



DRSEA INFORMER

Volume II, Issue 4: A Publication For Your Reading Enjoyment

Lector Programa (Reading Program) – The reading program for children debuted last week and was a tremendous success, in no small part due to the remarkable talents of Valoree de Lebron, who displayed an incredible ability to communicate with children. She may not be ready to take her act to Vegas, but she certainly wowed a crowd of 6- and 7-year-olds.

The reading program is inspired by a tradition in the cigar industry called *el lector de tabaquería*. In both Cuba and the Dominican Republic the cigar industry, even today, has long employed readers to entertain the cigar rollers while cutting and rolling the leaves. The *lector* reads aloud from newspapers and novels to help while away the hours. The readings came to be regarded as a social and cultural right, and spurred many cigar rollers to learn to read, and also to social activism.

Children International and the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy (DRSEA) partnered to launch the reading program that will send people out into Dominican communities to read aloud to children to stimulate a love of reading and the worlds it opens.

Only about 20 children were expected at the inaugural event, but more than 40 were anxiously waiting at a community center in Boca Chica, not far from Santo Domingo. Valoree, director of the Lebron & Barney International Learning Center who has worked as an educator in the Dominican Republic for the past 30 years, did not disappoint as she grabbed their attention immediately and held it for about an hour, no mean feat in itself.

She got the children involved by asking them what they wanted to be when they grow up. “*Abogado*,” said one. “*Doctor*,” responded another. A young boy drew giggles from the other children when he said “*Policía*,” but Valoree gave him nothing but encouragement, as she emphasized to all that reading was a fundamental building block for all their aspirations.

Then, reading from a large book called *Ojos, Orejas y Pecas*, she magically transported 40 children to another dimension, their faces rapt with attention. As she read, she took measures to include them in the process, asking them questions about what she read, making sure they connected not only with the words but with the bigger picture of the power of words.



Valoree de Lebron works her magic

The more I work with Valoree the more I am amazed by her tremendous commitment to the education of Dominican youth. For the past four years she has worked with Major League Baseball organizations including the Boston Red Sox, Cleveland Indians, New York Mets, and Seattle Mariners in the Dominican Republic. Her main objective has been helping to improve the players' personal and academic development while at the same time advancing their academic level. To date, 33 players have received their high school diplomas. This gives the Dominican players a second option in life if they are released from their baseball careers, which happens to a very large percentage of players. She is also on the board of the DRSEA.

The children also got some life lessons from Dominican baseball player Luis Perdomo (read more about him below), who told them about his own awakening to the power of education and what it has meant to him. Baseball and baseball players hold a revered position in the Dominican Republic, so his message carried a lot of weight.

Rafael M. Mejia, Agency Director for Children International, said the reading program is another example of Children International working to stimulate an interest in education at an early age. "Reading can open up the entire world, even the universe to children who have never ventured outside of their neighborhoods, let alone the Dominican Republic," he said. "Expanding horizons can make these kids hungry to know more, to read more, and even encourage their brothers and sisters and their parents to get more involved."



After the successful launch, the reading program is scheduled to be a monthly event at various locations in the Dominican Republic and is aimed at children 6 to 10. All of the kids who will participate are sponsored under Children International, which provides programs that benefit over 300,000 poor children and their families in 11 countries around the world, including Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Zambia and the United States. If you would like to help, check out how to sponsor a child today at www.children.org. The reading program is also looking for donations of children's books (in Spanish) and of school supplies.

Milagro Del Lobo (Miracle of the Wolf) – Remember the movie, *The Miracle Worker*, when Annie Sullivan (Anne Bancroft) was struggling to connect with the blind and deaf Helen Keller (Patty Duke)? After a month of Annie’s teaching, what the people of the time called a “miracle” took place. Helen could not grasp the meaning of words, but that changed one day when Annie led her charge to the water pump. As Annie pumped water on Helen’s hand, she spelled out the word water in the little girl’s hand. Helen’s face lit up with joy as she made the tie between words and objects and her ability to learn was a fastball from that point on.



Dominican baseball player Luis Perdomo also made a learning connection in his life and now appears on the brink of a major league breakthrough as a result.

