



DRSEA INFORMER

Volume III, Issue 13: A Publication For Your Reading Enjoyment

La Búsqueda De Los Sueños (The Pursuit Of Dreams) – Like thousands of other boys and young men in the Dominican Republic, Edgar Ferreira chased the dream of baseball most of his life. And, just like thousands of others, the chase went unfulfilled, ending far short of the big league career he had envisioned.

I first met Edgar a few months ago in a chance encounter along the roadside near his home, a ramshackle dwelling he shares with eight people. Now in his early 20's, he said his big league dreams began when he was about eight. As his pitching skills developed, and his fastball exceeded 90 miles an hour, he attracted the attention of several *buscones*, the flesh peddlers who auction off young prospects to the highest bidders, but he failed to latch onto a team at 16, the magical signing age for top prospects in the country.



Edgar Ferreira

As he got older, the ticking clock eroded his value and by age 19 the sands of time were beginning to run out. One team offered him \$3,500 to sign, another \$8,500; mere pittance in a country where the average signing bonus is \$100,000. But when a *buscone* convinced him to lie and shave two years off his age, Edgar signed with the Anaheim Angels for \$75,000, a sum he said he had to split 50-50 with his broker and others. When the lie unraveled, he was cut from the team.

He got one more shot with the San Diego Padres, but a medical exam revealed problems in his throwing arm. Nobody wants a pitcher with a bad wing; the dream shriveled like a raisin in the hot Dominican sun.

But Edgar had seen the promised land and now believes he can lead others there, help them to obtain the career that eluded him, and on the day I visited him again, he eagerly shows off a rag-tag platoon of recruits, about a dozen young men in baseball uniforms eager to take up the challenge.

He has them charge up a steep incline cut into the overgrowth on a hill near his home by the repetitions designed to improve leg strength. Edgar's prospects strain to reach the crest of the hill. We used to call them suicide drills when I played sports; that which doesn't kill you, makes you stronger.



Running the hill

The dreamers move on to a makeshift batting cage of netting strung between trees. Sand carted from the nearby beach provides a carpet as Edgar tosses batting practice with balls so worn that many are without covers. The crack of the aluminum bat echoes over the hillside.



Batting practice

Edgar's charges now take a turn in his gym, complete with weights constructed from steel rods anchored at both ends with cement set in tomato cans. Edgar's "training camp" is a true example of Dominican ingenuity.



Edgar's gym

We later trek down a steep, rocky road and cross a dry stream bed to a baseball field crudely cut into the terrain. A bull is tethered nearby; a single white crane keeps him company. It is here Edgar reflects on his own baseball journey and how it fell short. The *buscone* who encouraged him to lie has dropped out of sight, probably moving on to help another boy who shows potential.

Of his recruits, Edgar believes a couple have what it takes to succeed in baseball; one of them is so dedicated he dropped out of school to chase the brass ring. Edgar does not charge for his training; if one of his students signs, he says he will take only 20 percent of the bonus.

In the afternoon, after school lets out, another group comes to Edgar's camp. These 8- to 12-year-olds form his second tier of prospects, and all share the dream of becoming big league players. Ask them their favorites and they shout out the names of Dominican stars: Pedro, Soriano, Pujols, Big Papi; there is no shortage of role models for them.

It is here that sadness and frustration overwhelm me. Sadness that all of these dream chasers share not only a passion for baseball but also the poverty that fuels the dream. Baseball in the Dominican Republic depends on that passion, that lure, that pursuit of a game so intoxicating that people will lie about their age, will take steroids to become bigger, faster and stronger, will abandon school for a chance at stardom, for a chance to escape poverty. But in reality, only a precious few ever achieve the stardom the dream merchants offer.

I see the faces of so many who can benefit from what the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy has to offer; a chance to use their baseball skills to compete for college scholarships in the United States, to obtain an education, to use their minds to flee poverty. The frustration is that for some, the DRSEA will become a reality too late to help them.

I am quickly approaching two years living in the Dominican Republic and I had hoped we would be closer to bricks and mortar than we are. But if I have learned nothing else living here, I understand that things take time – and we are making progress.

We are looking at three separate site locations, and determining which suits the DRSEA best, both in terms of location and acquisition. Our curriculum is being fine-tuned, so that we can offer courses that will not only prepare DRSEA graduates to succeed in U.S. colleges and universities, but to excel.

