



DRSEA INFORMER

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Poniendo Un Dedo En Un Problema (Putting A Finger On A Problem) – Major League Baseball finds itself between a rock and a hard place as it tries to address the problem of age and identity falsification among prospects in the Dominican Republic. At the same time, the league is facing increasing criticism for its investigations into the situation.

A top baseball official told me recently that he believes the amount of fraud by young players and *buscónes* has escalated. “We are doing our best to manage this problem,” he said. It is estimated that somewhere between 70 and 120 suspected cases of lying about age and/or identity are currently under baseball’s microscope.

I have an idea on how to end the problem, how to make identification of potential Dominican signees almost foolproof, but the question is: Will anyone listen?

Here is the idea. Education is mandatory in the Dominican Republic through the fifth grade. The dropout rate after the fifth grade takes off at an alarming rate for a variety of reasons. One reason is the lack of resources for a proper education; 78 percent of Dominican youth do not complete the full eight years of primary education. Sadly, it is estimated that one in 10 children never even attends primary school.

Why not start a fingerprinting program for boys in the fifth grade (or earlier), and create a data base against which identities can be checked in six years, with 16 being the age when Dominican males can sign with Major League Baseball teams? Radical yes, but as anybody who has ever watched TV knows, fingerprints don’t lie. The fingerprints you are born with are the prints you carry for life; no two people have the same fingerprints.



The fingerprinting idea was actually pitched to me by another baseball executive, who pointed out that in Venezuela, children who apply for their *cedula* (national identification card) at 9-10 years old are automatically fingerprinted at local administration offices. “If the DR had this, we’d catch more players trying to misrepresent their age,” he said. But he also pointed out that “The problem is way bigger than MLB.....it all starts with the (Dominican) government.”

He went on to explain that Major League Baseball has lobbied the Dominican government to amend the *Ley de Deportes* to regulate *buscónes*, their facilities and their fees, among other things. “Those efforts received little support from the authorities. Cooperation and interest in some of these areas we identify as ‘issues’ in our game are lacking.”

Without cooperation and interest from the Dominican government, the issue of age/identify falsification will continue unabated as it will take government action to create a compulsory fingerprinting program. The Dominican Republic has its own *cedula* system, with citizens 18 and older required to obtain the ID card. Leave home without it and you are subject to arrest.

Extend national identification to include fingerprinting younger children and you can end age falsification. While the problem obviously applies only to boys, for those who cry discrimination, go ahead and include 10-year-old girls. More than 40 countries have some form of child fingerprinting, mainly as a safety measure, but also to identify children for specific purposes. In North Wales, a cashless catering system is employed in a number of schools to enable children entitled to free meals to be easily and accurately identified by scanning their fingerprints.

I am sure that people will point out flaws and concerns about fingerprinting children. In Britain there were complaints that child fingerprinting was done without parental consent. In North Wales, there was worry that hackers could get their hands on the data, but there are ways to protect the information. In Nassau, U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service special agents fingerprinted children and explained why it is valuable for their families to have the information.

Some opponents of fingerprinting children say it carries an inference of criminal activity, but I would venture to say that a 16-year-old whose fingerprints turn up at a crime scene has more to worry about than playing baseball.

The cost of such a program is not easy to gauge, but good digital scanning devices run from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand. After an initial purchase, perhaps shared by Major League Baseball, the cost would mainly be for administration and maintenance. Surely, it is cheaper than the DNA tests and bone scanning now being employed for age verification, and fingerprint identification makes far more positive identifications of persons worldwide daily than any other human identification procedure.. And, I would venture to say that the Dominican government probably has a system in its possession that could be adapted for a national program.



Fingerprint scanner

As I said, this idea is certainly not flawless, but the technology for accurate fingerprint identification is readily available. Again, if a program were implemented within the next year, you would have six years to work out the kinks. But it will take action by the Dominican

government to put such a program in place. The question now is whether the government is interested in cooperating.

I have said before that baseball is one of the Dominican Republic's major natural resources and should be protected as such. I don't think the Dominican Republic can afford to continue to have the reputation of its baseball players tarnished; it is like dumping sludge on one of its beaches, and I know that the country protects the integrity of those assets with a vengeance. The criminal fine for befouling beaches and the crystal clear waters that lap them runs as high as half a billion dollars.

