



DRSEA INFORMER

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El Hombre Con El Plan (The Man With The Plan) – Contrary to what some might believe, Sandy Alderson, Major League Baseball’s emissary to the Dominican Republic, does not have horns sprouting from his head. I met recently with the reform czar and came away with the impression that – while Alderson still faces an uphill battle – the right man is on the job.

The actual meeting, while in discussion for a few months, popped up on a day’s notice. I found myself anxious as the appointment neared, in part because I simply did not know exactly what to expect. I knew of Alderson by reputation; he is baseball’s fixer, sent into situations to repair them, and he has done a masterful job over the years. But he has been criticized from many corners in the Dominican Republic for what has been termed a gunslinger’s approach to reform; very aggressive and decisive, and without including others, including Dominicans, in the campaign to curb age and identity fraud, steroids use among prospects, and other issues.

I have written about the situation several times in the **INFORMER** and was even cautioned by one baseball official to tread lightly. It wasn’t a warning, just a reminder that baseball is very conservative and traditional and some in the industry do not like to see feathers ruffled. I was wondering if Alderson was among them.

He began the conversation by defending reform in Dominican baseball. After all, teams spend \$100 million a year on the development of talent here, and more around the world to promote the sport. But that makes baseball an “international citizen,” Alderson said, with responsibilities that go beyond promoting its interests. “We have a responsibility to do more for the people we work with, more for the Dominican community,” he said.



Sandy Alderson with a group of Dominican prospects

Alderson said that begins with the prospects currently in the 29 academies operated by Major League Baseball teams. And here is where he shocked me, pleasantly so. Alderson said that there is evidence that a better educated player has a better chance of succeeding in his goal of playing professional baseball, so it is in the best interest of baseball to provide some kind of education, either academic or vocational. He added that he would like to see every team provide a couple hours of instruction outside of baseball each day, but conceded that teams could not be forced to do so, outside a mandate from the commissioner.

He said his second point of concern is those prospects who wash out of the academies, which is the case with 98 percent. Something has to be done to help them with the transition from baseball, Alderson said, again either with some sort of academic or vocational training. American prospects routinely have clauses in their contracts that provide that teams pay for that education, something that might be explored in the Dominican Republic, Alderson said.

And last, but not least, Alderson said he is also concerned for potential prospects, those 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds who dream of a future in baseball, often dropping out to school to chase the rainbow. Once again, he said, education can and should play a key role, and here is where the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy could be instrumental. When the academy is up and running, he said, producing graduates who go on to college, and some of them also have successful careers in baseball, the power of education AND baseball will be evident, and the DRSEA will be viewed as a powerful alternative to the traditional development route, hopefully forcing others inside and outside of baseball to take note, and perhaps ensuring that Alderson's first two concerns are addressed.

That perception by Alderson of the role the DRSEA can play – a role we have always envisioned – was more than I could have ever anticipated, and reinforced my belief that he and I have more in common than most people think.

He reminded me that baseball has responded before when there were issues in Dominican baseball. In 2000, when there was evidence of miserable conditions at baseball academies here, Alderson said he worked to have Major League Baseball open an office in Santo Domingo, in part to address those conditions. I reminded him that I lead the group that examined the academies and issued the report on those conditions.

Alderson admits that the road to reform is full of potholes and he is, and will be, the target of criticism. He added that he expects to expand the dialogue on reform in the coming months, believing that other people, including those in education and government, deserve to be heard.

Only time will tell if Alderson's reform goals are met, and how much opposition they will face, but I left our meeting with a clearer understanding of the man who has a tremendous responsibility. And I think he has a clearer understanding of what I am trying to accomplish. I am hoping there is a lot of room for us to work together.

INFORMER Feedback – I always like to get feedback on the **INFORMER**; it lets me know that people are reading, but I was surprised by both the volume and scope of the responses I got to the last newsletter.

Several people focused on my take on the Ozzie Guillen situation, where I basically said I agreed with him that by affording them translators, Asian players are treated differently than Latino players who are not routinely provided the same service.

