



DRSEA INFORMER

Volume II, Issue 21: A Publication For Your Reading Enjoyment

Acto Dignificado (Class Act) – Albert Pujols may have had a better year, and Alex Rodriguez capped off his season with a World Series Championship, but the face – as well as the heart and soul – of Dominican baseball belongs to Pedro Martinez.

He may have fallen short in his World Series appearance that ended with a title for Rodriguez & Company, but Pedro – no need for last names here – is a hero in the minds of most Dominicans who sank or swam on every pitch the 38-year-old legend tossed this year. He started the season here in the Dominican Republic, tending garden with his mother and hoping to latch on with a team for one more shot at another ring. That opportunity finally came late in the season when the Phillies offered him a roster spot and Pedro delivered five wins while displaying flashes of the brilliance that made him an eight-time All Star and three-time Cy Young winner.

His return to baseball was either endorsed or rejected in the Dominican Republic. Many wanted to see him add to his status; others were fearful he would subtract from it. The night he made his season debut I happened to glance out from my rooftop onto what is usually one of the busiest streets in Santo Domingo and it was virtually empty. No need to guess why; everybody was on lock down to watch Pedro.



Pedro's stats over his 13-year-career support that he is a fantastic pitcher, but what seems to truly set him apart is personality. I met him once and he is one of those rare people in sports who has the charisma to go with his talent. He was among a group of people, many of them baseball stars in their own right, but you could watch the crowd gravitate towards him, and the more attention paid, the more charming Pedro became.

Teammates talk about his ability to sing and joke in the clubhouse before a game, then take the mound with the seriousness of a surgeon about to undertake a delicate operation. Perhaps it was fitting for him to be a central character once again on one of sports' grandest stages – the World Series.

I am pretty sure Pedro is in the Dominican Republic right now, under a mango tree somewhere, reflecting on his amazing career, which may or may not be over. He has always been someone who has remembered his humble beginnings and the fact that baseball liberated him, but did not erase the connection. He has been generous with his time, energy and money in providing for the educational needs of many of the children in the Santo Domingo neighborhood where he grew up.

Whether or not he returns to baseball next year remains to be seen, but from my vantage point Pedro has not only had a Hall of Fame career, he has had a Hall of Fame life, at least to the people of the Dominican Republic.

At one point during the World Series, Pedro chastised a fan sitting in the front row with his daughter who was saying “all kinds of nasty things,” about the pitcher. “I had to stop and tell him because I’m a father myself,” Martinez said. “God, how can you be so dumb to do those kinds of things in front of your child. What kind of example are you setting?”

The father need only look to Pedro for that example.

Acta Dignificado – When Manny Acta was fired last July as the manager of the Washington Nationals, I lamented that it was sad to see him go, in particular because people of color are scarce in management positions in sports, and it is even rarer that they get a second chance to assume such positions. But Acta has surfaced again, this time as manager of the Cleveland Indians.

I like to tell the story of how I met Acta in the Dominican Republic a year ago at a reception. Not recognizing him, I asked if he was in baseball. “Yes,” he said, “I am the manager of the Washington Nationals.” He showed a wonderful sense of humor when I tried to cover myself by saying I didn’t recognize him because I usually saw him on TV in the dugout with his hat on. He said, “Not likely; we don’t get on TV that much. You only get on TV if you are real good, and we are not there yet.”



Manny Acta

Now Acta gets a second shot at taking a bad team to glory and I am hoping he will fare better than he did with the Nationals. It was reported that his communication skills are what impressed the Indians, who see the Dominican Republic native's ability to relate with the team's Latino players as a huge plus.

Acto Uno? (Act I?) – In a decision some see as precedent setting, a Dominican Republic court ordered the Washington Nationals to pay \$40,000 in damages to a scout who was fired after signing a prospect who lied about his age. Jose Baez, the Nationals' former director of operations in the Dominican Republic, sued the team for what he said was an unjustified firing after Baez and special assistant to the general manager Jose Rijo signed a player who identified himself as 16-year-old Esmailyn Gonzalez.

The Nationals gave the player a \$1.4 million signing bonus; Major League Baseball later discovered that Gonzalez was almost four years older than he claimed to be and also lied about his identity.

