

A written record

Many events important events take place around the world. Some are related to Cuba. Sometimes, the news reaching our country are much more interesting than a simple reflection I can offer with the purpose of raising the public's awareness.

The BBC interview of Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, one of our Five Heroes, which was televised yesterday, had a profound impact on me. What human content, profundity and brilliance characterized it, qualities that only a mind that has endured 9 years of unjust psychological torture can have. We urge the Round Table to continue to inform us on the historic process surrounding the fate of these, our heroic fellow Cubans.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, the press continues to dig up stories and to report on the activities of the two boxers who, breaking the rules, disappeared from the accommodations where the Cuban delegation was lodged.

An EFE cable published in Rio de Janeiro on August 3 reports:

"After being caught in a resort near Rio, where they spent some days with a Cuban and a German businessman, and three prostitutes, the boxers were taken to a hotel in the night; they are under custody by the Federal Police.

"Ringodeaux and Lara were arrested at Araruama last Thursday. According to the police, the boxers regretted what had happened, they want to return to Cuba" and alleged to have been the victims of a planned strike, for which they were drugged by the promoters before being taken out of the Pan-American complex. The athletes turned down the offer of two lawyers who approached them at Federal Police headquarters and insisted on representing them.

"The Cuban athletes, however, had been seen in different resorts in the north coast of Rio de Janeiro, enjoying the resorts and partying full of alcohol and women". According to the owners of inns located in the Squarema resort who were interviewed by O Globo, the two boxers, accompanied by a Cuban and German businessmen, spent several days in that city before traveling to Araruama, accompanied by three prostitutes hired in Rio de Janeiro. 'They are good people, they treated us as if we were their girlfriends and they even told us they were going to miss us', one of the women declared, admitting to having received nearly one hundred dollars a day, in her statements for O Globo".

These are uncomfortable but essential details and I cannot use terms different from those chosen by the press agency in its article. I imagine the boxers informed their closest, adult relatives about these facts.

Yesterday, August 6, a cable from the same agency reported:

The Brazilian police stated it believed the story of the events recounted by the two Cuban boxers who were deported to their country after they disappeared during the Pan-American Games of Rio de Janeiro. They claimed they had been drugged and deceived by two promoters who sought to take them with them to Germany.

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We believe what they told us and we consider their story feasible and probable, Federal Police captain Felicio Latera, who headed the investigation, told EFE today

The Brazilian police is not investigating the alleged desertion of the two Cubans, it is investigating the two promoters who attempted to snatch them, the captain declared.

That same day, EFE reported in that same cable that:

During an interview with a Brazilian newspaper, German businessman Ahmet Öner, the promoter of four Cuban boxers who have already secured asylum in Germany, admitted that he organized Rigondeaux's and Lara's escape, for which he claims to have paid nearly half a million dollars".

We do not doubt that the Federal Police thought the athletes' regret sincere. That institution was tasked with securing, from the Cuban consulate, the documentation that the boxers were urgently requesting and with giving an account of what had occurred to them in their 12-day absence.

For the immense majority of our people, who educate and train the athletes with so much sacrifice, what is essential is their moral behavior.

The person, who is most to blame, in my opinion, is Erislandy Lara, who as captain of the boxing team broke the rules and played directly into the hands of the mercenaries. He is a 24 years old student of physical education and sports at the university. The two boxers are unaware of the negative influence which their close friendships with the boxers who were bribed in Venezuela had on their behavior, and they likely did not predict the indiscrete verbiage with which the owner of the mafia-like company was to speak after they failed to attend the weight-in.

The two athletes were reluctant to speak to the press. Miguel Hernández, a Granma journalist, greeted them at the airport and conversed with them about the matter. The answers were disappointing for him, who attempted to write a convincing article proving the sincerity of the boxers.

Julita Osendi, a television reporter who was well informed about the Pan-American Games held in Rio, arranged a meeting with them and made efforts to persuade them to speak with absolute frankness. They were more forthcoming and shared with her a number of additional details about their unusual adventure, but the final outcome of the interview was the same.

I asked comrade Fernández, the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers responsible for the National Institute for Sports and Recreation (INDER), among other institutions, to send me a transcription of Osendi's interview with Erislandy Lara and Guillermo Rigondeaux. The images were not enough for me; I wanted to analyze each question and answer. The text is twice as long as this reflection.

I will ask Granma to publish it in the sports or another section, for there to be a written record of the conversation.

Many poor countries face no problems with their professional athletes but, in those countries, many people also die prematurely or suffer incapacitating illnesses due to a lack of exercise. Rich developed countries also endure this tragic state of affairs as a result of the shortcomings of their rotten system and the commercial spirit of their medical services.

The athlete who abandons his delegation is not unlike the soldier who abandons his fellow men in the midst of combat. Cuba has many talented athletes but it has not stolen them from anyone. The people, what's more, are the ones who enjoy their marvelous performances. It is already a part of their culture, their wellbeing and their spiritual wealth.

The Revolution has kept its word. It promised to treat the two athletes in a humane fashion, to reunite them with their families immediately, offer them access to the press if they so requested it and provide

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them with decent employment in accordance with their experience. We have also diligently cared for their health, as we do with all citizens.

It was essential, as an elementary act of justice, to listen to them, to find out to what extent they regretted their involvement in so painful an incident.

We have made the facts we were able to gather available to our people. The athletes wish to return to their families. As part of a Cuban delegation of that sport discipline, they have reached a point of no return.

We, on the other hand, must continue the struggle. The time has come to put together the list of Cuban boxers who will participate in the Beijing Olympics, about one year before this event. First, they must travel to the United States to participate in the World Championship, one of the three qualifying events of the Olympic Games. Just picture the mafia sharks lurking about in search of fresh meat.

They should be warned of one thing: we are not eager to make home deliveries. Cuba will not sacrifice one bit of honor, nor any of its ideas, for Olympic gold medals; the morale and patriotism of its athletes shall prevail above all else. We know that, in the world of boxing, the size of the ring and gloves have been modified to strike at our country, which wins so many medals in this sport, so as to finally include professional boxing in the Olympic Games as well.

Sport authorities are analyzing all possible alternatives, including the option of changing the list of boxers or of not sending any delegation whatsoever, in spite of the penalties that may be in store for us. They are also analyzing strategies and tactics we could follow.

We will maintain our principled policy, even if the world heads more and more resolutely towards professionalism, and as in the times of Kid Chocolate, a true genius, even when there are no medals for healthy sports and the only conceivable disciplines are those which put a price tag on pitching balls that are impossible to bat, batting homeruns and throwing and enduring punches with no protection whatsoever. We will never return to such a time.

Healthy sport practices are incompatible with consumerism and wastefulness, phenomena which are at the root of the irreversible economic and social crisis facing the globalized world.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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