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Athletic letter

Notes for the history of automobilism in the city of Pinar del Río

Apuntes para la historia del automovilismo en la ciudad de Pinar del Río

Apontamentos para a história do automobilismo na cidade de Pinar del Río

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With the birth of the Neocolonial Republic in Cuba in 1920, a period marked by a disastrous economic, social and political situation began; in the region of Pinar del Río this was more critical than in other parts of the country. Referring to it, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz pointed out that: "No region of the country was more forgotten and no population of Cuba was the object of greater indifference and we could even say contempt" (Castro Ruz, F. 1973, p. 3).

Sports in this region constituted one of the elements that reaffirmed the structural crisis of the Pinar del Río society; it had a classist character. None of the government authorities showed the least interest in amateur sports and the only isolated manifestations were reduced and reserved for the wealthy classes, integrated by the



minority of Pinar del Río society, being practiced by members of clubs, many of them exclusive, such as the tennis club of Dr. Lamar in the capital city.

In the municipality of Pinar del Río, the practice of baseball began in 1900, in any place and for all social sectors. The first team was organized in 1908, made up of students from Pinar del Río who studied at the University of Havana; in 1921 the first baseball stadium was built at kilometer 1 of the road to Luis Lazo, it was fenced and had wooden bleachers that could seat 600 fans. On June 3, 1928, the stadium of the Instituto de Segunda Enseñanza was inaugurated, with a capacity for 1600 people; the game was played between the Atlético de Cuba club and the team Los Tigres de Pinar del Río, mainly made up of students of the Institute. This game was won by the locals 2 runs to 0, standing out in the battery the Ballester and Loria brothers, who hit a home run with a man on base (Pérez, 1954; Romero, 1981; Osaba, 2016).

It is significant, to point out that the municipality of Pinar del Río was represented in the Cuban team in the III Central American Games, in San Salvador in 1935, with Ángel Prieto, and in 1950, in the VI Games held in 1900 in Guatemala City, with Virgilio Roque Contreras; in both events they won the gold medal (Colectivo de autores, 1991, p. 18).

As the main manifestation of sports in Pinar del Río, baseball was an expression of the protection of commercial and political firms of the time, for example: Dulcería La Marina, Mayca and Campa; it was the same ninth team that represented Pinar del Río in the championships of 1945, 1946 and 1947 (Colectivo de autores, 2012. p. 25).

In 1908, Juan Corso Príncipe (the Spaniard) started playing chess in Pinar del Río region. The main scenario was the halls of the Spanish Colony; the greatest boom was reached in 1941 when a simultaneous game was played at the Ricardo Hotel with the presence of José Raúl Capablanca, which lasted six hours, in front of local players (Colectivo de autores, 1982, p. 54).

There were other sports activities such as fencing, boxing, basketball, and athletics, which were practiced in an elementary way, but like the aforementioned, they did not have coaches and much less premises for their development.

The territory of Pinar Del Río was the scene of other events during this stage: the automobile races held in the city in 1918, 1919, 1924, 1954, 1954, 1955, 1956 and 1957.

May 20, 1918 marks the beginning of the automobile races in the region, organized by the Pinar del Río City Hall and the Drivers Association presided by Amable Hernández, owner of the Chevrolet automobile agency, located on the corner of Martí and Coloma. A jury was created, headed by the Municipal Mayor Juan María Cabada y del Haya and other authorities of the territory, who would award the prize, consisting of a silver cup for the first place, and for the second and third places Seiberling tires and accumulators. The races were carried out by categories and in each one of them, the different brands of automobiles recognized at that time competed. The itinerary covered the distance (round trip) from Pinar del Río to La Coloma and had as its starting point kilometer one.

The local and national press echoed this event; according to the newspaper Vocero Occidental, "the first prize in the open race went to a Cadillac wedge driven by driver Marcelino Amador. In this race, a Ford and a Muced car also competed". In the second category, the prize was awarded to driver Rafael Arias; in second place, Margarito Santa Cruz entered the finish line driving machine No. 10 of the Overland brand. In the Ford



category, first prize went to No. 5, driven by Virgilio García; second place went to No. 2, driven by Justo Pérez Paz. These races were witnessed by more than 5,000 people, most of whom were located along the road to La Coloma (*Vocero Occidental Newspaper No. 54*).

