

Baseball: The History of the Sport that Connects the Dominican Republic and the United States

by

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Introduction

I am a Dominican American who grew up in the Bronx. My entire family came to the United States as Dominican immigrants. I was always fascinated by the stories they told about the Dominican Republic. My mother always made it of importance for me to know and experience her homeland. I would visit every summer and stay at my grandmother's house in Santo Domingo, the capital. I would see landmarks and parks and I was always curious to learn more about Dominican history. Each time I visited the Dominican Republic, I would hear more people wanting to travel to New York and experience the "land of opportunity," an ideal that triggered the imagination and desires of many Dominicans to migrate to the United States. I always found it interesting that around the area that I lived in the Bronx there were bodegas, hair salons, supermarkets, barber shops owned by Dominican immigrants. These are examples of how Dominicans became an important part of the city.

This essay seeks to explore how Dominican immigrants were involved in different aspects of society, creating their own cultural spaces in the United States. It focuses on one important shared cultural experience is baseball. Baseball is the main sport that is represented in the Dominican Republic and continues to be important for many immigrants while being in the United States. This is a clear from how many Dominicans and other Latinos enjoy watching games at Yankee Stadium. My mother's aunt would frequently go to New York City to watch baseball games at Yankee Stadium. She also explained her many experiences while growing up. She would see many boys playing baseball in an open field. Also playing a sport was important in school. My mother went to a catholic school and she played softball against other schools. My mother stated, " I often found enjoyment in playing softball and everyone would cheer in the games in my

school.”¹ My grandmother also had a cousin that played professional named, Danilo Rivas. My grandmother stated, “ Danilo Rivas was a recognized player and he came from my town.”² She would often remember the time of boys in her hometown, Salcedo, playing baseball in open fields. Baseball, as this essay will argue, is part of the experience of being Dominican and American in the United States.

Dominicans are among the many immigrant groups from Latin America and the Caribbean that settled in this country. They are one of the largest Latino ethnic groups in New York City. Data from the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau show that there 12,000 Dominican immigrants that arrived in the United States in 1960 and in the next decade it increased to 61,000.³ They were able to form their own culture and form their own identity, especially since 60 percent of Dominicans live in the states of New York and New Jersey. As many scholars have analyzed the Dominican presence has evolved over time. Some of this analysis includes how Dominicans formed their understanding of race relations in the United States.⁴ In terms of race relations, Dominican immigrants also learned how to negotiate their own notions of race while living with other racial and ethnic groups, such as Puerto Ricans and African Americans.

Dominicans in the United States began to learn about race relations and formed their understandings on how they were being viewed in a society that is shaped by racial binary system. In the Dominican Republic, race and skin color are not the central markers used to define a person. There are some terms that define people by skin color. The times where race is acknowledged is when Dominicans compare themselves to Haitians. By having the same or similar dark skin color

¹ L. De La Rosa, personal communication, December 2021.

² D. Martinez, personal communication, December 2021.

³ Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2019 American Community Surveys (ACS)

⁴ For a history of Dominican Republic and race relations see, Dixia Ramirez, *Colonial Phantoms: Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas, from the 19th Century to the Present*, New York University Press, 2018.

of a Haitian, it was often looked down upon.⁵ Many Dominicans do not identify themselves as Afro Latinos and deny their African ancestry. Education, culture and social status are usually some important aspects to define the Dominican identity. One of the challenges they faced was how in the United States they would be recognized as black. Hoffnung- Garskof stated that the immigrants that came in the 1960s, were praised for their culture and being different from African Americans and Puerto Ricans. On the other hand, Dominicans lived in these same areas as these other groups of color and faced similar problems and situations. Examples of these problems include disparities in education, police brutality and housing. Yet, As Dominicans settled down in the United States, they came to be perceived as racially different, and those of Afro- descent came to be seen as black, although their Spanish language destabilized easy racial stereotyping.

Dominicans began to immigrate in large numbers to the United States after the fall of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, who was in power from 1930 to 1961.⁶ His assassination led to thousands of Dominican immigrants leaving their homeland because of political instability and the removal of democratically elected President Juan Bosch. He was only able to serve his term for a couple of months until a military coup that was supported by the invasion of U.S. Marines in the Cold War context after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. The result led to a political alliance that brought Juaquin Balaguer to power.⁷ Balaguer was formerly one of Trujillo's cabinet members and recognized as Trujillo's right hand. With the establishment

⁵ Hoffnung-Garskof, Jesse, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 205.

⁶ While the Dominican presence in the United States began already since the late nineteenth century, it is after the 1960s when waves of Dominican migrants will arrive massively to the United States. As scholar, Hoffnung-Garskof put it, there are more Dominicans living in the New York/New Jersey area than in other Dominican city, except for Santo Domingo. For a transnational history of Dominican Americans in New York, see Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

⁷ For a history of Dominican politics in the 1960s, see Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren Derby and Raymundo Gonzalez, *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, Duke University Press, 2014.

of the Immigration Act of 1965, many Dominicans stated to immigrate to the United States in large numbers.

As more and more Dominicans left the island of Hispaniola, they settled in urban areas, such as New York City and New Jersey.⁸ In New York City, many Dominicans resided in the Washington Heights area and people started to think of ways to create their own community and identity without detaching from their roots. The Dominican identity developed with a strong connection to their homeland in which many scholars have presented as transnational identities. Following historian Peggy Levitt, while these immigrants settled down in these cities in the United States, they developed their own identity and through the formation of second and third generations groups, Dominicans kept a strong national identity to the Dominican Republic.⁹ Also living transnationally became the rule for living at a fast pace and changing society, in terms of following modernity. Levitt describes the connections between a Dominican town called Miraflores and Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood in Boston. There were also some struggles within the community such as recognizing the roles of race and gender. Overall different communities can be established whether it be Washington Heights in New York City or Jamaica Plain in Boston.

This essay explores the history of becoming Dominican Americans through baseball. As part of Dominican identity, and one of the most important sports in the United States, baseball also became a way through which Dominican immigrants settled down in this country. They did so as spectators, consumers, but also as this essay will show, as active participants within the sport. By analyzing the career and life experiences of Felipe Alou and Juan Marichal, I will describe their

⁸ Levitt, Peggy, “*Transnational Ties: The Case of Dominicans in the United States,*” in *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960*, ed. by David G. Gutiérrez (New York: Columbia, 2004),229-256.

