



La Prensa del Béisbol Latino

A publication of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) Latino baseball committee

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Winter 2007

2007 Season Around the Corner; Latino set to Shine

by Anthony Salazar

As the new season dawns, so too does the speculation and wonder of a new season brings.

When we last left off, a number of Latino players were at the tops of numerous lists. Consider Johan Santana, ace of the Minnesota Twins staff. The Venezuelan led the American League in wins (19), ERA (2.77), and was the AL Cy Young award winner. He pitched a total of 233.2 innings with 245 strikeouts.

Boston Red Sox slugger David Ortiz smacked 54 dingers, with 137 RBIs, and 355 total bases. He had a slugging percentage of .636, with an on-base percentage of .439.

Carlos Zambrano, pitcher for the Chicago Cubs, threw 193 innings, with 16 wins and an ERA of 3.41. And, José Reyes, New York Mets speedster stole 64 bases, while racking up 17 triples.

How will they do? Can they repeat? More questions: Hanley Ramirez of the Florida Marlins was bestowed the NL Rookie of the Year. Will he suffer sophomore jinx, or can he continue his pace?

More questions: Sammy Sosa? The Texas Rangers invited Sosa to Spring Training. So far, he's got a couple of home runs under his belt to-date. Can he come back? He says he still wants to be a slugger. If he gets a chance to DH everyday, he can closer to the 600-HR mark. He's deflected questions on steroids issue, but that's not likely to go away.

Let's not forget Juan Gonzalez, who is looking for a comeback in the big leagues. He made a good case for himself in the Caribbean Series, batting a productive .409. Someone will need to give him a shot to try again.

Well, enjoy the new season! It will fun!

Caribbean Series 2007: A recap analysis

by Leonte Landino

The most recent edition of the Caribbean Series held in Carolina, Puerto Rico, showed many aspects to consider when fully analyzing the environment and playing level of winter baseball following another successful season.

The winter leagues are becoming more and more a kind of an integrated "super-league" of 28 teams in 4 regions,. Each region has its own strengths and weaknesses, its unique character and flavor, and for a week in February they all converge in a mini round-robin to define the crown. Everything gets together and the result is a Latino baseball celebration, and a showcase of the best each league can offer.

This year, the Dominican Republic showed that by far they have the best power and playing level of the Caribbean, and their game has matured so

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Ozzie Virgil—Dominican Hall of Famer

By Malcolm Allen

Many of you already know that last fall marked fifty years since Ozzie Virgil became the first Dominican to appear in a major league game. This April will mark the golden anniversary of some other important firsts that the former New York Giants third-baseman achieved.

Virgil's debut in 1956 took place in part because his family made a home in the Bronx after emigrating from the D.R. a decade before. He was just a few subway stops from the Polo Grounds after his minor league season concluded, so the Giants invited him to put on a uniform for the last few weeks of their season. He went hitless on September 23 in his only action at home, but banged out five hits during a double-header in Philadelphia on the last day of the season.



That winter, Virgil hit .312 to lead the Dominican League, also pacing the circuit in RBI to help the Leones del Escogido win their second straight championship. Despite a so-so showing the following spring, he broke camp with the 1957 Giants to become the first Dominican on an opening day roster.

Virgil batted only once in the first week, but earned starting duties at the hot corner for most of the first half. His two-run homer off Hall of Fame right-hander Robin Roberts on April 27 was the first big league round-tripper by a Dominican. Virgil's hustle, arm and versatility were his strongest suits, and the fact that he wasn't really a power hitter cost him his job in the second half. He suffered through a 0-30 slump lasting eight weeks, and started only four games after the All Star break. Overall, he batted .235 with 4 home runs in 96 games.

The disappointed Giants traded him to Detroit a month before spring training in 1958, discouraging Virgil since the Tigers had never so much as invited an African-American or Latino player to spring training. He responded by pounding triple-A pitching and forcing Detroit to promote him. When Virgil finally integrated the Tigers eleven years after Jackie Robinson on June 6, it left only

the Boston Red Sox with an all-white roster. (Pumpsie Green broke *that* barrier down thirteen months later).

