

NOT MY FATHER'S GAME: IMMIGRATION, MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL  
AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Since the 1980's the number of Latino players, specifically Dominicans on major and minor league baseball teams, has increased significantly. This demographic shift is due in large part to Major League Baseball (MLB) teams actively recruiting and developing Dominican players via the Dominican academy system. This thesis focuses on the process through which Dominican minor league baseball players are made into commodities by the global corporation of MLB. I examine the experiences of Dominican players as both baseball commodities and immigrants, comparing the challenges they face acculturating to American life with other Dominican immigrants in the North Texas area. A year of participant observation within a North Texas Dominican community and ethnographic interviews of Dominican immigrants, players and baseball personnel revealed a complex baseball commodity chain stretching from the Dominican Republic through the minor league system in the U.S. This commodity chain allows teams to refine players' baseball skills, readying them for public consumption, and to use players as a means to recruit Latino fans to generate additional revenue. Despite changes implemented by MLB to protect immigrant players from labor exploitation, Dominican minor league players remain vulnerable to exploitation as a result of power imbalance and fear of retribution.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THIS IS NOT YOUR FATHER'S GAME

#### 1.1 Introduction

"Keep your eye on the ball," my father told me. There I stood, tightly grasping the thin handle of a plastic yellow kiddie bat. I was decked out in the proper garb; a baseball cap and a T-shirt with my favorite team's logo. Imitating the men I saw on television I neared the home plate drawn in the dirt and took my batter's stance. I had dreams of a home run. Time and time again my father threw the large ball, a gentle under-handed lob, toward me. Each time, I swung; trying desperately to will the disproportionately large head of the bat to make contact with the ball. It was to no avail. I never did hit the ball, at least not that day.

This rather mundane recollection emblazoned upon my brain at the ripe old age of four has the distinction of being the first memory I can recall. So this is how my love affair with baseball began, playing in the front yard with my father. From there it blossomed into batting cages, playing catch, going to the ballpark, watching games on TV, and the list goes on today. Baseball was both a pastime and a means of communication between my father and I. In those dreadfully awkward teenage years when we suddenly had little in common to talk about baseball was the common thread. I loved to hear him speak of the old-timers he had watched play the game. He filled me with stories of nostalgic eras gone by, when Americans were a captive audience to the drama unfolding on the diamond. I grew up with knowledge of and respect for my father's game. As my father shared baseball stories with me he interjected bits of American history and morality. The dates of World War II were linked to Ted Williams because it was during those years, the prime of Williams' career, that he left baseball to join the military. Racism

in America was illustrated through Hank Aaron's chase to break Babe Ruth's homerun record. The racial slurs and death threats he endured as a "black" man on the verge of surpassing a "white" man's record were as much a part of the story for me as the actual number 715. Looking back, I realize much of my life's narrative is reflected in this game called baseball.

From this self-reflexive story emerge two points. First, this memory of my childhood, while special to me personally, is not unique. The aforementioned story is shared by many (albeit usually boys) growing up. This could have been the same story for any number of people, in America or abroad. Second, Major League baseball has undergone a global transformation that has manifested in a variety of ways. Newspapers and televisions cover MLB games not just in the U.S, but also in Mexico and the Dominican Republic (D.R.), to name a few. The language overheard spoken by players on the field may be English, Spanish, Korean, or several others. The names on the back of jerseys increasingly have a more Latino or Asian flair. This is not the game my father knew.

### 1.2 Research Problem

The primary question this thesis answers is how the globalization of baseball has led to the commodification of Dominican baseball players. Major League Baseball (MLB) is a multinational corporation actively recruiting and incorporating Dominican men into a type of global commodity chain, mass-producing baseball players in an effort to enhance the worldwide visibility of the sport and contribute to its profitability. This study situates the Dominican baseball player within a commodity chain, examining various links in the chain, the actors involved, and the role of each in the process of commodification. This research is geared toward understanding the labor recruitment process of MLB in the D.R. and the impact these processes have on the immigrant players.



I also examine how baseball is used by a group of local Dominicans to express their ethnic identity. While the local Dominicans benefit from better education and socioeconomic status, this study reveals how they relate to Dominican players through baseball as well as their shared immigrant narratives.

This thesis asks important questions regarding the labor recruitment practices of MLB including: How are Dominican players recruited? How do recruitment practices of Dominicans differ from American-born players? What happens to Dominican players once they sign with a team? What happens to the players after they are cut from a team? What programs does MLB provide the Dominican players to help minimize the impact of culture shock and how effective are these programs? How do local Dominicans utilize baseball when expressing ethnic identity? How important do local Dominicans feel baseball is to their culture? What role does baseball play in their immigrant narrative?

Some may question the relevance of a study heavily steeped in baseball. The answer to the question “Why study baseball?” is actually quite simple – to study baseball is to study American trends. Of the four major professional sports (football, baseball, basketball and hockey) baseball is the oldest and, historically, the most linked to American culture. To gain more of an understanding of one aspect of American culture requires in-depth analysis of one of America's iconic symbols-baseball. In addition, studying the globalization of baseball as it pertains to Dominican players reveals our patterns of consumption of sports and how that leads to the commodification of other human beings.

Some Dominicans lament that their people are “only known for two things – selling drugs and playing baseball” (Pessar 1995, p. xi). This study does not attempt to reinforce a negative stereotype. Instead, it examines the Dominican baseball players as a commodity within the MLB labor market. The players of primary interest in this study are those signed by MLB to Minor League contracts, not the players who have established themselves as millionaire superstars in

the Big Leagues. Although some Major League superstars are referenced in this thesis it is important to note they are the end product. Their success is the goal, the motivating force behind young Dominican players. Dominican Major League players have already passed through the preliminary stages of MLB labor market. Success has resulted in more social capital – personal representatives and a players' union to look out for their interests. The young Dominican player has far less power; therefore, he is easily manipulated and exploited.

### 1.3 Methodology

This thesis uses ethnographic research to document the role baseball plays in the ethnic identity of two groups of Dominicans, minor league baseball players and a local immigrant community. It is the product of fifteen months of fieldwork I conducted with the DFW Dominican community, a local professional baseball team, and a number of other professional baseball insiders. Pessar (1995) in stressing the importance of ethnographic methods stated it “allows us to see real people as they adjust, cope, and change in the immigrant context.” This is one way in which my research benefited from ethnographic methods. In addition, ethnography of those who do not comprise the immigrant community, such as informants linked to professional baseball; shed light on the experiences of immigrant players.

Fieldwork with the first population in the study, the DFW Dominicans, began in the spring of 2007. During this time I attended the monthly meetings of the local Dominican cultural organization, two picnics, the Sammy Sosa baseball game and a number of impromptu social gatherings or dinners. I kept my notebook close and jotted down thoughts and observations about the many events. Members of the cultural group did not appear uneasy or even very curious about my constant note taking. I had been introduced by Alma as a student who wanted to learn about Dominican culture, which seemed to move me out of the realm of intruder in the eyes of most. In fact, on several occasions I was asked (or told) I should write down a particular fact regarding the culture or history of the D.R.

DFW Dominicans comprise the 1.5 generation of immigrants, the children of immigrant parents, born in the D.R. but raised in the U.S. In order to understand the experiences of these Dominicans I interviewed six individuals from the Dominican cultural group. Of those interviewed, two informants were male and the other four were female. All of the informants were between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five. The individual interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the informant; three were in the individual's home, one a restaurant, and two at their offices. The interviews were not tape-recorded.

At the onset of my fieldwork, a deal was brokered between Miguel, the President of the cultural organization and myself. After the first meeting I attended he said to me, "we can help you if you help us – we need a secretary." So, I became what Miguel referred to as the "unofficial secretary." I was "unofficial" because I was unable to write and distribute the monthly minutes for the group. Nonetheless, I was called upon to run group errands, supervise snacks and handle ticket sales for the picnics and solicit items from the Texas Rangers to be raffled for the group's philanthropies. The relationship I developed with the group was mutually beneficial and genuinely warm. The members of the DFW community welcomed me to their organization and were more than willing to teach me about their vibrant culture. I am truly indebted to them.

Once I initiated contact with the group of local Dominicans, scheduling interviews with informants progressed quickly. Word of my research spread through the group and one of my eventual informants actually contacted me to ask if she could be of service. Members of the Dominican community consistently mentioned how important it was to them to "have a voice" and share their immigrant narrative. Locating and interviewing players and other baseball personnel proved much more challenging.

I used a variety of strategies to locate individuals willing to share their knowledge and experiences about baseball. I relied heavily on non-traditional means of contact such as the Internet, blogs, and chat rooms. In addition, I was aided by the use of the "snowball" method

(Cornelius, 1982) in which one informant introduced me to another informant. Through blogs and chat rooms I met individuals who knew baseball personnel and put me in contact with them.

I contacted several other informants via the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of cold calling. I found names of baseball personnel listed on team websites. Then, I guessed what their email address through the team might be and sent out emails explaining who I was and the research I was conducting. I sent out twenty-five to thirty email messages and two individuals responded. Of the four informants affiliated with professional baseball teams one was interviewed in person and the other via telephone. Phone interviews were necessary because the informants resided out of state. The two former baseball players were each local and interviewed in person. Interviews with all informants were semi-structured, consisting of me asking a set of basic, predetermined questions and allowing additional questions to emerge from topics mentioned by the informant during our conversation.

As a master's degree thesis my research was performed on a tight budget, which proved to be my greatest limitation. My intent was to include the voice of current young Dominican baseball players in the research. Attempts to interview current players at the academies and the minor league level were met with several obstacles. First, due to lack of funding I was unable to travel to the D.R. and other cities within the U.S. to find the players. Second, speaking no Spanish was another limitation in conducting interviews, restricting informants to those with more advanced English skills. Finally, there is a veil of secrecy surrounding MLB's dealings in the D.R. MLB has received harsh criticism from sports writers and previous players regarding their recruitment practices of Dominican players. Teams do not want to speak with outsiders to try to avoid further bad publicity. Players typically do not want to speak to outsiders fearing their teams would view it unfavorably and penalize them. In three cases where an opportunity presented to interview a young Dominican player either the players' agent or family members blocked my communication, citing concerns that the team would frown upon the interview. In another

instance, I asked a minor league team official if I could come out before a game to speak to the Dominican players. He said he would be willing to set those interviews up for me after I had submitted the list of questions I would ask for approval by the team. This is a strategy utilized by the teams to try to filter out questions of a negative nature and shield the teams from being portrayed in a negative light to the public.

#### 1.4 Brief History of Baseball and Dominican Participation

Baseball is frequently called “America’s Pastime.” While the exact time and place of baseball’s origin is debatable, it is widely agreed the game is a derivative of the English game called rounders. The first baseball game ever recorded took place in New Jersey in 1846. Throughout its more than one hundred years of existence baseball has served as both a reflection of American culture and, on occasional, a vehicle of cultural change. During the turbulent years of segregation in America, the ugly face of discrimination was mirrored on the baseball field as talented African-American ball players were barred from playing in “The Big Leagues.” Major League Baseball (MLB) would eventually become a trailblazer, an institutional advocate for equality. The Brooklyn Dodgers first publicly shunned discriminatory ideology among their ranks when General Manager Branch Rickey signed a young African-American second baseman named Jack Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson (Baseballlibrary.com). Robinson broke baseball’s color barrier in 1947; seven years before the Brown v. Board of Education decision that desegregated American schools (Knee 2003). Reflecting upon the history being played out, Branch Rickey reportedly told Robinson, “A box score is a democratic thing. It doesn’t tell...what color you are...It just tells what kind of a baseball player you were on a particular day” (Rowan 1960:116).

Branch Rickey’s determination to integrate baseball is subject to criticism. While signing an African-American to a Major League contract was historic and worthy of applause, many believe Rickey did so as a shrewd business move (baseballlibrary.com). Rickey may have been

interested in recruiting proven players from the Negro Leagues as well as talented locals from the Caribbean. Tapping into the talent pool of these leagues of dark-skinned men would first require the desegregation of baseball. From the late 1800s through 1946 fewer than fifty Latin-born players infiltrated the American Major Leagues. These players were typically Cuban and all were considered “white” (Regalado 1998). In 1949, Orestes “Minnie” Minoso, a Cuban, became the first black Latin player in the MLB system when he signed a minor league contract with the Cleveland Indians (Wendell 2003). Since the 1950s scouting and signing of Latino talent has increased. Minoso was followed by baseball greats such as Roberto Clemente and Tony Perez. More recent talents, Manny Ramirez and Vladimir Guerrero have helped solidify the D.R. as the current hotbed of “beisbol” talent.

The D.R. is a little more than twice the size of New Hampshire and has around 8 million citizens (Black 1986). The nation’s citizens are, for the most part, rural, poor and uneducated. Most government statistics show a relatively high literacy rate of 82 percent (UNICEF 1990). However, these numbers can be very misleading. According to the Population Reference Bureau,

“...the country is faced with major educational problems: scarce classroom materials, poorly trained and paid teachers, and overcrowded classrooms. For every 100 children entering primary school, only 58 finish fifth grade and only 22 complete high school in 13 years or less. People age 25 and older average only five years of schooling” (2005).

Although most citizens have limited formal education, they do have an incredible fervor for the game of baseball. The baseball players share a commonality with most other Dominican immigrants, the desire for a life of better economic opportunity. Former Major League All-Star Octavio “Cookie” Rojas, who is Cuban, put it best:

“They come from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and Venezuela, mostly, but they might as well come from the same place. The same thing drives them. They don’t want to go back home to a standard of living they tried so hard to leave. They all had the “special hunger” (As quoted by Regalado 1998).

This “special hunger” describes both their love for the game and their desire to leave the island, both of which can lead them to the unique labor force of the MLB system.

Dominican immigrant populations are heavily concentrated in New York, New Jersey, and Florida (Levitt 2004). Since Dominicans are a large immigrant population, they have been the subject of various anthropological studies. Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) examined the socioeconomic background of immigrants, the motivation behind the decision to leave their country of birth, and the role gender plays in resettlement. Pessar and Foner (1996) explore the Dominican immigrant’s experience in America, how they redefine their culture in their new homeland, and the contributions they make to American society. This study will differ from previous bodies of work by examining Dominican baseball players within the labor market established by MLB.

Over the past two decades, Dominicans have been among the fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S. According to Levitt (2004) “between 1988 and 1998, 401,646 Dominicans were admitted to the United States, almost twice the number from any other Caribbean country and second only to Mexicans as the principal immigrant group entering the United States from within the Western Hemisphere” (p. 237-238). Within the Dominican immigrant population is a small subgroup of approximately 1300 (denverpost.com) talented young baseball players admitted to this country annually with a work visa arranged by their employer, Major League Baseball. The number of these men, while small compared to other Dominican immigrants, is very important in the context of the MLB system. According to an official press release from Major League Baseball, on Opening Day of the 2005 season 242 of the 829 players (29.2 %) were born outside the United States (MLB.com). The D.R. led all countries other than the U.S. with 91 players or 11% of all Major Leaguers; Venezuela was a very distant second with 46 players or 5.5%. The Dominican players in MLB’s Minor League system are embedded in a

unique situation – they are immigrants whose labor helps run the economic engine of what many consider the most “American” of sports.

For many in the D.R., baseball is more than a game. It is a possible “ticket off the island” (Joyce 1990). Young men are willing to play for meager wages in their native land, knowing success there could mean a trip to America and the promise of economic prosperity. Baseball’s role in the U.S. and abroad is duplicitous. Baseball is, on one hand, the all-American sport that glorifies camaraderie and hard work. On the other hand, it is a business - a \$40 billion a year industry (Fisher 2004) with an ongoing, intense need for labor. As baseball’s popularity spread to many countries across the globe, the talent pool and possible sources of labor have increased. A constant need for labor, in the form of baseball players, leads Major League Baseball to heavily recruit young Dominican men. According to Breton (2000), MLB estimates that 90 to 95 percent of all Latino players signed to MLB contracts (of which Dominicans are the majority) will never play a single game in the Major Leagues. Most of these hopeful men will be classified as ‘not good enough’ for American professional baseball and never leave their homeland. A small, fortunate group will receive a minor league contract from a MLB team and join other Dominican immigrants on a journey to the U.S.

In a recent documentary entitled “Viva Baseball!” producer/director Dan Klores chronicles the obstacles encountered by early Latino baseball players in the U.S. Numerous old-timers were interviewed, sharing personal experiences of their lives as participants in America’s Pastime. Victor Pellot, who was given the Americanized name “Vic Power,” told of an event that took place when he was still playing in the minor leagues during the 1950s. In America, Puerto Rican born Pellot was considered “black” and restricted as to what public facilities he could patronize. At a restaurant a waitress approached Pellot and informed him, “We don’t serve Negro.” To which Pellot retorted, “No, I don’t eat Negro. Give me some rice and beans.” Current players arriving in the U.S. from Latin American countries do not face this type of government-



sanctioned discrimination humorously described by Pellot; however, they are still confronted by language and cultural obstacles. Recent attempts have been made by Major League Baseball to embrace the Latino baseball players. Prior to the World Series this year fans voted on their favorite past and present Latino players. The results were announced at the World Series and touted the “Latino Legends Team.” The rules for the Home Run Derby have also been changed so one representative from various nations are chosen to participate. Behind all the pomp and circumstance, what is MLB doing for the young Dominican men just joining the MLB labor system in the minor leagues? Before examining what MLB is doing, one must first understand the two primary issues impacting these young men; language and cultural barriers.

Juan Marichal, a baseball Hall of Famer and Dominican hero, played in the Major Leagues from 1960 to 1975. During his tenure with the San Francisco Giants, the manager of the team, Alvin Dark, prohibited players from speaking Spanish anywhere in the ballpark. In an interview with reporter Stan Isaacs, Dark was quoted as saying, “We have trouble because we have too many Spanish-speaking and Negro players on the team. They are just not able to perform up to the white ballplayer when it comes to mental alertness” (Klores 2005). Soon after the comment was published, Dark was fired. Unlike Marichal, current players are no longer banned from speaking their native tongue but they quickly find that the inability to speak English is still a major hurdle to overcome.

It is uncommon for young, newly signed players to immediately begin playing with the actual Major League team to which they are signed. Once signed by a MLB team, the players typically have to work their way up the ranks of the Minor League system. Here the players are taught to hone their skills. Dominican players usually attend the Dominican baseball academy affiliated with the Major League team with whom they are signed. Some of those will be sent to the U.S. to compete in the Rookie League. A few talented players may be promoted up the chain to Class A ball, AA, AAA, and then even “The Big Leagues.”

The Rookie League towns and many of the minor league towns are small and may have few people who speak Spanish. Such was the case for Juan Melo. He left the D.R. and was sent to Spokane, Washington where only 3% of the 195,629 residents were Hispanic (White 2001). No one around Melo could speak Spanish. Melo admits the first year away from home was lonely and painful. Each night he would return to his hotel room and cry. Most of his extra money went toward the purchase of phone cards to call home. Ordering food in restaurants proved troublesome as well. Melo said, "Every time we ate, I just ordered the same thing everyone else did because I didn't know how to order my food. I never heard of some of those things. I just ate it" (as quoted in White 2001). The first actual sentence Melo learned in English, "I'll have what he's having," was utilized daily for some time.

Al Reyes found similar difficulties as a first-timer to America and the minor leagues. If restaurant menus lacked illustrations he looked for the one item he could read in English, 'chicken.' Trips to the local grocery store were equally frustrating because he could not read the labels; therefore, he was forced to buy whatever looked familiar (Arangure 2003).

In a 2004 newspaper article Amaury Telemaco, a pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies described his earliest trials in the U.S.:

"They sent me to Huntington, W. Virginia. Can you imagine that? A Dominican boy, 17 years old, in Huntington, W. Virginia, staying in Marshall University, in the dorms. We...had to eat out every day, find a way to do your laundry...That year I saved \$84, and I brought \$100 from home, so I lost money...That's how tough it was..." (As quoted by Bachelor, Dodd, & Weir 2004).

The language barrier experienced by Dominican ballplayers is commonly shared by the larger community of Dominican immigrants. However, Dominicans, like most other immigrant populations tend to create ethnic communities in the cities of settlement, sharing a common language, food, and customs. According to Torres-Saillant and Hernandez, not only do 65% of Dominican immigrants in the U.S. reside in New York City, most (67.3%) are concentrated in two boroughs, Manhattan and the Bronx (1998). Some Dominican ballplayers find themselves in a

'Dominican borough' if chance places them on a team with other Latin Americans. Not only do Dominican teammates band together, but so do most from Spanish-speaking countries, forming "a single cultural community" (Regalado 2002). For the many, like Juan Melo, there is no cultural community, no support system other than family member thousands of miles away.

Without assistance from seasoned Latino players on their team, young Dominicans not only stumble over English words but also may get tripped up over cultural differences. Superstar pitcher, Pedro Martinez, describes how young Dominican players might inadvertently get themselves into trouble with American women:

"Sometimes you just make a mistake trying to be nice. Like you whistle at a girl. Girls don't like to be whistled at here. In the Dominican, that's flirting with a girl...Here, some of the girls will take that as sexual harassment or whatever" (As quoted by Weir & Bachelor 2004).

In a recent article, McCauley described early Dominican players, such as Felipe Alou, and how an inability to speak English negatively impacted the relationship between the Dominican players, their teammates and the media (2005). At times the language barrier resulted in ridicule. When Alou went through the minor leagues in the 1950s he struggled with speaking English despite enrolling himself in classes. By the time he made it to the Major Leagues several years later, Alou was able to communicate in English but was infuriated by the manner in which sports reporters quoted him and his fellow Latinos. Reporters would print quotes phonetically, turning "I hit the ball" into "I heet de ball." Alou and others found this practice disrespectful and insulting. Although this incident actually occurred in the Major Leagues the point it illustrates is applicable at all levels. Fear of being ridiculed for less-than-perfect English skills is a real stressor for the minor league Dominicans.

Many players simply limit how much they speak to avoid uncomfortable situations. That can lead teammates and coaches to perceive the young men as aloof or dim-witted. In the words of Boston Red Sox manager Terry Francona, "I think we as Americans who speak English, we thumb our noses at everybody. If they don't speak English, they're dumb" (As quoted in

McCauley 2005). Grace Guerrero Zwit, the director of minor league administration for the Chicago White Sox, agrees with Francona's assessment. She says the players' unwillingness to speak English is frequently misconstrued and viewed as rudeness. Zwit is bilingual and empathizes with the players' hesitancy to speak English, "I think it's a defense mechanism. They're afraid to make mistakes..." (As quoted by Weir and Bachelor 2004).

