



DRSEA INFORMER

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Hora De Hacer Algo En Beisbol (Time For MLB To Play Hardball) – Major League Baseball recently held its annual midsummer celebration of the game of hardball and, as usual, Dominicans were well represented on the All Star teams selected as the best of the best. The numbers are testament to the contribution the Dominican Republic makes to baseball, providing it with many of the top stars today.

Dominicans In 2009 All-Star Festivities



Albert Pujols



Carlos Pena



Nelson Cruz

But amidst the All-Star hoopla, the dark side of Dominican baseball continues to fester. Around the same time baseball was celebrating in St. Louis, the Yankees were voiding the contract of a young Dominican prospect who lied about both his age and his identity, and no fewer than 10 Dominican Summer League players were suspended for using performance enhancing drugs. Even Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig took note of the age falsifications during an All-Star address, saying, "That's one of the areas we've got to get a lot better handle on. We've got a lot of work to do in the Dominican Republic. And we're doing it."

But not doing near enough. Now is time for Commissioner Selig to take action or Dominican baseball is going to crumble under its own weight; it is already a crisis in development, with the latest developments only adding fuel to the fire lit by Sammy Sosa, Manny Ramirez and Alex Rodriguez – and now David Ortiz – as well as the additional accusations of age and identify falsification by Dominican players.

Understand, baseball is a natural resource for the Dominican Republic, doing as much or more for the country than tourism, the leading industry. In fact, tourism feeds off the publicity generated by baseball. People who had never heard of the Dominican Republic know of the country because some of their favorite baseball players hail from here; many of them visit the country as a result. Baseball and the Dominican Republic cannot allow a public relations plus to turn into a nightmare.

Signings of players in the Dominican Republic have been slowed or put on hold by the questions about the legitimate age and identity of some players. Teams are conducting bone density scans to verify the age of some players and DNA testing is being ordered for others, with the players forced to bear the cost of testing unless results vindicate them.

The DNA testing itself raises ethical questions on a horrific scale. Ask yourself the question what might have happened if baseball had had DNA testing available when a young Lou Gehrig was coming up. What would the Yankees have done with the talented player if they had been able to determine he was predisposed to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis? Once DNA information is obtained, no one can guarantee how it is used and by whom. That alone is dangerous.

But the ethics of DNA testing aside, baseball has already taken several to the head with regards to Dominican baseball players and, from what I understand, this is just the tip of the iceberg as scrutiny intensifies; that more age/identity falsification will be uncovered and more steroid users exposed, further undermining the integrity of Dominican baseball and the exceptional players it produces. I predicted several months ago that there was going to be a slow trickle of names made public from a 2003 steroids test, a test that was supposed to remain confidential. Sammy Sosa's name recently popped up, and now both David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez are named.

Commissioner Selig needs to act now, appointing a high level commission, much as he did with the steroid issue, to study the problems and develop solutions. The Mitchell Report led to substantial changes in the way baseball addresses the use of performance enhancing drugs, but the problem is epidemic among Dominican players and will continue unless addressed head on, as will lying about age and identity.



Commissioner Selig

A few years back, a group of Olympic athletes was asked if they would take steroids to assure Olympic glory even though it would result in certain death. Over 60 percent said yes. In a country where baseball is viewed by many as the only opportunity to escape poverty, I am willing to bet that the percentage of those willing to exchange baseball success for death would be even higher.

The commission Selig needs to announce today, and appoint within the next 30 days, should include people from Major League Baseball and Dominican baseball, as well as players (current and former), doctors, educators and representatives of the Dominican government whose role would be to protect the country's natural resource of baseball. And part of the commission's

charge should be to promote and develop opportunities for the players for a life outside of and beyond baseball. If players realize that baseball is a single opportunity but other opportunities are available, they might realize that risking their lives by taking steroids, or getting caught up in the lies of age and identity falsification, are just not worth it.

The Dominican Republic gets so much from baseball and baseball gets too much from the Dominican Republic to allow the situation to deteriorate further; at some point it becomes irreparable. Commissioner, you have the power to see that that does not happen. Time to step up to the plate.

Ramón El Mago (Ramon The Magician) – Among the many pleasures of living in the Dominican Republic is access to some of the best cigars in the world. The Dominican Republic is the world's largest producer of handmade cigars; there are over 600,000 acres of land devoted to growing tobacco for cigars. Half of all cigars consumed in the United States – over 525 million – are made right here; there are over 3,000 brands to choose from.

One of my daily stops is at *La Leyenda Del Cigarro* (The Legend of Cigars) in Santo Domingo. It is a good place to socialize, to talk sports and other events, and, naturally, to light up. The shop features a variety of Dominican cigars, as well as offerings from Cuba, but it is the house brand I love the most, in part because I know of the love that is put into each cigar by Ramon, whose prestidigitations with tobacco are so skillful I respectfully call him a magician.

