

Thesis Prospectus

Entre dos mundos: Defining the social role of MLB's Dominican Baseball Academies

Overview

Baseball maintains a tremendous influence in contemporary Dominican society. Originally brought to the country by Cubans in the late nineteenth century, the sport gained a foothold and has maintained it ever since (Klein 16). During the 1950s, professional teams in the U.S. took notice of the talent in the Dominican Republic and began to include some Dominicans on their rosters. The numbers grew into the hundreds by the 1980s (Klein 35). Today, the DR continues to produce some of the best baseball talent in the world. A quick look at the MLB reveals this. For instance, at the beginning of the 2010-2011 season, over 10% of all Major League players were from the DR while about 25% of all minor league players were Dominican (Gregory). The successes of Dominican baseball players or *peloteros* have stimulated the interest of MLB teams. However, recruiting in the developing world has proven very different from how teams find and select talent in the U.S. Consequently, Major League Baseball teams have set up a system of academies in the country as they seek to find the next Manny Ramírez, Sammy Sosa, Jose Reyes, or David Ortiz. These academies serve as a goal and proving grounds for many young Dominican boys and inevitably affect the dynamics of the game that is so integral to the social fabric of the Dominican Republic. At the same time, they provide a point of contact between the Dominican Republic and mainstream American society. I am interested in how these academies act as a point of influence from the MLB (and America) into Dominican society but also from Dominican society into the MLB (and American society).

Research Question

My research question is the following: “What is the nature of the academies as a point of exchange and influence between Dominican society and the U.S.?” The answer to my question will be two-fold. On one hand, I will explore how the U.S. influences and shapes Dominican society via the nexus between the MLB and the position of baseball in the DR. Conversely, it will be necessary to examine how Dominican society makes itself known in the U.S. by way of the great players it sends through the academies and into the living rooms of millions of Americans.

Structure

I will open my investigation with a history of baseball in the Dominican Republic. I will explain how the country’s lack of social infrastructure (such as solid academic-based sports teams) created the vacuum that the MLB and individual Dominicans filled with the unique recruiting pattern that exists in the country today. I plan to compare and contrast the position and effects of baseball within Dominican society before and after the major changes that occurred involving the MLB. This will allow me to explore the influence the MLB has exerted over Dominican society, particularly via the academies. I will also examine the growth of Dominican baseball players in the U.S. and relate it these same changes. I will then analyze this growth in relation to other forms in which the Dominican Republic has inserted itself into mainstream U.S. society (such as via immigration). This will allow me to deduce the importance of Dominican baseball players to the diffusion of knowledge of the DR in the U.S.

Methodology

I will use historical analysis of secondary sources to inform my conclusions as I compare and contrast the changes that have occurred in Dominican baseball and society and MLB's role in them. I will utilize media outlets, such as newspaper articles, for information on recent developments. Secondary sources will also largely inform the conclusions I make about the importance of expressions of Dominican society in the U.S. outside of the baseball context. For my primary sources, I will be able to analyze MLB rosters and statistics as I explore the importance of Dominicans to the game in the U.S. I will also seek interviews with individuals who have been on the "inside" of the sport as it deals with Dominican society, such as players and those who have worked with them.

Bibliography

Gregory, Sean. "Baseball Dreams: Striking Out in the Dominican Republic ." *Time*, July 26, 2010. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2004099-1,00.html>

Klein, Alan M. *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.

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