

CUBA EXPERIENCE

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I was lucky enough to be in Cuba for two weeks this holiday season. It was especially interesting for me because this was my first time in Cuba.

Since I am what you could call a volleyball addict, two weeks of two a days was exactly how I wanted to spend my vacation. We got to practice in one of the nicest gyms in Matanzas but even that wouldn't be considered safe by Canadian standards. But playing in those conditions taught me a few things. The first thing I realized was how much I take for granted at home, smooth level floors and climate control to name a few, and I gained a new appreciation for our gym, even though it's not considered top notch in the OUA. Another thing that playing there taught me was how not to focus on things you can't control. This concept was brought up in one of our meetings and was incredibly relevant to what we were facing every day. I've heard the concept before but being able to get a ton of reps in really finally drove it home.

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When we went to Havana and got to play the Junior National team it was quite an experience. I was amazed at the athletic ability of the athletes that we played against. Playing against them was a ton of fun because they were such a challenge and momentum swings happened often. Since they were so powerful, every dig, block and dime was huge. That team got third on the world scale, so they are some of the best athletes in the world for their age. Playing with that level of intensity always reminds me of why I love volleyball.

Aside from the volleyball, two weeks in Cuba over Christmas and New Years, a time where family is usually close was a little strange for everyone. But I believe we grew as a team in ways that only two weeks in Cuba could have brought about. These things made my Cuba experience special. Being a rookie I really didn't know everyone on the team all that well before the trip. Being there without our families made us grow closer as a team. At the beginning of the season one of the guys said that we were his family. When it was first said I heard it, but now I understand and feel the same way. So whether it was the aerobics on the beach (that clearly improved all of our dancing abilities), the food that was rough on everybody's system, the late night bonding at the disco and Cuban shows, the swimming in the ocean, the lack of sleep or the beach volleyball we got to play I feel that the team is much closer and that the good things in the second half of the season are direct result of this trip.

*Cuba with Canada
Cuba is good!*

I am very grateful to have been a part of this unforgettable experience and I would like to thank Mirek for making it all happen. I would also like to thank Danielle and Katrina for their contributions to the trip that made playing and dancing possible. Also thank you to everyone who attended our fund raiser, and everyone else involved in the background that helped make this trip possible.

Robby E.