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Creando Las Estrellas: Determining the Quality of the Dominican and Cuban Player
Development Systems

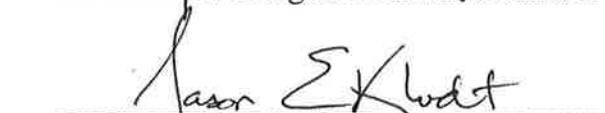
By
Samuel C. Hearn

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion Of the Bachelor of
Arts degree in Public Policy Leadership at the Trent Lott Institute
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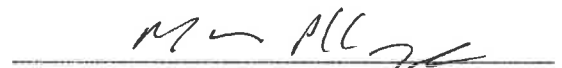
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ABSTRACT

Samuel C. Hearn: *Creando Las Estrellas: Determining the Quality of the Dominican and Cuban Baseball Development Systems*

Recently, there has been a huge rise in the number of Cuban ballplayers, or peloteros, as the baseball playing Latinos are known. Why do Major League Baseball (MLB) teams go to such lengths to sign Cubans, when a heavy presence already exists in Cuba's Caribbean neighbor, the Dominican Republic? Through the comparison of educational systems, statistics of each country's elite players, and comparative accounts of the Dominican and Cuban player development systems, the contrast between the two systems is evident. Though the Dominican system creates a large return in the investment MLB teams make in the country, the socialized sport system propels Cuba to create the ideal pelotero.

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Introduction

When we talk about baseball throughout the Caribbean region, two names come to mind as powerhouses of baseball talent. The Dominican Republic, the new international power in tournaments like the World Baseball Classic, provides a steady stream of labor to the United States' major and minor leagues. Cuba, the traditional, rarely defeated power of the international stage, shows the world its potential each time a new star makes it off the island, defecting to become part of the small collection of forbidden fruit in Major League Baseball today.

The names of players are similar, the language is similar, and the love of baseball permeates both cultures. These are the final similarities between the two countries. Cuba and the Dominican Republic exist in two separate worlds. The differences in poverty, education, employment, and healthcare are staggering. Through the fray, and through two very different systems, baseball emerges. Which country develops a better player? The baseball development systems in these two countries begin and end in very different ways, but each produces success. Which one produces more consistent success?

The Cuban system, neat and orderly cranks out player after player, into the country's amateur baseball program. The Dominican system exists through massive investment by Major League Baseball (MLB). Based on the hope of making it to stardom coupled with massive investment from the MLB, Dominican teenagers compete for the opportunity to make it to *'las grandes ligas'* or the big leagues. However these dreams do not deliver each boy to the doorstep of the United States ready to play baseball. The grueling work put in year after year, starting at age 12-13 in the Dominican and age 4 in Cuba demonstrates the dedication these players have to their craft. The dedication

coupled with player development is what turns boys into men, and prepares them to play the game they love in a country they do not know. Player development is composed of education, strength training, baseball skills, and an intangible ability for some kids that cannot be taught. This development pushes players towards their goals. Determining which country does it better is the focus of the work that will occur. Two systems with different methods and different focuses hope to achieve one thing: creating the ideal baseball player. To measure the success in creating the ideal baseball player, statistics will be analyzed, programs examined, and cultural differences pondered to determine how these players develop in their respective countries. Through this analysis the picture emerges to ascertain which player development system is able to best mold a young man into a star, and create the more efficient, more effective, and more successful baseball player. Though each system sees successes, Cuba produces a more successful baseball player.

Chapter 1: The Dominican Investment

Dominican Development

Baseball in the Dominican Republic has a long history, popularized in the sugar refineries to the passionate national game of the Dominican. In the Dominican Republic, baseball began in 1886 as an import, not from Americans, but from Cubans. Originally played between rival sugar refineries, “as a diversion supplied by refinery managers for their men during the slack harvest period...the familial, close-knit nature of the communities that grew around the refineries fostered an identification with the baseball players and teams, and this intensified the game.”¹ Following this period, baseball soon took off as an amateur game, drawing huge crowds to observe impressive talent. This amateur success is illustrated by an interview with Cuqui Cordova, a man who had written for a Santo Domingo area newspaper in the Dominican Republic. Cordova described the exuberant nature with which baseball was played during the 1921 Championship of the Queen, or the most beautiful woman in Santo Domingo. Cordova described this event to Rob Ruck, author of The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic. “‘It was a social event,’ Cuqui Cordova had written, as the young beauty of Cibao (who happened to be Cuqui’s aunt) made her way through the capital in an open car to the flower-strewn street where she would stay.”² This historical account shows that a bout between teams quickly evolved into a source of passion that consumed not only a few hours on a baseball

¹ Alan M. Klein, Sugarball The American Game, the Dominican Dream (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1991), 25.

² Rob Ruck, The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1993), 34-35

diamond, rather, permeating the Dominican culture and quickly becoming the most popular sport on the island in the early 20th century.

This passion for baseball still exists today, and evidence of this passion is never more present than in the Dominican Winter league, arguably the most competitive winter league in the world. During a Dominican Winter League game, “firecrackers explode behind the bleachers and a merengue band snakes its way through the stands. Women sell rum and an array of delicacies while bettors wager on every conceivable aspect of the game.”³ The description of a Dominican baseball game seems hectic, but truly embodies the nature of baseball, as played in the Dominican. It also provides a stark contrast to the businesslike fan behavior in the United States. This “brand” of baseball, this distinctly Dominican baseball, provides an insight into the love of the game felt on this small island. However, passion and love cannot drive the desire to play baseball for so many Dominicans. In a country where the average poverty rate was greater than 50% for the first decade of the 21st century, more and more young Dominicans see baseball not only as a way to have fun during downtime, but as a means of achieving monetary success and providing better lives for their families.⁴

Baseball as business is not only an idea that permeates the Dominican mindset, but also has been the tract of the sports industries in the United States. Alan M. Klein observes this change when he states, “it may look like a game, but baseball in the Dominican Republic has become an industry. It is subsidized by the government, receives international investment, directly and indirectly includes a significant segment of the

³ Rob Ruck, The Tropic of Baseball (1993), 14.

⁴ Quentin T. Wodon et al. “Poverty and Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean, Volume 1,” World Bank technical paper no. 467, June 30, 2000.

population, and wields considerable cultural clout.”⁵ The idea that Dominican baseball has become a business reflects the continuing trend that the Dominican Republic’s government, economy, and people are consistently dominated by the influence of the United States, making Dominican one of the least sovereign countries in the world.⁶ When baseball is made even more attractive by the presence of heavy investment on the part of Major League Baseball, it is no surprise that young Dominican men are turning to baseball as a means of economic elevation as opposed to the fringe, often-informal industries of tourism and agricultural day labor. Baseball as a business is often masked by the promotional value and removed nature of the players in the United States. However, the removed nature of the players in the United States is far less true in a country where Major League Baseball academies dot the map with frequency, and the investment of Major League franchises serves not only for sport, but also for developing labor in the form of young Dominicans looking for a way to create better lives for themselves.

Creating Context: A Review of Dominican Baseball Literature

The literature surrounding baseball in the Dominican Republic is extensive in its historical accounts and modern day descriptions, though it does create some issues with regard to applicability in the industry of Major League Baseball. Alan M. Klein leads the way with three works surrounding baseball and the Dominican Republic. The first, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream*, is a work that explores the inner workings of Dominican baseball along with the political dynamic of the Dominican

⁵ Alan M. Klein, Growing the Game: The Globalization of Major League Baseball (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2006), 90.

⁶ Jan Black, The Dominican Republic: Politics and Development in an Unsovereign State (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

economy. Written at a point in time when the Dominican explosion in Major League Baseball was a fairly new phenomenon, Klein provides an excellent introduction to Dominican baseball and what makes it unique. The second of Klein's works, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, works well as a modern update to *Sugarball*. Exploring the coming of age of the academy system as well as the role of *buscones*, or independent scouts that train young Dominicans before they are eligible to sign a professional contract. *Dominican Baseball* could well be the most important work for understanding how Dominican Baseball and Major League Baseball's operations on the island. Finally, *Growing the Game: The Globalization of Major League Baseball*, serves as an overview for the growing international presence of baseball, but contains excellent discussion of the Dominican boom during the mid 2000s in Major League Baseball. Klein does not stand alone in his authority on Dominican baseball. Other authors have also made useful contributions to the greater body of work surrounding baseball in the Dominican. Often taking a critical tone, Klein often hints at a negative undertone of Major League Baseball involvement in the Dominican, portraying the MLB as a type of colonizer through the academy system.

Rob Ruck, another author of many works surrounding baseball wrote *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic*. Ruck's work offers an overview of Dominican baseball, exploring the reasons for playing, the political dynamic that baseball went through during the years under the brutal Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, and the experiences of many current and former Dominican players and coaches through extensive interviews and trips around the Dominican countryside. Samuel O. Regalado offers an overview of baseball in Latin America in his work, *Viva Baseball! Latin major*

Leaguers and Their Special Hunger; he presents not only an overview of the Dominican game, but also Puerto Rico, and the importance of former baseball idol, Roberto Clemente, on the development of the game in Puerto Rico. This work helps put books, like *The Tropic of Baseball*, in perspective, as the Dominican game is presented alongside other baseball playing Latin American countries.

Finally, Mark Kurlansky presents, in Spanish, a work that looks to one city: San Pedro de Macorís. Colloquially known as *la ciudad de campocortos*, or the city of shortstops, San Pedro de Macorís provides a microcosm of Dominican baseball and the relationship between the sugar refineries, love of baseball, and the poverty that is seen throughout the Dominican Republic. The book, *Las Estrellas Orientales: Cómo el béisbol cambió el pueblo dominicano de San Pedro de Macorís*, or *The Eastern Stars: How baseball changed the Dominican People of San Pedro de Macorís*, explores the socioeconomic issues surrounding baseball through the lens of one baseball-loving city. San Pedro de Macorís has enjoyed unusual success in the amount of the city's residents being signed to play professional baseball, and Kurlansky successfully explores the culture and manner in which people interact surrounding baseball in this Dominican city.

Each work explores the importance and cultural affects of baseball in the Dominican Republic. Accurately depicting Major League Baseball's involvement in the Dominican combined with cultural analysis ensures that each of these works contributes to the greater body of knowledge surrounding baseball in the Dominican Republic.

Each work of literature discussed above has positive aspects, however, the shortfalls of these works of literature are very much present. The cultural knowledge provides a strong base from which to begin this work; however the literature does not

apply the cultural issues discussed by each of these authors into a workable solution. The purpose of this work is not to say that Major League Baseball should be deaf to observations made through extensive research, but rather that the literature is not entirely applicable to the actual needs of the industry. This thesis seeks to correct the shortfalls of past literature by comparing the systems in a way that will ascertain which methods best accomplish the task of creating the optimal player.

Scouting the Talent: The Dominican Summer League and Academy

Structure

In the Dominican scouts, known as *buscones* provide the backbone to a system that raises many children into prospects and prepares them for the hope of signing a contract with a major league club. The Dominican system of player development remains one of the last bastions of true scouting ability. Predicting the growth of a fifteen-year-old Dominican kid who hasn't played more than 30 organized games in his entire life remains a skill that few people possess. Those that do possess that special eye get the chance to watch some of the most raw, incredible talent work harder than most American fifteen-year-olds toward the dream of signing a professional contract with a major league Team. To understand the progression Dominican boys climb in an effort to realize their dreams of playing professional baseball, a step-by-step explanation of the baseball playing life must be described.

