



DRSEA INFORMER

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MLB Estudia La Sugerencia De DRSEA (MLB Studying DRSEA Suggestion) –
Back last summer, I floated a suggestion in **DRSEA INFORMER**: that Major League Baseball consider a novel idea with regards to combating age and identity fraud among young prospects in the Dominican Republic.

The idea as described in that **INFORMER**: 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.

I also noted: 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."

I wondered at the time if anyone would listen to the fingerprinting idea; if there was even sufficient interest to consider such a notion. Apparently there is.

A recent *New York Times* article reports that Major League Baseball is studying a number of initiatives, including fingerprinting. According to the article, lawyers for Major League Baseball are in the final stages of determining if fingerprinting players as young as 11 or 12 is legal in the Dominican Republic, adding that officials believe that such a process several years before they turn 16 would indeed deter fraud. Dominican Republic media are reporting child fingerprinting is not legal.

I am quoted in the article: "Fingerprints are extraordinarily difficult to alter," I said. "There are going to be flaws in the system but if you are fingerprinting 10-year-olds than it will be much less likely that they can take on another identity before they turn 16."



“This will help young Dominican players and baseball combat the image that many Dominican players lie about their identities and are older than they say they are. That has become a big problem for the image of Dominican players.”

It remains to be seen whether fingerprinting can or will be implemented, but I am optimistic. At the very least, consideration to implement the DRSEA suggestion means Major League Baseball is serious about addressing a problem that has plagued baseball in the Dominican Republic, ultimately casting doubts on the integrity of players from a country second only to the United States in producing professional baseball players.

Alegría Y Dolor (Joy And Pain) - Haiti continues to provide lurid tales of both joy and pain as the country struggles to revive from the earthquake that devastated the country. Joy for people who have been found alive, or simply reunited with family. Pain as bodies continue to be discovered, and thousands are still in need of food, water and shelter as the country faces a bleak future.

The entire world has taken notice of Haiti’s plight, responding with overwhelming support. At one point, 1,000 planes were backed up waiting for instructions on when they could come to Haiti. Truckloads of supplies pour over the Dominican Republic border filled to brimming with food, water and other essentials as tent cities are being set up to afford some sort of temporary home for more than a million people.



The Dominican Republic has been a staging ground for much of the relief effort since the earthquake; hotels in Santo Domingo are filled with rescue workers and humanitarians who have come to help, or are returning from Haiti.

The ones returning from Haiti are easy to spot. There is a forlorn look on their faces, their eyes reflecting the horrors they have witnessed and will never forget.

I listened to a medic from England describe his week in Port-au-Prince, where he said he spent 36 hours straight performing nothing but the amputation of arms and legs. This is someone who had served time in the Gulf War, who had been in Louisiana in the aftermath of Katrina, had been in Sri Lanka following the tsunami, but none of that prepared him for Haiti where he said his greatest difficulty was simply trying to wrap his mind around an event that lasted less than 30 seconds but claimed the lives of more than 200,000 people.



I also met a doctor with whom I share a first name. He is from Oklahoma where he is the pediatrician on a Native American reservation. He had paid for the trip to Haiti out of his own pocket; like the medic, he is a veteran of wars and natural disasters around the world.

Charles said upon arrival in Haiti he was warned not to give anyone food, because if there was not enough food for everyone, there would be problems. Not to give anyone water, because if there was not enough water for everyone, there would be problems. And not to give anyone money, because if there was not enough money for everyone, there would be problems.

He said he would sometimes work 24 hours straight, tending to the youngest victims, including newborns who are now orphans. Charles said that all around was the stench of death as flies circled over collapsed buildings, indicating that there were still bodies to be recovered. The putrid smell was mixed with that of diesel fuel that spilled from tanks ruptured in the quake and has mixed with the ground water that for some is the only drinking source.

Charles said there was a massive aftershock one night but he was too tired to budge, and besides, he couldn't leave the newborn who lay next to him in a makeshift crib. Even in the midst of so much death, the cycle of life continues.

But after a few days, Charles said he looked at his fellow doctors and simply said, "That's it. I have given all I can and I can't give any more. I have to go." And so he did, as he now sat comfortably in Santo Domingo, his voice still echoing the sadness of his experience as he looked forward to going home and meeting the new granddaughter who had been born during his time in Haiti.

There are literally thousands like Charles from all over the world who have come to Haiti to help, and most come with good intentions. But there have been others I have met – or heard about – who, while perhaps meaning well, acted foolishly.