⁹ Levitt, Peggy, *The Transnational Villagers*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 25.

struggles while being in the United States and their identity as Latinos. I will analyze how baseball became a significant economic opportunity to survive and progress in the United States. As Dominican immigrants became part of the sports industry, they gave visibility to the Dominican community, who were proud of their representatives in the sport, while Felipe Alou becoming to the first Dominican manager and Juan Marichal becoming the first Dominican to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Yet, as immigrants from the Caribbean they faced many challenges of social and race relations in the United States. Social and racial discrimination in times of the Civil Rights struggle were among the challenges that Dominican had to “negotiate” in order to become part of this society. This is also a part of a history of U.S.- Latin and Caribbean relations, particularly, in the way in which countries of the hemisphere become producers of resources exported to the United States. Dominican baseball players, trained in the Dominican Republic, were also part of that economic exchange.

I will argue that baseball, understood as culture was significant in the ways in Dominicans also became American in the United States. In doing so, they developed particular way of being Dominicans, differently from being a Dominican in the Dominican Republic or “dominicanos ausentes,” as they are called in the Dominican Republic. “Dominicanos ausentes” are people that create a different lifestyle and form different experiences in the places that they immigrate to the Dominican diaspora in the United States. If a “dominicano ausente” were to return to the Dominican Republic, they would get recognized for how they changed, in terms on how they conduct themselves. Moreover, they would be viewed on their different morals and values.

Based in the scholarship that explored the history of Dominican Americans, their transnational identity, and the history of race relations in the United States, I will look at baseball as a case study. In the following pages I will analyze the biographies of Felipe Alou and Juan

Marichal, focusing on moments of struggles during their baseball career. I will also analyze values that the Major League Baseball (MLB) holds, the dominant neocolonial relationship with the Dominican Republic and describe the Major League Baseball system of commodifying young talent.

Section 1: The Origins of Baseball in Latin American and Caribbean countries

Before baseball reached the Dominican Republic, it first started in Cuba in the 1860s. Cuban men who studied in the United States brought the sport back to their country where many young boys were fascinated and played in the streets.¹⁰ There would be Cuban sugar moguls as well in the 1870s spreading baseball influence. There would be games played on the sugar plantations during dead time or “tiempo muerto”. Groups eventually formed into official “company teams sponsored by rum, sugar and fruit enterprises.”¹¹ In 1891, two Cuban brothers, Ignacio and Ubaldo Aloma, created the first two baseball clubs in the Dominican Republic. There were also more teams formed two years later in La Vega, which is north of the capital. These teams were formed by a Cuban doctor named Samuel Mendoza y Ponce de Leon.¹² American sailors stationed in the Dominican Republic at times of American expansionism following the Roosevelt Corollary, spread the game throughout the island.

Since the United States saw how much talent was coming from Cuba, it sought to expand into the Caribbean islands. In the case of Mexico, some of its first records show competitions in Guaymas, Oaxaca, Nuevo Leon and Yucatan in the 1910s and 1920s.¹³ Additionally, Mexican and

¹⁰ Rodriguez, Darwin, “Beisbol in my Blood- History of Dominican Baseball,” 2015, YouTube.

¹¹ Mitchel, “The Dominican Republic and the United States: A Baseball History”, 2021

https://origins.osu.edu/article/dominican-republic-and-united-states-baseball-history?language_content_entity=en

¹² Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 35.

¹³ Ontiveros, “Baseball in Mexico City during the Porfiriato, 1882-1910.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. 30 April 2020; Accessed 8 Apr 2022.

Mexican American laborers from the north and south of the Rio Grande were able to connect with each other with the use of baseball. In the case of Puerto Rico, baseball was introduced to the island in 1898 by Cubans. The first game was played as Borinquen, which was the original name of the island and the people played against Almendares, a team of Cuban migrants. During this time, a Puerto Rican viewed the sport as “dangerous for human beings and a silly form of entertainment.”¹⁴ Also military and civilian personnel from the United States played with local people in their free time, which led to the expansion of playing venues. The local players were able to recognize the difference in playing styles between themselves and the Americans. Eventually, more people began playing from dockworkers to sugarcane workers to farmers. By 1918, Puerto Rico was getting more recognition and Major league and Negro league teams began to visit the island. This motivated some Puerto Ricans and investors to create Puerto Rican all-star teams. To become more recognized and appeal internationally, some clubs took names from North American companies and products to show economic and political ties with the United States. Some examples of team names include, Wrigley and Sherwin Williams.

For many of these Latin American countries, baseball integrated itself with different cultures and a new wave of nationalism. For Mexico, people believed that it was important to embrace western sports and it showed a “sign of modernity” and during the Porfiriato era, having success in international competition was important for social and governmental progress.¹⁵ In addition, during this time period, the government promoted the slogan, “Mother to foreigners and stepmothers to Mexicans” to attract potential companies and investors and display their baseball talent.

¹⁴ Gmelch, Nathan, *Baseball Beyond Our Borders: An International Pastime*, 41

¹⁵ Gmelch, Nathan, *Baseball Beyond Our Borders: An International Pastime*, 77

In the late nineteenth century, Dominicans considered baseball as a leisure activity and there were only two professional teams which were, Ozama and Nuevo Club.¹⁶ Cubans escaping the Ten-Year War, which lasted from 1868-1878, came to the island and introduced the sport. It continued to gain traction until the early 1900s, when baseball was played by mostly upper-class young boys and later on caught the attention of boys of other social classes and different towns. Soon, the Tigres of Licey, became popular which led to the formation of Licey Park in 1914. By the time of the American occupation in 1916, American soldiers would compete against Dominicans in terms of friendly competition. The local teams would often beat the marines. These competitions allowed for new teams to be formed, such as Los Muchachos, San Carlos and Delco Light and later all teams formed into one group called, Los Leones del Escogido. After the American military left the island, it led to an era called “beisbol romantico” or baseball romanticism. The players would play freely in open fields and create strong relationships with communities. The fans would wait after the game to talk with the players and would give them money. By the 1930s, Dominican teams were playing with other teams from North America and teams in the Caribbean, expanding the networks and circulation of players and fans.



