

FOURTH REFLECTION ON THE PAN-AMERICAN GAMES: THE REVOLTING COMMERCIALIZATION OF ATHLETES

What, from the technological and economic points of view, has been the worst problem faced by poor countries? The brain drain.

What has been their worst problem in patriotic and educational terms? Talent theft.

In poor countries, local newspapers and honest individuals who are interested in sports begin to ask themselves why they must endure the theft of their nation's talented athletes, after the many sacrifices and investments it took to train them.

Cuba, whose successes and efforts in the field of amateur sports no one can put in question, suffers these kinds of piranha bites more than any other country. Just look at how the talent scouts react to Cuba's accusations. When I spoke of the German mafia and the millions of dollars it had at its disposal to bribe Cuban athletes, they immediately felt they had been alluded to and declared: "no, no, we're not a mafia!".

They gave a detailed account of how the shameful business of purchasing and selling boxers works. I quote their statements below, in the order they reached me:

Hamburg, July 24 (DPA) - The heads of Arena Box Promotions, a German company that scouts foreign amateur boxers to turn them into professionals, defended themselves today from criticisms by Cuban President Fidel Castro.

Castro's accusations reached Muller-Michaelis through DPA, which, in an article today published by Cuban newspapers, confirmed the desertions of two-time world and Olympic champion Guillermo Rigondeaux and world champion Erislandy Lara, members of Cuba's delegation at the Pan-American Games held in Rio de Janeiro.

"In Germany, there is a mafia devoted to selecting, buying and promoting Cuban boxers in international boxing matches", the Cuban leader affirmed. "It uses sophisticated psychological methods and many millions of dollars", he added.

Hamburg, July 25 (DPA) - The two Cuban boxers who deserted during this year's Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara, turned to mediators to come into contact with the German promotional agency Arena Box Promotions, according to declarations for a Berlin newspaper made by Turkish German promoter Ahmet Oner, president of the company.

In the brief declarations he offered the newspaper, Oner claims it was the boxers who separated themselves from their country's delegation and sought contact with his company, and not the other way around, as was insinuated in a number of Cuban media.

In view of this, Oner, who is not currently in Germany but vacationing somewhere in Southern Europe, said that he decided to send emissaries to South America to try and contact Rigondeaux and Lara, offering no further details.

Oner's declarations were confirmed in Hamburg today by Arena spokesman Malthe Muller-Michaelis,

who reiterated that the initiative was the Cuban deserters', as he declared to the press agency DPA.

In this case, the athletes in question are Odlanier Solís, Yuriokis Gamboa and Yan Barthelemy, who are currently not in Germany but vacationing abroad.

In this connection, Peter Danckert, chairman of the Bundestag Sports Commission (Lower Chamber) of the German Parliament refused to make declarations on the Cuban boxers who deserted.

I'll let the experts on the matter do that, he commented in response to a request from the agency DPA in Berlin.

Hamburg, -July 26 (DPA) - The two Cuban boxers who "deserted" at the 2007 Pan-American Games in Rio, Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara, are currently in Turkey, where they await a German visitor's permit, according to an article published by the newspaper Morgenpost today.

We have hired Rigondeaux and Lara, the Turkish president of the Hamburg promotional agency Arena, Ahmet Oner, told the newspaper.

Fidel, naturally, is angry, but he has no reason to be surprised. His boxers do not want to be amateurs their entire lives, they want to make money, Oner declared for the paper.

Fidel wants to hide his formidable boxers from the world. I show them to the world, the young, 34-year-old promoter underscored.

Twenty-six-year-old Rigondeaux is extraordinarily talented. Between 1999 and 2003, the two-time bantamweight Olympic champion won 142 consecutive fights.

Oner told Morgenpost that, Castro's anger vis-à-vis the "German mafia" notwithstanding, he wants to do business with the Cuban president. I will suggest to him organizing a boxing evening in Havana shortly, he added.

Hamburg, July 26 (DPA) - Cuban boxers Guillermo Rigondeaux, two-time bantamweight Olympic champion, and Erislandy Lara, world welterweight champion, signed contracts with the German Arena Box Promotions following their 'desertion' during the Pan-American Games of Rio de Janeiro.