I got one response that said, "I agree, it is biased not giving a translator to Spanish athletes. On the other hand, it does not matter where the individual is from, they should learn English when immigrating to the USA.

"No other country offers interpreters, provides signage in other languages, or phone options to press #2 for English. You want to live here, learn the language like anywhere else."

One point he missed is that the vast majority of Latino players in Major League Baseball have no interest in immigrating to the United States. They come to the U.S. for spring training and return to their native countries in the off season.

Yes, I think it is important for them to learn English, just as I think it is important for me to continue to learn Spanish while living in the Dominican Republic; I would be foolish not to try to pick up at least some of the language. However, I know Americans who live here and refuse to learn any Spanish, ignorantly insisting that Dominicans need to speak English – in their own Spanish speaking country!

One of my friends here, Paco, teaches English to Dominicans at one of the local universities and I often speak to his classes. One of the things I stress to his students is that while I understand them wanting to learn English, the real value is that they are becoming bilingual, able to speak both English and Spanish. That is what Latino baseball players need to understand as well in the push for them to learn English, which all teams need to do, not so they can live in the United States, but so they can expand their own horizons.

I also got a lot of response to my piece on Cabrera, a breathtakingly beautiful section of the Dominican Republic I visited at the invitation of Cesar Geronimo, the former major league great. It is truly one of the unspoiled locales in the Dominican Republic and I hope it stays that way.

I heard from many people who agree with me; including one man who I had lost touch with, who informed me his wife was from Cabrera and he was familiar with many of the Cabrera sites I described. Another friend of mine called me to tell me that when he finished reading about Cabrera, he could close his eyes and see what I described, and that is exactly what I intended. If you can get people to visualize through words, then you have successfully communicated.

And I got a number of e-mails about my amazing 89-year-old uncle who I got to spend some time with when he visited Puerto Plata. There was also agreement that the vacation destination is not a true representation of the real Dominican Republic. “You absolutely know the real DR and not the DR most gringo tourists see,” said one reader.

But I was touched most by the reader who said simply, “Your work and passion are truly inspirational.” Someone once said that feedback is the breakfast of champions; I am certainly feeling like a winner right now.

Ciudades Hermanas (Sister Cities) – One of the reasons I wanted to live in the *Zona Colonial* when I moved to the Dominican Republic is that it reminds me of New Orleans, one of my favorite cities in the United States. The architecture of both are quite similar, and both, in fact, were developed around the same period of time.

Zona Colonial is the first settlement by Columbus and Spanish explorers to the New World and is part of the original Santo Domingo, dating back to 1498. There are a number of landmarks, including the ruins of the oldest hospital in America, the first church, and even the home of Columbus’s son.

France invaded the west side of the island called Hispanola in 1655 and by 1795 Spain ceded the entire island to France. By 1804 the African slaves in the western portion of the island (now Haiti) had rebelled against the French, and eventually ruled the entire island.

In comparison, the city of New Orleans controlled the Mississippi River through its location; and therefore was a key location to shipping goods to and from parts of the United States west of the Appalachians. A treaty with Spain in 1795 gave American merchants the right to store goods for export in New Orleans as well as the right to navigate the entire Mississippi. That treaty was revoked in 1798, much to the chagrin of America; Napoleon Bonaparte returned Louisiana to French control in 1800. But U.S. President Thomas Jefferson was uncomfortable with France and Spain having the power to block U.S. access to New Orleans.

Napoleon, meanwhile had lost Haiti to the slave revolt and abandoned plans to rebuild the French empire in the Americas. He was also preparing for a war with Britain, and without the sugar revenue from the Caribbean, he was cash strapped.

America was prepared to pay up to \$10 million just for New Orleans, but France surprised everyone by expanding the offer to include not only New Orleans, but all or part of 14 current U.S. states and two Canadian provinces for \$15 million. The Louisiana Purchase Treaty was signed on April 30, 1803.