“U.S. Marines play baseball in the Dominican Republic, circa 1916”¹⁷

¹⁶ Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic*, 8,9.

¹⁷ Mitchel, “The Dominican Republic and the United States: A Baseball History,” *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, 2021.

In the history of Dominican baseball, players belonged to different types of leagues. Before there were men in the major leagues in the United States, there were Dominican men playing in the Negro Leagues, including some players like, Pedro Alejandro San, Esteban Vargas and Horacio Martinez. In 1920, the Negro Leagues was created because of the constant rejection of African American participation and enforcing segregation during the late 1800s. Along with African Americans, many Latin American and Caribbean players used this as an opportunity to play baseball at a professional level and showcase their talent. The year 1936, represented a turning point for the sport on the island, now part of the modernization of the Dominican state by the dictator, Rafael Trujillo. In the following year, Trujillo decided to recruit players from the Negro Leagues such as Satchel Paige and formed the team called, Los Dragones de Ciudad Trujillo. Trujillo gave Paige \$30,000 to recruit the best Negro League players. He was also told to keep \$6,000 for himself, which was the largest amount he ever received for playing baseball. Trujillo used the sport of baseball as political tool. He thought by investing in a baseball team, people would be entertained and gain their trust. Additionally, Trujillo brought in Cuban and Puerto Rican players to create a stronger team. Eventually, Los Dragones de Ciudad Trujillo, won their first Dominican championship against the Aguilas Cibaenas. After the championship, the team was not able to stay together because Trujillo was not able to continue investing money and the league went bankrupt. The foreign players returned to their countries.



Rafael Trujillo with Ciudad Trujillo Team including Satchel Paige on the right, 1937¹⁸

Although Trujillo enjoyed the sport, the person that truly invested was his son, Ramfis. He was a dedicated fan and when he was 9 years old, he became brigadier general of the armed forces. When he got older, he got the position of commander of the Dominican Air Force. He was also in charge of the air force baseball club called Aviacion. The club became his “personal fantasy league team,”¹⁹ since he could draft any young Dominican into the armed forces. He would closely watch games and players understood that had to play their best. One of the young men that caught his attention and recruited was Manuel Mota. Mota stated, “ We were soldiers, the only thing was that we had no guns, we only play baseball.”²⁰ Then for the first time, a major U.S. baseball team visited the island, Cincinnati players. In 1948, the Brooklyn Dodgers also played on the island. These teams would go to the island to do Spring training and present their skills in local games.

¹⁸ Winter League Teams, “Ciudad Trujillo Team,” 1937, Center for Negro League Baseball Research. <http://www.cnlbr.org/DefiningNegroLeagueBaseball/WinterLeagueTeams/tabid/59/Default.aspx>

¹⁹ Shanley, John, dir. “Republic of Baseball: Felipe Alou Juan Marichal & 1st Dominican MLB Superstars and Civil Rights Heroes.” 2006; United States, Dominican Republic, YouTube video.

²⁰ Shanley, John, dir. “Republic of Baseball: Felipe Alou Juan Marichal & 1st Dominican MLB Superstars and Civil Rights Heroes.” 2006; United States, Dominican Republic, YouTube video.

This led to the start of baseball connections between the Dominican Republic and the United States.

Since the Cuban embargo became more imposed in the 1960s, it led for MLB organizations to create a stronger relationship with the Dominican Republic. In 1951, a “working agreement was established. This agreement represented a non-formal relationship. There would be coaches and players of major league clubs working with the Dominican partners. They would be at the forefront while the Dominican partners would hold onto any players that would come in and be chosen by any MLB club.²¹ They would keep any promising talent and would wait for the MLB club that they work under to pick who would be right for their team. The importance of baseball continued to climb and the “golden era” started with the construction of Estadio Quisqueya in 1955. It was praised for its strong structure, design and the overall look of the stadium. The stadium also led to the initiation of an official baseball league called LIDOM or Liga de Beisbol Profesional de la República Dominicana.

Since the established relationship in the Dominican Republic, the MLB has depended on their administrators and coaches to look after any upcoming Dominican talent. Over the years, the MLB has thought of new ways to manage talent through different measures and focusing on how to maximize profit. One of these measures is focusing on the use of “buscones”, which is defined as “one who searches” or unofficial street agents.²² Since the early 1990s and 2000s, buscones have become more involved at different stages of developing talent.²³ While some buscones have baseball academies and developed the skills of young boys on their own terms, now they are being used by the MLB. Even though the MLB does not want to show their connections with the

²¹ Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 38.

²² Gmelch, Nathan, *Baseball Beyond Our Borders: An International Pastime*, 28,29.

²³ Gmelch, Nathan, *Baseball Beyond Our Borders: An International Pastime*, 28,29.

buscones to preserve their image, they do serve the benefit of managing younger players with little to no money. Compared to the MLB, buscones do not have a lot of funding and they struggled to provide for the welfare of the players. The MLB and buscones have also faced violations for exploiting their players. There is a seventeen-year-old rule that states that players cannot be signed up until six months before their seventeenth birthday. Also, the MLB and the buscones allows players to have pain killers to be injected into their bodies. The academies involve rigorous training and workout, including boys as young as 13 years old who train as if they were 16- and 17-year-old. This can be seen as violation of human rights. Academies lack proper regulations and engage in practices that the MLB would not allow in the United States. The MLB has not provided these academies with the proper resources and usually the court cases built against them do not go far. Because baseball is seen as “America’s pass time” and a part of American culture, the Dominican government continue to have loose regulations on the terms of the MLB.²⁴

When these young males enroll in these programs run by the buscones, the main goal is to get into the MLB academies and eventually get picked by a major league. The eligible age to get picked for the academy is 15.5 years old. Some of these young teenagers have to face hard conditions in these programs. The buscones at times struggle to have enough money and provide for the young players. This can be compared to the Venezuela, which are the second largest for MLB players. Venezuela also has programs that have been scrutinized for insecurity and malnourishment towards young players.²⁵

