



# **DRSEA INFORMER**

Volume VII, Issue 2: A Publication For Your Reading Enjoyment

***Changing Of The Guard*** – Citigroup executive Samuel A. Brooks was recently named Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy (DRSEA).

Brooks, a three-year member of the trustee board, said of his selection, “I believe the DRSEA is moving in the right direction so I am going to focus on developing and executing, with the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board of the DRSEA, a strategic plan that will further highlight the purpose, strategic goals and performance expectations of the DRSEA over the next 12 to 18 months in an effort to maximize our visibility and credibility. This strategic marketing plan goes hand in hand with raising funds for the DRSEA to ensure we succeed in making a difference in the Dominican Republic.”



*Samuel A. Brooks*

Brooks is an AVP at Citigroup Global Markets Inc. Prior to joining Citi, he was the regional director for Non Public Educational Services Inc. (NESI), an organization providing after school tutoring to New York City public school students in the tri-state area. Previously, Brooks was the

director of student enrollment for the BELL Foundation whose mission is to increase the academic achievements, self-esteem, and life opportunities of children living in low-income, urban communities.

Prior to joining BELL, he was a parent coordinator for the New York City Department of Education. As a result of his strong ties to the community, Brooks co-founded the South Bronx-based non-profit International Education Resource Center Education Foundation (IERCEF) to provide study abroad opportunities for secondary and post-secondary minority students, giving them a competitive edge in the post-grad job market. Before his transition into education, he worked for several years at a market research firm, where he analyzed and summarized corporate finance and M&A transactions for a global financial information firm.

In another change, Harold Méndez, who chaired the Board of Trustees for a number of years, is now treasurer of the DRSEA.



*Harold Méndez*

Méndez said of Brooks' selection to succeed him, "I am confident that Sam will lead the organization to new heights. He brings a wealth of experience to the position and beyond that he is passionate about the mission of the DRSEA, and that passion will translate into success. We could not have a better person at the helm."

The DRSEA also made former Cincinnati Reds star César Geronimo Honorary Chairman of the Board of Trustees. My take on the move is that while the organization prides itself on being multi-ethnic, multi-national and multi-gender, we believe that because our mission is to make a difference in the Dominican Republic, the face of the organization has to be that of a Dominican, and no one represents the Dominican Republic better than César.



*César Geronimo*

***Dominican Republic, New York City Fundraisers Hit Home Runs*** – The DRSEA recently held two fundraisers, one in the Dominican Republic, the other in New York City, both of which were highly successful.

The Dominican event, **JAZZ UNDER THE STARS with the Legends of Baseball**, was a memorable evening of music under the stars with the renowned group Eric Litman & Wavelength, held at the Las Terrazas del Mesón de la Cava, an unbelievable venue in Santo Domingo that is a visual wonder and a natural acoustical marvel.

But the real stars of the night were the lineup of Dominican baseball legends who attended, including Juan Marichal, César Geronimo, Jesus Alou, Rafael Landestoy, Mario Soto and Ozzie Virgil, the first Dominican in the major leagues.



*César Geronimo, Mario Soto, Rafael Landestoy, Juan Marichal, a non-legend, and Ozzie Virgil.*

“Anytime I can support an event that is about education, I make it a point to attend,” said Marichal, the only Dominican in the baseball Hall of Fame. Alou stressed that while education is important for baseball players, improving education overall in the Dominican Republic is a must as well. “We need to educate mothers, fathers, as well as baseball players,” he said.

Chivas Regal, Marianne Joyas and Cigar Country Stores were the sponsors of the event, with a generous supply of cigars donated for smoking at the event by La Leyenda del Cigarro, the store in Santo Domingo where I get my personal stash.

In all, it was a fantastic event that we plan on turning into an annual affair, with additional activities planned for next year, including a golf outing. Make plans now to attend on June 13, 2015. Updates will be posted on our website, [www.drsea.org](http://www.drsea.org).



*La Terrazas del Meson de La Cava at night*

The DRSEA also held its Fourth Annual ***“Making A Difference In The Dominican Republic”*** event in New York City at the 809 Lounge. We were honored to pay tribute to Rafael Perez, Director, Dominican Office Operations for Major League Baseball, for his outstanding and sustained commitment to the advancement of Dominicans and the Dominican Republic, particularly in the area of education.

