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LATIN AMERICA COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

Buenos Dias ..Felicidades..Feliz Año Nuevo..Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to all SABR members..Best wishes in all research endeavours you all might be involved.We welcome new LAC members Woody Wilson,Jesus Pit Azanza and Yuyo Ruiz...

The omission of Puerto Rico as one the countries where many Negro players teams played since the 1910's in the "Baseball" video by Ken Burns has caused a lot of resentment among the Puerto Ricans. Mexico and Cuba are mentioned as the two countries where they played outside the USA.A mention is given to the Ciudad Trujillo team sponsored by President of the Dominican Republic , Rafael Trujillo. On its roster were Satchel Paige ,Joshua Gibson, Chester Williams Bob Griffith. William Perkins, James "Cool Papa" Bell and Leroy Matlock among other stars.

Cuba and Mexico's proximity to the United States was a determining factor in the Negro as well as other minor leaguers participation in barnstorming tournaments and later in their professional leagues. In Cuba you could find a larger amount of players in a highly class baseball. The Mexican league was organized in 1937 and in 1955 became the actual AAA circuit affiliated to the National Association of Baseball League. Cuba's baseball has been divided in 3 eras: 1878-99,1900-33 and 1934 to 1960,when pro ball was vanished by Castro's government.

Since 1914 Negro and Minor League players came to Puerto Rico. The Brooklyn Royal Giants under Nat. C.Strong came to Puerto Rico on November 1916. On its roster were Charles Earle, William Handy, Joe Hewitt, Lee Miller, Johnny Pugh, Dick Redding, Louis Santop, Speck Webster, Andy and Joe (Cyclone) Williams ,Ernest Gatewood and Lee Miller.

After the Royal Giants other teams played in Puerto Rico, among them, Lincoln Giants, New York Black Yankees, Brooklyn Giants, Estrellas de Ramirez which had Dave "Showboat" Thomas, Joshua Gibson, Dick Seay, Harry Salmon, John Stanley William Casey, Ted Page, Rap Dixon, and Jim Williams as well as Leroy Morney; Brooklyn Eagles (twice as the Black Giants in different years) . Other teams like Venezuela's Concordia who had Paige, Gibson and Johnny Mize in its roster on several of its editions played in Puerto Rico as well as Cuban teams.

Not only these players enjoy playing in Puerto Rico and Venezuela because they

became idols and felt the warmth of the fans, who above all treated them as they always deserved, as HUMAN BEINGS, regardless of the color of their skins. Venezuela was another country in their barnstorming trips in the late twenties and thirties, which isn't mentioned in Burns' video and really deserve to be mentioned. On the other hand Roy Partlow, San Juan Senators star pitcher photo appears as if he was playing in Mexico, instead of Puerto Rico. The effort of bringing these players to the limelight and they really have always deserve recognition, but the proper research will make the effort better. The Latin America Committee is willing to provide the correct data to avoid blunders.

After the Puerto Rican league was organized, many of these negro players and others like John Ford Smith, Bob Thurman, Willard Brown, Quincy Trouppe, Tom Young, Schoolboy Barnhill, Chet Brewer, Earl Taborn, Leonar Pearson, Bud Barbee, Neil Robinson became top stars, among others great players who also won the recognition and affection of fans as well as sportwriters and baseball executives.

Research has been made on the US players that participated in the Panama professional league and Puerto Rico Winter league which was organized in 1938. Names and years of participation will be provided in the next LAC newsletter. Mario Longoria, LAC member has done research on Vincent Nava, the first Mexican-American major league player. His findings will also appear in the next LAC newsletter.

Caribbean Baseball Series Hall of Fame first induction will be held at Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic during the 38th Series to be played there from Feb 3-8, 1996 as part of its activities. It will include players from Cuba, Panama, Venezuela and Puerto Rico, (1st stage 1949-60) and from Mexican (Pacific Coast), Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Puerto Rico (2nd stage 1970 to the present). Four players will be elected yearly including those born in other countries like USA.

For imported players it is deemed that they have played at least in one series, while those born in the participating countries should have played at least in two series. Both should have been retired from active participation at least for 5 years and should have observed exemplary conduct on and off the field.

Three new publications dealing with Caribbean baseball are available: PUERTO RICO PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL, III Edition. AP Publications, P.O. Box 2753, San Juan, P.R. 00936. (narrative in Spanish of P.R. Winter League 1994-95 season and the 1995 Caribbean Series. \$8. postpaid. BORICUAS EN LAS GRANDES LIGAS (Puertoricans in the major leagues). Complete records including minor leagues of all Puertorican players that have reached the Big Leagues Mr. Jose Crescioni, Editor, P.O. Box 630548, Cataño, P.R. 00963-0458 \$14.00 postpaid. SERIES DEL CARIBE (Caribbean Series) Records and stats of the Caribbean Series since 1949 to 1995. Mr Alfonso Araujo, Editor, 412 Niños Heroes St. Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico \$8 postpaid.