Children start playing in the street of Dominican *bateyes*, or small towns built around sugar refineries, and in cities throughout the island. Playing with broom handles and branches, bottle caps and rolled up socks, and rarely any gloves, Dominican children introduce themselves to improving hand eye coordination at an early age by playing with

such rough materials. These young kids have no idea of the difficulties that fielding and throwing a bottle cap entails or the benefit it has on their development. They are playing, as discussed above, out of a passion for baseball and a love of the sport that their country adores.

Buscones, or independent player developers play an incredibly important role in the Dominican player development system. Though much focus is spent on the Academy system and education of the prospects, *buscones* provide a service without which the modern Dominican player development structure could not function. Deriving from the Spanish verb *buscar*, or to search, *buscones* spend every day helping to prepare the young, middle-school-aged kids to become professional baseball players at age 16. *Buscones* typically follow the sequence that Alan M. Klein describes. The *buscones* begin with the “initial identification of the talented young player followed quickly by negotiations with his family to establish an exclusive *buscón*-player relationship.” Next the prospect, usually thirteen or fourteen years old, begins receiving daily instruction on various aspects of the prospect’s skill set. Additionally, the prospect “must be physically developed (in terms of weight, height, and strength), and he must be psychologically tutored in how to present himself well in the next phase.” The next phase consists of tryouts at various major league academies, which hopefully conclude with the negotiation of a contract offer and signing bonus. After this point, the final phase of a *buscón*-player relationship is the verification of the prospect’s age by the team and Major League Baseball’s Dominican office. These groups “check the birth certificate and other evidence presented by the prospect’s family and *buscón*; this may involve visits to the hospital

where the prospect was born and the schools he attended.”⁷ This is not the exact method of every Dominican prospect and his interaction with his *buscón*, however it does mirror the typical process that Dominican prospect goes through prior to being signed by a major league team.

After the intensive process which includes years of not only baseball instruction, but housing, feeding, financially supporting, educating, providing medical care to the boys and many of their families, and most importantly building baseball skills, the *buscón* will take somewhere around thirty five percent of the prospect’s signing bonus as payment for the time and resources spent to build the prospect into a successful and attractive prospect.⁸ Thirty five percent seems to be a high number to many people, at first glance, but for the years of work put into each young man, the percentage that *buscones* receive is a fair sum for the work and time dedicated to the prospect’s success. Many scouts surrounding Major League Baseball have a negative view of *buscones*, viewing them as pimps trying to push young men and skim their percentage off the top. The poor perception of *buscones* is true in some cases, but in the cases of others is an unfair characterization.

To understand the emergence of the modern *buscón*, three trends should be explained. The first trend is the weakening of amateur leagues due to more and more prospects signing at the age of 16. The second trend is the *buscones* beginning direct player development, as opposed to serving solely as low-level independent scouts for various major league teams. The third trend is the rise of the academy system and the

⁷ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice (Temple University Press, 2014), 70-71.

⁸ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 69.

increased organizational and fiscal presence in the Dominican.⁹ These three trends, all interrelated, have occurred during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The modern *buscón* is, even more so than the academies themselves, a new phenomenon in the Dominican player development system. As with other parts of the development system, continually improving is the main goal. Ensuring the efficiency of the *buscones* as a part of the player development system will be key to the harmonious interaction between independent developers and Major League Baseball.

After the buscones have poured years of investment and training into the young Dominicans, July 2nd becomes the most important date of their young lives. Excluding Canadian and Puerto Rican prospects, all of which are subject to the Major League Baseball's amateur draft, international prospects are eligible to sign each year at the beginning of the international signing period beginning on July 2nd, given that they are 16, or will be 16 within six months of the beginning of the international signing period.¹⁰ At this point, teams bring prospects to the academies, many of which are located throughout the Dominican Republic, with higher concentrations in Boca Chica, San Pedro de Macorís, and Guerra. The work ethic at the academies is high with each Dominican prospect hoping to make it to *El Norte*, the United States, to play baseball. However, the discipline and the cyclical nature of a routine is also a new experience for many young Dominicans. Many prospects will have trouble adjusting to the rigor of the daily work of a Major League Baseball Academy. This struggle says nothing of the

⁹ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 72.

¹⁰ Ben Badler, "More Elements to Controversial International Rule Changes," (BaseballAmerica.com, 2014).

obstacle that travelling to and playing in the United States presents for young Dominican prospects.

The academies are comprised of two components. The baseball component includes hours of practice, lifting weights, conditioning, and the two Dominican Summer League rosters that play the other academy teams throughout a short rookie-ball type season during the summer months. As Alan M. Klein observes, “The DSL (Dominican Summer League) represents the first time a Dominican player can gain currency that is in any way measurable, and from it a team can more accurately project his movement through the minor league system.”¹¹ By currency, Klein means that up to this point the players have no statistics. Scouts have seen players on the diamond during tryouts, but have not seen performance under the higher stresses of playing in an actual game. The stats and way a player proves he can handle himself on the field is extremely valuable to a front office official evaluating the trajectory of a certain prospect. These performances in the Dominican Summer League can not only be the proving ground for prospects, but also serve as the last stop for some signees that fail to pan out to the potential scouts and *buscones* saw during the tryouts prior to the international signing period. It is for reasons such as the lack of usable knowledge about a player’s game play that effects the bonuses and contracts of these young prospects. Luis Silverio, a scout in the Dominican for the Kansas City Royals told Klein in an interview taken from *Growing the Game: The Globalization of Major League Baseball*, “paying this kid twenty-five thousand is nothing. He would be a third round [draft pick] in the U.S., getting \$500,000 out of high

¹¹ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 44.

school.”¹² The uncertainty of signing a Dominican sixteen year old and that sixteen year old’s lack of statistical capital is interesting in the sense that high levels of investment from major league teams would seemingly produce a good baseball player with each try. However, the uncertainties present in Dominican society such as education, illiteracy, healthcare issues, and lack of formal experience playing baseball lead to increased uncertainty. Of course nothing is certain when scouting prospects to be signed as international prospects or drafted as Americans. Dominicans, Cubans, Americans, Japanese, and Koreans all have risk when predicting future success in a game like baseball. However, the low cost of operation combined with a large talent pool that has immense passion for and desire to play baseball makes an attractive place to which Major League Baseball can turn. It is worth noting Klein’s observation regarding the Dominican academy system and baseball in the Dominican Republic as a whole.

Klein observes:

A Major league franchise that sends its best coaches and instructors to a particular country clearly has confidence in the talent that it sees there, and its investment in the country in turn makes the caliber of play higher.¹³

Major League Baseball saw an opportunity in the Dominican and began investing its resources. Due to that investment both Dominican players and Major League Baseball are reaping the benefits. Young Dominicans see heroes of their countries outperforming Americans each day in *Las Grandes Ligas*, while fans of Major League Baseball increasingly see names they recognize as Dominican. Though increased name recognition illustrates the importance on the baseball side of the academy system, an entire other side

¹² Alan M. Klein, Growing the Game (2006), 50.

¹³ Alan M. Klein, Sugarball (1991), 66.

exists off the field. Living with other baseball players does not challenge these prospects, though being away from families certainly does as it would any young man stepping away from home for the first time. Another off the field aspect takes importance in terms of operation in the Dominican Player development system. The importance is especially relevant when shortfalls in this aspect lead to delays in physical development and realizing potential. The other side is the education of the prospects.

No hablo ni ingles ni español

Education can, to a certain extent, improve everyone's standing in his or her current position in life, however the current education systems of the Dominican Republic and the major league baseball teams in the Dominican fail to provide a quality education necessary for success off, and at times, success on the field. This conjecture may be questionable in sports occupations, as it seems that it is much more important to have a greater physical prowess. However, when every professional can throw a baseball a certain speed or get a hit a certain percentage of the time, what sets players apart?

In the Dominican Republic, education is not a priority for young boys. The Dominican Republic spends two point three percent of its GDP on education. As a result the Dominican ranks in the bottom half of educational statistics including literacy, average years of schooling, and educational enrollment. Additionally, only fifty eight point nine percent of boys enrolling in the first grade reach the fifth grade.¹⁴ While none of these statistics directly point to baseball as the root cause of the educational problem, the low participation rate of boys in the educational makeup and the fact that Major

¹⁴ Adam G. Wasch, "Children Left Behind: The Effect of Major League Baseball on Education in the Dominican Republic" (2009).

League Baseball teams have signed many of these boys to play baseball leads to a what some would call an ethical mandate to educate these young men.

The problem of educating young Dominican prospects is compounded by the fact that many prospects are unable to correctly read, write, or speak Spanish that is grammatically correct. The fact remains that teams cannot teach prospects English or help prepare them for baseball in the United States when they cannot speak their own language. Alan M. Klein observes, in his research, that “some organizations understand remediation as bicultural-that is, they see a need to teach rookies how to read and write in Spanish as well as English.”¹⁵ The Royals are one of the prime examples of this method of educating the Dominican prospects off the field. As a small market team, the Royals have made a relatively high commitment to their Dominican academy and Dominican players in general. Investing what is, by comparison, a larger portion of their budget, the Royals have built their own facility into the community in Guerra, Dominican Republic. With this large investment, the Royals have not taken their focus to creating baseball machines. Understanding the importance of education the Royals have put prospects into classes such as reading, writing, and psychology, each of which is taught in Spanish. Following these remedial classes taught in Spanish, only then will the Royals move on to teaching English to the club’s prospects.¹⁶

The Los Angeles Dodgers were the first team to place an academy in the Dominican Republic and have been pioneers in that country. As pioneers, the Dodgers have been able to stay on the forefront of innovating and leading the pack in the Dominican Republic. Former Dodgers Vice President of Latin American Operations,

¹⁵ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 56.

¹⁶ Alan M. Klein, Growing the Game (2006), 98.

Ralph Avila told Alan M. Klein in an interview that the Dodgers “teach [the prospects] about culture, such as eating, personal hygiene. [They] lecture these kids all of the time about rules are rules in the U.S.”¹⁷ The idea of culture classes about the Dominican helps not only to educate the prospects on how they should act when in the United States, but also gives them a sense of self and an understanding of where they came from. The cultural classes are an important lesson of self worth that the Dodgers have created. In a big country, where most prospects do not speak the language, prospects knowing that they have learned, and can learn new things helps to build confidence for many prospects. As Klein states, “Major league teams have now placed language acquisition on the front burner because they realize that given the size of their investment in Dominican talent and facilities, anything less would be irresponsible.”¹⁸ This statement by Klein illustrates the importance of language acquisition while also highlighting the cultural value that stems from creating a better-educated work force. Finally, Klein notes that language is the “most important cultural variable that determines whether and how fast a player will make it up the chain.”¹⁹ The understanding that education is and will continue to be key to the improvement of prospects helps not only Major League Baseball teams, but can lead to more fulfilling lives for baseball players. With educational importance being key, the Dominican player development system shows promise going forward. However, problems persist through these improvements and though the physical coaching is

¹⁷ Alan M. Klein, Growing the Game (2006), 98.

¹⁸ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 61. This same idea is echoed as corporate social responsibility, by Adrian Bouchet, Michael Troilo, and John Welty Peachey in Major League Baseball and the Dominican Republic: What is in the Best Interest of the Players?

¹⁹ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 61.

unparalleled, the mental coaching lags and creates potential shortfalls of the current system.