In 2000, Perez took over Major League Baseball’s new office in the Dominican Republic. While there, he established standards for all MLB academies in the country. His oversight of Major League Baseball operations in the Dominican Republic ended when he left for the New York Mets in 2005, despite an offer to remain in Santo Domingo.

With the Mets, Perez was Director of International Relations, responsible for the team’s operations in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, coordinating the Winter Leagues, and developing an international education program as well as special international projects.



*Rafael Perez*



The return of Perez to head MLB's Dominican office in 2011 signaled a new, tougher attitude towards reform in the Dominican Republic. When he originally headed MLB's office in the Dominican Republic, he fought to curb the influence of *buscones*, and sought to address age and identity fraud and the use of steroids, problems that have plagued Dominican baseball.

Since his return, Perez took on the task of addressing the lack of education among prospects and during his current tenure, Major League Baseball adopted a program where released players can continue their education.

Under Perez' leadership, MLB recently unveiled a program designed to improve reading, writing, critical thinking and English skills among prospects; five teams signed up for the 20-week pilot program that started in January.

Perez has always been an advocate for educating young baseball players and MLB has followed his lead. As a Dominican who came through the system, he has an intimate knowledge of its complexities and the odds and obstacles that face these kids. He knows that ultimately it is education, not baseball, that will prepare them for life.

"I am blessed to do something I love and have passion for," Perez said. "Even though it is nice to be recognized for the work I do, it is not the reason I do it. I believe that MLB can make a difference on and off the field. I have no doubt that we can make a big difference in our industry, but most important in the life of kids."

We were also delighted to have on hand Lou Melendez, a retired Major League Baseball executive who was honored at the New York event two years ago. Melendez has been a staunch advocate of the DRSEA since its inception, and I was humbled by the credit he gave me.

My concerns about baseball in the Dominican Republic grew out of a trip I took in 2000 at the request of Major League Baseball to take a look at MLB baseball camps in the country. It was very telling. Conditions in many were horrible; some resembled prisons and cheese sandwiches were served as dinner at more than a couple. Education for prospects simply did not exist.



*Harold Mendez, Lou Melendez, Rafael Perez and me at tribute to Perez*

As a result of that trip, Major League Baseball opened an office in the country to oversee its teams' academies. There have been vast improvements in conditions, with some camps looking like college campuses and offering plush facilities. Under Perez' leadership, Major League Baseball is beginning to address the educational needs of prospects.

"Charles was instrumental in assessing the conditions of MLB's academies in the DR and developing a plan to improve them," Melendez said. "Without Charles, MLB academies would not be where they are today."

High praise indeed, but had it not been for that trip and how is opened my eyes to the plight of baseball players in the Dominican Republic, the DRSEA would not have been created, and it is the DRSEA that is, and will continue to be, the catalyst for change in Dominican baseball. And ultimately, it will be the efforts of people like Rafael Perez and Lou Melendez that will continue to make a difference in the Dominican Republic.



*Rafael Perez with DRSEA Board members Sam Brooks and Tim Halloran*



*Me with MLB Executive Chris Haydock*

***Friendship Is Essential To The Soul*** – As I get older, I have come to accept that more and more frequently, my contemporaries are going to transition, but there are some deaths I will never be prepared for. Such was the loss of George T. Hedgespeth, Jr., my friend of more than 40 years, whose passing has left me heartbroken.

George was not an ordinary friend; he was sometimes like a father, sometimes like a brother; he gave praise when I needed it, and took me over his knee when that was appropriate. You could not ask for a better friend, nor want one, nor need one.



*George T. Hedgespeth, Jr.*

I met Hedges at Lincoln University, our alma mater, where he was two years ahead of me. I didn't get to know him until I pledged the same fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, and as I look back, I might not have made it had it not been for George; he taught me more about brotherhood than any other single brother.

