

Conclusive remarks made by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, on the second TV Special Program on the National and International Sports Movement. September 3, 1999 [1]

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When I instructed the head of our sports delegation in Winnipeg and the president of the Cuban Olympic Committee to trust the honor and the word of one of the world's greatest sports figures, I was not defending a gold medal or the feat of having achieved first place in track and field by beating the United States, a victory ignominiously robbed from us by stripping him of his medal. I was actually attempting to save the moral life of a man.

An Olympic athlete is not a lowly instrument used to gain international prestige, an object to be bought and sold on the market, a commodity to be used and then thrown into the garbage. Athletes are, first and foremost, human beings, with mothers and fathers, spouses and children, brothers, sisters, friends and fans as well as pride in the recognition they have earned through their efforts and extraordinary merit. They have honor, above all, honor. Those who have never competed for money have competed and triumphed for honor alone. Honor is worth more than life, because life without honor is meaningless.

There is a crime more reprehensible than any physical crime. It is the moral crime of accusing Sotomayor of being a drug addict, a hard cocaine user. That substance has come to terrorize the world today and such accusation can tarnish forever the life of a man, even with no real proof and no backing, without giving him the slightest opportunity to defend himself nor any possibility to appeal. Only 48 hours were needed to destroy 21 years of total, selfless dedication to amateur sports, dating back to when he was only 10 years old.

It cannot be so arbitrarily and brutally ignored that he has passed both scheduled and surprise doping tests on more than 100 occasions, and that on more than 300 occasions he has surpassed the height with which he won his medal that day in a single jump. Even the most mediocre of courts and judges meting out penal justice throughout the world would have taken into account the life history and background of the person they have set out to judge.

If the international sports movement is not capable of providing this minimum of guarantees to the athletes who compete in international events, then there is an obvious need to eradicate such procedures and replace them with others that are more humane, rational and fair. Amateur athletes who do not compete for money cannot go on living under such a reign of terror.

Everyone will be watching what happens with Sotomayor, who has been made the victim of an atrocious crime, a repugnant and ignominious moral assassination. What he is facing is similar to what happened just over a century ago during the infamous Dreyfus case, when racial prejudice and hatred led that officer from the French General Staff to be unjustly accused of espionage, severely punished, and sent to French Guyana, with the worst criminals until there was no other alternative but to vindicate him. If the outrageous, arbitrary and unfair sanction against this glorious, humble and selfless athlete is not

immediately rectified, Javier Sotomayor will become the Dreyfus of the century now coming to an end.

When we unhesitatingly stated his innocence based on this conviction, we could not have even imagined that two days later, a wave of unjust sanctions would be used to attempt to wipe the Cuban weightlifting team off the face of the Olympic movement, and that by accusing three Cuban weightlifters of doping with nandrolone, they would allow us to unravel and fully expose the odious plot staged in Winnipeg against the Cuban athletes.

We have irrefutable proof. Everything that has been stated here, from the solid scientific, theoretical and practical arguments offered by the director of the Sports Medicine Institute, to those of the young, brilliant and talented doctor of the national weightlifting team, and those of the highly experienced commissioner for this sports discipline to the overwhelming and indisputable results of the three prestigious laboratories linked to the Olympic movement, two of which were responsible over the last eight years for testing the samples for an Olympic Games and a world track and field championship, all serve to demonstrate the gross injustices committed against these Cuban athletes.

All these arguments grouped together and presented with all the relevant details and documents constitute such irrefutable proof that the presentation made by any one of them would be enough to persuade an unbiased court. What happened days later at the World Boxing Championship, that was the last straw.

On behalf of the Cuban people, we request that the president of the International Olympic Committee Juan Antonio Samaranch, who is the highest authority in the international sports movement and who we trust, proceed to create a commission to investigate the events in Winnipeg and Houston.

We have already called on the International Amateur Boxing Association to review the verdict that robbed five Cuban athletes of their gold medals, as we did the same night that the scandalous decision was made by corrupted referees on the match between Juan Hernández Sierra and Russian boxer Timor Gaidarov.

We demand the return of the gold medals fairly won and then stolen by way of a criminal and disgraceful procedure from world high jump record holder and six-time world champion Javier Sotomayor, and from weightlifters William Vargas, in the 62-kilogram category, and Rolando Delgado, in the 69-kilogram category, in addition to the silver medal won by Modesto Sánchez in the over-105-kilogram category.

And something still much more important: We demand that they clear the honor of the athletes victims of this outrage. We will not rest until this goal is achieved. We will even resort to the law, if need be, to demand penal liability for the crime of defamation and slander against our athletes.

We will support these athletes in any claims for compensation that they may decide to file for human damage and moral injury.

There is more than enough evidence of the injustices suffered by the Third World countries and the inequalities that prevent them from developing sports and attaining the victories to which they are entitled.

We will establish, with the utmost urgency, a modern and efficient doping control laboratory that will cooperate with the countries of the region that require it. Likewise, as we have done in the field of medicine where we are also a major force, we will not only contribute to the development of sports through cooperation with Cuban specialists but are also seriously considering the establishment of a Latin American and Caribbean school of physical education and sports, so that these nations will have their own specialists to promote this noble and healthy activity in their own countries.

One day, we, Indians in frock coats, will demonstrate what we are and what we can do.

Thank you very much.

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