it stayed there. I can tell you that the services of that big plane cost around 200,000 dollars. They also paid for the hotel expenses, all the expenses in Baltimore, so the trip of this valuable and numerous delegation did not cost us a penny. Nobody should think that the country has spent a single penny.

Very well. They complied with everything and were extremely kind. They invited a delegation of children baseball players in two categories, two age groups, to play a game. Was it part of the agreement or did they themselves propose to mingle for the match? (He is told that it was their proposal) It is all right that there should be a competition between full athletes, but as for children they were not going to make a small team here and another there. I thought it was a good idea that they should mingle. They brought children here and reciprocated inviting our children.

The Orioles athletes were friendly, respectful and decent with the members of our team; they were angry because of the provocation, mostly after the incident provoked by the individual who went all the way to the umpire. We must recognize all this. I think the American fans have had the opportunity to

watch a great game. Also, in all the Caribbean islands, Central America, everywhere. It is possible that there are also fans in Europe, in Italy, in the Netherlands, in Japan. I imagine that in all of these countries, tens of millions of people watched this historic game.

We did not go there looking for anything, that is quite clear: we were not after economic or political advantages of any sort, nor were we trying to make propaganda. There cannot be more propaganda than what the enemies of this Revolution have made with their foolishness for over 40 years. It is like a boomerang turning against them. When Americans come here and they watch a game and they meet the people, as they did in the first match, they are amazed. When they see the excellence of our team, the athletes' performance, they are amazed and they feel more respect for our country.

Our perception of that game --which had been in preparation for a long time-- is that it was a positive, constructive, peaceful event, and I think yesterday's match was just that.

We must not be boastful about our success because we played an excellent team, with many sluggers; one of them hit 50 homeruns in the past season. It is a strong team, with very strong hitters and many excellent pitchers. They played fair and square, just like we did, and in this case, overcoming all sorts of great obstacles --as I have already described-- we obtained a convincing victory.

What does this tell us? That we cannot rest on our laurels, that we are only beginning, that we must develop more and more athletes, that we must improve on our qualities, our skills, our abilities in this sport. Although all sports have been a source of satisfaction for our country, in this case our athletes and those accompanying them played a leading role in an event which is really historical in all respects, and what must be said and highlighted about that game is that it was a constructive event, an example of a peaceful, civilized activity.

A long time will still have to go before all our differences with that country can be left behind but it is very important that that country respects us, that it learns to respect us.

We recently waged a hard battle in Geneva, where they obtained a shamefully Pyrrhic victory, that is the truth. A few hours before the voting, Cuba had approximately five more votes than they did. It was the last night and early morning before the voting, when they realized that they were about to suffer a humiliating defeat, that they began to exert really heavy pressure on numerous Third World countries, forcing five countries who were going to vote with Cuba to abstain, and one which was going to abstain, to vote against us. That was what, together with the unanimous support of all the NATO members and some other unconditional allies, determined the one vote in their favor. I am citing this only as an example; you know the respect and support Cuba enjoys in the world.

I think it is now more important than ever for events like yesterday's game in Baltimore to take place. This event can serve as an example, an inspiration and a proof that many things can be achieved and important steps can be taken towards understanding, respect and peace among the peoples when responsibility and reason prevail.

This is but a sport event. It is important along the lines that I have explained, in terms of concepts, of ideas. There is another more important conflict.

Presently, brutal and destructive air strikes are taking place in the very heart of Europe, which are causing devastation, death and terror in a population of millions. Religious and ethnic conflicts have been considerably aggravated and thus hundreds of thousands of men, women and children, also horrified by the bombs and the war, are massively migrating.

On the eve of the next millennium Europe --that is, NATO and its members, the United States of America included-- is involved in what can be described, whether they like it or not, as genocide. That is what results from depriving one million people from electricity and heating services, overnight and in mid winter. Also from cutting off all communications, sources of energy and transportation; destroying non-

military facilities providing crucial services to all the population and tearing to pieces all the means of life created by a nation. Such destructive frenzy, either by mistake or recklessness, is directly killing or injuring thousands of civilians while trying to submit them by the destruction of their mass media and the intensification of the psychological warfare with overpowering technology and bombs. Unquestionably, this is a major genocide.

Europe is involved in a conflict hazardous to itself and the world. An extremely serious precedent is being set in defiance of international law and the United Nations Organization, and resulting in an increasingly complicated situation.

We are of the view that in such a predicament only a political, and not a military, solution is possible based on respect for the rights of every nation in that region, and every religion, ethnic group and culture: a solution for both, Serbians and Kosovars. I am deeply convinced that the problem cannot be solved by force, that the military technology will crash against the will of any people determined to fight. I firmly believe that when the people are willing to fight --and this is how I feel about our own people, too-- no power, regardless of its might, can throw them down on their knees.