We roomed together one summer which is when we connected. Both of us were beer drinkers on a campus where wine and whisky were the preferred beverages, and over the years we taste tested our share of a wide variety of lagers, ales and pilsners. I laugh as I recall us being so broke at times that we resorted to buying beer so cheap that the pop tops broke off when we went to open the cans.

George inspired me early on. As a senior, he was already a father and worked three campus jobs to support his wife and son. I was so honored when he and Portia named me godfather of Little George.

After graduating, George took a job in the business office at Lincoln, and while he always maintained his professionalism, he also found time to commiserate with those who had been his fellow students. I chuckle when I recall the night a snow storm was brewing and I convinced Hedges to drive to the nearby town to purchase two cases of wine. We got back to campus ahead of the storm which quickly made the roads impassable. That night, George watched as I doubled the price and sold the bottles to fellow students. Needless to say, we made a killing.

In the days before pay-per-view, often the only resort to following major boxing events was to get a round-by-round account via radio. I recall sitting during a power outage in pitch darkness in George's house, glued to a transistor radio on October 30, 1974, listening to the "Rumble in the Jungle," as Mohammed Ali took on George Foreman in Kinshasa, Zaire. Round by round, Hedges and I got accounts of Ali lying against the ropes, taking a pummeling from Forman, but were shocked and amazed when the eighth round report came through that Ali had regained the heavyweight championship via knockout; the "rope-a-dope" was born.

I later became godfather to George and Portia's second son, Sheldon, again honored that they had such trust in me.

George moved around over the years, taking a series of college administration jobs in Rochester, Miami, Washington, DC and Charlotte before settling down a few years back as the chief financial officer at Cranbrook Schools, a prestigious private school near Detroit.

It was not long after that move that George's heart started to give out. There was a history of heart problems in his family and Hedges would not escape the trend. I flew to visit him when he was getting a shunt installed to open clogging valves, but it wasn't enough as he eventually underwent a bypass and later a heart transplant.

Hedges lived on borrowed time after that, but never complained. Forced by health reasons to retire, he became a volunteer, rising in the Rotarians to hold several key offices in his chapter. I would kid him from time to time when he would end a conversation saying he had to go to work. "George, you ain't got no job," I would say, and he would respond, "I probably work harder now than when I had a regular job." I think staying involved, giving back, was his way of saying thanks for the extra time he got on Earth.

Hedges was a huge basketball fan, and, along with me, a diehard Philadelphia 76ers fan after the team acquired Julius "Dr. J" Erving. We had partial season tickets for several years and anguished over the team's failure to capture a championship. That ended in 1983 with a sweep of the Lakers in The Finals. George called me crying tears of joy, exclaiming, "We won, we finally won!" as we rejoiced together.

I remember going to the NBA All-Star Game in Denver one year with our good friend Willie King. I used to get tickets to the event every year from the NBA and this one year, not long before the heart transplant, Hedges asked if he could go, saying it might be his only chance. We had a blast and to my knowledge he never attended another, which makes the memory even more special; that I could give him that experience and share it with him.

I last saw George in February when we attended the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our fraternity chapter at Lincoln. True to his nature, Hedges invited me to share his hotel room, knowing I was short on funds. He looked great and was so full of energy and brotherhood.



*That's George in the middle at Beta Chapter's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, flanked by Joe Brown on the left and Charles Cephas on the right.*



We had time to reflect on the long and glorious friendship we had, and how special we were in the lives of each other. And, as we both enjoyed the fraternity of our brothers, some we had not seen in 30 or 40 years, we accepted that many of them we would never see again. Little did I know we would lose George in a few months.

I last connected with him a couple of weeks before he died. He had just returned from a trip to Australia on Rotarian business and we exchanged messages on Facebook as we frequently did. And then he was gone.

I had wanted to attend his services in Michigan, but for a variety of reasons just couldn't. I know he would understand.

As I think of him now, I remember our last night together, in tuxedos, singing our fraternity hymn for the last time together, the tears welling in my eyes:

*“Through days of joy or years of pain;  
To serve thee e'er will be our aim;  
And when we say our last goodbye;  
We'll love Omega Psi Phi”*

Love and miss you Hedges; your friendship was – and will always be – essential to my soul.

*Charles S. Farrell*

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