

# **Cuba defeats Team Pittsburgh, 7-4 in front of over 2,500 fans at Battle on the Bridge**

Pittsburgh, PA (August 1, 2016) – A group of some of the best amateurs from boxing hotbed Cuba defeated Team Pittsburgh 7-4 on Saturday night in front of a packed crowd of over 2,500 on the Roberto Clemente Bridge adjacent to PNC Park.

The meet, which was a year in the making that saw the team from Pittsburgh travel to Cuba in May for a dual-training session between the teams and culminated with the historic event.

Not only was the meet staged in front of a capacity crowd, but was broadcast live back to Cuba with an estimated viewing audience of 11 million people.

In attendance were 1996 Olympic Gold Medal winner Maikro Romero of Cuba, who came over as an ambassador for his home country as well as two-time world champion, Steve “USS” Cunningham, who was a coach for Team Pittsburgh and father of team participant, Steve Cunningham Jr.

The younger Cunningham, along with teammates Nehemiah Hollinger, Sylvio Cercone & Kiante Irving were the four members from Team Pittsburgh to have their hand's raised.

For more information on the event, [www.cubasipgh.org](http://www.cubasipgh.org)

## **History of the Event**

In the sport of amateur boxing, Cuba has established itself as a world power house. Despite only having a population roughly equal to that of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Cuba has won an unbelievable 67 Olympic medals in boxing, 34 of which are Gold. By all accounts, Cuba is a world leader in the

sport.

In November of 2015, a diverse delegation of business and community leaders led by Congressman Mike Doyle, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, and Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak traveled to Cuba to invite Cuba to take on Team Pittsburgh. Today, July 30, 2016, right here in Pittsburgh, you are a witness to an unprecedented athletic exchange with Cuba. While Pittsburgh has had a long-standing relationship with the City of Matanzas, Cuba and has engaged in countless academic, cultural, and humanitarian exchanges with our friends in Cuba, this athletic exchange will be a first. Our belief is that if Pittsburgh wants to be the best in the world, we have to learn from the best in the world. Having the opportunity to compete against Cuba provides our athletes with a tremendous opportunity to challenge them to become better boxers while making friends and learning about a different culture

This competition will be unique in the fact that unlike the athletic exchanges of the past between USA and Cuba, this event will be a "friendly" club match. Each of the bouts athletes are evenly matched. The goal of the evening's competition is to provide young boxers of all skill levels a chance to compete on the international level and ultimately grow as boxers and individuals. Because of the historic nature of this event, we endeavored to stage the boxing match in a manner that reflects its significance. Matanzas is Cuba's City of Bridges, and Pittsburgh holds that designation in the U.S.A. Because of the need to create a symbolic bridge between the U.S. and Cuba to move past the Cold War Era, we have chosen to hold this match on the Roberto Clemente Bridge, honoring at the same time a man who gave his life building unity among nations.

#### History of Pittsburgh Matanzas

The Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership was founded to create an opportunity for our residents, public officials, and leaders of organizations to engage in mutually beneficial

'people to people' exchanges with the residents of Matanzas, Cuba. On February 20, 1998 a signing agreement took place in Matanzas officially designating our sister city relationship.

The Mission of the Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership is to expand our sister city relationship between the City of Pittsburgh and the City of Matanzas, Cuba, to foster understanding and bilateral cooperation through mutually beneficial exchanges between individuals, government officials, community groups, organizations, educational, environmental, cultural, sports, business, and other institutions. It is important that ordinary people be able to experience Cuba for themselves and form their own opinions. Over the years, our work has expanded to encompass bilateral relationships within the entire nation of Cuba.

Our work focuses on these 4 objectives:

1. Lift the illegal and immoral blockade (Extra-territorial economic and trade sanctions that impact world trade)
2. Lift the Travel Ban (Allow Americans the same freedom of travel enjoyed by every other democratic nation.)
3. Building International Relations that respect the independence and Sovereignty of Cuba
4. Ending the illegal and immoral occupation of Guantanamo Bay (US is in outright violation of Treaty)

Despite decades of travel restrictions placed on U.S. residents by our own government that remain in place even to this day, as do crippling economic sanctions against Cuba, which have been condemned worldwide as immoral and illegal under international law, we have continued our work to engage in peaceful and constructive activities with the people and institutions of Cuba.

#### History of Hibernian Celtic Athletic Fund

The Celtic Athletic Fund was created by members of Ancient Order of Hibernians to help make sports accessible for low-income Pittsburgh youth of all nationalities through

“Friendship, Unity, and Christian Charity”.

Boxing on the Bridge is the brainchild of the organization.

Michael Diven, a former Pittsburgh councilman and former state representative, is a member of the Hibernian Celtic Athletic Fund and the Pittsburgh Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership. For the past three years on St. Patrick’s Day, the fund has sponsored an exchange with Irish boxers called the Donnybrook organized by Mr. Diven.

The Cuban Constitution guarantees “access to study, culture and sports.” But in the U.S., youth sports, as well as art and music, are among the first to be cut when school district funding shrinks. “Boxing on the Bridge” continues the work of the fund to support sports initiatives for Pittsburgh’s youth and builds on decades of work by the Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership

For Pittsburgh, it will be a unique opportunity for our amateur youth boxers to learn from the best boxers in the world. And for our nation, it will help build bridges with Cuba and public support for congressional action to finally end the U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba, which continues, despite President Obama’s March visit to the island.