The Issues

The greatest challenge to the success of young Dominican prospects, and to the system as a whole, is the transition of players from the Dominican academies to being a professional baseball player in the United States. This challenge becomes most evident during the prospects' initial assimilation into the minor leagues of the United States. Within these difficulties transitioning to baseball in the U.S. are latent difficulties that come along with the new focus on language acquisition and education in Dominican academies. The issue faced by so many prospects, however, is the "where" transition. Being out of their country for the first time, eating new foods, living in places where there are few people that speak their language, prospects can become overwhelmed. Klein states "for many excellent prospects the quick transition to the United States proved too difficult socially and psychologically, derailing their playing potential."²⁰ The overwhelming transition is preventable in some ways, such as teaching English, and in some ways it is simply part of the game. Similarly, the 18 year old American first round draft pick that tastes alcohol for the first time being away from his parents' house may flounder and drink away his career; while the Dominican player, newly arrived in the United States, might be too nervous to eat and not know how to describe an injury to a doctor, resulting in a premature end to a potentially promising career.

The language issue continues to permeate the problems that the Dominican player development system faces. Learning a language allows for greater learning in other

²⁰ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 40.

aspects, namely learning from a coach. Dominican icon Jesús Alou, who has held various positions throughout the Dominican player development system, stated in an interview with Klein that “[the prospects] don’t know how to learn, and you know you have to ‘teach’ the game. So if these guys go to school, I think that they can learn how to learn the game! And that makes them better players.”²¹ Alou highlights just how important it is in the grand scheme of player development to be able to truly teach the game.

However, recent arrivals of Dominican rookies, playing Short Season A-ball, consistently feel the effects of the language barrier and the shortcomings of their language education during their time in the Dominican Academies.²² In addition to Klein’s experience with the shortfalls of the language programs taught to the Dominicans during their time in Dominican academies, some clubs continue their language education during the lower levels of minor league play.

The New York-Penn Example

A minor league executive from the New York-Penn League, a Short Season-A league, described continuing problems for Dominican players that occurred during his tenure with the team. The executive, who had extended interactions with the players setting up interviews with Spanish language television and radio in the team’s media market, stated that he did not see a noticeable difference between the international prospects’ English with and without the program. The executive stated that the team usually receives somewhere between 10-15 international players, with an overwhelming majority arriving for their first stops in the United States fresh from the major league

²¹ Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 63. Marcos Bretón and José Luis Villegas in Away Games: The Life and Times of a Latin Ball Player echo this same sentiment on page 28.

²² Alan M. Klein, Dominican Baseball (2014), 62.

club's Dominican academy. During this interview, the minor league team did not have any Spanish speaking coaches, trainers, or medical staff, which has been the origination of the most problems. Communicating the extensiveness of an injury were common problems during the executive's tenure with the minor league team.²³ Many of these examples the minor league executive provided are from the first decade of the 21st century, and much has changed since that time. The organization, a member of the American League East Division does not operate a language program in its Short Season-A club, but does offer language, culture, and life skill lessons five days per week, for an hour a day, at three different learning levels.²⁴ Though this education is continually evaluated in hopes of improvement, the shortfalls of the system still seem evident in a lower level minor league team that works with many Dominican prospects.

A Dominican Future

The future of Dominican stars relies on the continual financial support of major league clubs and the continual success of *buscones* in the search for talent. The Dominican player development system is trending towards the example of the Royals. More and more clubs in an age of information see the benefits of providing holistic development to the investments. The drive and passion of the Dominican people to achieve success in baseball is unparalleled in sports. The desire to be the best and work at

²³ The above information was provided during an interview with a minor league executive in the New York-Penn league. This information was part of a larger discussion on the lifestyle of Dominican prospects during their tenure with the team. Due some of the information being potentially taken negatively by the parent team, I have withheld the name of the minor league executive.

²⁴ The International Scouting Director of an American League East team provided the above information on the improvements to the international program and Dominican language program to me. To further protect the identity of the minor league executive I have withheld the name of the major league scout to prevent possible connections.

it from a young age puts the Dominican players in a category of their own. The investment is also unparalleled. Major League Baseball teams put massive amounts of capital and manpower to create the next generation of stars every day. From the scouting preparation from middle school age, to the signing rush each July 2nd, the cream of the Dominican prospects seems to always rise to the top. However, the volatility of the Dominican system and the relatively new nature of much of the player development system in the Dominican will prove to be a challenge in keeping up with the data driven, results-oriented league that exists today. There are areas where the current player development system can improve, and if these improvements were made, the efficiency and highly skilled player created through the Dominican player development system would continue to be a determining factor for every Major League Baseball team.

Chapter 2: Climbing the Pyramid

Baseball's Cuban Ancestry

Cuban baseball holds the title as the originator of Latin American baseball. Cuba, not the United States, was the epicenter of baseball during baseball's Latin American beginnings. Cuba's baseball origins "coincided with independence from Spain and with the consolidation of a national identity." The foundational role of the sport within the national identity explains, "the depth and durability of baseball as a part of modern Cuban culture...the coincidence of the birth of the nation and the inception of the game is a key in understanding that resiliency."²⁵ With this foundational role in Cuban culture, baseball fits into a deep crevice within the national culture of Cuba. As Echevarría González states in The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball, "Cuba was the center from which baseball spread to other parts of the Caribbean, such as Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican."²⁶ The acknowledgment of Cuba as the epicenter from which baseball spreads evinces sense as to why these newly independent Latin American countries, free from the yoke of Spanish rule, chose to follow the Cuban example and play baseball.

²⁵ Roberto González Echevarría. The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 75-76. Louis A. Pérez Jr. echoes a similar sentiment in "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898," stating that baseball became a distinguishing characteristic between pro-independence, *criollo* Cubans and pensinsular Spaniards. Cubans flocked to baseball, while Spaniards clung to bull fighting.

²⁶ Roberto González Echevarría. The Pride of Havana (1999) 103.

The early state of Cuban baseball is not what led to Cuba as the baseball power it is today. However, Milton Jamail, widely considered an authority on Cuban baseball and the player development system used in the country today, connects the national identity of early Cuban baseball with the new Cuban political environment of the 1950s. As the leader of Cuba, “Fidel, like the Cubans fighting for independence against Spain, would also use baseball; only this time, he would try to use the ‘American game’ as a weapon against a different enemy: the United States.”²⁷ Cuba, as the principle actor of spreading Caribbean baseball, ties together many countries throughout this region under a common cultural trait. However, the importance of Cuban baseball lies not in its uniting force of spreading baseball, but rather the isolation felt under the United States embargo of Cuba and the Castro regimes.

Revolutionary Baseball

Cuba and the revolutionary relationship with baseball present an interesting dichotomy through which baseball flourishes but the country as a whole languishes under the low income and hunger faced throughout the population. Though strong in the education and provision of healthcare to the Cuban populace throughout the entirety of the Castro regime, Cuba remains weak in economic strength for its citizens. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Cuba entered into “the período especial (special period) which was the excuse used for broken machinery and lack of goods and services.” Jamail continues to state, “As the Cuban economy entered a free fall, the government latched on to whatever it could for national pride and prestige. Baseball was

²⁷ Milton H. Jamail Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000), 27.

its main asset. Whatever else, at least Cuba had the best amateur baseball team in the world.”²⁸ This idea of baseball as a distraction from the dire economic situation in Cuba helped Cuba during a trying a time, but also in its development as one of the strongest nations in global baseball. Jamail describes this phenomenon, stating, “ironically, it was the embargo, by limiting contact with the U.S. professional game that allowed Cuba to develop the world’s top amateur program.”²⁹

Jamail’s description of the effects of the U.S. embargo provides direct insight into how the Cuban program grew, and also why Major League Baseball teams began to turn to the Dominican Republic and other places for talent to fill the void left by the U.S. embargo on Cuba. To understand Cuban talent, looking to the recent Cuban economy provides some insight into this country of many baseball players. Jamail, describing the Cuban economy at the time of this book states, “the bottom line is that since Cuba legalized dollars in 1993, the position of baseball players in Cuban society has gone from privileged to underprivileged. Cuban players receive only a small salary, less than the equivalent of \$30 a month, but it takes at least \$120 a month to sustain a basic level of comfort in Havana.”³⁰ This underdevelopment in the Cuban economy drives the desire to defect and pushes Cuban players away from the premier amateur system in the world. The increased defections, started in the 1990s, coinciding with the special period and the defection of René Arocha in the Miami airport. Arocha was the first player in three decades to defect from Cuba.³¹ Liván Hernández, and Orlando “El Duque” Hernández, two star players and half-brothers, also defected in the late 1990s. Since the end of the

²⁸ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 5-6.

²⁹ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 138.

³⁰ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 7

³¹ Jonathan Daniels, “Baseball’s Notable Cuban Defectors” (2010)

20th century, Cuban defections make up an increasing number of recognizable names to the casual baseball fan. The success of Cuban players in Major League Baseball is not a random occurrence. The player development system of Cuba's amateur baseball leagues provides a stark contrast to the Dominican player development system previously discussed.

Historical Accounts: Understanding Cuban Baseball

The literature surrounding Cuban baseball provides a multitude of historical accounts but is somewhat limited in its modern day use as relations between the United States and Cuba continue to change. Much of the literature provides a look into the Cuban baseball system of which people outside the baseball industry could normally only dream. Roberto González Echevarría was born and raised in Cuba. His book, The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball provides a complete historical account of baseball in Cuba from its inception in the mid 1800's, all the way through the revolution and its relationship with Major League Baseball. The extensive account does not provide much in depth analysis of baseball as a part of Cuban culture, but rather gives matter-of-fact accounts of the historical occurrences in Cuban baseball. The straightforward narrative is helpful in understanding the evolution of Cuban baseball, especially in light of the revolution and use of baseball as a means of unification. Milton H. Jamail also provides an account of Cuban baseball in Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball. His modern day look into the player development system of Cuban baseball is both extensive and eye opening, illustrating the remarkable progress Cubans are making to develop some of the most impressive baseball players in the world.

Two other works assist in the understanding of Cuban baseball when compared to other systems. Milton H. Jamail also writes Venezuelan Bust, Baseball Boom: Andrés Reiner and Scouting on the New Frontier. This book explores the Caribbean nations in which baseball has a strong foothold by describing the baseball boom in Venezuela and the fringe of development in nations like Panama, Colombia, and Nicaragua. As the point from which baseball spread, seeing the growth of baseball in other nations helps in the understanding of Cuba as one of the most important baseball nations in terms of the spread and love of baseball. During one of the most volatile periods in Cuban history, the mid 20th century, baseball and Cuba went hand in hand. Lou Hernández, in his work The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues, 1947-1961, gives a historical overview of the this period and the rise of the winter league in Cuba, the Dominican, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. Similar to Venezuelan Bust, Baseball Boom, Hernández' work shows the progression of baseball and gives a direct account in comparison to González Echevarría's account in The Pride of Havana. Each of these works gives context and explanation into how Cuban baseball became the way that it is and how Cubans today effectively develop players.

The historical nature of some of the current literature surrounding Cuban baseball limits the understanding of Cuba's player development system. Though informative, many of the works fail to accurately and capably describe the current status of Cuban baseball. Though Jamail's Full Count paints a picture of what Cuban baseball looked like at the turn of the 21st century, the system Jamail describes is the system of Cuba, fifteen years ago. Changes have occurred in the past fifteen years, and with softening relations between Cuba and the United States, future literature would be successful were it to

analyze the relationships in the context of Cuban player development and relations between Cuban baseball and Major League Baseball.