Among the Latin American countries where baseball is the top sport, there is Nicaragua, whose top major league is Dennis Martinez whose contribution to Cleveland's American Championship was outstanding 12-5 3.08 ERA.

LAC member and well known sportswriter Tito Moran has written "A SHORT HISTORY OF NICARAGUAN BASEBALL" which I believe can provide SABR members a vision on how and when the PLAY BALL voice was first heard in this Central American country.

"It starts like a good trivia question, as baseball in Nicaragua was first played outside Nicaragua.....

The Nicaragua Atlantic coast was occupied by the British towards the end of the last century and cricket was the most popular game. Following a rift with the local sports authorities, an American businessman residing in the port city of Bluefields, Albert Addlesberg, convinced two of the most popular cricket clubs to switch to baseball, and imported the necessary implements from New Orleans.

The acts of constitution of the new baseball teams, "Southern" and "Four Roses" date from 1887, and the first games were played early the following year. The sport has been played continuously in that region since then.

The first official game in what it was then Nicaragua was played in the capital city of Managua in July, 1891 between Managua and Granada. The first team with a more or less continuous history was founded by an American Consul, Carter Donaldson, in 1904 and was named Boer because of the conflict at that time in what now is South Africa (it was a custom in those days to name teams after warring factors, the teams "Japan" and "Russia" were founded in Masaya in 1904). It remains the most popular team in the country.

The first national tournament was organized in 1914; the "Managua" team beat out "Boer" and clubs from Masaya, Leon, Chinandega and Granada to win the "Interlocal Championship" of 1915.

The first international series took place in 1924 visited neighboring Costa Rica, now a hot bed of soccer.

Although a few players, from the most black Atlantic Coast had played in the Pacific Region, in 1932 the "Navy" team traveled west. They went 40-3 and amazed the locals with their prowess; there were even accusations of witchcraft. Most of their players remained and the quality of Nicaraguan baseball improved tremendously.

In that same year, the first foreign team visited Nicaragua, the "General Trujillo" from the Dominican Republic, and the Nicaraguans discovered that though we had good players, we were not yet able to compete with first class teams.

The first player with Big League experience arrived in 1933, as manager-player of a Cuban barnstorming team, "Cueto Cubs", led by former Cincinnati Red Manuel Cueto; the team featured some players from the Negro Leagues. They proved to be almost unbeatable (25-1). However, a couple of their players remained in Nicaragua for a time and helped to teach the fundamentals of the game.

In 1934, a so called "Almendares" team from Cuba visited Nicaragua, and three of

their players stayed to live in the country, including Ponciano Lombillo, a young catcher who was a reserve of the Habana Reds, and who played, managed and was a sportscaster until his death a few months ago.

In 1935 Nicaragua took second place (to Cuba) in the Central American and Caribbean Games, the oldest regional Olympic competition in the world, and they did with many top players missing from the team.

In 1938, Leslie Mann organized a "World's Championship" in England between the British and the United States, although the nationality and non professional status of the participants was in doubt, it was recognized as the first Amateur Baseball World Championship, and the following year Cuba organized the second. Nicaragua and the United States participated.

Through the years, Nicaraguan baseball has focussed on those events, and the country has hosted five of them: 1948(X), 1950(XI), 1972(XX), 1973(XXII) and 1994(XXXII). Professional baseball, one of the golden ages of the sport of our country, was played briefly, from 1956 to 1967. Two international championships were won in that era, the Panamerican Series of 1958 by Leon (over Mexico and Colombia) and the Interamerican Series of 1956 by 5 Estrellas (topping Puerto Rico and Venezuela).

Our sport was in disarray after the pros folded, until it was reorganized as an amateur league in 1970 by Carlos Garcia, who is probably the father of Olympic baseball. The 70's were the second golden age, as Nicaragua became again a force in international competition and the first five Major Leaguers the country has produced were developed: Dennis Martinez, Tony Chevez, Albert Williams, David Green and Porfirio Altamirano.

After the sport suffered a slump during the 80's (with the brief shining interlude of the Silver Medal at the Venezuelan Panamerican Games of 1983 over the United States team of Mark Mc Guire, Will Clark, Barry Larkin and company), baseball, under Garcia again, is flourishing anew, as the only country in the continent in this decade that has a better record than Nicaragua in international competition is Cuba.

Because of political circumstances many people fled the country during the last decade; of the nine Nica players in professional baseball at this moment, two were signed in the United States and one in Panama.

One Marvin Benard, just made the Big Leagues. Maybe as a harbinger of the future.