While players from the D.R. and other Latin American countries attempt to master basic English skills, many players from Japan enjoy the services of their team- provided interpreters (McCauley 2005; Shpigel 2005). For example, Hideki Matsui and Ichiro Suzuki each have interpreters payrolled by their respective teams. Part of the contract Kaz Matsui had with the New York Mets included an interpreter for him as well as his wife. Dominican players that have worked laboriously on their baseball and English skills frequently resent what they view as special treatment for the Japanese players. The enormously successful Major Leaguer, David Ortiz, is an outspoken advocate for the plight of his fellow Dominicans trying to 'make it' in baseball. He explained the root of the resentment of Japanese players by saying, "There are lots of Latinos and only a few from Japan" (As quoted in McCauley 2005). Ortiz is correct. Forty-percent of all the players in the minor leagues are from either the D.R., Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, or Venezuela (McCauley 2005); none of them have interpreters. Literally a handful of Japanese players pepper the teams of MLB and all of them have an interpreter.

### 1.5 No More Chances: The Dominican Baseball Immigrant after Baseball

According to Marcos Breton (1997), every year literally hundreds of young Dominican men are brought to the U.S. by MLB. The men are eager to play ball and hungry for the prosperity a life in America promises. Unfortunately, this optimism is crushed when "baseball deemed them not talented enough, dissolved their contracts and their only means of living in the United States legally" (p. 1). When forced with the prospect of returning to an impoverished life in the D.R., about nine out of every ten released players remain in the U.S. illegally. With limited

education and language skills they are typically relegated to a life of violence, drugs, and poverty.

The majority settles into New York City barrios in areas with “the city’s highest homicide rate”

(Breton p. 2). Their lives are sad and sometimes desperate:

“My goal was to build a hospital in my town. We are poor people and I really wanted to do something. To this day, whenever I play the Lotto, I still think of that hospital. Look at me now. I’m 30 years old and I’m finished” Carlos Made (as quoted in Breton 1997).

While some decide to stay in the U.S. because there are more opportunities, others are motivated by embarrassment. Some say they will not return to their homeland because people there will laugh and ridicule them for failing in the minor leagues. A life in the D.R. after baseball would be a life wrought with shame and humiliation. Still others continue to believe the dream of being a professional baseball player is alive and well. One man, Jose Santana, was released from the Houston Astros minor league team. He is twenty-four and has one surgically repaired knee. Santana stocks shelves at a neighborhood grocery store making about \$200 weekly. The weekends he reserves for playing in a Latin semi-pro baseball team. As long as Santana plays, the dream will continue to live. He says, “I just need one chance. Just one” (Breton p. 8).

The dream of Carlos and Jose is one shared by literally thousands of young Dominican boys. It is the dream of professional baseball, exchanging Dominican poverty for lucrative contracts in America. Through this research, I demonstrate three consequences that have arisen from the influence of American baseball on Dominicans. First, I expose the central role baseball plays in the cultural identity of the Dominican community. Next, I show the process through which Dominican players are made into commodities in the U.S. minor league system. Finally, I reveal the similarities and differences in the immigrant experiences of Dominican baseball players and other Dominican immigrants.

### 1.6 Organization of the Chapters

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical perspectives of researchers in the areas of the globalization of sports, the anthropology of sport, Dominican immigration and commodity chains.

Discussion of these research areas will lay the underpinnings for the ethnographic chapters that follow. Chapter 3 analyzes ways members of a local organization utilize baseball as an extension of being Dominican. Chapter 4 introduces the concept of a global commodity chain and situates the Dominican baseball player within the initial phases of the chain that occurs within the D.R. Chapter 5 continues to follow the Dominican baseball player as he comes to the U.S. and experiences that country's unique aspects of the commodity chain. Chapter 6 expands the concept of commodity chain by revealing the stories of several players and the regulatory commission established to clean up professional baseball practices in the D.R. Chapter 7 briefly summarizes the important findings of the research, its limitations, and the need for further study.

This research is a contribution to the current anthropological data in that it utilizes Gereffi's model of global commodity chains and situates baseball players within its framework. This thesis outlines the ways in which the Dominican baseball player can be viewed as a true commodity and ways in which the global commodity chain framework can be modified to incorporate human subjects. This research also reveals baseball's importance within the 1.5 immigrant generation as a means of expressing their ethnic identity and relating to other immigrants such as the Dominican baseball player.

CHAPTER 2  
THEORIES OF THE GLOBALIZATION OF BASEBALL, DOMINICAN IMMIGRATION AND  
COMMODITY CHAINS

“Baseball is the only thing beside the paper clip that hasn’t changed.”

Bill Veeck

For the baseball purist, the individual who considers baseball America’s pastime, it is probably difficult to accept the game is indeed changing, undergoing a metamorphosis in front of a global audience. The irony of Bill Veeck’s quote is he was acutely aware of early waves of change in the sport and, in some instances was a facilitator. As the owner of the Cleveland Indians it was Veeck who signed Larry Doby, making him the first African-American in the American League and the second in Major League Baseball behind Jackie Robinson. Integration revolutionized baseball in two ways. First and most obviously, it opened the door to talented African-Americans who until then had been restricted to playing baseball only in the Negro Leagues. However, it also paved the way for thousands of other dark-skinned men around the world to enter the ranks of the minor and major league divisions of the MLB system. Originally these men were dark-skinned Cubans but over the past few decades the men are predominately Dominican.

In addition to being referred to for decades as “America’s pastime,” baseball is intricately linked to American imperialism. Some academics in the disciplines of English, history and anthropology have touched upon sports studies; however, most who write about sports are mainstream sportswriters. While the contributions of sports writers are noteworthy, their writing is geared toward popular consumption rather than academia. Anthropologists can bring something

new to the table by offering a cultural perspective of what happens when classes and cultures mix and mingle. Sports writers' knowledge base is centered on the world of sports and journalism, not on cultural studies. As a result, what they write is sometimes culturally incorrect, and even insensitive. This thesis will interject knowledge of Dominican and American culture into baseball and vice versa.

### 2.1 Globalization of Baseball

"Globalization," a rather ubiquitous term, has seemingly leaked from university textbooks to mainstream American society. The term or some form of it surfaces constantly in the media and entertainment. Globalization has been analyzed through the lenses of economists, political scientists and sociologists, to name a few. Again, anthropologists offer a unique perspective on the topic. According to Ina and Rosaldo (1995):

The tendency of much of the literature on globalization is to focus on the macro scope of the phenomenon, thinking of it principally in terms of very large scale economic, political or cultural processes. Anthropology, on the other hand, is most concerned with the articulation of the global and the local, that is, with how globalizing processes exist in the context of, and must come to terms with, the realities of particular societies...(p.4).

This study concerns itself with the articulation of the global and the local as it examines the global baseball market's impact on local Dominican players. Previous anthropologists who have written about globalization have looked at economics or cultural flows. This study is novel in the way it weaves culture and economics with baseball.

The globalization of sports, particularly baseball, is a topic brought to the forefront of mainstream and academic writings over the past two decades. Numerous sport writers such as Tim Wendel (2003) recognized that the "new face of baseball" in Major League Baseball was Latino. Wendel traces the roots of Latinos in baseball from the time of trailblazers such as Rod Carew, Orlando Cepeda, and Roberto Clemente to present day heroes Sammy Sosa, Alex Rodriguez, and others. The picture of global baseball painted by Wendel is overall positive and does not emphasize the uglier side of the sport.



A far less auspicious account of the globalization of baseball is provided by Marcano and Fidler (1999; 2002; 2004), two attorneys and writers. Utilizing the actual experiences of Alexis, a young Venezuelan, Marcano and Fidler (2002) argue that Major League Baseball is not the national pastime, but a long-standing business. Alexis is similar to other young Latin American men with hopes of playing in the big leagues. Unfortunately, Alexis saw the “ugly” side of this global business in the squalid living conditions of the Dominican summer camps and the lack of sufficient food, water, sanitation and basic medical care. The authors present Alexis’ story and argue he is just one example of how MLB exploits men from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Two significant articles by Marcano and Fidler delve further into the exploitation of Latin American men by MLB (1999; 2004). In both articles, baseball is described as a big business with domestic and international roots. There are consumers of baseball as well as baseball talent across the globe. In accessing these global markets MLB is acting like other multinational companies (MNC). Marcano and Fidler further argue the multinational business of baseball has been largely unregulated in their dealings with Latin American prospects. The Latin America pool of talent is vital to MLB although the recruiting system is vastly different from that of North American and Asian players. The authors offer evidence of human rights and labor violations such as lack of drug testing, recruiting of boys as young as ten years old and lack of proper living conditions and access to medical care for injuries (1999; 2004). Major League Baseball profits from these recruits; however, they have reacted very slowly and grudgingly to making changes. Some of the changes made are deemed mere “band-aids” because they are not written codes within the MLB system.

According to the writers, one of the purposes of their work is to expose the little known side of the globalization of MLB. Not only do Marcano and Fidler (1999) purport Latino players are not treated with the same respect as non-Latinos, they suggest ways in which the treatment of the Latino players can be improved. Marcano and Fidler reveal that the globalization of

baseball has also resulted in the “denationalization” of local labor markets in the D.R. In other words, local baseball talent has slowly been dismantled or watered down by the number of players trying to play in MLB. Young Dominican men are not motivated to stay and play baseball in their native country when playing in MLB could prove so lucrative. MLB continues to extract players from the D.R. causing shrinkage of the talent pool from which local teams draw. This “talent drain” can be likened to what some anthropologists call the “brain drain,” the process by which highly skilled workers (i.e. physicians) migrate to other countries in an effort to secure more lucrative jobs.

The correlation between globalization and the exploitation of Latin American baseball players is also explored in the writings of Breton (2000) and Breton and Villegas (1999). Breton (2000) expresses concern that despite the large number of Latinos in MLB, they are still relatively unnoticed and grossly misunderstood. Breton and Villegas (2000) researched and chronicled the rise of one Dominican baseball player, Miguel Tejada, from his beginnings in the minor league to his advancement to the Major Leagues. According to them MLB has a “boatload mentality” meaning they sign many Dominican players for very little money because they may be able to get twenty of them for what it costs to sign four Americans. If the Dominicans do not work out, MLB will cut them, sending them back to a life of poverty. The number of Dominican men that never make it to the Big Leagues is disproportionate to the number signed. MLB’s own statistics say 90-95% of Latino players signed to a minor league contract never go to the Majors. Little money is lost by the teams because they were so cheap to sign. MLB justifies their behavior by saying it is a great opportunity for poor kids that would be doomed to a life in the sugarcane fields. Breton (2000) acknowledges this to be true but points out it does not excuse the practice. Once released from a minor league affiliate team, many Dominicans stay on in the U.S. illegally. Much like the perspective of this thesis Breton likens MLB’s mentality toward “Latino immigrant workers” to that

of other U.S. companies. The work of Breton and Villegas is important as it sheds light on some of the practices MLB employs to recruit young Dominican men.

Arbena (1994) gives an in-depth analysis of the migration of sports as it pertains to Latin America. He examines migration into, out of and within Latin America as well as the impact of each form of migration. He defines in-migration as players migrating from the U.S. to Latin America, an uncommon practice. In baseball, some American players have extended their careers by playing in the Mexican leagues and a few have played in the Caribbean Winter League. The best example of in-migration was the 1930s to 60s when American players would play in the Caribbean in the off-season to stay in shape. Black players segregated from American professional ball would also play in the Caribbean sometimes. Out-migration, according to Arbena, concerns the players from Latin American coming to the U.S., which is the most common form of sport migration. Arbena refers to them as “migrant workers.” He discusses the adjustment issues the players have and how their departure weakens the teams and traditions in the homeland. Arbena emphasizes the need for more research in the area of migration and sports, especially quantitative or geographic thus making my research seem timely and pertinent. Arbena, as a historian, gives a detailed account of sports migration lacking any ethnographic information. However, his work is very applicable to mine because he regards players as migrant laborers.

## 2.2 Anthropology of Baseball

Sport studies is an area of anthropology that is still in its infancy. The most prolific anthropologists who have studied baseball are Alan Klein and George Gmelch.

Klein’s seminal work on baseball in the D.R. (1991) was conducted during fieldwork in the late 1980s. Klein refers to baseball in the D.R. as “sugarball” and explains the term originated because early players of the sport were sugarcane cutters that, when they were not harvesting, passed the hours away with baseball. The various sugarcane refineries formed teams and would

play against one another, thus establishing an amateur system. Klein argues that Caribbean baseball is rooted in colonialism because sugarcane was the monoculture brought to the island by the colonizing West. Not only did the West's seemingly insatiable appetite for sugar lead them to colonize the D.R. and establish a vast web of sugarcane fields, but it also introduced the sport of baseball to the island. Klein argues that baseball and MLB in the D.R. is linked to both hegemony and resistance. On one hand the D.R. embraced the dominant Western culture by adopting the game of baseball. On the other hand, baseball was used by Dominicans as a form of resistance against the West as they became so skilled at the game they were able to beat American teams.

Klein (1994) connects baseball in the D.R. to the broad topic of labor migration. He offers a somewhat holistic picture by mentioning both major and minor league baseball players. He refers to baseball in the D.R. as "industry" and accuses the U.S. of dismantling it to gain access to cheap labor. According to Klein, the spread of baseball in the Caribbean is an example of America's practice of "baseball imperialism." He explains the role Cuba plays in the current "labor migration" in MLB. Klein also gives some information regarding the sometimes illegal practices employed by Major League teams when signing young Dominican prospects and the issue of obtaining visas for the plethora of Dominican players in the MLB camps and academies.

In addition to studying the dynamics of baseball while in the D.R., Klein (2000) also conducted fieldwork at one of the sport's best-known ballparks, Fenway. This work examines the media and fans' (Anglo and Dominican) perceptions of Dominican Major Leaguer Pedro Martinez during his first season pitching for the Boston Red Sox. Boston, with its high population of Dominicans, did not see significant numbers attend Red Sox games prior to the arrival of Martinez. Klein's work, like the present study, suggests that it is interesting to examine the Dominican baseball players because the larger Dominican population is proud of them and look to the players as a symbol of their culture.

Klein studied newspaper articles and conducted ethnographic interviews of Anglo and Dominican fans attending home games in which Martinez pitched. His purpose was to compare the different perceptions of race held by the media and fans. He found that Dominicans for the first time attended home games, but only when Martinez pitched, because they wanted to show support for their Dominican hero. Klein exposes some of the cultural miscues made by those in the press corps in their coverage of the games Martinez pitched. News reporters wrote articles about the new Latin flare at the games and painted a picture of widespread acceptance of Martinez in Boston. Frequently, Dominicans' traditions were confused with Mexican and Puerto Rican. Klein's findings showed that while most Anglos had a positive perception of Martinez as an athlete and person, it did not carry over to the larger Dominican population. Klein stresses the importance of more disciplines performing research in the area of sports studies. He says media analysis is frequently utilized in sport studies because there is limited information from which to draw; however, the media's reports tend to be distorted.

My research is indebted to the work of Klein as it serves as the inspiration and foundation for this anthropological investigation of the globalization of baseball. There are, however, some limitations to his body of work. First, Klein (1991) mentions the baseball academies and acknowledges that abuses have taken place, but tends to stress the changes made by MLB to improve conditions. Given the time span between his work and mine, it seems apparent that egregious problems still exist in the MLB Dominican labor system. While he explores the issue of the exploitation of the Dominican players, he does not feel that the academies exploit the young men. My research, on the contrary, reveals that problems do persist, problems created by the academies and various agents in the labor chain whose actions reduce Dominican players to commodities. Also, the findings in *Sugarball* were based on fieldwork Klein conducted in the late 1980s. Globalization is a dynamic force that has continued to reshape baseball. It has resulted in the proliferation of Dominican players in the major and minor leagues. Unlike when Klein

conducted his fieldwork, the number of academies has swelled, with most MLB teams now participate in the academy system. With more and more Dominican men migrating to the U.S. to play baseball, their importance from a labor standpoint needs to be more closely scrutinized.

Next, Klein (1994) based his findings on published sources rather than ethnographic fieldwork. He compares information regarding Dominican baseball players to information published by Grasmuck and Pessar, who found that Dominican immigrants were typically male and skilled. This fits with Klein's examples of Major League players who are male and skilled in the area of sports. Klein's comparison of baseball players to migrants is similar to my research, although I focus exclusively on minor league players. Also, Klein does not offer an ethnographic perspective of Dominican players in terms of immigrants as I will do.

Finally, while Klein's (2000) study of fan reaction to Pedro Martinez is interesting and relevant, the conclusions drawn might not be representative. Klein's research was conducted in one city, at one MLB ballpark, and pertained to the perceptions of one Dominican baseball player. In baseball circles, Boston is known as a city very passionate and opinionated about baseball. The same research conducted in another region of the country may have yielded completely different results.

Probably the best-known cultural anthropologist who has written on the topic of baseball is George Gmelch. Gmelch utilized anthropological theory and ethnographic techniques to produce several works examining aspects of baseball culture. In his oft-reprinted article "Baseball Magic" (1978), Gmelch compares Malinowski's observations regarding the rituals of fishermen in the South Pacific to modern day baseball players. The fishermen performed rituals in the face of uncertain circumstances when luck was paramount. So is the case for many baseball players, especially prior to very important games. Most recently, Gmelch lays to rest romantic notions of baseball life in *Inside Pitch: Life in Professional Baseball* (2001) by following American ballplayers from the recruiting process through the various levels of the minor league

system. On the road to “The Big Leagues” Gmelch shows how the life of professional baseball impacts relationships with players’ wives and children.

Gmelch and Weiner (1998) also offered insight into those who run the economic engine of baseball; scouts, ushers, ticket-takers, and vendors. Through twenty-one in-depth interviews, Gmelch and Weiner open up the behind-the-scenes world of baseball. What they reveal is an industry dominated by men who work long hours in typically low-paying jobs to be a part of the game they loved since childhood. These works by Gmelch are relevant and important contributions to the anthropology of sport; however, the insight provided is an American perspective only. The informants are Americans working in American MLB parks. My research, on the other hand, will highlight Dominican players in the D.R. and in the U.S., tracing their experiences through the lens of a global commodity chain.

The research of Klein and Gmelch prove the invaluable contributions anthropologists offer to the field of sport studies. First, ethnography as a primary methodology gives an insider’s perspective on subjects of interest. When ethnography is coupled with participant observation, as Klein showed (2000), a multi-dimensional view of an individual and a culture can be revealed. Next, anthropologists analyze multi-sited ethnography. In other words, they investigate the dynamics of one geographic location vis-à-vis another. Finally, anthropologists bring the topic of culture to the equation. As Klein did at Fenway (2000), anthropologists focus on the interaction between cultures and the interpretation of cultures by “outsiders.” This study seeks to utilize these three key aspects of anthropological research (methods, multi-sited ethnography and culture) to shed light on the immigrant experiences of minor league Dominican baseball players in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.

The most recent research by Burgos (2007) discusses the historical roots of Latino baseball players from the late 1800s to the 1990s. He explores issues of race and segregation in the U.S. during the Jim Crow era. Light-skinned Latinos were able to play in the Major Leagues

before desegregation because team officials presented them as Spaniards to the general public. He argues that it was Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier that allowed for the increase of Latino participation in baseball. Once desegregation occurred, darker-skinned Latinos were no longer restricted only to the Negro Leagues. Over time, baseball's racial inclusiveness has paved the way for teams to seek out new labor sources in places such as the D.R. Burgos argues that "transnational actors" within baseball were made possible only after desegregation. Some of the transnational actors he mentions include *buscones*, scouts and the academies. He examines the impact each of the following had on the proliferation of labor recruitment in the D.R.: the breakdown of U.S.-Cuban relations, the U.S. Labor Department's limit on baseball player visas, and the institution of free agency in Major League baseball. Burgos reveals how Dominican players are exploited by a labor recruitment process (via the academies) that is separate and unequal from that which American, Puerto Rican and Canadian players participate (the amateur draft).

Burgos' research is the most contemporary of all the previous sources but it does end in the late 1990s. Globalization continues to shape baseball, as seen in changes to visa regulations initiated just last year. My research has a slight edge over Burgos in that it is the most recent. Also, Burgos' work lacks analysis of the entire labor process. My thesis examines the impact baseball's labor process has on one specific group of Latinos, who are also the most valuable to MLB's labor pool.

### 2.3 Dominican Immigration

In the opening pages of *A Visa for a Dream* (1995), Pessar's seminal work on Dominican immigrants, one of her informants expresses frustration regarding the American mindset that Dominican immigrants are known for only two things: drug dealing and baseball. While this study does not seek to reinforce any cultural stereotypes of Dominican immigrants it is important to recognize that there are a disproportionately large number of Dominican baseball players both in



the minor and major league teams that comprise MLB. All of these men, the young men of the minor league teams in particular, share some similarities to the larger Dominican immigration population. Not to examine this small population would be to ignore an important facet of the Dominican immigrant experience, which also has an enormous impact on the world of American professional sports.

Pessar (1995) fused a variety of techniques to gather information for her book, including ethnographic interviews, surveys, U.S. census information, and participant observation. She focused on New York City, where the largest number of Dominicans in the U.S. lives. Many of her conclusions regarding Dominican immigrants in general are applicable to their countrymen who come to the U.S. as baseball immigrants. Like Dominicans in Pessar's study, the baseball immigrants maintain transnational connections to their homeland through global communication technology such as air travel, phone calls, and more recently Internet access. The players and New York Dominicans also contribute to the income of family members who stay in the D.R. by sending remittances. Finally, both groups' motivation to migrate stem from the hope of better financial opportunity in the U.S. For Pessar's group the opportunity came mainly in the form of low-skilled industrial work. For the baseball immigrants it is, of course, baseball.

