

# La Prensa del Béisbol Latino

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

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## Demise of the Puerto Rican Winter League

by Peter Bjarkman

Fans of international baseball — especially the brand played in the Caribbean during winter off-season months — had to be saddened and even deeply disturbed by this week's unsettling news that the 69-year-old Puerto Rico winter circuit has finally folded operations after years of worsening financial struggle.

The league's demise ironically comes on the heels of a largely successful Caribbean Series staged this past February in the island's showcase Roberto Clemente Walker Stadium; it also is the latest blow to international baseball which is still reeling from the 2006 decision of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) to remove baseball and softball as official sports for the 2012 Olympic competitions scheduled for London.

Numerous explanations might be offered for the demise of the most troubled and most venerable winter circuit. The decline of baseball interest in Puerto Rico has been attributed to such factors as the lack of participation in the October-January league by recognizable Puerto Rican big leaguers; the fact that the island is now subject to the First-Year Player Draft (which drains away most of the top young local talent); and the rise in popularity of rival sports like soccer and basketball. But the establishment of MLB's Arizona Fall League as a major focus of off-season player development certainly has not helped. That Puerto Rican fans will still turn out in droves to see top-level native pro stars was proven by the 2006 World Baseball Classic's opening two rounds in San Juan, which witnessed packed grandstands at 20,000-seat Hi Bithorn Stadium (especially for battles between the host team and Caribbean rivals Cuba, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic).



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## CUBA REMAINS INTERNATIONAL BASEBALL CHAMPIONS!

by Peter Bjarkman

It is a record unsurpassed and not even reasonably approached in the entire history of team sports—professional, amateur, collegiate, scholastic, youth league, men's or women's, or any format imaginable.

The Cuban national baseball team, in its many different editions over the past half-century, has now gained the championship, or at least reached the deciding gold medal game, in every major international tournament it has entered

since 1959, a string that now includes 48 straight events. (If the survival of Fidel Castro for a half-century has bordered on miraculous, how about the invincibility of the Cuban baseball squad over the same couple of human generations!) Yes, forty-eight straight tournaments either won—or at the worst barely lost, with an appearance in the final championship game. An international baseball championship at the

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## Just Getting Started:

### An Interview with Elena Mendoza, Group Sales Manager, Visalia Oaks

By Anthony Salazar

*In a continuing series of profiles of Latinos in baseball's front office, La Prensa del Béisbol talks to Elena Mendoza. The Michigan native entered her first year in baseball this season with the Visalia Oaks, first as a the Hispanic Marketing Manager then as the Group Sales Manager.*



#### How did you get into baseball?

My passion for baseball has been with me since the beginning, thanks to my father. He introduced me to baseball cards, taught me how to keep score, and took me to ball-games across the country. Being from Michigan, the Tigers were our favorite team. It was in 2006, during their fight for the American League Championship, when I came to understand the positive impact baseball can have on a community.

As our last place Tigers climbed and clawed their way to the top, I witnessed the transformation and rejuvenation of our community. The Tigers gave Detroit hope and pride to our community and it was once again reunited. The effect the Tigers had on our community was inspiring and refreshing. From then on, I knew I wanted to be involved with this great American pastime so I too could participate in the improvement of other communities across the country.

#### How did you get to the Oaks?

After receiving a Baccalaureate with Honors in Strategic Communications from The Ohio State University, I completed an internship with Burns Entertainment and Sports Marketing, Inc. in Chicago, Illinois. While in Chicago, I spent my free time sending my resume to Minor League teams who had posted job openings on the Internet. I felt the Visalia Oaks offered the best fit with their ballpark renovations and a Hispanic Marketing position in a community with a large, growing Hispanic population.

#### What was your experience with Visalia's Latino Community like?

My first goal as Hispanic Marketing Manager was to develop a rapport with the Hispanic Community. As a result, the Visalia Oaks joined the Tulare and Kings County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and hosted the

Chamber's April Mixer at the Ballpark. The mixer raised \$300 for the Chamber and had the largest turnout of all the Chamber outings to the ballpark this season. A new partnership was created with our local Spanish station, La Campesina Radio 90.5FM and the Spanish news publication, *El Sol*.

New promotions were created and tailored to the Hispanic community, such as Día del Niño and Hispanic Heritage Night. Both promotions were a great success. Día del Niño included an ice cream stand, face painting, a clown and a post-game running of the bases for the children.

Hispanic Heritage Night included a kid's quiz with questions regarding Hispanics in Baseball. A Visalia City School Board Member and a representative of the Latino Peace Officers Association threw the ceremonial first pitches. La Campesina Radio did a live remote during the game and a live Mariachi band provided in-game music. The Hispanic team members were recognized in a pre-game ceremony and authentic Hispanic food was sampled throughout the game.