We have a stack of resumes from qualified individuals eager to teach and/or coach at the academy. Inquiries come in from all over the world from young boys and parents wanting to know about enrollment. Colleges baseball coaches are also inquiring, many with specific requests for a pitcher, or a third baseman, knowing that a Dominican talent infusion could turn a good baseball team into a great one.

The media has shown an interest – particularly as reform in Dominican baseball ramps up – and the DRSEA and the education it will provide are being viewed as part of the solution.

So I find myself caught between the progress we have made and the distance we still have to go, the money we have to raise to put the bricks in place, to pay teachers and coaches, to take care of baseball fields and dormitories, to outfit classrooms, to make the DRSEA a world class academic and athletics facility. And the economic climate here and in the United States is not making things any easier.

I often feel like my clock is ticking as well; that I am not moving fast enough to help kids like those in Edgar's camp, and yet I know that I can't stop now, no matter how long it takes. **UN PASO MAS Y LLEGAMOS.**

Photos by Jose Sanchez

A photo of Sandy Alderson in the last **INFORMER** was taken by New York Daily News photographer Corey Sipkin

Encuentros Cercanos (Close Encounters) – It is not unusual for me to spot individuals of varying degrees of fame in Santo Domingo. I once ran into former NBA star B.J. Armstrong at a hotel, and met Kelly Perine, an comic actor who has made a career of playing the kooky brother or sidekick on several television shows, at the cigar shop I frequent.

But I was not quite prepared when I recognized Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the United States' pre-eminent African-American scholars, strolling in the park near my home. Of course I introduced myself and inquired why he was in the Dominican Republic. He told me he is working on a documentary on blacks and Latinos; he has written about the uneasy relationship

between the two, so I am very interested in what the documentary will reveal, particularly given my circumstances in the country.



Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Some may not remember Gates for his scholarly pursuits, but rather from his arrest in July 2009 when, as he attempted to gain entrance to his own home, a passer-by reported a possible break-in and police were summoned. A confrontation resulted in Gates being arrested for disorderly conduct; he claimed it was for being “a black man in America.”

The incident stirred debate on race relations and law enforcement in the U.S., even attracting the attention of President Barack Obama who invited Gates and the officer involved to join him at the White House for a beer.

Though there was not time for Gates and me to share a beverage, I did give him one of my best cigars, then watched as he and his film crew shot background scenes for the documentary in which I now feel I have a personal stake.

La Paz Este Con Usted (Peace Be With You) – One of my favorite people in this world is Edward Hill, Jr., the sports information director at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He serves as the primary contact for the Bison men’s basketball and football teams, but produces information and statistics on all sports at the university.

I have known Eddie for more than 20 years now, having first worked with him on a conference I produced annually at Howard for a number of years, but I really got to know him when his kindness and generosity helped me get through a tough period of my life.

I had been working out of my house and was going crazy within the confines of the dwelling and what was swirling in my life at the time. I asked Eddie if he could provide me with a desk in his office, a place that I could at least escape the boredom. He readily agreed and even assigned me an extension I could use to receive calls.

Within a few weeks, he began asking me to review copy for his media guides, edit them for typos and grammar. I was only too happy to oblige. And, within a month or so, he actually persuaded the university to compensate me for my assistance; this was at a time when I was unemployed and struggling to make ends meet by freelance writing. I not only had a place to go every day, I had a job that was important and interesting for someone who loves sports. And I got to know Eddie well; as we discussed all issues under the sun, we became friends.

Eddie is also an adjunct professor at Howard, teaching a sports and media course every spring and I often am a speaker in his class. He is also active in the D.C. community where he serves as head coach and co-founder of the DC Warriors basketball program and as a counselor for the National Youth Sports Program.

Oh, and Eddie is a devout Muslim.



Howard University Sports Information Director Edward Hill Jr.

I say that because I thought of Eddie recently due to all the anti-Muslim sentiment that seems to be sweeping the United States in the form of protests over a proposed mosque near Ground Zero and a threatened burning of the Koran. And all I can think of is Eddie Hill, who is a prince among men, in part because of the teachings of his faith.

