

Secrecy abundant for exhibition game

HAVANA (AP) — Floodlights bathe Havana's Cerro neighborhood nightly as Cuba's best baseball players practice in an empty stadium closed to the public and the media.

Only a few officials and reportedly Cuba's No. 1 baseball fan — President Fidel Castro — are allowed in.

With Cuba's national pride on the line, the final roster for Monday's exhibition game against the Baltimore Orioles at Camden Yards is a state secret. No one wants to risk giving the Orioles a strategic advantage.

"No one shows their cards and this is no exception," the Communist Party's workers newspaper Trabajadores said. The team will be announced Friday.

Castro had attended several practices, government sources said. Like most Cubans, he is passionate about the sport, and sat in the front row behind home plate during the first exhibition game at Havana on March 28.

Cuban baseball commissioner Carlos Rodriguez said the team would emphasize speed, not force.

"We will have two or three sluggers, but the team's characteristic will be a fast game," Rodriguez said.

The players "are training at full steam," the Communist Party daily Granma said Thursday. Reportedly, the players have adapted to the use of wooden bats, which they recently switched to from aluminum ones.

The secrecy surrounding the selection and practices of the team has led to speculation about the final roster.

A pre-selection list of 48 players

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CARLOS RODRIGUEZ
Cuban baseball commissioner

includes the biggest names in Cuban baseball: third baseman Oscar Linares, second baseman Antonio Pacheco and first baseman-designated hitter Orestes Kindelan. Also on the list are pitchers Jose Ibar, who started the first exhibition game, Jose Ariel Contreras and Pedro Luis Lazo, who worked in relief.

For this game, more of Cuba's best players will be available because some were involved earlier in national play-offs.

The Orioles won the first game 3-2 in 11 innings.

Almost 300 Cubans will fly to Baltimore for the rematch. The delegation includes journalists, retired baseball players, members of youth groups and outstanding students.

Some of the better-known athletes in the delegation are former world champion heavyweight Teofilo Stevenson, high jump world record-holder Javier Sotomayor and Connie Marrero.


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