The most recent Hispanic outreach occurred last month in Lindsey, California when the Oaks mascot, Chatter, and some Oaks representatives including myself, attended a food distribution put on by United Farm Workers Association. We handed out over 700 boxes of food to citrus farmers affected by this past season's freeze. The farmers and UFW Association volunteers were also given vouchers for discounted tickets to the second Annual Agriculture Day at the Ballpark.

#### What lessons have you learned so far?

The most important lesson I have learned thus far is organization is the key to success. As in most Minor League organizations, I wear many hats. I am Hispanic Marketing Manager, Group Sales Manager, and On-Field Promotions Coordinator. Each title is an essential aspect of the whole operation and without organization skills it is hard to stay on top of things. It is important to develop an organizational system that works for you so that you may take care of yourself and your clients as best you can.



See **MENDOZA**, page 7

## BÉISBOL TRIVIA CHALLENGE

1. Who was the last Latino player to hit 30 home runs and steal 30 bases in the same season?
  - a. Bobby Abreu
  - b. Alex Rodriguez
  - c. Alfonso Soriano
  - d. Vladimir Guerrero
  
2. What Latino player hit the most home runs as a switch hitter?
  - a. Jose Cruz, Jr.
  - b. Carlos Beltran
  - c. Ruben Sierra
  - d. Bernie Williams
  
3. Up until recently, the Puerto Rican Winter League featured teams in these cities, with the exception of ...
  - a. Escogido
  - b. Ponce
  - c. Carolina
  - d. Arecibo
  
4. Omar Minaya works for the \_\_\_\_\_, and is baseball's only Latino general manager?
  - a. Rangers
  - b. Dodgers
  - c. Cubs
  - d. Mets

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

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**NAME:** Edwin Fernandez

**SABR CHAPTER:** Orlando Cepeda Chapter: Puerto Rico

**AREAS OF EXPERTISE:** Latinos in Baseball, baseball history and statistics

**FAVORITE BASEBALL MOMENT:** 1997 All-STAR Game at Jacobs Field in Cleveland

**FAVORITE LATINO PLAYERS:** Orlando Cepeda, Roberto Clemente, Ruben Sierra, Fernando Valenzuela, Roberto Alomar, Tony Oliva, Ivan Rodriguez, Omar Vizquel, Vladimir Guerrero

**LATINO BASEBALL EXPERIENCE:** Our long but rewarded experience of writing the book JONRON, gave me the opportunity to explore how the great game of baseball was introduced in our Latin culture. We immediately found how relevant is the Latino player to the baseball history, which began back in 1871. Things have changed, and now to succeed goes beyond statistics and performance. It certainly requires that Latino players add to their goals list a behavioral statistic to complement a career of achievements in and out of the baseball field. Nevertheless, in our journey of researching the Latino experience we encountered with pleasure, the GREAT SHOW put by our ambassadors in the best baseball arena, the Major Leagues.

## Getting involved in a SABR committee

Among the first 540 biographies posted by the Baseball Biography Project, we are beginning to see some great stories on Latino ballplayers. Fellow Latino baseball committee member, Rory Costello, in just the past year, has presented the lives of Elrod Hendricks, Al McBean, Elmo Plaskett, and several others.

Anthony asked me to write something to encourage further involvement from your committee in writing biographies. I do so enthusiastically. The very first biographical subject I ever tackled, years before this project was conceived was Luis Tiant, one of my early heroes.

We welcome individual contributions, if you have a favorite player or players you wish to write about. We also would be very supportive of the committee banding together on a project to write many biographies. A lot of

people in SABR are very excited about the great research being done by people in your committee, and I strongly believe it is to all of our benefit that the stories of the wonderful Latino players and managers be told for all to read.

Think big. Imagine a book of biographies like the books recently produced by the Deadball committee. What an accomplishment that would be, and what a wonderful book for the rest of SABR to read.

We are here to help.

**Mark Armour**  
**Chair, BioProject Committee**  
 markarmour@comcast.net



## Are Puerto Rican professional baseball teams a national heritage in the island?

By Roberto Mercado

It has been often thought that national identity and historical heritage are only preserved by means of national monuments and certain relevant cultural traditions.

During the eight years that I worked as a bat boy with the Mayaguez Indios, I found out in a direct way that the intrinsic qualities of cultural heritage this team provides are extremely homogeneous, a full reflection of the social and territorial similarity of Puerto Rico. This sport institution's cultural contribution is a part of this heritage, the

same as regional dialects, music, dance, local architecture, etc. are.

Since its founding in 1938 until today, the Puerto Rican Professional Winter League teams have accounted for that common heritage in the island by creating an iconographic phenomena that has gone beyond the limits of time.

These visual icons have been continuously represented by its non-official hymns, their songs, their announcers, their championship celebrations, and their cheerleaders as well as by the peculiar response of the fans to the multidimensional game structure. In this sense, the cultural legacy inherited is constituted by these everlasting expres-

sions, full of validity and of a particular meaning for the Puerto Rican, and Caribbean baseball fans from the viewpoint of their social identity, their tradition, their beliefs and their customs.

