



La Prensa del Béisbol Latino

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Winter 2016

Major League Baseball returns to Cuba March 22nd

by Anthony Salazar

Not since 1999 has a major leaguer set foot on a field in Cuba, when the Baltimore Orioles took on the Cuban national team for a one-on-one series. On Tuesday, March 22nd, the Tampa Bay Rays will take on the Cubans in Havana, with US president Barack Obama looking on, no less.

The exhibition game is another instance of “béisbol diplomacy”, where the sport has helped to bridge international differences of political ideology. The Obama administration has actively taken steps to re-engage Cuba after more than 50 years of a frosty relationship.

While the government re-establishes relations with Cuba, Major League Baseball is looking to engage more freely with Cuban ballplayers, creating direct in-roads to the majors, and avoid the continued dangers of escape and defection to the US. MLB has submitted paperwork to the Treasury department in hopes of streamlining that process. Though, any formal relationship would begin first with the Baseball Federation of Cuba,

the Cuban government and the MLB Players Association.

Within the last six years, 25 Cuban players have fled Cuba, and signed with MLB teams for contracts worth more than \$1 million. However, it has been estimated that 150 Serie Nacional players left the country just last year, though many have not signed on with major league clubs.

Much more will be discussed on the Cuban pathway to baseball in the US. One thing is clear though, this story has many chapters left.



A look at the Cuban roster

by Anthony Salazar

The upcoming game in Havana pitting the Tampa Bay Rays against the Cuban National team will be an interesting match-up. Baseball America calls the current crop of Cuban talent, “The worst team in recent memory.” They attribute this to the vast number of players leaving the island to seek their fortunes with the major leagues. Consequently, Cuba is forced to use older players. One of their highly touted player, outfielder Alfredo Despaigne, is a veteran of the Nippon Professional Baseball. Here is what their roster will look like:

Pitchers

Freddy Alvarez
Vladimir Banos
Danny Betancourt
Yunier Cano

See **ROSTER**, page 3

INSIDE LA PRENSA

<i>MLB returns to Cuba</i>	1
<i>Looking at the Mexican Leagues</i>	2
<i>Re-capping the Caribbean World Series</i>	3
<i>The Road to the 2017 WBC</i>	3
<i>Spring Training in Arizona</i>	4
<i>La Serie: Past and Present</i>	5
<i>New books on Cuban baseball</i>	7
<i>Contributing to SABR's BioProject</i>	11

Winding Down Baseball in Mexico

By Bruce Baskin

When the Mazatlan Venados brought back Juan Jose Pachó to manage the team in midseason, the veteran skipper was inheriting a last-place team from Miguel Ojeda, who resigned on December 9 prior to accepting a job running the San Francisco Giants' AA Richmond affiliate. The Venados had turned in a decent 20-15 record in the first half to finish in third place and pick up six playoff points, but Mazatlan was scuffling early in the second half when Pachó took the reins from Ojeda.

The Deer didn't set the Mexican Pacific League on fire over the rest of the regular campaign, going 18-15 for another third-place finish in the second stanza, and after losing their first-round playoff series in six games to Navojoa, it took the MexPac's wildcard rule allowing the team with the most wins in an opening-round loss to join the three series winners as a semifinal to keep the Venados' season barely alive.

The rest, as they say, is history as Mazatlan proceeded to knock out Obregon in a tough seven-game set before topping Mexicali in five contests to win the LMP pennant. Then the Venados marched into Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and ran the table to become the fourth MexPac team in six winters to win the Caribbean Series title. None of it was new to Pachó, who brought the Venados back from a similar first-round loss all the way to their first Serie del Caribe title in 2005, conveniently held in Mazatlan that year and kick-starting Carnival a little early.

Obregon finished the LMP's best regular-season record at 39-29. Former Nats farmhand Jesus Valdez hit .347 for Jalisco to win the batting title while massive DH Japhet Amador led the circuit with 14

homers and 48 RBI's for the Charros before leaving two weeks early after signing with Japan's Rakuten Golden Eagles. Mazatlan outfielder Jeremias Pineda stole 31 bases in 36 attempts to finish on top of that table.

Mexicali's Javier Solano topped the loop with eight wins and 71 strikeouts over 81 innings to win two of the three pitching triple crown categories and Alejandro Soto of Mazatlan posted a low ERA of 2.63. Los Mochis closer Andres Avila tied an LMP record with 23 saves, one more than Mazatlan's Steven Hensley.