In the case of Serbia, the aggressor thought it would be a simple walk, a three days adventure, that the Serbians would surrender to the first bombs. Forty days have already passed and thousands and thousands of bombs have been dropped, however, we do not perceive any symptom of weakness in their will to fight. This we know by keeping in touch, through cellular phones --the only means of communication-- with three Cuban diplomats in Belgrade who relate to us what is happening there every day and after every night of Dantesque bombing.

We are told by those diplomats about the extraordinary morale of the Serbian people, in general, and particularly the people in Belgrade where planes are constantly flying at low altitude, thundering in the sky, terrorizing and causing traumas in children --hundreds of thousands, millions of children and adolescents afflicted perhaps for life-- youth, women and elders affected by the noise of the explosions and the constant attacks, whose growing viciousness is being proclaimed. Once again I insist that such a path will not lead to the solution of the problem. I firmly believe that there is no other choice, for anybody, but to work toward a political solution which is possible on the basis of common sense and rationality.

From the beginning of the attacks we realized that they would be useless and would only bring about a catastrophe. We are aware of the history of World War II, the nazi invasion of Yugoslavia and that people's long resistance. This time the aggressors do not even want to use ground forces since they believe that their smart bombs and guided missiles can solve the problem. But the problem cannot be solved with missiles, bombs or ground troops because when the people are determined to fight they do so everywhere, from all directions, and every house may become a fortress, every man or woman a combatant. It is not a matter of armored divisions, artillery groups, air or navy war fleets.

We know very well how we would conduct a struggle in our country under similar conditions and so do millions of people here; all those methods would be useless. This country cannot be conquered by anyone; a country that is willing to fight becomes unconquerable. It is wrong to try to conquer it. It already happened in Vietnam where the Americans understood it only when they had lost over 50 000 lives and killed 4 million Vietnamese. Well, now, they are in a similar situation there, and one that can become more complicated if the Serbians everywhere give their support to the Serbians inside Serbia. Then, the political situation in Russia would become untenable because the ethnic bonds between both peoples are very strong.

Other peoples will draw their own conclusions. I think the Russians are drawing theirs -- after all that has happened to them in the past and all that can still happen to them in the future-- when they see the numberless bombs dropped by a military alliance driven increasingly arrogant, haughty and furious by an unexpected resistance. Europe and NATO have become the hostages of a subjective factor: the decision the Serbians might adopt, or maybe not, to resist to the end although it is to be assumed that

after such destruction they would not be much inclined to give up. What is happening there was obvious to us from the beginning. This does not mean that we are against anybody's rights; we support both, the rights of the Serbians and the Kosovars' rights.

When we were recently informed that Guantanamo Naval Base would be used to accommodate 20 000 Kosovar refugees, we immediately agreed, and I think it is the first time that we have agreed with anything the United States of America has done in that base. It is not that they requested our permission or agreement, actually they simply were kind enough to communicate to us that they would do that. They explained their purposes, they said it would be for a limited period of time while the conflict was settled, and so on. The least they expected --they do not know this country yet-- was our reply.

We said that we did not only agree that 20 000 Kosovar refugees were sheltered there but also that we were willing to cooperate as much as possible in providing care for those refugees, that we offered our hospital services if required, our doctors and any other cooperation within our capabilities.

Finally, they were not sent in and it was a clever thing to rectify that decision because they would have been much criticized. The truth is that none of the NATO countries, which have dropped so many bombs there, really want to receive refugees. There is much xenophobia and selfishness in the West. They had said they would receive from 80 000 to 100 000 but they have only received a few thousands because they do not want to have Kosovar refugees in their own territories, so they have done nothing significant. Anyway, it was a political mistake but we were informed and we said that we agreed.

There is something else. There is this international humanitarian organization known as the St. Egidious Religious Community which cares for refugees; it has relations with the Catholic Church and works mostly in supportive actions every time there are refugee problems.

Although we strongly condemn the brutal and genocidal attacks against the Serbian people, we also share in the suffering of the hundreds of thousands of refugees dragged to such condition by a series of longstanding factors, not only historic in nature, but also associated to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a country that had lived in peace for 40 years after World War II.

Those who disintegrated Yugoslavia and stirred up the national ethnic and religious conflicts are greatly responsible for what is happening there now. Many of Europe's statesmen and public figures are aware of Europe's responsibility in that process. Those who so lightly agreed to use all their sophisticated and overwhelming military technology against what was left of the former Yugoslavia bear a great responsibility for what is going on there and the misery of those hundreds of thousands of refugees.