²⁴ Lisman, Michael, “Walk-Off or Trade-Off? Baseball And Education in The Dominican Republic.” *States News Service*, March 25, 2019. *Gale Academic OneFile*

²⁵ Lisman, Michael, “Walk-Off or Trade-Off? Baseball And Education in The Dominican Republic.” *States News Service*, March 25, 2019. *Gale Academic OneFile*

The first academy in the Dominican Republic was made by a Dominican man, Epy Guerrero, who was also a scout for the Toronto Blue Jays in 1977. Then in 1982, a Cuban living in the Dominican Republic, Ralph Avila, decided to make their own academy as well. His academy eventually became the trend, and his academy became the first academy feeder for the Los Angeles Dodgers.²⁶ Initially, the idea of creating places to house the players was not well received and ignored by the MLB. Players needed spaces that they could practice but also rest. These spaces allowed players to practice freely and not having to travel to back and forth from their homes. Avila had the dilemma of housing Licey-Dodgers players and working with other players from other teams. He decided to completely focus on the Licey- Dodgers players and he moved from Olympic Stadium in Santo Domingo to San Pedro de Macoris with his main scout, Elvio Jimenez in 1981. Avila stated, “We didn’t know if we could afford it. I convinced Monchin (owner of Tigres del Licey) to pay players a little more. I told our players on Licey that for that little bit more that they [were] getting, we move to San Pedro and work...”²⁷ For there was a boarding house for the original players, but as they kept signing more players, they built two rooms in Jimenez ’s backyard and each room had eight beds. Jimenez ’s wife was also involved by cooking for all of the players. Overall, this can be viewed as Avila and Jimenez forming a system to provide for the players to be able to train easier and having a place to live. Overall, baseball academies have been built in other Latin American countries as well. Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Mexicans have also made a name for themselves in terms of showing promising talent. The academy system is important because it allows for one of the ways that the MLB to maintain a uniformed process in training upcoming players.

²⁶ Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 37.

²⁷ Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 41.

While these young men go through these struggles, many see them as sacrifices that they have to make. Mostly these young players come from poor families and are raised with the expectation that they should be strong and not show much emotion. This can be connected to strong male pride or “machismo”. An example can be shown in male values portrayed in the town of Miraflores. A migrant named Alfredo states, “Though boys are also taught to help their fathers... my father used to take me to the fields, but more often than not I spent my childhood running around Miraflores with the other boys.”²⁸ Also, as they get older, the idea of becoming a bread winner starts to become more present, and they are pressured to go on a certain path. Young boys are often told by their fathers to be manly and explained the importance of getting a job early²⁹. Baseball is seen as a manly sport and families sometimes put their children to play baseball as soon as they can walk. These young players already have a set ideology, which can be described as using hard work and determination in hopes of getting drafted and helping to support their families financially. Many parents put pressure on their sons to be strong, stoic and represent the family well. Also, young boys are put to do physical labor jobs and put less importance towards education. In comparison to young females, young males in the Dominican Republic are twice as much to fail or repeat school.³⁰ Since the chance of getting drafted is small, many of these young men that used their teenage years to practice and train, now fall behind from their peers and struggle in being in becoming stable citizens in society. Many do not return to school and struggle to find long term jobs and become labeled as the “ni- ni generation (neither-nor)”.³¹ This age range

²⁸Levitt, Peggy, *The Transnational Villagers*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001,98.

²⁹ Levitt, Peggy, *The Transnational Villagers*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 61,98.

³⁰ Lisman, Michael, “Walk-Off or Trade-Off? Baseball And Education in The Dominican Republic.” *States News Service*, March 25, 2019. *Gale Academic OneFile*

³¹ Lisman, Michael, “Walk-Off or Trade-Off? Baseball And Education in The Dominican Republic.” *States News Service*, March 25, 2019. *Gale Academic OneFile*

in also critical in societal issues because it is the most common age range for violence, gang activity and drugs that impacts the urban areas of the Dominican Republic.

It is important to see the training of young boys in the Dominican Republic of potential roles in the MLB in the United States as part of a commodity chain. This concept is connected to the “neo colonist tradition”.³² The neo colonist tradition explains how foreign investments impact countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These kind of interactions began in 1880 and continued in the 1930s.³³ Many Latin American leaders openly accepted the foreign investments from major western industries and adapted policies to please any potential investors, such as the United States and the British. The global commodity chain also pertains to baseball in terms of who to recruit and provide their labor. Over time, younger and younger boys would get recruited by the buscones and move on to the academies in hopes of getting signed. Some young men believe that after getting signed they will automatically be placed in the major leagues. But there is a tiered system within the MLB, the A minor league, the AA minor league and the AAA minor league, which leads to the major league.³⁴ Not many players that have a minor league contract, reach the end goal of making it to the major leagues. Many struggle to keep up with this process and deals with the fear of getting dropped at any level.

In the Dominican Republic, people consider baseball to be the national sport and describing it to be “in the blood” of Dominicans. Young boys playing baseball in open fields in San Pedro de Macoris became the center of recruiting upcoming players. San Pedro de Macoris is known for managing the exports of cattle, timber, molasses and sugar. In this town, most kids would make a

³² Klein, Chain reaction: Neoliberal exceptions to global commodity chains in Dominican baseball, 47 (1) 27-42, 2011,28.

³³ Klein, Chain reaction: Neoliberal exceptions to global commodity chains in Dominican baseball, 47 (1) 27-42, 29.

³⁴ Klein, Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice, 27.

living shining shoes or washing the windshields of cars. Boys would spend their free time grabbing sugar cane stick and using it as a bat and practicing with a rock. On the other hand, the commodity chain is viewed differently in the United States. Unlike their North American counterparts, Dominicans have to develop mentally and physically at a much younger age. Young players in United States are able to wait until they finish high school or while they are in college to be able to get signed to a major league team.

