

## A Living Legend of Cuban Basketball

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Written by Victor Manuel Blanco González

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Reinaldo Perdomo, almost nobody at home or at work calls him by his first name because for decades his hundreds of friends and acquaintances address him, simply as the "Poti". The Poti is considered a living legend of basketball in Pinar del Río, a discipline that he helped to organize together with a small group of coaches in the distant 60's of last century.

Since then, dozens have been the great luminaries he has formed with his imprint and multiple titles achieved in all categories. Right next to the stove to which he has dedicated most of his life and almost without taking his eyes off the girls who train a few meters away from us, he proudly tells me how he began his passion for basketball, the orange blossoms of that first organizational stage, the goals achieved and the dreams yet to be realized.

"When I was in seventh grade, a friend invited me to go to the Normal School, which was where basketball was practiced and where all the tournaments were played at that time. First by following the others and then by hobby I continued running, so little by little I was getting that little bug inside.

"Before it was played by zone, I remember that I formed my own team that I jocularly called the "Vultures of the Alameda" and with which every year we had a field fight with the "Tigers of Cavada".

How do you become a coach?

"In 1963 Arístofanes Mesa, regional director of Inder at that time, asked me to go as an activist to the first School of Revolutionary Instruction and some time later to go to the Normal School, where the first Emerging Masters course was going to be created.

"In the year 66 I have to go to the military service in Havana, when I return is that I incorporate myself to work in education, there I join Félix Pollo, Enrique Enríquez, Julio Llanes and other companions who had passed the first course of teachers of Physical Education".

How do you remember those first steps in organizing basketball in Pinar del Río?

"At that time, mini-basketball began with children between 10 and 12 years old in a center that we called the Ciudad Deportiva, which is located where the University and the Hotel Pinar del Río are today. I remember some athletes who were there like Teonila Armenteros, Rosa Arango and Flora Gato, with whom we went to the first National Championship" "In 70 we wanted to make a change, bring athletes and where there was more was in Orozco, then I voluntarily went there for

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a year and brought about 9 or 10 girls, from there came the core of the first results of women's basketball, with those girls and some who were in the mini, then we went to work officially for the EIDE".

Have you always been involved in women's basketball?

"Initially when we started with the mini I started with the men's but Jorge Luis Barrizonte arrived, who came from Germany and did not deal well with girls, so I went to coach the women's team.

When does the first great result of women's basketball arrive for the province?

"It was right here in the 86-87 season when we won the first National Championship, that was extraordinary because at that time there were six teams of incredible quality.

"We defeated Matanzas who had a great team, for me that moment is unforgettable because it meant my fulfillment as a coach.

Did you ever get a chance to work with the national team?

"I was very regionalist, there was no one to get me out of Pinar del Rio, but I was able to travel around much of Europe as a stimulus because I was one of the most important contributors to the national team in Cuba. "In the '91 Pan American Games, I also had the opportunity to be, along with Julio Llanes, one of the delegates of the Cuban team and to sit on two occasions less than two meters away from the Commander in Chief.

What do you think was the golden age of women's basketball in Pinar del Río?

"At the end of the 70's and almost all of the 80's, there were many of the athletes who have shone most in this sport in Cuba, starting with Lisset Castillo, the "squirrel", great not only in Cuba but in the world, another extraordinary player Olga Lidia Vigil, the pioneers of the team, Odalys Cala and Ana Gloria Hernandez, who really were the ones who started Cuba's results in multidisciplinary events. "There was a time when we had six players in the national team and 10 in a B team, from there until now the least we have had are two athletes in the Cuba team.

How important has this sport been in your life?

"Thanks to basketball I can feel satisfied, I have two small grandchildren and there is no difference between them and basketball,

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I enjoy them as much as being on a court.

Do you trust this new generation of players who are emerging now?



"There are many things that are unrepeatable and comparisons are always bad but before the level was higher, this group three or four must reach the top, that's what we work for and we do believe that these girls have a lot of future.

What would be the greatest personal satisfaction I could experience before saying goodbye to the courts?

"To see this new generation at the top, even if it is not with them, to watch them on television or listen to them on the radio assuming the responsibility of basketball in Pinar del Río".

Considered one of the fathers of basketball in the westernmost of the provinces, Reinaldo "El Poti" Perdomo is a living symbol of the Cuban Sports Movement, which he has not hesitated to represent in nations such as Nicaragua, Mexico or Venezuela. His imprint, his charisma and his daily love for his profession, has touched generations of players and coaches, who today have words of gratitude to the man who trained them not only in sports but for life.