

Name: Ariel Hernández Azcuy

Date of birth: April 8, 1973, Guane, Pinar del Río, Cuba.

Nationality: Cuban

Citizenship: Cuban

Title: Double Olympic Champion (in Barcelona, 1992 and Atlanta, 1996), World Champion (in Tampere, 1993 and Berlin, 1995) and only one with two titles in Orb Championships for Youth (Bayamón, 1989 and Lima, 1990).

Ariel Hernández Azcuy. Retired Cuban amateur boxer in the 75 kilogram division. He obtained multiple international titles as Olympic and Wporld Champion and seven times national champion. Selected among the one hundred best sportsmen of Cuba in the XX century. Glory of Cuban sport.

### **Biographical Synthesis**

He was born on April 8, 1973 in Guane town, in Pinar del Río province. He started in the sport, when he was only nine years old, as a baseball pitcher. At the end of 1984 he went into boxing, following the steps of his older brother, and at the age of 14 he entered the EIDE Ormani Arenado Llonch School of Sports Initiation in Pinar del Río, under the guidance of coach Emiliano Chirino. At that time he weighed 54 kilograms, and his dream was to become an Olympic champion, like his idol, Teófilo Stevenson. He was quickly promoted to the Escuela Superior de Perfeccionamiento Atlético (ESPA), where he continued his training with trainer Waldo Santiago.

#### **Sports career**

In 1989, at the age of 16, he formed the Cuban squad at the World Youth Championship (for children under 19) in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, where he won the gold medal in the 67-kilogram division without many

setbacks. He won four fights, including the final round, against German Democratic Republic boxer Chris Bartholomess, who suffered an injury in the first round that forced him to quit.

The following year, the International Amateur Boxing Association (AIBA) decided to bring forward the next meeting of the youth world, which was scheduled for 1991. Thus, Ariel Hernandez had the opportunity to fight in the youth category once again. With no problems, he overcame every obstacle until winning the final fight against Russian Nurgam Smanov, 19-9, which became the only double world title holder in that category in the history of amateur boxing.

At that time, Juan Hernández Sierra, who represented his country at the XI Pan American Games in Havana in 1991 and at the Orb Championship in Sydney, both held that same year, reigned in Cuba in the welterweight of seniors.

Ariel Hernandez continued his preparation, already as a member of the national preselection -but in the 75 kilogram division-, always with his coach Julio Mena. At the beginning of 1992 he won the Playa Girón National Boxing Championship, and in the Giraldo Córdova Cardín International Boxing Tournament he ratified that he was already the first in his country, in addition to triumphing in several events abroad.

#### Participation in international events

The technical commission placed all its trust in the young athlete, and thus arrived at the first Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992, Spain, where he was not an unknown, but neither was among the favorites to integrate the medal table. He possessed remarkable ability to avoid blows, and a fine boxing fencing, which were his main weapons. The draw in the Olympic organization chart favored him. It began with an easy 6-0 win over Joseph Nii Ashiao Layer (Ghana) and continued, 13-2, over Gilbert Willomont Brown (Virgin Islands).

Their third fight against Germany's Sven Ottke was a tough one, but they won 14-6. They went into the semi-finals, against all odds, and defeated Korean Seung Bae-Lee, 14-1. In the final round, they faced American Chris Byrd, who was the favorite; however, Ariel Hernandez beat him 12-7 to win the Olympic gold medal. Years later, Byrd was a professional heavyweight world champion.

His first world title came the following year in Tampere, Finland, where he defeated Igor Buznin (Uzbekistan) 13-1 in his first fight, and then Sven Ottke (Germany), in a fight that ended in a draw with two and had to be decided in the individual ballots of the judges. In

the semifinals, he passed Raymond Joval (Netherlands), 11-4, and in the fight for the crown he beat Akin Kologlu (Turkey) by only two strokes (9-7).

In 1993, he took part in the Central American and Caribbean Games in Ponce, Puerto Rico, where he defeated Marvin Penniston John (Trinidad and Tobago), 13-1, for first place. In 1994 his main competition was the World Cup in Thailand, in which he was eliminated in the first bout by the very strong German Bent Schenk, 4-11, which was one of the big surprises of the tournament.

Defeat did not frighten Ariel Hernandez. He increased his preparation in the following season, and attended, to defend his crown, the World Championships in Berlin. He was a bye in the organization chart, and in his first preliminary bout he defeated Eric Wright (USA) 16-2.

In the round of 16 he beat Mchitar Vanesyan (Armenia) 7-2. For the pass to medals won, 7-2, Murat Sultanov (Russia), and in the semifinals had the Uzbek hitter Dilshod Yarbekov, 6-1. With success over Tomasz Borowski (Poland), 6-2, he won his second gold medal at World Championships. Thanks to his impressive performance in the ring, with lateral displacements and spins that made him virtually untouchable by his opponents, he received only nine hits of coincidence in four bouts.

The possibility of a Pan American Games title was opened to Hernandez that same year in Mar del Plata, Argentina. It was presented in unbeatable form, and left Jorge Melo Silva (Brazil), Alex James (Granada), Ronald Simms (USA) and Ricardo Araneda (Chile) in the way. He already had all the titles of the International Boxing Association (AIBA), but he was going for more.

His second Olympic opportunity came in 1996, in the U.S. city of Atlanta. At the age of 23, he was in top condition and showed exquisite technique, with a strong blow and precise lateral movements of the legs, to avoid the attacks of his rivals. He defeated Egypt's Salin Kabary 11-4, Germany's Sven Ottke 5-0 and Russia's Alexander Lebziak 15-8, USA's Roiz Wells 17-8 in the semi-finals and Turkey's Malik Bayleroglu 11-3 for his second Olympic title.

He did not perform well in 1997, losing several competitions, including the World Championship in Budapest, Romania, where he was defeated in the final by Zsolt Erdei (Hungary). It was almost impossible for him to maintain his weight in the 75-kilogram division.

In Cuba, he had a major rival in the Camagüeyan Jorge Gutiérrez Espinosa - who would become champion in the Sydney Olympic Games

(2000) - with whom he starred in fierce fights. But the national commission decided on Ariel Hernandez for two of the three main competitions in 1998. He won the Central American and Caribbean Games in Maracaibo, Venezuela, against Colombian José Luis Herrera, and won the gold medal at the Goodwill Games in New York, where he beat Frenchman Jean Paul Mendy, 15-14, in the final. The Beijing World Cup was attended by Jorge Gutiérrez, who won the gold medal.

However, in 1999 Ariel Hernandez was chosen to represent his country at the World Championship in Houston, Texas, in the 75-kilogram division. Without the usual speed of legs and arms, he lost his first fight against the Romanian Adrian Diaconu, a silver medalist. He suffered from hepatitis that took him away from the gym for a few months, which caused a considerable weight gain, and his return was no longer the same.

He participated at the beginning of 2000 in the tournament Girón Beach, in the division of 91 kilograms, and lost in his second fight, against Odlanier Solís, 0-5. He tried to reduce his weight to 81 kilograms, but could not integrate the team to the Olympic Games in Sydney, although he had great expectations to reach the optimal form in the heavy weights and get his third Olympic gold medal.

#### Retirement from sport

The weight problem forced him to retire prematurely at the age of 27, although he had spent 15 years on Cuba's top boxing team. His official farewell took place during the celebration of the IV Cuban Sports Olympiad in 2008. He then began to work as a Sports Coach for the national team and provided sports collaboration in Venezuela, and when he returned from the mission he worked as a coach for the main figures of the Cuban pre-selection.