Merely by considering these contributions with more detail, the educational institutions along with the men who study social dynamics, committed to this task, will be able to understand the new needs in terms of historical preservation that might arise in the future,

without defying the ability to work of those who have already recognized that this cultural heritage is a solid basis and an essential point of reference for Puerto Rico's intellectual and social evolution, as well as those of its Caribbean professional teams.

(From the book: "Chronicles of an "Indio" bat boy" by Roberto Mercado.)



The "Sonora del Bacalao" or the "Codfish Sonora" is an impromptu *plena* group that forms at Mayaguez Indios' home games. The "musical" band has been "performing" during the Indios games for the last two decades. (Courtesy of Gail Oshman.)

### DID YOU KNOW...

In recent weeks two MLB clubs have hosted Latino-oriented promotions. The Milwaukee Brewers provided its second annual "Cerveceros Day," with their Chorizo sausage bobblehead giveaway. The team also reports that they plan to create a Spanish-language website to cater

to their growing Latino market. [Editor's note: I bought a Chorizo bobblehead online, and I must say, it's pretty darn cool!]

The Detroit Tigers, meanwhile, also hosted a Latino day at the ballpark, with ¡Fiesta Tigres! featuring Latino music and related events. The event was hosted by Tigers second baseman Placido Polanco and his wife, Lilly.



**PUERTO RICO, from page 1**

Winter league baseball throughout the Caribbean has been dealt a near fatal blow over the past three decades by a professional baseball structure which prevents high-salaried MLB superstars native to the region from desiring (or even being allowed by their agents) to participate in off-season competitions in their homelands. But in the broader view, the death knell for winter Caribbean baseball seems only the latest chapter of an ongoing saga which has seen Jorge Pasquel's rebel Mexican League (1940s), the Negro leagues (1950s), and the North American minor leagues (1950s and 1960s) all crumble as viable alternatives to MLB's televised baseball entertainment enterprise.

Recent MLB raids of top players from the Japanese pro circuits might well suggest that the top rival Asian baseball empire will be the next to fall; the Cuban League appears today to be the only healthy surviving alternative baseball universe, and its days are also likely numbered (given the tenuous hold on the island nation of an aging and sagging socialist government system that has long kept the encroachments of MLB recruiting at bay). Political strife in Venezuela also suggests that the Venezuelan Winter League circuit (which had its own 2003 season cancelled in midstream do to renewed civil unrest involving the increasingly unpopular government of ball-player-turned-socialist politico Hugo Chavez) may also be on the verge of an inevitable meltdown.

I have written at some length about the plight of the winter league circuits (as well as the MLB monopoly which undermines international baseball movements) in my 2005 book, *Diamonds around the Globe: The Encyclopedia of International Baseball* (Greenwood Press) and readers are welcome to pursue these arguments in that original source. For the moment one can only speculate on what the immediate impact will be for winter baseball as a whole—of this suspension of play in Puerto Rico. For one thing, an immediate crisis now faces the traditional February Caribbean Series, the annual championship play-off between the four winter circuit champions, which is scheduled this year for Santo Domingo.

The event will now seemingly be reduced to an impractical three-team affair, not at all a promising prospect. There is talk of a replacement league

based in Puerto Rico, one involving an expansion of the island's popular amateur league (Liga Double A) into a six-team and 20-game circuit that would be called the Liga Invernal Boricua. It would run throughout November and December with playoffs in January; each 25-man roster would have 16 native amateur players and nine "imported professional players" with major league affiliations. But such a circuit would not likely produce sufficient talent to be competitive in the annual Caribbean round-robin.

Some have speculated that the new winter league in Nicaragua would be the big beneficiary of these developments and an appropriate substitute for Puerto Rico. But this is also a "developmental" rookie league with a considerably limited talent pool.

Maybe it is time for a radical departure on the part of the Alianza Latina de Beisbol and the Confederacion de Béisbol del Caribe (administrative bodies governing the winter circuits) and an overture to officials of the Cuban League.

The presence of the Cuban champion (this year Santiago de Cuba) in this mix would certainly do much to stimulate fan interest and elevate the quality of play. But the Alianza has already gone on record on this matter when Confederation Commissioner Juan Francisco Puella remarked at last year's event (in San Juan) that Cuba would be welcome only if it "fulfilled all the requirements of professional baseball" (perhaps meaning that the Cuban government would have to release its players to MLB signings, not a very likely scenario). Puella commented further last February that the Caribbean Series was as healthy as ever, that it had gotten along just fine for decades without Cuba, and that it certainly didn't need Cuba now.

Such exaggerations of the tournament's true health status seemed something of an idle boast a year ago, and they certainly seem like an even further stretching of the truth now.



