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11Aug91 CUBA: CUBA OVERPOWERS U.S. IN BASEBALL AT PANAM GAMES.

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, Aug 11, Reuters - Cuba won the most eagerly awaited contest of the Pan American Games in Havana on Sunday when their veteran power hitting baseball team beat the United States 3-2 before a record 60,000 spectators.

The young U.S. team, averaging just 20 years of age and mainly college players, made nine hits to Cuba's seven but lost its opportunity in the 8th inning when they loaded the bases but were unable to score.

For such a tense and closely-fought game, both players and fans showed admirable restraint in avoiding any incidents.

The winning pitcher was starter, Jorge Luis Valdes, an eight year veteran of the Cuban team, who was replaced in the 6th by Osear Ojete after giving up two hits and the second U.S. run. Ojete kept the Americans scoreless in the last three innings.

Losing pitcher Jeff Ware, a 20-year-old, showed veteran-like composure but was unable to prevent the Cuban heavy hitters from making hits at the right moment.

Ware gave up a homerun to Lourdes Gurriel who led off in the fourth. The second Cuban run was also scored in the fourth when Jose Delgado reached first on an in-field error, and then scored on a sacrifice fly by German Mesa.

The U.S. had drawn first blood when they scored in the top of the fourth on a double error by Cuban pitcher Valdes in the fourth inning. Jeff Hammonds hit a slow roller to Valdez who dropped the ball, picked it up and threw wild to first allowing Hammonds to reach third base. Hammonds then scored on an infield out.

Gurriel gave Cuba the winning run by hitting a double in the next inning to put the hosts up 3-1.

The Americans fought back in the sixth when Jeff Hammonds doubled, Chris Roberts singled and then Jason Giambi's single brought Roberts home.

The heart stopper of the game took place at the top of the eighth when Ojete gave up a single to Hammonds and then committed an error on a slow roller putting men on 1st and 3rd. Roberts then singled loading the bases with no outs.

Giambi, the U.S. cleanup hitter with a .360 average in the Pan American games, struck out. The next hitter, Chris Johnson, hit a flat grounder that looked like it would go for a hit but Mesa, the Cuban shortstop, dived for the ball, captured it and lobbed it to the second baseman who whipped it to first for a double play ending the inning.

It was the last U.S. chance as Ojete easily put down the American batters in the top of the ninth before a wildly cheering home crowd.

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