The greatest moment of Virgil's career occurred in his first game in front of the Detroit fans on June 17. The Tuesday night crowd at Briggs Stadium was about double its' usual size, and Virgil gave them a performance to remember. He pulled a double off Senators right-hander Pedro Ramos in the bottom of the first, and stroked four more singles to finish 5-5 in the Tigers 9-2 victory.

Virgil bounced around for the next decade, never logging more than 89 major league at bats in a season after 1960. Nevertheless, he did everything but play centerfield and pitch in a career that lasted until 1969. He coached for a number of teams after his playing days, and managed with distinction all over Latin America. Ozzie Virgil joined the Dominican

The Minnesota Twins are the only major league franchise yet to sign, develop and play their own big-league ballplayer out of the Dominican Republic in the half-century since Ozzie Virgil's debut. Here is the order in which the other teams got on the ball.

team	player	position	MLB debut
Giants	OZZIE VIRGIL	3b	9/23/1956
Braves	CHI-CHI OLIVO	p	6/5/1961
Yankees	PEDRO GONZALEZ	2b	4/11/1963
Cardinals	SANTIAGO GUZMAN	p	9/30/1969
Angels	TOM SILVERIO	of	4/30/1970
Astros	CESAR CEDENO	of	6/20/1970
Mets	TED MARTINEZ	if	7/18/1970
Pirates	FRANK TAVERAS	ss	9/25/1971
Brewers	BILL CASTRO	p	8/20/1974
Reds	SANTO ALCALA	p	4/20/1976
Indians	ALFREDO GRIFFIN	ss	9/4/1976
Dodgers	RAFAEL LANDESTOY	2b	8/27/1977
Royals	LUIS SILVERIO	of	9/9/1978
Red Sox	JULIO VALDEZ	ss	9/2/1980
Phillies	JULIO FRANCO	ss	4/23/1982
Blue Jays	TONY FERNANDEZ	ss	9/2/1983
Nationals (Expos)	SERGIO VALDEZ	p	9/10/1986
A's	LUIS POLONIA	of	4/24/1987
Rangers	SAMMY SOSA	of	6/16/1989
Padres	RAFAEL VALDEZ	p	4/18/1990
Orioles	LUIS MERCEDES	of	9/8/1991
Tigers	DANNY BAUTISTA	of	9/15/1993
White Sox	NORBERTO MARTIN	2b	9/20/1993
Mariners	ARQUIMEDEZ POZO	if	9/12/1995
Cubs	AMAURY TELEMACO	p	5/16/1996
Marlins	LUIS CASTILLO	2b	8/8/1996
Rockies	NEIFI PEREZ	ss	8/31/1996
Diamondbacks	DUANER SANCHEZ	p	6/14/2002
Devil Rays	BARTOLOME FORTUNATO	p	6/29/2004
Twins	???		in the future

BÉISBOL TRIVIA CHALLENGE

1. **Preston Gomez managed what team in 1974?**
 - a. Texas Rangers
 - b. San Diego Padres
 - c. Houston Astros
 - d. Seattle Mariners
2. **Felipe Alou first piloted the Montreal Expos in:**
 - a. 1990
 - b. 1992
 - c. 1993
 - d. 1994
3. **How many games did Mike Gonzalez managed the Cardinals?**
 - a. 23
 - b. 352
 - c. 81
 - d. 220
4. **Former Angels manager Cookie Rojas hailed from:**
 - a. Puerto Rico
 - b. United States
 - c. Dominican Republic
 - d. Cuba

Trivia answers: 1) c; 2) b; 3) a; 4) d

DID YOU KNOW...

The New York Mets host "Fiesta Latina" geared at the Puerto Rican community, while the Dominican community are treated to "La Noche de Merengue." The Los Angeles Dodgers host "Viva Los Dodgers" featuring numerous Mexican musical acts...The Selig Center for Economic Growth estimates that the current Hispanic buying power is \$863 billion. Within the next few years, Hispanic buying power should reach \$1 trillion...Pew Hispanic estimates that 15.1 million U.S. Latinos were born elsewhere, though 11 million indicate that they speak English, "less than very well..." Scarborough Research reported that 4.5 million Latinos went to MLB games during the 2006 season...According to ESPN Deportes, 59% of (total) Hispanics follow MLB baseball. That is, U.S. and foreign-born Latinos... The US Census Bureau reports that 60% of Hispanics were born in the United States, while 40% were born in other countries.