González, Echevarría and Hernández each fall short in providing an analysis of the Cuban situation. Though the historical account is helpful in gaining insight into the past and the transformation of Cuban baseball, it is extremely limited in its applicability in this research. Player development, especially in today's game, depends on much more than a historical understanding of baseball, with much more focus on the statistics and the methods behind the development. Due to these shortcomings, much of the literature on Cuban baseball and especially Cuban player development is extremely limited.

Amateur Status, Professional Quality

The amateur Cuban baseball system begins talent evaluation at a young age and continues to form a pyramid of levels through which the best rise to the top. Cuba's amateur baseball system is amateur in the sense that it is not professional in the sense of Major League Baseball and its accompanying minor league affiliates. The word 'amateur' conjures the image of a less than stellar baseball player, hoping for a chance to get near the pros. However, anything but this image of amateur holds true for Cuba's amateur baseball players. The professional conduct of the players, from a young age to the highest level of the Cuban national team, players are taught how to act, how to play, and due to this instruction reflect the socialist sports system that has given rise to Cuban success in the field of player development.

To understand the level of talent among Cuban baseball players, the complex system of academies and the extensive education needs examination. To put into perspective the level of talent and the potential talent in Cuba, Milton Jamail compares

Cuba to other Latin American countries. Through this comparison, he illustrates in the simplest of terms the potential of Cuban baseball. Jamail states, “To get an idea of how much talent there is in Cuba, one need only look at Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. If Puerto Rico, with only one-third of Cuba’s population, Juan González, Bernie Williams...Iván Rodríguez,” and other Puerto Rican stars would not have played in the major leagues. “The Dominican Republic, with three million fewer residents than Cuba, has nearly fifteen hundred players signed to U.S. professional baseball contracts. How many players would Cuba, with a much more highly developed baseball system produce? One U.S. scout told [Jamail] he thought each U.S. organization could sign at least twenty Cuban players—from young prospects through major league talent.”³² The comparison of Cuba to the traditional baseball-playing nations, the U.S. and the Dominican Republic excites baseball fanatics that recognize the potential for more highly skilled Cuban signings with the thawing of diplomatic relations during the Obama Administration’s 2015 attempts.

A more in depth look at Cuba’s player development system is needed to understand how these prospects develop, and how this system compares with the Dominican player development run by Major League Baseball and the *buscones*. In an interview with Miguel Valdés, a former director técnico of Equipo Cuba, the Cuban national team, Jamail learned about the bottom rung of the pyramid. Due to the fact that education plays such a key role in the Cuban player development system, it seems fitting that the first step in the pyramid begins with the Cuban education system. Miguel Valdés informs Jamail “when students are age five, physical education instructors in primary

³² Milton H. Jamail Full Count (2000), 120.

schools evaluate the abilities of the youngsters and steer them towards various sports... Those who elect baseball begin to learn the ABCs of the game. At age eight they will begin to play in interschool tournaments... when they are ten, the boys move into specialized areas where baseball técnicos begin to look for prospects.” The speed of the players receives special emphasis, because it “is difficult to improve on the speed of a player after he is twelve or thirteen.”³³ After this stage, Miguel Valdés explained that the players move into a multi-tiered system to improve and select the best players. This system continues into the Escuela de Inivación Deportiva, which consist of fifteen boarding schools, “where student athletes between the ages thirteen and sixteen study half the day and practice the other half.”³⁴ This system ensures continuing education as well as baseball practice. The next tier in the Cuban system elevates players into the Escuelas Superiores de Perfeccionamiento Atlético. Similar to the fifteen-school program, these schools exist throughout each of Cuba’s provinces and additionally one more in Havana. Continuing the emphasis in education, “the best players from the province work on baseball four hours a day, six days a week, while they also attend school.”³⁵ This system ensures a proper education, and when stacked up against that of the Dominican Republic, shows the importance of education in player development. The emphasis on education throughout the entirety of the player development process appears to be a complete difference maker in the readiness of the players to move into playing baseball full time, and for some, eventually defecting to and playing baseball in the United States. When defection becomes the only option for baseball players to escape the

³³ Milton H. Jamail Full Count (2000), 34.

³⁴ Milton H. Jamail Full Count (2000), 36.

³⁵ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 39.

dour economic situation in Cuba, the early education is a complete difference maker in comparison with the Major League Baseball academies in the Dominican that coddle, teach, but still often poorly prepare Dominican prospects for baseball in the United States.

The next, and final level on the Cuban baseball pyramid is the Equipo Cuba. Jamail describes the Cuban national team as, “basically the equivalent to all-star teams of the U.S. major leagues, but because in Cuba there is only one league, there is only one team. The twenty-four best Cuban players are selected each year to represent the country in international competitions.”³⁶ Though a second team, Cuba B rises nearest to the top, the importance of being on Equipo Cuba is the apex of Cuban baseball and, having enjoyed wild success, is the goal Cuban baseball players aspire to reach.³⁷ However, rather than stopping at Equipo Cuba, an increasing number of Cubans, some of whom have never played for Equipo Cuba, are jumping ship and defecting much earlier in their careers. The increased defections are a direct result of the large contracts being handed down to earlier and superior defectors. Though increased defections muddy the water in the Cuban market of Major League Baseball, these defections lower the bidding price of Cuban players, as opposed to the awe that many teams felt when seeing megastars like Yasiel Puig and Yoenis Cespedes coming out of Cuba in the last five years. As more average players defect with the hopes of playing professional baseball in the United States, it becomes more evident that the average player coming out of Cuba has been well prepared to play baseball.

³⁶ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 42-43.

³⁷ Tim Wendel and José Luis Villegas, Lejos de casa: Jugadores de béisbol latinos en los Estados Unidos (2008), 54-55. The wild success to which I refer is the 152 consecutive victories between 1980 and 1990.

An important reality of the Cuban baseball system is explained by Miguel Valdés during his interview with Jamail, “the Cubans work on the mental game, explaining the need to be patient, disciplined, and ready to adjust. ‘This is important, because sometimes the body develops and the mind stays behind... When you get the two together at a young age, this is exceptional.’”³⁸ (Jamail, *Full Count*, 40) This complex system, and focus on education and development create a complete player development system that excels in preparing a player that is ready to play in Major and Minor League Baseball. The focus on developing players from a young age realizes its importance not only in recognizing the excellent quality not only of Cuban baseball, but also of the Cuban player development system.

Serie de Desarrollo y Nacional

In addition to the pyramid beginning at age four and continuing to the apex at the Cuban National team, two leagues exist that also assist in player development and experience for the Cuban players. The first league is the Serie de Desarrollo, or the Development Series. The Serie de Desarrollo exists as a minor league to Cuba’s higher league. The Serie de Desarrollo exists as a “league composed of younger prospects,” acting as “an opportunity for a game experience for more than four hundred Cuban players. It has a parallel structure to the Serie Nacional, with sixteen teams... most of the players are still studying, working out in the afternoons, and playing games only on weekends with a doubleheader and a single game on Sunday.”³⁹ The point of the Serie de Desarrollo serves not as a feeder to the higher league, the Serie Nacional, but rather as a finishing touch to the baseball pyramid Cuban baseball players spend their lives

³⁸ Milton H. Jamail, *Full Count* (2000), 40.

³⁹ Milton H. Jamail, *Full Count* (2000), 41.

climbing. Once again, in the Serie de Desarrollo the need for continued education helps to develop complete players that are mentally prepared to play in the highest level of competitive Cuban baseball. Cuba continually succeeds in the development of players partnered with education. The Serie Nacional differs from the Serie de Desarrollo in that it is the premier league in Cuba. The highest level of amateur play, some would argue in the entire world, the Serie Nacional mirrors the seasons of other Caribbean winter leagues. Similar to the Dominican, Venezuelan, Puerto Rican, and Mexican winter leagues, Cuba's Serie Nacional stands alone in that only Cubans will be found playing in these games. No major or minor leaguers will be returning home for extra at bats during the offseason. No pitchers have the opportunity to work out the slider they tried the previous spring to perfect. The home fans are not excited that their beloved players have returned home, they are excited because they witness the premier level of winter league competition.

In the past two decades, the reemergence of the Serie Nacional, in a hiatus for some time under the Castro regime, has been the springboard for Cubans looking to defect. The experience these players gain is the closest a player can get to playing professional baseball anywhere from the AA level to the major league level. The winner of the Serie Nacional competes each year in the Caribbean series, a tournament held between the winners of the Dominican, Venezuelan, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Cuban winter leagues. This tournament represents a chance at regional glory, and for many hopeful defectors, a chance for scouts to get an in person look at the star studded Cuban lineup. Though the Serie Nacional serves multiple functions, from national pride to high-level competition, the opportunities it provides to players looking to defect into United

States' professional baseball is perhaps the most important role in terms of player development for Major League Baseball.

The Cuban Advantage

It seems extraordinary that in a league, such as the Serie de Desarrollo, players continue their education while still playing at what essentially mirrors the college and lower minor league levels of the United States' system. Jamail had the opportunity to meet with Andrés Reiner, who is the subject of one of Jamail's later works. Reiner, at this point a Latin American scout for the Houston Astros, has paramount experience observing, scouting, and pursuing Latin American prospects of many different countries. In this interview with Andrés Reiner, Jamail learns that “‘physically, they are faster and they have tremendous reflexes. Mentally they are very quick, and they have intuition to play baseball...’ Reiner, who has had the opportunity to watch players for the past decade, is also impressed with the educational level of the Cuban players and the fact that they come from a disciplined system. He believes this would give them an advantage in making the difficult adjustment to playing in the United States.”⁴⁰ Not only does Reiner make excellent points, but he also echoes the same sentiments Miguel Valdés stated as an insider with extensive knowledge of how the Cuban player development system functions.

The nature of the Cuban system also increases in importance when thinking about the existing infrastructure in Cuba. Jamail states, “the Cubans already have baseball academies-fifteen spread throughout the island. With a small investment in infrastructure, they could be used by U.S. organizations. Based on other teams' experience—such as the

⁴⁰ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 120-121.

Los Angeles Dodgers in the Dominican Republic or the Houston Astros in Venezuela—Cuba could greatly improve on its already outstanding baseball talent production.”⁴¹ Though the educational portion of player development seems to be far superior to the Dominican education programs within the player development system, without a doubt the conditions of facilities in Cuba could be greatly improved upon given a significant investment from major league clubs. This information, of course, is only speculative given the nature of relations between the United States and Cuba. However, with changes in diplomatic relations announced recently by the Obama Administration, the idea of Major League Baseball pulling players from Cuba in a manner different than the current pattern of defections seems as though a new country could overturn the Dominican as the top producer of global baseball talent.

The fact remains that, “for all its defects the Cuban political system after 1959 greatly expanded educational opportunities and availability of health care. The result is a more literate and healthier population than that of the Dominican Republic.” The opportunities that Cuba provides its citizens to live healthier, well educated lives stretches into the game of baseball, and creates a system that greatly benefits the baseball in Cuba. In addition, “Cuba’s best athletes still choose baseball, and the Cuban people’s deep love and understanding of the game permeate the island and ensure that baseball will continue with succeeding generations.”⁴² This love and systematic development couple to create one of the premier player development systems in the world, potentially overtaking the Dominican and all of Major League Baseball’s investment propelling the Dominican into the premier tier of player development.

⁴¹ Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 139.

⁴² Milton H. Jamail, Full Count (2000), 11.

Chapter 3: Comparing the End Result

How Are They Comparable?