Baseball brings an estimated \$350 million annually to the shores of this island; isn't that worth projecting? Hopefully, fingerprinting of children as part of that protection is worth considering. But is there sufficient interest in doing so? I don't know.



En El Elogio Del Plátano (In Praise Of The

Plantain) – Another of the many joys of living in the Dominican Republic is the food, and the plantain is a basic. The plantain, for the uninitiated, is a member of the banana family. Plantains are very starchy, much like a potato, but unlike the banana, are not eaten raw.

In the Dominican Republic, you can buy plantains in the supermarket, or from peddlers who cart their wares on horse-drawn wagons. They look like green bananas but ripe plantains can be black in color.

Many Dominicans use the plantain to make something called *mangu*, which basically is cooked, pureed plantains topped with sauteed onions, often pickled in vinegar. Sometimes a little milk or butter is added to the mix. The result is a rib-sticking concoction that is often found in a typical Dominican breakfast, alongside scrambled or fried eggs, *salchichon* (Dominican sausage) or fried salami and even fried cheese – yes, fried cheese!

I have learned to make *tostónes*, slicing the peeled plantain into rounds and frying them until just soft. Now here's the trick; you smash the softened rounds flat and fry them again. Sprinkle with a little salt and you have a side better than French fries and more satisfying than potato chips. There is even a kitchen tool available just for smashing.

The plantain is added to soup and stews for flavor and thickening, providing depth and substance to almost anything. And, one of the best things about the plantain is it rarely goes bad. As it ripens, from green to yellow to black, the sugar content in the plantain increases, creating more banana-like qualities. Baked or fried, *plátanos maduros* can be served as a side dish, or even dessert with a little sugar sprinkled on top.

Plantain can also be used to make an alcoholic drink; dried, it can be turned into a flour. The leaves are used as a wrapping for other dishes, including *pasteles*, a Dominican cousin of the *tamale*. Even the flowers are edible.

And besides being superbly versatile, the plantain is incredibly healthy. A single plantain after cooking contains 50 – 80 grams of carbohydrates, 2 - 3 grams of protein, 4 - 6 grams of fiber and about 0.01 to 0.3 grams of fat. It is very rich in potassium, and is commonly prescribed by

doctors for people who have low levels of potassium in their blood; the potassium in plantains helps to prevent hypertension and heart attack. It is also rich in magnesium and phosphate and is a good source of vitamins A, B6, and C which help maintain vision, good skin, and build immunity against diseases. Cooked, unripe plantain is very good for diabetes, as it contains a complex carbohydrate that is slowly released over time. There is even a saying: Give a sick man the juice of a plantain. If he retains it, he will live; if he loses it, he will die.

Plantain – the wonder food.

El Mensaje De Méndez

What do Sammy Sosa, Manny Ramirez, David Ortiz and Alex Rodriguez have in common? Yes, they are Dominican and yes, all of them have been linked to use of Performance Enhancing Drugs (PED's); the four have all been linked to MLB's 2003 survey testing for drug use. Just as importantly, they are all represented by Major League Baseball's Player's Union (MLBPA), which managed to fail them, and the fans miserable over the situation, by promising to keep the testing results confidential, but then failing to destroy the results, as they had agreed to do. This has resulted in the painfully slow release of names from this list and a constant feeling of "who will be next from this list!?"



*MLBPA Executive Director
Donald Fehr*

The MLBPA holds the responsibility of protecting its constituents. As such, it has successfully increased the average player salary, increased the minimum player salary and, in essence, turned a few millionaires into multi-millionaires! What it has failed to do is protect the rank and file members and the integrity of the game, which has provided them these riches! The MLBPA has consistently made decisions based on what was good for the top 10% of its constituents. The MLBPA refused, until the most recent Collective Bargaining Agreement, to allow testing for steroids, thereby allowing the use of PED's to grow amongst its players.

The end result of this has been more and more players willing to risk the use of PED's in hopes of securing the highest salaries possible. It is no stretch to think that MLBPA could have easily predicted this outcome. Rather than refuse testing for so long, on the grounds of player privacy, they created an environment ripe for the rampant use of PED's. Their failure to then destroy the test results has resulted in a violation of the players' privacy and has also created a constant uncertainty and left fans to question every player and every new record set.