Notes & News to Use

NEWS TO USE

Dominican Summer League president **Freddy Jana** passed away recently at the age of 69 in Santiago, Dominican Republic. Jana, who had been largely responsible for establishing the League in 1985, was a banker and businessman. The League started with four co-op teams, but today, it operates 30 to 35 teams, representing just about all major league clubs... Famed Spanish play-by-play announcer **Amaury Pi-Gonzalez**, has signed on with the Anaheim Angels of Los Angeles to call all 162 games. Pi-Gonzalez worked all home games for the Seattle Mariners for the past three seasons, while simultaneously calling select home games for the San Francisco Giants. For the past 30 years, Pi-Gonzalez has been behind the mike for the Mariners, Giants and Oakland A's... The **San Diego Padres** are revamping their academy in the Dominican Republic. By next season, their \$8 million project should be ready for play. The academy, based in the town of Najayo overlooking the ocean on a hillside, will house up 65 players and include classrooms and medical support.



NOTES

Roland Hemond writes regarding the SABR Scouts Committee "Who-Signed-Whom" database project that's "it's been difficult to find out who should get the credit in signing the Latin players in their various countries. For instance, many players in Mexico were first-signed by a professional team in the Mexican League prior to the players' contracts being sold to organizations in the U.S. We usually know the names of the American scouts who recommended the players to their respective major league organization, but we also would like to record the scouts who first signed them in Mexico." If you help, please contact Roland via jayhemond03@msn.com or Rod Nelson rmelton@sabr.org... I'm searching for some info on the first five years of the Dominican Summer League, which started up in the mid-eighties. In the first year of operation, teams in the DSL did not have major league affiliations. In the fifth year, they did. I'm trying to find out whether the teams had major league affiliations in the second, third, and fourth year, and if so, what they were. Contact Greg Spira at gregspira@POST.HARVARD.EDU.

A Chance Meeting with Buck

By Jay Berman

There is no question that the ugliest chapter in the history of major league baseball is its exclusion of black players, including many Latinos, from the game until Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

It could just as easily be argued that the biggest mistake baseball's Hall of Fame has ever made is to deny Buck O'Neil a place in its membership.

O'Neil will always be remembered in the uniform of the Kansas City Monarchs, for whom he played and managed, but he also has close ties to the game in Latin America, having played winter ball in Almendares, Cuba, and Obregon, Mexico. He told Bill Ladson, writing for mlb.com five years ago, that he and other Negro Leaguers played year-round not solely because they liked to play, but because "it was a good living."

"After the (season, it was off to) Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America, somewhere else."

O'Neil, who died in October in Kansas City, was one of 39 black players and executives from the Negro League and pre-Negro League era considered by a panel of researchers and historians early last year, but he was not among the 17 who were selected and inducted into the hall in July, along with former closer Bruce Sutter.

The voting was conducted by secret ballot, but news stories since O'Neil was hospitalized in mid-September say he missed the required 75 percent by one vote. An observer might wonder if former Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris was in charge of counting the ballots.

My wife, two close friends and I had the honor of meeting O'Neil last April at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City. I've never met the pope, nor the Dalai Lama, but now I think I have an idea of what that might feel like. Ten minutes in the company of Buck O'Neil doesn't

tell you what he did for baseball, but it did allow us to sense his personal warmth, his charm, his love for life...and baseball.

We had gone to the museum, in the Missouri city's historic 18th and Vine neighborhood, to see its displays -- photographs, uniforms, programs, signed baseballs and the like -- but we harbored some hope we might meet him. We knew he was chairman of the museum, but -- at 94 -- was there much of a chance that he might be there?

"I think his car is here," a receptionist told us. "Would you like to meet him? I'll have someone try to catch him for you before he goes to a luncheon. We'll come inside and find you."

About a half-hour later, an employee came to tell us that, if we wanted to see O'Neil, we should return to the lobby, as he was about to leave. We took little time getting there.

