



2016 Men NORCECA Continental Olympic Qualification Tournament

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
January 8-10, 2016

molten
For the real game

SPORT COURT
January 2015
Year 14 - No. 03



Canadian Hoag dreams with a spot at the Rio Olympics

Edmonton, Canada, January 8, 2015 – Canada's coach Glenn Hoag has been at the helm of the men's national team for almost ten years now and the veteran skipper sees the NORCECA Men's Olympic Qualifier as a chance to realize long time dream.

"The last time we had a volleyball team playing in the Olympics was in 1992 at Barcelona so winning the tournament at home would be like a dream for us," Hoag said on Thursday night. "But we need to focus on achieving that goal."

Last year Canada team, currently ranked 10th in the world, had a perfect 9-0 win-loss record against the teams of Cuba, Puerto Rico and Mexico they will be facing during the weekend at Saville Community Sports Centre and are considered strong candidates to earn the ticket available to Rio de Janeiro Games in the tournament.

"Winning the competition at home would be great to promote volleyball in Canada and to motivate the kids to play the game since we are going to be on national television," Hoag added. "We want to show the fans the progress of our team."

Canada team won their four matches against Puerto Rico, beat Mexico three times and twice defeated Cuba. They will start the event facing Mexico on Friday followed by the contest with Puerto Rico on Saturday before closing the competition on Sunday against Cuba.

Even though he showed respect for the talented Canadian squad and their home team advantage, Cuba's coach Rodolfo Sanchez said he has not favorites or a special team to beat.



"Canada is a good team and they are playing at home, but the truth is that you have to win against three teams to earn the ticket to the Olympics and Canada is one of them," Sanchez said. "So I don't see them as the team to beat."

Sanchez commented about his team's preparation for the tournament and commented about the return of the athletes who are playing in foreign leagues with authorization from the national federation.

"We have a pretty young team that has trained very well for this competition and we hope everything comes out the way we have planned," he said. "We started had about 15 days ago and the players who were playing at foreign leagues joined us. Our goal, like everybody else, is to earn a ticket to the Olympics."

Mexico's Jorge Miguel Azair, who has returned to coach the men's team after a season with the ladies squad, has a more modest goal.

"We are coming here with the illusion of qualifying directly to the Olympics but that is a big challenge," Azair commented.

"A good result for us would be a third place because then we would be playing the intercontinental tournament against Chile and the second and third placed teams from the African qualifier."

Javier Gaspar, the coach of Puerto Rico, hopes the up and coming Maurice Torres, who has been playing brilliantly in the Italian League, will be able to play to the most of his talent.

"We expect a lot from Maurice Torres, who has been among the top five offensive players in Italy this season, and also from Steven Morales, who both are part of our rebuilding process," Gaspar said. Hector Soto, a mainstay in the national team for years, won't be with the squad on this occasion after suffering a foot injury during the national league.

"We just finished the league on December 17 and started to practice together four days later," Gaspar said. "We are very glad to be in this situation with a chance to qualify to the Olympic whether winning here or in a second chance but you can tell everybody that we are going to play hard from start to finish."