

LATIN AMERICA COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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Buenos Dias, back in good health..Thanks God. I am very grateful to all the wonderful SABR members for the calls and message that I received during and after my open heart surgery. It seems that there are more innings in my arm, therefore I am looking forward to many SABR National Conventions including next June 24-27.

Since 1871,when cuban Esteban Bellan became one of the Troy Hay-makers outfielders in the National Association League(NAL),over eight hundred Latin Americans have participated in the Major Leagues, considering NAL as such. He was followed by infielder-outfielder Luis Castro from Colombia who in 902 wore the Philadelphia Athletics uniform in the American League. As a matter of fact he became the pioneer in the actual major leagues.

Cubans Rafael Almeida, Cincinnati Reds outfielder (1911); Jacinto Calvo and Merito Acosta, Washington Senators outfielders (1913);Mexican Melo Almath, Boston Red Sox outfielder (1933),Venezuelan Alejandro Carrasquel, Washington Senators pitcher (1939); Puertorican Hiram Bithorn, Chicago Cubs (1942); Dominican Ossie Virgil. Detroit Tigers infielder (1956) Virgin Island's Joe Christopher, Pittsburgh Pirates outfielder (1957); Al Williams, Minnesota pitcher(1980);Belize's Chito Martinez Baltimore outfielder(1991) were these countries firsts Major Leaguers.

Since they arrived to the Big Show, the amount of Latin American (including Caribbean players) in organized baseball in all its categories has increased from the Major League down to the Rookie circuits. On the opening day rosters of the Major Leagues of the 841 players (750 active and 91 disabled), 165(19.4%) were born in this area. The Dominican Republic was represented by 66 players, Puerto Rico 36, increased to 41 as of June 7; Venezuela, 25;Mexico, 12;Cuba, 8; Panama,6;Colombia and Curacao, 3 each; Jamaica,2; Virgin Islands, Aruba and Nicaragua, one each.

Meanwhile Latin American players participation in the minor leagues continues also in "crescendo". At the beginning of the 1999 season there were 2,300 latins active in the 30 organizations. This excludes 400 participating in

the Mexican League (AAA), though this circuit is affiliated to the National Association of Professional Leagues, its players except those on option from Major League teams their contracts belong to their respective clubs.

Dominicans are the largest group, 1371 due mainly to the 30 teams in the Dominican Summer League. Venezuelans follow with 582. There is a similar situation between this country and the Dominican Republic as there is a Summer League (8 teams). Due to this program, there is a direct impact in all phases of its players development. Puerto Rico is third with 122, Mexico fourth with 77 and Panama with 59 players, all under contract with Major League organizations. It is significant that among this new breed you find others born in countries like Brazil, Aruba, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia, Honduras and Netherlands West Indies (Curacao) where baseball isn't the national sport as soccer is. This not the case with Cuba, Nicaragua and Panama as you know, where baseball is been played for over 80 years, and has produced big leaguers including Hall of Famer Rod Carew.

It seems that if there are 59 Panamenians it won't be long before Panama will again have a professional baseball league. During the 40's and 50's, these Centroamerican country was a founding member of the Caribbean Baseball Confederation along with Cuba, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico. As a matter of fact Panama ,their Spur Cola team won the II Caribbean Baseball Series played at the Sixto Escobar Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

On the other hand for the first time, professional baseball players are eligible to participate in Olympic Games, as well as PanAmerican, European, Asiatic Games, Intercontinental Cup and World Championship, restricted in the past only to amateurs. This change undoubtedly will create another phases to Several SABR committees including Latin America, Baseball Records and Pictorial History among others,

The first of these events will be the XIII Pan American Games to be staged in Winnipeg, Canada, July 23 to August 8. Latin America Committee will cover it. Out of the 10 participating national teams, eight will be from Latin America: Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Brazil Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The others are Canada and USA. We expect to provide not only stats but other data that could be useful to other SABR committees.

Brazil, whose national sport is soccer and where basketball has gain international recognition thru its participation in World tournaments as well as

in Olympic, Pan American and South American Games is also developing baseball.

At the present there are two prospects in the organized baseball, Marcel Vianna and Jose Augusto Pett, pitchers in the farm systems of Atlanta and Pittsburgh respectively. On the other hand Henrique Tamaki plays with the Hiroshima Carps while Daniel Matsumoto and Reinaldo Sato with the Yakult Swallows in the Japanese Central League.

JAPANESE CONTRIBUTION TO BRAZILIAN BASEBALL

How and when baseball arrived to Brazil? It was in the 30's when Americans employees who worked for the USA enterprises like Light, Companhia Telefonica and Frigorifico Armour as well as at the USA consulate in Sao Paulo participated in animated games during the weekends in the Agua Branca, Estadio de Sociedade Esportiva Palmeira or at the National Atletico Club near the Comendador Souza sector.

Meanwhile there was a large Japanese immigration, some of them brought baseball equipment to practice the sport. Don't forget that since baseball was introduced in Japan in 1870's, among others by American Professor Horace Wilson it became very popular developing very fast nationwide. The visit of Major leagues had a great impact in the popularity of this sport.

Like in other Latin American countries the construction of railroads had a direct impact in the development of baseball in Brazil, as it happened in Mexico, Panama and Nicaragua among other nations in this continent.

It was in the Japanese colonies in the state of Sao Paulo that baseball got great impulse. In was in that area that the Noroeste, Paulista and Soreocabana (names of railroads) leagues were born. From the 30's, coffee was sent from Sao Paulo to the northern state of Parana for exportation to other countries. Many Japanese or their descendents went also north. Baseball also went along expanding to other areas of Brazil, where more Japanese colonies were established.

In September 24, 1946 was organized the first Brazilian baseball federation, "Federacao Paulista de Beisebol e Sofibol" which reunited Coopercotia Atletico Clube, Piratas Baseball Club and Sao Paulo Gigantes Baseball Clube.

The federation didn't had their own park until 1948 when with Captain Silvio Padila provided some land in the north margin of the river Toiete, 100 meters near Clube Esperia now there is Estadio de Born Retiro.

In 1951 the First Panamerican Games were held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. marked the first international competition of a Brazilian baseball team, Entirely composed of native Brazilians, they finished seventh on an eight countries competition with a 1-7 record.

Since 1990 the Brazilian Baseball and Softball Confederation invited Cuban and Japanese technicians to offer clinics to players and coaches. On 1992, considering the Cubans world leaders position in baseball an interchange of Brazil/Cuba was established.

Another important factor was to promote in Brazil several international events as the Panamerican Junior tournament held in 1990 in Sao Paolo, where the local team finished fourth. Since Brazilian teams have participated in several international Youth, Juvenile, Junior tournaments with relative success.