O'Neil, wearing a blue suit and light blue shirt, open at the collar, was carrying a uniform and a plaque he was to present at the luncheon. We surrounded him the way children might have, nearly three-quarters of a century ago, asking for an autograph as he came off the diamond.

We took turns offering the kind of meaningless pleasantries people come up with when, nervous or lacking for words, they don't know what to say to a celebrity. He put us at ease, shaking hands with the three of us who were men and giving my wife, Irene, the kind of hug you'd offer a dear relative you hadn't seen in a long time.

I told him I had read his autobiography, I was Right on Time, and, to prove it, noted that a fellow former Negro League player he had written about, former Chicago Cubs and Pittsburgh Pirates infielder Gene Baker, had been my favorite ballplayer when I was a kid. "You from

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The Latino Eight-team HR Club

By Leander Collin

For five decades, Latin America has sent some of the most prodigious sluggers to the big leaguers with the coming of Orlando Cepeda of Puerto Rico in 1958. Since then Latino slugged their way to the all-time home run charts, captured home run titles and set numerous records.

In this group of Latin sluggers are a handful of players (7) that are not synonymous with the game's most colossal Latin sluggers, excluding Bobby Bonilla and Ruben Sierra. These seven players belong to an exclusive club among Latino home run hitters. To enter the club, a player had to have homered for eight major league clubs.

The initial member of this club was Puerto Rico's Juan Beniquez. Not known as a power hitter, Beniquez, managed to collect 79 circuit shots for eight big league clubs between 1971 through 1988. His career covered 1500 games,

going to bat 4651 times for an AB/HR ratio of 58.87.

While Dave Martinez showed little power throughout his career, he did accumulate 91 four-baggers for nice teams. His season high came as a member of the Chicago White Sox in 1997, when he clubbed 12 home runs. Martinez is one of four players since 1900 to homer for nine teams.

Ruben Sierra was the most productive of these seven players, clouting 306 homer runs from 1986 through 2005. His season high came in 1987, when he homered 30 times for the Texas Rangers. He hit a total of 180 for the Rangers.

The latest to enter this exclusive club was Jose Hernandez, who went deep for Philadelphia, his club during the past 2006 season.

The Latino Eight-team Home Run Club

YRS	CTY	PLAYER	CLUBS (HRS)
1971-88	PR	Juan Beniquez	Bos (8)-TEX (21)-NYY (4)-SEA (6)-CAL (25)-BAL (6)-KC(3)-TOR (6) TOTAL-79, SEASON HIGH - 1978 TEX-11, G 1500, AB 4651, HR 79, AB/HR 58.87
1986-01	USA (NY)	Bobby Bonilla	ChiWS (2)-PIT (113)-NYM (95)-BAL (38)-FLA (21)-LA (7)-ATL (5)- STL (5) TOTAL-287, SEASON HIGH - 1993 NYM-34, C 2113, AB 7213, HR 287, AB/HR 25.13
1991-06	PR	*Jose Hernandez	ChiC (71)- ATL (4)- MIL (60)- COL (8)- PIT (4) - LA (13)- CLE (6)- PHI (2) TOTAL-168, SEASON HIGH- 2001 MIL-25, G 1587, AB 4618, HR 168, AB/HR 27.48
1987-00	PAN	Roberto Kelly	NYY (57)- CIN (12)- ATL (6)- ATL (6)- MON (1)- LA (6)- MIN (11)- SEA (7)- TEX (24) TOTAL-124, SEASON HIGH-1991 NYY-20, G 1337, AB 4797, HR 124, AB/HR 38.68
1986-01	USA (NY)	Dave Martinez	ChiC (13)- MON (23)- CIN (3)- SF (9)- ChiWS (27)- TB (10)- TEX (2)- TOR (2)- ATL (2) TOTAL-91, SEASON HIGH-1997 ChiWS-12, G 1919, AB 5795, HR 91, AB/HR 63.98
1986-05	PR	Benito Santiago	SD (85)- FLA (24)- CIN (19)- PHI (30)- TOR (13), ChiC (7)- SF (33)- KC (16) TOTAL-217, SEASON HIGH- 1996 PHI-30, G 1978, AB 6951, HR 217, AB/HR 32.03
1986-05	PR	Ruben Sierra	TEX (180)- OAK (60)- NYY (45)- DET (1)- CIN (2)- TOR (1)- ChiWS (4)- SEA (13) TOTAL-306, SEASON HIGH- 1987 TEX-30, G 2172, AB 8016, HR 306, AB/HR 26.19
<i>*One of 40 players to appear in 100 games at four positions, games played in 2006, not available.</i>			