One of the biggest stories of the MexPac season was the continued significant growth in attendance. Nearly three million fans clicked the turnstile during both the regular season and playoffs for a 12 percent increase, the seventh straight winter such numbers have gone up. An average of more than 9,500 attendees places the circuit behind only Major League Baseball, Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball and the Korean Baseball Organization in average pro baseball attendance worldwide. Conversely, no affiliated minor league in the United States drew more than 7,000 per opening. In all, the LMP has seen attendance rise 39 percent since 2012 and with stadium development still ongoing in various MexPac cities, including Obregon and Mazatlan, those numbers should continue to go up.

Culiacan fans in particular have taken great pride in Estadio BBVA Bancomer, with over 16,000 people attending Tomateros games to watch a non-playoff team, and the venue will host next February's Caribbean Series.

See MEXICO, page 7

ROSTER, from page 1

Livan Moinelo
 Jonder Martinez
 Miguel Lahera
 Alexander Rodriguez
 Yosvani Torres
 Yoanni Year

Catchers

Yosvani Alarcon
 Frank Morejon
 Osvaldo Vazquez

Infielders

Yorbis Borroto
 Yurisbel Gracial
 Alexander Malleta
 Yordan Manduley
 Yuniur Paumier
 Rudy Reyes
 William Saavedra
 Yordanis Samon
 Andy Sarduy
 Juan Carlos Torriente

Outfielders

Guillermo Aviles
 Stayler Hernandez
 Jose Adolis Garcia
 Denis Laza
 Roel Santos



Re-capping the Caribbean World Series

By Ismael Nuñez

Super Bowl Sunday February 7th! The game starting at 6pm, final game of the 2016 Caribbean World Series. Mexico's Mazatlan Venados vs Venezuela's Aragua Tigres game starting at 2:30pm.

The game was almost like watching Game 7 of 2003 American League Championship game between New York Yankees/Boston Red Sox, and Game 7 of the 1960 World Series between the New York Yankees/Pittsburgh Pirates. Ending in dramatic fashion!

Mexico struck first taking 2-0 lead into the Fifth Inning. Then Venezuela came back scoring two runs in the top of the Fifth inning and then added two more runs in the top of the Seventh Inning to lead 4-2. Unfortunately for Venezuela their bullpen received an F, for in the bottom of the 7th inning Mexico scored two runs to tie the game at 4-4. Mexico's bullpen received an A when they held the team scoreless and hitless until the bottom of the 9thinning. That's when Jorge Vazquez came to bat in the bottom of the 9th inning and just like Bill Mazoroski did in the 1960 World Series Pittsburgh Pirates vs New York Yankees.



Vazquez hit a game winning home -run! Mexico wins their third Caribbean Series title in 4 years. Here's another thing Mexico would win all six games in the series!

After watching the game one can this reporter can honestly say can't wait till next year. Watch out for next Super Bowl you might've met your match. Now in April 2016 Baseball season begins! LOVE THIS GAME!

The Road to the 2017 World Baseball Classic

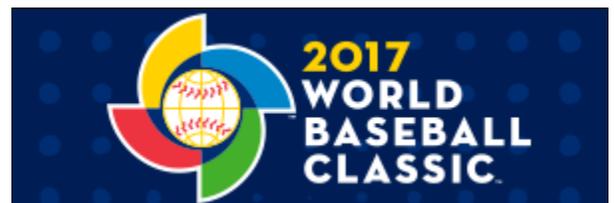
By Anthony Salazar

Stages for the 2017 World Baseball Classic are currently underway with qualifiers in Australia, Mexico, Panama and the United States.

In recent games, Mexico shut out Nicaragua, though, Nicaragua came back to beat the Czech Republic, to face Mexico and a chance to make the next round.

Meanwhile, Panama faces Columbia in the qualifier championship, after losing to the neighboring country in a previous match-up.

Stay tuned for more WBC action in the next issue!



CURRENT 2016 QUALIFIERS

Sydney (Blacktown International Sportpark)
 Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa

Mexicali (Estadio B-Air)
 Czech Republic, Germany, Mexico, Nicaragua

Panama City (Rod Carew Stadium)
 Columbia, France, Panama, Spain

Brooklyn (MCU Park)
 Brazil, Great Britain, Israel, Pakistan

For more info: <http://www.worldbaseballclassic.com>.

