

'I Didn't Like Castro,' Cuban Athlete Says

By AL BURT

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — If Fidel Castro himself picked a symbol of the Cuban revolution, he probably would come up with a boy like Juan Pablo Vega Romero.

Juan, a Negro, was 11 years old when Castro came to power. He rode the wave of Cuba's privileged youth being groomed for communism.

As a scholarship student and athlete studying physical education at the Fajardo Institute in Havana, whatever Cuba had to offer was his.

Soviet, Czech and East German instructors taught him and guided his political indoctrination. Cuban Negroes who had lived in the U.S. told him horror stories about racial discrimination and urged him to hate Americans. His father is a member of the Communist Party and a director of a Cuban furniture factory.

But Juan, a lad who by all counts should have been one

Chicago-Bound For a New Life

Cuban athlete Juan Vega Romero arrived in Miami Tuesday en route to Chicago, where he said he hopes to start life anew with a physical education career in a free country.

He repeated comments made earlier in Puerto Rico of widespread fear in Cuba and expressed amazement at the freedom of speech and the press in Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland.

of Castro's strongest supporters, defected from the Cuban sports delegation here and asked for political asylum in the U.S. He is a lightweight wrestler.

"I didn't like Castro," Juan said simply. He is an engaging, crew-cut 18-year-old who seems to speak his mind freely.

"I had the idea to leave many years ago," he said. "I did not believe what they taught me about the U.S. at school or what I read in the newspapers."

"I don't know much about the U.S. but it must be better than Cuba. I see the people moving around freely, the freedom of the press, the buildings and the good food."

Juan, who flew to Miami Tuesday, plans to go to Chicago to live with a brother-in-law, Bernardino Cortes. He would like to continue his studies and he and Cortes hope to get the rest of their family — except the father — out of Cuba.

"I talked only to my sweetheart before I left. She told me to go and then help her get out." His girl's father lives in New York.

Juan says the youth of Cuba do not support Castro as everyone supposes. "They are just afraid — afraid of being killed."

As a becado, or scholarship student, he did not have to serve in Cuba's mandato-

ry military program for men 14 to 26. He had good food to eat there because of his status as an athlete but said others do not.

Juan learned to speak English while studying as a very young boy in a Roman Catholic school, but he said he did not to go mass in Cuba. "If you go they see you and (he snapped the hand on his wrist)."

He denied that Cuba's athletes are free to leave the delegation here as Jose Llanusa, minister of education, has said. "We could only go around the Olympic villa. If I had told Llanusa I had wanted to leave, I would not be here," Juan said.

He said all the athletes had been warned in Cuba that they would be tempted with money and promises.

He said all the athletes had been warned in Cuba that they would be tempted with money and promises. "They talked to us about our revolutionary conscience. They told us in Cuba we were free and that in the U.S. it was bad."

Juan did not know how many G2 agents might be in the delegation, but said he knew about 20 men who were political types.

He remembered the mis-

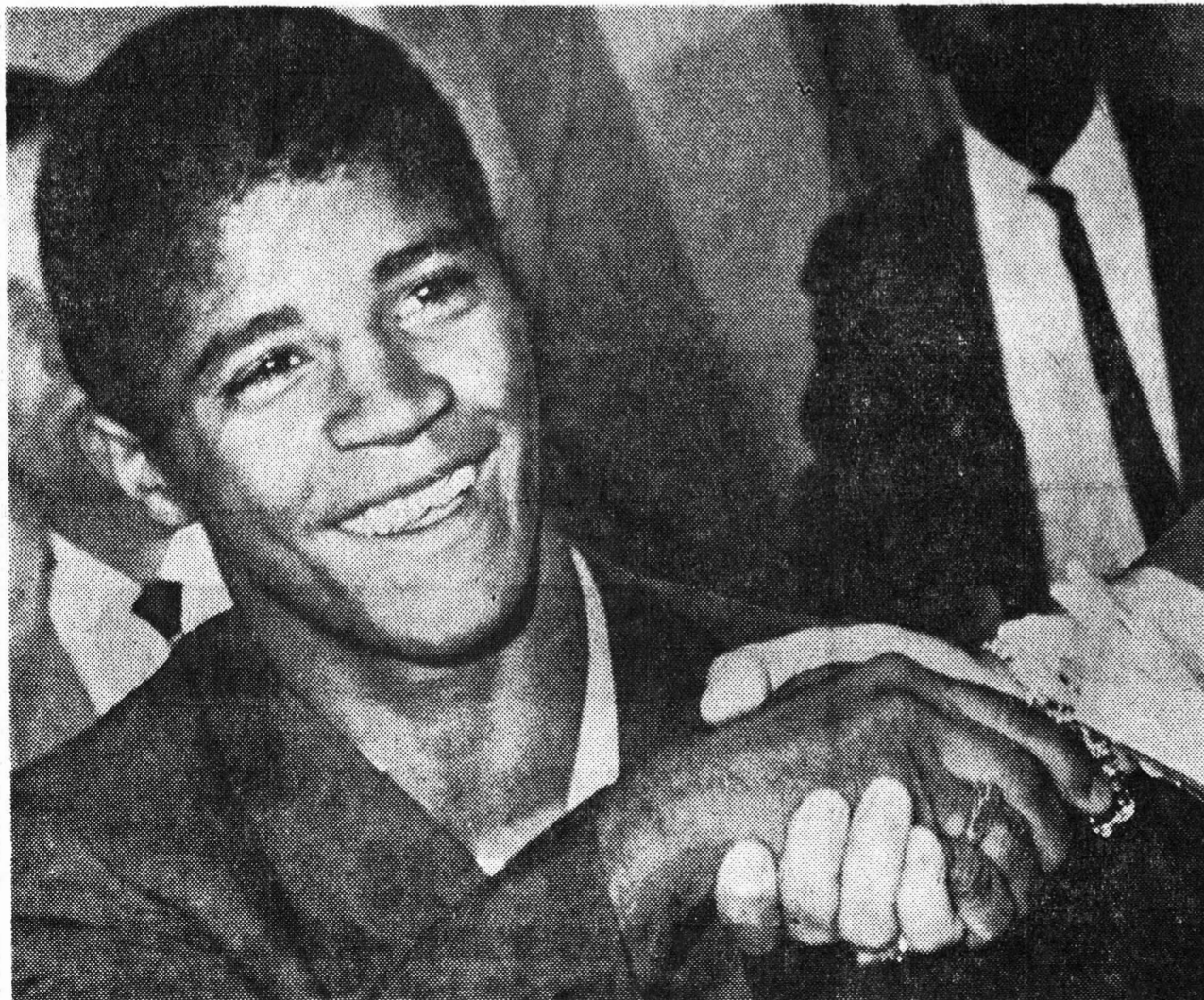
sile crisis of 1962. "We waited for the U.S. but you didn't come." He said he thought Che Guevara, Cuba's missing international Communist, was dead.

Athletes of other sports delegations quartered in the Olympic Villa asked a lot of questions about food, Castro and how many people were

being shot, Juan said.

He added that out of a conversation like this with a Puerto Rican athlete came his escape. He asked the Puerto Rican for help and got it.

About Llanusa's description of him as a traitor, Juan smiled. "I am one. I don't like them."



—Herald staff Photo by EAMON KENNEDY

Cuban Wrestler Juan Vega Romero Arrives in Miami
... handshake greets him at International Airport