According to Pessar, the island's major export and most valued commodity are its workers. The minor league players fit this category as they are workers brought to the U.S. to "work" for the MLB system and contribute to the commodification of baseball. While Pessar concludes that the original wave of Dominican immigrants who entered the U.S. was skilled and educated, this is not the case for the players. Pessar also explains that the very poor Dominicans were far less likely to emigrate because they had to obtain visas to enter this country, as opposed to crossing a nearby border. Acquiring a visa requires money and social contacts, which the poor and uneducated do not have. The baseball immigrants, as the research will show, are very different in this regard. The baseball immigrant is from a socioeconomic class vastly different from

Dominican immigrants of Pessar's research. The baseball immigrants in this study are poor, unskilled and have little to no education; thus their human capital separates them from the traditional Dominican immigrant. The only way they can obtain visas is through sponsorship provide by MLB.

Many of Pessar's informants were surprised by the discrimination they faced in America because in the D.R. they were considered "white" if they had any "white" blood. Haitians are considered "black" in the D.R. This issue is applicable to the players as well. Racism is not as rampant as it was several decades ago but it frequently exists in the smaller communities where the minor league teams play. Pessar's study focuses on the Dominican ethnic enclave of Washington Heights. Obviously, this location was chosen due to the large population of Dominican immigrants, and the location afforded Pessar a unique and pertinent perspective of what it means to be a Dominican immigrant.

As is true for so many diasporas, remittances are heavily relied upon in the D.R. In fact, remittances are the second most important source of foreign exchange in the D.R. and many of the so-called "tourists" are actually Dominicans who have returned for a visit. For the baseball players who come from meager economic backgrounds, remittances are the primary motivating force driving them to succeed in the minor league system.

Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) examined the socioeconomic background of immigrants and the motivation behind the decision to leave their country of birth. Their findings suggested that an increase in the number of educated skilled workers in the D.R., coupled with high unemployment rates, motivated many to migrate to the U.S. in search of jobs and a more stable financial future.

The most distinguishing characteristic of my research is the use of Gereffi and Korzeniewicz's (1994) global commodity chain (GCC) approach. Borrowed from political economists, the original GCC was a means of analyzing the organization of production and consumption of goods or commodities in the global world economy. Traditionally viewed, commodities are inanimate

objects; however, as defined by Appadurai, commodities are simply “objects of economic value” (1986:3), meaning that the definition can be expanded to include individuals or groups of individuals. “People can be and have been commoditized again and again, in innumerable societies throughout history...” (Kopytoff 1986:64). As my thesis shows, Dominican baseball players are one such commoditized group.

As defined by Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986:159) a commodity chain is “a network of labor and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity.” For purposes of my research the commodity chain consists of all actors involved in the recruitment, training and distribution of young men from the D.R. who play baseball within the MLB system. The commodity is the young men themselves. The young Dominican baseball player can be viewed as a commodity because he possesses (at least potentially) the ability to play baseball, which, if done well, generates fan interest and translates into team revenue.

Gereffi and Korzeniewicz’s work examines a number of industries within the concept of a global commodity chain. Industries such as shipbuilding, footwear and even recreational drugs are dismantled and each process of commodification explained. These industries however, deal with inanimate objects or goods. My thesis differs from past research because it reveals that the global commodity chain theory is a useful tool to analyze and understand the labor recruitment process of Dominican baseball players.

The GCC helps situate those involved in labor recruitment of Dominican players, explains their individual roles, and reveals the dynamic nature of the labor process. Although previous works have described Dominican players as commodities (Guevara and Fidler, 2002) and even mentioned labor production processes (Klein, 1991) an in-depth analysis has been lacking. My study distinguishes itself from its predecessors by casting the labor recruitment process of Dominican baseball players as the central tenet of research.

Situating humans within a GCC also brings a unique perspective to the current research. As human beings the young Dominican baseball players are not merely passive participants within the machine known as the MLB system. Each player brings with him human agency, the ability to make decisions and impact his own life. In addition, the Dominican players within the GCC are subject to the process of acculturation, an aspect that distinguishes the baseball GCC from other commodity chains.

This thesis builds upon the foundation of previous immigrant studies by recasting the Dominican baseball player as an immigrant, comparing his experiences and narrative with those of other Dominican immigrants. Unlike the work of previous anthropologists and sociologists who have studied Dominican culture, my research delves into issues of ethnicity and identity within a small group of Dominicans who are part of the 1.5 generation living in an area of secondary migration. This thesis is also the first to utilize the GCC theory to study the process of labor recruitment in baseball from the point of origin in the D.R. to the U.S. minor leagues. My research then moves beyond the GCC, discussing human agency and regulation, unique aspects of the baseball commodity chain that exist only because the commodities are human beings.

## CHAPTER 3

### DOMINICAN TIME: EXPRESSIONS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY THROUGH BASEBALL

Driving up to the house it became obvious that my worst fear had come to fruition. I was the first person to arrive for the meeting. The two-story brick house sat on a quiet corner lot of an upper-middle class suburban neighborhood. I observed the telltale signs of a new residential development – grassy lots with “available” signs posted intermixed with occupied homes and homes in various stages of construction. What I did not observe were cars parked outside the house. I arrived on time and still beat everyone else to the meeting.

This house belonged to the president of a social/cultural Dominican group in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area that I will refer to as the “Association.” I rang the doorbell and a young woman answered. She looked at me bewildered but allowed me in nonetheless. Her father, the Association president, Miguel, then quickly greeted me. He welcomed me in and explained that no one ever showed up at the designated time. He laughed and said the start time of three o’clock was more like a suggestion because Dominicans come on their own time! Thus, my fieldwork with The Association as well as my introduction to “Dominican Time” began.

In this chapter I focus on two primary facets of DFW Dominicans. First, I analyze the immigrant narratives of several Association members, exploring the challenges they perceived as an immigrant coming to the U.S. This will enable me in later chapters to illustrate the commonalities this group shares with the Dominican baseball players and why they claim the players as their own. Second, I show how members of the Association and the organization as a whole utilize baseball as a means of expressing their ethnic identity.

### 3.1 Demographics of the Dominican Population

According to the 2000 U.S. Census 42.7 million Hispanics reside in the United States. Of those, approximately 1,281,000 claim Dominican heritage. In addition, around half of all Dominicans in the 2000 census claim New York City (NYC) as their home. It is because of NYC's high concentration of Dominicans that previous anthropological studies have been restricted to that and surrounding areas. NYC has been a point of entry for scores of immigrants including Dominicans. However, recent Dominican immigration trends show gradual movement out of the East Coast into states such as Florida, Georgia and Texas. The Dominican population in Texas as of 2000 was 4,296 (U.S. Census Bureau) with approximately 1,300 in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metropolitan area.

DFW Dominicans who participate in the Association typically reside in suburban areas and enjoy middle to upper-middle class lifestyle defined as such through ownership of a home valued at \$120,000 or more. All six of my informants were high school graduates and only one did not have a college degree. Their professions include finance, social work, factory supervisor, entrepreneur, city worker and professional musician. Also they were all children of immigrants who first resided in New York City. The informants' residence in Texas was the result of their own personal decisions to relocate.

It is important to recognize that my informants might not be representative of the general population of Dominican immigrants in DFW. The number of local Dominicans is small and dispersed over a wide area. DFW lacks a Dominican enclave such as those found on the East Coast; therefore, the Association was the best way for me to meet Dominicans. The Association does appear to attract individuals who share similar educational and financial backgrounds. Any homogeneity revealed within the Association should not be interpreted by the reader as a sweeping commentary on Dominican immigrants in the region.

### 3.2 The Association

My work with the Association began in May of 2007 when I attended a meeting. The members proved friendly and welcoming and not intimidated by my scribbling in my notebook. Several made comments to me about the note taking. One boisterous member walked by and said, "Dominicans are loud. You need to write that down!" I was introduced to the group when the meeting began and several people sitting nearby were kind enough to serve as my interpreter for the Spanish segments of the meeting. I was quickly invited to join the organization and was met with much applause when I paid my membership dues. The Association welcomes people of any ethnicity but most are Dominicans or spouses of Dominicans. The group's cohesiveness, however, is deeply rooted in the exchange of their immigrant narratives, stories of life growing up as a Dominican in the U.S.

The Association was founded in 1991 by three Dominican women in DFW. Alma, one of the founders, was in the Air Force and married an Air Force pilot. Her husband's job required frequent moves, both internationally and domestically. Raised in New York with a large extended family, she moved from New York to Spain, Florida, and Salt Lake City before settling down in Texas. Alma explained the challenges she faced as one of the few Dominicans in DFW:

Alma: It took a while to adjust...You miss your food, your culture. I used to go a lot to the Puerto Rican Association. I call them my brothers because we share the Caribbean culture.

MK: And you were a founding member of the Dominican Association here?

Alma: Yes.

MK: How did that come about?

Alma: I went to a meeting in a building where I saw the Dominican flag. It was very emotional. The building is where the consulate's office was. I met the consulate who introduced me to another Dominican person. It started with three ladies and before we knew it we had a group of people who were Dominican, married to Dominicans, or once lived there. We started little by little. It's been about 18 years since we started. Many people don't know we're here because we are all over the place [in DFW]. There's a lot of word of mouth. We have grown.

For Alma, a situation such as unexpectedly catching a glimpse of the Dominican flag evokes strong feelings of ethnic pride and identity. Much of Alma's life is intricately woven into her Dominican heritage. She expresses her culture by going to area elementary schools to teach children about the historical and artistic contributions of peoples in the Caribbean, more specifically the D.R. Alma says her goal is to utilize art, music and dance to "promote self-esteem and cultural pride."

Alma's means of expressing her identity as a Dominican is easily ascertained by reading the organization's literature and bylaws, documents she was instrumental in writing. The Association is self-described as "a non-profit, cultural organization dedicated to promote, educate, and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the Dominican Republic." The purpose is "to unite our native Dominican families, build fellowship, and cultural bridges in our community."

Although the Association may have been created as a forum to express Dominican identity through education and reinforcement of Dominican history, some members seek other platforms. Unlike, Alma, the former president and current vice president of the Association, Pedro, utilized baseball to express his "Dominican-ness."

Pedro: We had a co-ed baseball team one year. I organized the players and I even paid for the jerseys with my own money. I didn't care. We had great participation. People were really excited about coming together to play and cheering on other players. It was great. It's who we are. But some officers got mad at me because the team cost The Association a total of \$300. They want to hold onto the money instead of investing it in the group.

Pedro's statement illustrates his view of Dominican identity. "Investing" in the group to Pedro is coming together to play and support a Dominican game, baseball. Although Alma did recognize the importance of baseball to Dominican culture by saying "Yes, it's very big," it does not play a prominent role in her immigrant narrative. For Alma, the Association is an extension of her culture, another means to educate the DFW community and gain visibility for area Dominicans. For Pedro, expressing his cultural pride is best done through camaraderie and social interactions with other Dominicans through baseball games.



### 3.3 Reasons for Dominican Immigration

According to Pessar (1995), the wave of immigration from the D.R. into NYC began in the 1960s and 1970s and was comprised of unemployed or underemployed skilled workers from middle class backgrounds. The D.R. government's increased emphasis on education produced higher numbers of educated individuals who were unable to secure adequate employment in the country's depressed economy. Although many coming to NYC found themselves working menial jobs for low wages, it was still viewed as a better alternative to the poverty and unemployment on the island. As is the case for many immigrants, those in Pessar's study came to NYC in hopes of bettering their lives and those of their children.

My informants from the Association differed in their age of arrival in the U.S., from one year to 18 years. However, the motivation for migrating was always the same and was shared by those Pessar studied. The following are some of the common responses I received to the question, "Why did your parents come to the U.S.?"

"Ninety-nine percent of the people that come to the U.S. want a better future, better education. It's the same. They came here to have a better future and we had a lot of family in New York." -Alma

"Economics, better opportunity." -Rosa

"To give us a better life, more opportunity." -Luciana

"Their big thing – we were very poor. I remember being five and only having one pair of underwear I would use on Sunday and when I went to the doctor. They wanted us to be educated. It worked out. They have two teachers, a doctor and me." -Pedro

The parents of all these informants immigrated because the U.S. was viewed as a place with more economic opportunity, a country in which a brighter future could be secured for the entire family. My informants share a common thread with the Dominican baseball players in their motivation to migrate to the U.S. What differs between the two groups is the means by which they attempted to gain economic opportunities. For the DFW Dominicans it came through

education and employment in the professional sector but for the Dominican baseball players it comes through sports.

### 3.4 Transnational Lives: Staying Linked to the Dominican Republic

Transnationalism, defined as “The process by which immigrants build social fields that link the country of origin to the country of settlement” (Glick-Schiller, 1992), plays a prominent role in the lives of Dominican baseball players arriving in the U.S. as well as the Dominicans in DFW. Transnational behaviors were primarily economic in nature and were heavily emphasized through Association newsletters, emails, and the members themselves. One member, in an attempt to encourage donations, conveyed this message:

“We all have a migration story. Part of who we are as Dominicans is remembering that and giving back.” -Rosa

Rosa’s statement exhibits her thought that supporting relief projects to the D.R. is woven into the immigrant’s narrative. She assumes fellow members share their immigrant narratives and appeals to it as a motivating force to give more money to Dominican aid projects. As the previous section revealed, the DFW immigrants came to the U.S. searching for financial stability. The members of the Association who achieved that goal were then compelled to share their success with people in the D.R. The philanthropic ventures supported by the Association were both one-time assistance and long-term relief projects, including storm relief, fire-fighter assistance, school supplies and LEAP (Life Enhancement Association for People).

When Tropical Storm Noel came ashore on the island of Hispaniola on October 28, 2007 its torrential rains caused massive widespread flooding and landslides (CBS/AP). At least twenty people were reported dead and thousands left homeless. In response to the disaster, the Association sent requests to members via email requesting donations of items such as blankets and toiletries. Members were encouraged to box up items and drop them off at the home of the Association’s president, Miguel. Miguel, in turn, enlisted the help of a shipping company in Houston that agreed to deliver all the boxes to the D.R. at no charge.

In September of 2006, a company of firefighters from the D.R. attended the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters International Training Conference in Dallas. At that time the Dallas Hispanic Firefighters Association pledged to donate badly needed supplies to the Dominican firefighters. The seventy boxes of uniforms and firefighting equipment were still in Dallas awaiting transport to the D.R. as of November 2007. In a monthly newsletter, the Association stated the equipment was “greatly needed on the island” and explained they were “trying to coordinate the shipping of the donation as soon as possible.” The Association asked members to contribute money to pay the \$3,500 shipping cost.

In addition to contributing to sudden, incidental needs of Dominicans on the island; the Association also has several charities to which they have ongoing commitments of financial support. For the five years preceding my involvement with the Association, it had been sending supplies to a school in the D.R. In conjunction with the Dallas school system, the Education Committee annually sent crayons, paper, pencils and other materials to an elementary school in a low-income area of Santo Domingo. The supplies or funds to purchase supplies were collected from Association members.

The Association's main philanthropy is LEAP, a non-profit organization founded by a surgeon and comprised of medical personnel who travel to impoverished areas of the world providing medical services free of charge. The teams specialize in surgically correcting craniofacial anomalies such as cleft lips and cleft palates.

I was introduced to LEAP during the first Association meeting I attended in May of 2007. At the meeting was a young man, David, who was in the U.S. for follow-up medical treatment made possible by LEAP (and in turn, the Association). During the meeting, David and his mother were introduced and his story was shared with the group. As a young boy in the D.R., David had three of his four limbs severed in an accident. LEAP provided a number of surgical procedures and the Association offered their contributions and sponsored David and his mother when they

traveled to the U.S. for him to be fit with prosthetic limbs. David's literal and metaphoric journeys were chronicled in pictures that were shown to me at the meeting. During the meeting, David and his mother addressed the group, giving a tearful speech of appreciation. They thanked the Association for the financial contributions that made the surgeries and prosthetics possible as well as the warm welcome the group extended to them during their trips to the U.S.

The Association's emphasis on LEAP and other Dominican-related charities is reminiscent of Smith's (2005) description of hometown associations. Smith's study of Mexican immigrants in New York found transnational ties were maintained through hometown associations in which immigrants lend financial support for public works projects in their city of birth. While the main focus of philanthropy for the Association, LEAP, is not tied to a specific town or village, it is a hometown association in the sense it helps residents on the island from which the DFW Dominicans immigrants came.

The majority of my informants had few familial and economic ties to the D.R. outside the Association. In fact, several had not been back to their country of birth in more than a decade. When asked if they would ever go back to the D.R. to live permanently, all but Alma responded in the negative. Patricia was sent to the U.S. to care for her older brother when he migrated to attend an American university. After her brother finished his education and returned to the D.R., Patricia opted to stay and go to college herself.

MK: Do you think you will ever go back to the D.R. to live?

Patricia: I think I'm such a hybrid it's hard. There are so many things I want to do. Everything is a struggle [in the D.R.]. It takes time. Maybe I'm used to America. I go run errands and it takes a couple hours, not a couple days. I may go back when I'm old but I'm not craving it. I don't miss the country. I never did get homesick. The one thing I miss is the warmth of the people. There is beauty.

Although Patricia does not want to return to the D.R. to live, deeply felt emotions still tie her to the island and its people. This emotional link led her to create a children's music program sustaining transnational and emotional links to her place of birth.

Patricia and one of her friends, both professional musicians, raised money, collected instruments, and hired a teacher in the D.R. in the hopes of teaching poor children music. Patricia and her friend “went to different groups” looking to be matched to a community. The proposal to teach poor children music was initially rejected by those in positions of authority. Eventually, another friend of Patricia who works for a health organization introduced her to the children of sugarcane slums. These are the children of Haitian immigrants who labor in the sugarcane fields of the D.R. Patricia describes these children as the poorest of the poor, the children the people and the government of the D.R. ignore because they are black Haitians. Her program helped bring media attention to the plight of the Haitian/Dominican children.

Patricia: The article [a magazine article she had given me] that came out, people were surprised the government had never done anything and they have the means. It’s just two people doing it. My dream is to have music in all the poor barrios. Already these kids are setting goals and achieving them. It helps self-esteem to reach goals.

In the case of Patricia, her transnational activity has social and political undertones. While her organization connects her to immigrants in the country of her birth it also stands as her individual critique of the local government’s unwillingness (or inability) to care for the poor.

Patricia also maintains transnational ties to the D.R. through familial bonds. Her parents, brother and sister live in the D.R. and she keeps in contact through daily phone calls.

“I have a phone service that is about \$200 a month and I talk to my mom one time a day. I feel guilty because I’m not there sometimes when she calls. I’m so busy and if I don’t call her she asks why I haven’t called.” -Patricia

International phone calls and phone cards are the most basic way immigrants exhibit transnational links and will be revisited when examining the case of Dominican baseball players. Phone calls keep immigrants connected to their friends and families while enabling them to keep abreast of current news within the community. Moreover, the calls allow the immigrants’ families to share in their accomplishments in the U.S. and remind the immigrants of their culture and obligations to it.

Alma, unlike Patricia, participates in individual transnational activity, which is a blend of economics and cultural preservation. Among her various paid and volunteer jobs, Alma designs jewelry from her home. She and her husband travel back to the island an average of twice annually and stay about a month each time. While there she collects semi-precious stones used to create her jewelry designs. Alma also brings back artwork from various Dominican artists. The jewelry and art is then sold at local craft shows and out of Alma's home. Some of the art and jewelry is integrated into her work with school children.

As part of a group of the 1.5 generation of immigrants, my informants revealed transnational links to the D.R. primarily through the collective participation of fund-raising activities hosted by the Association. Why these two have individual transnational connections and the others do not may be explained by when they migrated. The two informants with separate and unique transnational connections each came to the U.S. later than the others. Alma's age of migration was thirteen years and Patricia was eighteen. Despite their differing opinions regarding returning to the island, their later age of migration allowed for more emotional attachment to their country of birth, possibly spurring the desire to make individual contributions to the D.R. The two Dominican women both strive to better the lives of the poor in the D.R., a goal I will later show is shared with Dominican baseball players.

### 3.5 Soy Dominicano – Expressing Dominican Identity

When asked, most of my informants said they viewed themselves as Dominicans. Luciana elaborated on the topic saying, "I am Dominican because I was born there. I consider my sister Dominican-American but I'm full Dominican. I don't have the culture but it's in my blood." When asked what it meant to be Dominican, informants utilized several nouns: food, music, language and, of course, baseball. These characteristics of Dominican identity were apparent in the activities the Association participated in and hosted during 2007. The activities include the *Tarde sociales*, the annual picnic, and the Sammy Sosa baseball game.

### Tarde sociales

The *Tarde sociales* are the monthly meetings, or “get-togethers” of the Association. Unlike the ethnic enclaves of NYC, the Dominican population in DFW is not heavily concentrated in one area; therefore, meetings do not take place at a centralized location. In an effort to try to accommodate everyone, the meeting place changes from month to month as members volunteer to host the *Tarde social* in their homes. The rationale behind a changing meeting place is it will allow most members easy access to the *Tarde social* at least some of the time. The central core of members typically attends each month and mixes with a variety of others. Meetings are usually scheduled for the first Sunday of each month from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. As mentioned previously, the times are mere suggestions. The meetings never begin on time and last far later than 5:00 PM.

When the president, Miguel, arrives at the meeting place he positions the Dominican flag in front of the house so it is easily visible from the street. While a symbolic expression of Dominican pride and identity, the flag is an important visual marker to help members more easily find the ever-changing meeting location. If the meeting has not begun upon a member’s arrival it is customary to greet each person there with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. I learned and accepted this practice quickly. Upon seeing me kiss each person in turn before one of the meetings, Alma exclaimed with excitement, “Oh, so Dominican!” Informants perceived themselves as very warm people. To be Dominican is to physically embrace friends and acquaintances; therefore, this practice is a small way of reinforcing Dominican identity.

The host or hostess of the *Tarde social* is responsible for preparing food. When the meeting adjourns, the members eat and socialize. The food varies but is a mixture of Dominican and American favorites such as rice and beans, salad, yucca, fried chicken and cake. The laughter and chatter in both English and Spanish is sometimes unintelligible over Dominican music (frequently merengue) blaring in the background. Videos of the D.R. are sometimes

watched as well. Alma shared a video she shot during a recent visit to the island. In it, local villagers danced and celebrated a local holiday. Another video, which seemed geared toward tourists was also viewed. Several of the members strongly urged me to watch the video and served as eager interpreters. The video was reminiscent of a sports highlight reel. Historical facts of the island were situated between panoramic views of beaches and the countryside. The narrator's booming voice explained the geography of the regions and contributions of the D.R. and its people. Members cheered enthusiastically as scenes of their towns of birth were shown. Javier said it was a way for me "to learn about my country."