In order to determine which player development system stands superior, the most efficient manner in which to compare between the Dominican and Cuban player development systems is to look at the great equalizer: statistics. Not simply batting averages and number of homeruns, but in order to ascertain which system truly produces a better player, looking at the value a player adds to a team paints the picture of success in the 21st century game. Last year, in Major League Baseball, eight Cubans pitched in a Major League Game, while 76 Dominicans pitched in a Major League Game. Last year 26 Cuban position players (players that play any other position besides pitcher) played in a Major League game. 145 Dominican position players played in a Major League Game. The trend continues in a similar fashion over the previous nine seasons. Many Dominicans play or pitch in Major League games, while far fewer Cubans make Major League debuts. Obviously, the fewer debuts of Cuban players present deficiencies when comparing between two groups. By looking at the sheer number of Dominicans versus Cubans playing Major League Baseball, obviously Dominicans would run away with the race. However, the numerical comparison ignores the political situation of Cuba, and does not take into account the massive system that continually cranks out Major League Baseball talent in the Dominican. The two systems, as we learned in the previous chapters, are very different. While there is an understanding of how each system works, the following statistics that will be analyzed provide an ultimate understanding of which

player development system produces the better player. The statistics that will be analyzed are a part of a greater body of work called sabermetrics. “Metrics” is derived from measurement, while “saber” finds its origins in SABR, or the Society for American Baseball Research. Sabermetrics is “defined variously as the ‘search for objective knowledge about baseball’ and ‘the mathematical and statistical analysis of baseball records.’”⁴³ Though sabermetrics is defined as objective, the authors of Understanding Sabermetrics: An Introduction to the Science of Baseball Statistics, Gabriel Costa and Michael Huber conjecture that certainty in sabermetrics does not come near the realm of certainty in traditional mathematics. However, sabermetrics is useful to strengthen plausible conclusions, steer a conversation, and provide backup to the points being made in baseball discussions.⁴⁴ However, to create a sabermetric statistic, for say a pitcher, accounting for the opponent ballpark, weather, field condition, and umpire strike zone must all be noted when compiling the sabermetric statistic. Assigning a number value in order to compute these statistics is difficult, but possible. Sabermetrics allows for understanding, not certainty, but most importantly assists in confirming evaluations of players. In this capacity, sabermetrics’ function will be the latter: confirming success in Dominican and Cuban player development systems.

In order to compare the player development systems, six sabermetric statistics will be analyzed. Three statistics will be position player categories, with a statistic that evidences offensive, defensive, and overall value to a team. The other three statistics will

⁴³ Gabriel B. Costa and Michael R. Huber. Understanding Sabermetrics: An Introduction to the Science of Baseball Statistics. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland &, 2008) 146-147.

⁴⁴ Gabriel B. Costa and Michael R. Huber. Understanding Sabermetrics. (2008) 224. Tom M. Tango, Mitchel G. Litchman, and Andrew E. Dolphin echo this sentiment surrounding statistical uncertainty in The Book: Playing the Percentages in Baseball.

be pitching statistics, which will demonstrate success in allowing a low number of hits and walks, skill in pitching separate from fielding, and finally a statistic that illustrates overall value to a team. By analyzing offensive, defensive, and pitching statistics, the conclusions provided will emerge as holistic, illustrating the complete success of each player development system. In order to level the playing field, the statistics will be presented in a different manner than a straightforward list of numbers. Utilizing the number of players from the Dominican and Cuba playing Major League Baseball each year, the statistics will be presented in proportions that illustrate the likelihood that a player is in the top 100 players in each of these categories, given that the player meets the minimum requirements (400 plate appearances/season and 50 innings pitched/season). These requirements provide a minimum point, so that no players that played a small number of games are able to lead the league with inflated stats. However, even if these players play one game in the Major Leagues during that season, they are included in the total amount of players, because they are products of their country's player development system. The six different types of statistics come from Baseball Prospectus. Baseball Prospectus is on the forefront of baseball statistics and pioneers new methods of calculating and analyzing traditional and sabermetric baseball statistics. From this point the statistics can be standardized and compared to see which country's player development system truly produces a better player.

The Numerical Difference

In order to provide a baseline from the statistics can be understood, the following tables demonstrate the number of position players (non-pitchers) that played at least an inning in the major leagues each year between 2005 and 2014. This table provides an

understanding of the following statistical comparisons by showing the true number of Dominican and Cuban position players year by year.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dominican	152	162	151	139	176	160	140	167	145	145
Cuban	12	11	10	14	15	24	24	20	21	26

This table helps to demonstrate the sheer difference in the number of players active in the major leagues year to year. By knowing the numbers, this helps give perspective when thinking about the following statistical comparisons.

True Average

True Average began its statistical importance in the 2010 rebranding of the statistic equivalent average, by the experts at Baseball Prospectus. As the first statistic used to analyze the successes and value of position players, True Average is one of the most important offensive statistics offered, and gives an idea of how a player, purely from the batter's box, is able to succeed at getting a hit. From the glossary at Baseball Prospectus, True Average is described as follows:

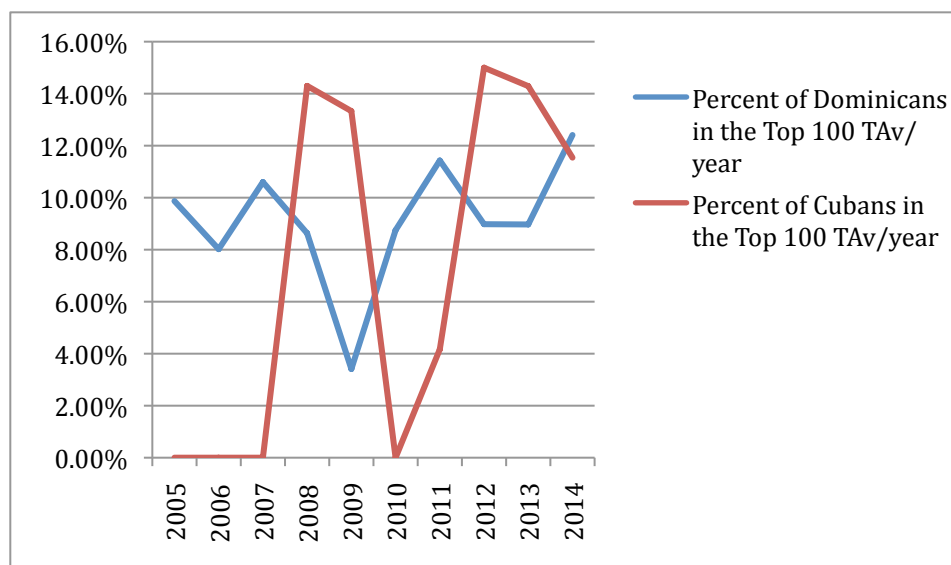
True Average (TAv) is a measure of total offensive value scaled to batting average. Adjustments are made for park and league quality, as such the league-average mark is constant at .260.

True Average incorporates aspects that other linear weights-based metrics ignore. Reaching base on an error and situational hitting are included; meanwhile, strikeouts and bunts are treated as slightly more and less damaging outs than normal. The baseline for an average player is not meant to portray what a typical

player has done, but rather what a typical player would do if given similar opportunities. That means adjustments made for parks and league quality. True Average's adjustments go beyond applying a blanket modifier-players who play more home games than road games will see that reflected in their adjustments. Unlike its predecessor, Equivalent Average, True Average does not consider baserunning or basestealing.⁴⁵

From 2005-2014, the 100th ranked player by True Average was roughly right around, or slightly above the league average of .260. The top player was often near .370. During most years, a Dominican or Cuban player was either highest, or very near the top (within the top five players). The following graph illustrates not the True Averages themselves, but rather the likelihood that a Dominican or Cuban born player would be ranked in the top 100 Major League Baseball players when ranked by True Average with a minimum of 400 plate appearances:

⁴⁵ "TAv." Baseball Prospectus | Glossary. A similar description is given of Equivalent Average, the predecessor to TAv. In [Baseball Between the Numbers: Why Everything You Know About the Game is Wrong](#), Equivalent Average is noted for its importance as an offensive statistic. Thus, the improved True Average becomes an even more important statistic.



Created using statistics from baseballprospectus.com & baseball-reference.com

As is evidenced by the above graph Cubans in the Major Leagues have not always put players in the top 100 players when ranked by TAv. 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2010 all saw years in which there were zero Cuban players in the Top 100 of TAv. However, unlike the Cubans, the Dominicans consistently placed a high number of players in the top 100 players ranked by TAv. While Cubans saw a spike in 2008-09, Dominican players also saw a fall in the number of players in the top 100, with 2009 being the lowest year. The low Dominican numbers are not a huge surprise however, with 176 Dominican players playing in Major League games in 2009. 176 debuts represents the highest number of active Dominicans in any of the last nine years being examined, so the possibility of having even more Dominican players in the top 100 seems difficult.

Cuban percentages see a spike in 2012, even though the number of Cubans playing in Major League games actually lowers from 24 in 2011 to 20 in 2012. The emergence of stars, such as Yasiel Puig, Yoenis Cespedes, and Jose Abreu, account for the 2012-2014 rise in Cubans in the top 100 of TAv, Dominican players continue, during

these years, to perform with continued success that nearly matches the percentage of Cuban players having similar successes. Offensively, Cubans and Dominicans are consistently finishing in the top 100 players when ranked by TAv. The importance of this statistic is not simply personal, but truly demonstrates the offensive importance that a percentage of Dominican and Cuban born players add to their respective teams. Though the low percentages for Cubans at the outset of the data could be detrimental to the Cuban player development system, it more likely shows a decrease in the number of Cuban defections, while the amount of Dominican players having success in the True Average category remains fairly steady. The Dominican consistency provides a clear look at the past decade of Dominican offensive success, the Cuban ups and downs highlight the changing landscape and the recent increase in Cuban talent flooding the upper echelon of Major League Baseball's hitters. Though True Average illustrates offensive importance it does not highlight the important defensive contributions that many Dominican and Cuban players make for their teams.

Fielding Runs Above Average

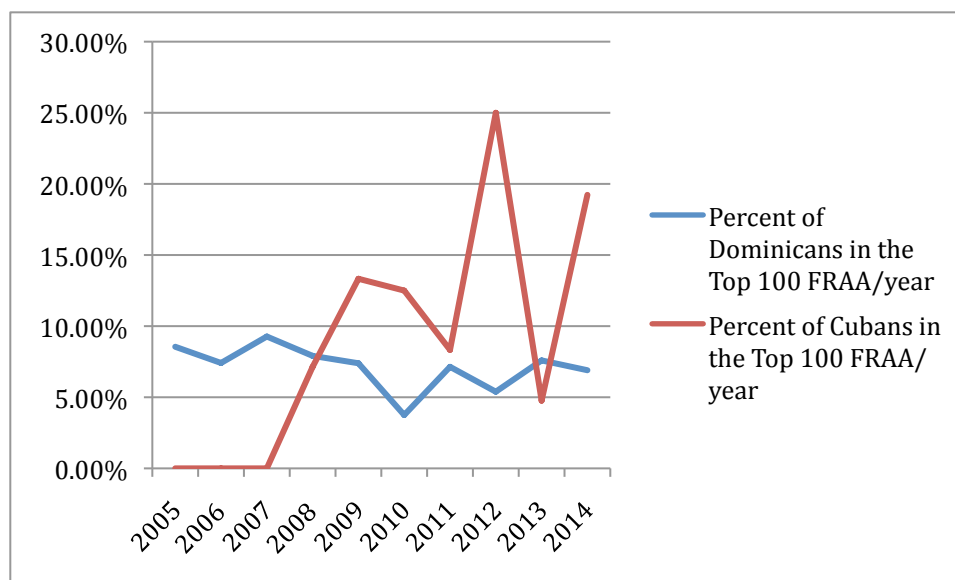
Fielding Runs Above Average (FRAA), the second statistic used to analyze position player value and success, is a defensive statistic that demonstrates the importance of an individual player's defensive value to his team. While the statistic favors positions such as shortstop and centerfield, each of which receive a high amount of batted balls, other defenders often excel in the statistic by performing consistently on defense, with few errors in the plays they receive. Originating from Baseball Prospectus, this statistic is best explained through the Baseball Prospectus glossary, which describes the statistic as follows:

Fielding Runs Above Average is Prospectus' individual defensive metric created using play-by-play data with adjustments made based on plays made, the expected numbers of plays per position, the handedness of the batter, the park, and base-out states.

