



# DRSEA INFORMER

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***MLB Anota Una Carrera (Major League Baseball Scores)*** – Major League Baseball scored a significant victory recently when Dominican authorities arrested a prominent MLB scout and charged him with fraud and document forgery in connection with young baseball prospects.

Victor Baez was regarded as one of the most successful Dominican scouts and ran his own baseball camp that sent dozens of players to MLB camps with lucrative contracts. But Dominican officials and MLB investigators allege that Baez hid the true identities and ages of his players by providing fraudulent documents. In many cases, this allowed him to extract higher bonuses for players.

Scouts like Baez traditionally take a large chunk of bonuses when their prospects are signed. Prospects in the Dominican Republic can sign at age 16, but their value deteriorates with age, creating the incentive to falsify age and identity.

About a year ago, MLB launched a reform movement aimed at addressing problems such as age and identity fraud, as well as steroid use by prospects and skimming of bonuses. In the past, baseball officials confided in me that the lack of cooperation from Dominican authorities was hampering reform.



*Victor Baez*

Corey Sipkin photo

Dominican Police Colonel Maximo Baez said the arrest of Baez was the result of a new initiative to investigate and arrest scouts who traffic in fake documents, visas or passports, explaining, “The objective of this new focus on the part of Dominican authorities is to further avoid victimization of Dominican citizens who fall prey to manipulation by document fixers.”

Major League Baseball instituted its own crackdown on age and identity fraud, including the use of fingerprints as verification, a practice advocated more than a year ago in the **INFORMER**. Discovery of such fraud has resulted in the voiding of numerous contracts worth millions of dollars over the past year.

According to MLB spokesman Patrick Courtney, a Dominican player blew the whistle on Baez, saying the scout provided him with documents to create a new age and identity. “We turned over what we had to the (Dominican) authorities, and they took it from there,” he said. “This is the way it is supposed to work. It’s a sign they are involved and interested in the issue.”

Puerto Rican attorney Jorge Perez-Diaz, who currently heads baseball’s reform efforts in the Dominican Republic, acknowledged the cooperation of the U.S. consulate and Dominican authorities in the effort to address the issue of fraudulent documents.

Baez told the New York Daily News last year that he helped 53 players get contracts with professional teams, adding that he did so without using false documents or providing his players with performance-enhancing drugs.

The arrest of Baez is a positive step because reform in Dominican baseball cannot succeed without cooperation on both sides of the equation. The arrest signals the willingness of Dominican authorities to work in tandem with MLB to address corruption in Dominican baseball and I believe it is a major turning point in the reform movement.

***Puede Llevar Un Caballo..... (You Can Lead A Horse.....)*** – I had an interesting, yet perplexing conversation recently with a good friend, Jose Sanchez, who spent 24 years in the Dominican Army, much of it with the U.N. Peacekeeping Forces doing intelligence in such places as Lebanon, Somalia and other hot spots around the world. He is one of the most resourceful people I have met in the Dominican Republic and his insight has been extremely valuable.

So when he lectured me about educating baseball players in the Dominican Republic, I listened, though the message was not always optimistic. Jose used his Army stint to finance college, and while he realizes the value of an education, he says many Dominicans do not, particularly those who pursue or want to pursue careers in baseball. I kept telling him that because of the failure rate of prospects – 98 out of 100 – that baseball has a social responsibility to provide them with other opportunities beyond baseball, and give them a basic education that will allow them to have the fulfilling lives that they had hoped baseball would provide.

Such opportunities are at the heart and soul of the DRSEA mission, and while our ultimate focus is on educating and training Dominican baseball players to receive scholarships at U.S. colleges and universities, we have been and will continue to advocate for the education of all baseball players, indeed for all Dominicans.

Jose said that he believes that the DRSEA can and will identify a select population that understands the value of education, particularly at a U.S. college, but it has been his experience that most baseball players, even if offered an education, would turn it down. “They just don’t see the need,” he said.

I not only found Jose's conclusion sad, but ultimately a reflection on how many may view education in a country where less than 3 percent of the GNP is spent on education. Worse yet, Jose said, is that he believes baseball can use player indifference to justify not funding educational opportunities for people who are not willing to take advantage of them.

When I decided to become an advocate for equality in sports, for a level playing field for minorities in the sports industry, it was in great part due to the fact I believed the system was failing black athletes, many who were pursuing the dream of playing in the NBA or NFL, while being denied educational opportunities or failing to take advantage of them. Colleges were admitting black athletes who were not qualified for admission, simply to fill their pockets with the riches basketball and football bring to these institutions of higher education. The result was a great many did not graduate, and also did not have professional careers.

After generations were lost to such exploitation, public outcry and moral outrage led to reform in college sports that required colleges to adhere to academic standards for the admission of athletes, and make a real effort to educate the athletes they accept. It is by no means perfect – too many colleges and universities graduate an unacceptable percentage of black athletes – but at the very least college sports are held accountable.