Section 2: Struggles in the United States: Racism, Discrimination, Identity

Juan Marichal and Felipe Alou are examples of Dominican born baseball players that have faced many hardships and overcame them as they gained experiences while being in the United States. Felipe Alou has had many life experiences that has led him to become one of the most recognized baseball players in the Dominican Republic. Alou was the second Dominican to make it to the major leagues. He was born on May 12, 1935. He grew up in a poor family and lived in the town of Haina. His family consisted of a mother, father, and five siblings. Originally, he never thought that he would become a baseball player and believed that baseball was going to stay in his youth. In Haina, there was no baseball field, no coaches, no leagues and no equipment. As a child Alou showed some passion towards baseball, while playing around his house with his siblings. His father was the main provider of the family and could not play with his children but he decided to make something for them. He was a carpenter and blacksmith and he made Felipe a baseball bat. Eventually he made baseball bats for the boys in the neighborhood and they used an unripe lemon or a coconut for a ball. Alou tried to get a real baseball with his brother Matty, when they were watching a local team play against a team from Santo Domingo. There was a ball that landed

outside of the area where they were playing. After the game, they searched for an hour to find the ball and compared it to a “diver finding a rare pearl.”³⁵

As he grew up, Alou began to focus on education more and becoming a doctor. His mother would enforce the importance of education. To go to high school, he moved to the capital, Santo Domingo and lived with his uncle. Then after some time, he decided to move back home and travel 12 miles each day to school. By traveling a long distance, sometimes it would give him the opportunity to see the city kids and play baseball against them. His father also gifted him a pair of baseball cleats but soon had to return them because his father removed the spikes because he needed a pair of shoes for himself. Alou often found himself running. One day, during school, he and his friends were watching the track and field team. There was a javelin that landed near him. Instead of walking and passing it to the coach, he threw it and went over everyone’s heads by 25 feet and it surprised everyone. Alou was approached by the coach and soon he was throwing the javelin, the discus and running the 100- and 200-meter dashes. These experiences while being on the track and field team helped him to become a better runner and thrower.³⁶

One of the events that impacted his life was when he was eight years old. He witnessed his two-week-old sister losing weight and suddenly passed away in her crib. From that moment, he believed that it was his calling to become a doctor and help people that did not have money. People that lived in the town could not afford medical treatment. It was more common to rely on remedies and superstition. There was also a time where Matty broke his arm and it was healed by a man through massage. Their mother also knew all kinds of herbs, teas and natural remedies. Eventually, Alou knew that the best and proper way to help his family is by becoming a doctor. In college,

³⁵ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 23.

³⁶ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 20.

he would be on the baseball team but he was also looking toward being on the track team in the 1955 Pan American Games in Mexico City. Before he got to Mexico City, there was a stop in Miami. In Miami, he had to sit in the back of busses. He considered this his first experience with racism in the United States.³⁷ At the last minute he switched over to being on the baseball, which resulted the team winning gold. After this, Alou planned to continue studying medicine and polishing his ability to throw the javelin on the track team. He held the national record for throwing the javelin and was on path for the upcoming 1956 Olympics in Australia. Suddenly, he had decisions to make when his father lost his job and the Dominican Republic was having trouble in affording to send delegates for the Olympic games. His baseball coach, which was also a scout for the San Francisco Giants, saw the potential in making baseball his career and Alou made the decision to sign. On June 8, 1958, he made his debut in the big leagues with the San Francisco Giants. His payment was \$200 and there were no bonuses.³⁸

At the same time that Alou was initiated into U.S. baseball, he was also initiated into U.S. race relations. Alou generally knew racism existed in the United States, but he did not understand it. Dominican Republic was a “country where race didn’t matter”³⁹. He saw Jackie Robinson in a photo where he was sitting alone and the white players were sitting away from him. Over the years, he also noticed black players slowly being presented in Major League Baseball. When he was 12 years old, Alou was able to see Jackie Robinson in the Dodgers team play in 1948. As a trip from school, he was able to watch the Dodger’s spring training and play against the Dominican Republic All Star team. Alou was impacted by the uniforms because it was the first time that he saw baseball players wear them and have different colors. “ I was mesmerized seeing grown men play baseball

³⁷ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 20.

³⁸ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 20.

³⁹ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 22.

with four real bases and wearing dazzling uniforms that shimmered in the spring sun.”⁴⁰ He also knew about the circumstances surrounding Robinson because his teacher at the time told him that the Dodgers were avoiding the “race problem in the South.”⁴¹ Alou knew the concept of racism but did not understand it. He did not understand it from the perspective of his family coming from a black father and white mother. Additionally, he did not notice people acting differently “coming from a country where race did not matter.”⁴² But he acknowledged racism when he saw a photo of Jackie Robinson in a newspaper. It showed Jackie Robinson sitting alone and the white players were sitting away from him.

Alou was signed by the Giants and arrived for Spring training in 1956 in Florida. He was assigned to the Lake Charles Louisiana club. He knew little information about segregation, but as time went on, he saw how differently he was being treated. In one of the games, he was not able to play. An interpreter had told him that he was on hold. He was going to be put in a city that was more “friendly to the black.”⁴³ Then when he was able to walk onto the field with his black teammates, they were not allowed to pass. They were all forced to take off their uniforms and sit in the colored section of the bleachers. He felt less than because of his dark skin but also as a Latino. He believed that others were looking down on him as a Latino and “... viewed less than equal in the black communities where I spend much of my time, trying to avoid trouble.”⁴⁴ Being Latino at the time Also, during this time Louisiana legislature was considering banning interracial play and it became official later on in the summer. Alou was shocked. He and other Dominicans had viewed the United States positively. He thought that the United States represented a place of

⁴⁰ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 22.

⁴¹ Ruck, *Race ball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, 146.

⁴² Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 22.

⁴³ Ruck, Rob, *Race ball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, 149.

⁴⁴ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 22.

democracy and a place of opportunity since the Dominican Republic was under a dictatorship. Alou lost loved ones under the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship and he believed that the United States had the power to remove him.⁴⁵ He and his brothers, Matty and Jesus, had no choice but to also play for the Leones del Escogido team in Santo Domingo. The Leones del Escogido team was the baseball team closely associated with Trujillo. The Alou brothers would play in the Dominican Winter League every time they returned home.

