

“Our National Pastime is now the worlds.” –Gene Budig

Baseball has always been known as the United States national pastime, but that term has grown over the past years due to the presence and impact of the stars that come for the Latin America area. Statistics back up the statement as shown in 2002 with 26.1 percent of major league players were born outside the United States. Furthermore 88 percent of the total number of players on the major league teams at the beginning of the season that hail from foreign countries was from the Latin America countries (Guevara p. 3). Statistics do not lie that Latin American players help make up what is mostly in the minor leagues of Major League Baseball. All the teams in the major league have places that operate facilities throughout the summer and winter months in the Dominican Republic and almost all teams do the same in Venezuela. These players that make up this team though do not get any respect from the people that run the teams and that is something that is not seen by everyone in the United States. People in Latin America grow up in the scrums so they do not know what is actually considered good or bad, so they appear weak in decision making to people with higher education. The fact that kids grow up in those scrums is why baseball scouts think they can strike gold by taking ten, eleven, and twelve year olds and hiding them in their academies. Kids who are not even far in their education or even in their teen years want to pursue the sport that everyone has a dream for and start training in these academies to see if they have any potential to be future superstars.

Everybody sees the success of Sammy Sosa, Pedro Martinez, David Ortiz, among other players and assume that it must be nice what is going on in the Latin area being able to turn out

all these players, but when reality strikes these high potential players that are being scouted by teams are faced with no respect and poor treatment in Latin America and that represents the ignorance by Major League Baseball. "Latin stars are being recognized as never before, and the future looks just as bright moving into baseball's third century," Evan Grant of the Dallas Morning News point of view on these high quality stars being produced. That vision of the "Golden Age" contrasts with the history of discrimination and racism Latin players faced in making their way in the major leagues (Guevara p. 6).

Major League Baseball does not have an institutional mission statement to go by for how they portray themselves as a company. Searching through their website though, an MLB International overview is given and states, "Major League Baseball International (MLBI) focuses on the worldwide growth of baseball and the promotion of Major League Baseball and MLB Club trademarks and copyrights through special events, broadcasting, market development, licensing and sponsorship initiatives. MLBI is committed to showcasing the world's best baseball talent through international events around the globe (*MLB International*. 2009)." That statement about their international spotlight proves that the MLB will continue to believe in what they have in other countries such as the Latin American part. And as long as the company as a whole keeps bringing in more and more viewers and people that want to buy merchandise that the ways of what the academies are doing are acceptable. They are committed to getting people outside the United States to see the best athletes in the world be competitive and have kids in the lower parts of foreign countries to strive for something. Baseball was global long before any of the other major sports discovered how to do it. To understand the globalization

of baseball one has to see the Major League as a business and not so much looking at the sport as a pastime.

The question is whether the MLB is trying to make up for mistakes they have made in the past. In Latin America there are many ways to recruit foreign talent. One of the most popular ways is by using a buscon which does not sound like a legitimate way of recruitment, but can actually be efficient and beneficial to major league teams. The buscon service is used so heavily by major league teams because it can be cheaper than hiring a full-time scout and since buscons are not employees from the MLB they can actually begin preparing children for the major league teams at an earlier age than allowed to teams. The fact of this system is that Major League teams are in an industry that traffics children in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela (Guevara p. 39). An argument proposed by Washington Post writer Steve Fainaru was that Major League Baseball “decries the abuses but effectively created the system that fosters them.” That being interpreted means that the MLB can say they are against cruelty to these kids and that they are putting them in good places to achieve the opportunity to be a baseball player in the United States. But in reality they created this system and are behind it because they know it is helping their sport grow and get more popular in countries.

Another aspect in the way Major League teams get Latin payers cheap is the way they get kids to sign the “contracts” that are being offered to them. It has be to understood that these are kids who have barely any education due to them being so young and the fact they are choosing to go the route of the chance to play baseball and will do whatever it takes to get that chance. The players are a bit at fault for being ignorant about what they were signing and it was

the Major League teams effort to exploit that ignorance every chance they received. A modern day example of this is household name Sammy Sosa who wrote in his autobiography about the time he got noticed in 1985 at the age of fifteen. "I never knew what was on the paper that I signed with the Phillies. To this day I don't know. You were totally innocent and unprepared for negotiations – not a good way to be in the harsh business world of baseball (Guevara p. 42)."

The question of why contracts are not translated to Spanish since the Major Leagues are recruiting so hard in foreign places is just another loophole for them that they intentionally put into their requirement that everything came in English, unless the player asked for it in Spanish, but they did not know their rights. Major League teams are proud of how cheaply they can operate their baseball academies in comparison to cost of developing in North American baseball talent. An example of that is in 2000 when the Washington Post reported that the Cleveland Indians signed forty players in Latin America for \$700,000, more than one million less than the team paid its first round draft pick (Guevara p. 45). It's a classic saying that fits nicely, bigger bang for your buck.