All speculations have come to an end: Rigondeaux and Lara have signed five-year contracts with Arena, a communiqué published by the Hamburg-based company headed by Turkish-German promoter Ahmet Oner confirmed today.

According to the communiqué issued by Arena, the two boxers will shortly travel to Germany. Oner refused to reveal the current whereabouts of Rigondeaux and Lara, for understandable reasons, but he commented that the steps needed to secure visitor permits and German residencies were being taken.

HAMBURG, July 26 (AP) - "Two Cuban boxers who defected during the Pan American Games in Brazil signed five-year contracts Thursday to fight on a cable television station.

"Guillermo Rigondeaux, a bantamweight who won gold at the 2000 and 2004 Olympics, and Erislandy Lara, an amateur welterweight world champion, signed with Arena TV.

Arena TV is the company that other three first-class Cuban boxers, who deserted in December, signed with.

"Now the best up-and-coming professionals in the world fight for Arena', company boss Ahmet Oner said."

"The two fighters failed to appear for bouts after leaving the Pan Ams athletes' village Sunday in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

"Since the 2004 Olympics, the Cuban boxing program has been hit hard by defections, with several champions now fighting professionally in the United States and Europe".

Arena wants to secure a place for itself in the world of televised sports and believes the Cubans are a great investment.

Rio de Janeiro - July 26 (EFE) - In declarations for a Brazilian newspaper, German businessman Ahmet Omer, promoter of four Cuban boxers who have already sought asylum in Germany, admitted he organized the get-away of two Cuban boxers who deserted during the Pan-American Games of Rio de Janeiro.

I organized the whole thing, the owner of the company Arena Box Promotions stated during declarations published today by the Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper, where he admitted having paid nearly half a million dollars to finance the operation.

Twenty-six-year-old two-time bantamweight Olympic and world champion Rigondeaux was one of Cuba's main figures at the Rio de Janeiro Pan-American Games and was considered a sure medal for the country.

The boxers' desertion was discovered this week when they failed to appear for weighting, to which they had to be submitted to fight in their respective categories, in which they were gold-medal candidates.

A German company here with contacts in South America brought me Barthelemy, Gamboa and Solís in December. I paid good money for them. They later brought me Ridondeaux and Lara, the boxers' representative affirmed.

I took good care of Solís, Gamboa and Barthelemy, who are friends of Rigondeaux and Lara's. I believe that helped, the businessman added upon commenting that the boxers' friendship helped in making the other two Olympic champions opt for deserting to begin professional careers in Germany.

The German promoter said that the operation undertaken last December to organize the desertion of three boxers and transport them to Germany cost him around 1.5 million dollars.

The five will be world professional boxing champions. Today, I am the youngest boxing promoter in Europe. With them, I will be the greatest, he declared.

Hamburg, July 26 (DPA) - The desertion had been planned months in advance, for a tournament in Ankara. But, on that occasion, Cuba participated with a B team, without Rigondeaux, which was the boxer Oner was most interested in.

Following this, when Cuba decided not to take part in Germany's Halle tournament, where the Chemie Pokal tournament is traditionally held, Oner began to suspect Cuba had been tipped off that a boxer was considering desertion. The city of Halle and the Chemie Pokal tournament had been the stage, already over a decade ago, of the desertion of Cuban cruiserweight boxer Juan Carlos Gómez (one of the four boxers who had been bought in the past).

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That is why we set our sights on Rio and the Pan-American games, where we finally reached our objective, he said.

Now, we are going through the red tape with the boys, and, once we have all of the documents, we'll travel to Germany, where we will give them a welcoming ceremony at the appropriate time, he pointed out. The two Cubans signed five-year contracts.

For the other Cubans, all this took three months. With these two young men, we'll take half the time, that is to say, a month and a half.

Just look at how they boast about their foul deed against our country. Everyone knew perfectly well that Cuba would obtain nearly all gold medals in boxing. They had to deal our country a blow, and they not only bought two athletes who were sure to win gold medals, they also attempted to deal a blow to the pristine morale of the other athletes who continued to defend their gold medals with valor. The low blow even had repercussions among the judges.

But they would never have been able, not with all of the world's money, to buy men like Stevenson, Savón, or the deceased Roberto Balado, whose beautiful tradition bequeathed much glory to Cuban boxing.

In spite of everything, we have already won 44 gold medals.

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