Such was not always the case with Perdomo, who signed with the Cleveland Indians as a non-drafted free agent in April 2003. In his three seasons at the Indians’ academy in the Dominican Republic, he earned the nickname “*El Lobo*,” for his fiery temper and incorrigible nature. The pitcher with boundless talent and potential appeared to be self destructing.

Fearing he was going to be cut by the Indians, Perdomo at least had the forethought to take advantage of the Indian’s educational program and advance his academic level. Perdomo felt that with a better education he might have a chance for a life beyond baseball. Valoree de Lebron became the young man’s tutor and mentor, urging the struggling baseball player to educate himself.

Something clicked. Perdomo became so dedicated that he would take a flashlight to study after lights out at night and became like a sponge for education, de Lebron recounted, as he went on to earn his diploma.

Something else clicked – his career. Perdomo made his stateside debut in 2006 with the Gulf Coast League (GCL) Indians where he was ranked second in the league in saves (9), appearances (19), and games finished (17). The flame-throwing reliever made a major breakthrough in 2007 at Lake Country, finishing the year 4-4 with eight saves, a 2.57 ERA, and a .164 BAA in 46 appearances, and he continued his success in the off season in the Nicaraguan Winter League where he was 1-2 with five saves, a 1.66 ERA and a .211 BAA in 21.2 innings thrown.

His best weapon is considered his fastball that’s clocked at 95-96 mph; he used that gun to shoot down 81 batters in 66 innings. His arsenal also includes a slider and changeup, with the fastball-slider combo rated as one of the best in any rising player. Though considered small at 6 feet, 170, his athleticism, strength, durability, and mental game make up for that.

Perdomo played for the Cardinals’ organization last year and left for Spring Training with the Giants last week where league rules guarantee him a spot on the roster or an automatic return to the Cardinals.

Even someone deaf and blind can’t ignore the connection between Perdomo embracing the importance of education and his career resurgence, as they took place simultaneously. Education helped Perdomo improve his level of self esteem and his ability to become a critical thinker which is crucial to the success of a Major League Baseball player.

Baseball is looking to substantially cut back or eliminate existing educational programs in the Dominican Republic, but before doing so it needs to take note of the Perdomo story as there are hundreds, maybe

even thousands of players just like him in the Dominican Republic who just need to get their heads in the game.

Education enlightens, enriches and strengthens the mind and a strong mind helps to make a strong body, and therefore better baseball players. So much is invested in the Dominican Republic in developing baseball players; might baseball be wise to understand that its investment dollars could reap better dividends if it developed the bodies *AND* the minds of players? Just a thought.

DRSEA Website Mejorado (DRSEA Website Revamped) – The DRSEA website has undergone a renovation to include much more information about the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy and all we are trying to do. You can now get frequently updated information on our activities, including programs; all back issues of the **DRSEA INFORMER** are also available. Take a look at the new and improved DRSEA website (www.drsea.org) today and tell us what you think about the reconstruction.

Otras Noticias De Interés (Other News of Interest)

Trees Needed – Environment Minister Jaime David Fernandez Mirabal says that recent flooding and landslides in the Cibao Valley is proof that more trees need to be planted in order to contain erosion. He added that officials have to increase their awareness of the importance of forest cover. He also said that the Cordillera Septentrional mountain range is especially vulnerable because a continental fault line runs through it.

Dominican Economy Grows – The Dominican Republic's GDP grew 5.3% in 2008 as a result of a 19.5% growth in communications, 13.7% in the financial sector, 55% in the commercial sector, and 10.3% in the water and energy sector. Agriculture was down 3.4%, free trade zones by 1.1%, construction by 1.2% and mining activities by 30%. Central Bank Governor Hector Valdez Albizu says the country ended 2008 with a US\$318 deficit in the balance of payment. Valdez Albizu says that the Dominican Republic was the country in the region with second lowest level of currency depreciation and that the country managed to obtain US\$340 million in reserves. The Dominican Republic is projected to receive US\$2.35 billion in direct investment in 2009.

Charles S. Farrell

DRSEA Contact Information in the Dominican Republic

Address: Calle 19 de Marzo, #103, Suite 305, Zona Colonial, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Phone: 829-505-2991

Website: www.drsea.org