*Tarde sociales* are a means of socializing and exchanging shared experiences of being Dominican in the U.S. Alma's husband called it her therapy, a way for her "to be with her people and be bathed in her culture." First-time visitors are always asked if they were born in the D.R. and if so, where. The conversation inevitably shifts as the visitor is asked, "Did you come here by way of New York?" In the vast majority of cases they have. The conversation then changes again to talk of the Heights, where they lived and what school they attended. They would laugh and jokingly say there are more Dominicans in New York than in the D.R. Talking about the Heights seems to elicit as much or more excitement than talk of the D.R.

Most of my informants were very young when they left the D.R.; therefore, memories of the Heights far exceed those of the island. They share a common culture from the island as well as a New York Dominican culture. Informants described life in the Heights as poverty-ridden and, at times, violent.

Rosa: I went into the Air Force so I was in New Mexico from 1985 to 1990 and then I started living the American Dream. I had to get out of New York first. The Air Force was a way out of NY. We came from poor people. I always say "Uncle Sam was the best uncle I ever had!" He took good care of me and I was lucky to be in there [the military] during peacetime.

Pedro: A lot of people I grew up with are dead or in jail. I got a lot of help from my parents and priest. I witnessed a kid getting killed when I was 14 years old and I knew I didn't want to stay there. As soon as I got married we came here [to Texas].



Miguel: I joined the Marines right out of high school. I joined because I was going in the wrong direction, to get away from bad influences. New York is a beautiful place but it attracts people to do things. Temptation is everywhere. I was taking drugs and in a gang. So I joined the Marines. When I came back most of my friends were in jail or dead.

Conversations overheard among members and visitors reflect a rather romanticized view of the D.R. compared to the Heights. The hardships of life in the Heights needed to be escaped. Life in the D.R. was and is different to them. Life in the D.R. is difficult but people are more relaxed. The people on the island are poor but they are happy.

### Picnic

The Association sponsors an annual picnic for members, their families and guests. Miguel said it was a huge event last year and he anticipated that 100 to 150 people would attend. Originally, the date for the picnic was set early in the summer in an effort to avoid the oppressive Texas summer heat. A suitable location could not be booked for the early summer so the date was set for the first weekend in August. A combination of the heat and inadequate notification of members probably contributed to the less-than-stellar turnout of about fifty people.

Much like the environment of the *Tarde sociales*, the picnic was a blend of Dominican and American culture. There was traditional Dominican fare of beans and rice and yucca as well as a whole pig that was roasted all day. There were also traditional American favorites such as hot dogs and hamburgers. While tending to the large grill Miguel yelled to me, "Hey Marylyn, we got turkey dogs just for you!" Actually, the turkey hot dogs were also a hit with the children of the members who did not have a palate for Dominican cuisine.

Alcohol was available for purchase and was also part of the fundraising raffle. Pedro donated several El Presidentes (a popular Dominican beer), and a bottle of Dominican rum. Raffle tickets were sold for fifty cents each for the beer and one dollar each for the rum. The proceeds from the raffle were to go into the general operation fund for the Association. Although the beverages were Dominican in origin, Pedro had brought them back from New York during a recent visit. The beer and rum are another example of the ties to both the island and the Heights.

Most of the day, participants gathered under the tent near the fan socializing, eating, and listening to music. Merengue and other Latin music played throughout the day. Rosa, head of the Activities Committee, expressed surprise and disappointment that people were not dancing. After much cajoling, Rosa got people onto the makeshift dance floor, but only after the heat subsided.

The annual picnic was not considered complete without a game of co-ed baseball. One of the lures of this particular location as a site for the annual picnic was the adjacent baseball diamond. Late in the afternoon the action shifted from the tent to the baseball field. Several men showed up with baseball uniforms and cleats, obviously serious about the friendly co-ed game. None of the players had ever played professionally but several had played in recreational leagues. The crowd in the tent thinned out significantly when the game began. Those who did not play watched and cheered on the participants. Although playing baseball at a picnic could be construed as a typical American activity, in this environment playing baseball was another way the group expressed their cultural identity.

The importance of baseball as part of Dominican cultural identity was also apparent in interviews and casual conversations and participation. The following are informants' responses to how important baseball is in Dominican culture.

It's their life. Everyone lives to go out and watch the players in Winter Ball. As soon as they're old enough they are making baseballs out of things like a mango pit. I've seen children with broomsticks for bats.

- Luciana

It's just huge. When I was growing up, that's all we had. They do have some basketball now. I remember being 5 or 6 and we would roll up paper or a rock for a ball. Over there because it's hot all year you can play all year. Since I have left, most teams (MLB) have academies and put kids in the academies and they have school. We had four teams there that represented certain regions of the country so it was a big deal when they played. It represented your region. Baseball is much bigger the past 15 years because players come here. Players there don't make much money. They do it because they love it. But the dream is to make it here.

- Pedro

Pedro's comments illustrate two important aspects of baseball in the D.R. As a whole the country shows pride and support for their countrymen who find success playing for MLB. In this way, Dominicans create a national identity tied to baseball and Dominican ethnicity. In addition, local identity is created and reinforced through the regional teams on the island. A number of my informants described the passionate fans cheering fervently for the players on their local teams. Members of the Association were even overheard playfully boasting the superiority of the regional team from their childhood homes. These regional teams have existed for decades, providing the island with a smaller, informal version of MLB. Unfortunately, an increasing number of the elite players are lost to MLB teams because regional teams simply cannot compete financially. The dream "to make it here" is lucrative.

While Luciana's and Pedro's narratives of baseball evoke images of poor children playing in the towns of the D.R., Rosa's story draws upon two of her identities. She is a Dominican who appreciates the impact the game has on her country of birth; however, she also recognizes and mentions a little of the dynamics of baseball to East Coast Dominicans.

I'm from New York and in New York there are two teams; you have to pick. I was a Yankee fan. I would watch the games on TV with my dad. I would sit on the floor doing my homework. This was before the days of the remote control. I was the human remote control and I would sit there on the floor and change the channels back and forth between the games for my dad. Baseball is huge, baseball is king.  
- Rosa

The best example of the interaction of baseball and Dominican cultural identity was found during participant observation at the Sammy Sosa celebration and baseball game. During the game members of the Association did not call upon an American identity. Their clothing and behavior exhibited a strong sense of Dominican culture and pride.

#### Sammy Sosa Baseball Game

On June 20, 2007, Sammy Sosa hit his 600th career home run. This feat was significant for two reasons. First, the "600 Club" as it is called, is an elite group of just six players (including

Sosa). Second and most importantly, of the five players - Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Barry Bonds are American and Sammy Sosa is Dominican. A Dominican Major Leaguer joining the ranks of American legends was a tremendous source of pride for Dominicans in the Association. As Sosa approached number 600 his progress was noted in casual conversations. Sosa, for many of my informants, was the quintessential philanthropist and Dominican role model. He established his own non-profit organization geared toward helping children in the D.R.

So many of those guys make it big here playing baseball and they go back home and give away a lot of their money. They really help out. Some of them build ball fields and give the kids equipment. They grew up poor. They remember who they are and where they came from. A-Rod's Dominican when it's convenient. He's got all that money and he doesn't always remember he's Dominican, doesn't mention it much. He's not one of us. - Miguel

As Miguel's statement illustrates generosity of the players is equated with Dominican identity. Members of the Association encourage their own community to donate generously and expect Big Leaguers with lucrative contracts to give accordingly. Players such as Alex Rodriguez (A-Rod) who are not perceived as lending enough financial support to needy Dominicans are criticized harshly. For many DFW Dominicans, ignoring the financial need of people on the island is equated with denying an individual's Dominican heritage.

To commemorate Sosa's attaining the home run milestone, his MLB team, the Texas Rangers, planned a special pre-game celebration. As president and vice president of the Association, Miguel and Pedro were asked by the Texas Rangers organization to participate in planning the pre-game celebration. As I was the "unofficial secretary" of the Association as well as a researcher the two invited to come along to the planning meeting.

I went with Miguel and Pedro to the Rangers' Ballpark in Arlington to meet with Traci Wilson, an events coordinator for the Rangers. When we arrived at Traci's office she came out, offered a quick greeting and escorted us to a nearby conference room where we all sat down to talk. The meeting consisted of Traci giving an update of the plans for the Sammy Sosa pre-game event. Miguel believed the purpose of the meeting was to help plan the event. The Rangers may

have been asking for input and participation from the local Dominican community but in reality the event had already been planned. From the Rangers perspective incorporating the Dominican community served two purposes. First, it reinforced an established relationship between the Association and the team. That relationship could be utilized to aid Dominican players in adjusting to the DFW area. Also, cultivating a relationship with the larger Dominican community was a means for the Rangers' to recruit the Latino fan base.

Booker T. Washington High School was scheduled to perform the Dominican national anthem because they had some experience singing the song. Traci discussed with Pedro the need for four people dressed in traditional clothing to carry out the Dominican Flag. Carrying out the flag was an important symbolic representation of Dominican ethnicity and pride and an exciting opportunity for Pedro, Miguel and the others chosen to participate. The game night presentation was set to begin at 7:00 on July 21st. July 21<sup>st</sup> was chosen because Sosa's jersey number is 21. The Rangers arranged a special ticket rate for the Association and planned to place them all in one section.

The presentation would begin with the American and Dominican flags being brought out onto the field and the singing of both national anthems. Miguel wanted the Association to prepare a special reception for their Dominican hero, but according to Traci, Sosa was holding a private reception at his home after the game. This was disappointing for the members of the Association who very much wanted to reach out to the man they revered and with whom they claimed a common ethnic background.

Representatives from all three of the D.R.'s political parties were scheduled to attend. During the meeting Miguel inquired if the president of the D.R. was coming and Traci initially balked at sharing that information. Eventually, she revealed somewhat indirectly that the President did want to come but due to the country's current labor strike he did not want to commit until the strike had ended. Miguel later revealed to me that the President of the D.R. is a close

personal friend of Sosa who kept a watch on Sosa's games as he neared the 600 mark. Miguel felt sure the President would attend if at all possible.

A special Sammy Sosa baseball card was given to all fans in attendance. Miguel asked if Sosa could autograph an extra card or something else for the Association to raffle for their charity (LEAP). In requesting this "donation" from Sosa, Miguel was once again showing ways Dominicans are expected to "give back" to fellow Dominicans. Although no signed Sosa memorabilia were ever donated to the Association, Traci was instrumental in helping get an autographed baseball from another player donated to the Association for a LEAP-related raffle. As a tribute to Sosa's feat the Rangers donated 600 baseball gloves to Sosa's charitable foundation, one for each of his home runs, thus reinforcing the intertwined relationships among transnationalism, philanthropy and the Dominican identity.

Prior to the pre-game festivities there was a reception to honor a distinguished guest brought into town for the occasion, Juan Marichal. Marichal, a former MLB pitcher, is the only Dominican (thus far) to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Several officers from the Association were invited and Miguel was kind enough to put me on the guest list. Meeting Marichal was a tremendous honor for Miguel and the other members. I was told several times that Marichal was the only Dominican in the Hall of Fame. As a baseball fan this was a fact that did not escape me. They claimed him as their own, a countryman. They shared with him a language as well as a transnational identity. Marichal himself has his feet in both countries. He revealed to me in a brief conversation that he owns a home in Miami and the D.R. and splits his time fairly equally between the two. Marichal represents two groups of interest in this thesis – Dominican migrants and Dominican baseball players. His lifestyle serves as an example of the existence of a transnational baseball immigrant.

For Miguel the pre-game event offered the Association exposure. His goal was to get the Association banner on television so Dominicans in the area would be aware of the organization.

He even attempted to get a cadre of members on the field to carry the Association banner during the pre-game festivities. This did not come to pass and neither did the four people from the Association scheduled to carry the Dominican flag onto the field. A reason for the change was not given but later it became apparent. Although the president of the D.R. was unable to attend the event, he sent a number of high-ranking government officials, including the Vice President, to honor Sosa. For security purposes, the Rangers organization had to restrict access to the field and the six dignitaries.

I heard from Miguel that individuals affiliated with the Rangers organization, not Dominicans, brought the American and Dominican flags onto the field. So the flag, a symbol of Dominican ethnic identity, was brought in by individuals unable to appreciate the country or people it represented. Miguel appeared unaffected by this fact. The number of flags brought by Dominican fans probably assuaged any disappointment Miguel might have experienced. Although only about thirty tickets were purchased for Association members and guests, many more Dominicans were present at the game. Several tickets purchased through the Association went to non-Dominican friends and co-workers of Miguel. Two young boys, sons of Miguel's friend, were recruited to carry the Association's large banner. It was interesting to witness two non-Dominican boys roving about the stadium toting a Dominican banner. It constituted an expression of Dominican identity in the hands of boys far removed from the organization and the meaning behind the banner.

Several members of the Association brought flags and banners. Many wore hats and T-shirts with the flag of the country or just the words "Dominican Republic." When the two teenagers sang the Dominican national anthem, all the Dominicans around me rose, removed their hats and sang the song aloud. When the U.S. national anthem was sung they remained standing but I did not see one person singing. Ethnicity for them is situational and contextual. Attending the game was a show of support to a Dominican man who attained superstar status

playing “America’s Pastime.” In this environment their identity was not American or New York Dominican, it was simply Dominican. The flags, the anthem, and the Association banner connected them to one another and to Sosa. It helped them claim ownership in his accomplishments. Sosa’s success as a Latino, more specifically a Dominican, embodied what so many had spoken of in interviews, attaining “The American Dream”-- success and financial stability, made possible for Sosa through baseball.

### 3.6 Conclusions

Members of the Association have a complex identity infused by characteristics of their country of birth as well as the city of primary migration. The Dominican immigrants in the DFW area differ from East Coast Dominicans (and minor league baseball players) in a variety of ways. My informants enjoy a higher socioeconomic status in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area. They do not benefit from ethnic enclaves such as those prevalent in NYC. Instead, they must seek out one another through social networking and increased visibility of the Association. Unlike some of the NYC Dominicans and Smith’s (2005) subjects, my informants are not politically active. In part this is due to a restriction written in the Association bylaws prohibiting “activities of a political nature” to be linked to the organization. It may also be due to a lack of urgency motivating the members. For many in NYC, political activism arose from a need to improve economic and social concerns. My informants could be classified as upper-middle class individuals who do not struggle as much for financial and political equality in DFW.

For local Dominicans, the Association is both a means to express their ethnic pride and identity as well as a way to maintain transnational lives. When they come together they share their language. Several expressed to me that it is not just Spanish they speak but “Dominican Spanish,” which is identified by the slang words they use. Ethnic pride and identity is also found at mealtime. Sharing of traditional Dominican food at *Tarde sociales* and parties becomes a miniature celebration of being Dominican. It also separates many members of the Association



from their “Americanized” children who refuse to eat Dominican cuisine. At parties where there is Dominican food invariably I heard merengue. Local Dominicans often spoke to me of merengue and bachata, calling it “their own” music.

The Association fosters ethnic pride and transnational links. Global news media enable them to stay informed about current events. Members who have regular contact with family back on the island disseminate information among the group. For example, during a *Tarde social*, one member shared stories of the new subway in Santo Domingo. The strongest transnational connection is conveyed through their charitable work with local schools and LEAP. By giving to these charities, members show that they remember not only the country of their birth but in most instances the meager conditions from which they escaped. Many of the members feel it is their duty to “give back” to the D.R.

The role baseball plays in the cultural identity of DFW Dominicans is threefold. First, it establishes a geographic tie to the island and legitimacy. The D.R. has a semi-professional league of four teams, each representing a separate region of the country. As a Dominican living on the island, one cheers for the team from his or her region. DFW Dominicans cheer for the teams associated with the regions from which they migrated. The ability to identify one’s regional teams gives a Dominican credibility and commonality among other Dominicans. Next, baseball helps the local Dominican population define themselves as Dominican New Yorkers. New York is an integral part of their identity because it was the location of primary immigration. New York City has two MLB teams, the Mets and the Yankees. It was not uncommon to hear a local Dominican asking others if they were Mets or Yankees fans. As a New York Dominican one has to be one or the other.

Finally, baseball defines the context of a Dominican immigrant living in America. All of my informants mentioned the opportunity living in America afforded them. Success has been possible because they came to the U.S. The same is true in baseball. For the most part,

Dominican baseball players and their Dominican fans define true baseball success as succeeding in the U.S. The Association members are very proud of the athletic accomplishments of their countrymen, as was apparent in the festivities of the Sammy Sosa game. They brought their Dominican flags, sang the Dominican national anthem, and cheered for their Dominican hero because he reached an historical baseball landmark in the U.S. The MLB players, just like the members of the Association, are Dominican immigrants who maintain transnational connections because they are strongly tied to their ethnic identity.

For the DFW Dominicans, baseball has been woven into their lives and identities as Dominican immigrants. For the group of talented baseball immigrants, the game does not merely have a role in their life; it actually symbolizes life. Baseball is for many young men and boys in the D.R. the only means of providing a financially secure future for themselves and extended family; therefore, baseball represents the opportunity to avoid a life of abject poverty.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG BASEBALL PLAYERS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

“Latino Major Leaguers have risen to stardom with their excellence, brilliance and brawn in practically every aspect of the game. Never before has the Latin player known such prominence. Let us celebrate the deep passion Latinos feel for a sport that moves freely across borders.”

*The New York Times*, February 22, 2006

The full page advertisement’s headline, “United by Baseball,” was boldly printed below a picture of eight baseball bats, each containing the name and corresponding flag of a country which consistently produces major league baseball players. The advertisement was for a traveling exhibit sponsored by the National Baseball Hall of Fame honoring the contributions of Latino baseball players. In making this statement MLB is not only acknowledging contributions of Latino baseball players but it is also recognizing baseball’s free movement across borders. In other words, MLB is embracing, even celebrating, the globalization of baseball.

As this chapter shows, the globalization of baseball is complex and multi-layered, involving countless actors within the U.S and abroad. The following three chapters examine globalization’s impact on Dominican baseball players via the lens of a global commodity chain (GCC). Utilizing the concept of a GCC, I address the following questions: How are Dominican baseball players recruited by MLB and how does that process differ from the recruiting of American players? How have the mechanisms for recruiting Dominican players changed over time, and why? What programs does MLB provide to address cultural issues faced by newly recruited baseball players? How is baseball representative of general trends in globalization?

The original GCC was intended to be a means of analyzing the distribution process of manufactured goods. According to Gereffi and Korzeniewicz (1994), segments or links in a

commodity chain can be visually represented by “nodes,” boxes that link the segments together to form a network. The stages of the commodity chain are sequential and include input acquisition, manufacturing, distribution, marketing and consumption. Figure 1 outlines the basic nodes of a GCC as it pertains to MLB and Dominican baseball players. The GCC in Figure 1 is divided into two regions, the D.R. and the U.S. This chapter explores those actors whose role takes place primarily in the D.R., while Chapter 5 will focus on American actors in the GCC. In an effort to better illustrate who comprises the nodes of the Dominican portion of the GCC and their function, I will enlist the help of “Joaquin,” a composite of players described to me by informants.

#### 4.1 GCC Phase 1: Input Acquisition and the Dominican Player

Joaquin is a twelve-year-old boy living in a small town in the D.R. He comes from a poor family and dreams of making it big as a baseball player, living a life similar to his hero, Major Leaguer David Ortiz. Like most Dominican boys his age, he plays baseball whenever the opportunity presents itself. He and his friends fashion baseballs from mango pits and bats from broomsticks, playing on makeshift baseball diamonds in dusty fields. Joaquin represents the first node in the GCC, input. Input acquisition refers to the raw materials or unfinished articles that must be gathered prior to producing a specific product. Joaquin has a talent to play baseball but he is self-taught. He is a raw material because he has not benefited from formal instruction to aid in the development of sound fundamental baseball skills. In order to further advance within the GCC, Joaquin and his “raw material” or skills will have to be refined.

#### 4.2 GCC Phase 2: The Manufacturing of a Commodity

##### *Buscones*

One day, Joaquin is approached by a man named “Ricardo” (another composite) who has been watching the young boy play ball. Ricardo, a *buscon*, represents the first actor in the manufacturing process of Dominican baseball talent. *Buscon* is defined as “one who is searching” (Guevara and Fidler, 2002). It is an appropriate word given the task of a *buscon* is to

find young local boys he believes have promise and nurture them athletically. The boys are usually between the ages of eleven and thirteen years when they enter into a relationship with the *buscon*. According to Guevara and Fidler (2002), in the past *buscones* chose to affiliate themselves with a single MLB team; however, the explosion of interest in Dominican talent prompted them to go out on their own, becoming independent contractors capable of dealing the young players to any team. As independent contractors *buscones* can shop around, offering up the players to the team willing to pay the most money. A *buscon* is self-employed and his practices are not monitored by MLB or any other regulating body. The *buscon* system has proven advantageous for MLB as it is impossible for the teams to employ enough scouts to evaluate all the talent on the island. *Buscones* can bring the young men to the attention of the scouts in exchange for a modest finder's fee which is much more economical than employing a full-time, year-round American scout for the D.R.

In addition, the existence of independent labor recruiters such as the *buscones* shifts some legal responsibility from MLB. MLB is in a position to deny responsibility in cases where *buscones* have exploited a young Dominican player. The story of Willy Aybar is one example of *buscon* exploitation (Fainaru, 2001). At age thirteen, Aybar was taken under the wing of *buscon*, Enrique Soto. Soto practiced with the boy up to six hours a day, gave him a balanced diet and supplements to aid in development of muscle mass. At age sixteen, Aybar signed a legal contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers for \$1.4 million, one of the largest signing bonuses ever penned in the D.R. Aybar and his parents, unfamiliar with how banks operated, asked that the check be sent to Soto. The first installment of the bonus, \$490,000, was indeed sent to Soto who, in turn, deposited it into a Dominican bank under his own name, giving the family less than ten thousand dollars.