Making cigars is an intensely hands-on process; there are over 220 individual steps in making a cigar, from seedling to final product, and each is done manually, but none are more important than that of people like Ramon, the *torcedores*.



Ramon at work

Rollers take years to perfect their skills, often apprenticing to master rollers to develop their techniques. Ramon learned on the knee of his grandfather, one generation passing his wisdom to another. It is not simply the rolling of the cigar, but the selection of the right tobaccos and marrying them, blending them with other tobaccos to make a cigar that is flavorful, aromatic and intimately smokable.

It never ceases to amaze me to watch Ramon, who helps in the selection of all tobacco, make his works of art, taking the long filler *ligero* that give the cigar its deepest flavors, then adding bits and pieces of other tobaccos to the mix, and skillfully twisting them into a cylinder that is placed into a press. A half hour in the press, then a half turn of each cigar, and more time in the press to ensure each cigar will hold its shape.

Ramon then carefully selects a wrapper, making sure it is without flaws to ensure great texture and color to each cigar, then lovingly cloaks the pressed cigar in its coat, securing it with a dab of vegetable glue, and fashioning a cap or point on each, all the while taking into account that each

cigar must have a good draw and an even burn. Quality and consistency are the only ways you judge a good cigar; “*la calidad es el respeto al pueblo*” is embraced at every phase of the industry.

Ramon does this dozens of times a day, hundreds of times a week; I estimate he makes over 60,000 cigars every year in varying shapes, sizes, colors and strengths.

Ramon is so good at what he does, you can give him a cigar, any cigar, and he will analyze it, sniff the leaves, smoke a bit, perform a forensic exam and then duplicate the cigar to near exactness in appearance and taste.

He has also made a few cigars he conjures up for my benefit only, using his knowledge of what I like with his wizardry of what works. My tastes run to intermediate in strength, with a dark maduro wrapper and a thick ring gauge. He once combined six different tobaccos to make a robusto that was literally an experience of a lifetime. His creation was the only cigar of its kind on the planet and I was the beneficiary of that solitary uniqueness.

My respect for Ramon grows each day I watch him, as passersby come to marvel through the window at his dexterity, as visitors from around the world crowd around him to take pictures, as they exit with boxes of his gems to enjoy when they return to various corners of the world. His work seems so simple and he makes it look that way, as any great artist does. Ramon truly performs magic, turning tobacco into masterpieces. But I am the one who makes them disappear – one by one.



Y Esa Es La Manera Que Es (And That’s The Way It Is) – No matter what pursuits I have undertaken over the years, including my current one of building the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy, I have always considered myself a career journalist. I have been involved in the media since college, writing for the school newspaper, and got my first job, for a technical publication, the day after I graduated. Since then I have written for a variety of publications and writing has always been my strong suit in any job. Journalism has provided me with so many opportunities and has given me many of the principles I follow even today: sticking to deadlines, accuracy, integrity, responsibility.

Walter Cronkite, who died recently, was one of my heroes. He set a standard for journalism that has influenced the media – and the world – for more than five decades, earning the reputation as “the most trusted man in America.” An emotional Cronkite told the nation about the assassination of President Kennedy; his zeal over a man landing on the moon was also felt by the nation. And when he called for an end to the Vietnam War, the country listened.

When Cronkite started in the business there were only three TV stations. Now news is delivered 24/7 over a multitude of stations and the Internet. I doubt whether the Founding Fathers, in contemplating the First Amendment, could have remotely conceptualized the immense scope that it would embrace today. Anyone with a website can become a reporter and cloak themselves in First Amendment protection; the landscape is muddled to say the least.

Newspapers are suffering from the media glut; many are going out of business. Misinformation is dispersed on a regular basis on TV, in newspapers and magazines, and on the Internet. Responsible journalism is well on its way to becoming an oxymoron.

Cronkite set a standard for journalistic values and personal integrity and I hope his legacy will not only be remembered, but be the measuring stick for an industry that in many cases seems to have forgotten its fundamental responsibilities.



As you prepare for schools to reopen in the next month, please remember that schools are also reopening in the Dominican Republic and we plan on taking our reading program to even more locations in the months to come. School supplies are desperately needed and to make your donations easier to get here, we have arranged with Laura Acosta, one of our board members, to have them shipped to her and she will get them to us. We need supplies like crayons, pens, pencils, erasers and paper. Every little bit helps.



Send donations to:

The Juan Pablo Duarte Foundation (JPD Foundation)
Attention: Laura Acosta
427 Ft. Washington Avenue Suite #BS-A
New York, NY 10033
(212) 740-6806

Please mark the package: DRSEA Donation

Charles S. Farrell

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