The situation in the United States is different from that in the Dominican Republic, yet there are distinct similarities according to my good friend Richard Lapchick, founder of the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University and a leading proponent for the education of athletes, who said that “In both cases, athletes who don't make it to MLB leave not only without a career but without an education. They become double losers.

“I think baseball academies in the Dominican Republic should understand that all studies show that athletes with some education also become better performing athletes.....there is a moral obligation there with the academies who invest so much in the talent of the players to be educated at the same time, and not lost on life's path with no direction.”

The San Diego Padres have been providing a voluntary education program in the Dominican Republic for a couple of years. Juan Lara, who oversees the English As A Second Language and Cultural Assimilation Program for the team, said the Padres also offer to pay for education once a player is released. “As you may imagine, while in uniform every player believes he will get to the Major Leagues,” Lara said. “So we decided to extend the offer once their playing career was over as well. To date, only two players have taken us up on this offer. One is a current player and the second was a player who opted to finish his high school degree after being released.”



*Padres' Dominican Republic facility*

Currently, the Pittsburgh Pirates are the only Major League Baseball team that provides a mandatory education program for players, mandatory, according to Trevor Gooby “because we know that if it is voluntary, then most players would choose not to attend. It does cost additional money and I understand that teams are on tight budgets. However, I believe the money is an investment in the future.” Gooby is the Senior Director of Florida and Dominican Republic Operations for the Pirates.

Gooby explained that the Pirates embrace a philosophy to develop the whole player. “This means physically, mentally, educationally and culturally,” he said. “We want to have a complete, productive person that will be an asset to society.” He added, “I truly believe that it is our duty to develop this person. We can’t be blind to it.”



*Trevor Gooby*

In just its first year of operation, the Pirates’ educational program has already had several prospects graduate from high school. “Realistically, many of our (prospects) will never make it to the majors,” Gooby said. “They will go back to their towns and villages. We want them to be productive members to their community and not a burden on the society. I truly believe that our educational program will assist them in their post-baseball lives.

“When we opened our academy, our owner, Bob Nutting, stressed the importance of education. He told us that our jobs were to change the lives of our players and make the Dominican Republic a better place than we found it. We were going to offer our players an opportunity to improve their lives. I truly believe that all 30 teams can do this and make a tremendous impact on the lives of many.”

***Feliz Ano Nuevo (Happy New Year)*** – During all the time I visited or lived in New York City, I never brought in the new year in Times Square, and after 9/11 the thought became even more distant as the threat of a terrorist attack made joining 1 million people in that confined area totally illogical in my mind.

And, as I watched the preparations for 2011 on television, I again was glad I was in the Dominican Republic and not New York. Manhole covers were sealed shut as blocks and blocks of streets were sealed off by 17 miles of police barricades. Waste receptacles were removed for fear of hiding bombs, even as bomb sniffing dogs patrolled along with the thousands of police officers on duty. And those 1 million people had to go through security checkpoints, and were not allowed to carry back packs, purses, or bring with them celebratory beverages to usher in the new decade. Temperatures were above freezing, but still very chilly.



*Times Square, New York City*

Contrast that with the celebration along *El Malecon* in Santo Domingo. Though not nearly the same size crowd as in New York City, thousands gathered in front of a huge stage to listen to their favorites and dance to the sounds of salsa and merenge and watch the old year exit and the new year enter. It was a cool 75 degrees.

I was given only a cursory glance as I entered the concert area through a police security gate; others received quick pat downs, but were permitted bags and containers that held food and beverage. For those who didn't wish to lug packages, rows of booths sold food, beer and rum to the eager crowd, many dressed in holiday finery reminiscent of a New York fashion show. The crowd was festive, even raucous at times, but never rowdy, in spite of the massive quantities of alcohol I saw being consumed, knowing that there would have been mayhem in New York City under the same conditions.

The 60-second countdown to midnight was repeated en masse and as the clock stuck midnight, everyone erupted with shouts of "Happy New Year" or "*Feliz Ano Nuevo*." People hugged complete strangers with genuine blessings for the future; for a few minutes it was one big family under a spectacular fireworks display.



*El Malecon, Santo Domingo*

An hour later, a television screen on the stage cut to New York City as the countdown began there and was repeated in Santo Domingo with the celebration reenacted a second time, complete with another shower of fireworks, some bursting from a tower that is a replica of the Washington Monument.

New York City has its historic way of bringing in the new year. Santo Domingo has its. I like Santo Domingo's. Happy New Year everyone.

*"Any time you have an opportunity to make a difference in this world and you don't, then you are wasting your time on Earth." – Roberto Clemente*

*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](http://www.drsea.org)

**Myspace:** [Myspace.com/drseaorg](http://Myspace.com/drseaorg)

**Twitter:** [Twitter.com/drseaorg](http://Twitter.com/drseaorg)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/drseaorg](http://www.facebook.com/drseaorg)

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