

Brazil-Cuba rivalry heats up at Pan American Games

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil --

(AP) -- A scuffle between Brazilian and Cuban fans at the judo games forced the hasty departure of Brazil's sports minister, Orlando Silva, in the latest flare-up in the nations' rivalry at the Pan American Games on Sunday.

Home fans were upset after a judge gave Cuban Sheila Espinosa the victory over Brazil's Erika Miranda in the under 52-kilogram (114-pound) women's final.

The fans began booing and throwing plastic cups and other objects at the judge and Espinosa. At the same time, an altercation began in the stands after fans were upset with the celebration of members of the Cuban delegation, which included former athletes such as volleyballer Regla Torres.

Brazil's former Olympic champion Aurelio Miguel, a commentator for a local TV station, also got involved in the melee.

No punches were thrown, but security guards intervened and removed the Cubans from the site for their safety.

The competition was delayed for about an hour because of the scuffle, and the crowd booed the announcement of the medal ceremonies.

At the end, fighters and delegation members from both nations got together and shook hands.

The Pan Ams organizing committee said in a statement that it "regrets the incidents occurred Sunday" and asked for an investigation.

In an earlier Brazil-Cuba final, Yanet Bermoy defeated Brazil's Daniela Polzin in the under-48 kilograms (106 pounds) women's class.

"I was surprised with the boos at the medal ceremony," said Yosmani Pike, who took silver to Argentina's Miguel Albarracin in the men's under 60 kilograms (132 pounds) class. "The Brazilian people's opinion does not matter, the medal is mine."

On Thursday, Brazilian fans were angered after a judo judge, reportedly born in Cuba and a naturalized American, awarded Cuba's Oscar Brayson a disputed victory over Brazilian Joao Gabriel Schlittler.

Brazilians have been turned off by Cuba since the latter upset the home side in a thrilling women's volleyball final on Thursday, and some Cuban players provoked the local crowd after the medal ceremonies.

On Friday, Cuba defeated Brazil 6-5 in the women's water polo bronze-medal match, keeping the Brazilians from reaching the podium for the first time since the event began being played in 1999 in Winnipeg.

The next day, Cuban cyclist Yumari Gonzalez won the women's road race and prompted complaints from Brazilian athletes who accused the Cuban team of pushing them.

Brazil has beaten Cuba in the finals of women's beach volleyball and women's handball without incident, but on Sunday, Cuban Mariela Gonzalez beat Brazilians Marcia Narloch and Sirlene Pinho in the women's marathon.