A Major League Baseball press release in April 2009 noted that two hundred and twenty-nine players on the opening day rosters were from foreign countries. "28.0 percent of the 818 players on April 5th rosters were born outside the 50 United States, representing 15 countries and territories. The all-time highs occurred in 2005, when 29.2 percent (242/829) of Opening Day players were foreign-born, and in 2007, when 246 players were born outside the U.S., totaling 29.0 percent of all players. In 2008, 239 players from a pool of 855 were foreign-born, also totaling 28.0 percent (MLB 2009)." With that being said baseball has showed they have established their company in the popular cultures of many countries. In the same press

release numbers were drawn up of where exactly the players came from internationally, “The Dominican Republic has produced the most Major Leaguers born outside the U.S. with 81. Venezuela (52) and Puerto Rico (28) have the next highest totals, followed by Mexico (14).” All these numbers prove is that the United States are really succeeding at outreaching and can be compared to a matter discussed recently in the classroom of the Nike brand.

Phil Knight, the founder of Nike, took a lot of heat back when he outsourced his product to Vietnam and had children working in sweatshops on wages that could not get them through a day. This is used a proper comparison to the MLB because they were ignorant and tried putting it behind them until they realized their problem was just not going to go away and it had to be addressed. With the MLB they thought the same thing. They figured with time everything will be forgotten and go back to normal and when they realized that people were being persistent changes had to be made. The average wage for a worker at the Nike factory in Vietnam was \$1.60 per day which would not be able to cover three meals a day for these workers, which made this factory get scrutinized and labeled unbearable. Another thing Nike was put under the microscope about was their prices of their shoes and their marketing in places where there was not much money to go around. In the MLB they get scrutinized for going international to find cheap talent that could end up being better than what you pay for a highly touted player in the draft. For Nike they were marketing in an urban city area where people can hardly keep a roof over their heads, yet Nike is making the new one hundred dollar pairs shoes look like it's the must have thing of the year. In an urban area this leads to kids doing whatever it takes to get money if that is stealing it from people, getting involved with the wrong people, and begging their family to shell it out even though it could be used in wiser

situations. Thankfully people stand out in situations and people came to the urban city to point out just what Nike pays to make the shoe and compared to how much they sell it, why there is such a big gap. When people brought this to others attention it led to a march and everyone participated in bringing in their shoes and placing them at the doorstep of the Nike Company doors and asking why they cannot pay for shoes more reasonably (Klein, Three Logos). The same thing happened with the MLB people took initiative and that led to people being fired and more jobs being implemented to oversee their development internationally.

A player of much interest in the book, *Stealing Lives*, is Alexis Quiroz. He is the man that stepped up and made sure Major League Baseball know that he was not going down without them doing something about the way things were operating over in Latin America. To give the brief background on Alexi is he was a boy that joined relatively late to the game of baseball. One day riding home with his father, Alexis Sr., he told his dad he wanted to be a baseball star and at the age of twelve he was joined up to play organized baseball. Part of the process that is normal in Latin America is for scouts to see you playing at this young of an age and take an interest in the development of one's game. The thoughts throughout the youth of Alexi seem to be that it was not a matter of if he would make it to the United States it was a matter of when and soon the brutal truth would be clear to him about how this "business" worked. The man who took the early interest in Alexi was a buscon for the Chicago Cubs, Ciro Barrios. Barrios put Alexi through a brutal workout schedule that made him ready for anything that would come his way and that was when Barrios passed him on to the tryout where he would get to grab the interest of Cubs main Venezuelan scout, Alberto Rondon (Guevara p. 61).

Rondon sent Quiroz to the Dominican Republic for a summer league so they could hone their skills and ultimately be ready for the next season tryout to be on their way to the United States. Empty promises was just one of the many things the Latin Americans accepted as something that happened, another thing that was for certain in the Latin American leagues and it was understood that the player's job was never a secured one and they always had to perform at their peak to stay there. Team did not want players that were 19 or 20 years old and if the player was 18 then he would have had to have a good reason why he was still looking for a team. It is scary to think how there is no certain future out there for the majority of the players that will not become anything in the major leagues especially with how they were treated in the bad economic time for Latin America. In 1998 and 1999, the majority of Latin American countries suffered a severe economic recession that drove corporations into insolvency and thus forced many to close down. The recession also caused the deterioration of the banking system's financial situation and massive lay-offs that increased the existing unemployment level and caused the loss of purchasing power among large sectors of the population (TWN).