Spring training 2016: Sabor Latino como siempre

By Jose M. Romero

After a week covering spring training for the Associated Press, I've already been in four different clubhouses. On Feb. 19 I got a handshake from Felix Hernandez of the Mariners soon after he reported to camp for his physical, the top of his hair and his beard dyed bleach blonde.

Saturday morning had me in San Francisco Giants camp, and I made it a point to speak with pitcher Ricky Romero. I always try to seek out the players I think I can identify with, and Ricky being Mexican American made him the easy choice. Right off the bat, he told me he'd never heard of or seen a reporter with his last name, then he asked me if I speak Spanish.

In English.

"I'm all right," I said. "Not my first language but I know a lot."

That's my answer, or some variation of it, when asked that question by anyone.

I like to just chat when the interview is over, no recording. So we talked about El Tepeyac, a well known burrito joint in East LA where he's from.

Not far from Romero sat Johnny Cueto, who signed with the Giants this offseason. He holds court with a few other Spanish-speaking players who sit near him. On this day, Cueto was happy to meet the woman who announces the players' names at AT&T Park, wondering aloud who she was and how beautiful of a voice she has.

Cueto uses a translator in interviews with media.

Since then I have also spoken to another Giant,

Mexico's Ramiro Pena, about the World Baseball Classic. It's just easier to understand Mexican Spanish for me!

I eavesdropped on Pena's conversation with Puerto Rican Giant Angel Pagan, but I'll leave that one here. You try to respect people's privacy although I'm sure it was a harmless talk.

At Arizona Diamondbacks camp on Monday, I planned to talk to David Peralta, one of the starting outfielders. He was too busy, though, helping a Spanish-speaking teammate find his way around the clubhouse and facilities.

Two things I have noticed: Sergio Romo es bien travieso. He's always joking around and smiling and making light of situations or messing with people in a fun way. And veteran relief pitcher Joel Peralta of Seattle is beloved among his teammates. The Juan Uribe of pitchers. He's a guy, I take it, who has a solid reputation around the league since he's played for several teams, and he gets a lot of respect from coaches and teammates.

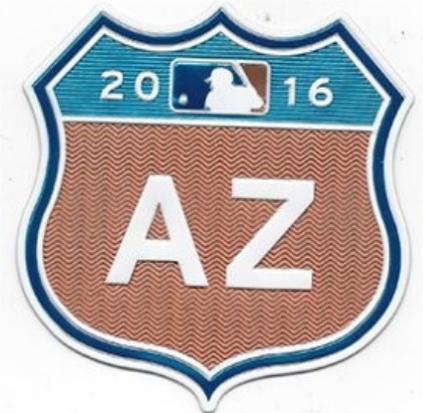
On Thursday I spoke with Dominican shortstop Ketel Marte of the Mariners. It's always interesting with the young guys like him, his English is not as good as that of veteran like Robinson Cano, so I could see that he really appreciated the chance to speak in Spanish to me. Marte is set to be the M's starter this season.

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La SERIE del CARIBE – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

by Monte Cely

Introduction

La Serie del Caribe, the Caribbean Series, is the culmination of Latin American *beisbol invernal*. The winter league champions from the participating countries meet each year to determine who will be crowned king of winter baseball. 2016 marked the 58th edition of *la Serie del Caribe* and was held in *Estadio Quisqueya Juan Marichal* in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.

This article will trace the history of *La Serie del Caribe*, describe how the competition has evolved, discuss the current state of play, and speculate about future developments.

History – la Primera Etapa – the First Phase (1949-1960)

With so many Dominican players starring in Major League Baseball (MLB) today, it may seem surprising that the Dominican Republic did not participate in the first phase of Caribbean Series play. The very first *Serie del Caribe* was held in Havana in February 1949. The champion teams from Cuba, Panama, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico represented their countries' professional leagues. The first Series champions were the Cuban representatives, *Alacranes de Almendares*. The Scorpions, also popularly called the Blues, swept the field with a perfect 6-0 record. Cuban hurler Agapito Mayor (nicknamed *Tres Veces Feo*, "Three Times Ugly") established a still-standing record of three wins in the tournament. Al Gionfriddo led in batting with a .533 average, and Monte Irvin supplied the Scorpions' power with two HR and 11 RBI. Mayor took the first-ever Series MVP crown.