On October 10, 1919, a new event was repeated, when the tragic death of driver Justo F. Caraballo was regretted when he crashed into a leafy tree on the left, at kilometer seven of the road from Pinar del Río to La Coloma. There, the "*ases del volante*" (as they were called) had a monument erected, which was demolished at the end of the 1940s. In this event, outstanding "driving aces" participated, among them: Marcelino Amador with his Sturd machine and the German José Rossum, known as the White Bear, the winner was Justo Pérez Paz with a time of 33 minutes, 50 seconds and six-tenths (*Periódico Heraldo Pinareño No. 24*).

The races held on May 20, 1954 were marked by several events, among them: the starting point was marked in the premises of the Jupiña factory and the final finish line in the Malecón Habanero, its sponsor "El Heraldo de Cuba" and organized by the newspaper "Avance", in homage to the birth of the Neocolonial Republic, for the first and only time a woman Angelina Carrera wife of Manuel Pacheco accompanies him in his car, In the Stock Modified category a car is driven by the well-known artist Enrique Santisteban, an accident was registered in the Guanajay Park, Gerardo Gómez's car crashed against one of the lampposts and the young man had to undergo a delicate surgical intervention on his head (*Heraldo Pinareño Newspaper No. 73*).

On May 20, 1955, the II Classic Avance Pinar del Río-Habana was held. Forty-nine cars were registered, but only 25 managed to cross the finish line, among them three champions of past competitions, the heroes of the day, Rafael Gallinat who with his Buick made the 172 Km course in one hour, nine minutes and 41 seconds at an average speed of 148.50 Km/h, he covered 10 m with all four wheels in the air (*Heraldo Pinareño Newspaper No. 74*).

In the automobile races of May 20, 1956, sponsored by the Avance newspaper, Mario Padrón Torres from Pinar del Río stands out, piloting a 1956 Studebaker Golden Hawk, who won with a surprising time of 1 hour, 5 minutes and 53 seconds at an average speed of 157.48 Km/h to break the record of these races and win the III Classic.

In an interview with the winner, *Mario Padrón*, he said:

"The maximum speed reached on the trip was 240 Km/h, on the straights and on the curves between 180 and 190, except for the Mani curve. In Punta Brava, the fan belt broke, however, I arrived with the maximum temperature without suffering any damage" (*Heraldo Pinareño Newspaper No. 75*).

In this race there were two accidents, the first one occurred when the Jaguar driven by Alfonso Gómez Mena crashed into one of the houses of the Montequín crossroads, causing the death of retired army second lieutenant Zacarías Borrego Crespo who was watching the races and in the second one the 11 year old Rolando Fonticoba was injured in the collision.

The fourth and last classic of the Pinar del Río-Habana races started with 54 cars and at the end of the competition the jury reported 33. The idol Mario Padrón participated in these races driving a 1956 Packard car, but when he accumulated the time of 43 minutes and passing through Guanajay, the engine blew up preventing him from winning, which



fell in the hands of Chaquito González, one of the most experienced drivers, one of the most experienced drivers, who set the record of 1 hour and 32 seconds in the 160 Km traveled, improving, in almost three minutes, the previous record set by Mario Padrón Torres, becoming the absolute winner of the Gran Turismo B category (**Heraldo Pinareño Newspaper No. 76**).

According to the Mercantile Property Registry, on November 2, 1990, the oldest sports facility in the city of Pinar del Río, located on Polvorín Street No. 2 (today Pedro Telles Valdéz between Rafael Morales and Ormani Arenado, its owner José Fernández Rodríguez, was registered as a bathing industry, It had tennis courts, fencing, pulleys to widen the back, boxing practice and other modalities, this center was attended by prominent Pinar del Río residents such as Doctors León Cuervo Rubio and Guillermo Montagú, as well as by the high officers of the North American army stationed in Pinar del Río (**Colectivo de autores, 1982. p. 82**).

During the analyzed stage, sports in Pinar del Río, as in all of Cuba, were characterized by being an expression of the most brutal professionalism, mercantilism and the select practice of sports determined by a minority and powerful group, which had little or no interest in official support and the benefit of the majorities, as characteristics of a society that needed to be radically changed.

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The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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