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much that their league now can be included on a discussion: Which league is the best after the Major Leagues? In this category we can include the Japanese leagues, the Cuban National Series, the International League (AAA) and the Pacific Coast League (AAA).

An astonishing year for the Dominicans

Dominicana was represented by the Aguilas Cibaeñas. This team, led by Miguel Tejada, had a whole compendium of talent on the field, which just for “out-of-the-park” reasons can be left out of the crown. With their 5 wins on the series, the Aguilas won their 6th Caribbean Series of their history after capturing their 18th league title against their long-time rivals, Tigres del Licey.



Even though Tejada said several times that he would not play winter ball this season, he came forward on January and asked the team if he can join them for the finals, getting a warm welcome from the front office. His spirit shows up that there are still plenty of players who have love for the game. Even though he holds a multimillionaire contract with the Orioles, he helped the team to win it all this year again, sharing his great pride wearing the Dominican jersey in the tournament, his 9th of his career.

What can be better for a winter team, than having more than 10 major-league experienced players from their 25-men roster, including names who have reached a big status among the best of the game, such as Tejada, Tony Batista, Luis Polonia, Alberto Castillo, Willy Mo Peña and Jose Lima? Their talent was so large this year, that they had the luxury of benching players with major league experience, including American players, who were considered “key players” on their teams.

Indeed, winter leagues are not an easy task for American players who are considered “refuerzos” or foreign backups for holes in the rosters. They are expected to perform better than local players and in a more consistent rhythm. They are treated with more benefits than local players and received their salaries in US Dollars. If they don’t meet the team’s expectations in a short-term, they just get fired and returned to the US.

The Aguilas Cibaenas, had four American players on their roster for the season, and during playoffs and finals, they barely played, they were benched, not fired, just benched. The team had this kind of luxury.

This year Dominican Republic showed that they can come up with great pitching. A rotation comprised of Jose Lima, Julian Tavares, Wandy Rodriguez, Jose Acevedo and the American Derek Lowe, would easily become a rotation for any major league team, such as the Royals, Devil Rays or Brewers. The quintet combined for a collective ERA of just 0.87 in 6 games. (Opponents hit for .183) They had talent such as their closer Jose Vargas, a flamethrower who can combine 96 mph fastballs with 80 mph breaking changes.

Most importantly, he has iron nerves. The question...why he is not in the majors? He is the kind of player who took a little longer to get developed. Now he prefers to be the closer for a Mexican Summer League team, than fighting for a spot as middle reliever with some 21 year-old rookie. However, if a big chance shows up, he would definitely take it.

It was a great year for the Dominican baseball. Even though they did not play the finals for the World Baseball Classic, being favorites, their triumph in the Caribbean Series reveals that there is talent and love for the game for many years to come.

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Buck, from page 4

Davenport?" O'Neil asked me. No, I said. Los Angeles. I had seen Baker, who was from Davenport, Iowa, play with the Pacific Coast League Los Angeles Angels in 1953. I was 13. Baker was 28 and was about to be named the Angels' most valuable player.

"Gene was a great young man," O'Neil offered. Baker was born in 1925 and died in 1999, still a young man to O'Neil, who was born in 1911.



O'Neil seemed almost to be flirting when he turned to my wife and said, smiling: "You look like you might be an Indian to me. Are you Cherokee?" "No," she answered, surprised at the question.

"Mexican, but I was born in Los Angeles."

"Well, you look Cherokee to me," he said, as though she were hiding something. He posed for photos with all of us, put the uniform and the plaque under his arm and headed out the front door, turning back for a last "So long, Cherokee," to Irene.