## Luis Castro and the ship log: A Researcher's Quest

By Leonte Landino

The development of Latinos in the game of baseball and their contributions in many aspects to the highest levels, not only in the United States, but also around the planet is an issue completely unquestionable by the time I write these words, the year 2007.

Baseball created its roots in the northeastern region of the United States over 150 years ago and today is one of the most recognized and followed sports in the globe, serving as a way of entertainment and as a mean of living and a lifestyle for millions of living souls.

Latin America quickly got on board with the game that Walt Whitman once praised. Databases and documentations from Cuba, Venezuela and Mexico have shown the presence and beginnings of the game before the arrival of the 20th century creating around this game what today we consider as a cultural connection, a legacy, and a heritage.

The best exponents of the game from our countries carry the same heritage these days. Their perseverance and hard work to make a living and help the growth of the game is present in each player that arrives to the United States and attempts to become a star in the top level, the major leagues, or at least get a little taste of its sweet flavor, just like Luis Castro did in 1902.

Our focus in Castro is based on being the first born in Latin American who ever played Major League Baseball. Esteban Enrique Bellán, a Cuban ball player, was the first Latino who ever played "professional baseball" in the United States, when he was hired and brought from Cuba by the Troy Haymakers of the American Association in 1871. However, Major League Baseball history does not recognize the National Association stats or players as a part of their system, because of some issues about this circuit: gambling, dominance of only one team and the lack of a central direction or authority. Since this is also a point in dispute in baseball history, Bellán is not considered a former major league baseball player.

For many years we, as Latinos, have believed that the pioneer in the Major Leagues has been a mystical, mysterious, even phantasmagorical figure of a second baseman that was picked by the legendary manager-owner Connie Mack to play for his Philadelphia Athletics. Luis Castro's birthplace has been subject of never-ending researches from people all over the continent. The biggest mystery remains there, although af-

ter years of putting some results together and talking to several people, the search is now narrowed to Colombia, either Cali, Cartagena or Medellín or New York City.

The most common version of the story tells that Castro was a student at the Manhattan College in New York and was signed to play at the major league level with the Philadelphia team of the American League. He played just 42 games and after that he was released. There are records about his playing days in Minor League Baseball after 1902.

It was also believed that he could have been the son of General Cipriano Castro, president of Venezuela, who sent his son to attend college in New York, and became a baseball player, but the kid in order to hide his activities from his father, changed his nationality on the school records.

The most recent version came after the United States government made public the original records of the 1930 census, and researchers found that a Louis Castro, with profession "baseball player", son of Nestor Castro, was a resident of Flushing, New York, and as his birthplace he stated: New York City, putting aside the fact that he was the first Latin American born to ever play baseball at the Major League level.

The biggest challenge in Castro's case is to determine his birthplace. After all, we know that he played baseball; we know that he attended Manhattan College, and we know he died in New York City. But his birthplace will make his soul recognized as the first Latin major leaguer, or not. If he was born in Colombia or Venezuela, he is definitely "the one", if he was born in New York, then we will have to place our directions to Chick Pedros, who played two games for the Chicago Orphans in August 1902, and was born, according to the official baseball records in Havana, Cuba.

After interviews and conversations with many people who have also attempted to trace Castro's origins, I



Luis Castro. Courtesy author.

**See CASTRO, next page**

**CASTRO, from page 6**

talked to Nick Martinez, a baseball researcher from Las Vegas, Nevada who provided me with the key to leave Castro's legacy as the first Latino in Major Leagues.

Martinez found an original list of passengers from the S.S. Colon, which arrived in New York City on October 16th, 1885. The ship sailed from the port of Aspinwall, United States of Colombia. In this list, passenger number 18 is Nestor Castro, 50 years old, born in the United States of Colombia, listing banker as occupation, coming to America as a visitor. Passenger number 19 is Master Luis Castro, age 8, born in the United States of Colombia.

The most consistent data about Castro's life is that his father was Nestor Castro. It is stated in his school records and his census card; therefore, this list proves that Castro came at 8 years old, with his father to New York and both entered the United States as visitors, and stayed in the country. His birth date on November 25th, 1876 matches his reported age on the ship.

Colombia and Panama formed the United States of Colombia, as a country, until 1886 when the country changed the name to Republic of Colombia. Panama became an independent republic on November 3rd, 1903. The city of Aspinwall, was a center of dispute, since it was an important port of call and trade center for American companies who ended up calling the city "Aspinwall". However the locals refused this name and claimed that the city's name should be Colon. In 1890 the Colombian government decided to return every mail piece addressed to Aspinwall, changing the official name of the city to Colon, which still remains.

In simple words, Castro and his father, both born in Colombia, supposedly on Medellin according to the school records, arrived in New York from Panama and started a new life in America since 1885.