The judge in the case also directed the Nationals to pay Baez six months salary, plus other damages – including holiday pay and a severance package – that will bring the total payment to almost \$75,000. Testimony by baseball investigator Nelson Tejada is said to have supported Baez's assertion that he had nothing to do with Gonzalez's age and identity change.

With a similar suit by Rijo pending, there are many wondering if Major League Baseball can get a fair shake from the Dominican court system. If Tejada is found to never have advised the Nationals to fire Rijo, then Rijo could also be awarded damages. Rijo – a special assistant to then-GM Jim Bowden who resigned in the wake of the scandal – had helped sign Gonzalez in 2006 and had a relationship with the player that dated back several years.

Obviously, Dominicans have home-field advantage in their own country, and now there are those who believe MLB may be reluctant to punish Dominicans accused of baseball misdeeds. And, believing that Dominican courts are more likely to side with them, the fear is that some unscrupulous Dominicans may even be emboldened to commit acts of fraud against Major League Baseball, further complicating the myriad of issues in baseball in the Dominican Republic.

Comiendo Bien En El Barrio (Eatin' Good In The Neighborhood) – I have never been a fast food fanatic, generally steering clear of burger havens, pizza joints and chicken shacks because I can make better, healthier food at home. And I follow the same course in the Dominican Republic, which has the same offerings of McDonald's, Pizza Hut and KFC.



But I have developed a weakness for *empanadas*, a kind of stuffed dumpling that serves as fast food here, but I think is far tastier, made with better ingredients, and is far more affordable.

Many stores and food stands have them ready made and kept warm for the consumers, but the place I like best is little stand where you can custom order from a variety of stuffings, similar to ordering pizza toppings, including cheese, ham, chicken, beef, and vegetables, or any combination. A little of everything is called a *completo*.

You can order ahead – if you have the chef’s cell number – but I generally order on the spot to ensure I get what I want. The chef uses a 7-Up bottle to roll out his dough, fills the center with your selection, folds the dough in half and uses the bottle to seal the edges and the neck of the bottle to make quarter-moon incisions that are both decorative and functional, before sliding the uncooked concoction into hot oil. A minute or two on each side turns the *empanada* golden brown and the finished dumpling is speared through the incision and allowed to hang for a few moments to allow excess oil to drip back in the pot. Surprisingly, they absorb little oil, and are remarkably crisp and light in both touch and taste.

Two *empanadas* cost 50 pesos, or about \$1.50 US, and are filling enough for a meal; one makes a nice afternoon snack. In the mornings, many *empanada* vendors add an egg to the mix, often combining it with cheese and ham as breakfast for those who have to eat on the run.

Empanadas. I’m loving it.

Se Esta Apareciendo Mucho A Las Navidades (It’s Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas) – Everybody knows that Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, traditionally signals the start of the Christmas season in the United States, but I guess since Thanksgiving is not widely celebrated in the Dominican Republic, they don’t have to adhere to that tradition – which may be why I have seen Christmas/Feliz Navidad decorations up for about a month now.

**Feliz
Navidad**

Even the stores have been promoting the holiday, offering artificial trees, ornaments, lights and other adornments for sale, featuring them prominently in their show windows. Stroll along most residential streets and you will encounter many houses with Christmas trees and festooned with lights and Santas and elves and even fake snow.



“We love this holiday more than any other,” said a friend of mine. “This is when so many relatives come back home, when family means so much, so we try to stretch it as far as we can.” Indeed, I am already getting invitations for holiday parties a month away, and hints from friends on desired presents. I must admit that it still feels odd, particularly sitting in my shorts and a T-shirt, impossible to dream of a white Christmas, but looking forward to it nonetheless.



Impulsión De Suscripción (Subscription Drive) – We hope that we have both entertained and enlightened our readers as we continue our mission of creating the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy. Part of that effort is letting people know what we do, which has made the **INFORMER** a valuable tool. Please make an effort to forward this issue to others who might enjoy reading the publication and ask them to go to our web page and fill out the inquiry form so we can add them to the subscriber list. **UN PASO MAS Y LLEGAMOS.**

"Any time you have an opportunity to make a difference in this world and you don't, then you are wasting your time on Earth." – Roberto Clemente

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