As for solutions, we advocate solutions for all the parties involved: refugees, citizens of Kosovo, Serbians and people of other nationalities living there, and all the nations that make up what is left of Yugoslavia today. That is, from the humane point of view our sympathies are with all the suffering people there. In this token, when several weeks ago, in the first days of April, we were visited by leaders of the St. Egidious Religious Community and they explained to us what they were doing to provide care and assistance to those distressed refugees, for which purpose they had about 30 medical doctors --this happened a few weeks ago but I have not mentioned it before, I am doing it for the first time-- we said to them: "Look, we do not have abundant resources but we have a human asset. If you needed medical personnel to care for those hundreds of thousands of refugees living in deprived camps, our country would be willing to contribute with one thousand physicians, absolutely free of charge, to care for the Kosovar refugees." (APPLAUSE)

Based on a longstanding experience we know that language is not a barrier. A six months old baby speaks no language at all, however, he/she can be cared for by a doctor. This offer we made to the leaders of the St. Egidious Community on the night of April 5, that is, 12 days after the onset of the NATO attacks.

You are all aware of our country's medical power and that now an ever increasing number of our doctors can be found in the most unbelievable places. I really wish our young people would have an idea of the conditions under which the Cuban doctors are working in Central America. If we want an example of what they can do, comparable to what our athletes do, comparable to what some comrade athletes have done renouncing tens of millions of dollars; what those selfless doctors do in out-of-the-way places where there is often no electricity, no communications, nothing, where they receive a letter only once in a long while. And the way they have identified themselves with the problems there and the good services they are rendering, compensated by something that makes them very happy: the recognition and gratitude of the people they are caring for.

I have spoken with some of them, and when you have the opportunity of seeing such examples you realize what the human beings are capable of when their best feelings and qualities have been cultivated. I have seen that in those doctors who are in Central America, in Haiti, those who are in Africa and those who are ready to leave.

We have sometimes said, as proof of the human capital created by the Revolution, that if a group of rich industrialized countries would jointly try to put together 2,000 volunteers to go work in those places, they would not find them, they would not be able to put them together. I dare to say so, categorically. The United States would not be able to get together 2,000 volunteer doctors to go work where our doctors are working. I say this because it is really amazing, impressive to know in detail what those doctors are doing.

That is why our country can talk about 100, 200, 500 and 1,000 doctors because I am sure that if it were necessary, we would not lack volunteers immediately willing to go to Albania, to Macedonia, anywhere where there are refugees, and even to Kosovo itself, because what they have never lacked and will never lack here is courage (APPLAUSE), and we have proof of this.

When a Cuban is told: look, there are two places, you can either go to X or Y. There is more danger in X than in Y, where do you prefer to go? He immediately answers: X. Such is our tradition of heroism. And not only men, but something very encouraging: women, just like men. Many of the doctors in those places are women.

We also had 2,000 teachers in the most remote mountains of Nicaragua. That will never be forgotten and now, in support of the medical programs undertaken by our country abroad, the health workers' union has handed us books with the signature of more than 300,000 health workers --doctors, paramedics, technicians, even people working in hospital services and activities-- expressing their willingness to join any kind of health effort, and our health care system would not be at all affected by this.

We can proudly say that the Latin American School of Medicine is commencing its activities. It will receive 1,250 Latin American students every year (APPLAUSE) a large part of them from areas where indigenous and poor people live.

The offer of scholarships to study in that school has had a great impact in many countries. Many people are showing interest, visiting it. It has not been dedicated yet but I am sure it will be an excellent school capable of transmitting the Cuban concepts about the role of a doctor and the nature of a doctor's mission. That is the main thing, young people from all parts of Latin America who will get to know one another.

The information we have about that school is really very good, and I hope that these youths are better students than the Cubans because the Cubans are used to having scholarships and all sorts of possibilities, and the boys and girls who are there, from very poor regions, and generally the children of poor families, never dreamed, or perhaps they did dream, but only dreamed of the possibility to study medicine. And our country's medicine has great prestige, and its prestige in the world is growing.

They are going to be better students than our own and we like that. Because that is the way it should to be. They will bear the concept of a doctor's duty as a guardian of health, a missionary for health and life. Sometimes I have used a religious term to describe it: a priest of health and life. That is why we can be absolutely sure to do what a nation of almost 300 million people, the richest in the world, cannot do: finding 2,000 volunteers to do what our doctors are doing.

How many can our country mobilize? If it were 2,000, which was what we offered Central America --they still have not received the 2,000, that takes time, it does not depend on us but on them, on creating the conditions; if it were up to us, they would all be already there-- we would send 2,000 now and in August we will be graduating 2,500. And the forge, the factory to produce doctors, good doctors, is there in our 21 medical faculties, none of which has been closed during the special period. And now with this Latin American faculty we have 22. (APPLAUSE) A tremendous potential, not only a sport potential but also a medical and a scientific potential.

