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NORCECA MEN'S OLYMPIC QUALIFIER TOURNAMENT

USA Men are in the Olympics



CAGUAS, Puerto Rico, January 10.- USA won a berth for the Athens Olympic Games after edging Cuba in a five-set thriller at the NORCECA Men's Olympic Qualifier Tournament by score of 21-25, 25-18, 24-26, 25-22, 15-13 before about 2,500 fans.

Players from both teams coincided saying it was one of the best played matches in the history of the region. The performance of Cuban Yasser Portuondo and American Clay Stanley was a factor for their teams stretching into a fifth set.

In the tie-breaker, Cuba opened what appeared a solid gap at 8-4, but the Americans gained ground behind the effective attacks of Reid Priddy and Stanley and the blocking of Ryan Millar and Tom Hoff. The veteran setter Lloyd Ball also was a factor.

In the closing moments of the fifth set Portuondo and Pavel Pimienta failed their serves and the Americans got the ticket to Greece with a spike by Millar and a block by Hoff. "It is an emotion impossible to describe, we played for six consecutive days

and won all our matches," said Ball, the captain of the Americans. "We also twice defeated two great teams as Cuba and Canada. It is a great honor to know that I can again represent my country in the Olympics."

"It was a great match but we could not finish well in the tie-breaker," said Roberto Garcia, the Cuban coach. "Those two serves we missed at the end cost us the final outcome."

"We accomplish our goal," said Doug Beal, the American coach. "The fans who came in today had the chance to watch one of the best volley ball matches I have ever seen."

Priddy had 16 points for USA and Stanley added 15. Portuondo scored 25 for Cuba.

USA-CUB 3-2 (21-25, 25-18, 24-26, 25-22, 15-13) Total (110-104) Duration: 2:05 Audience: 2,513

Canada wins the bronze medal

CAGUAS, Puerto Rico, January 10.- Canada recovered from a 1-2 deficit and edged Puerto Rico to finish in third place at the NORCECA Men's Olympic Qualifier Tournament. Like in the first match between these two teams, both sides battled strongly showing a lot of pride. The score was 23-25, 25-23, 23-25, 25-18, 15-10.

Canada used all their top players and could make two comebacks for the win in the second and fourth sets. "It was a well fought match, and all the sacrifices of my team end with this victory," said Stelio DeRocco, the Canadian coach. "Now we just have to wait and hope the FIVB invites us to one of the qualifier tournaments in May."

In the tie-breaker, the offense of Paul Duerden and Jason Haldane was fundamental for a comfortable victory for the North Americans. "Like in other occasions we lacked the clutch offense and failed to keep the rhythm you need to play at this

level," said Luis Ruiz, the coach of Puerto Rico.

Haldane and Ross Ballard had 15 points apiece and Duerden tallied 14. Puerto Rican Hector Soto led all the scorers with 25 points.

CAN-PUR 3-2 (23-25, 25-23, 23-25, 25-18, 15-10) Total (111-101) Duration: 1:51 Audience: 1,837

In the closing ceremony the organizers presented the awards to the best players of the tournament.

Best Service- Clayton Stanley (USA)

Best Attacker - Yasser Portuondo (CUB)

Best Blocker- Pavel Pimienta (CUB)

Best Defense- Lucas Snider (CAN)

Best Receiver- Gregorry Berrios (PUR)

Best Setter- Javier González (CUB)

Best Libero - Javier Brito (CUB)

Most Valuable Player- Tomas Alzabal (CUB)

