

Puerto Rico got his ticket to the world cup



Caracas, Venezuela - Puerto Rico came back from a difference from 22 points and defeated Venezuela in overtime, 86-85, to become the first qualified team for the 2014 FIBA World Cup in Spain. Jose Juan Barea, 30 points, and Renaldo Balkman, with 26 points, were the best players of the winning team.

With the support of Poliedro almost full, Venezuela opened the game with a 17-7 run, with the actions of a powerful Donta Smith and Luis Bethelmy. The home side came into the game with great intensity on defense and complicated the attacks of Puerto Rico, a team that only answered with the scoring of Jose Juan Barea. Venezuela was impressive in the first quarter: offensive flow, extra passes to find the man best placed, ferocious defense, rebounding and high effectiveness on the releases. At the end of the quarter the Venezuelan team had taken a 28-11 advantage.

In the second, Puerto Rico remained in a shadow on the court, very passive and vulnerable in defense. Venezuela with a well-distributed scoring got the maximum difference of the game (37-15). With Barea and Balkman the visiting team was able to diminish the Venezuelan lead to 15 points. Thus, the "Vinotinto" went into half-time with the scoreboard, 43-26.

Puerto Rico was present at the dawn of the third quarter and showed a better face. Based on a couple of good defenses in two minutes and got a 9-0 run, thanks to the conversions from Ricky Sanchez, John Holland and Balkman (46-35). However, Venezuela said enough and scored from the perimeter to regain control, with Cubillán and Smith. All the points from Venezuela in this segment were triples (7). But Puerto Rico was not far behind and answered in the same way with the three-pointers by Carlos Arroyo, Holland and Barea, who scored a spectacular one on the edge of the 24 seconds of possession. Thus, Puerto Rico was down by seven (64-57) at the end of the quarter.

The party won even more excitement when Puerto Rico narrowed the rivals advantage to 5 (66-61) with a double of Holland and a dunk by Balkman. Venezuela lost patience in that stretch and paid with the reaction of the opponent, Nestor Garcia cooled the situation with a time-out and Venezuela recovered, through Gregory Smith and Vargas, to take an 11 point lead

(77-66). But when it seemed history was written, Puerto Rico brought out his hierarchy, Arroyo, Balkman and Barea, who scored a triple falling to the mark impossible to shorten the margin to two points (79-77). Then a basket by Balkman tied the game at 79. Venezuelan, Smith had in his hands the triumph of Venezuela on the last play, but all failed and the result was the first overtime of the Championship.

In overtime, Barea put the Puerto Rican team on his shoulders, the NBA player nailed a crucial three-pointer, which gave Puerto Rico a lead of three points, 84-81, and later, Balkman took a huge offensive rebound and scored two points to make it 86-83. Donta Smith, with two free-throws, narrowed the gap to 1 (86-85), Puerto Rico played great defense and took the victory and became the first team qualified for the 2014 FIBA World Cup in Spain.

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