Central American and Caribbean Games

by Gloria Fisher

"Spectacular" is the only word to describe the 14th Central American and Caribbean Games held in Cuba on August 7th through 18th. At times the enthusiasm of the crowds; the rhythmic beat of the music; the bright reds, blues and yellows of the newly renovated stadiums; the colorful flags of the 24 participating nations; the surprise visits of Fidel Castro even outdid the stellar performances of the athletes.

As predicted, Cuba walked away with the games but there were surprises — the dismal showing of Cuba's basketball team; the first match loss by Angel Hererra, Cuba's two-time Olympic gold boxer; Cuba's first gold medal in swimming for 28 years.

There were times of great emotion — the easy win of Alberto Juantorena in the 800 meters; two stunning first-round victories by Teofilo Stevenson; three gold medals won by Leandro Penalvar; and a new world record by weight lifter Daniel Nunez.

The opening ceremony set the tone of music, color and brotherhood for the games to follow. Following the entry of hundreds of young people carrying red and blue flags, the flags of the participating countries were carried into the stadium by riders on galloping horses representing the "mambis" who fought for freedom against Spain. The delegations of athletes marched in beginning with Mexico, where the games began, followed by Netherlands Antilles, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermudas, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, US Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Cuba. The most enthusiastic was Puerto Rico, carrying small flags and stopping to salute President Fidel Castro; the crowd favorite was Nicaragua, which received a prolonged ovation.

The torch was lit — for the first time — by a woman athlete. The fire had come from Mexico by ship to Cuba, following the same route taken by Fidel when he returned from exile in Mexico in 1956 to bring freedom and independence to Cuba.

The formal opening ceremonies were followed by a demonstration in ballet, dance and gymnastics, with 5,000 students (ranging from age three through university age), depicting the role of sports in health. The demonstration was backed by 5,000 technical students who, with colored cards, formed 62 different pictures and designs.

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The sports activities were held in 18 facilities in Havana and sites in Santiago de Cuba and Cienfuegos. Many events were held at Sport City. Located in the heart of Havana, Sport City has acres of playing fields, a domed coliseum, an outdoor football stadium, two olympic-sized swimming pools and a diving pool with spectator stands. Adjoining Sport City is "Mariposa" stadium, a smaller, covered stadium of futuristic design used for wrestling, judo and similar sports.

Hard-fought basketball games that culminated in the double feature with the women's teams from Cuba and Puerto Rico and the men's teams from the same nations competing for the gold were played on the bright blue and red floor of the Sport City coliseum. The well coordinated Cuban women's team easily surpassed Puerto Rico 87-57, but Cuba's men lost 77-71. It was an exciting moment for Puerto Rico, but not enough to take the gold from Cuba, which won on points made, points given up. The standing was Cuba - Puerto Rico - Mexico for both men and women.

The games were played to a full house of over 14,000, complete with two bands that rocked the stadium throughout the games. And something that never happens in the US: the attendance, enthusiasm and pride were as great for the women as for the men.

Cuba took 11 of the 12 gold medals in boxing. One of the greatest surprises of the games was the defeat of two-time Olympic gold medalist and reigning world lightweight champion Angel Herrera, who was TKO'd in the first round of his first match. A cut above the left eye, the result of a head butt ruled unintentional, ended the match and Herrera's participation in the games.

Teofilo Stevenson

Teofilo Stevenson, super heavyweight, holder of three Olympic gold medals, easily won his two bouts with first-round knockouts. N. Rosa of Puerto Rico hit the floor after a hard right. J. Pearson of Virgin Islands USA sunk to the canvas following a hard left and a soft right; the verdict: "TKO." The fights did nothing to test the ability of Stevenson, who is attempting a comeback after a two-year absence from the ring following a car accident.

The closest bout was the bantamweight between Bautista Hernandez of Cuba and Manuel Vilches of Venezuela. The fight went a furious three rounds, with Vilches battling the world champion Hernandez to the bell. Hernandez won a 4-1 decision.

