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Athletic letter

The first Olympic champion of lucha libre pinareña

El primer campeón Olímpico de la lucha libre pinareña

O primeiro campeão olímpico de luta livre de Pinar del Río

Martín Torres Peguero^{1*}  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7321-7266>

Elizardo Ríos Morales¹  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7351-8789>

Juan Quintana Caballo¹  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5444-3729>

¹Universidad de Pinar del Río, "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", Facultad de Cultura Física "Nancy Uranga Romagoza", Pinar del Río, Cuba.

*Corresponding author: martin.torres@upr.edu.cu



On October 1, 1964, Alejandro Puerto

Díaz, the first Cuban Olympic champion freestyle wrestler, was born in the province of Pinar del Río. From a very early age, he began to be motivated by the sport, enlisting first in boxing, but as the athlete himself declared, his mother did not like it and only stayed for several weeks.

Later on, he casually starts to have contact with free style wrestling, as he attends the gym in a hurry accompanied by a friend. As he witnessed the daily training sessions, he began to feel attracted to this sport and began his training under the guidance of the outstanding professor Adalberto Concepción Álvarez Martínez (Chulungo).

In a short time, their progress was remarkable. In 1978, he participated in the National School Games, winning his first gold medal, in the 44-kilogram division. A year later, he won the Pan-American Youth Championship in this discipline.

From this point on, he began an uninterrupted ascent to the national top ranks among the seniors, participating in the Central American and Caribbean Games, held in Havana in 1982, where he obtained the silver medal in the 52-kilogram division and



in the continental event in Caracas (1983) he won the bronze medal in the same division.

Later, due to situations with the body weight, he moves to the division of the 57 kg, dominated for a long time by the Soviet-Russian wrestler Serguey Beloglasov.

Four years later, at the Pan American Games in the American city of Indianapolis, he wins the gold medal.

From then on, according to the athlete's own considerations, in an interview with him, the road to world and Olympic glory was quite difficult. [1]

Since the Cuban delegation did not attend the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, United States (1984), nor the Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea (1988), these absences impeded Alejandro Puerto from confronting the most relevant athletes of his specialty at the world level.

However, he continued an intense preparation at the Cerro Pelado training center in Havana, advised by coach Isidro Cañedo, participating in a large number of tournaments in America and Europe, where he had the opportunity to fight against the best fighters, providing him with blanks and experience.

With encouraging participations in the world championships in 1985, 1986 and 1989, he obtained a sixth, fourth and eighth place, respectively, and arrived at the World Wrestling Championship, held in Tokyo, Japan, in 1990, where the Pinar del Río athlete managed to break the hegemony of the Soviet wrestlers, winning the title in the 57-kilogram division. Due to the quality shown, many specialists and technicians considered him among the favorites to discuss the gold in the Olympic Games to be held in Barcelona in 1992.

But the 1991 Olympic prelude to the event was fateful for him, as he suffered a ruptured right bicep at the Cerro Pelado international competition, based in the province of Las Tunas. He underwent a delicate surgical procedure, which kept him away from the gym and mattresses for several months.

Without being completely recovered, the will and desire to participate in the 11th edition of the Pan American Sports Games, with venues in Havana City and Santiago de Cuba (1991), led him to compete in that event, where he passed the preliminary round without a hitch. In the final, against the American Brad Penrith, a violent grabbing action opened the wound on his arm, which cost him the victory and the gold medal, besides preventing him from attending the World Cup in Varna, Bulgaria, in October.

However, perhaps wounded in his self-esteem, Alejandro claimed his right to defend the world title he had won a year earlier in Tokyo.

In response, national commissioner Miguel Langaney advised him:

"I know you are going to be angry with me, because I am not taking you, but my interest in making that decision is to guarantee the gold medal at the Barcelona Games. I'm sure you will thank me later". [1]



The Olympic Games of Barcelona (1992) arrived, gathering the most select specialists in wrestling (both free and Greco-Roman) in the world, and among them Alejandro Puerto, who according to the criteria of the coach Isidro Cañedo, the Pinar del Río native had a reserved prognosis due to the referred injury. Immersed in the competition, he seemed not to remember the difficulties in the right bicep, winning the four preliminary fights without scoring a single point.

In the decisive semi-final stage he beat the American Kendall Cross, 10-6. Already in the decisive final he faced Serguei Smal, an athlete from the Commonwealth of Independent States (which brought together athletes from the former Soviet Union), who had been proclaimed world champion in Varna. In that match, Puerto, knowing the quality of his opponent, gathered all his experience and vast arsenal of technical resources, to win by a 5-0 decision, being thus rewarded his sacrifice, courage and athletic quality.

The cycle of a great champion was completed, who knew how to take his chance and win:

"I was convinced of my victory from the first day I returned to training. I prepared myself with care and this allowed me to develop the plans I had drawn up against the various rivals, almost all of whom I was able to beat in Tokyo". Those were his words after the resounding victory. [2]

Thus, for the first time, a Cuban and Pinar del Río freestyle wrestler climbed to the top of the podium in an Olympic event; his compatriot and fellow countryman Hector Milian, ten days earlier, had done so in the 100 kilogram division of the Greco-Roman style.

In the years that followed, the aftermath of his injury and the emergence of a new rival in the country sidelined him from the 1993 World Championship. However, his determination and willingness led him to the World Championship in Istanbul, Turkey (1994), where he was crowned for the second time. However, in March 1995, he did not get past the third place in the Pan-American Sports Games in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

The Olympic Games in Atlanta, USA (1996) offered him one last great opportunity to compete, when he was already 32 years old. But his speed was not the same as before, and despite the accumulated experience and the technical quality he still displayed, injuries and age had diminished his capacity, and he was eliminated from the competition with one won and two lost fights. These elements made him decide to retire from active sport.

Main international results of Alejandro Puerto

Olympic Games: Gold in Barcelona (ESP), 1992 and fifteenth in Atlanta in 1996.

World Cups: Silver in Toledo (USA), 1986; Gold in Toledo (USA), 1988; Bronze in Toledo (USA) and Fourth in Chattanooga (USA), 1993.

World Championships: Sixth in Budapest (HUN), 1985; Fourth in Budapest (HUN), 1986; Eighth in Martigny, 1989; Gold in Tokyo (JPN), 1990; Gold in Istanbul (TUR), 1994 and Fourteenth in Atlanta (USA), 1995.



Pan-American Games: Bronze in Caracas (VEN), 1983; Gold in Indianapolis (USA), 1987; Silver in Havana, 1991 and Bronze in Mar del Plata (ARG), 1995.

Without a doubt, Alejandro Puerto Díaz is one of the great fighters Cuba has had in the history of this sport, and his name appears among the hundred best sportsmen on the island in the 20th century.

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



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