Alou was treated poorly even on his own team, the Giants. For example, pitchers would throw at him during batting practice, and his teammates would talk with the opposing team on how to pitch a certain way against him. Alou never had the chance to play in Louisiana. He was sent to Cocoa, Florida on a bus. There were many times where he thought that he should go back to the Dominican Republic but he wanted to continue for Horacio Cortez, the scout that signed him.⁴⁶

During his early times in Cocoa, Alou was part of an incident where he considered to be his first act of rebellion.⁴⁷ He relied on a white Puerto Rican teammate, Julio Navarro, to bring him food from restaurants that he was not allowed to eat. In West Palm Beach, he and other teammates were waiting inside a car on other members that were inside a diner and were also waiting for them to bring them food. There was a waitress that came outside and was willing to take their orders but was stopped and yelled by the owner of the restaurant. The police came because Alou refused to leave and was about to be removed but the manager came to diffuse the situation. Alou stated that

⁴⁵ Shanley, John, dir. "Republic of Baseball: Felipe Alou Juan Marichal & 1st Dominican MLB Superstars and Civil Rights Heroes." 2006; United States, Dominican Republic, YouTube video.

⁴⁶ Alou, Alou: *My Baseball Journey*, 23.

⁴⁷ Ruck, *Race ball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, 151.

he was willing to fight anyone. In baseball, Alou also became more determined and won the Florida League championship during this time.

In 1961, the Giants got a new manager named Alvin Dark. At times he respected the Latin players but also was considered by them, “One day the best man in the world and the next day, the worst.”⁴⁸ Some of the people that were involved in the Latin Giants group were the Alou brothers, Orlando Cepeda, Jose Pagan Dark and Juan Marichal. Dark did not acknowledge the culture of any Latino on the team and prohibited them from speaking Spanish. Dark stated that the white players could not understand the Latin players. The Latin players were angered by this and Felipe protested and questioned Dark. Alou wanted to continue to speak Spanish with his teammates especially with his brothers. He believed that it would be a disgrace to his parents if he did not speak with his brothers in their native language. Dark was officially fired in 1964 when he stated in an interview, “ 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.”⁴⁹ Even though the Latin players were allowed to speak Spanish again, they knew that learning English is important and was still an obstacle to overcome. Alou couldn’t understand people at first while being in the minor leagues, but he made the effort to learn by reading newspapers, having other teammates to translate for him and enrolling himself in classes. While being in the Giants, he was able to communicate more in English but there were times where sports reporters criticized how he and other players were speaking. Reporters would write quotes with how the players would pronounce words to mock them. For example, “hit” would be written as “heet” in the sentence “I hit the ball”.⁵⁰ Many of the Latin players and Alou considered it was

⁴⁸ Ruck, *Race ball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, 157.

⁴⁹ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 93.

⁵⁰ Alou, *Alou: My Baseball Journey*, 66.

disrespectful, shows the belittlement of players and that they would never be recognized as an equal to their other teammates.

In 1962, the Latin group within the Giants began to fall apart because of the racism and the discrimination. The Latin players were continuously being targeted and treated poorly. The players were slowly being transferred to other teams.⁵¹ Alou continued to fight for what he believed what was right. He made an impact when he wrote an article with Arnold Hano, which was titled, “Latin Baseball Players Bill of Rights.” This article explained his reasoning for refusing to pay a \$250 fine from Commissioner, Ford Frick, and also other injustices. The Dominican government organized baseball games with Cuban players that were living in the United States. Alou and Marichal both participated in the games and considered “unauthorized” by Frick. He also was representing all Latin players that were struggling while playing on the field and expressing that someone was needed to acknowledge Latin Americans as people. Latin Americans that become baseball players would usually come from poor family background and was being taxed unfairly. Alou was being taxed as a single, even though he had four dependents. He was also advocating for someone to acknowledge and represent the Latin American countries well. “ He does not have to be Latin. He does not have to speak Spanish. He does have to see the conditions of these countries, face to face.”⁵² Sometime after the article was published, Alou was traded to the Milwaukee Braves. It has been speculated that he was traded because of the article that he published. Alou played for the Braves for six years. In 1964, he injured his knee from the Dominican Winter league game. He continued to play in future games because the Braves needed him to play center field. He recovered from his knee injury in 1965 and he alternated between first base and the outfield.

⁵¹ Ruck, *Race ball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, 165.

⁵² Alou, Hano, “Latin American Ball Players Need a Bill of Rights”, Sport, 22.

In 1966, the Braves moved to Atlanta and the hot climate allowed him to play his best season. In 1967, he got another injury, which was bone chips in his elbow. He played his last game in 1974 and stated he needed to "...get used to the life of a man that can't play baseball."⁵³

In 1976, he was given the opportunity to become an instructor for the Montreal Expos organization. He then became a major league coach for the next seventeen years. In later years, he alternated coaching minor and major league teams. The in 2002, he returned to San Francisco to manage the Giants. In 2010, the Giants won against the Rangers and received his fist championship ring. It can be considered as a full circle moment because in 2012, it had been 57 years signing his first contract to the Giants.

Felipe Alou went on a path that was uncertain and did not believe that he was going to become a baseball player. He became a widely recognized player in baseball history as a three-time all-star and award-winning manager. One of his main goals was to be the main provider of his family. He also learned how to live in an unexpected conditions as a foreigner and stood up for Latin American baseball players that were experiencing unfair treatments. He also formed experiences with his brothers who also played on the same major league team and later as a father coaching one of his sons, Moises Alou, into becoming six time All Star and well-known hitter in the National League. Throughout his baseball career, Felipe Alou had many accomplishments and learned to adapt to different situations and new environments, such as meeting teammates and how he formed his identity as a baseball player and as a Dominican immigrant while living in the United States.

⁵³ Chapman, "Brewers Salute Tom Murphy as Bullpen Savior", The Sporting News, 1974,9.

Another baseball player that faced similar struggles and had different life experiences was Juan Marichal. Marichal was born on October 20, 1937, in a small town called Laguna Verde in the Dominican Republic. He became the first Dominican baseball player to be inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1983. He was also the first Latin American to pitch a no-hitter in the major leagues. When Marichal was growing up, he took care of the farm that his family owned. He lived with his mother, father, two brothers and a sister. His father died when he was three years old of an unknown illness and his mother never remarried.