I have dared to explain all this because even though I strongly condemn, from the bottom of my heart, the crime that is being committed today against a nation, I share and defend the rights of all those who for one reason or another have been subjected to terrible suffering. Let this occasion serve to ratify our readiness to send the doctors that all the Kosovar refugee camps may need until they return to their country; and when that day comes --we have no doubts that it would be soon if a political solution is sought without arrogance-- we would be ready to go help them resettle in the territory of Kosovo. That was the last idea I wanted to express.

How do we perceive and would want you to perceive the match and the sports success we are celebrating today? As a constructive event, as an example that should call to reason and responsibility those who have that solution in their hands. Our small example, our small, friendly, peaceful match in Baltimore, despite the enormous differences we have with that country, is also in that respect a historic event. That is why we could not remain idle when, already past midnight, that game ended the way it did. Many things were proved there which strengthened our conviction that we will continue making progress in this field, and that we will have many opportunities to congratulate our athletes in this and other sports. We said: "This cannot be limited to just sending our congratulations to these comrades through the newspaper".

This was at 1:00 a.m., we had just had a huge mobilization for the May Day celebrations. Today, it was a working day and a day of study but we thought: "We must welcome the athletes." (APPLAUSE) The mobilization was organized in two hours. All the forces were put in motion, the workers, the mass organizations, the Party; no one slept. [Havana Party Secretary Esteban] Lazo did not have a minute of sleep nor did the Party and other organizations' officials. The formidable machinery, which is our united people, was put in motion and in a matter of minutes it mobilized a large number of people.

We left the airport before the athletes did to arrive at the University before they did and there was a river of people along that whole avenue; we did not know how we were going to get here. It was a true river of people that was mobilized. And here you cannot really tell, you cannot see, it is not like in the Revolution Square, because here I cannot see those who are beyond those steps. It is difficult to speak with someone you cannot see because if you see them become distracted, you notice them, make them a sign, embarrass them a little, and order and silence is restored, as we have here right now.

I hope you will forgive me for keeping you under the sun for so long, but I thought that this mobilization was worthwhile. (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "FIDEL! FIDEL!")

The athletes are anxious to get back to their families. From here they will go to the sports-village to fetch a few things and home from there. They already have a future engagement. Today is the 4th, within 15 days, more or less, on a Wednesday, this troop has to get together again to strive for a place in the Cuba team.

The Cuba team has not been formed yet and the talents are many but they will begin to get ready as

soon as they get their rest.

The people of Havana really deserve congratulations --we expected nothing short of this-- because it has set a record. I do not think such a big rally was ever organized in such short a time. The people of the Cuban Radio and Television Institute were hurrying since dawn. They woke up the Rector of the University and all the rest. I also woke up some people. I found them half asleep but joyful about our victory. I told them: "Wait, that is not the problem, we have to mobilize. We have to call the journalists, the radio stations, the television, the morning programs." You cannot imagine how many people were mobilized in a matter of hours. We were even thinking of using the Revolution Square, but being so big it was not possible to set up the necessary technical facilities there.

I do not know where they should have placed this platform. Maybe up there or somewhere else, to see the people there behind you. I cannot see the sidewalk at the foot of the steps down there.

The Lenin school was first going to be taken somewhere else and then Lazo decided for it to come here where they were going to be up front. (APPLAUSE) I am very glad to see you here, and I also want to congratulate you for the May Day parade. The march of the school was very impressive. (APPLAUSE) That is why no one can accuse us of being dreamers. Yes, we have to be dreamers, we have to dream of things but at the same time we have to make our dreams come true.

I remember that dream of a school such as this one, with a capacity for 4,500 students, some years ago, when the place was selected, when the construction brigades were sought, when the blueprints of the school were made near the Botanical Garden in the area of Lenin Park. I can assure you that this school --I am telling you frankly-- is even better than that school we once dreamed of. (APPLAUSE) We want you always in the vanguard and always in the front line. Lazo would have made a great mistake placing you along the highway instead of bringing you here and placing you in the front line as the outstanding students you all are. (APPLAUSE)

What better place to pay homage to our heroic athletes than these University steps where so many pages have been written in the history of our country; here, next to the Alma Mater, in this University of Mella and José Antonio Echeverría, in this University of so many heroic fighters. What place could be more symbolic for them to bring and deposit their flag.

If those who have to make the decision allow me, I would like to propose that this flag be kept on this University hill. (APPLAUSE)

All that they did yesterday, all that you saw yesterday, proves that when we say Socialism or Death! Homeland or Death! We Shall Overcome! it is true.

(OVATION)

Versiónes Taquigráficas - Consejo de Estado

Source URL: <http://www.comandanteenjefe.info/en/discursos/address-reception-delegation-attended-baltimore-sports>

Links

[1] <http://www.comandanteenjefe.info/en/discursos/address-reception-delegation-attended-baltimore-sports>