About his relationship with President Castro, the story about being his son came from a reporter who wrote about him being some sort of a "prince" in Venezuela. In those days, for a Latino to become "accepted" needed to have some kind of high class position in society, and maybe the relationship was just a marketing tale. President Castro was an open enemy of the US international policy, and he was well known in political public opinion at the time.

General Castro was born in a border town in Venezuela

and from 1888 and 1892 was the governor of his native state of Tachira. After he was ousted, went back to Colombia where he previously attended college and live a big part of his life, and planned the revolution movement to take the control and power of the country in 1899. Although no direct blood lines or genealogy links has been openly found, it is a strong possibility that Nestor and his son Luis, could have been part of General Castro's family in Colombia, and perhaps their trip to the U.S. and Luis' education could have been paid by their politician relative. Notice that the version of being General Castro's family came directly from a Luis story. His A's teammates called him the "Prince of Venezuela".

According to Dr. Jose de Jesus Jimenez, a baseball researcher in the Dominican Republic, Castro was no an easygoing person and was rapidly fired from the Athletics because of his strong behavior. After being released he started his minor league career until 1912, as the SABR Minor League Committee, has supported.

In the July 2001 SABR Minor League Committee has stated that Carlos Bauer, a former secretary with the Association of Professional Baseball Players found out that Castro received economic assistance during his late age. The official data from this office showed his birthplace is New York City. After the S.S. Colon log, we can assume that Castro probably wanted to pass for an American citizen by born, in order to receive economic benefits from the Association and to avoid any kind of discriminations.

Recently, several baseball databases such as baseball-reference.com and baseball-almanac.com, changed his birthplace to New York, making Pedroes the first Latino in Major Leagues, but the discovery of the ship's information and passenger's list provides a solid, and perhaps an irrefutable proof about his immigration to America. Even though he was not the first player who was brought by a team to play Major Leagues, Castro has to be recognized and credited as the first Major League Baseball player ever born in a Latin American country.

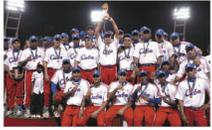
Oh...by the way. He was Luis, not Louis.

*Leonte Landino is a baseball journalist and SABR member. Log on to [www.eljuegoperfecto.com](http://www.eljuegoperfecto.com)*





PETER C. BJARKMAN  
**A HISTORY  
 OF CUBAN  
 BASEBALL,**  
 1864-2006



## A HISTORY OF CUBAN BASEBALL, 1864-2006 | BY PETER C. BJARKMAN

McFarland Publishing, 490 pages, \$39.95

Reviewed by Pete Cava

Like opera aficionados, fans of international baseball are passionate, but few and far between. And for any author, writing the definitive tome about Cuban baseball from its origins to the present is like taking vows of poverty.

Therefore, ¡felicitaciones! to Pete Bjarkman for his latest opus, *A History*

of *Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006* – simply the most complete work on the game as it's played just ninety miles away across the Florida Straits.

Bjarkman's book is a dizzying, four-part compilation of hard-to-find material on Cuban baseball – both pre- and post-revolution. Frequently detonating myths along the way, Bjarkman explains how the game took root in Cuba; how the island became a winter hotbed during the twentieth century's first decades for Negro League stars from the U.S. like Oscar Charleston; and how it was Cuba's amateur ballclubs (and not the winter league teams) that enthralled local fans prior to the ascent of Fidel Castro.

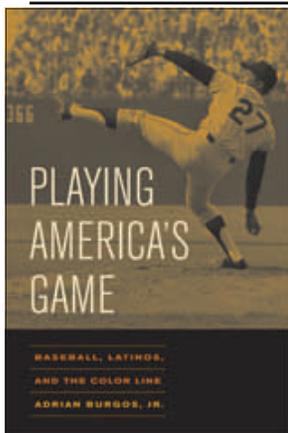
Paying homage to Cuba's legends, Bjarkman devotes time to Adolfo Luque ("the Original 'Pride of Havana'"), Orestes Mi-noso ("the Cuban Comet"), Conrado Marrero and Martin Dihigo ("Baseball's Least-Known Hall of Famer"). He also writes about Cuban players of the Castro Era ("The World's Best Unknown Ballplayers"): Omar Linares, Orestes Kinde-lan, Antonio Pacheco, Norge Luis Vera, Victor "El Loco" Mesa – men who would have commanded fabulous big league contracts on the open market, but remain unfamiliar to most North American fans.

A number of tomes on Cuban baseball have appeared over the past decade, written by notables like S.L. Price, Milton Jamail and Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria. Bjarkman alternately praises and scolds each of them throughout his book. Since he probably spends more time in Havana than Castro and may know more about Cuban baseball than El Coman-dante himself, Bjarkman's criticism can't be shrugged off.

Bjarkman buries once and for all the notion that Fidel was once a pitching prospect (while Castro was a schoolboy athlete in the 1940s, baseball wasn't even his best sport). Bjarkman also puts to rest any notion that Cuba's baseball tradition, like so many Cuban citizens, fled the island after Castro's rise to power.