Marichal loved playing baseball as a child. His older brother taught him pitching, fielding and batting. When he had to walk to school, he would go to the baseball field instead and play baseball. His mother found out from his teacher and told him that education was important and prepare for the future. From that point he became more determined and promised his mother that he was going to be a great baseball player. His goal was to become a part of the national team, which represented the country around the world.⁵⁴

In 1955, Marichal left high school to play for the United Fruit Company team called Grenada. He lived in a bungalow and received payments for checking the quality of bananas so they could be loaded on ships. One day the Aviacion team, had a game along the Haitian border in Manzanillo. While still being on the United Fruit Company team, Marichal performed well and the following morning he received a telegram from Trujillo's son, Ramfis. The telegram stated that Marichal had to be inducted to the Air Force immediately. He went to his mother to get her response and she was furious with discontent. She then proceeded to say, "Son, you cannot say no

⁵⁴Marichal, Juan, and Lew Freedman, *Juan Marichal: My Journey from the Dominican Republic to Cooperstown*, MVP Books, 2011,12

to those people.”⁵⁵ Marichal spent 14 months in the Air Force baseball team and he rarely lost any games. While traveling around Latin America with the Air Force team, many scouts from major league teams recognized his potential.⁵⁶ He eventually signed with the San Francisco Giants and was offered \$500 and he immediately accepted.⁵⁷ Marichal wanted to receive the money to immediately give to his family.

The first time Marichal went to the United States was in 1958 for training. He arrived at Miami, Florida and then went to Sanford, Florida to the Giants minor league camp. Some of the obstacles that he faced were the language and the food. He said that the rice and beans were cooked differently, and he mostly resorted to eating hard boiled eggs. At the minor league camp, he saw different groups including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans and Panamanians. He asked one of the players the reason for the Latinos being separated from the white players and he stated that Latinos were not allowed to play with the white players. Marichal asked, “ Why can’t we get with the white players? Because we’re different races.”⁵⁸ At that time when Marichal came to that realization, he wanted to go back home to the Dominican Republic. He kept reminding himself of the promise he made to his mother.⁵⁹ One way that Marichal found comfort was being with the Latin group in the San Francisco Giants team. He had developed a friendship with Felipe Alou. They both talked about their struggles with the English language, getting used to American culture and experiencing discrimination.

⁵⁵ Ruck, *Rob Race ball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*, 152.

⁵⁶ Marichal, Juan, and Lew Freedman, *Juan Marichal: My Journey from the Dominican Republic to Cooperstown*, MVP Books, 2011,12

⁵⁷ Shanley, John, dir. “Republic of Baseball: Felipe Alou Juan Marichal & 1st Dominican MLB Superstars and Civil Rights Heroes.” 2006; United States, Dominican Republic, YouTube video.

⁵⁸ Hall of Famer, “Juan Marichal: My Journey”, La Vida Baseball, 2018, YouTube video.

⁵⁹ Hall of Famer, “Juan Marichal: My Journey”, La Vida Baseball, 2018, YouTube video.

In 1966, Marichal had an incident with one of the players from the Los Angeles Dodgers, John Roseboro. He got into an altercation with Roseboro after a game. Marichal became known from that incident and showed a difference from his “Dominican dandy” image. The incident was described as racism, involving racial prejudices against black and Latino men. Marichal stated, “The Latinos coming to the United States encountered racism that hadn’t known at home. I mean, there weren’t Jim Crow laws in the Dominican.” Marichal also stated that he was shocked that he could not eat with his teammates and sleep in the same hotels as his teammates. These experiences that Marichal had faced, clearly showed how much he struggled and questioning himself as a Latino in the United States and being treated unfairly as a baseball player.

Section 3: Reforming the Global Commodity Chain and Government Laws

As mentioned in section one, we can think of baseball also as part of the economic relationship between the United States and the Caribbean, in this case the Dominican Republic. As stated in *Talons of the Eagle*, the US established a hegemonic economic presence in the Caribbean since the late 19th century.⁶⁰ That relationship was characterized by a dependency of the Dominican economy on exports to the US, its main market. As the US established its area of influence in the Caribbean, and particularly in the Dominican Republic, including the US Marines invasions in 1916 and 1965, the country developed its capitalist economy in the international division of labor as an exporter of agricultural products and importer of manufactures and a recipient of foreign investment, mainly from the United States⁶¹. This created a social and economic structure dependent on the prices of the foreign market, the degree of foreign investment and the international prices for Dominican products. This vulnerability and relation of dependence

⁶⁰ Smith, *Talons of Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.-Latin American Relations*,38.

⁶¹ Klein, “Chain reaction: Neoliberal exceptions to global commodity chains in Dominican baseball”, 47 (1) 27-42, 29

of the Dominican economy produced a structure of U.S.-Dominican relations that we can think as reproducing itself with baseball players. This can be described as, U.S.- Dominican baseball relations.

As explained previously, with the development of baseball as a national sport and the investment received by the from the government, especially during the Trujillo regime, the Dominican state invested and subsidized the sport in the island. Public funds to clubs, baseball clubs and the professionalization of the game, produced highly trained baseball players. As this project analyzed, and as the biographies of Felipe Alou and Juan Marichal, these players became assets for the sports industry in the United States. The MLB imported highly trained baseball players, whose professionalism and skills were produced in the Dominican Republic through academies owned by major league teams. The passion and talent that Felipe Alou and Juan Marichal showed from their time in the major leagues can described as overcoming periods of struggle, racism and discrimination. In addition, given the race relations and the challenges that Latino players faced in the US, their salaries were also different from those of American origin. There was discrimination in the sense of where you were born would equate with how much money you would get when you sign a contract. There would be more preference to a Dominican player be born or raised in the United States than a Dominican player born and raised in the Dominican Republic. With this preference, the MLB believes that there is more assurance and security in investment for those born and raised in the United States. For example, Alex Rodriguez, a Dominican American player born and raised in New York, was offered \$1.3 million upon contract in 1993.⁶² This can compare to a Dominican born, David Ortiz, who was offered \$3,500 upon

⁶² Sportrac. “ MLB-Alex Rodriguez” <https://www.sportrac.com/mlb/new-york-yankees/alex-rodriguez-597/>

contract in 1992.⁶³ This shows that the MLB signs Dominican born players for cheaper so they can increase their profit.

