

## Cuban Player Defects During Pan-American Games and Disappear in Brazil

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento  
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Rafael D'Acosta Capote, 19, a handball player with the Cuban team participating in the Pan-American Games in Brazil has left his teammates and is apparently seeking political asylum from the Brazilian government.

He traveled with nothing more than his clothes and paid US\$ 300 to a taxi cab to take him from Rio's Olympic Village in Barra da Tijuca to São Caetano do Sul in the Greater São Paulo, where another Cuban who also defected plays for a professional handball team.

The Cuban athlete explained that he wants to leave Cuba and live in Brazil because he believes Brazil will offer him more professional opportunities. He says he wishes to regularize his situation in the country as soon as possible and for that he will ask the Foreign Ministry for asylum.

"He is extremely scared," said a source at the São Caetano do Sul's Sports Secretariat. "If they find out where he is they might come here to take him by the neck."

Capote has already left São Caetano, however, and nobody seems to know or is willing to tell where he is. In São Caetano do Sul he met his fellow citizen Michel Oquendo, goalkeeper for the IMES/São Caetano handball team. Oquendo had defected himself, two years ago.

At Oquendo's invitation, Capote trained with the team at the end of last week but was told he could not be hired as his colleague because the IMES already has two foreigners, which is the maximum number of foreigners allowed by Brazil's National Handball League regulations.

Capote spent the weekend at the house that Oquendo shares with four other team players. One of them, Caio Cesar Eufrásio told reporters how the athlete showed up: "He only had his clothes on and this led us to give him some clothes and other items."

He apparently got scared after a team of reporters from Globo TV showed up at the house. "After the Globo guys left, he became terrified. He just got his things and disappeared," said Eufrásio.

The story was confirmed by Flávio Pontes, the IMES coordinator, who believes that he got scared that his situation would complicate if he gave any interview or was shown on TV.

IMES' Coach, Washington Nunes, says that he has no idea where Capote is: "I don't know where he is and have no idea what he intends to do."

The Cuban handball team coach, Carlos Carrete Galindo, says that his countryman "defection" served to unite his team even more in their quest for a gold medal. "This has influenced the team, in a positive way," he said. "It united us even more."

Galindo accused Capote of treason from "abandoning a team that trusted his work."

Monday, July 16, Cuban men's handball team won against Chile 40 to 18, advancing together with Brazil to the semifinals of the competition.

Right after the victory, Denip Fonseca Aleaga, from the Cuban team, commented: "We all suffer temptations, but nobody succumbed to them like Capote, who has become a Cuban traitor. We know that other countries offer things that we don't have in ours, but this is not enough for us to simply abandon it."

According to the Brazilian Federal Police and the Conare (Refugees' National Board), Rafael's situation in Brazil for now is legal. But, they inform, he will need to ask for asylum and be granted it in order to be able to work and play professionally in the country.