There was one party who decided to simply hop a plane to the Dominican Republic, where they planned to rent a van, load it with food and water and drive to Haiti to deliver their assistance. What they and others need to realize is that there is a before and after Haiti – before and after January 12 – and after that date it is not a good idea to simply go to Haiti unless you have planned well and also are part of the organized relief effort – not mavericks, totally independent in thought and action. That is both dangerous and counterproductive.

I was also appalled at the actions of those American missionaries who tried to kidnap children in Haiti and take them across the border to the Dominican Republic. First of all, what they attempted was blatantly illegal, even if parents of the children agreed with the plan. When Solomon wisely suggested dividing the baby in two, it was the true mother who showed compassion by offering to

give the child away; it is a natural instinct to want the best for your child and these American missionaries, good intentions or not, were exploiting that instinct.

I find so many Americans are arrogant in their ethnocentrism, caught up in the belief that they somehow have the right to impose their will on other countries, no matter the level of desperation, or maybe because of it. Haiti was a poor, desolate country before the earthquake, in large part because of centuries of exploitation and plundering by the rest of the world, including the United States.

Ironically, that same world is now claiming responsibility for trying raise Haiti from the ashes. But the rebirth of Haiti, unlike the legend of the Phoenix, must be more than a myth, and capable of withstanding the destructiveness of both nature and mankind.

Fruta Jugosa (Juicy Fruit) – Most days in the Dominican Republic, I start with a routine that includes one of the truly sweet benefits of living here. After putting on my pot of coffee, I venture out in search of ripe bananas for my cereal; access to fresh fruit is a perk I truly relish.

The bananas are a far cry from the hard, green pods that occupy the shelves of American stores, waiting to be taken home to develop their nature-intended yellow hue. I am able to select golden yellow bananas with delicate brown flecks that harbor fruit that is uncommonly sweet and flavorful because they were plucked from a tree within a day, allowed to ripen naturally. If you think you have really tasted banana before, most of you haven't.

And bananas aren't the only fruits available with that fresh off the tree/vine flavor. The Dominican Republic offers a cornucopia of fruits (and vegetables) that are delivered from nature's table to mine overnight.



The list includes papaya, avocado (it is a fruit, not a veggie), mango, cantaloupe, passion fruit, apples, oranges, limes, pineapples, guava, pears, strawberries, tamarind, grapes, watermelon, and coconut, to name just a few; there are others that I have no idea what they are. The pineapples often have crystallized sugar clinging to the rind, denoting the sweetness lurking inside. Avocados shine emerald green and yield a smooth, buttery interior that is perfect with just a touch of salt, vinegar and oil. The limes are deceptively small as the juice from one will fill half a glass and make an uncommon beverage. The oranges peel easily to provide mouthwatering wedges to suck on or squeeze for juice. The grapes are so huge and perfect you think they must be fake until one bite authenticates.

The melons are vibrant with color that would make a still life jealous – ruby red watermelon that you eat, drink and wash your face; salmon-colored cantaloupe with its fragrant, musky aroma; honeydew, the sweetest of all melons with its pale lime-green flesh.

And the mangos; ah, the mangos. Someone described to me that the only way to truly appreciate one is to stand naked in the shower so you can wash away the syrupy nectar that drips down your arms. Fruit, the way nature intended.

Often you can stop a vendor who is walking along the street balancing a huge bowl – loaded with piles of fruit – on her head,; she stoops to allow you to make your selection. There are numerous carts parked strategically along major thoroughfares where you can pick a selection and the vendor will skillfully peel and carve the fruit into a ready-to-eat variety platter. Honey is offered to top the fruit but I think it is a redundancy; why spoil perfection?

Sometimes I get a Dominican smoothie, a combination of fruits blended with ice to make a tropical shake that is like a vitamin supplement in a glass. My favorite is papaya, mango and orange; a *mixto*.

The fact that fruit can be delivered to my table almost straight from the source means not only sweeter, better tasting fruit, but fruit that is also better for me.



Dr. Lillian Beard, a friend of mine who is a pediatrician in Silver Spring, MD, told me that the natural maturation process produces optimal nutrition. Interrupting that process – harvesting early, rushing to the market place – produces a different quality of fruit that is not as tasty nor as healthy. All I know is that I am enjoying some juicy fruit, part of my sweet life in the Dominican Republic.

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