La Serie del Caribe was a result of discussions among winter league executives at the December, 1947 National Association meetings in Miami. Representatives of the Puerto Rican, Venezuelan, and Panamanian leagues expressed their desire to join Cuba as associates of Organized Baseball. Four months later, at a meeting held in Havana in April 1948, officials from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Panama estab-

lished the Caribbean Confederation as an organizing body across the Latin American winter leagues. Venezuela soon joined the Confederation. At the Havana meeting, a framework was proposed for a Caribbean Series to be held at the end of the upcoming (1948-49) winter season. Venezuelan baseball *empresarios* Pablo Morales Perez and Oscar Prieto Ortiz are widely credited with being driving forces behind the establishment of *la Serie*.

In the First Phase, the format of competition was *todos-contra-todos*, a double-round-robin where each of the four clubs played two games against each opponent. The team with the best record after their six games played was declared the champion.

During the First Phase, teams from Cuba and Puerto Rico dominated play. A Cuban club won the Series on seven occasions, followed by Puerto Rico with four titles. The remaining championship was won by the Panamanian team in 1950. Of the individual clubs, *Cangrejeros de Santurce* (Puerto Rico) won three championships, followed by two each for Cuban clubs *Tigres de Marianao*, *Alacranes de Almendares*, and *Elefantes de Cienfuegos*.

The 1955 Santurce club is considered one of the best ever to compete in *la Serie del Caribe*. The Crabbers were managed by Herman Franks and included future Hall-of-Famers Willie Mays and Roberto Clemente in their outfield. Crabbers shortstop Don Zimmer was the Series MVP with three homers and two doubles. Willie Mays led the tournament with 11 hits and nine RBI, and Clemente topped the scoring with eight runs. Bill Greason tied for the pitching honors with two wins in 18 innings pitched.

The First Phase of *la Serie del Caribe* ended with the 1960 tournament. Held in Panama City on February 10-15, the tournament was won by a Cuban team for the fifth consecutive year. The Cuban profes-

See *LA SERIE*, page 8

MEXICO, from page 2

Mexico's "second" winter circuit, the Veracruz Winter League, played a short regular season that involved the LIV's six teams playing 30-game schedules in December before embarking on January's playoffs. The Paso de Ovejas Campesino won the season title with a 19-10-1 record, two games up on the Acayucan Tobis at 15-10-1. The Tobis went on to win the pennant by beating Xalapa in five games in the championship series, breaking the Los Tuxtlas Brujos' string of four consecutive flags.

After winning their first title in ten LIV winters, Acayucan represented Mexico at the Latin American Series in Managua against champions from Panama, Colombia and host Nicaragua. The Tobis posted a strong 9-3 opening day win over Colombia's Barranquilla Caimanes on January 26 before dropping their final two round-robin stages games and losing a 1-0 semifinal play-in game against Barranquilla despite tournament rules clearly stating that in the event of a tie, the nod would go to whoever had won their first-round matchup.

Veteran baseballist Christian Presichi, a longtime Mexican Leaguer, led the loop's batters with a .407 average for Paso de Ovejas, Tuxtla Gutierrez' Carlos Rodriguez was tops with 7 homers and 32 ribbies. Campesinos hurler Angel Araiza and the Tobis' Juan Grijalva topped the loop with 4 wins each, Los Tuxtlas' Joel Payamps turned in an 0.82 ERA and Raul Carrillo of Palenque posted 39 strikeouts.

There are two other winter pro leagues in Mexico. While the Mexican Pacific League may be considered AAA in quality and the Veracruz Winter League regarded a AA circuit, the Mexican Winter League is the country's Class A vernal loop while the Mexican League-operated Academy League goes from being an A league in summer to a Rookie league for the winter.

The Mexican Winter League, or LIM, rose from the ashes of the now-defunct Northwest Baseball League, a Nayarit-based confederation that folded last year after eight seasons. The LIM, also overseen by the Liga (as is every play-for-pay league in Mexico outside

the LMP), moved its six-team operation eastward toward Mexico City, mainly in the central Mexican states of Guanajuato and Aguascalientes.

The first winter of LIM competition saw the Mexico City Diablos Rojos (augmented by players contracted to the Oaxaca Guerreros) defeat the Salamanca Petroleros, 4 games to 3, in the playoff final. Former Diablos outfielder Victor Bojorquez managed Mexico City to a 40-22 record and a first-place finish during the regular season before longtime Red Devils shortstop Jose Luis Sandoval piloted the squad through the playoffs, culminating in Mexico City's 9-5 Game Seven win over the Petroleros on January 20 in front of 4,669 at Estadio Fray Nano in the nation's capital.