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Verano De Descontento (Summer of Discontent) – I have been seeing a lot recently where pundits are calling this the Summer of Discontent, as worries about the economy, health care, and wars in the Middle East, among other things, have made these times a period of grave concerns and fears. Some have even placed everything on the president's shoulders, calling it Obama's Summer of Discontent as he struggles to address the issues.

The phrase evolved from Shakespeare's opening lines of *Richard II*: "Now is the winter of our discontent," and is often used to describe current bad times, but I can't help but remember summer 45 years ago; the Long, Hot Summer of 1964, when the nation was buried in the dark clouds of the darkest days of the Civil Rights Movement.

Only a summer before, Martin Luther King Jr., in his famous "I Have A Dream" speech in Washington, D.C., spoke of the black man's "summer of legitimate discontent," giving the term the substance to mean a time of discontentment and agitation that literally occurs in the summer, and there was much discontentment and agitation in the Summer of '64.

It was that summer that Mickey Schwerner left New York to go work in Mississippi. "The Negro in the South has an even more bitter fight ahead of him than in the North," Schwerner said in his application to CORE, "and I wish to be part of that fight. I would feel guilty and almost hypocritical if I did not give full time." The idealistic 24-year-old spent a week in training in Ohio, where he met Andrew Goodman, and on June 20th, the two white men went to Mississippi with another organizer, James Chaney, a black man from Meridian. Within days, they were stopped for speeding, arrested, then released on bail.

Then they vanished. Their plight became the focus of a nation, particularly after the discovery of their burned-out car. U.S. Navy sailors joined the search for the missing trio, to no avail.

The long, hot summer took its toll in other areas of the country. In New York City, a black teen was shot and killed by an off-duty policeman who claimed the youngster pulled a knife on him. A subsequent protest in Harlem about police brutality turned to rioting, with violence breaking out in the city on a nightly bases, spreading to other sections of New York. When the violence ended, one person was dead, scores were injured or jailed, and property damage was in the millions.

The mystery in Mississippi was solved on August 4 when the bodies of Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney were found in an earthen dam. Investigators pieced together the chain of events: after the trio was released from jail, two carloads of men overtook them, killed them, and buried them. While there were subsequent convictions for violating the civil rights of the dead men, no one was ever charged with murder.



Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner

Fast forward to Obama's Summer of Discontent, the first summer in our nation's history where a black man is president. We have come so far that a black man is president, yet a distinguished Harvard professor is arrested on the doorstep of his own home. Perhaps Henry Louis Gates did protest too much, but I understood what he must have felt at the time.

A few summers after the Summer of 1964, my father taught me how to drive, and one of his lessons was on how to act if I were stopped by the police. He didn't need to spell out that he meant white police; there were few black officers at the time. "Don't argue with the man," he told me. "Say 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir.'" These were literally life lessons; forgetting them could have resulted in me ending up in an earthen dam.

And so, 45 years after the long, hot summer of 1964, I sit here in the Dominican Republic recalling Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney as we face a new Summer of Discontent, with old issues of race still persistent – and I remember my father's lessons.

Otras Noticias De Interés (Other News of Interest)

Money For Education – The InterAmerican Development Bank has offered the DR government US\$100 million in loans that can be used to promote educational programs in the country. IDB local representative Manuel Labrado also announced that the IDB will be disbursing US\$50 million next year to help the Ministry of Education build five new schools and improve others in the DR. Labrado says the IDB already has two programs underway with the Ministry of Education for US\$870 million. These end in mid-2010. Furthermore, the IDB announced it has delivered a donation of US\$942,000 to the Fundacion APEC de Credito Educativo (Fundapec) for programs to train workers and enhance the student loans program. This project will be executed by the Multilateral Investment Fund (Fomin). Signing the agreement were Juan Francisco Puello Herrera, president of Fundapec, and IDB representative Manuel Labrado. This would be the second financing the IDB provides to Fundapec. In 1990 Fundapec received a loan of US\$20 million and technical cooperation for US\$1.4 million, which were used for their Program for the Strengthening of Technical Education.

Got An Idea? – Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez is sponsoring a Festival of the Ideas from 10 August to 16 September, an event that seeks to highlight the ideas of leading Dominican thinkers. President Fernandez explained that the event seeks to promote the historic memory of political and social thought in the Dominican Republic.

"Life is not waiting for the storm to pass, it's learning to dance in the rain."
- Unknown-

Charles S. Farrell

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