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Chess for people with visual disabilities: history of champions from Pinar del Río

Ajedrez para personas con discapacidad visual: historia de campeones pinareños

Xadrez para pessoas com deficiência visual: história dos campeões de Pinar del Río

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Chess is one of the oldest games and has proven effective in developing cognitive and social skills (Paco, 2023). The inclusion of visually disability people in chess dates back to the 20th century with the founding of the International Blind Chess Association (IBCA) in 1958. Since its inception, the IBCA has promoted the organization of international tournaments (García, 2002), and from there, chess has spread worldwide, with more than 15,000 blind players.



Because of the ease and possibility for sighted people to participate in competitions, chess is known as a sport with a long tradition among blind people (Laffita & Jerez, 2025).

Playing chess blindfolded becomes a challenge of concentration in which cognitive aspects play an important role. Recent studies have shown that chess improves working memory, sustained attention, and problem-solving skills (Burgoyne et al., 2016; Guerrero et al., 2023; Martín, 2025). Furthermore, it has been used as a tool for social and educational inclusion, especially in school and community settings (Mendoza & Mendoza, 2025); it empowers blind individuals; and it creates spaces for leisure, discipline, and socialization (Gallego & Salinas, 2019).

Its history in Cuba is marked by its deep cultural roots and its role as an instrument of social integration; ingrained in all sporting spheres, boasting one of the best players of all time, José Raúl Capablanca, World Champion 1921-1927 (Ramón et al., 2023). Since the 1980s, institutions such as the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER) have begun to implement specific programs for the practice of chess, aimed at blind and visually impaired people.

These efforts, in conjunction with the Cuban National Association of the Blind (ANCI in Spanish), have made Cuba one of the pioneering countries in Latin America in promoting adapted chess, which relies on technological and methodological resources specifically designed to facilitate the participation of blind people. The work of ANCI has also enabled Cuban participation in international competitions such as the Blind Chess Olympiad.

The National Chess Championship for the Blind and Visually Impaired is held annually in different provinces throughout the country. These tournaments serve as qualifiers for international events and contribute to raising the competitive level of the athletes. Pinar del Río's participation began with the ANCI Cup, held in Holguín province in 1981.

From that year onward, blind and visually impaired athletes from Pinar del Río have actively participated in various national events, achieving outstanding individual and team results. Among those who distinguished themselves in these competitions were Agustín Martínez, Alejandro Acosta Morales, José María Lorenzo, José Luis Sánchez Gálvez, and



José Antonio Pernado, who represented the province and the country for nearly three decades.

The participation of athletes from Pinar del Río in national events is listed below (ANCI collaboration in the province):

1981-ANCI Cup, Holguín

- Agustín Martínez. Blind. 5th place.

1982-Nacional, Cienfuegos

- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind. 6th place.
- José María Lorenzo. Blind. 9th place.
- Agustín Martínez. Blind. 9th place.
- José Antonio Pernado. Blind. 15th place.

1983-ANCI Cup, Guantánamo

The team achieved 3rd place.

- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind.
- José María Lorenzo. Blind.
- Agustín Martínez. Blind.
- José Antonio Pernado. Blind.
- Juan Carlos García. Low Vision.

1983-National, San José, Havana Province

- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind. 8th place.
- José María Lorenzo. Blind. 12th place.
- Agustín Martínez. Blind. 13th place.
- José Antonio Pernado. Blind. 19th place.
- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. 5th place.

1984 - ANCI Cup, Las Tunas

First place was achieved as a team.



- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind.
- José María Lorenzo. Blind.
- Agustín Martínez. Blind.
- José Antonio Pernado. Blind.
- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. 3rd place.

1986 - ANCI Cup, Consolación del Sur, Pinar del Río

The team achieved 2nd place.

- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind.
- José María Lorenzo. Blind.
- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind.

1987-ANCI Cup, San Nicolás de Bari, Havana Province

The team achieved 6th place.

- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind.
- José María Lorenzo. Blind.
- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. 1st place.
- José Domínguez Domínguez. Blind.
- Lanier Gutiérrez. Low Vision.

1988-National, Holguín

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 4th place.
- Agustín Martínez. Blind. 7th place.

1989 - Cuba Cup, Morón, Ciego de Ávila. Participants: Nicaragua, Spain, El Salvador, the Soviet Union, and Cuban teams A, B, and C

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Ciego. Consolación del Sur. 4th place, with Cuba B.

1990-Nacional, Colón, Matanzas

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 4th place.
- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind. 7th place.



1992-National, Cienfuegos

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 2nd place.
- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind. 6th place.

1994 - Western Tournament in Matanzas, with the participation of Pinar del Río, Isla de la Juventud, Havana Province, Havana City and Matanzas

We achieved 1st^{place} as a team.

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur.
- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind.

1995 - ISLA International Tournament, in Havana City, Hotel Habana Libre, with the participation of 4 countries: Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina and Cuba

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 8th place.

1996 - National, Santi Spíritus

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 12th place.
- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind. 7th place.

1997 - National, Santi Spíritus

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 4th place.
- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind. 5th place.

2000 - Associates' Olympics. Santiago de Cuba

The team achieved 5th place.

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur.
- Alejandro Acosta Morales. Blind.
- Yosbel Hernández Serrano.

2001 - Associates' Olympics

The team achieved 4th place.

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur.



2003 - Associates' Olympics. Santiago de Cuba

The team achieved 7th place.

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur.
- Juan Domingo Andarsio.

2006-National, Granma

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 5th place

2007-National, Las Tunas

- José Luis Sánchez Gálvez. Blind. Consolación del Sur. 12th place
- Juan Domingo Palacios. San Cristóbal. 6th place
- Juan Manuel Hernández. Consolación del Sur. Place 20.

2014-National, Holguín

- Juan Carlos Cuny. La Palma. 12th place

2016-National, Granma

- Juan Carlos Cuny. La Palma. 9th place

2018-National, Villa Clara

- Juan Carlos Cuny. La Palma. 9th place

2022-National, Holguín

- Juan Carlos Cuny. La Palma. 9th place

The practice of chess for the blind and visually impaired in Cuba's westernmost province has been more than just a sport; it has been a promoter of social integration and a space for leisure and recreation. The collaborative work of the Provincial Sports Directorate, the Cuban Chess Federation, and ANCI has been fundamental to promoting and expanding its practice, which faces challenges related to professional development, specifically the training of coaches, and access to adapted materials (Braille boards, special pieces, and other technologies).



Likewise, to increase the dissemination of their practice so that it is known to more people with visual disabilities and they can benefit as part of a training strategy, from school and community settings, in order to guarantee the continuity and increase of participants.

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The author is responsible for writing the work and analyzing the documents.



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