Guanajuato's Manuel Cruz led the LIM with a .414 and 12 homers while Mexico City's Jose Martinez drove in 47 runs. Diablos hurlers Filiberto Baez and Jesus Anguamea tied for the league lead with 7 wins apiece, teammate Ariel Gracia was tops with 67 strikeouts and a 2.85 ERA.

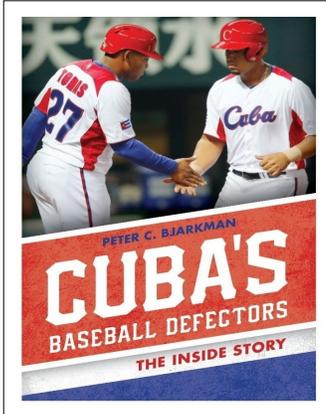
Finally, there's the Academy Winter League, consisting of Mexican League prospects housed together at the LMB's training facility near Monterrey. The Academy League runs a more ambitious "Class A" schedule from late March through July, but the winter league, which consists of four shared teams and one solely stocked with youngsters under contract with Saltillo, runs a shorter eight-week slate of doubleheaders between October and December, with teams playing about 27 games each. As in the LIM, a team shared by the Diablos Rojos and Oaxaca won the crown by going 21-4-2.

Now that the dust has settled on a full plate of winter leagues and games, we can all allow ourselves a breath, but only a short one because spring training is getting underway and Mexico's five summer pro leagues will be warming up before you know it. That's one of the beauties of Mexican baseball: There is no such thing as an offseason.



Bruce Baskin | BaseballMexico.blogspot.com

BOOK REVIEWS



Unknown tale of Cuban flight is timely tome

Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story

by Peter C. Bjarkman

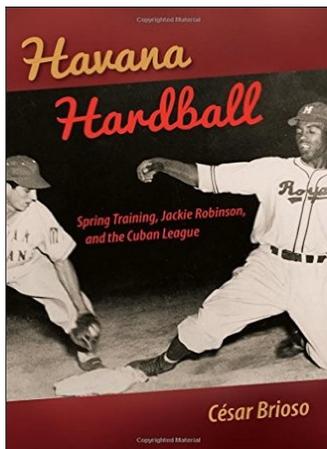
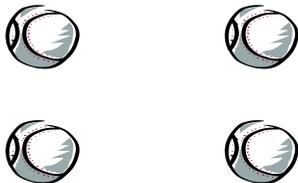
Peter C. Bjarkman's latest work is a bit of a departure from earlier historical accounts on baseball on the forbidden island. Often long is storytelling, but with a point, Bjarkman usually spins a great yarn about a player, a place or people along the way.

Bjarkman weaves a masterful tale, whether he is in Cuba, Holland or the United States. He is the ultimate insider to this fall of the "sugar cane curtain" and describes from an eye-witness account of many instances of these fateful decisions. The main strength is the expertise Bjarkman brings from his vast experience working around the Cuban baseball industry.

In *Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story*, the title does not exaggerate. In part, the story reads like a thriller, as you follow the player whose fateful decision changes the course of many lives. We also see the dozens of players who have left Cuba, and we begin to see a system, so well-crafted over decades, breakdown in a matter of months.

With all the news coming out from Cuba today, this is the most timely of tomes to hit the market. Get your copy ASAP!

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ISBN-13: 978-1442247987



Cuba's baseball lore provides backdrop for Jackie's place in history

Havana Hardball: Spring Training, Jackie Robinson, and The Cuban League

by César Brioso

The Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson to a professional baseball contract in 1945, and assigned the sport's first professional African American to their Montreal Royals affiliate. During the 1946 season the would explode on the field, exceeding Branch Rickey's expectations.

Brioso craftily weaves a grand tale intertwining the Dodgers moments of history, juxtaposed to the dramatic end of the 1946-47 Cuban baseball league season.

Hardcover: 320 pages
Publisher: University Press of Florida (September 22, 2015)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0813061164
ISBN-13: 978-0813061160

Robinson looked to compete for a job with the Dodgers during Spring Training in Havana in 1947. In *Havana Hardball: Spring Training, Jackie Robinson and the Cuban League*, author César

This is a pivotal moment in time for baseball in the US, Cuba and in Mexico. What makes this book a complete story is that Brioso artistically fills in the gaps of this important time in baseball's era. This book is a treasure for what it brings to our understanding, even in events of our current day.