Instead, Bjarkman argues that the sport reached its zenith during the Castro years – a theory that's bound to act as a lightning rod for criticism. But anyone who claims Bjarkman is soft on Castro's regime ultimately has to concede that this book isn't about Cuba's government: it's about Cuban baseball. And while many readers would disagree with what Bjarkman calls America's "blatant imperialistic policies," few would disagree when he acknowledges Havana's use of baseball as a propaganda tool (Bjarkman's depiction of Castro's micro-management of the Cuban national team would have George Steinbrenner shaking his head and clucking his tongue).

*A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006* explores Cuban baseball to its roots. It provides statistics, records, standings and other nuggets previously found only in the official Cuban league guides. And if there's any disparity, it's best to go with whatever Bjarkman says.



## Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos and the Color Line | by Adrian Burgos, Jr.

University of California Press, 384 pages, \$55.00 cloth / \$21.95 paper

Reviewed by Anthony Salazar

It's not hard to see why Dr. Adrian Burgos' treatment of Latinos in baseball has garnered so much national attention in recent weeks.

*Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos and the Color Line* is an excellent academic portrayal of the Latino struggle for acceptance in the big leagues. Burgos provides an insightful analysis putting history and

baseball's colorful past in perspective which places pioneers such as Esteban Bellán and Vincent Nava into a fuller social context.

Burgos, an expert in Latino ballplayers in the Negro Leagues, continues his scholarship with a powerful treatment explaining the rise of the

dark-skinned Latinos in the Negro Leagues, while the lighter-skinned Latinos found some success in organized baseball.

Things of course change once Jackie Robinson breaks baseball's color barrier in 1947, as teams reach out to Latino players of all persuasions. The strength of Burgos' book lies in such discussions on the rise of the "Cuban Senators" and the "Latino Giants," while paying homage to the great scouts, Joe Cambria and Alex Pompez.

The recent past of Latinos in the game plays well into the book, with a description of baseball before and after 9/11. This highlights the fact that baseball has become more of a global sport than ever before, as the number of Latinos on major league rosters continue to increase in rapid numbers. This well-researched title adds a great deal to baseball's historiography and aptly deserves a place on your shelf.

**CUBA, from page 1**

highest level over the past full 50 summers and autumns without Cuba in the final championship game has been equally as rare as a major league World Series without the Chicago Cubs sitting helplessly home on the sidelines.

Just how remarkable Team Cuba's streak is can be summarized in the following data. The string now includes the grand sum of 43 gold medal victories. The only final game losses occurred in the 2006 World Baseball Classic (to Japan), the 1967 Pan American Games (USA), the 1997 Intercontinental Cup (Japan), the 1981 Intercontinental Cup (USA) and the 2000 Sydney Olympics (again to the USA). Over the mind-boggling stretch the Cubans have captured 11 Pan American Games titles, 11 Intercontinental Cup crowns, three Olympic banners, and 18 World Cups (aka, the Amateur World Series before 1988). In the Pan American Games alone the tally now runs to ten straight titles (back to 1971) in which the Cubans have won a total of 74 individual ball games while dropping a mere five contests.

This has been done, recall, in a sport where a .600 winning percentage usually means a championship celebration while a .700-plus winning percentage unquestionably stretches credibility. Write a Hollywood film script version of this runaway Cuban success story and I guarantee you could never sell it to agent or producer as convincing or even passingly believable.

The recent 3-1 title win over a scrappy team of USA collegiate all-stars and future major leaguers came in most traditional fashion for the current version of the Cuban juggernaut. Ironically it also duplicated exactly the 3-1 victory of Cuban ace Norge Vera over USA prospect Jered Weaver in this event four years back in Santo Domingo. With their vaunted offensive held in check for most of the tournament, Cuba relied on solid pitching once again as veteran southpaw Adiel Palma

(earlier winner over Mexico) wove his second masterpiece of the week, scattering four hits and allowing a single tally across 7.2 solid innings. Pedro Luis Lazo closed down the predominantly left-swinging American lineup in the ninth for this third straight flawless mop-up effort. The Cubans banged out 10 hits with the biggest being a third-inning game-deciding two-run double by slugging first sacker Alexander Mayeta. Freddie Cepeda, whose bat was silent all week, provided the key defensive play with a brilliant running catch to end the seventh. And .370-career hitter Osmani Urrutia awoke from a week-long slump to pound out four straight hits and end the tournament with a .417 average.

It seems that whatever brief rough spots he might encounter, Urrutia would likely hit somewhere around the .400 pla-

teau no matter what the playing venue—Las Tunas, Pinar del Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Wrigley Field, or perhaps even the planet Mars. The Cubans once more proved in Rio this week that they almost never beat themselves. Although highly critical Cuban fans back home (and what do we expect in a land where continual winning on the diamond is almost a foregone conclusion) complained all week about the dearth of Cuban hitting, this team in the end was as dominant as almost any Big Red Machine edition before it.