Ricardo becomes a mentor to the young boy, teaching Joaquin the basics of baseball and ultimately preparing him for an eventual tryout with a MLB team. Like many *buscones*,

Ricardo supplies Joaquin with playing equipment and, if necessary, food. Joaquin is trained to throw and run but has little practical experience playing in games as there is not an equivalent to Little League in the D.R. As the *buscon*, Ricardo acts as an intermediary between the MLB teams and Joaquin. Ricardo provides Joaquin basic training in an effort to hone his baseball skills. All the efforts of Ricardo and Joaquin are done with a single goal in mind: to make Joaquin good enough to sign with a MLB team. In return for his services, Ricardo will receive a percentage of Joaquin's signing bonus when he pens a contract with a MLB team and enters their D.R. facility. This is as much as fifty percent of the signing bonus in addition to the finder's fee paid by the team. Once Joaquin signs a contract with a team and pays Ricardo, their relationship ends. The *buscon's* job in the manufacturing of a baseball player is complete.

The globalization of baseball and the increased recruiting of Dominican players by MLB teams were influenced by a number of factors, including: the deterioration of U.S. - Cuban relations, the implementation of free agency (Burgos, 2007), and MLB expansion teams. Prior to the U.S. embargo on Cuba in 1960, the island was the largest foreign talent pool for MLB. Without access to Cuban baseball players, professional organizations were forced to find alternatives. Puerto Rico and the D.R. were the next areas of interest until Puerto Rico was included in the amateur draft process. Since the 1980s most foreign-born talent heralded from the D.R. Baseball's popularity has been declining in the U.S. while simultaneously increasing in areas of Latin America. The manner in which baseball is engrained in the Dominican culture coupled with the young men's desire to escape extreme poverty has made the D.R. a logical choice from which MLB can obtain exports. Since Dominican players are not eligible for the amateur draft, players do not have legal representation and are not protected by the rules governing draftees. The signing bonus of the Dominican players is far less than that of players eligible for the amateur draft, making the Dominicans a better bargain for MLB. The money

saved in bonuses can then be reinvested into the development of additional players in the D.R., creating a cyclical process of labor recruitment that has been successful and profitable for MLB.

In 1976 the Major League Player's Association (players' union) won the right to free agency, meaning players would no longer be bound to a single team for an entire career unless they chose. Upon completing a contract with one team a player had the right to sign with another team of his choosing, frequently for more money. Free agency led to a dramatic increase in players' salaries. This resulted in many organizations looking to the Caribbean to obtain inexpensive young players.

The final factor contributing to MLB's globalization and need for foreign labor is expansion teams. MLB currently encompasses thirty Major League organizations and the various minor league affiliates of each, for an approximate total of 120 teams. Between 1968 and 1998 ten new Major League organizations were created. An increase in the number of teams requires more players. The need for more players to fill roster slots on new teams added to the increasing cost of maintaining a MLB organization and created a situation in which the cheap labor of Dominican young men was vital.

#### Scouts and the Academy

Several years later, when Joaquin is seventeen, Ricardo is approached by a scout employed by a MLB team. Scouts are commonly utilized by MLB teams both in the U.S. and abroad. MLB teams employ scouts and assign them to a specific geographical region where their job is to find the best talent prospects that region has to offer. The scouts may be former baseball players, coaches, or simply individuals very familiar with baseball and what is necessary to succeed at a Major League level. Most MLB teams have at least one scout searching for potential young talent in the D.R. One such scout approaches Ricardo inquiring if he currently has any talented players. Ricardo suggests the scout observe Joaquin. Watching the young boy play, the scout sees potential. He does not have the authority to sign Joaquin but reports

back to the head of scouting who comes to evaluate Joaquin personally. The head of scouting agrees that Joaquin is a good prospect and signs him to a contract with his team.

Once the contact with the team is signed, Joaquin is introduced to the next stage in the manufacturing process, the team academy. As a new recruit, Joaquin is sent to the team's Dominican sports complex, or academy, where he will have some schooling and continue to fine-tune his baseball skills.

All but one of the MLB teams currently operates an academy in the D.R. The academy is a team's private facility where young men, primarily Dominicans, are housed and trained in the mechanics of baseball. The facilities vary from team to team but usually include dormitory-style housing and at least one baseball field. The academies were established by teams for the purpose of player development. Young players with raw talent but little playing experience are taught baseball fundamentals while gaining weight and building muscle mass.

The proliferation of baseball academies in the D.R. was due largely to the visa restrictions. In 1974, the U.S. Labor Department began to restrict the number of visas given to MLB teams. Each organization was allowed twenty-six to twenty-eight work visas for both the major league and minor league affiliates. Prior to 1974 there were no restrictions on the number of visas that could be acquired. The new regulations meant the organizations had to distribute visas judiciously, reserving them for the players most likely to perform. Therefore, teams were forced to develop a different strategy for evaluating talent. This was the impetus for the academy system. The academies are the MLB team's prime means of recruiting Dominican baseball talent, young men who are as talented but frequently more cheaply acquired than their American counterparts (Guevara and Fidler, 2002; Breton and Villegas, 1993). The academies allow teams to develop and nurture talented players, giving them a screening process by which a decision is made as to who will be issued a precious work visa and play ball in the U.S.



The academies function as a factory in the GCC. It is here that the mass production of Dominican players begins. The raw material arrives in the form of the player. Players are housed, schooled and trained in baseball at the “factory” with the goal of being distributed in the U.S. to play in the minor leagues. The academy also represents the decentralization or shift of production from the core to the periphery. According to Klein (1991), prior to the 1970s there were no academies, just team scouts who scoured the country looking for athletic talent. Once found, the talent was shipped to the manufacturing facility in the core, the U.S. minor league system. The shift to the periphery (the D.R.) was the result of a need for cheap labor and, at least initially, flexibility of regulations. Little monitoring of those involved in recruiting Dominican men was in place three decades ago. At some academies, players were subjected to squalid living conditions, inadequate food and medical care (Guevara and Fidler, 2002) leading some to view the term “academy” as being synonymous with exploitation. The D.R.’s government responded to allegations of abuse and corruption in the recruiting practices in 1984 by passing Decree 3450, which regulated scouts and contracts and required some English classes at the academy (Klein, 1991). MLB lagged behind the country’s government with no regulatory office in the country to monitor teams’ practices until the late 1990s.

While Dominicans are playing organized baseball for the first time at the academies, American players have a head start, playing in some type of league from the time they are very young. American players typically benefit from tee-ball and Little League teams from ages as young as four years. Extracurricular sports in junior high and high school allow young American boys access to good equipment, fields and instruction. This continues at the college level as U.S. baseball players undergo intense baseball training and battle rival schools in college leagues such as the NCAA. Americans benefit from better overall nutrition, resulting in a weight advantage over Dominicans of similar age. Americans also have the advantage of exercise facilities at high school and colleges, many of which boast state-of-the art equipment. Typically,

American players enter into the MLB draft after college and can be signed to a minor league contract with a team.

#### Thomas the Scout: In his own words

As the manager of international scouting for the “Bulldogs,” Thomas said, “I work the day-to-day there.” By “there” he was referring to the Bulldogs’ academy in the D.R. When speaking of the facility in the D.R., Thomas opted to use the term “complex” as opposed to “academy.” This is an interesting substitution, especially since he is the only person I spoke with associated with the Bulldogs or MLB who chose to do so. I can only guess his choice is rooted in the somewhat negative context with which the word “academy” has been associated in the past.

The road to the academy is one that begins very early for a young Dominican man.

Thomas explains where his job as scout fits into the GCC:

“We have scouts there (the in the D.R.). One covers the east and one covers the west. They go to the little towns and usually one guy there runs a program. He finds the players for himself. He finds young kids – 11, 12, 13. He takes a couple kids he thinks has potential. He signs a contract with them and trains them, feeds them. If you (a player) sign a contract with a team he gets a percentage. The (Bulldogs’) scouts go to this guy and ask for potential players. Our scout will report back to the head of scouting. You can’t sign a player until July 2<sup>nd</sup> and the player has to be 16 years old. He must be 16 between July 2<sup>nd</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup> or wait until the next year.”

Thomas is describing the very circumstances experienced by the composite, Joaquin. “The guy” to whom Thomas refers is the buscon. Thomas’ words show the link between two actors in the GCC, the buscon and the scout. As a manager of international scouting Thomas is the individual to whom the other scouts report their findings of potential players. Thomas can be viewed as a transitional actor in the GCC whose function is to move players from the initial means of manufacturing, the buscon, to the second means of manufacturing, the academy.

The current Bulldogs’ complex was built just a few years ago. Pictures Thomas was kind enough to email me show the new complex consists of a long two-story building painted grey with red and blue trim. The team’s logo is prominently displayed on each end of the building. The

exterior of the building is reminiscent of a motel but the inside, according to Thomas, resembles a college dormitory. The eight suites each contain four bunk beds so as many as 64 players can be housed at the academy at any given time. There are also four coaches' suites, a training room, a classroom and cafeteria that serves three meals a day. Most importantly, on the complex grounds there are two manicured baseball fields surrounded by lush tropical landscaping. This is where the players spend much of their time during practice workouts and structured games. The players live at the complex full-time, playing baseball and attending some classes.

Building this updated facility in the D.R. shows the Bulldogs' commitment to the long-term manufacturing of Dominican baseball talent. The new facility is located in a different town and is a larger piece of real estate. The new complex, according to Thomas, is "much nicer" and has an extra baseball field. The Bulldogs are not alone in the practice of building complexes in the D.R., as Thomas revealed:

"Twenty-nine teams have academies in the Dominican (D.R.). Milwaukee doesn't. I don't know why not. Maybe they don't think it's worth the investment. It takes time to develop the players."

The term "develop the players" has several layers of meaning. From the baseball perspective it means gaining skills in fielding, throwing, and hitting. From the perspective of the GCC, however, it means fine-tuning the commodity and readying it for the consumer. The players, as the commodity, live at the Bulldogs' academy full-time, playing baseball and attending English class one hour each day. Unlike an inanimate commodity, the players begin the process of acculturation while at the academy. The acculturation process will continue for those players brought to the U.S. to play in the minor leagues. It is imperative players that gain functional literacy in English to communicate with American players, coaches, and fans. Learning English and the American way of doing things results in a product (the players) more palatable to the consumer (the general public). All teams have at least basic English classes available to the academy recruits, but the quality and depth of the curriculum differs, at times resembling more

formal education. As Thomas stated, “some teams send the kids to school.” Since the amount of time to develop an individual’s skills varies, a player will attend the academy from one to three years, receiving English classes for the duration. After three years at the Bulldogs’ academy a player will be cut if progress is not substantial. It is possible for a player to sign with another team but that typically does not happen.

The Bulldogs invested not only in a new facility for the Dominican recruits but also invested in a staff of coaches reflective of player demographics. While most of the players at the academy are Dominican-born, there are a few from other areas of the Caribbean. The coaches are comprised of “five Dominicans, one Puerto Rican, one Venezuelan, and one American.” All of them are bilingual. Since the coaches are bilingual they offer baseball instruction unfettered by a language barrier, which again improves the process of manufacturing baseball talent.

The manufacturing process of Dominican baseball players begins decidedly late in life compared to their American counterparts.

“The U.S. players are strong. They have benefited from coaching. In Little League the parents pay for the boys to have instruction and it helps make them good. In the Dominican they don’t have the formal instruction from a young age. They are good because they play the game a lot as kids.”

This narration by Thomas illustrates the disparity of resources available to American and Dominican players. American children have organized instruction at ages as young as five years old. Young American boys are nurtured gradually and their progress is tracked over a span of years. MLB scouts frequently have knowledge of talented American high school players. Dominican players, on the other hand, lack formalized training and are not tracked by MLB scouts for long periods of time.

“Compared to players from the U.S. they (Dominican players) are so young and far away. Here, you draft a guy that’s played in college. In the Dominican Republic there’s a lot of projections. We watch and see the talent and dream.”

Thomas and others within MLB dream about the talent because it is difficult to predict how much a Dominican player might improve with proper instruction. For that reason Thomas

stated it is more of a financial risk for the teams to scout Dominican players than American players. This is difficult to believe given the fact most Dominican players are still signed for a fraction of their American counterparts. The manufacturing of Dominican baseball players has produced far too many minor and major league baseball players to be considered a risky venture.

#### Independent Agents

Another actor in the manufacturing of a Dominican player is the agent. Agents are typically employees of a U.S. based corporation or company. The company is composed of a number of agents whose job is to represent the professional interests of an athlete. Baseball agents, such as the informant in the following section, are transnational labor recruits, employed by a company headquartered in the United States but constantly moving across international borders to perform various tasks. Some of the tasks are unique to the island while others occur in the U.S.

Since the inception of free agency, the baseball agent has played an important, albeit sometime contentious role in the player-team relationship. Agents provide legal representation and negotiation power, trying to obtain the best contract for the player. In exchange for services the agents are compensated. MLB's intense interest in procuring Dominican talents has been seen as a market opportunity for American agents (Guevara and Fidler, 2002). Since agents receive a portion of contracts negotiated for players, there is potential for great personal profit, especially given the large number of Dominican men striving to play baseball.

#### Luciana: An American Agent

"Luciana" has worked for the same sport agency company for about nine years. At the time I met her and conducted the first interview she represented the interests of eight individuals or "clients," all of who were baseball players. Although she handled football players as well for several years, she now represents only baseball players, in both the minor and major leagues. Several of her clients played for the Bulldogs and their AAA affiliate. Luciana is a unique agent

not only because she is a woman working in a male-dominated profession but also because of her ethnic background. Luciana, like many of the young men she represented, was born in the D.R. Unlike those young men, she came to the U.S. at the age of three years old. Like most of my informants of the 1.5 generation she speaks Spanish fluently, for which she credits her father's insistence:

"My dad bought a chalkboard and wrote in Spanish, 'In this house we do not speak English.' If we were caught speaking English at home we had to say that phrase in Spanish. I am grateful now because...it's also helped me in my job. It has opened doors."

Her ethnicity has enabled her to communicate very effectively with her Dominican clients. Not only does she share a common language with the young Dominican men but she possesses an understanding of their culture, the very culture in which she was raised. Luciana has an advantage over other agents because she was born in the D.R. and will be viewed by many natives as a Dominican, not an outsider. Luciana is a transnational in her business and personal life, giving her some additional credibility with the Dominican athletes she represents. She straddles both worlds – that from which the young Dominicans want to escape and that to which they want to escape.

Luciana straddles the line between Dominican and American culture as well as the gender line. The D.R. is a patriarchal society (Pessar, 1995; Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991). Men are the breadwinners and live a "life on the street," (Pessar, 1995) meaning they socialize with other males outdoors or in local bars. Women, on the other hand, live "life in the home," and tend to domestic chores and childrearing. Since males play baseball and are the primary breadwinners, Dominican women play only a supportive role in the life of the baseball immigrant. Whether he is playing at the academy or in the U.S., the baseball immigrant retains his status as breadwinner within the male-dominated Dominican culture by sending money home to his family. Luciana, who claims a Dominican identity, is quite different from the traditional female in the D.R. because she does not live a "life in the home." Luciana does not restrict herself to domestic

duties; rather she has a full-time job in a male-dominated industry. Her role in the life of the baseball immigrant is not merely supportive because she is seeking the men who will be incorporated into the baseball GCC.

As an agent and transnational labor recruiter Luciana's first task in the D.R. is to find players. An agent working in the D.R. usually has contacts within the country to assist with this task. According to Luciana:

"I have two field guys that do the leg work. They find the players and watch them. Then I'll meet them in the D.R. or here (wherever the player is playing at that time). I sign them after looking at their numbers and making sure they have good numbers."

Based on information received from other informants, these contacts were most likely *buscones*.

After Luciana travels to the D.R. to evaluate the player's skills she may offer him a contract. Once signed, the contract between an agent and young Dominican player is for one year and renewable if both parties can agree to terms. Players are free to change agents at their discretion; however, if a player changes agents prior to the expiration of the contract, he is still legally bound to pay the original agent the fee as outlined in the original contract. As Luciana explained:

"It's just a year. It's on a yearly basis...They (the players) are not making a lot of money so they sign a contract saying I will provide equipment."

MK: So your company is responsible for providing equipment?

Luciana: [Very firm response] It's not our responsibility but we do it as a favor. It's not required. Some guys get stuff from the company but other companies say it's not worth the investment.

This response offered by Luciana is a bit paradoxical. On one hand she says the company is providing baseball equipment to the young players as "a favor," and in the next sentence Luciana talks about some companies not wanting to invest in this type of activity. Giving the young players quality baseball gloves, bats, and shoes, is providing the proper tools for the players and may help refine their skills making them more marketable to MLB teams. The

equipment Luciana's company gives a client is given in the hopes of moving the player through the manufacturing process. The gesture is not altruistic: not a true "favor," but a business decision.

Once the contract is penned and the agent/player relationship begins, Luciana becomes the intermediary between the player and the team. Now the third phase of her work in the D.R. begins. She must present her new client to MLB teams. If the player has not been through the academy system, the agent will approach teams in an effort to pique their interest.

MK: So, do you market their talents to the MLB teams?

Luciana: Yes. If you have a guy (a player) who may have talent...You showcase them, that's what we call it, and have them try out for the teams.

By presenting players to various teams for evaluation Luciana is acting as a labor broker or contractor. Luciana goes on to explain that showcasing a client is "a process." A single scout from a team will do a preliminary evaluation of the young man's playing skills. If that scout is impressed he will report back to his supervisor who will send additional scouts to evaluate the player. As a result, a team's decision to sign a player goes through multiple channels and must be agreed upon by several scouts.

Once a team shows interest in one of Luciana's clients she embarks on the next aspect of her job, contract negotiations. Signing a contract with an MLB team is essentially a payday for a player and agents such as Luciana. Like the *buscones*, the agent receives a portion of the player's bonus when a contract is signed with a MLB team; therefore, it is also in the best interest of an agent to negotiate the most lucrative deal possible. Unlike the *buscones*, agents do not train the players and they do not receive finder's fees from the MLB team. Laws prohibit the exchange of money from a team to an agent negotiating a player's new contract. The agent should have the best interest of the player, not themselves, in mind. Payments distributed to *buscones* are legal because the *buscones* merely present a player as opposed to trying to represent his financial interests.



The final aspect of her job in the D.R. is not centered on the players per se, but on their families. Each year one of Luciana's trips to the D.R. focuses on what she termed "client maintenance:"

"We (agents) go there when they (clients) are not playing and are relaxed. I get to know them on a personal level. It helps keep them loyal. This is a backstabbing job. The more you get to know them and their families, the more loyal they are...We discuss any concerns they have about the new season. It's a summary of what's happened and what to expect for the next year. It's just a follow-up visit to make sure all is good."

The activities involved in client maintenance reveals ways Luciana and other agents attempt to cultivate a patron-client relationship, actions typical of labor contractors.

In addition, the above statement illustrates two points regarding the Dominican baseball player and the GCC. First, it reinforces that these players are commodities. The backstabbing Luciana referred to is the measures some agents invoke to persuade players to move from one agent to another. If the players did not possess economic value, agents would not try to "steal" clients from one another and Luciana would not employ techniques to keep clients loyal and in her charge. This statement also illustrates one way in which the GCC paradigm has to be modified to incorporate the Dominican baseball player. Players do have some human agency; therefore, they can choose to sign with one agent over another or leave their current agent and sign with someone different. The athletes deemed the most talented prospects will also have a choice of which team to join.

#### 4.3 Conclusions

The journey traveled by a young man from the D.R. to a minor league team in the U.S. differs greatly from that of American-born players. While American and even Japanese players participate in the MLB draft prior to joining the minor league system, Dominicans do not. They must first work through the ranks of a MLB team's Dominican academy. Decades ago the initial lure of Dominican baseball players was their raw talent and willingness to sign a contract for very little money. The cheap labor of Dominican players compared to the cost of Americans gave rise

to accusations of the “boatload mentality” (Breton and Villegas, 1999) and the exploitation mentioned in Chapter 2. Although a rising number of prospects receive tens of thousands or even a million dollars, many young men are still signed for only a thousand dollars and half of that is claimed by the buscon. This need for cheap labor has given rise to the GCC that characterizes MLB and Dominican baseball players.

The workings of the GCC are present and active even after the player leaves the D.R. and comes to the U.S. to play baseball. As I will argue in the next chapter, the minor league system functions as the distribution and marketing components of the GCC. Many actors aid in acculturating the Dominican baseball player, readying him for exposure and distribution to baseball fans. It is after the player has successfully undergone these processes that MLB utilizes him as a tool to increase baseball consumption by the Latino community.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DOMINICAN BASEBALL PLAYER AND THE GLOBAL COMMODITY CHAIN IN AMERICA

During a press conference in the spring of 2008, Atlanta Braves pitcher, John Smoltz, announced he would have to undergo shoulder surgery that would end his season, and perhaps his career. To the average person this would seem a trivial event hardly noteworthy of news coverage. To me it was sad. Smoltz had been a fixture in my household, a topic of conversation for almost two decades. As a fan of baseball and a fan of Smoltz in particular, it was hard for me to imagine a baseball season that did not include him. Smoltz's looming retirement caused me to reflect upon the constantly changing landscapes of professional baseball. Certain changes in baseball are expected and understood – older players retire and a new generation fills their places on the team rosters. However, other changes have emerged that are not anticipated. For example, the shifting recruiting practices that emphasize Dominican men were not only unforeseen but also not easily understood. This chapter explores three components of the GCC that play out in the United States: distribution, marketing and consumption.

#### 5.1 Distribution and Marketing

In Gereffi's original model of the GCC, distribution and marketing are two separate links. The GCC for Dominican minor league baseball players differ from Gereffi's in that there is heavy overlap between the distribution and marketing sectors. In addition, since the players are human beings, the "distribution" process for them is obviously different from inanimate products such as shoes or clothing. Once again Joaquin's journey is useful in illustrating the points.

Two seasons at the academy have passed and Joaquin is progressing well. Progress at the academy means he has developed increased arm strength, enabling him to field and throw

the baseball more accurately, and he is able to hit the ball more consistently when at bat. Joaquin's improvement prompts the Bulldogs' decision to promote him out of the Dominican facility, thus initiating the distribution and marketing of Joaquin as a baseball player in the MLB system. The distribution of young Dominican players entails moving them from the Dominican academy to play in the U.S. Young baseball players typically do not go directly into the major leagues. This is true of Dominican players as well as their American counterparts. Young players lacking experience begin their major league careers in the minor leagues. Joaquin, for example, signed with the Bulldogs, but when he arrives in the U.S. he will be sent to a minor league affiliate of the Bulldogs, also known as a farm team. The minor leagues are designed to further advance the skills of young players and prepare them for playing for the major league team.

