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Homeland in the athlete's heart

La patria en el corazón del atleta

A pátria no coração do atleta

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It is more than evident that when the athlete competes he or she is defending with his or her performance the land where he or she was born, because, although the athlete does not always do it under his or her flag and shield, it is inevitable that they impose their style and technique as their way of proceeding, which is firmly linked to their first teachers, trainers and his childhood games.

Even in ancient times, sport was an instrument to teach the young man the handling of weapons with the instruction of the great masters of the places of origin. "public games were an occasion of rapprochement among the Greek states. They constituted the soul of inter-Hellenic relations, since they were equivalent to true general assemblies of the Greek people" **Sesé Alegre, J. M (2008)**.

For this reason, these games were conceived as a pretext to enjoy the diversity of athletes who demonstrated the best skills trained in their homeland. In a way, they were held to maintain a relationship with these states. In ancient Greece, rather than creating separatism, individualism in each state, the representation of an athlete in the Olympic Games tended to integrate, to unify Greece as a great nation **Sesé Alegre, J. M (2008)**.

"The official participation of the Greek cities in the offerings and sacrifices and the collaboration of individuals created a sense of brotherhood and a feeling of belonging to a socio-political structure superior to that of the polis. At the same time, the spirit of competition, traditionally monopolized by the nobility, spread to the rest of society, which, without abandoning its religious roots, instilled more democratic characteristics" **Sesé Alegre, J. M. (2008)**.



After the restoration of these Olympic Games, which were then held every four years in different cities around the world, the cult of brotherhood, fair play and clean play was maintained in the events, although in practice these objectives were not always achieved. An example of this was the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, in which Hitler, the all-powerful host at that time in Europe, was able to discriminate against many athletes who, although very competent, could not participate because they were associated with Jewish or communist origin or any anti-Semitic characteristic.

Many years later, at the dawn of this new century, representing another country in the Olympic Games has not only been a consequence of emigration, political problems or discrimination, there have also been other causes that turn the athlete into a subject that adapts, transforms to new training realities and achieves success in different latitudes.

At the 2018 Olympic Games, approximately 6 % of the athletes, some 178 athletes, competed for a country in which they were not born. The only requirement of the Olympic Charter is that an athlete be a national citizen of the country for which he or she is competing. All athletes who want to compete in a different country will have to wait three years after the last time they competed for the previous country.

Example of such athletes were: Ahn Hyun-soo who won four Olympic medals, three gold and one bronze, while representing his country South Korea in 2006, however, due to differences with his local coaches he decides to exchange his three more gold medals and one bronze medal at the Sochi Olympics in 2014.

In order to seek more resource support, other athletes competed under a foreign flag, this is the case of ice speed skaters Carlijn Schoutens and Ted-Jan Bloemen. But they do not renounce their country, they simply adopt a dual nationality: Dutch-American and Dutch-Canadian. Their only interest is to take advantage of this new team to win medals without leaving their country of origin.

Another case, in this same sport, was Maame Biney, who was born in Ghana and competed on behalf of the United States. Biney managed to transcend as the first African-American woman on the Olympic ice speed skating team and although she lived only a short time in her native country, she never renounced her roots.

On the other hand, this phenomenon did not occur only on an individual basis, it is important to highlight that, of the total members of the Korean delegation, 18 athletes were not Korean. Others are attributed to compete on behalf of another country for family reasons, such as the Mexican-American Sarah Schleper, after marrying Federico Gaxiola and integrating the United States delegation, despite this inevitable event in her life, wanted to return to represent her country, Mexico, in subsequent sporting events but her immigration documents were not ready in time.

But this was not the exception in history, since playing for another country does not mean any problem or any global prejudice. Many are the athletes hired by the professional baseball league of Japan, including Cuban players who travel to that country to share seasons with the Japanese and in passing calibrate their high sporting potential.

However, sharing these scenarios that make Cuban sports policy more flexible does not mean that the country is ceding its best players to foreign capital.



Despite the material needs that Cuba has, as a result of the economic and financial blockade of the United States, the government has never abandoned any athlete, nor limited the development of any athlete **Brossard, A. (2011)**. And in sports competitions, politics is the cult of virtue, to talent, to fair play.

"Cuba has never bought an athlete or a referee. There are sports where arbitration is very corrupt and our athletes fight against the adversary and the referee. Cuban boxing, internationally recognized for its prestige, has had to face attempts of bribery and corruption to snatch gold medals from the country by buying highly trained and seasoned boxers, as they try to do with baseball players or other outstanding athletes. The Cuban athletes who competed in Beijing and instead of gold brought back silver, bronze or an outstanding place in the competitions, have enormous merit as representatives of the amateur sport that gave rise to the resurgence of the Olympic movement. They are unsurpassed examples in the world", **Pérez Rodríguez (2010)**.

It is for these reasons, and many more, that the Cuban athlete is different; he is the fruit of the best of the Revolution, which transforms itself and proposes to build a new man where money is not the goal, but part of the means to achieve happiness.

The homeland is in the heart of the athlete when he defends the sovereignty of a country in the field of competition. One is patriotic when one gives one's best to achieve victory, even knowing that the training characteristics of the opponent are superior. You have to feel like the brunettes of the Caribbean, like Mikhail Lopez and like our Cuban fighters to know what it is to enjoy a medal, while wearing our national flag. That feeling has nothing to do with mercantilism or breaking records with the sole ambition of supremacy or accumulating more wealth. When a medal is won for the homeland, it is rewarding the work of many technicians, of many people who collaborated with the training of the athlete, even in very adverse conditions such as those in Cuba. But after the crises that today plague the world, there will be no other choice but to think differently at a global level, and without being triumphalist, surely Cuba will be a reference of humanism to begin with, **Caballero Riera (2011)**, **Martín Rodríguez, M. (2011)**.

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