1988

UU ISA LEN BAS YPC
:CUBA-BASEBALL, (SPORTS)
TIGHT FINISH IN LEAGUE PLAY BRINGS BASEBALL FEVER TO CUBANS:
BY LIONEL MARTIN
HAVANA, MAY 11, REUTER - CUBA HAS BASEBALL FEVER AS LEAGUE PLAY APPROACHES ITS FINAL, NAIL-BITING DAYS WITH TWO TEAMS TIED FOR FIRST PLACE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A THREE-WAY TIE WITH ONLY TWO MORE GAMES TO GO.

THE TIGHT RACE FOR FIRST PLACE IS THE MAIN TOPIC OF CONVERSATION ALL OVER CUBA. EACH NIGHT THE STADIUMS, WHERE ADMISSION IS FREE OF CHARGE, ARE FULL OF FANS WHILE MILLIONS OF CUBANS WATCH THE GAMES ON NATION-WIDE TELEVISION. EACH MORNING IN EVERY WORK CENTER ONE CAN HEAR BASEBALL NUTS HEATEDLY DISCUSSING LAST NIGHT'S GAME AND SECOND GUESSING THE MANAGERS.

ON WEDNESDAY MORNING THE CITY OF HAVANA TEAM AND THE NINE FROM PINAR DEL RIO, CUBA'S WESTERNMOST PROVINCE, WERE TIED FOR FIRST PLACE IN CUBA'S +FOURTEENTH BASEBALL SELECTIVE SERIES+ WITH 38 WINS AND 23 LOSSES WHILE THE SERRANOS FROM EASTERN CUBA WERE TWO GAMES OUT OF FIRST PLACE WITH 36 WINS AND 25 LOSSES. LAS VILLAS, THE TEAM FROM CENTRAL CUBA IS FOUR GAMES BEHIND THE LEADERS AND IS ALREADY OUT OF THE RACE.

THE SELECTIVE SERIES IS ONLY PART OF CUBA'S BASEBALL SEASON. THE SEASON ACTUALLY BEGINS IN NOVEMBER WITH THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES WHICH HAS TWO LEAGUES WITH NINE TEAMS, EACH F WHICH PLAYS 48 GAMES. THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP ENDS IN FEBRUARY WITH A FOUR TEAM PLAYOFF. THEN THE BEST PLAYERS OF THE EIGHTEEN TEAMS OF THE NATIONSHAL CHAMPIONSHIP ARE CHOSEN TO MAKE OF THE EIGHT TEAMS OF THE SELECTIVE SERIES WHICH EACH PLAY 63 GAMES.

IN 1977 WHEN THE FORMER NEW YORK YANKEE PITCHER, WHITEY FORD, WAS IN CUBA HE OBSERVED THAT MANY OF THE BASEBALL PLAYERS WERE OF MAJOR LEAGUE CALABRE. YET, THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF CUBA'S BASEBALL PLAYERS HAVE REMAINED IN CUBA PLAYING AMATEUR BALL BECAUSE SKIPPING CUBA FOR THE U.S. PROFESSIONAL LEAGUES AND THE BIG MONEY WOULD BE CONSIDRED A BETRAYAL OF THE REVOLIUTION'S IDEALS.
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    ORESTES KINDELAN OF THE SERRANOS IS ONE OF THOSE EXCITING HEAVY HITTERS WHO WINS THE HEARTS OF HIS TEAMS'S FOLLOWERS. DURING THE PRESENT SEASON HE HIT 22 HOMERUNS IN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES, 1 HOMERUN IN THE PLAYOFFS AND 28 HOMERUNS IN THE SELECTIVE SERIES SO FAR FOR A TOTAL OF 51 HOMERUNS IN 117 GAMES.
    LOURDES GURRIEL OF LAS VILLAS IS LEADING THE LEAGUE AFTER 61 GAMES WITH A BATTING AVERAGE OF .438. SOME 30 OTHER PLAYERS ARE BATTING OVER THE .300 MARK IN THE SELECTIVE SERIES.
    DURING THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES WITH ITS 48 GAMES, LAZARO VARGAS OF THE INDUSTRIALES OF HAVANA FINISHED WITH A .446 BATTING AVERAGE WHILE OMAR LINARES OF THE VEGUEROS OF PINAR DEL RIO WAS CLOSE BEHIND WITH .441.
    THE CREAM OF THE CREAM OF CUBA'S BASEBALL PLAYERS ARE CHOSEN FOR THE NATIONAL TEAM WHICH REPRESENTS THE COUNTRY IN INTERNATIONAL AMATEUR PLAY. CUBA HAS NOT LOST AN WORLD AMATEUR BASEBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SQN WHICH IT HAS PARTICIPATED SINCE 1961. IT DID NOT TAKE PART IN THE CHAMPIONSHIPS PLAYED IN COLOMBIA IN 1965 AND IN SOUTH KOREA IN 1982 FOR POLITICAL REASONS.
    IN INTERCONTINENTAL CUP PLAY: AFTER LOSING TO A YOUNG UNITED STATES TEAM IN 1981 IN CANADA, THE CUBAN TEAM CAME BACK TO TAKE THE LAST THREE CHAMPIONSHIPS, IN 1983, 1985 AND 1987. CUBA HAS ALSO BEEN BASEBALL CHAMPION AT THE LAST FIVE PANAMERICAN GAMES.
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