

Cuban Players Apparently Defect

Associated Press Online

July 18, 1999; Sunday 21:36 Eastern Time

Copyright 1999 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

Section: Sports

Length: 678 words

Byline: CHRIS SHERIDAN

Dateline: SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico

Body

Four **Cuban** basketball **players** may have **defected** during an Olympic qualifying tournament, the organizing committee said Sunday.

"The information we have is that there are at least two of them and possibly more," said Salvador Villela, president of the organizers.

Cuba had only eight **players** in uniform Sunday for its 88-52 loss to the United States that eliminated the Cubans from advancing to the next round.

The team arrived at the arena without three of its four leading scorers: Lazaro Borrell, a 26-year-old center; Roberto Herrera, 24, a guard; and Angel Cabellero, 28, a guard. A fourth **player**, 23-year-old center Hector Pino, also was missing.

Herrera is the son of **Cuban** Basketball Federation president Ruperto Herrera. His brother, Ruperto Jr., **defected** in Argentina in May.

"We don't know if they **defected** or if they are with some Puerto Rican women," coach Miguel Calderon said. "What I can say is that they are not in the arena."

A spokeswoman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington said she had no information on any **Cuban defections** in San Juan.

Borrell was averaging 21.3 points in the tournament, and Herrera and Cabellero were the third- and fourth-leading scorers for Cuba. Pino had not played in Cuba's first three **games**.

"They (the **players**) have not told us anything," Calderon said. "Until they tell us something, we cannot make statements."

None of the **Cuban players** would comment before the **game**. One of them, center Amiel Vega, drew his finger across his mouth when asked what had happened. Two other **Cuban players** walked away when approached by a reporter.

The Pan American basketball federation confirmed four missing **players**. No one could immediately say for certain they had indeed **defected**.

Said Tomas Herrera, president of the **Cuban** delegation: "It would be a disgrace if we talk about these **players** as defectors and then they appear. When they appear, then a statement will be made."

Cuban Players Apparently Defect

The Cubans lost all four of their games in the 10-nation tournament. They did not play Saturday following their loss to Argentina on Friday.

The top two teams advance to the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia.

"The defections make you think about how lucky we are to live the way we live while members of the opposite team are trying to leave their country," U.S. forward Tom Gugliotta said.

Cuba has a history of defections at sports events, especially in baseball and often in Puerto Rico.

In 1993, basketball player Andres Guibert defected at a tournament in Ponce. He later played briefly for the Minnesota Timberwolves. He now plays in Europe and is attending the qualifying games in San Juan.

"I wasn't surprised that they defected, but I was surprised at the players who defected," Guibert said, referring to Borrell and Caballero. "They seemed to me like very disciplined guys."

Two other Cuban basketball players defected during the 1994 world championships in Toronto.

The most prominent baseball defector is Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez, who fled Cuba in December 1997 and signed with the New York Yankees. There was also Hernandez' half-brother, Livan Hernandez of the Florida Marlins and major leaguers Rene Arocha, Osvaldo Fernandez, Rey Ordenez, Ariel Prieto and Rolando Arrojo.

In May, Cuban baseball coach Rigoberto Betancourt Herrera defected to the United States during the national team's visit to Baltimore for an exhibition game against the Orioles.

In July 1998, three Cuban swimmers left training camp on the north coast of Puerto Rico and defected with the help of Cuban exiles on the island.

Jose Perez defected after winning the bronze medal in the 400-meter hurdles at a San Juan meet in 1997. In 1993, 43 Cuban athletes defected during the Central American and Caribbean Games in Ponce.

"We don't condemn what they are doing, but the solution is not to flee to the north or south, but to work in Cuba for the transformation to democracy," said Angel Padilla, editor of Disidente, a magazine for Cuban exiles in Puerto Rico.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: BASKETBALL (90%); TOURNAMENTS (90%); SPORTS & RECREATION EVENTS (90%); OLYMPICS (89%); SPORTS GOVERNING BODIES (89%); SUMMER OLYMPICS (78%); BASEBALL (73%); SPORTS & RECREATION (73%); IMMIGRATION (66%)

Company: PANASONIC HOME APPLIANCES INDIA CO LTD (65%); PANASONIC HOME APPLIANCES INDIA CO LTD (65%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%)

Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (55%)

Ticker: PANASONIC (NSE) (65%)

Cuban Players Apparently Defect

Geographic: SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA (79%); SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO (71%); NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA (51%); CUBA (96%); UNITED STATES (93%); ARGENTINA (92%); PUERTO RICO (92%); EUROPE (77%)

Load-Date: July 18, 1999

End of Document