The U.S. minor league system is comprised of many levels. Players usually begin at the Rookie Ball level, which is the lowest rung within the minor league system. From Rookie Ball a player can progress to the A Ball affiliate, the AA affiliate, the AAA affiliate, and finally, *Las Ligas Grandes*, the Major League team itself. Each level within the minor leagues is actually a league in itself, a miniature version of the major league system most fans recognize. All the major league teams (i.e. Yankees, Red Sox, etc.) have affiliate teams at each of the various minor league levels. All the teams at each minor league level play organized games against teams within their level. For example, the Rookie Ball teams play only other Rookie Ball teams, A Ball teams play only A Ball teams. As a player's skills improve, his team will decide if he should move up the ranks of the minor league system and promote him to a higher level. Each time a player is promoted to a higher level he leaves his current team to join the team associated with that level. The minor league affiliates for a particular team are spread throughout the U.S.; therefore, a player could feasibly play in three or more different states while still playing for a single MLB organization.

In terms of the GCC the distribution of the Dominican baseball player begins with his transfer across geographic regions. Joaquin was part of the manufacturing process of the Dominican-based academy. When the Bulldogs opted to promote him to the minor league system the team secured a visa for Joaquin and sent him to Rookie Ball in Florida. If Joaquin proves to be a valuable baseball talent he could be moved from Florida to Iowa, Kansas and Texas.

The dispersal and distribution of Dominican baseball players is contingent upon a crucial legal document, a visa. As I began my research the visa issued to Dominicans (and other foreign nationals) signed to play baseball in the U.S. minor leagues (Young 2005) was called the H-B. According to the U.S. Department of Labor:

“The H-2B nonimmigrant program permits employers to hire foreign workers to come to the U.S. and perform temporary nonagricultural work, which may be one-time, seasonal, peak load or intermittent.” (<http://workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/foreign/h-2b.asp>)

This type of visa allows an individual to enter the country for temporary work, bring their dependants, and travel freely within the U.S. borders. The visa holder is not permitted to apply for the visa directly; this is the responsibility of the employer. Moreover, U.S. law allowed each Major League team twenty-six H-2B visas (Breton 1997), meaning about 700 players from all of Latin America were brought to the U.S., leaving literally thousands of others languishing at home.

When the employer is MLB and the employee is a poor, uneducated Dominican immigrant who speaks little or no English, these laws inadvertently established a power imbalance. The imbalance of power sometimes leads to the manipulation and exploitation of Latino players (Guevara & Fidler 2002) as they continue to work, wait and hope for a visa that frequently never come. Teams have been accused of repeatedly promising players visas to the U.S. knowing that they would not be chosen to go. This was done so MLB teams could maintain a grip on the inexpensive labor of the Dominican players. As long as there is the hope of a visa the men will play.

As an H-2B visa holder, a baseball immigrant was permitted to change jobs only if he could provide proof of another job offer. What that meant for a Dominican baseball player was he was not free to change employers. A release from a team resulted in an immediate trip back to the D.R. He was not able to solicit another team for a contract. He might have been able to sign with another team, but only after he returned home and started the process over again. In addition, a player could not find a job in some other industry and remain in the U.S. The only legal job he was entitled to was playing baseball. Should the Dominican player have been fortunate enough to be promoted to a Major League team, his visa would be a P-1 rather than the H-2B. The P-1 visa is valid for five years and can be extended one time for an additional five years. The H-2B visa, since it is for temporary, seasonal help, is valid for only one year. The very temporary nature of the H-2B immigrant visa seemed to represent how MLB regarded the Dominican players – temporary, transient, and disposable.

According to the Commissioner's Office, as of 2007 the visa for minor league players was no longer the H-2B:

"The visas have recently changed. It used to be the H2B visa, which is the same as people who work on farms. ..Now we use the same visa as the major leaguers. There used to be a limit per club but it changed last year. Now it is a P visa and we have no limits. The only limit is what we impose on ourselves, however many players we can accommodate." - Daniel

Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League, which also relies heavily on a minor league system to develop talent, joined ranks to lobby Congress and get the visa status of the minor league players changed.

As Daniel mentions, while the visa situation for Dominican baseball players has improved and the numbers coming to the U.S. have increased, there are limitations. There are still far more young men playing at Dominican academies than there are available slots on minor league

rosters. The few players fortunate enough to come to the U.S. will quickly become acquainted with the next actor in the commodity chain, to whom I refer as the Major League (ML) educator.

#### The ML Educator

An ML educator is a term I use to describe individuals employed by a team for the purpose of educating and acculturating the players. The education players receive ranges from the academic to the cultural and experiential. The amount of education is not regulated by MLB and therefore varies from team to team. Education of the players begins at the academy level. It may include only rudimentary English skills or may be as elaborate as organized schooling. All teams with a Dominican academy offer basic English. This is deemed necessary to prepare the young players for the possibility of coming to the U.S. to play in the minor leagues. Teams feel players advancing to the level of the U.S. minor leagues should be capable of conversing with teammates using simple baseball terminology. Some teams set a goal of preparing the players for interaction not only with teammates, but any Americans they might encounter. In doing this, the ML Educator aids in the marketing of the players. A Dominican player capable of conversing adequately in English will “fit in” better with his American teammates. He will also be able to interact better with the fans, those who are on the consumption end of the GCC. Teams with more in-depth educational programs have players in class for approximately two hours each day. These classes teach baseball terminology, spoken English and occasionally written English as well. Other teams have programs that offer players the opportunity to earn high school diplomas while living at the academy. Teams with these more in-depth programs at the academy also continue the education when the players arrive. ML educators in the U.S. minor leagues may continue curriculum at a more advanced level, offering leadership and critical thinking classes.

#### Jessie: An ML Educator

As both an international scout covering Mexico and the Manager of Cultural Enhancement, Jessie is a man who wears several hats for the Bulldogs. He is based out of the

U.S., working primarily with the Latin American players coming from the Dominican academy. When speaking of his job he explains, "When an international player comes here (to the U.S.) they play Rookie Ball. I help them. I teach them English and give a support system in the U.S."

Jessie himself is an immigrant. Born in Guatemala, his parents migrated to the U.S. when Jessie was two years old. Like most of my Dominican informants, Jessie spoke only Spanish at home. Jessie possesses a unique perspective that proves a valuable asset for his job. As a member of the 1.5 generation of immigrants he understands aspects of the language and Latino culture from which the young baseball players matriculate. Similar to many in the 1.5 generation he also understands American culture very well and the potential challenges faced by Latino men. Immigrant communities frequently have individuals, trailblazers who come to the U.S. and offer assistance to those who follow. In the immigrant baseball community, Jessie is that contact person, the bridge between life in the D.R. and the U.S.

Jessie attended college and after graduation interned with a MLB team. While working for that team as a scout Jessie met Kyle, who was eventually hired by the Bulldogs as Head of International Scouting. Kyle helped Jessie secure his current position with the Bulldogs. When asked why he thought the Bulldogs considered the creation of this position important, Jessie responded:

"Kyle oversees the signings of all these players and I think he saw that we weren't giving Latin players the opportunity to succeed."

The early Latin American men who came to the U.S. to play baseball were not given the same opportunity to succeed. These baseball pioneers spoke little or no English and suffered the effects of culture shock and discrimination (White 2001). The creation of positions such as Jessie's is an attempt by teams to offer a better experience to the future Latin American recruits. The motivation is not however, entirely altruistic. Success for the Latin American baseball players spells financial success for MLB.



In an effort to help the players succeed Jessie performs two tasks; he oversees the English program and aids in the players' acculturation to the U.S. First, Jessie is the director of the Bulldogs' English program both in the D.R. and the U.S. He travels to the D.R. frequently, at least three times annually. The Dominican complex opens in January so Jessie goes soon after to "see how the kids are." He goes to the Dominican complex to check the both the progress of the players' baseball skills and the status of the English program.

Jessie did not set up the English program entirely on his own. There "was something in place" prior to his arrival but he was instrumental in revamping and improving the system. The educational program in the D.R. was, as Jessie put it, "outsourced" to an English institute there in the country. The person in charge of instruction at the institute tests all the players entering the academy and breaks them into various educational levels. The lower levels are bused to the institute Monday through Friday for two hours of English classes each day. The higher levels stay at the complex for instruction.

In March of each year, about forty players from the Bulldogs' Dominican academy are moved to the Rookie Ball affiliate in the U.S. Jessie continues the English education for most, dividing them into groups to form small classes. He teaches the two classes for one hour a day, Monday through Friday. The classes continue in this fashion for one month. After a month the Bulldogs will make their rosters and some players are sent to minor league affiliates in other areas. The players remaining at the Rookie Ball level will number about twenty. They will continue with classes until June when a few more, usually about six, are lost to the other minor league affiliates. Jessie will teach the final fourteen or so until the end of the season in October. The goal is for them to communicate orally. Jessie does not worry about the writing skills. He says "Once they leave here (Rookie Ball) they have to have learned and understand English because where they go to play ball next, people (in that city) may not know Spanish." Just as

Jessie teaches the players at Rookie Ball, he has a teaching counterpart at the next level of the minor league system, called short A season.

There is no consistency of English education among the MLB teams because there are no regulations dictating minimum requirements for educating the players. Jessie mentioned a book he uses in his classes that “a guy in Philly...prints and distributes...and I think MLB helps him by having it printed and distributed to the teams. Some teams use it but it’s available to all.” The book he referred to is an English manual compiled by Sal Artiaga. It contains vocabulary words for baseball and other basic day-to-day English words.

In addition to being their teacher, Jessie is a mentor to the young Latin American players who are, almost without exception, away from their family, friends and culture for the first time.

“I do everything with them. I talk baseball with them. I have three or four guys at my house for dinner each week. I take them to the mall, help them open bank accounts, teach them how to handle money. I took them to that exhibit “Body Works.” We were really lucky to be close to where the Diamondbacks play so I took some of the kids to the Diamondbacks playoff game. These kids play baseball but have never set foot in a major league park. I do things with them that we take for granted. I feel like if I wasn’t here they would be stuck in their hotel room watching TV. These American kids have cars and can go places. They have parents that can send them money. It’s the other way with the Dominican kids. They are sending their money back to their parents...we are building relationships.”

The players do not receive formal education in finances but Jessie tries to counsel and encourage fiscal responsibility. When they first come over he is responsible for getting each player a social security number. Then, he helps them open a checking account and set up direct deposit. The Bulldogs have an agreement with a local bank for the players to get free checking. Jessie talks to them about money one or two times and then he listens to conversations among the players to identify problems. If one player mismanages his money, other players will talk about it. Jessie then steps in and addresses the problem with the individual player.

Some of the players send every dollar they can back to their families in the D.R. At Rookie Ball, the Bulldogs provide two meals a day and the players must provide the third meal

themselves. Some of the players omit the third meal so they have more money to send home. On the other hand, some players spend all they make. Jessie feels some players are enticed by the consumerism of American culture, saying, "A lot of these kids have never been to the U.S. and they see all these things to buy. Sometimes I won't take them to the mall if I know they are spending all their money." Jessie also notes some spend as much as fifty percent of their income on calling cards, talking to their families every day. Making frequent calls to parents back home in the D.R. was also mentioned by one of the DFW Dominicans. Patricia spends about \$200 monthly to maintain a long distance plan that allows her to speak to her family as much as she chooses. The frequent calls to the D.R. made by players and other Dominican immigrants such as Patricia, inform them of family news and current events within their homeland, thus maintaining transnational connections. Players who received higher signing bonuses often invest in computers and spend hours each night chatting online with friends and family back home. While Jessie recognizes homesickness plays a role in the large number of hours spent connecting with people back home, he also feels culture plays a part. "I think in Latin culture, the family is important."

Jessie also feels cultural differences are apparent in the players' dealings with the opposite sex.

"The most challenging part of my job is to help maturity. I help them with their English too. Their social skills are not good. They are not used to speaking to authority figures or women. I think it's different in the DR. There's no real structure. Even when you are driving along on the street you realize no one really adheres to the law. The age we deal with are not used to having to be places at certain times. With women they tend to treat them with less respect than here in the U.S. It's nothing bad, just a different culture. I think it tends to happen with a lot of Latino cultures; they have that kind of macho view. To them it's normal but I have to explain it is looked at in a poor light.

If a player is cut from the Bulldogs' organization he is immediately sent home. Jessie acknowledges that some of the players try to remain in the U.S. illegally and says there is not much the team can do to prevent it. "We do what we can to make sure they get on the plane," he

says. If the Bulldogs or any other team is aware of a player staying in the U.S. illegally, they are required to inform INS.

Jessie, like several other MLB representatives I spoke with, is very proud of his position and what he is able to accomplish for the Bulldogs and MLB. He perceives his position not as part of a commodity chain but somewhat altruistic. He noted in the interview the widespread poverty and lower educational standards in the D.R. For Jessie, the Bulldogs are giving the players an alternative, an opportunity for a better life. Jessie's view of his job was evident in his final comments during the interview. When asked if he had any long-term goals, he responded:

"I'm happy where I am. I feel like I am making a difference in some guys' lives. I have an emotional investment. I like seeing them succeed."

#### Independent Agents

As discussed in Chapter 4, agents employed through U.S.-owned and operated companies play a role in the manufacturing of Dominican baseball talent. The manufacturing process occurs within the confines of the D.R.; however, the workings of the agent have no geographic limitations. Once a Dominican player comes to the U.S to play for a MLB team, the agent's job responsibilities change slightly. The manufacturing process is complete. The player's skills are adequate enough for the team to pay for him to play in the U.S. Now, the distribution process commences, which in the case of these human commodities includes a system of acculturation. The agent's list of job duties shifts to more contract negotiations, endorsements, and sometimes acting as a cultural broker. Returning to Luciana, the agent discussed in the previous chapter, illustrates these examples.

#### Luciana: An American Agent Revisited

Luciana's most important job function in the D.R. is also the most important in the U.S. - negotiating players' contracts with prospective MLB teams. Although contract negotiations are a function of the agent both in the D.R. and the U.S., Luciana knows that once the players arrive in the U.S., even to a lower level of the minor league system, there is much more at stake. Players

do not want to be sent home by a team, their dreams of athletic superstardom dashed. Most Dominican players send remittances home and fear if they are cut, the loss of income would be devastating to the financial stability of their families. The players want Luciana to be aggressive and secure a high-paying contract. When asked to describe the process of contract negotiations Luciana explained:

“If you’ve seen “Jerry Maguire” you have the right idea...You negotiate their contracts with a general manager of each team to try to get them the best offer. Before that you have to do your homework, find out about the team and other players in the same position. You also have to try to get the player to bend a little bit. It’s interesting when it’s time to do a contract. It’s stressful. You don’t want to pressure the client to do something but there’s a fear there’s not going to be another offer. October and November is the time the guys stop playing and the teams see who’s out there. November and December is when the negotiations start.”

In this statement, Luciana verbalizes one perpetual concern of players and agents alike – the fear no team will offer the player a contract. To pique the interest of teams, Luciana does research, finding statistical data regarding her client and other athletes who play the same position. Statistics of comparable players serve as a bargaining chip for Luciana. Through this information she shows a team how her client stacks up to other players and why her client deserves a more profitable contract. In this situation Luciana is marketing the player to a team.

The marketing of Dominican baseball players is a perpetual cycle. Luciana and other agents also market players to teams during the designated contract negotiation time while year-round marketing is being conducted to the consumers of baseball, the American public. This type of marketing is done via endorsements and is the second aspect of her job in the U.S.

According to Luciana, the upper echelons of baseball major leaguers receive the most lucrative and visible endorsement deals from companies such as Gatorade, Nike and Rawlings. These endorsement deals involve mostly negotiation regarding how much the player will be compensated. Other less known players require leg work from Luciana. When asked how endorsement deals materialize, she responded:

“...we approach them (i.e. Nike). If they are interested they will give feedback... we are the ones that go out and ask for contracts. If it's someone like Alex Rodriguez the company approaches them.”

There are also endorsement opportunities available with local businesses such as car dealerships, restaurants, and physicians. These may not be as lucrative but are easier for Luciana to secure. The local endorsements obviously play to a smaller audience but are still important because they increase the visibility of a player and help the consuming public learn to identify with the player, forming a level of attachment and team loyalty.

The importance of endorsement deals for the Dominican player is twofold. It supplies financial compensation to the player as well as Luciana. In addition, it is a means of distributing the player, the commodity. For inanimate objects such as shoes, the public is encouraged to consume them through print, TV and radio advertisement. This is true for the Dominican baseball player; however, appearing in product endorsements gives the player exposure to the consuming public. Agents and sports teams want players to have more of this type of exposure because the more consumers see a player the more likely he will attract a fan base that will attend games and buy MLB-related merchandise.

The third and final aspect of Luciana's job here in the U.S. is that of a cultural broker. Players coming from the D.R. are faced with adjusting to a new language and culture. The schooling MLB classes do not adequately prepare a young Dominican man for the various cultural stumbling blocks he will encounter. Luciana had several talks with one of her Dominican clients, explaining that his behavior was not acceptable by American standards:

“One of my clients just married a young lady from the States. The women in the U.S. are very different. Even my customs and ways are different because I grew up here. The women are more independent. He's had to make adjustments and learn to be more American. There (the D.R.) the men are chauvinistic. He needs to learn the women here are liberal. But he's doing fine. It's not like it was years ago. The stories from the vets when they first came here...the first time they went to a restaurant they didn't know how to order so they would go to the Chinese buffet because all they had to say was “Coke” or “water.”

Throughout Luciana's childhood she grew up influenced by Dominican culture at home and American culture outside her home. Her parents assisted newly arrived Dominicans with "getting set up" in America. Luciana feels that some of what she does for the players is reminiscent of what her parents did for their fellow immigrants. To some extent, this is true. Luciana is a cultural broker, an intermediary between Dominican and American culture. However, from the perspective of the GCC she is also facilitating the distribution of the Dominican baseball player through acculturation. Helping players learn behavior deemed appropriate by American cultural standards makes him more marketable. A player viewed as chauvinistic will not be palatable to the vast majority of American baseball fans.

As I witnessed during my first interview, Luciana's job as agent can sometimes veer sharply from the role of distribution and acculturation of the Dominican player. Luciana prides herself on offering good service to clients in both the minor and major leagues.

"...they both (minor and major leaguers) require just as much work. Sometimes the minor league guys need more attention and are very easily persuaded to go to another agent. Major leaguers know I can offer whatever anyone else can. Most of them want good service."

This statement illustrates once again that Dominican baseball players do have some human agency. A Dominican player can choose to abandon his contract with Luciana in favor of another agent. Knowing this, Luciana is motivated to perform some tasks not typically in the job description of agent. Luciana will oversee the shipping of personal effects from the D.R. to the U.S. for her clients who come to play in the American minor or major leagues. She sometimes even acts as an entertainment coordinator.

Sitting in Luciana's kitchen during our first meeting it was obvious to me that certain aspects of her job were stressful and unexpected. With the help of an assistant she runs a mini command center from the kitchen and dining room of her home. With her toddler napping in another room, Luciana simultaneously juggled frequent calls on her cell phone, giving instructions to her assistant and playing hostess/interviewee to me. The urgent task at hand was created by

the wife of one of her clients. The client was playing an away game in New York and his family was with him. The wife called Luciana requesting tickets for herself and her children to attend a certain Broadway show, the title of which she did not know but was certain it had something to do with fairies or princesses. Thus, a frantic search commenced as Luciana and her assistant tried to determine the name of the show. They could not identify the show so the wife asked Luciana to find a museum or exhibit close to their hotel so she could amuse the children. Unfortunately, it was late in the afternoon in New York City and as a former New Yorker herself Luciana told me, "It's too late. All the museums will be closing."

The frenzy of activity I witnessed between the women in Luciana's home coupled with her hesitancy to tell the client's wife "no" revealed agents such as Luciana are not just brokers between the players and the MLB organizations. Agents can also be personal assistants of sorts, especially for the more important Major Leaguers.

### 5.2 Consumption

The academies are obviously utilized to recruit and develop the next generation of baseball players. Once those players develop baseball skills and become more acculturated to American life they can be employed by teams to recruit the next generation of fans. The increased consumption of MLB by Latino fans is made possible by the visibility of Latino players both on the field and within local communities.

The globalization of baseball has resulted in more Latino players and therefore (according to MLB mindset) should also result in more Latino consumers. According to the 2000 Census, there are 45.5 million Hispanics in the U.S. and the number is expected to rise significantly. More and more baseball advertising is fashioned to appeal to Latino cultural values as perceived by MLB. Some teams have administrative positions geared specifically toward advertising and public relations within Latino populations. To capitalize on the popularity of Latino players, teams place players in television advertisements or send them to speak out their



immigrant experiences at local churches and community events. Teams hope the personal connection fans feel toward the players will translate into willingness to buy tickets to see the players in action.

### Using Players to Recruit Fans

Located in a large metropolitan area of 5.2 million people is the MLB team I previously referred to as the Bulldogs. The area is home to an increasing number of Latinos, approximately 1.7 million call this metropolitan area home. Demographic trends such as the increased number of Latinos in the U.S are mirrored in baseball. As the number of Latinos in American baseball rise, the Bulldogs hope the number of Latino fans will follow suit. The Bulldogs, like so many MLB teams, actively recruit Latino players, especially those from the D.R. and Latin America. They have an academy in the island where young men are brought to hone their skills before coming to the U.S. Minor Leagues. This is a known technique of recruiting and advancing young players. What many do not realize is the Bulldogs actively solicit and encourage players' participation in increasing the fan base.

Baseball's popularity in the U.S. has waned over the past few decades as other sports such as basketball and football have experienced a boom. The downturn in baseball's prevalence led teams such as the Bulldogs to seek out new means of revenue. The best solution has been to tap into the nearby Latino population. When asked what led the Bulldogs to reach out to the local Latino community one of the marketing managers for the Bulldogs explained:

"I'm not sure what initially started it. But when the information from the 2000 Census came out they saw the demographics and the high number of Hispanics. It is always a goal...to sell tickets and we realize the market shifts. We need to develop a fan base for the future. Also, we are trying to get African-American kids playing baseball again."

