



DRSEA INFORMER

Volume II, Issue 22: A Publication For Your Reading Enjoyment

Notre Done – I am not one to gloat, but I must admit that I am taking a measure of pleasure in Notre Dame’s miserable football season that culminated with the firing of head coach Charlie Weis. Nothing against Weis. His demise came for the reason most coaches get fired – he couldn’t produce wins, ending up with a worse record than his two predecessors. My glee comes from the fact that I think Notre Dame got what it deserved after dumping Ty Willingham, the first black head coach in school history.

I was part of a concerted effort back in 2001 to get Willingham hired. He was not Notre Dame’s first choice for the job, and it was only through intense lobbying on many levels that the university selected Willingham, who had a winning record at Stanford University that included four bowl appearances.

He began his Notre Dame career with eight straight wins and had converted me to an Irish fan who spent many a Saturday afternoon in front of the television cheering as Willingham became the only first-year coach in school history to win 10 games. He also won several Coach of The Year awards.



Ty Willingham at Notre Dame

The next two years were not so kind as Willingham went 5-7 and then 6-5. His overall record was 21-15 when Notre Dame, one of the most storied programs in football history, terminated him. My problem was not so much on his firing, but the how and when. He had to fight for the

job, then was the first football coach ever fired by Notre Dame before his contract was over – despite a winning record – which leads me to believe, even today, that the color of Willingham’s skin played a role in how he was treated.

There are those who strongly disagree, many of them suggesting that the sheer number of blacks who play college and professional football – and other major sports including basketball and baseball – is proof that race is not a factor in sports; that racism doesn’t exist. To think that is naive at best; racism is a part of sports and has been for a long time. And probably will be for the foreseeable future, be it subtlety or subconsciously.

I worked in the early 1990’s at the Center For The Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University where we conducted studies into racial hiring by all the major sports, college and professional, and found that while blacks were well represented as athletes, particularly in football and basketball, their numbers were low or even nonexistent beyond the playing field, as head coaches, general managers, executives, athletics directors, team doctors, and other positions of authority.

Why is it that blacks, and in some sports Latinos, are so prevalent? The rules of sports are clear and precise. The football field is 100 yards long; the hoop in basketball is 10 feet off the ground for everyone, and when the rules are clear and precise, success is objective. But the rules for becoming a coach are more subjective; many of the decisions are made behind closed doors by people with special agendas using special, often secret criteria, or criteria meant to eliminate, not include certain candidates. I remember one time a major university hired a white football coach over a black coach with more experience, explaining that the white coach “had a great interview.” What is a great interview?

The proliferation of Latinos in baseball has escalated the perception of race and racism in the sport. I wrote in the **INFORMER** about when New York Mets General Manager Omar Minaya increased the number of Latinos on his team and was labeled a racist by many. I felt then, as I do now, that there are those who are offended by the Latinization of baseball.

You have to understand all sports – and in my opinion baseball in particular – are saddled with persevering images of racism, real or imagined. Even the casual fan knows about Jackie Robinson and his contribution to baseball, but I bet few can name his counterparts in breaking the color barriers in pro basketball, football or hockey. Many remember Marge Schott and her racist tirades, and recall the Al Campanis fiasco that blacks lack the “necessities” for management positions in baseball. And many of the current black Major League Baseball players have been extremely vocal about what they see as racism in their sport.

All this has created an image nightmare for Major League Baseball at a time when the number of black players has fallen to under 10 percent of the total. That is down from a high of 27 percent in 1975, and many experts say the perception of racism that persists in baseball is a major factor in the decline, coupled with baseball looking more and more to countries like the Dominican Republic for its next stars.

And given that many baseball fans take umbrage over the fact that a third of MLB players are Latino suggests that racism is alive and well in America’s pastime. Baseball executives admit as much to me privately, with many saying that it has to be addressed on two levels; both the task of increasing the number of black players and fans, as well as with the influx of players who bring not only race, but a different culture and language into the mix.

In the meantime, I have yet to see the name of a single African American surfacing in the search for a new Notre Dame football coach. I will continue to root against the Irish.

Sueño Diferido (Dream Deferred) – Several people contacted me with the news that former basketball star Dean Meminger had been hospitalized in a critical condition after being found unconscious in his room following a fire at a dilapidated rooming house in the Bronx in New York. I subsequently discovered that fire investigators were looking into the possibility that Meminger may have ignited the blaze while smoking crack.

While the blaze's link to a crack pipe was eventually eliminated, I was not surprised by the accusation. I have known Meminger for several years and was well aware of his history of drug and alcohol abuse, but I was still saddened that his descent had reached such an abyss.

Meminger was known as “Dean the Dream” during his basketball career, including his days as a key reserve for the 1973 NBA Champion Knicks. This followed a storied history as a high school phenom in New York and an All American at Marquette University.



But after his basketball days ended, Meminger struggled, once saying that his longest drug free period as an adult was three years. He coached briefly in the Continental Basketball Association; interestingly, when he was let go from the Albany Patroons partway through the 1982-83 season, Phil Jackson became the coach and went on to greater glory delivering NBA championships as the coach of the Bulls and the Lakers. Meminger was never so fortunate; he conducted basketball clinics over the years, focusing on the defensive side of the game that was his specialty. He also worked for a time as a drug counselor.

I always liked Dean, who I simply called Dream when we worked on several projects together for the Sports Foundation in the Bronx. As someone who has had my own problem with alcohol abuse, I can definitely sympathize with his struggles. Addiction is a horrible beast that, even under control as mine has been for six years, lurks in the shadows every day, waiting for the chance to resurrect its stranglehold. I know alcohol nearly destroyed my life; I am one of the fortunate ones to realize how dependent and pathetic I had become.