Due to these economic difficulties there was no money coming in the countries and jobs where scarce so it was even harder for baseball players who had not been in school since their pre-teen years to go out and look for jobs when all they have to show is that they got released by a minor league baseball team. The problem lies in the inability of Latin American public universities to capitalize on the opportunities afforded to them by new ICT to improve the quality and reach of their research and to modernize their administrative structures. Addressing this problem requires investment in people and physical infrastructure. (Carty p. 37) What that

is trying to say is that with technology growing and the terrible economic ways in Latin America there is a gap that needs to be filled so countries do not get to unbalanced like a rich country such as the United States compared to a poor one.

This worried players in the Dominican since they had a coach, Valdez, who tormented the players verbally, tried to pick fights with them waving his gun around, when they complained about anything. Alexi ultimately got released by the Cubs since Valdez held a bit of a vendetta against him thinking it was Quiroz who complained to higher management about the way players were treated in the Dominican. These players were left in a place where they did not know what to do when a situation like the one with Valdez occurred and that needed to be taken care of. Comparing what living conditions were like for the players who represented the Cubs in the Dominican with the Oakland A's as Alexi does in the book he points out that the A's actually live in a place that has water that will run and where living quarters are something you can deal with and suitable for a normal person. Another big reason for worries among players was the lack of professional medical staff that could take care of injuries and know what to do in the heat of the moment. This is the reason that Alexi Quiroz career was cut short and it lies on what Cubs people in the Dominican thought was the right thing to do for their players. If Alexi was anywhere else his story could have been much different as he points out even getting hit in the knee or arm by a ball in his short stint in Mesa made him comfortable knowing a real staff was there to provide him with his medical needs.

Changes that have been made since the uncovering of how buscons and scouts take advantage of Latin American players include one that was big in the news. When Senator

George Mitchell came out with his 400 page report discussing the doping going on in baseball there was a recommendation on page 287 that said "The Commission should establish a department of investigations." The recommendation received little attention but MLB took the idea and formed a unit in January 2008. In February, after receiving a tip about the Chicago White Sox they looked into the scouts of the team and found out that money was being stolen from the innocent Latin players. The man who was behind the White Sox money stealing was none other than Dave Wilder, who played a big role in the life of Alexi Quiroz as explained in the book, *Stealing Lives*. In the 90's Wilder was in charge of the Chicago Cubs training facility in Mesa and though there was nothing Wilder was accused of when he was with the Cubs he did certainly breach contracts with Quiroz which was heavily mentioned through the latter portion of the book when Alexi was out to get his message across that the MLB should take fault for how Latin American players are treated. The incident with the White Sox and Wilder was a role in financial improprieties involving the signing of Dominican players. What that means is he was telling the Chicago White Sox to pay a player a certain signing bonus and Wilder could project him as a highly touted player so the bonus would be big and then he would take a chunk of it for himself. An MLB official said that Wilder has been doing it for years and has gotten away with hundreds of thousands of dollars which is why he will never again serve a job with Major League Baseball (ESPN OTL).

The success of Dominican players in North America further fuels fan interest. Latin baseball players had commanded adulation throughout the 20th century, with their increasing numbers and rising success in the United States and Canada they returned home as national heroes (Klein p. 121). Repairs to the Globalization of Baseball started with first embracing what

their minor leagues really made up of. The statistic was provided that more than 40 percent of minor league players are from foreign countries (Guevara p. 179). To understand that better when Major League Baseball's minor league system, the young men that are developed to become the future of the sport, is made up of almost half of Latin American players the league has to be able to accommodate and appreciate what is being produced in that country. Bad publicity and harsh, published criticism forced the MLB to realize that what they have been doing is wrong and that they needed to go another way with it. On December 5, 2000, Major League Baseball opened an office in the Dominican Republic from which a new administrator for the Latin America would oversee MLB operations in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. The Commissioner's Office appointed Rafael Perez to be the new Latin American Administrator. The new founded job gave Perez many responsibilities that hold huge stakes in what has been so criticized for years. Some of his responsibilities include monitoring signing by major league teams in the Latin American countries, identify and investigate illegal signings, make sure everyone complies with the seventeen-year-old rule, and make sure scouts know the rules of signing players, among other responsibilities. (Guevara p. 179).

Globalization of Baseball has now been reignited as the Major League took what people had to say and agreed that change was needed to keep the game's integrity. Overall, thoughts are acquired as to whether the MLB should implement a mission statement. They have gone without one and gotten away with mistreating employees of the league, the players. It's hard to say if they had that solid ground under them that they know is where the league crosses the line it would help them make decisions and be able to enhance the game to even greater strengths and make additions that benefit all.