The biggest difference between Fielding Runs Above Average and similar defensive metrics comes in the data and philosophy used. Whereas other metrics use zone-based fielding data, Fielding Runs Above Average ignores that data due to the numerous biases present. Fielding Runs Above Average instead focuses on play-by-play data, taking a step back and focusing on the number of plays made compared to the average number of plays made by a player at said position. The pitcher's groundball tendencies, batter handedness, park, and base-out state all go into figuring out how many plays an average player at a position would make.⁴⁶

This sabermetric statistic provides a true essence of what sabermetrics seek to accomplish. By combining various other statistics, such as a pitcher's groundball tendencies, game situation, batter, park, and comparing plays made to average plays made, Fielding Runs Above Average is able to assign a value to the season-by-season defensive value that a player can add to his team by assigning a number that demonstrates that player's defensive value. Similar to True Average, the following graph demonstrates the likelihood for a Dominican and Cuban player to be in the top 100 players when ranked by Fielding Runs Above Average, assuming the player had a minimum of 400 plates appearances.

⁴⁶ "FRAA." Baseball Prospectus | Glossary



Created using statistics from baseballprospectus.com & baseball-reference.com

This graph shows a different picture than the True Average graph portrayed. The defensive value of Cuban and Dominican players ranked by the Fielding Runs Above Average is interesting in the sense that Cubans appear to have an advantage as of late. Though beginning in much the same way, with 2005-2007 being at 0% for Cuban players, 2008-2014 shows a consistent percentage of Cuban players finishing within the top 100 players of Fielding Runs Above Average. With the exception of one year, 2013, Cubans consistently put a greater percentage of players in the top 100 players in FRAA during the last decade. There are several reasons the higher percentage of Cubans could be the case. The complete player, educated, healthy, and fast, created by the Cuban player development system would naturally have more of an emphasis on defense. By making a player ready to step into the Major Leagues and have an impact on both sides of the field, the Cuban player development system's holistic approach is evidenced in the consistent outperforming of Dominican players within the last six years. Dominican players have by no means been poor defenders, as is evidenced by the high percentages that Dominican

players enjoy in the top 100 players ranked by Fielding Runs Above Average. However, the Cuban player development system, as demonstrated by the high number of Cubans consistently performing quality defense, appears to produce consistent high quality defenders more often than does the Dominican player development system.

Batting Wins Above Replacement Player

The final position player statistic used, Batting Wins Above Replacement Player or BWARP, is a holistic statistic that combines offense and defense and assigns the performance on both sides of the ball a number. As an offensive and defensive statistic, BWARP is able to identify the strongest players on both sides of the game. This number is incredibly abstract, but represents the amount of wins a player has secured for his team above the number that the fictional 'replacement player' would secure. The replacement player is one of the more abstract concepts in sabermetrics, thus leading the BWARP to be abstract as well. Though abstract, BWARP has found its way into being one of the most important sabermetrics used to analyze performance and value to a team. In the Baseball Prospectus glossary definition, Baseball Prospectus defines WARP in general, because a pitcher's version of WARP also exists, but more importantly the definition provides an explanation of the replacement player, and what a replacement player is in terms of Major League Baseball teams. The definition is as follows:

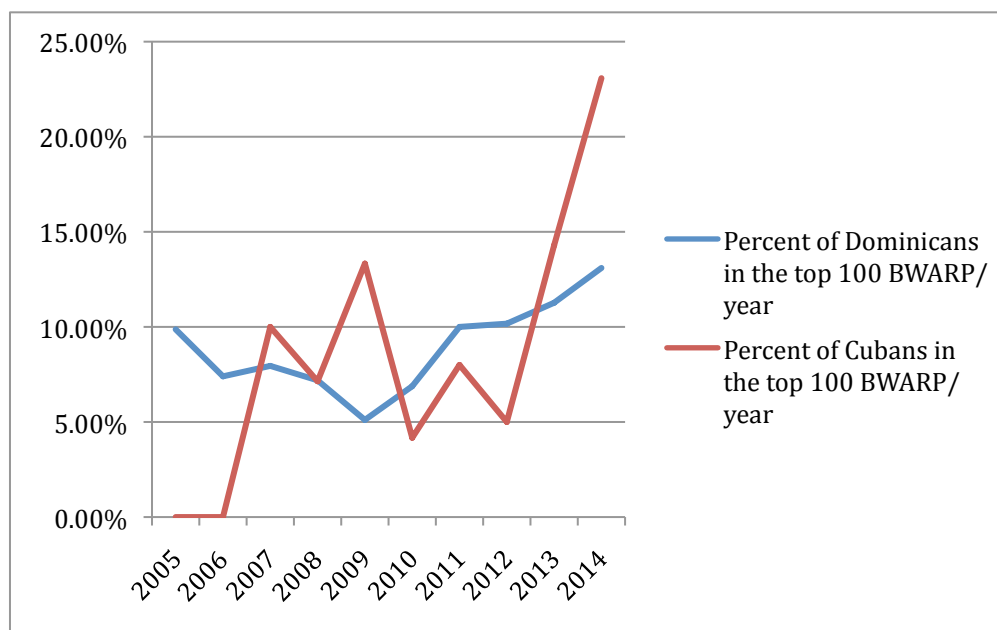
Wins Above Replacement Player is Prospectus' attempt at capturing a player's total value. This means considering playing time, position, batting, baserunning, and defense for batters, and role, innings pitched, and quality of performance for pitchers.

Perhaps no sabermetric theory is more abstract than that of the replacement-level

player. Essentially, replacement-level players are of a caliber so low that they are always available in the minor leagues because the players are well below major-league average. Prospectus' definition of replacement level contends that a team full of such players would win a little over 50 games. This is a notable increase in replacement level from previous editions of Wins Above Replacement Player.⁴⁷

With this definition of the replacement level player in mind and what the replacement level player means in the greater scheme of Major League Baseball, the following graph and statements regarding the data will be offered regarding the data sets used to create the graph that demonstrates the amount of Dominican and Cuban players finishing in the top 100 ranked by BWARP with a minimum of 400 plate appearances. Each player making the sets, year-by-year, consistently performed greater than the Major League average of BWARP, which is 2.0. Many of the Dominicans, and more recently Cubans, were among the highest in the BWARP rankings. In addition to the highest rankings, the more numerous Dominicans saw their top 100 finishers spread fairly evenly throughout the top 100, rather than concentrated at the bottom. The following graph illustrates, much in the same way as the previous two, the likelihood of Dominican and Cuban players to be in the top 100 Major League players ranked by BWARP:

⁴⁷ “WARP.” Baseball Prospectus | Glossary



Created using statistics from baseballprospectus.com & baseball-reference.com

From this graph a number of things become evident. First, when bringing in the defensive play and value that defense adds to an overall player, the Cubans will have higher numbers than in a completely offensive statistic. In terms of baseball as a game the offensive and defensive combination holds high value, because unless a position player is a designated hitter, then defense will matter as a part of the game, and it will contribute to wins and losses in a significant way. However, this graph shows a consistent amount of Dominicans in the top 100 players ranked by BWARP. 2009 represents a low year for Dominicans as well as a spike, though not the high point, for Cubans. This mirrors the spike seen in the top 100 players from 2009 from the True Average graph. Though still much fewer in number, Cubans are a growing part of Major League Baseball. This graph's representation of 2014 shows a huge spike in the percentage of Cuban players in the top 100 players ranked by BWARP. While Dominicans perform consistently throughout the graph, the 2014 numbers do beg the question of what could happen as the number of Cubans increases in Major League Baseball. While this graph does not answer

this question, the trend consistently seen by Dominicans in the BWARP graph could be a precursor to the future of Cuban players and the levelling out of talent away from the huge ups and downs seen not only in the above graph, but in the True Average and the Fielding Runs Above Average graphs. This trend may occur with the addition of more Cubans, but the more interesting part to predict is where the trend will level off. Will it level off between 5-15% like the Dominicans have seen in the past decade, or will it continue and level off between 20-30%? Even if the trend were to level off at 15-25%, these high rates would illustrate a victory for Cuban player development. However, at this time, the consistency of Dominican players in offense and in the overall depiction of value to a team appears to give the upper hand to the Dominican player development system. Though Cuban defense appears to be superior through the statistics illustrated in the above graphs, the sheer number advantage of Dominicans appearing in the top 100 may point to an advantage in the Dominican system after all. Position players are incredibly important. Eight of them roam the field at a time, ready to make a defensive play that will prevent the other team from scoring. However, each play begins with the ball in the hand of the pitcher. The pitcher and his value throughout a player development system is incredibly important to the success of a team as well as the evaluation of player development systems.

The Numerical Difference Among Pitchers

In a similar manner to the previous position player statistics, a second table, demonstrating the number of Dominicans and Cubans pitching each year in the major leagues will be utilized to provide some context for the statistical comparisons that follow.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dominican	104	112	100	96	92	92	96	93	86	76
Cuban	7	7	6	7	7	9	10	7	10	8

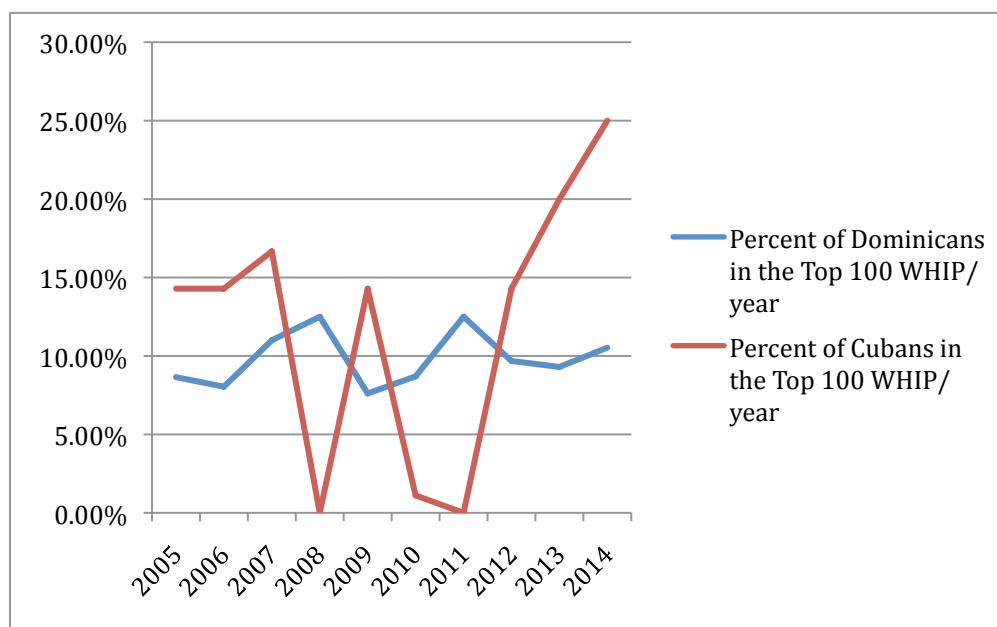
The comparison of the following pitching statistics will be aided by the fact that it is understood that a great numerical difference exists between the number of Cuban and Dominican pitchers pitching each year in the major leagues.