LA SERIE, from page 5

professional clubs limped through the 1960-61 winter season and then were disbanded in favor of a non-capitalist, amateur league organization. As a result, *la Serie del Caribe 1961* was cancelled and the Series remained dormant for the next ten years.

History – *la Segunda Etapa* – the Second Phase (1970-2012)

La Serie del Caribe was resurrected in 1970 at *Estadio Universitario* in Caracas, Venezuela. Cuba was no longer participating, and Panama had also dropped out due to the ongoing financial difficulties of their winter league. The Dominican Republic winter league champion was added. Therefore, the tournament format was a three-team, 12 game round-robin, which yielded eight games for each club. The hosting Venezuelan club, *Navegantes del Magallanes*, won a *Serie del Caribe* title for the first time with a 7-1 record.

In 1971 *la Serie del Caribe* returned to its previous four-team, double round robin format with the addition of the champions from the Mexican Pacific League (a winter league). The Dominicans won their first *Serie* title as *Tigres del Licey* swept the field 6-0. Player-manager Manny Mota led the Dominicans and was also voted tournament MVP. The Mexican entry, *Naranjeros de Hermosillo* tied with Santurce (PR) and La Guaira (Ven.) at 2-4.

A Mexican team, *Naranjeros*, won their first title in 1976. The host country was the Dominican Republic, and this tournament was the first *Serie del Caribe* held at multiple venues – *Estadio Quisqueya* in Santo Domingo and *Estadio Cibao* in Santiago. Legendary Mexican home run king Hector Espino was voted series MVP.

The 1981 event was cancelled due to a players' strike in the Venezuelan Winter League. The strike was the result of a dispute between players and owners over gate receipts and meal money. However, *la Serie del Caribe* picked right up in 1982 in

Hermosillo, Mexico, and has been played annually to the present day. The schedule of host countries was not on a set rotation during this period, due to declining attendance in several of the participating leagues. Between 1985 and 1993, Mexico hosted *la Serie del Caribe* five times. In what was considered a botched experiment, *la Serie del Caribe* was hosted in the U.S. in Miami in both 1990 and 1991. The 1990 games were played at the Orange Bowl, which had to be configured for baseball and yielded a record number of home runs (48) hit to the short left field. A different format was tried in 1991 at Miami-Bobby Maduro Stadium, with a second round of play and a final best-of-three series. The 1991 series was not even promoted nor advertised as "*la Serie del Caribe*", but rather as "Winterball I". None of the "innovations" attempted in Miami worked, attendance remained low, financial losses were high, and the Series has never returned to the continental U.S.

During the Second Phase, the Dominican teams were ascendant. Dominican clubs have won 19 *Serie del Caribe* crowns, led by *Tigres del Licey* with ten. Puerto Rican teams added ten titles, although they have not won it all since 2000. Venezuela won seven *coronas*, and Mexico six.

The Current Phase (2013-present)

Although some historians of Latin American baseball might say we're still within *la Segunda Etapa*, I am going to designate the period beginning in 2013 as *la Etapa Actual*, the Current Phase. I'm making this distinction for two reasons: 1) The change in tournament format to include a "knock out" round, either a final game or semi-final and final games; and 2) the return of the Cuban *Serie Nacional* champions to *la Serie del Caribe*.

In *la Serie del Caribe 2013*, held in Hermosillo, Mexico, a "final game" was introduced. The traditional double round robin was played through the first six days, and then the two top teams met in a final game to determine the Series championship. The

See *LA SERIE*, page 9

LA SERIE, from page 8

debate over having a meaningful final game was again brought to the forefront by the results of the Series in 2012, where *Leones del Escogido* had clinched the tournament championship on day five, making the last day of play meaningless.

Further changes were necessitated in 2014 by the return of the Cubans to *la Serie del Caribe* competition in Isla Margarita, Venezuela. Now, with five teams competing, the format was changed to: a) a single round-robin phase over five days, with each club playing the others one time; b) the bottom team being eliminated from further play, and the top four clubs advancing to a semi-final phase; and c) a final game to determine the Series champions. This format has now been used for three years (2014-16).