Toss out the clichés -- legend, ambassador, elder statesman -- examine John "Buck" O'Neil on his record, and decide if he doesn't belong in Cooperstown. He was first baseman and later manager of the Kansas City Monarchs from 1938 until 1955, leading the team as manager to five pennants and two Negro World Series titles and winning a

batting title in 1946.

He left his small Florida home town in the early 1930s to play in semiprofessional games. Along the way, he met pitcher Satchel Paige, who helped him get a contract with the Memphis Red Sox of the new Negro American League in 1937. His contract was sold to the Monarchs the following year. He had four .300-plus seasons in Kansas City, where he had a career batting average of .288 and played in four all-star games. With the color barrier finally broken, he became a scout for the Cubs in 1956, signing future Hall of Famer Lou Brock to his first contract.

In 1962, the Cubs made him the first black coach in the majors. He became a scout for the Kansas City Royals in 1988 to spend more time in his adopted hometown. Many people heard of him for the first time when he was narrator on Ken Burns' PBS documentary on baseball in 1994.

He was a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame Veterans Committee from 1981 until 2000. Early last year, when he learned he had not been among those chosen by the special hall panel, he addressed about 200 friends who had gathered to celebrate his induction, assuming he would be chosen. He told the crowd:

"God's been good to me. They didn't think Buck was good enough to be in the Hall of Fame. That's the way they thought about it and that's the way it is, so we're going to live with that. Now, if I'm a Hall of Famer for you, that's all right with me. Just keep loving old Buck. Don't weep for Buck. No, man, be happy, be thankful."

He wasn't on the veterans committee released by the Hall of Fame for this year, either. That must make sense to someone in Cooperstown.

Caribbean, from page 6**Tigres de Aragua, Venezuela's team of the decade**

Tigres de Aragua made their fifth consecutive trip to the Venezuelan finals, winning their third title in this span. This is a team commanded by the next Venezuelan superstar, Marlins' infielder Miguel Cabrera.

Cabrera at 23, has prematurely developed into a team leader. After winning the 2003 World Series against the Yankees, he became ready to leave a legacy in baseball. In his first four years in the majors, he has won 2 Silver Slugger awards and has been elected to the All-Star Game 3 times. Yet with all of his achievements at his young age, he has never given up playing winter ball with the Tigres,

and the results of his leadership in the team has led them to successful results.

However, after the league finals, he decided not to join the team for the Caribbean Series. He was in the middle of negotiations for his first big contract with the Marlins.

But the Tigres gathered a fine team to fight their Caribbean neighbors looking to keep the Series trophy won by the Venezuelan champions, Leones del Caracas, in 2006. Led by Orioles catcher Ramon Hernandez, and with emerging stars such as Cubs infielder Ronnie Cedeño, Aragua had a balanced team ready to fight. The first game of the series was an epic episode of this tournament, when Dominican Republic beating Venezuela 4-3 after battling for 18 innings.

A note from the Editor

by Anthony Salazar

Greetings, and welcome to another issue of the La Prensa del Béisbol Latino. This edition is filled with more great stories, I'm sure you will agree.

Leo Landino gives a nice re-cap of the recent Caribbean World Series. Malcolm Allen presents a look back at Ozzie Vigil, the first Dominican to make the big leagues. Leander Collin has researched a unique topic, Latinos who have homered for at least eight clubs. And frequent contributor, Jay Berman writes about a chance meeting with famed Negro Leaguer, Buck O'Neil.

Other news to note: SABR's Board of Directors has agreed to our request for the committee's name change. Officially, we will now be known as the Latino baseball committee. We are working on the text of our mission statement, which will be posted on SABR's website. Work on the committee website is ongoing.

You may recall that in the last issue, I ask a "burning question": Should Roberto Clemente's number retired, as some advocates suggest. In a very unscientific poll, with about 30 people responding, 19 people indicated that number 21 should not have the same honor as Jackie Robinson, while 10 responded affirmatively. One voter was undecided. The debate will continue.

Thanks for your support, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

SABR Latino baseball Committee

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In This Issue

Ozzie Vigil, meeting Buck, the Serie del Caribe & much more!