The basic principles of Islam are principles to live by, including the ways of peace, reverence for education and intellectual pursuit, charity, morality, and the basic equality of mankind. Eddie practices this every day, as do those who truly follow the Koran, the teachings of the prophet Muhammad, and the divine word of Allah.

When I worked in his office, Eddie would disappear at a certain time of day to go pray, as is also part of his faith. People looking for him at that time would often make crass remarks and jokes that I dismissed to ignorance. But I am seeing that ignorance shared by those who would lump a group of extreme terrorists with the millions around the world like Eddie who adhere to the true values of Islam.

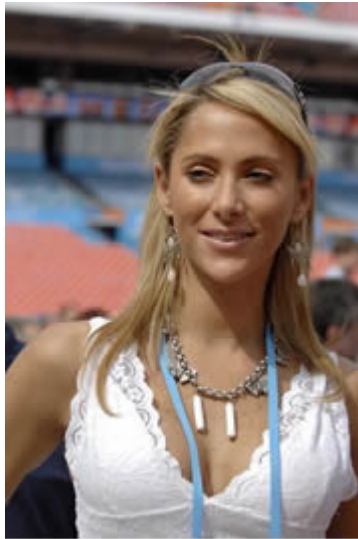
The world is complicated enough without holding an entire religion hostage for the actions of a few, no matter how horrid those actions are. Maybe if those who want to condemn Islam knew Ed Hill, they would understand that.

As-Salaam Alaikum, Ed.

Deje Que Todo Se Vea (Letting It All Hang Out) – I have seen the genitals of some of the world's most famous athletes. Let me put that into context before anyone gets the wrong idea. As a former sports writer and frequent post-game visitor to locker rooms, I have seen football, baseball and basketball stars coming out of the shower and/or giving interviews in their birthday suits.

In many instances there were female reporters asking questions to a naked man, which in all honesty made me uncomfortable. I remember thinking, "My mother would not approve," and if she didn't approve of something, then it was probably inappropriate.

Women in the locker room took a new turn recently when Ines Sainz, a reporter for a Mexican network, said she felt uncomfortable in the New York Jet's locker room after players, including some who were naked, made suggestive comments as she waited to do an interview. She also said that an assistant coach seemed to deliberately toss a football to players near where Sainz was standing on the sideline during practice.



Ines Sainz

Sainz is a very attractive woman, and bills herself as “the hottest sports reporter in Mexico,” but that certainly does not give anyone license to harass her, assuming her accusations are true. And you can’t simply dismiss it to boys being boys as athletes have a responsibility to act in a professional manner when they are in their workplace, be it the field or the locker room.

Sainz said she has no plans to press the issue, but the National Football League is investigating the incident after the Association for Women in Sports Media complained, saying it is committed to creating and maintaining a work environment free of harassment and hostility.

Incidents similar to this have happened in the past, some milder, some decidedly raunchy and offensive, but I think this is one of those minefields with no simple solution. Keith Lee, a former NFL player and a DRSEA board member, says that when his locker room was first opened to female reporters, his wife demanded he wear a robe. He added, “As a former pro football player, I felt I was sexually harassed by the presence of female reporters in my workplace. According to law, it made me feel ‘uncomfortable’. Harassment doesn't have to be in the form of words.”

But other players will tell you that the locker room is their sanctuary and if female reporters enter than they have to deal with the environment, naked men and all.

Some teams have experimented with a separate interview room; problem is that the locker room interview immediately following the game usually produces the best quotes. The longer the time between the end of a game and an interview, the staler the answers to questions, so women reporters want access to those fresh locker room interviews.

I think there is a fine line between sexual harassment and boyish antics, but how and when that line is crossed is blurry. Complimenting one woman on what she is wearing could be offensive to another.

I am taken aback sometimes here in the Dominican Republic because I see women routinely subjected to stares and comments, many of them very specific, but it seems to be socially accepted. I tell men that if they made such comments in the United States, they would be accused of sexual harassment. Their response: “Well, we are not in the United States.”

And the NFL locker room is not a common workplace environment to be sure. Question is, how do you maintain this male domain – which it clearly is – while at the same time providing equal access for women reporters to do their job in what certainly can be an uncomfortable climate for some?

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The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth. - Erasmus

Charles S. Farrell

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