



DRSEA INFORMER

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Viendo Es Creyendo (Seeing Is Believing) – I was once called an illusionist for pursuing the dream of creating the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy; accused of conjuring a fantastic plan that defied perception. But with persistence, we continue to move the dream to reality, continue to add form and substance.

We have narrowed our search for land, refined the DRSEA course of studies, attracted interested students and teachers, and improved the visibility and credibility of our mission which is to give young, gifted student athletes in the Dominican Republic a better opportunity to become well-rounded individuals, to excel in life, outside the lines and off the playing fields.

Recently I had the opportunity to witness the fulfilling of a similar educational mission, giving me even more reason to believe that we will get this done, that we can create a model institution, that we can take this plan from perception to fact.

I had heard about the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation's work in the Dominican Republic a few years ago; the Foundation is the charitable arm of the Fuente and Newman families, both renowned cigar makers who support humanitarian efforts in the Dominican Republic.



Today, the Foundation has developed a 23-acre complex in the Bonao region of the Dominican Republic that started as a simple dream of adding a wing onto the local elementary school. The complex now includes primary and high schools, a health center, sports and recreation facilities, and an organic farming area. The Cigar Family Community Complex serves over 5,000 families and has had a profound impact on improving the lives of children in the region.

In so many ways, the Foundation's support makes sense. Tobacco is the Dominican Republic's top cash crop, generating over \$300 million a year. And the Fuente brand is on over 24 million cigars a year, more than any other Dominican cigar manufacturer. As a cigar smoker myself, I appreciate the sentiments of Carlos Fuente Jr., founder Arturo Fuente's grandson, who said, "The basic needs

of the poorer people of the Dominican Republic are enormous. I feel it is incumbent upon all of us – cigar manufacturers, tobacconists and cigar consumers who have benefited so much from the Dominican people – to give back.”

And give back they have. The Cigar Family Community Complex is incredible in scope and vision, one of those places that practically invites you to come and learn. When I visited, we were met by students who enthusiastically greeted us in Spanish, English and French, gushing with pride on being part of this revolutionary experience. Computers are available to aid students; there is a well-stocked library, a rarity in most Dominican schools. There is dental and medical care available. Sports facilities include the inevitable baseball field, but also a volleyball and basketball court; a karate class gave a demonstration that Bruce Lee would have envied.

There are vegetable plots and fruit trees; there is even a bee hive colony. Sweet!

Weekend activities are also provided, with the students allowed to bring their families; it is truly a community complex.



I came away from my visit to the Cigar Family Community Complex with a clear understanding of what can be accomplished when the desire is there. My mind’s eye can more clearly see what the DRSEA can strive to become. Anything is possible if you believe.

Un Poco Del Cielo (A Little Bit Of Heaven) – Cigar enthusiasts recognize the Fuente brand as one of the world’s best, and it has taken on legendary status under the direction of Carlos Fuente and his son, Carlos Jr., son and grandson of the founder, Arturo. And when I got to visit the Cigar Family Community Complex, I also got the rare chance to set foot on hallowed ground – the *Chateau de la Fuente* – the tobacco plantation where much of the Fuente magic is created.

Cigar lore dictates that farmers grow tobacco and manufacturers make cigars. Much of tobacco growing is done by contract, with farmers tilling small plots and then selling to larger cigar producers. So when the Fuentes decided to buy a plantation, they drew a lot of skeptics, particularly when word spread that they would grow tobacco for wrappers. The wrapper is a critical part of a cigar, giving it its smooth outer appearance and distinct elements of style and flavor.

No one grew tobacco for wrappers in the Dominican Republic; the best wrappers were imported from Brazil, Indonesia, Ecuador, Cameroon or even the United States, as growing wrapper tobacco in the Dominican Republic had proved impossible because of weather conditions and topography.

But the experiment was a success and the new wrapper, grown with the help of cheesecloth to protect the tobacco from wind and sun, was paired with select fillers and binders to create the Fuente Fuente OpusX, the first Dominican cigar containing only tobaccos grown in the Dominican Republic. The OpusX is one of the most sought after and highest rated cigars in the world, with a reputation for quality and rich, robust flavor; the price of a single cigar can often reach \$50.



I have had exactly three of these little bits of heaven, and each provided its own distinct smoking experience of near perfect taste; I feel blessed to have received them as gifts.