During the Current Phase, the Mexican teams have been dominant, winning three of the four championships. Cuba won the championship in 2015, staging a strong comeback in the semi-finals and finals after barely edging out the host Puerto Ricans for the fourth and last semi-final spot.

Beisbol – the same game, but with differences

Beisbol is baseball, but the game south of the border has some distinct differences from an MLB or

U.S. minor league professional game. Here are a few:

The Fans – *Los fanaticos* are a big part of *beisbol*. A *beisbol* game is part *juego* and part *fiesta*, truly a party at the ballpark. *Fanaticos* are pas-

sionate about the sport, as well as enjoying themselves at the game. I would guess-timate that 1,000 *fanaticos* can generate the same noise level as about 10,000 fans north of the border.



Author with Mexican fanaticos at la Serie del Caribe.

The Men on the Field – One will quickly notice that a *beisbol*



Author with Mexican fanaticos at la Serie del Caribe.

uniform is covered with advertising, as in professional soccer. Even the umpires have advertising on their shirts. Another difference is the concept of a batboy. In *beisbol*, the “batboys” are usually men that serve as an additional coach, helping the on deck batter to prepare for the next at-bat, as well as assisting on plays at the plate by acting as a sort of “home plate coach”.

Rosters & Reinforcements – The roster size for *la Serie del Caribe* is 28, and most managers load up on extra pitchers. The winter leagues also use a roster technique called *refuerzos*. As teams advance in their league playoffs they can draft *refuerzos*, or reinforcements, from the clubs that have been eliminated. This makes the teams stronger as they advance, and also broadens the appeal of the team to fans of other cities in the league.

In-Game Tactics – “Inside game” tactics are prevalent in *beisbol*. Managers tend to play for one run at all times, even to the extent of having “power” hitters sacrificing early in games. There is much more action on the bases, with the sacrifice bunt, stolen base, and pushing for the extra base prevalent. This results in more excitement on the base paths, as well as more base-running outs.

Ballparks – Most ballparks I have visited in Latin America seat 10,000 – 18,000 fans. Outfields are usually spacious, which along with the weather conditions can suppress the long ball. An interesting architectural feature is the extended roofs that provide shade to most of the grandstand and box seats.

See *LA SERIE*, page10

LA SERIE, from page 9The Future

There was much discussion in Santo Domingo in 2016 about the future of *la Serie del Caribe*. Attendance was surprisingly low in Santo Domingo, with less-than-expected support from local fans. An executive of the host *Escogido* club stirred up a hornet's nest by suggesting that the future of the Series, except for the strongly-attended Series hosted by the Mexicans, might be to return to Florida or move to Arizona. This immediately brought published rebuttals from the presidents of the Puerto Rican and Venezuelan leagues, who strongly asserted that they were ready and willing to host *la Serie* on their next turn. The Mexicans already are on record as offering to host an additional turn, should the ruling Caribbean Confederation want to implement a five-year rotation now in preparation for Cuba hosting a future Series.

The format of competition is another issue that is generating controversy. Traditionalists want to return to the double-round-robin format, assuring that the club with the most wins is crowned the champion. Modernists want a meaningful final day of play. The current format has provided some dramatic final games, as happened this year (2016) when Mexico defeated Venezuela in the final game on a walk-off ninth inning home run. A downside, though, is the fact that a team can go 1-3 in the round robin, barely qualify, and then win two games (semifinal and final) to take the crown. That is exactly what happened when Cuba won in San Juan in 2015; they barely qualified by eliminating Puerto Rico due to tie-breaker rules (they were both 1-3), but then the Cubans got hot and won the two knock-out games to take the title.

The quality of play is a source of concern for some. Whereas, in bygone days, many major-leaguers and future stars appeared at *la Serie del Caribe*; today that is much less the case. Active major-leaguers and top prospects are usually prohibited, or at least discouraged, by their MLB teams from playing so close to major league spring training. Familiar MLB names that do participate are often at the end of their careers, or between contracts. An article published in the local Santo Domingo newspaper cited statistics that only 33% of players at *la Serie del Caribe* (excluding those on the Cuban roster) were under contract to an MLB team, and only 9% were on a 40-man MLB roster.

Expansion is yet another topic. The Cubans are currently competing by invitation of the ruling winter league body, the Caribbean Confederation. Cuba hopes to formally re-enter the Confederation by 2018, and then to host *la Serie del Caribe* at a future date. Panama is also under consideration to re-enter the Caribbean Confederation.