There were many times I was with Dean when I knew some sort of substance use was at work. I also know that professional athletes have a high incidence of substance abuse, particularly after their playing days are over. The theories abound, but all seem to have some roots in the adrenaline rush these stars get from the cheers, and the absences of the thrill when the cheering stops. Drugs and alcohol become the substitute, filling the void with empty promises.

I was never that professional athlete, but I did believe alcohol filled a vacuum, keeping me company, promising to be my friend during both highs and lows in my life, masking my fears, accentuating my joys. People don't believe me when I tell them the vodka bottle used to talk to me, inviting me, cheering me on, but ultimately delivering only misery.

I am praying for Dean, praying he will fulfill his dreams.

“You block your dream when you allow your fear to grow bigger than your faith.”
-Mary Manin Morrissey

Hablando de Moda (Fashionably Speaking) – It was once said that fashion is a social agreement, the result of a consensus of a large group of people.

Legend has it that once upon a time a Dominican woman had a pair of jeans that were a size or two too small. One day she decided to wear them anyway, tugging and pulling them on, near skin tight and stretched to their limit. Impossible to pull waist high, the jeans were left hanging low around the woman's hips as she went about her business, unaware of the impact she was about to have. Her friends took a liking to her look and deliberately purchased smaller sizes to emulate her. As the legend goes, fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, a Dominican himself, saw the trend developing and designed jeans to be worn low on the hips – and the low riser was born.

I have noticed in my observations that Dominicans, both men and women, are very stylish and fashion conscience, but have always been curious as to what drives the fashions I see proliferating, a couple in particular.

First, Aéropostale seems to be everywhere. Not a day goes by when I don't see the name emblazoned on someone's shirt, jeans or other accessory. Then I come to find out that Aéropostale, or Aéro, has over 900 stores in the US, Canada, Puerto Rico, Peru, Costa Rica, Dubai, and, of course, the Dominican Republic.

AÉROPOSTALE

According to Aéropostale, the brand has always represented a spirit of enthusiasm and a sense of adventure, achievement and dedication since it was launched in 1987, taking the name from a pioneer airmail company in the 1920's – Campagnie Generale Aéropostale – the first to fly between France, South Africa and South America, a tremendous accomplishment in those days.

In September 2006, Aéropostale opened its first store in the Dominican Republic, located in Acropolis Plaza in Santo Domingo, following a trend to set up shop in malls and large marketing centers, and target teens and young adults, typically at prices under \$50.

At a time when retail sales are down, Aéropostale is bucking the trend and enjoying record sales and planning on adding even more stores, particularly in Latin America. The company's marketing tactics explain a little about why the brand is so popular. The strategies include following trends instead of trying to be a trendsetter; most teens and young adults are fashion followers, not fashion leaders. In other words, give them what they want, and not try to convince them to buy what you have.

It is working very well in the Dominican Republic.

The other brand that is everywhere is Playboy. Jeans, shirts and other apparel seem to be multiplying like – well, like rabbits.

Playboy, of course, has long been famous for its interpretation of female beauty, and Dominican women are among the most beautiful in the world, with a charm and grace that only accentuates their beauty.



But the women I have spoken to about their fashion choice are generally oblivious to the iconic nature of Playboy, how the magazine and the philosophy it espouses have inspired generations. They just like the way it looks, following in the Aéropostale tradition that people buy what they see others wearing.

Casual chic is the trend in the Dominican Republic, with Aéropostale and Playboy leading the way.

Nuevo Y Mejorado Website (New And Improved Website) – Check out the new and improved DRSEA website. We have updated www.drsea.org to include more information, including all issues of the **INFORMER**, and have made the site more user friendly.



Happy Holidays

Merry Christmas

Feliz Navidad

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy, we would like to wish you the very best of holidays and a prosperous New Year.

The DRSEA made great strides this year. Without help and support such as yours, we would not have made those strides, and for that we are blessed. As we look towards 2010, there is renewed expectation and hope in the air as we continue to deal with a dismal economy that inhibits fund raising, but doesn't dampen our enthusiasm or commitment.. We hope you will continue to share our passion and vision for creating a unique education institution for which we can all be proud, and consider a year-end donation to the not-for-profit DRSEA.

Among DRSEA accomplishments this year:

- A major article referencing the Academy appeared in the Los Angeles Times and numerous publications reprinted excerpts from the **INFORMER**.
- The DRSEA is prominently featured in an upcoming documentary on *buscónes*, the “agents” who traffic in young baseball prospects in Latin America.
- The DRSEA reading program for children continued to inspire on the joys of reading and the lifelong benefits it delivers.
- Continued to narrow the search for a site location for the DRSEA.
- Established several partnerships/relationships with key organizations in the Dominican Republic and United States including the Cross Cultural Center in Santo Domingo and the International Education Research Center Educational Foundation (IERCEF).

- Added numerous key members to the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board including Juan Casimiro, Iris Nunez, Samuel Brooks, and Anthony Simmons (bios at www.drsea.org).

Like so many other non-profits, we continue to be challenged by the economic recession. We ask you one final time this year to consider a gift to the DRSEA to sustain our growth and development on all fronts. Your support will allow us to continue to grow and be the catalyst for change and opportunity in the Dominican Republic. Together we can make this a season of *exceptional giving* so that future student athletes in the Dominican Republic can benefit from an *extraordinary DRSEA experience*.

Again, enjoy the holiday season as we thank you in advance for helping to make the DRSEA dream shine even more brightly. **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

Charles S. Farrell

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