As this statement shows, "America's Pastime" is a business. The Bulldogs recognize the need to increase revenue and secure fans for future profit so they develop strategies customized for their geographic area. The first step to tap into the potential new fan base is education. Part of the advertising campaign is geared toward educating the potential new consumer. Most of the

Mexican immigrants in the area migrated from regions of Mexico in which boxing and soccer are far more popular than baseball. To cultivate a new fan base the team must first educate them on the basic rules of baseball. Then, the new fans are “educated” about the cost of the games and told some of the tickets are available at low prices. The Bulldogs emphasize the games are both affordable and are an activity that can be done with the family. Since many Latino communities have strong familial ties, the Bulldogs unabashedly interject family into the marketing equation saying, “Family is huge to the people [Latinos] in this market.”

The team is involved with community outreach and philanthropy; however, some of its efforts have been chosen to support the goal of recruiting fans. The team donates sports equipment and players work with The Boys and Girls Clubs in the area. These clubs consist primarily of Latino and African-American children. So the visibility of Bulldogs players helps to “get both populations” and possibly develop the next generation of baseball players and fans.

One goal of the Bulldogs’ marketing plan is to have a fan base that mirrors the population. To achieve the goal a variety of approaches are employed, according to the marketing manager:

“We run print, radio and TV. We want to create a sense of identity, a sense of family with the Spanish players. Family is huge to the people in this market [Latinos], as I’m sure you’ve learned. I do advertising. I do a lot of community relations. We take Spanish-speaking players to the schools to talk to the kids. So we do advertising but community service as well.”

The Bulldogs’ marketing crew believes they have a good understanding of the values of the Latino population they are courting. When I asked what strategies work best in dealing with the local Hispanic community, I was told “word of mouth, a grassroots effort, going to churches and restaurants.” The traditional slick magazine and newspaper advertisements are not as effective for this population, especially the first generation immigrants. Since this population utilizes the Internet infrequently, the Bulldogs rely more on direct mail to advertise and encourage people to come to games.

The most effective means of recruiting fans is through the players themselves. The Bulldogs' forty-man roster each season includes eighteen to twenty players the team classifies as "Hispanics." The high percentage of Latino players is one reason the Bulldogs market the local Latino community. When asked to expound on this more, the marketing manager said:

"...we have the ability to communicate with the people through the players. We had a player who was a second generation Mexican immigrant who went to a school to talk to the kids. The kids could relate to him because many of them had similar experiences. Most of our players are very family oriented. We don't have a lot of superstars on the team but we have hard workers and the people can relate to that. We do a student of the week dinner...During one of them a player was talking about an experience he had in the minors. He hit a ball and it ended up going into the stands and hitting a fan. He didn't know English well. He thought "thank you" were the words for "I'm sorry." He ran over to the fan and kept saying "thank you." The fan just stared at him. When he told that story it put the parents at ease. They could relate to him. Also, most of these players have families back in their home countries they are trying to support and a lot of people can identify with that."

The preceding narrative demonstrates how transnational lives are used in the marketing of Bulldogs' baseball. The first player mentioned, the "second generation Mexican immigrant," is able to relate to the school children that comprise the 1.5 and second-generation immigrants. The second player shared his humorous story of the language barrier, which resonates with the parents who are the first-generation immigrants. Also mentioned in the narrative are the families at home the players are supporting. Remittances are an integral part of the transnational migrants' lives whether they are MLB players or average persons. The marketing manager was correct and quite savvy for recognizing the importance of remittances in the baseball and general Latino population. As revealed here, the Bulldogs are able to market effectively to the local Latino population because they have at least a basic understanding of the dynamics of the group and their core values. Incorporating players who are new immigrants and second-generation immigrants allows the Bulldogs the opportunity to touch upon a variety of immigrant issues.

### 5.3 Conclusion

Inserting Dominican baseball players into the GCC reveals the line between the distribution and consumption nodes become blurred when using human subjects. The Dominican

player's distribution process begins when he is issued his visa and gains admittance to the U.S. minor league system. Although recent changes to the visa protocols have raised the maximum number of players a team can bring to the U.S., the players are still restricted to the confines of the GCC because they have no opportunity to change employers. While in the U.S., players continue to feel the effects of the GCC through the ML Educator who teaches them English and cultural skills. In doing so, the ML educator becomes an agent in the GCC. He aids in the distribution and marketing of the Dominican players by preparing them for public exposure, thus making the young men more palatable for consumption by American fans. The Independent Agent who sometimes acts as a cultural broker, informing a player when his behavior is not acceptable by American cultural standards, also reinforces the process of preparation for fan consumption. It is important that a player act within culturally constructed norms in order for the Agent to have better success securing endorsement opportunities and negotiating contracts. Corporations and teams typically do not want a player who might be viewed as a troublemaker for acting outside cultural norms.

In addition to being groomed for consumption by American-born fans, players are utilized in marketing plans to recruit fans within the Latino population. Teams utilize the players' immigrant stories to appeal to fellow immigrants within the Latino community in an effort to increase the number of possible consuming fans.

Gereffi's GCC has proven a useful tool in examining the processes by which baseball players are taken from young, raw talent in the D.R. to polished players in the U.S. helping franchises build a new fan bases. Although many characteristics of the Dominican baseball GCC mirror traditional GCCs such as the clothing and automobile industries, questions pertaining to the human elements cannot be explained through the lens of an economic theoretical framework. The next chapter explores issues pertaining to human agency and the regulatory office that was established to address reported inequalities and exploitation in the Dominican baseball system.

## CHAPTER 6

### PLAYERS AND THE REGULATION OF MLB: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

In September 1998, Cleveland Indians scout Luis Aponte approached the parents of Laumin Bessa saying he wanted to sign their son to a contract immediately. The Dominican boy, fifteen years old at the time, was below the minimum eligible age required by MLB to sign a contract. Aponte promised the boy and his parents a signing bonus of \$300,000 and convinced them to sign a contract written on the team's stationery. The contract had a number of blanks that Aponte said he would fill in later. The Bessas were unaware that the document they signed was for a \$30,000 signing bonus up front with the remaining \$270,000 payable only if certain milestones were attained (i.e. \$150,000 would be awarded should he make it to the Major Leagues). This type of payment schedule is also prohibited by MLB (Fainaru, 2001; Fidler and Marcano).

Stories such as Bessa's are not unique. MLB has been accused of a wide array of infractions ranging from mere indifference in the unique plight of Latin Americans to blatant exploitation. It was these inappropriate practices that promoted outcry from players and the establishment of a regulatory body located in the D.R.

Chapters 4 and 5 were analyses of how Dominican baseball players fit into the global commodity chain established by MLB. This chapter moves beyond the GCC as outlined by Gereffi and brings into focus the purely human aspects of the baseball commodity chain as seen through the experiences of a Dominican baseball player, an American baseball player and a former employee of MLB's Commissioner's office. Their narratives add nuances to the study of the commodification of Dominican baseball players such as human agency and regulations, actions Gereffi's model for non-human commodities cannot cover.

### 6.1 Carlos: The Dominican Baseball Player

The most challenging aspect of my fieldwork was finding and interviewing Dominican baseball players. The largest stumbling block was the language barrier. Unlike my informants who were members of the Association and the 1.5 Dominican immigrant generation, Dominican baseball players are not fluent in English. I had two separate interpreters lined up, neither of whom materialized for various reasons. Pedro, one of my key informants, set up my meeting with Carlos and was going to act as interpreter but cancelled at the last minute due to a work conflict. Pedro and Carlos were long-time friends and teammates, playing on a semi-pro team based out of the DFW area.

I met Carlos at the Caribbean restaurant specified by Pedro. Carlos, a man of forty-two, is of average height and stocky build. He speaks English with a very heavy accent and was difficult to understand at times. His affable manner was apparent each time I requested he repeat a sentence because I could not comprehend his broken English. As an informant, Carlos is a good representation of both groups comprising my study – the Dominican immigrant living in DFW and the Dominican minor league baseball player.

Carlos, like so many children living in the D.R., began playing baseball at an early age. Carlos' first recollection of playing ball in his home country was at the age of six. In 1984, a scout nicknamed Guero found out about Carlos and came to see him play. Two months later, Carlos was signed by the team Guero represented, the Toronto Blue Jays. The Blue Jays immediately sent Carlos to their Dominican baseball academy. He spent two months at the Dominican academy and was then sent to the team's Rookie League club in Florida. During his second year with the organization he was promoted to A level ball, and in the third year to AA level ball. In 1987 he broke his ankle in a game. After the injury healed he was sent back to play in the D.R. for a year. After the Blue Jays did not renew his contract he played for a Dominican team, then got a contract offer to play in the Mexican League in 1990. Carlos' baseball journeys led from his

home in the D.R., to the U.S., back to the D.R., and then to Mexico, thus revealing the truly global nature of baseball.

He spent only about two months at the Academy. There he played baseball and went to school almost every day to learn English. Being there only a month or two would not allow him to achieve adequate English skills prior to arriving in the U.S. Once he came to the U.S to play Rookie Ball he received an additional three or four months of English instruction. After Rookie Ball practice he went to school one hour a day with the other players. He was in Florida for Rookie Ball three months, most of which was spent living in a hotel. There was no schooling offered to him or his Latino teammates at the A or AA Ball level. He says it was not too difficult to adjust to life in the U.S. He had the same coach in Rookie Ball and AA, an American who knew Spanish and communicated well with Carlos. The players tended to move up through the minor league ranks together, so there was a core group of about seven Latino men on Carlos' teams.

The Rookie Ball team was based in Miami, a city with a large Spanish-speaking population. Communicating with people in Miami was typically not a problem. Issues did arise, however, when visiting other U.S. cities. Teams that comprise the Rookie Ball League are frequently located in small American towns, so traveling to play other teams was difficult, revealing the limitations of Carlos' English skills:

“The first three months I ate at Burger King every day. I just point to the food. And the lady there knew me. Then, my mom send [sic] me recipes and I cook instead.”

Carlos played a total of four years in the MLB system in the U.S. During one of his minor league games he broke his ankle. The team sent Carlos to a physician in Miami and Carlos underwent surgery to repair the injured ankle. Following surgery and a two-and-a-half-month recuperation period, Carlos was sent back to the D.R. Carlos never returned to the U.S. minor league system following his injury. I inquired several times into the details surrounding his failure to return but there was no clarification. I do not know if this was a product of the language barrier or hesitancy to discuss a difficult time in his life. Looking at the contents of the interview

and the lack of any negative aspects in the narrative, I suspect it was more the latter than the former.

Carlos acknowledges the different climate current Dominican players face at the academies:

“My nephew, he signed six months ago by Cincinnati. He’s at the academy. He got everything, a TV in the room. He takes classes. They have to stay at the academy two years to play baseball and go to school five hours a day. When you come to U.S. you ready for English. Yes, they (the teams) do better job getting ready to come to U.S.”

As a product of Dominican baseball in the 1980s, Carlos can be considered a pioneer compared to his nephew. Carlos’ journey through the MLB system was an improvement over that of Dominican trailblazers such as Juan Marichal, who was essentially dropped into the U.S. without any language or cultural instruction. Carlos does, however, recognize the strides taken to make life at the academy and the transition to the U.S. easier. These positive changes were made possible through advocacy from individuals such as Marichal, Felipe Alou and countless other unknowns. As a human commodity, they lacked social capital but possessed human agency. These players spoke out on behalf of the plight of Dominican players. Human agency, the ability to bring about positive change through activism, sets the Dominican baseball players apart from other commodities within the GCC as defined by Gereffi.

### 6.2 Kelly: An American Minor Leaguer

Kelly was the only one of my informants whom I knew on a personal level prior to embarking on my research. He was a friend of a friend I met on a number of occasions ten years prior when he was a newly drafted catcher in the Cleveland Indians organization. My interaction with Kelly years ago had been limited and I opted to interview him at the suggestion of our mutual friend who arranged the meeting.

When I met Kelly at the restaurant I recognized him immediately. At six feet three inches tall and over two hundred pounds Kelly is a physical presence enhanced by a palpable



confidence absent the narcissistic tendencies of many athletes. Gone was the immature, goofy boy I remembered. In his place was a twenty-nine-year old professional, a husband and proud father of two.

Born and raised in the Dallas area, Kelly was the younger of two sons. He was close to his parents, especially his father, who passed away during the time Kelly was playing in the minor leagues. Kelly credits his parents with helping him achieve the goal of playing in the MLB system. "I was very blessed with my parents," he said. "They never took vacations, they just went to baseball tournaments with me."

Growing up, Kelly was the stereotypical American boy. His voracious appetite for sports and being outdoors was apparent in the variety of sports he played – soccer, football, and, of course, baseball. Like so many other little boys, Kelly began playing the game as a toddler with his father. His introduction to organized ball came as a five-year old tee-ball player. From there he progressed through the various levels of kid's baseball (pee-wee league and little league). At the age of fourteen Kelly had an epiphany: "I got it in my head...this was it, baseball was my passion." Kelly's love for the game and his talent led him to Boys Baseball Inc. (BBI), a select league of the best baseball players ages fourteen to eighteen in the area where he lived. Admission to the BBI marked the end of what Kelly deemed "recreational baseball" and the beginning of a serious mindset toward becoming a professional baseball player.

Kelly attended college briefly, playing on the school's baseball team. The team included several Puerto Rican men, which, for Kelly, was his first exposure to foreign-born players. After a year in college he was drafted by the Cleveland Indians organization in 1996. In 1997, at the age of nineteen, he was sent to play with the Indians Rookie Ball team.

Kelly remembers the make-up of the Rookie Ball team being "fifty-fifty. About half American-born players and half foreign-born players. The lower classifications (of the minor leagues) are full of foreign players. They were from the D.R., Venezuela and Panama. I think the

reason there are so many is they (MLB teams) can bring them when they are young and develop them.”

The manager of Kelly's Rookie Ball team was an American who did not speak Spanish. However, his coaching assistant was bilingual. The organization that drafted Kelly apparently differed from other teams in the amount of education provided to the players. According to Kelly, as much as seventy-five percent of the Latino players, including the Dominicans, did not speak English well enough to communicate in a simple conversation. Most of them knew baseball terms but the limited English was more of a challenge for Kelly than many other Americans on the team because Kelly was a catcher. Non-verbal and verbal communication is essential between catcher and pitcher. The catcher and pitcher must discuss the meaning of the various non-verbal hand signals as well as different pitching strategies for players coming to bat. In addition, the catcher provides verbal encouragement to the pitcher when he is struggling. A language barrier can interfere with the catcher's ability to perform his job and possibly the outcome of the game if miscommunications arise. Kelly described one method he employed when dealing with non-English speaking pitchers:

“The shortstop in my team would translate for the pitcher and me if I was catching...I know some Spanish but it did limit me. As a catcher you are a psychologist when handling the pitcher. Most of the Dominican pitchers just throw the fastball. They are very confident, somewhat cocky. The majority of the time I was trying to calm them down. I only took Spanish in high school but it was important to me that I could communicate with them. It's a two-way street with communication.”

Kelly revealed himself to be sympathetic to the plight of his Dominican teammates. He took some personal responsibility in the communication process while at the same time buying into the stereotype of the hot-headed Latino. Becoming introspective, Kelly described the interaction on the field that took place prior to game time as divided across cultural lines. During the pre-game warm-ups and stretching all the American players would go to one area of the field and all the Latin American players to a different area. It was segregation by choice, according to Kelly, with all the Latin American players laughing and talking to one another but not with the

American players. "Baseball mirrors society," Kelly said, "some guys are prejudiced and don't want to associate with them (Latin players)." While Kelly could have been accurate that the divide between Latino and American-born players was created through prejudice, it may have merely reflected cultural expression. DFW Dominicans spoke Spanish at meetings, events and frequently during casual conversations with fellow Dominicans. Language is a fundamental link to culture and a means of expressing ethnic identity. Although the Latino players of Kelly's team were not exclusively Dominican, speaking "Dominican Spanish," they could easily converse in Spanish with one another. In Chapter 3, Alma recalled socializing with her Puerto Rican "brothers" because they shared similar culture. This would be true for the players as well. The players did not all share identical ethnicity or places of birth so they created a new common culture through Spanish.

The forging of these pan-Latino links may sometimes be interpreted as what Reed-Danahay (1993) described as "everyday resistance," ways in which those with little power can resist authority. If Latino players are congregating together and choosing to speak Spanish when they have the ability to communicate in English, it is a subtle form of resistance to the dominate culture of American society and MLB, both of which would prefer the players converse in English.

When Kelly broke into the minor leagues he was paid a typical salary of \$850 per month, half of which went to living expenses. Players were also charged ten dollars per day for clubhouse dues, which went to the person who washed the uniforms and kept the clubhouse neat. The meals, which were modest cuisine, were provided by the team. The meals provided were not substantial enough for young men with high activity levels, so the players purchased additional food with money from their small salaries. Kelly remembered the personal difficulty of existing on the small salary and mentioned how much harder it was for his Dominican teammates:

"With the American kids, their parents would come down (to visit) and pay for everything. The Latin players didn't have that. If we got peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from the

club they would eat just that so they could send more money home. We had this one guy, he was so skinny. He never ate. He just sent all his money home.”

Players typically send remittances back to the D.R. to aid in the day-to-day living expenses of their families. Since most of the players grew up in extreme poverty, these remittances are sometimes the only reason families had enough to eat. Remittances were also practiced by the DFW Dominicans. Although most of my informants no longer possess strong familial ties to the island, they contributed to their “Dominican family” as a whole through monetary contributions to philanthropic organizations.

The Cleveland Indians were aware that the Dominican players were not eating enough and took action. Kelly acknowledged the Indians “took good care” of the Dominican baseball players by ensuring language interpreters were available and by requiring the players to weigh-in periodically. If a player’s weight began to decrease the coaching staff required the players to drink protein shakes and would sometimes give them additional food. The benefits of this policy of the Indians were two-fold. First, it ensured the Dominican players were not starving themselves to send larger remittances back to the families at home. In addition, it aided the Indians in the process of manufacturing the Dominican baseball player. A player with better nutrition will be stronger, faster, and have greater endurance, all qualities necessary in a successful baseball player.

### 6.3 Daniel: Baseball and Regulations

I came to know of Daniel in a non-traditional way. He was “introduced” to me through an Internet contact I found via a blog for persons interested in Dominican baseball. This gentleman, whom I will refer to as Jack, approached his friend Daniel who graciously agreed to talk with me, a complete stranger, over the telephone. A face-to-face meeting was not feasible given the many hundreds of miles between us. Daniel is a well-spoken man whose passion for the game of baseball is undeniable even over a telephone. I initiate all interviews by asking the informant if he

or she has any questions for me about the research. Daniel's response was not unique compared to my other informants.

MK: First of all, do you have any questions for me about my research and what I'm doing?

Daniel: Yes. Ah, coming from the Bears (team's name has been changed) they are always leery about us talking to people...if something comes out. They are very guarded. But Jack said you were going to talk to me about my time in the Commissioner's office so that would be okay because I don't work for them anymore.

I told him I did understand the Bears' position because that concern had been voiced to me in the past. I also told him I would be asking about both his position at the Commissioner's office and with the Bears. I explained that as an anthropologist I was not allowed to use his name or the team name, even if he wanted me to do so. He seemed reassured by this and the interview proceeded. MLB insiders are extremely apprehensive answering questions about the inner workings of MLB. As an anthropology student I was lumped into a category with media and sportswriters, the very individuals who have been critical of MLB practices and, in some cases, those who exposed examples of corruption within the system. Jack, who arranged my interview with Daniel, was told by several other individuals he approached on my behalf that they would not speak to me because if it was discovered by their team retribution might follow. There is a climate of suspicion within MLB that has been fueled by a legacy of indifference toward and sometimes exploitation of Dominican baseball players.

I consider my affiliation with Daniel to be an ethnographic gift. I was unaware of the various aspects of Daniel's career within MLB. The interview, much to my delight and surprise, supplied both a perspective of the educational process of the academy and minor league systems as well as insight into the regulatory body of MLB, the Commissioner's Office. The Commissioner is the chief executive of MLB and the regulatory body he oversees is officially referred to as the Office of the Commissioner of Baseball. The Commissioner's responsibilities include oversight of umpires, managing television contracts and negotiating labor issues between team owners and

the player's union. The first Commissioner was chosen in 1920 in an effort to clean up baseball following the Black Sox Scandal in which eight players from the Chicago White Sox accepted money for intentionally losing the 1919 World Series. Commissioners continue to be chosen via a voting process among team owners. Daniel's insight into the Commissioner's office in the D.R. brought my research full circle by enabling me to see the impact globalization has on Dominican players and how MLB has responded to negative issues related to the global explosion of their own industry.

Due to the breadth of information Daniel shared with me, his ethnography is divided into several sections. Following some biographical background is a section dedicated to his current employment experiences with a MLB team. The second section offers insight into his previous position with the Commissioner's Office.

#### Daniel – A Different Dominican

According to Daniel, his personal story was "different from most other Dominicans." Born in the D.R. into what he described as a middle class family, Daniel came to the U.S. on a baseball scholarship. He attended a junior college for two years and then transferred to the University of Southern Alabama to play on their baseball team. After graduating from the University of Southern Alabama with an accounting degree, Daniel played in the minor league system of the Pirates from 1989 to 1990. After being cut from the team Daniel entered the corporate workforce where he remained for ten years. In 2000 Major League Baseball opened its first office outside the U.S. It was located in Daniel's country of birth, the D.R. Daniel accepted a position with MLB's Commissioner's office to help establish a satellite office in the D.R.

Daniel's personal experience with the minor league system differs greatly from the vast majority of his Dominican countrymen past and present. As he told me, "See, I'm not a typical Dominican player. I come from the middle class. I have commodities." He did not struggle with the English language as Carlos did and who to some extent does still. Daniel had basic English

skills. Minimal English proficiency is required and must be demonstrated on standardized test before a foreign-born student such as Daniel could receive a baseball scholarship. Also, unlike Carlos, Daniel did not go through an academy. In 1984 the Pirates did not have an academy in the D.R. The development of the academy system, according to Daniel, exploded from 1985 to 1990. A few academies peppered the country but not in the numbers seen today.