Walks Plus Hits Allowed Per Innings Pitched

After comparing three statistics that measure the abilities of position players, now three different statistics will be used to compare pitchers. Beginning each play, with the pitching of the ball, the pitcher is incredibly important to the success of a team. By using three different sabermetric statistics, Cuban and Dominican player development systems become comparable and it can be ascertained which country produces better pitchers, and in the end, better players as a whole. Walks Plus Hits Allowed Per Innings Pitched is abbreviated as WHIP. WHIP measures how many people are reaching base due to the pitcher. As a statistic that is absent of fielding errors, the true success of the pitcher emerges by enumerating the average number of batters to reach base due to the fault of the pitcher in an inning. Baseball Prospectus defines WHIP incredibly simplistically using only the title of the statistic, Walks Plus Hits Allowed Per Innings Pitched, as the definition provided within the glossary.⁴⁸ Allowing an average of less than one hit or walk per inning is an incredible feat, and one that is accomplished by only the elite Major League pitchers. However, names of Cuban and Dominican pitchers frequently appear in

⁴⁸ "WHIP." Baseball Prospectus | Glossary

the top 100 pitchers ranked by WHIP year after year. Names, such as legendary Cuban fireballer Aroldis Chapman, appear consistently during the last few years, while Dominican names appear with greater numbers and similar results near the tops of the lists. Though a WHIP above one is certainly nothing of which to be ashamed, the graph that follows illustrates the likelihood of Cuban and Dominican pitchers to appear in the top 100 pitchers ranked by WHIP.



Created using statistics from baseballprospectus.com & baseball-reference.com

This graph illustrates a theme that has commonly appeared in many of the position player graphs. This theme is the upward trend of Cuban pitchers in the past four to five years, with the Dominican pitchers remaining fairly consistent across the ten year period. In the above graph, the common theme of high ups and downs during the 2005-2011 years continues. However, the main takeaway from the Cuban line of the graph should be the high upswing in the likelihood of pitchers in recent years to be ranked in the top 100 of WHIP.

In the Dominican line of the graph, there is relative consistency. Though there is some small measure of fluctuation, the Dominican percentages never dip below 7.6%, and often raise to nearly 13%. One of the main conclusions from this graph is that Dominican percentages never reach zero percent. While the Cuban percentages do reach zero percent in 2008 and 2011, Dominican percentages never get near being at the zero percent mark. Most likely due to a much higher number in the population of Major League Baseball players, the Dominicans maintain consistent percentages in the top 100 of WHIP. This consistency, in the case of WHIP and the previous sabermetric statistics, could be viewed as a measure of success. Two more pitching statistics also measure success. These two statistics will also be analyzed to provide a full image of the type of pitcher that Dominican and Cuban player development systems produce.

Contextual Fielding Independent Pitching

Contextual Fielding Independent Pitching, abbreviated cFIP, is a statistic that measures success independent of runs allowed due to defensive mistakes of position players. It gives the true rate of successful pitching solely as a pitcher. Contextual Fielding Independent Pitching is best explained in an article by Jonathan Judge, one of the writers and statisticians for Baseball Prospectus. The statistic, cFIP, developed as a way of measuring pitching success without having to rely on Earned Runs Average or ERA. ERA has long been criticized by baseball statisticians as an inaccurate method of measuring pitching success due to the factors leading to runs that pitchers cannot control. In addition to ERA, many stats have been developed in an attempt to measure pitching success outside of occurrences that a pitcher cannot control. Contextual Fielding Independent Pitching is one of the best ways developed to date to measure pitching

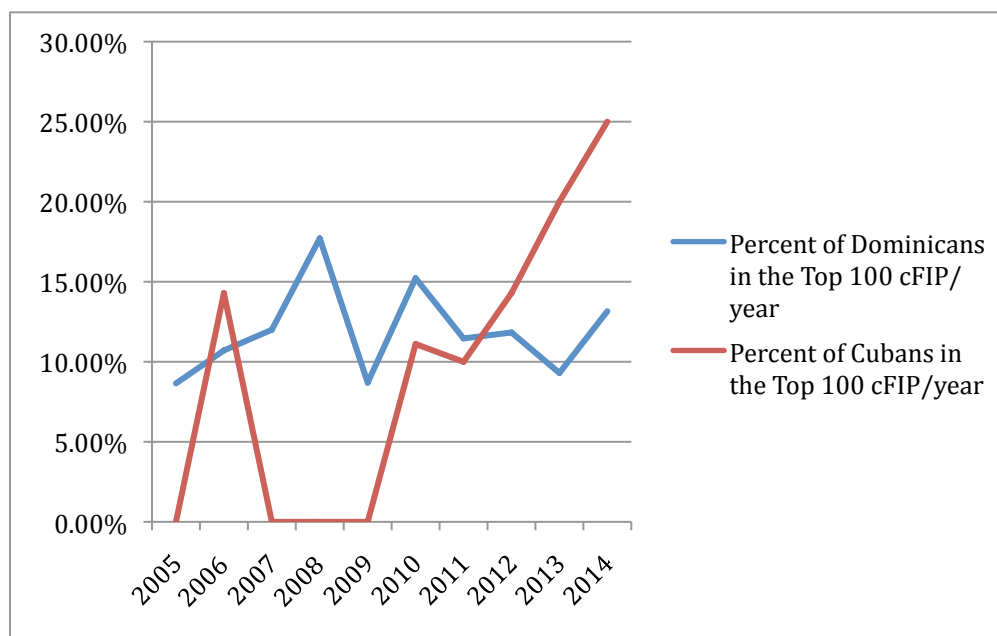
success, with cFIP measuring, “each batter the pitcher faced, the number of times the pitcher faced that batter over a season, the catcher to whom the pitcher threw, or the umpire behind the plate...how each event was affected by the stadium in which it occurred, the handedness of the pitcher and the batter, or the effect of home-team advantage...a pitcher throwing in a loaded division, as opposed to a pitcher running up his stats against lesser competition.”⁴⁹ By taking into account each of these factors, Baseball Prospectus has developed a statistic that directly measures how much success a pitcher attains during a season. Baseball Prospectus author Jonathan Judge describes cFIP as follows:

Building on the mixed-model approach we developed at Baseball Prospectus for Called Strikes above Average (CSAA), cFIP seeks to provide this missing context. Each underlying event in the FIP equation — be it a home run, strikeout, walk, or hit by pitch — is modeled to adjust for, as appropriate, the effect of the individual batter, catcher and umpire; the stadium; home-field advantage; umpire bias; and the handedness relationship between pitcher and batter present during each individual plate appearance.⁵⁰

With this explanation of cFIP in mind, and the true success level as purely a pitcher cFIP indicates, the following graph illustrates the likelihood that a Cuban or Dominican pitcher will be ranked in the top 100 pitchers when ranked by cFIP:

⁴⁹ Jonathan Judge. “FIP, in Context,” The Hardball Times (2015).

⁵⁰ Jonathan Judge. “FIP, in Context,” The Hardball Times (2015).



Created using statistics from baseballprospectus.com & baseball-reference.com

When looking at this graph through a Cuban lens, two trends jump out immediately. The first trend is the years 2007-2009 during which Cuban pitchers represented zero percent of the top 100 pitchers ranked by cFIP. In 2007, six Cubans pitched in the Major Leagues, and in 2008 and 2009 seven Cubans pitched in the Major Leagues each year. This three-year trend of underperformance in a statistic specifically designed to measure pitching success is a very negative indicator for the Cuban player development system. It could be that the best Cuban pitchers were not defecting and rather were staying on the island to pitch, or that these years batting statistics rose. However, the latter seems unlikely due to 2008 being the highest percentage year for cFIP among Dominican pitchers. This three-year drought of pitching talent calls into question the efficacy of the Cuban player development system especially when it comes to pitcher training.

The second trend evident in the graph, as in the other graphs, is the upswing of Cuban talent in recent years. From 2010-2014, Cuban pitchers have, as a percentage of

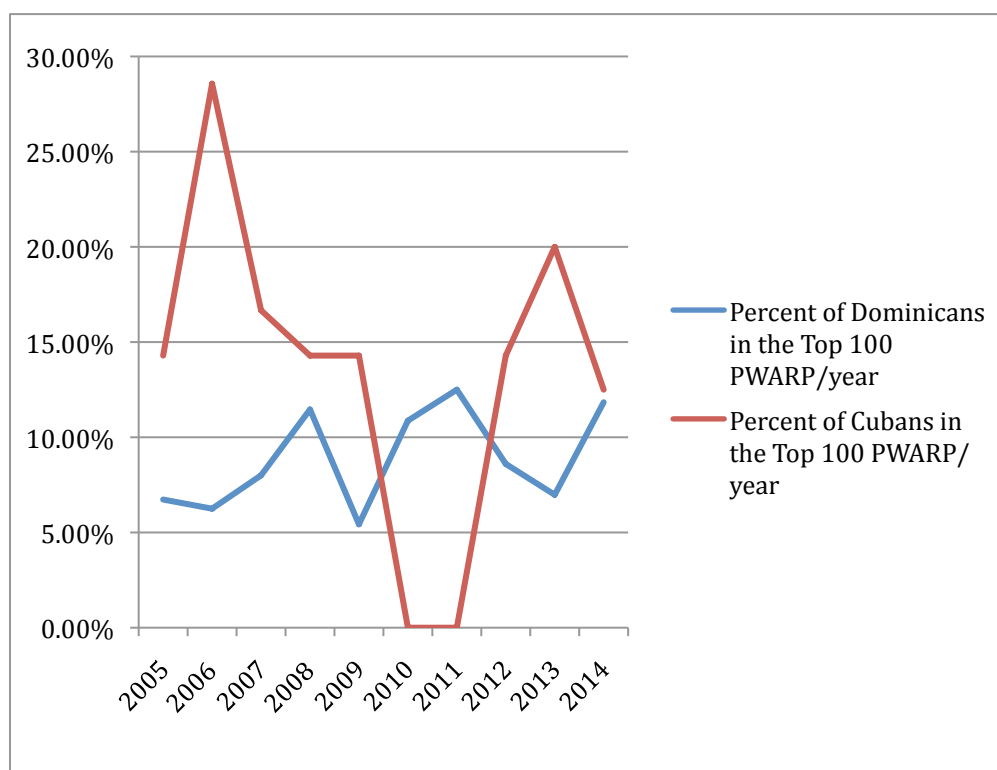
the whole, been on the rise for pure talent and success as demonstrated in the graph and the nature of the cFIP statistic itself. Due mostly to the astronomical rise of Cuban star Aroldis Chapman, the rise in Cuban numbers may reflect not success in player development, but rather one man given the ability to hurl a baseball. The Cuban cFIP numbers, what the statistic itself means and what the percentages show do not reflect well on the abilities of the Cuban player development system.