Author with Mexican fanatics at *la Serie del Caribe*.

Regardless of what the future brings, *la Serie del Caribe* is a baseball experience like no other. I have been to the last six Series, and I am already making plans to attend in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico in 2017. If you have the opportunity to attend sometime in the future, I'd strongly recommend going. SABR members will thoroughly enjoy themselves at this unique baseball event.

Saludos

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Photos courtesy of Juan Antonio Jasso Rodriguez; Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico

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Contributing to SABR's BioProject

By Mark Armour

SABR's Baseball Biography Project has been around for nearly 14 years and we have over 3500 bios on our site. However, we could certainly use help from the researchers on this committee. Our bio collection already includes many of the most well known Latinos who played in the major leagues, like Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda, Luis Tiant, and Tony Perez. But many of the rank-and-file players from this period are not as well covered. Some of the research is a bit more difficult -- information about families, schooling, and long careers in Winter Leagues are not as easily found in the typical sources that SABR members are used to using.

Still, the work is rewarding and the finished product makes a valuable contribution to the baseball community. I wrote the bios on all three Alou brothers and they are among the favorite things I have ever written. The bios are much better because I had the help of Rory Costello -- who researched the winter leagues material for me, and also fixed up some of my clumsy writing about Latino culture and customs. I like how they turned out, just as I love Peter Bjarkman's bios of Tony Oliva, Martin Dihigo, and many others, and Rory's bios of Manny Mota,

Chico Ruiz, and many others.

Our bios are written in English for now, though I hope some day that we can support Spanish versions. We are interested not only in Latinos who played in the major leagues, but also players who starred in their homelands. We are also interested in managers, broadcasters, and business people who helped run teams and leagues. We require that players have been retired for at least five years, and we want about 3000 well-researched words.



If you go to <http://sabr.org/bioproj/browse> and scroll to the bottom, you can click on the name of a country to find the players that we have completed bios for.

If you have any interest in this project, feel free to contact us at any time. Enjoy the upcoming season.

Mark Armour

Director, Baseball Biography Project

SABR 46 to be held in Miami, Fla; will take on a “Latin Flavor”!

With its proximity to Cuba and its rich and vibrant history, the annual convention for the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) this summer in Miami, will take on a “Latin flavor” according to

SABR executive director Marc Appleman. Specific details are still in the works, but SABR and the Latino baseball committee will look to put on numerous presentations, special events and panels, relating to some aspect of Latino baseball past and present.

The Latino committee has already or-

ganized a Latino authors panel, featuring Peter C. Bjarkman, Cesar Briosio and Dr. Adrian Burgos, Jr.

SABR will also look to host a Latino players panel, along with a number of presentations pertaining to some aspect of the Latino experience in baseball, either in Cuba or the United States.

If you have any ideas on making the convention an event to remember, let us know!

Be sure to keep updated with all activities related to the SABR 46 at <http://sabr.org/convention>.



A note from the Editor

by Anthony Salazar

Every year around this time is always pretty exciting. The hope that you feel during March when your team is working out the kinks for a new year somewhere in Arizona or Florida, in anticipation of a new season. I feel that way every year watching from afar the Mariners get through their innings in Peoria, hoping, wishing that THIS year will be our year. Seattle has never had the honor of a World Series championship. Maybe this year?!?

It's also a very exciting time for baseball with recent news coming out of Cuba. I have been reading up on the possibility of baseball opening up in the isolated island, as the Tampa Bay Rays will visit Cuba to take on the national team, with President Barack Obama in the stands. The first ever visit by the US president in nearly a hundred years. The hope that Cuban players can directly sign with MLB teams is very strong, considering what many Cuban ballplayers have had to do to escape the island facing un-

told danger and unforeseen circumstances, just to fulfill their dreams of playing baseball in the US.

I just finished watching ESPN's "Outside the Lines", where the episode focused on the upcoming Rays games in Havana. Everyone seems hopeful for a new beginning. Hope springs eternal, they say. Here's hoping for a new beginning. Play ball!



Latino Baseball Committee

Anthony Salazar

Chair, Editor

La Prensa del Béisbol Latino is a newsletter published quarterly by the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR). Inquiries and submissions should be directed to Anthony Salazar at salazar8017@yahoo.com.

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La Prensa del Béisbol Latino

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In This Issue

Rays vs Cubans; Spring Training; La Serie; WBC & much more!