The Cuban defense didn't commit a single error, its pitching never allowed more than a single run in any frame except the fifth-inning fiasco against Panama, and the confident Cubans played with the lead through every game but the first. It was indeed a winning combination. And it is indeed an ongoing Cuban baseball tradition.



Cuban players celebrate another international victory.  
Photo provided by author.

## 100 and Counting

By Malcolm Allen

On May 29, 2007 at RFK Stadium in Washington, DC, Tony Abreu of the Dodgers moved from third base to shortstop for the last two innings of Los Angeles' 10-0 victory. In doing so, Abreu became the 100<sup>th</sup> different man born in the Dominican Republic to play shortstop in a major league game.

Every big league franchise has employed at least one Dominican shortstop, beginning with Amado Samuel of the Milwaukee Braves in 1962. The Phillies made Roberto Pena the first to play regularly six years later, and Rafael Santana of the Mets became the first of six shortstops from his country to start for a World Series champion in 1986.

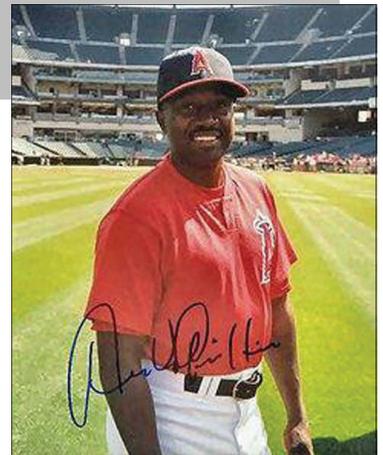
Eight different shortstops earned All Star births, led by Tony Fernandez and Miguel Tejada with four selections apiece. Fernandez also won four straight Gold Gloves, more than the other two recipients from his country combined. Angels first base coach Alfredo Griffin, known as "El Brujo", was an All-Star, Gold Glove winner, and the first of three Dominican shortstops to be named Rookie-of-the-Year. Griffin is the record holder among his countrymen with 1,862 games played at the position, though Tejada may surpass him down the road. Tejada logged the fifth-longest consecutive games streak in major league history until a pitch broke his wrist earlier this year.

At least one Dominican has played shortstop in the big leagues for forty-six consecutive years, with at least one primary starter every season since 1974. Only twice in the last quarter-century have fewer than three clubs had a Dominican playing regularly at short, with six or more in over half of those seasons. Perhaps the best illustration of Dominican shortstop dominance took place September 24, 2005.

*Cubs shortstop Neifi Perez (#1) sparked a Chicago rally in the middle innings at Wrigley Field, but Houston shortstop Jose Vizcaino (#2) drove in a pair to help the Astros maintain their lead in the Wild Card race...Tejada (#3) went hitless for the Ori-*

*oles in Baltimore... Shortstop Rafael Furcal's (#4) two-run homer helped the Braves close in on another division title...Indians rookie Jhonny Peralta (#5) blasted one of his own to keep the Indians in the thick of the AL playoff*

*race. Royals shortstop Angel Berroa (#6) managed a hit in what proved to be Kansas City's 102<sup>nd</sup> defeat...On the other hand, shortstop Juan Uribe (#7) participated in four double plays to help the White Sox improve their league-best record..Jose Reyes (#8) kept Mets fans looking forward to 2006 with a leadoff double to spark a five-run first in D.C., too much for Nationals shortstop Cristian Guzman (#9) and his teammates to overcome...The Padres' shortstop fouled a ball off his shin, so Manny Alexander (#10) got off the San Diego bench to see some action...The Cardinals shifted Abraham Nunez (#11) from third to short for a couple of innings when their starter had to depart, then substituted Hector Luna (#12) for Nunez after two innings...In late action on the west coast, Devil Rays shortstop Julio Lugo (#13) hit safely in each of the first two innings, but the Angels came back at home to beat Tampa Bay...The Dodgers got a double in four trips out of Antonio Perez (#14), but dropped a decision to the Pirates.*



**Alfredo Griffin.** Photo provided by author.

That's fourteen shortstops from the Dominican Republic seeing action in a single day! Incredible!

Fourteen is still a record, but maybe not for long. Eight Dominican shortstops are playing regularly in 2007, just one shy of the record established in 1986 and 2005.

## Daniel Cabrera: The Tallest Latino Big Leaguer

By Malcolm Allen

“When he lets the ball go, he’s right next to you.” That’s how Robinson Cano of the New York Yankees describes batting against the tallest Latino ever to play Major League Baseball, Baltimore Orioles pitcher Daniel Cabrera.