The continued consistency of the Dominican percentages remains steady through the same time period in which Cubans saw a rise in the percentages of Cuban pitchers in the top 100 of cFIP. However, during the earlier years when Cubans saw no success in putting pitchers in the top 100 pitchers of cFIP, Dominicans continued their steady success, with percentages fluctuating between 8.7% and 17.7% in the top 100 ranked by cFIP during years when Cuban pitchers maintained zero percent placement in the top 100 of the same ranking. The consistency displayed in a category that reflects the success pitchers are having independent of all other factors bodes well for the Dominican player development system. In the Major Leagues, where instant and continued success are valued and numbers tell the truth, the Dominican numbers compared to the Cuban numbers throughout the cFIP graph show much better overall for the Dominican player development system. The final statistic that will be analyzed will demonstrate overall value that a pitcher and his pitching performances offer to a team. That statistic is Pitching Wins Above Replacement Player.

Pitching Wins Above Replacement Player

Pitching Wins Above Replacement Player, or PWARP is a statistic very similar to BWARP, the final statistic analyzed to compare position players. PWARP measures, in a

similar fashion to BWARP, how many wins a pitcher adds to his team in his role, rather than the abstract replacement level player that would hypothetically occupy his role on the team. According to Baseball Prospectus, PWARP specifically takes into account the role of the pitcher, innings pitched, and quality of performance for pitchers, which is then combined with the typical sabermetric factors, such as opponent quality, field, umpire, and assorted other factors that put pitchers on a level field from which to measure.⁵¹ The following graph, as with the previous graphs, displays the likelihood that Cuban and Dominican pitchers will be ranked in the top 100 pitchers, when ranked by PWARP.



The above graph demonstrates a number of things, but two of the most important demonstrable trends are seen in the most recent years in the graph. As usual, Cuban pitchers are seen having a downturn, until 2012, when there is a huge spike in the

⁵¹ “WARP.” Baseball Prospectus | Glossary

percentage of Cuban pitchers in the top 100 ranked by PWARP. However, the most important trend is the realistic place to which Cuban pitchers are trending. After a huge jump in 2012, and a slight decrease in 2013, the 2014 percentage for Cuban pitchers is very near the 2014 percentage for Dominican pitchers. This trend could be interpreted to show that in a game where more Cubans are defecting (though still nowhere near the number of Dominicans in the game), Cuban pitchers are growing towards a more realistic place in the role they play on teams and the value, in terms of wins, that Cuban pitchers are adding to teams. Unlike the previous two pitching graphs that show continually rising pitching percentages for Cubans in recent years, the PWARP graph displays what is likely a much more realistic trend in Major League Baseball. As more Cubans come to Major League Baseball, the probability that those Cubans will grow to be more average Major Leaguers and not a disproportionate part of the successful elite in Major League Baseball is very likely.

In the case of the Dominican line on the PWARP graph, not much has changed from previous statistics. Though Dominican pitchers appear to experience more fluctuation in the PWARP graph than on the previous graphs, the Dominicans are seen in recent years working toward the same point as the Cubans in terms of percentages. This trending towards the same percentages could reflect the changing game today, and the likelihood that pitchers are able to have around the same success regardless of what experiences occur before they make it to the Major League level. However, the trend that matters is the high spikes and the low spikes that Cubans experience in comparison to the Dominican consistency. The player development systems are difficult to compare directly, with virtually no stats existing in the Serie Nacional in Cuba, and what does

exist being difficult to compare due to the young age at which Dominicans play in the Dominican Summer league. However, what these statistics, percentages, and graphs illustrate are the discrepancies that exist between the Dominican and Cuban players in terms of the percentage of players having success and the consistency that the Dominican players show, as what is a likely result of the player development system through which they are trained, groomed, and sent forth to become Major League Baseball players.

Chapter Four: Lingering Problems and the Superior System

The ways in which Latin players achieve their dreams of playing Major League Baseball are incredibly varied. As is seen throughout the writing many people throughout the Dominican and Cuba, as well as the United States take an interest in the successes of these players. Whether for the glory of a nation, pulling one's self out of poverty, running a successful business, or simply seeing a kid realize his dreams, so many people throughout the player development system work to see young Dominican and Cuban baseball players succeed. However, to answer the initial question, which player development system produces a better player, there is more to consider than the hope and effort put in by so many along the player development assembly line. The education and physical training all play a role in development, and are seen in the results displayed at a Major League level.

Education

For Dominican children the educational experience often ends prematurely and abruptly as baseball emerges as the main priority. It is of no doubt that the Cuban player development system provides better education for players. The pyramid like, even socialistic, sport system ensures that Cuban players can compete on an education field, whether or not they are gifted enough to succeed in professional baseball. In the Dominican, the country as a whole falls short in elementary education, and that continues

into Dominican players' player development days.⁵² Though teams like the Royals are pioneering the way with multilingual education, all too frequent are examples in which Dominican players arrive and immediately have trouble with language barriers and performing simple tasks as a result of lackluster language and personal education as seen in the New York-Penn League example. Cuba's leg up in the education department is clear, but is also only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to player development.

Better, Faster, Stronger

The young bodies of Dominican prospects provide trained strength trainers an almost sculpture like situation, in which these coaches are able to create the strongest, most explosive player they can at age sixteen. Though the speed training often has a leg up in Cuba, as is evidenced by the explosive speed drills and the observations of long time scouts, like André Reiner, the Dominican speed and strength training is nothing to dismiss too quickly. The best coaches in the world coupled with massive investment in a country teeming with talent has allowed Major League Baseball to take the player development system and blow the physical coaching out of the water. With great experience, training, and resources, Major League Baseball teams are able to provide the Dominican player development system with U.S. like treatment and training in the players' home of the Dominican Republic. Though Cuban coaches are surely well trained and able to teach the game well, the level of experience gained from coaching in and playing in the highest possible level of baseball in the world allows the Dominican system to achieve unparalleled physical success in developing its players.

⁵² Ryan S. Hanlon "School's Out Forever: The Applicability of International Human Rights Law to Major League Baseball Academies in the Dominican Republic" (2013), 238.

Size Matters

The size of the Dominican system when compared to the Cuban system is roughly the same. Though more prospects cycle through the Dominican system, the Cuban hierarchy permits a continual growth of players while ensuring only the best continue. However, the size referred to in the title of this section is not the size of the system itself, but rather the harvest of the crop. In this case, that crop is a U.S. ready Latin baseball player. The Dominican system and its accessibility are incomparable to the closed island that is Cuba. Though the player development system in Cuba is incredibly successful, the numbers of those players that eventually make it to the United States are much, much smaller than the number of players from the Dominican Republic. The large amount of players that the Dominican player development produces ready to send to the United States is significantly higher. More than anything this discrepancy between the two systems, and advantage for the Dominican player development system is caused by nothing more than politics.

Changing Political Landscapes

The changing political landscape refers to two situations surrounding baseball and the Dominican and Cuban player development systems. The first situation is the tangled immigration situation in the United States. The second situation is, to put it broadly, Cuba's government. The immigration system in the United States greatly affects the Dominican player development system, and only affects the Cuban player development system when a Cuban player defects. All foreign players require visas to play baseball in the United States, but with a system that continually pumps out large amounts of talent, such as the Dominican player development system, getting all of these players to the

United States is difficult. In 2006, President Bush signed a law that added 35,000 H-2B visas, which is the standard visa issued to a foreign worker. This is to say that minor league players coming from the Dominican are competing for the same pool of visas with the people that immigrate to the United States for low skill labor, such as agricultural work or service industry work. Upon reaching the Major Leagues, players attain a P-1 visa for someone that is outstanding in his or her profession.⁵³ Though Minor League Baseball players are certainly among the one percent of all young men that play the game, they must compete for a visa that is difficult to attain, especially in comparison with the P-1 visas of Major Leaguers. The immigration situation proves an obstacle for the Dominican player development system and creates a barrier for which the Dominican player development system must answer. However, the obstacle of obtaining a visa is nothing in comparison to the obstacle of a United States embargo coupled with a Communist government that does not want to see its best players leave to play in a country that has caused so much havoc in the history of Cuba.

As one of the few points in which the United States and Cuba have in common, baseball retains the possibility of becoming a rallying point as the countries' diplomatic landscapes change with regard to bilateral relations. However, at this point the difficulties Cuban players face in navigating their own government and the rules in place by the United States have created an impeded path for many Cuban players hoping to realize their dreams of playing baseball in the United States.⁵⁴ In an interview with "ESPN The Magazine," Antonio Castro, one of Fidel's nine sons and vice president of the

⁵³ Alan M. Klein, Growing the Game (2006), 96-97.

⁵⁴ Rachel D. Solomon. "Cuban Baseball Players, the Unlucky Ones: United States-Cuban Professional Baseball Relations Should be an Integral Part of the United States-Cuba Relationship." (2011)

International Baseball Federation, discusses the changes occurring in Cuba to make Cuban baseball more open to the world. Author of the article, Paula Lavigne describes the Cuban situation in recent years as follows:

In the fall, the Council of Ministers, which is headed by Castro's uncle Raul, approved a new rule that allows Cuban baseball players to play in professional leagues outside Cuba and earn a salary. The move is widely seen as the start of Cuba's opening its doors to the rest of the world. Yet because of the U.S. economic embargo, the new rule does not yet fulfill Tony's dream of seeing Cubans in the major leagues without defecting.⁵⁵

The sentiments of someone close within the ruling ranks of Cuba and the International Baseball Federation (which wields considerably less sway than Major League Baseball worldwide) reflect the hopes of a nation longing to see its best and brightest having success at the highest level of baseball. As costs of signing one of the few premium Cuban defectors continue to rise, Major League Baseball and its owners would likely have an interest in seeing that these prices do not go beyond an affordable level. With President Obama's recent change in diplomatic relations with Cuba, the future could be bright for the Cuban player development system and the prospect of sending more players to the Major Leagues. However, at this point Cuba, its government, and the United States' embargo remain as a debilitating barrier to sending more players to the United States.

⁵⁵ Paula Lavigne. "Cuba has to Budge," ESPN the Magazine (2014).

Good, Better, Best

Cuba and the Dominican Republic boast excellent player development systems, however, Cuba's advantages combined with the political landscape point to a slight advantage for Cuba as the king of player development. When deciding which player development system produces the best player, each of the above factors plays a role into the decision making process. Not only do the above factors play a role, but each example, each pioneer looking to improve Dominican education, each additional person that sees an open Cuba not as a threat but as an opportunity to spread freedom, each coach that dedicates his life to making young men better at the sport they love to play, plays a role in the player development systems of the Dominican Republic and Cuba. While Cuba succeeds wildly above the Dominican in areas such as education and health of the player, it cannot match the abilities of a system run by Major League Baseball with the premier coaches in the world. However, Cuba's future is bright as it faces renewed diplomatic relations with the United States and an uptick in the number and successes of players as discussed in Chapter Three. Through no supernatural occurrence, but rather the closing of Cuba, the Dominican Republic has soared and stepped into its role as the player development king in Latin America. Largely a product of Major League Baseball, one cannot ignore the work of Dominican *buscones*, training, feeding, and even raising some major league prospects. The ability to produce a player that will eventually make it to the United States, play in the major leagues, and hopefully become a star points to a superior system. As Major League Baseball continues to invest in its own future, it invests in the future of the Dominican Republic. However, the changing Cuban landscape also has a role in the future of the major league players. As relations thaw and travel resumes

between the United States and Cuba, more and more players will make it to the United States to play baseball. As the amount of players increases so too will the success of the player development system. At this point, the only advantage the Dominican Republic holds is the ability to produce more players. As more players from Cuba play baseball in the major leagues and more major league clubs invest in the future of player development in Cuba, Cuba will overtake the Dominican Republic as a the elite producer of major league talent through its player development system.

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