As a result of their daring, the Fuentes have achieved rock star status in the cigar world, revered for their passion in developing some of the world's best and most innovative cigars. They add to their stardom with slick, classy promotions and are often pictured on their plantation among the rows and rows of vintage tobacco.



Carlos and Carlos Jr.

When I traveled to the Cigar Family Community Complex, we had to go past the shaded plots of emerald green tobacco plants and the distinctive red barns that house the harvest that will one day be enjoyed by millions around the world. While I was dazzled by the complex, what happened next was simply one of those occurrences I will treasure for a long time.

As we drove from the complex, back through the acres of tobacco plants, I asked to stop and take a photo of one of the curing barns. I stepped to the gated entrance of *Chateau de la Fuente* to snap a photo, only to have an armed guard move in my direction. While entry into the legendary plantation is not unheard of, it is considered a privilege, conducted only in the rarest of circumstances, and generally by invitation only, so I feared the worse as the guard approached.

To my surprise, he swung open the gates and gestured for us to drive in, to actually go up to the summit of the plantation where I could gaze down on the lush countryside that is a monument to cigar excellence. It was a cigar lover's dream come true.

From the lookout high atop the property, I lit up a cigar to savor as I took in the breathtaking view that included not only the vast fields of prime tobacco, and the multitude of barns housing cut tobacco, but also sculptured gardens in full bloom with an amazing array of colors and fragrances accenting the gorgeous sky that touched the surrounding mountains. God's in His heaven, all's right with the world.

There below me, laid perfectly in colored stones, was the distinctive OpusX logo, as well as other stone artwork. I can think of no more perfect a location for a herf, a place where people like me can gather and share their love for cigars. And I can't help but believe that Carlos and Carlito Fuente planned it that way.



Revolviendo En Pote (Stirring The Pot) – Richard Lapchick is, by definition, an agitator, though Merriam-Webster stops short of posting his photo next to the entry: **one that agitates:** as a : one who stirs up public feeling on controversial issues.

In the 25 years I have known Rich, he has stirred more things than Betty Crocker in his quest to use sports to combat racial, gender and social inequities in society; many have dubbed him the “social conscience of sports.”

And, as another college basketball season winds down, Lapchick once again is creating controversy with his annual college basketball study that reports the graduation rates of teams that make the NCAA men's basketball tournament. This time, however, the study has drawn the attention of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan who is proposing that colleges with poor graduation rates

be banned from postseason competition. While I would hate to see government intervention in college sports, Duncan is correct to call a foul.

According to Lapchick's analysis, one out of five men's teams who made the NCAA tournament graduated less than 40 percent of their players over the last six years. Duncan asks the question, "If you can't manage to graduate two out of five players, how serious are the institutions and the coach about their players' academic success? How are you preparing student athletes for life?"



Arne Duncan

More troubling are the dismal graduation rates of African-American ballplayers on some of the tournament teams; five graduated 20 percent or less of their black players and two – Maryland and California – failed to graduate a single black player who started school from 1999 through 2002.

In comparison, the Lapchick report includes seven universities that graduated 100 percent of their basketball players, black and white, and another five with over 80 percent graduation success. But in contrast, nine teams show a discrepancy of 60 percentage points or more in graduation rates between their white and black players. "You cannot tell me that discrepancies that large are unrelated to a program's practices and an institution's priorities," Duncan said.

I couldn't agree more. Coaches like Maryland's Gary Williams argue that programs like his lose players to the NBA and to transfers, but I have to call a tech on Williams; the NCAA factors in those equations in determining accurate graduation rates, so Coach, zero percent graduation is your final score – you lose.



Gary Williams

But ultimately, you can't fault Williams, who is in the business of winning basketball games. I have a riddle: What do you call a basketball coach with a 100 percent graduation rate and three straight losing seasons? Answer: Unemployed.

But you can fault Maryland and California, and the 12 universities with men's teams that have graduation rates below 40 percent, as do three universities' women's teams who made that tournament. These are institutions of higher education; their business is education and they are getting poor to failing grades and need to be held accountable.

Duncan calls his proposal to ban postseason play for teams that fall below the 40 percent graduation rate a “low bar,” that should be increased over time, but it provides a starting line and makes universities accountable for doing their jobs, for providing an education, for keeping score.