Other Cuban victors were lightweight Rafael Saenz, a unanimous decision over Marlon Amodos of Nicaragua; Adolfo Horta, unanimous winner over featherweight Samuel Fuentes of Puerto Rico; light welterweight Carlos Garcia over Pedro Cruz of Puerto Rico with a TKO in the second round; welterweight Jose Luis Hernandez KO'd Genaro Leon of Mexico in the 2nd; lightweight Armondo Martinez won a unanimous decision over Venezuela's J. L. Stevenson; Bernard Gomez TKO'd middleweight Frank Ruiz of Puerto Rico in two; light heavyweight Pablo Romero TKO'd Eddie Ruiz of Puerto Rico; heavyweight Hemeregildo Baez defeated R. Marin of Puerto Rico with a TKO.

Alberto Juantorena

In the lightweight division Juan Rodriguez of the Dominican Republic won a 3-2 decision over Jose Guzman of Venezuela that brought boos from the crowd.

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Alberto Juantorena, called the "gentleman of Cuban sport," electrified the nation with an easy win in the 800 meters, breaking his own meet record at 1:45.15. Juantorena made sports history in 1976 by winning Olympic gold medals in the 400 and 800 meter races, clocking an awesome 44.26 seconds in the first and 1:43.50 — a world record — in the second.

During the 1977 World University Games in Sofia, Bulgaria, he broke his own record by clocking 1:43.44 in the 800 meters.

Experts speculated that Juantorena could make the 800 meters in 1:40, but he gave signs of slowing in 1978. Although his achilles tendon was operated on, he never regained his former speed. In the meantime, Sebastian Coe had accomplished the feat the experts predicted for Juantorena, doing 800 in less than 1:42.

A recent operation by Cuban surgeon Dr. Rodrigo Alvarez Cambras, using new techniques he had developed, was apparently successful. His previous times this year were 1:46.29, 1:48.19 and 1:46.46. Juantorena, at 31, looks forward to the Pan American games next year and the 1984 Olympics.

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Alberto Juantorena led the Cuban 400 meter relay team to victory with a record time of 3:03.59. The Cuban team was composed of Agustin Pavo, Roberto Ramos, Carl Reyte and Juantorena. Juantorena came from behind with a lap of 44.13 to bring victory to the Cubans.

Cuba also won the men's 100 relay and the women's 400 relay.

In track, Leandro Penalvar Gonzalez of Cuba thrilled the crowds at Pedro Marrero stadium by winning three gold medals — 100 meters (10.16), 200 meters (20.42) and 100 meter relay (39.15).

Penalvar, 21, first competed in track in 1973 after playing baseball for 12 years as a pitcher and second baseman. He continued in baseball until 1979, when he began studies to become a P.E. teacher. It was in school that his great speed was discovered. In 1981 he began training for competition.

After only 5 months training Penalvar ran the 100 and 200 in 10.24 and 20.92. Selected for the Cuban team to compete in the Spartacaids of the Friendly Armies in Hungary, he won the gold medals in 10.24 and 20.91 and ran the post in the 100 meter relay. In 1982 he won the national championship.

Penalvar's 200 meter win set a new record at 20.42. Osvaldo Lara of Cuba was second at 20.94, and Nunoez of Dominican Republic third, the same position as in the 100 meters.

Penalvar and Lara

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One of the most dramatic moments of the games came when Cubans Nery McKeen and Maria Rebaux and Puerto Rican Angelita Lind threw themselves over the 800 meter finish line in what proved to be a photo finish before collapsing on the track in exhaustion. The Puerto Rican, the favorite to win, led until the last 30 meters. The camera showed McKeen the winner. Time — 2:04.22. The clock showed Lind at 2:04.24 and Rebaux at 2:04.47.

Jamaican Sondra Freeman won the women's 400 hurdles at 58.15, a new meet record.

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
CUBA	173	71	39	283
México	29	55	47	131
Venezuela	19	39	54	112
Puerto Rico	7	43	53	103
R. Dominicana	4	8	22	34
Jamaica	4	3	6	13
Costa Rica	3	1	4	8
I. Virg. USA	2	5	4	11
Bahamas	2	3	4	9
Guatemala	2	1	6	9
Trinidad Tobago	1	0	1	2
Guyana	1	0	1	2
Haiti	1	0	0	1
Panama	0	11	9	20
Nicaragua	0	3	5	8
Belice	0	1	0	1
A. Holandesas	0	0	3	3
Barbados	0	0	2	2
Bermudas	0	0	2	2
Granada	0	0	2	2
Suriname	0	0	1	1

Daniel Nunez of Cuba set a new world record in the 60 kilo class weight lifting with a snatch of 136 kilograms, bettering the mark of Bulgarian Boloslav Manolov of 135.5. Nunez, the 1980 Olympic gold medalist, also won the press at 160 kilos, a new meet record. Nunez' total was 292 kilos, also a meet record.