The Major League Baseball have recognized the contribution of Dominican talent and impact to the demographics of professional baseball. Currently, all of the 30 major league teams have academies in the Dominican Republic. Boys start as early as the age of 10 to practice in these academies. Unlike their North American counterpart, Dominicans have to develop mentally and physically at a much younger age. Young players in the United States are able to wait until they finish high school or while they are in college to be able to get signed to a major league team. Major League Baseball have invested up to \$76 million dollars into the Dominican Republic and \$15 million dollars to create these baseball academies.⁶⁴ In addition to training players in the sport, the baseball academies usually focus on English classes and classes on what can be expected while being in the United States. The MLB have been criticized by buscones and the public for not providing more education programs for these young men. These classes are not helpful long term because less than 1% make it to the Major Leagues. Another factor of this is how the Dominican government views education. There was an education law passed called, the General Law of Education 66/97, which was passed in 1997. This law describes that every Dominican has a right to free education for the formation of productive citizens and better lives. In 2005, the Dominican government used 9.7% of their budget on education expenses.⁶⁵ The government has also signed UN documents that enforces children's rights towards education.

⁶³ Sportrac. "MLB-David Ortiz" <https://www.sportrac.com/mlb/boston-red-sox/david-ortiz-100/>

⁶⁴ Lapchick, "Realities Behind America's Favorite Pastime: Dominican Republic's Cheap Labor Bazaar for Major Leagues". *States News Service*, April 20, 2010. *Gale Academic OneFile*

⁶⁵Lapchick, "Realities Behind America's Favorite Pastime: Dominican Republic's Cheap Labor Bazaar for Major Leagues". *States News Service*, April 20, 2010. *Gale Academic OneFile*

Some buscones have been wanting to change the stigmas of their title and provide better for the young players. Buscones have been characterized by the MLB with negative terms. International scouts from major league teams would describe them as, “There are just pimps”, “We don’t let them in the clubhouse” and “Believe me, you do not want to have dinner with those guys.”⁶⁶ Since buscones are the driving force behind recruitment for the MLB, some have reclaimed a part of the commodity chain by forming their own academies. Also, they have created alternatives to going to the major leagues because of the small chance of being recruited during tryout season. Academies have trained the boys until of age so that they can play in the Dominican teams. Currently, there are six teams in the Dominican Republic that play pro baseball, they include, Tigres del Licey, Estrellas Orientales, Leones del Escogido, Aguilas Cibaenas, Toros del Este and Gigantes del Cibao. Another alternative is being able to coach in the academies. These alternatives allow young men that return from not being recruited to have stable jobs and other ambitions. Overall, this shows advancements in the baseball system compared to the times of Juan Marichal and Felipe Alou. Young boys can now develop their talent on the island through MLB owned academies and Dominican academies. By focusing on the development of young boys in positive ways, it can help prevent cycles of crime, unemployment and poverty that has resulted from being dropped from major and minor league contracts as young adult men.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Gmelch, Nathan, *Baseball Beyond Our Borders: An International Pastime*, 29

⁶⁷ Lisman, "Walk-Off or Trade-Off? Baseball And Education in The Dominican Republic." *States News Service*, March 25, 2019. *Gale Academic OneFile*.

Conclusion

My research shows the importance of Dominican immigration to the United States and how they marked their own presence and formed their own communities. The sport of baseball is an important bridge between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Since baseball is one of the oldest sport in the United States and is part of the image of American culture. Many young boys aspire to play in the major leagues not only to make a name for themselves but also be able to provide for their families. The model of the global commodity chain shows the dependency on athletic labor and it impacts each production stage.

Felipe Alou and Juan Marichal are some of the recognized Major League Baseball players from the Dominican Republic. Their stories demonstrate many of the struggles Latin American and Caribbean players faced during the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the struggles that they had were language barriers, racism, discrimination and assimilating to a new environment. Some of these could have been anticipated and prepared for in advance, but since there were no language and American culture classes, many Latin American and Caribbean players, like Alou and Marichal, were experiencing the unexpected while being in the United States. In the United States they had to acknowledge how they were being viewed differently in the times of segregation. Additionally, they were struggling how they were being viewed as Latinos. As more Dominicans began to immigrate to the United States, they negotiated their identity and kept many aspects from the culture. It became important for many Dominicans to portray themselves as Latinos in these communities. Even though it can be viewed as disregarding their blackness, being a Latino in the United States signified a group of people with different cultures and background. Dominicans were able to hold on to that and build their own communities in the United States. Being a Latino maintained a sense of security. Ever since baseball became incorporated in Dominican culture, it

has built a sense of nationalism for the country. This sense of nationalism has led to many positive and negative impacts towards Dominican immigrants. One positive aspect is that mass producing baseball players from Latin American and the Caribbean has led to the worldwide recognition of the sport. A part of the longevity of baseball can be attributed to the passion of young Dominican players and Dominican immigrants that support these young men and their fascination of the sport. One similarity that connects Dominican immigrants and Dominican baseball players is the struggle of speaking English. When many Dominicans immigrate, they usually settle in predominantly Dominican cities in New York and New Jersey. Some of these people find not need to learn or perfect their English. The image that this presents to others is rudeness and can lead to other misunderstandings. Some baseball players, especially during the times that Alou and Marichal played professionally, were afraid to make mistakes and were reluctant to speak English earlier on during their careers. Some negative aspects involve the commodification of young players though the global commodity chain. This type of system was formed through the globalization of baseball since the 1950s and enforced by the Major League Baseball organization. Many young boys today continue to believe that they will make it to that final stage of being in the major leagues, when in reality many start off in minor league contracts and struggle to keep up with each stage. They often sacrifice their adolescence and don't complete their education. Not only does their passion for the sport drives them to continue with the rigorous training but also using their talent to help their families economically. Currently in society, some Dominican academies have made continuous efforts to help these young boys, such as proposing better regulations and programs to major league representatives, requiring young boys to complete their high school education to continue with training and offering alternative career paths for the future.

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