As Lapchick concludes, “As always, there are schools that win big enough to be here in March *and* graduate their student athletes.” Secretary Duncan hears him and maybe the NCAA should do something before Duncan does.

I first listened to Rich in the mid 1980s when he walked into the office of the newspaper where I worked, persistent in wanting to meet with me. I didn’t know him but was familiar with his father, Joe, who, as coach of the New York Knicks, signed Nate “Sweetwater” Clifton, the NBA’s first African American player in 1950.

Rich had started the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University in 1984 to address racial equality in sports and to promote and ensure the education of athletes. As someone who wrote about college sports, and had already seen the inequities that existed there and throughout the sports industry – including the paper where I worked – I felt an immediate kinship with Lapchick.



Richard Lapchick

In 1989, I joined him at the Center, where I worked as special projects coordinator, specifically with a federally funded program that teamed with colleges to improve support for student athletes. It was an interesting two years; Rich and I often bumped heads on procedures, but we never wavered from our dedication to improving the landscape for athletes, particularly athletes of color.

I used to laugh because when he first started, people would literally run from Lapchick; he agitated that much, putting the entire sports industry on the carpet, bringing attention to problems the industry was – and to a certain extent remains – reluctant to address.

Our paths continue to cross on a frequent basis; he inspires me and says I do the same for him. We both believe we can make a difference, that we can use sports as a catalyst for change. Time will tell.

Despierte Y Huela El Café (Wake Up And Smell The Coffee) – While my daily routine varies depending on what I need to achieve, I always try to start the day off the same – with two cups of coffee – Dominican coffee, of course.

I was never a big coffee drinker, but got the habit of appreciating good coffee from my ex-girlfriend, a Dominican woman who lives in New York. I would kid her that her coffee was so strong a spoon would stand up in it, but the taste benefits of freshly brewed *good* coffee were clear.

Dominican coffee may not be as renowned as Columbian or Jamaican, but I think it stands up well to the competition; over 260 years of growing experience will do that. Coffee flourishes here due to the climate, altitude, rainfall and soil; a perfect storm for choice, darker beans with a soft, sweet flavor that some describe as “the best kept secret in coffee.”



Dominicans drink coffee all day long; you often find vendors selling thimble-sized cups of the elixir already sweetened to provide a caffeine jolt guaranteed to perk you up. Many Dominicans use a *greca*, an aluminum pot that brews only a cup or two. It can be kind of tricky, so I use a standard coffee maker to make my morning quota. And while some Dominican consider it a sacrilege, I like my *cafe con leche* – with milk – which is often warmed before added to the cup.



Standard greca

I also prefer to buy the beans and grind them fresh in a spice grinder; the difference is amazing, both in taste and aroma, but I didn't know how enticing the aroma could be until I lived here.

I usually put my coffee on the brew, then go to the local store to get a couple of bananas for my cereal; the coffee is ready when I return. After a few weeks in the Dominican Republic I noticed that Ramon, the handyman in my building, always seemed to be dusting down apartment doors right at the time I sat down to my morning coffee. I thought it was just a coincidence since most days I had breakfast around 8:30 a.m. He would always ask for a cup which I gladly provided.

But then I noticed that even when I varied my routine, either eating earlier or later, Ramon was at my door. It wasn't until one day when returning from my banana run that I noticed that the smell of fresh brewed coffee – my coffee – was permeating the building – and I made the connection that Ramon waited until he smelled the coffee to provide maintenance to my apartment door. Smart man.



Dominican coffee is available in many stores in the United States, and can be ordered online. If you are a true lover of good coffee, don't miss this experience. Just don't be surprised if the neighbors show up when you brew a pot.

Otras Noticias De Interés (Other News of Interest)

Dominican Republic and IDB Sign Educational Loan Agreement – The Dominican Republic and the Inter American Development Bank (IDB) signed a conditional loan for US\$100 million for school improvements. They also signed another US\$50 million agreement to support the 10 Year Plan for Education. Hacienda Minister Vicente Bengoa and Luis Alberto Moreno, the head of the IDB, finalized the agreement during the annual meeting of the governors of the multilateral organization. The US\$100 million is a line of credit to be used to extend school hours, improve learning programs, especially in math and language in the elementary and high school levels, and reduce the number of students in classrooms.

The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth. - Erasmus

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