Nunez and Manolov will meet a second time in September in Yugoslavia. In their last meeting, in the world championships in France, Manolov took the gold and Nunez the silver.

Julio Loscos, also of Cuba, made three new records and won three gold medals in the 67.5 kilo class. The records are 132.5 in the snatch, 165 in the press and 297.5 total.

Cuba took all 30 gold medals in weightlifting and broke 43 meet records.

Sport is the right of the people — Fidel

Luis Mariano Delis of Cuba is a double champion, setting a new shotput record with a throw of 18.88 meters, the previous mark being 17.51. Delis won the javelin with 82.40 meters, breaking his previous record of 78.74.

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Cuba retained the volleyball titles for both sexes. The world champion women's team defeated Mexico 15-14, 15-10 and 15-12. The men easily defeated Mexico 15-10, 15-8 and 15-4. The Dominican women were third, the Venezuelan men fourth.

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Venezuela won the gold medal in football (soccer) and its victory was nearly as surprising as Italy's in the World Cup. Victory came with a 1-0 score over favored Mexico. The Venezuelan team attacked with great speed and made its only goal 8 minutes into the final half. Cuba defeated the Bahamas for third.

Fresh from a fifth-place win in the world championships in Guayaquil, Ecuador, the previous week, the Cuban water polo team easily defeated Mexico 12-5 and Puerto Rico 3-1 in the finals. The Cuban team set a new record, holding the title for four consecutive Central American and Caribbean games. Mexico took the silver and Puerto Rico the bronze in this demanding sport.

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The Dominican Republic won the gold in baseball after a surprise defeat of Cuba by Panama put Cuba out of the running. Cuba's defeat, along with a second loss to Puerto Rico, raised a call for an investigation of Cuba's baseball program — for so long the best in the world.

Dominican Republic defeated Venezuela 5 to 4 for the gold; Cuba was second and Panama third.

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Cuba won a convincing 3-1 victory over favored Mexico to take first place in field hockey. Cuba's short passes and rapid attack dominated the game. In spite of Mexico's superior technique, they could not hold back the constant approach.

An unusual game was played between Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados for third place. After regulation time and two overtime periods the game was still scoreless. After 10 penalty strokes each the score was tied 6 all; after an additional 10 strokes the score was 15-15; and after a third set of penalty strokes Barbados won 21 to 20.

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Bahamas won first place in men's softball by defeating Cuba 7 to 1 in the last game of the tourney and a 5-1 win over Cuba in the semi-final. The final victory came with 10 hits including 2 home runs and 3 triples.

The Puerto Rican women took the gold.

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Mexico dominated the swimming events with 24 medals including 13 gold. The team was led by Isabel Reuss and Alberto Mestre with six gold each and Teresa Rivera with five gold. For Venezuela, Rafael Vidal won 6 gold.

Pedro Hernandez won Cuba's first gold medal in swimming in 28 years, with a new area record of 2:24.97 in the 200 meter breast stroke. In all, 41 new swimming records were set.

Venezuela was second with 19 medals (10-2-7) and Costa Rico followed with 7 (3-2-2).

Mexico also took the gold in synchronized swimming; Cuba was second and Puerto Rico third.

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A political victory was the presence of Puerto Rican spectators who challenged Reagan's ban on tourism to Cuba by attending the games. These people, many of them parents of the young athletes, face 10 years in prison or fines of $10,000. "We're here because we don't accept the Reagan administration's unfair decision to ban Puerto Rican tourists from traveling to Cuba to attend the Central American Games, and we don't mind facing all the risks and reprisals," said Ruben Berrios, president of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, when he arrived in Havana. He added that the unfair and arbitrary order proved, in a direct way, what US colonialism really means. "When freedom of movement is restricted for sports fans, the people can see what colonial domination means."

The tourists were met at the airport by Cuban officials; and the common colonial heritage of Cuba and Puerto Rico, and the brotherhood between the two islands, was apparent throughout the games.