Daniel played baseball because he loves the game. He believes baseball is an embedded piece of the culture that defines the D.R. It is the Dominican pastime as well as a means to attain personal goals. First, it is a way to get out of poverty; second, it is a way to fame. As Daniel explains “No other industry in the Dominican (D.R.) gives that opportunity.” The choice of words in Daniel’s quote is telling. In referring to baseball (MLB baseball specifically) as an industry, Daniel tosses about romantic notions of fame and fortune and recognizes quite plainly that MLB baseball is a business.

#### The Bears Academy

Daniel is currently employed by the Bears as the Director of International Player Development. He describes his job as an intermediary between the scouts and the minor leagues, receiving the player from the scout and overseeing the player’s development. In terms of the GCC his job tasks fall into the manufacturing phase of Dominican baseball players. Daniel is responsible for the administrative side of the academy – supervising the staff and coaches and overseeing the academy’s educational program. Of those, thirty-four were from the D.R. The Bears actually have two team academies, one in the D.R. and the other in Venezuela, further revealing the extent of the globalization of baseball and the commodity chain into which the players fall.

Daniel is very proud of the strides the Bears organization has made in dealing with the needs of the Dominican players. He feels they present unique challenges when coming to the U.S. because, in general, the level of education they receive growing up in the D.R. is below that

of their American counterparts. Daniel says the Bears' baseball academy has closed the educational gap. While baseball is paramount at the academy, three other things are emphasized as well – education, culture and language.

In 2006, Daniel assisted in establishing an in-depth educational program at the Bears' academy, which allows players to continue their high school education. Daniel calls the year-round program a “modified adult learning program structured around a baseball schedule.” The classes are taught three hours a day, three times a week with a curriculum that includes basic administration skills, education about the use of drugs, alcohol and steroids, critical thinking and English. English classes are taught with the aid of Rosetta Stone, a popular interactive software program for language learning. Similar to U.S. public schools, players are divided into four groups, ninth through twelfth grade, according to their level of education. The lowest “grade” a player will be placed in is be the ninth, even if his Dominican education fell below that grade equivalent. Daniel cites the success of the program in the fifteen Dominican young men who have graduated from this high school program.

The new Bears' academy was slated to open in May of 2008. The new facility covers thirty-seven acres, more than double that of the old facility. A total of eighty players and sixteen staff members can be housed in the dormitory-style complex at one time. It is a more modern facility complete with a twenty-computer lab with full Internet access for the players. While the new facility will, no doubt, benefit the players who stay there, giving access to computers and education, it will also aid in the acculturation and manufacturing of the players as MLB commodities.

Daniel feels the Bears organization prioritizes education much more than most other teams. Only one other MLB team has an academy educational program as extensive as the Bears'. Most teams offer some type of educational program but it may include only basic English. There is a great deal of inconsistency league-wide because MLB has not established protocols



outlining specific curriculum requirements. The teams are left to determine the extent to which they will educate their Dominican players both before they come to the U.S. and after they arrive.

When asked if players coming to the U.S. to play in the Bears' minor league system continue their education, Daniel responded:

“We continue with the English and cultural education. We do a lot of things with the local junior college to help the players interact, especially with women. The cultural dealings with women are different there. I don't want you to misunderstand me. It's just different. We take the players to movies, outings, dinners, things to get them exposed to the culture. We also have a special group of about twenty-four players that we bring together and give seminars on gender violence, media, finance, and culture.”

The educational process described above is necessary for both the players and the teams. The players desperately need English language training to communicate effectively with teammates, coaches and the general public. Instruction in American culture can help offset potential issues regarding how the Dominican players interact with Americans. This is the perspective of Daniel in the preceding quote. The team offers these programs to help the players. While the instruction does aid the player, the team's intentions are not entirely altruistic. English and cultural education and exposure are part of the acculturation process of the players, an aspect of the global commodity chain unique to the Dominican baseball player.

A crucial aspect of his job with the Bears is securing visas for the Dominican players whom the team chooses to play in the U.S. As mentioned in previous chapters, the type of visa required for Dominican baseball players has changed.

“It used to be the H-2B visa which is the same as people who work on farms. After 9-11 they imposed a limit on the number of visas we could have. Now we use the same visa as the major leaguers. There used to be a limit per club but it changed last year. Now it is a P visa and we have no limits. The only limit is what we impose on ourselves, however many players we can accommodate.”

According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the H-2B visa “applies to an alien coming temporarily to engage in non-agricultural employment which is seasonal, intermittent, a peak load needed, or one-time occurrence” ([www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)). Under the H-2B

Dominican baseball players were viewed as unskilled workers, an ironic fact given the aggressiveness with which teams recruit players they believe have baseball talent.

In 2008 the total number of international players in the Bears minor league system was eighty-seven. Thirty-four of those were from the D.R., a significant increase from the twenty Dominicans the previous year. Daniel attributes this to the new laws, which do not restrict the number of players a team can bring into the country. No visa restrictions coupled with the new, larger Bears academy ensures the process of manufacturing of players will not only continue but likely increase. According to Daniel, having no visa restrictions “provides more opportunity” to the players. Many Dominican boys would agree, but it also provides an open market, increasing the size of the labor pool. The change from the H-2B to a P visa allows more Dominican baseball players to travel to the U.S. in the hopes of fulfilling their dreams. It does not, however, afford them opportunities for employment outside baseball. Once a player is cut from a team, he is placed on the next flight back to the D.R. So the reality for the player is that while the change in visa status allows an increase in the number of men permitted to play ball in the U.S. it does not give them additional rights or privileges within the U.S or change their status within the GCC. For the teams it becomes a bit of a numbers game. No restrictions of visas translate into more Dominican players coming to the U.S. Statistically speaking, if more players are imported to and trained in the U.S. the greater the likelihood teams will have a few players good enough to stay and play in the Major Leagues. Again, while the visas benefit the players, they also facilitate the teams’ ability to maintain the Dominican baseball player within the GCC.

#### The Commissioner’s Office

Prior to the year 2000, MLB did not have a satellite office in the D.R., a stunning fact given the intensity with which MLB teams successfully recruited a large number of Dominicans playing in MLB system. Each year more than 500 players from the D.R. are signed to a MLB contract, yet there was a distinct absence of rules governing those transactions.

“Baseball is becoming more globalized...It’s a millions-of-dollars-a-year investment and Major League Baseball needed to protect the investment and teach clubs how to operate internationally, to understand the rules. There are things you need to be aware of when you operate a business in another country. You have to understand the laws and the culture.”

As Daniel stated, MLB had to protect their financial interests in Dominican baseball players. Interestingly, the protection was needed to save MLB from the seedy dealings of many of its own employees. Essentially, MLB needed to be protected from itself.

The lack of regulation of the Dominican academies led to a system rife with problems. First, were the living conditions of the academy players. The conditions in which the players slept and ate were, at many academies, deplorable. Dozens of young men were forced to share one or two bathroom facilities. Toilets overflowed with sewage and there was no running water in the showers. Players had no other choice than to bathe in nearby waterways and eliminate outside academy buildings. One team reportedly housed their young recruits in a former brothel in an undesirable area of town where the players would be robbed on a regular basis. Several other teams opted not to provide housing but instead have the players sleep under the bleachers at the stadium. It was, after all, more convenient and eliminated the need for daily transport of the players to the stadium.

The story of Laumin Bessa illustrates several exploitative labor practices. Many Dominicans and their families were tricked into signing contracts that were blank or written in English, a language they were unable to speak, let alone read. Like Bessa, young men have been lied to regarding the amount of signing bonuses or may have had the money stolen from them, such as was the case of Willie Aybar. These illegal tactics went unchecked for decades partly because the players did not speak out. The reasons for staying silent are many. Some players fear teams will cut them or coaches will refuse to let them play. Many players fear retribution for themselves as well as relatives who may be signed to the same team or bound to the same buscon. Systematic corruption has left those who would like to come forward with little

human agency due to power inequalities. Still others simply accepted the corruption as part of the system, the cost of seeing a dream come to fruition.

Over time, some players have spoken out. The tragic events of Alexis Quiroz, a former Venezuelan playing in the D.R., were chronicled in a popular book (Guevara and Fidler, 2001). Several Major League stars such as Pedro Martinez and David Ortiz have voiced their frustration regarding the quality of education provided, the inequality in signing bonuses and MLB's denial of Spanish interpreters on teams but the inclusion of Japanese interpreters. Martinez and Ortiz, as baseball superstars, are no longer included in the baseball GCC. They have achieved an extraordinary level of success eliminating power inequality and allowing for human agency.

Daniel's position with the International Commissioner's office was to "regulate and develop players." He established minimum standards on everything from academy standards to education. Teams were required to provide adequate housing for the players with no more than four players per bathroom and running water. Playing fields had to be well maintained and free of obstacles or holes that might cause injury to a player. All teams were required to set up a basic English language program to prepare players coming to the U.S. During his tenure at the International Office, Daniel and just five other people implemented the changes at all of the Dominican MLB academies. Of their various tasks, Daniel is most proud of their ability to better the living conditions in which the young players will find themselves. "One of the biggest things we did is improvements. It's dramatically better there now."

Since Daniel's departure from the International Office, a psychologist has been added to the staff who treats players with drug problems, implements anti-doping rules and educates players regarding banned substances. MLB's recent crackdown on banned substances exposed another negative impact of the globalization of baseball – high incidence of drug use in Dominican players. The climate of poverty and desperation motivates players to take steroids and supplements banned by MLB. Some players will do anything to try to obtain a tryout with a

team or get to the minor leagues, turning to drugs willingly or yielding to the pressures from *buscones*.

Daniel acknowledges the strides made by MLB in the D.R. and recognizes more needs to be accomplished.

“Physically and mentally they (players) are better prepared. Major League Baseball has done a better job transitioning players to the U.S. We could still do better with facilities and the educational programs could improve as an industry. Fifteen teams have it (in-depth programs) but it needs to be more consistent.”

The Commissioner’s International Office in the D.R., like so many other regulatory bodies, was established because corruption and exploitation existed. According to Daniel, one problem in the D.R. prior to regulation was “people could interpret the rules the way they wanted to.”

MLB has taken serious steps to improve the experiences of Dominicans and other Latino ballplayers. The days of Alvin Dark banning the use of Spanish have given way to an increased awareness of the ethnic and cultural difference between this “American” game and its immigrant employees. This is most evident in the minor league system. In an effort to assuage the impact of culture shock, every Dominican academy owned and operated by a MLB franchise offers English classes. Of the 30 Major League teams, only three do not have a Dominican baseball academy (Weir & Bachelor 2004); therefore, the majority of Dominican players receive some tutoring in English prior to stepping foot on American soil. In addition, according to MLB’s player’s union, all teams are required to provide English classes for players when requested. Several of the teams have staff members at the major and minor league level that concentrate on issues related to Latino players. As mentioned by several of my informants, Sal Artiaga, Philadelphia’s director of Latin American Operations, has published three manuals, each in English and Spanish, detailing essential baseball skills as well as some skills necessary for everyday life, such as how to sign an apartment lease. All of these manuals have been made readily available to the major and minor league teams (Weir & Bachelor 2004).

Besides offering English classes, at least eight franchises have taken additional strides to assist Dominican players. A language and cultural program called *Ganadores Garantizados* (Guaranteed Winners), was started by Becky Schnakenberg. Schnakenberg, a licensed counselor, is also fluent in Spanish. She combines her skills not only to teach the players English but also to tend to their psychological needs. She helps the new players move past the inevitable cycle of depression that hits them when they become homesick and lonely. Schnakenberg's job can be especially challenging because the educational backgrounds of the Dominican players tends to fall well below their American-born counterparts. The players frequently have only a first- or second-grade education. Each year, at least one of the players in the program is unable to read his native language. Fortunately, according to Schnakenberg, "most players are fluent in English by the end of their third season because of the immersion" (Weir & Bachelor 2004).

The overwhelming problem with the language and cultural programs MLB provides for Dominican and other Latin American players is the lack of consistency. Granted, most teams have an academy in the D.R., which provides exposure to the English language. There will inevitably be young men who fall through the cracks because they did not start at a Dominican academy. These Dominican men will receive no English prior to coming to the U.S. and may have to fend for themselves. For those players attending English classes in the D.R. it remains to be seen if the amount of English tutoring is enough to truly be helpful. In addition, the teams do not disclose who teaches the English classes. Obviously, the instructor's teaching skills and degree of fluency in English will have a substantial impact on how successfully students acquire English-speaking skills.

The agreement between MLB and the player's union stating that English classes have to be offered by a U.S.-based team when requested is problematic as well. A young Dominican player coming to a minor league club for the first time may be unaware of his rights as negotiated by the player's union. Furthermore, the Dominicans entering the minor leagues are young

(typically in their teens or early twenties). Youth, an inability to communicate effectively, and the fear of being cut from the team can cause the players to feel intimidated and unwilling to request Spanish classes.

Manuals like those compiled by Sal Artiaga are good tools, but only if utilized. These manuals are made available to teams but the teams are not required to possess them or required to have the Dominican players read the information. Even if the teams do have the manuals and make their content required reading, the issue then becomes what to do for those Dominicans who cannot read in any language.

Language and cultural programs such as Becky Schnakenberg's are the most viable options for helping minimize culture shock. These programs incorporate all the major issues associated with life in a new country – language differences, cultural difference, and emotional needs. Again, the problem is not the program itself; it is the lack of consistency across the entire league. These programs are optional for the minor league teams. The annual price tag of \$15,000 to provide these programs is nominal given the profitability of MLB (Weir & Bachelor 2004). In fact, it would seem a worthwhile expenditure considering the number of talented Dominican players. Successfully adjusting to the culture of the U.S. will lead to fewer distractions on the field and a more confident, productive baseball player.

Finally, the shortcomings of MLB's programs and policies regarding helping Dominicans transition into the U.S. social and sport culture became apparent with the new rules on banned substances. The 2005 baseball season marked the introduction of MLB's stricter policy prohibiting the use of performance-enhancing drugs such as anabolic steroids, ephedra, and others. In the minor leagues, 47 players were suspended after failing a mandatory drug test (Jenkins 2005). Of those 47 players, 24 were from Latin American countries and 10 were Dominican (Blum 2005). There are several, sometimes controversial, reasons for the high proportion of Dominicans and other Latinos getting snarled by the new drug rules. The first

reason, which MLB has little control over, is the availability of banned substances such as steroids in the D.R. Unlike the U.S., the D.R. does not have strict regulatory laws prohibiting the distribution and use of many drugs. Steroids and other banned substances are easily obtained over-the-counter (Jenkins 2005).

Even the most conscientious of Dominican ballplayers can still inadvertently take a banned substance due to marginal English skills and insufficient communication from MLB. Dominican players in the Major Leagues have brought up concerns that are applicable to them as well as those in the minor leagues. Many Dominican players feel that despite what MLB does for Latinos in baseball they are still missing the mark. Some paperwork and memos, such as those containing information on the drug policy, are written in English and simply placed in a player's locker. In doing so, the MLB system assumes that if the Dominicans can speak English well enough to communicate with teammates on the field, they can understand a formal memo full of American and medical jargon. Players have left the papers in their lockers or thrown them away accidentally because they could not read the contents.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter showed that while the GCC is a useful means of analysis, there are limitations when applying it to the Dominican baseball player. Gereffi's model was designed for non-human commodities; therefore, it cannot account for issues such as human agency and regulation. While the capacity for human agency distinguishes the Dominican baseball commodity chain from traditional GCC models, the players' resistance to speak out is a result of the power imbalance between them and the actors within the baseball GCC. Fearing retaliation from *buscones*, scouts and coaches, many players do not speak out about abuses in the system. For many, fear of losing their baseball salary and the ability to give their families remittances is enough to stay silent and allow the commodification to continue.



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS

“The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It has been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this game: it's a part of our past, Ray. It reminds of us of all that once was good and it could be again. Oh...people will come Ray. People will most definitely come.” Field of Dreams, 1989.

Like so many baseball fans this quote and the movie from which it came, is inextricably linked to the sport. This is lighter side of baseball portraying a world of second chances and healed relationships made possible by the all American sport. Unfortunately, as this thesis revealed, the reality of baseball is a far cry from the movies. Globalization's imprint on baseball is complex and sometimes convoluted, incorporating young Dominican men in a process of commodification.

My thesis examined the impact of baseball on two subsets of immigrant Dominicans: those comprising the small group in DFW and those who leave the D.R. to play baseball in the U.S. Baseball is indeed embedded in the Dominican culture both on the island and in the local DFW community. Baseball is a means of expressing Dominican ethnic identity, pride and commonality. Evidence of this was apparent in the preparation and participation of DFW Dominicans at the game honoring Sammy Sosa's inclusion into the 600 home run club. Waving Dominican flags, holding pictures of Sosa and chanting his name during the game made it obvious to me that they saw him as one of their own. The DFW Dominicans and Sosa share both a common ethnicity and immigrant narrative.

The immigrant narratives of the DFW Dominicans and the baseball immigrants contain a great deal of overlap. Both groups viewed the U.S. as a country of immense opportunity, thus

motivating migration or the attempt to migrate. In my thesis I draw parallels between the transnational activities of the DFW Dominicans and baseball players. Both groups maintain transnational links through money giving; for the players it is remittances to the family and for the DFW Dominicans it is via carefully chosen philanthropic organizations. The players, however, do not benefit from the social networks available to the DFW Dominicans. Players are more isolated because they come to the U.S. with marginal English skills. The small towns in which they play minor league ball typically do not have ethnic enclaves or any social networking organization such as the Association in DFW.

The participation of Latinos in American baseball circles is not a new phenomenon. During the Jim Crow era of segregation, light-skinned Latinos were recruited and passed off to the fans as Spaniards. Jackie Robinson and the integration of baseball opened the door to darker-skinned Latinos who, up to that time, were restricted to playing in the Negro Leagues or in other countries. The number of Latinos was limited during segregation, saw an increase following the break of the color line, and has exploded through the workings of globalization.

No country has felt the impact of the globalization of baseball more than the D.R. Decades of high unemployment rates and extreme poverty in the D.R. have created an environment from which many want to escape. MLB success stories of countrymen like Sosa, Pedro Martinez and David Ortiz who also grew up in the barrios, incited the hopes of Dominican boys. Young, desperate, and frequently uneducated the young men have become targets for exploitation. This desperation makes them vulnerable to the sometimes inequitable and exploitative forces that comprise MLB's global commodity chain.

My thesis revealed the major difference between MLB's recruitment of Dominican players vis-à-vis American and Puerto Rican players. While these two groups are included in the amateur draft, Dominican players are not. Dominican players arrive to play in the U.S. only after playing at an academy and passing through the GCC. Draft-eligible players have access to legal

representation prior to signing a team contract and are protected by the very rules protecting major league players. Dominicans are extended none of these privileges; they are denied equal access, in part because draft players, as a whole, garner far greater signing bonuses than Dominicans in the GCC.

By superimposing baseball players within the GCC, I challenge traditional views of commodities being only inanimate objects. Dominican baseball players are highly sought after and recruited by MLB teams for financial gain. With the help of ML Educators and independent agents, teams groom and prepare players for public exposure and consumption. Players must be taught the language and customs of America to be more appealing to the general public. Also, in areas such as DFW, players assist in marketing to the sought-after Latino population by speaking at churches and other community functions. Although the Dominican players are indeed commodities, my study of their role in the GCC reveals their uniqueness compared to non-living commodities. The players are part of labor migration circulation. *Buscones*, scouts, agents, and academies are all part of the GCC of baseball, constantly tugging at and reshaping the baseball skills and social capital the young Dominican players possess. Unlike other commodities, players have human agency, the ability to voice concerns about their treatment. As my research reveals, power inequality and fear frequently inhibit their willingness to demonstrate agency. Some players may demonstrate subtle forms of resistance such as forging pan-Latino links and refusing to speak English; however, true agency is typically seen at the major league level when the powerful players' union can protect a player.

Despite fear of retribution from teams, some minor league players and a number of Major League players have been openly critical of the treatment of Dominican players, the inadequate living and playing conditions and language instruction at academies. My findings regarding the establishment of a satellite Commissioner's Office and institution of new regulations stand as

affirmation that MLB recognized the need to clean up the industry. It is in the face of exploitation and inequality that corporations typically create regulatory bodies.

While this research was limited to the geographical boundaries of the U.S. and the interviews conducted here, future research would benefit from a multi-sited approach. Expanding upon work I have done, future research should begin in the D.R. and follow the entire commodity chain from the fans on the island to the Commissioner's office in the U.S. How does the average Dominican and local officials view MLB's recruiting methods? How has MLB's new regulations changed the Dominicans' response to MLB? What are the obstacles preventing further improvements from happening? What responsibilities does MLB believe Dominicans have in regulating the labor recruitment process in their own country? What does MLB perceive as the successes and obstacles encountered by their new regulations? A multi-sited research approach is imperative to truly understand the impact of the globalization of baseball to the D.R. and its people.

Future expansion of this research should include traditional ethnographic interviews of the Dominican players. As the commodity in the modified GCC their voices are essential to understanding the personal impact of the commodity chain process. New research in this area would ask how the players view their role within the GCC. How effective are MLB's educational programs? How do players feel coaches and team officials at the academy treated them? How does that treatment change as the players moved through the ranks of the GCC? What do players perceive as obstacles to their success in baseball in the minor leagues?

Several of my informants discussed the wide variety of educational classes offered by the MLB teams, with my informant from the Bears describing the opportunity to receive a high school diploma at their academy. An interesting longitudinal study would include analysis of this program and others like it, tracking the players who completed the program. Pertinent question would include: What are the educational opportunities players now have available at the

academies and/or minor leagues? How have completion of these program impacted the men? How has the program changed former players' socioeconomic status? How does MLB view the progress of the educational programs? Exploring the long-term impact of a high school education of the Dominican players who did not make it to the Big Leagues could shed new light on the efficacy of MLB's educational programs.

It is only fitting that even as I write this conclusion to a thesis so deeply rooted in aspects of professional baseball that the MLB season is nearing an end. Once again, the boys of summer will be packing up their bats, gloves and uniforms and heading home to placed scattered throughout the world. Even as the season and my research draws to a close I cannot help but reflect upon the game through the new lens I have acquired. The game my father knew as a child is gone. In its place has emerged a multinational corporation, both a product of and catalyst for globalization.

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