In 1822, commanded by Toussaint Louverture, Haitians took over the island of Hispanola and ruled for 22 years, In 1838, a small group of Spanish-speaking Dominican intellectuals from Santo Domingo organized a secret society called *La Trinitaria* to overthrow Haitian rule. The society was established by Juan Pablo Duarte, the son of a wealthy Dominican family. Independence was reestablished on February 27, 1844.

I have always said that the United States and the Dominican Republic have a lot in common, including the criss-crossing of history. So much of that criss-crossing is evident by just looking at the *Zona Colonial* and at New Orleans and what influenced their evolution.



Zona Colonial



New Orleans

On the fifth anniversary of when the levees broke and changed New Orleans forever, I took a stroll along *El Conde*, the main thoroughfare of the *Ciudad Colonial*. It is a combination of Bourbon Street and Canal Street, and offers many of the same amusements. People stand on balconies, shouting to friends and passersby. Like New Orleans, the *Zona* is undergoing a revitalization project, but it is slow in development. Many historic buildings are crumbling under the weight of time and neglect.

I love New Orleans and the spirit of the people who live there and now struggle with the dream to rebuild it. I also love *Zona Colonial* and the spirit of the people who live here, and dream of restoring its glory. With so much history overlapping, both cities are deserving.

"Way down yonder in New Orleans/In the land of dreamy scenes/There's a garden of Eden/You know what I mean." – Louis Armstrong

Deje Que Suene La Banda (Let The Band Play On) – The world lost a legend recently with the passing of Dr. William P. Foster, who earned the title the “The Maestro” in addition to being recognized as the “Dean of America’s Band Directors.”



Dr. William P. Foster

For more than 50 years Foster served as the band director of the famed Florida A&M University Marching "100." From the time he created the band in 1946 until his retirement in 1998, Foster revolutionized marching band techniques, many of which have become standards for high school and college bands. His textbook, "Band Pageantry," is considered "The Bible" for the marching band.

In the process, the FAMU band became world famous, performing at half-time of college and professional football games, including the Super Bowl. In 1975, The Marching Band made its first television commercial for Coca-Cola: Look Up America, I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing. In 1989, the band was selected as the official United States representative at the Bicentennial Celebration of the French Revolution in Paris, France.

The list of accolades includes Sports Illustrated declaring the band the best college band in all of America in 1992. In 1996, Foster and the Marching Band were inducted into the Afro-American Hall of Fame for Fine Arts. The roll call of accomplishments by Foster fills many pages. I was fortunate to meet him more than 25 years ago when I wrote an article about the band man, and was touched by his humbleness.

Foster learned to play the clarinet at age 12. His talent was extraordinary enough for him to be named student director of the Sumner High School Orchestra in Kansas City, Kansas. In 1936, he became the director of an all-city band. He received his bachelor of music education degree from the University of Kansas in 1941, a master of arts in music degree from Wayne State University in 1950, and a doctor of education degree with a major in music from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1955. But it was at the University of Kansas where a racial slight was to set him on a life course, he told me when we met in 1984.

As a young black man, even with exceptional musical talent, he was denied a spot in the all-white band. He told me it was at this point he vowed he would create his own band, one that would set itself apart from all others. Funny how racism can have such a powerful impact, isn't it?

Foster says he was never bitter about the slight, but he always remembered the lesson it taught him; if you strive for excellence you can reach it. "It was something I expected each and every band member to believe," he said.



"The Maestro" at work

I watched the band practice one afternoon during my visit to FAMU and the dedication was evident. Even when practice was over, sections gathered to refine their marching cadence, to perfect their music, to reach for excellence. And their impeccable performance during the Saturday football game reflected that work, and the indelible legacy Foster instilled in them.

Foster called me after the article was published, and sent me a case of Florida oranges, saying he was impressed with how I captured his great love and passion for his profession. But it was I who was impressed with him and how that great love and passion translated into a legacy not only for Florida A&M, but for marching bands everywhere. He became a giant who commanded respect and got it.

"He was the best," was how a friend of mine summarized Foster. Indeed he was.

Charles S. Farrell

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