Cabrera nearly no-hit New York last September 28 at Yankee Stadium, but Cano, his friend and fellow San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic native- singled with one out in the bottom of the ninth to ruin it. Cabrera stood a mere 6’7” then, but he’d grown to 6’9” by his next starting assignment in the Bronx on August 14. The night before earning his ninth win of the season with 6 2/3 shutout innings, Cabrera graciously agreed to discuss his journey to the big leagues with *La Prensa del Beisbol Latino*.



Photo provided by author.

There almost wasn’t a baseball career to talk about. Unlike most Dominican boys, particularly those from San Pedro, Cabrera preferred basketball as a youth, following his older brothers to the courts most every day. He rooted for the Chicago Bulls, and their star ex-minor league outfielder Michael Jordan. There weren’t any NBA scouts in the Dominican

though, so when a buscon (sort of a broker between young Dominican players and professional baseball clubs) told Cabrera his height would make him an imposing pitcher, the lanky 15-year-old decided to give baseball a try. He could barely catch the ball at first but, inspired by the dominance of Pedro Martinez, Cabrera dreamed about making the major leagues each night.

Even though he threw only 79 mph as a 6’6”, 160 lbs 17-year-old, the Orioles signed him in 1999 for \$10,000. They had a vision of what he could become but, initially, they didn’t even have a bed at their San Pedro complex large enough to hold him. Baltimore’s Latin American scouting director Carlos Bernhardt still calls Cabrera “Cama Largo” (Long Bed) as a result.

Cabrera’s put on thirty pounds and got his velocity up into the mid-90’s, but experienced a “really tough” adjustment

during his first season of rookie ball in the United States in 2001. Not speaking a word of English was bad enough, but what was he supposed to eat when there was no Dominican food to be found? Coaches loved his arm and determination, so he kept working hard on pitching, and his results improved the following year with as he was better prepared for life off the field.

A 0-7 start for single-A Delmarva in 2003 proved to be a temporary setback as Cabrera finished strong and reached the major leagues the following year. He beat the White Sox on his mother’s birthday in his major league debut, and wound up third in the Rookie-of-the-Year voting with a 12-8 record. Initially only expected to make an emergency start or two, Cabrera’s 96-100 mph fastball made the Orioles want to see more. He was even better in 2005, though poor run support caused his won-lost record to slip to 10-13.

With Leo Mazzone on board as the Orioles new pitching coach in 2006, many anticipated a breakout season for Cabrera. He starred in the World Baseball Classic during spring training, and finished the year with his near no-hitter. In between though, he was so wild that he managed to lead the American League in both walks and wild pitches despite missing 6 ½ weeks with a trip to the disabled list and a stint in Triple-A.

Cabrera had corrective eye surgery after the season, and while he’s still the AL walk leader, he’s actually issuing fewer free passes per nine innings than ever before. He’s already established a career high in innings pitched, ranking among the league leaders in that category. Not only did he grow two inches last off-season, he continued to put on muscle and now weighs 269 lbs. “He’s a horse,” says Orioles manager Dave Trembley.

Cabrera’s only 26, and with less than a decade of organized baseball under his belt, his best years are still to come.

### MENDOZA, from page 2

#### Are you thinking about working in the big leagues one day?

I feel it is most rewarding to stay in the Minor Leagues for the time being. As I have conducted some informational interviews, I learned that the Major Leagues are much more departmentalized. Some may find this more appealing because they can focus on one aspect of the organization. I believe in order to truly understand the goals and purpose of an organization, it is important to be knowledgeable about the operation of the organization.

**Thanks a lot for your time, Elena. Good luck in your career!**

## A note from the Editor

by Anthony Salazar

Welcome to the 4th year of this publication! I would like to first thank all our contributors over the past three years, especially the writers in this current edition. It's another great issue, and of course, it can't happen without your support and your faith in our project. Thank you very much!

In this issue, **Pete Bjarkman** traveled abroad to write about Cuba's recent international baseball victories. **Roberto Mercado** sheds another light on his life as a batboy for the Mayaguez Indios. **Leonte Landino** provides a nice story on uncovering the truth of the origin of Luis Casto, while **Malcolm Allen** gives us some great insight on Latino short-stops. Mr. Bjarkman also writes about the recent demise of the Puerto Rico's Winter League. Due to a variety of reasons, the island's baseball institution folded. It can only be hoped that it will one day be resurrected.

A special congratulations are extended to **Davey Concepcion**, who will have his #13 uniform number retired by the Cincinnati Reds in an upcoming

special ceremony. Concepcion was an integral part of the "Big Red Machine," and has one more year of eligibility remaining in the Hall of Fame writers ballot voting. A candidate needs at least 75 percent of the ballot to enter baseball's shrine, Concepcion has never reached higher than 17 percent of the voting. In past issues, arguments have advocated for his election.

It can only be hoped that this ceremony will bring about a fresh look at his stellar career.

### SABR Latino Baseball Committee

<b>Anthony Salazar</b>	Chair, Editor
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**In This Issue**

*Puerto Rico ends Winter League, Luis Castro & much more!*