

COMMERCIALIZING SPORTS

Fidel Castro Ruz

A short while ago I was saying about the brain drain that is disgusting. A bit later, a good offensive player on the Cuban handball team showed up wearing the uniform of a professional Sao Paulo team.

Betrayal for money is one of the favorite weapons the United States uses to destroy Cuba's resistance. The athlete was a higher education student; he would be a graduate with a degree in Physical Education and Sport, an honorable job. His income is modest, but his professional training is highly appreciated; whatever the sport or specialty, if they attract a large audience and commercial publicity or none at all they are still useful for human growth.

Those that applied for asylum in Brazil are doing it after the United States declared recently that it would not be fulfilling the exact quotas of the migratory agreements signed with our country. Suffice it to say that of the almost two hundred athletes and coaches who participated in the first week of Pan American competition, we went missing one handball player and one gymnastics coach. I am not going to say, for that reason, that the Cuban handball team was better than the excellent Brazilian team and its formidable athletes, but the Cuban delegation received a low moral blow in the Pan American Games with these pleas for political asylum. The Cuban team was thus knocked out even before the match for gold began.

Last Sunday, July 22, around noon, the sad news was received that two of the most outstanding athletes in boxing, Guillermo Rigondeaux Ortiz and Erislandy Lara Santoya did not show up for the weigh-in. Very simply they were knocked out by a punch to the chin, paid with American bills. No countdown was needed.

Watching those first matches in Rio, I exclaimed that our boxers were fighting with such elegance and technical mastery that they had transformed their rough sport into an art form. In Germany, there is a mafia devoted to selecting, buying and promoting Cuban boxers in international boxing matches. It uses sophisticated psychological methods and many millions of dollars. A mere three hours later, the victory of the Cuban Mariela Gonzalez Torres in the marathon, a classic Olympic sport which took her on a course of more than 40 kilometers, more than compensated for the treasons and her feat was engraved with golden letters in the annals of sports history of her country. The Cuban people must pay tribute to the heroic example of Mariela, born in the eastern province of Granma, where the rates of infant and maternal mortality were, in 2006, 4.4 per each thousand live births and 11 per 100 thousand deliveries, better than the figures in the United States. In her municipality, Rio Cauto, with a population of 47,918, the figure was zero on both counts. After all, Cuba has thousands of good coaches who work abroad with athletes who very often win gold medals in competitions against our own athletes. Another fact: there is an International School for Professors of Physical Education and Sport where more than 1300 students from the Third World are taking their higher education courses. A few days ago, 247

graduated. We do not encourage chauvinism or any superiority complex. We work with science and knowledge and on this basis we struggle to create the ethical values of a healthy mind in a healthy body.

It is totally unjustified to seek political asylum. If Brazil is not the final marketplace, it makes little difference. There are wealthy countries in the First World who would pay much more. The Brazilian authorities have declared that whoever wishes to defect must prove the real necessity for seeking asylum. It is impossible to prove the opposite. Even beforehand, we know their final destination as mercenary athletes within a consumer society. I think that they have offended Brazil by using the Pan American Games as the pretext for their self-promotion. In any case, we consider the declarations of the authorities to be useful.

We would like Brazil, a sister nation in Latin America and the Third World, to have the honor of hosting the Olympics. □□□