



# DRSEA INFORMER

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***Qué Hay En Un Nombre (What's In A Name?)*** – I used to chuckle when my mother would sometime look at me quizzically and ask, “When were you born?” My reply was generally, “You were there, weren’t you?”

But as I continue to ponder the ongoing dilemma that Major League Baseball faces in the Dominican Republic concerning age and identity fraud among young prospects, my mother’s occasional memory lapse has become increasingly understandable, particularly in a country where record keeping is often lax.

Major League Baseball recently revealed that of the 500 prospects a year it investigates, more than a third are rejected because of inconsistencies about who they are or when they were born. I am convinced more and more that a substantial amount of the identity questions are not because of deliberate attempts to mislead, but part of a cultural anomaly. But it is virtually impossible to separate the intentional from the unintentional, further exacerbating the dilemma. Baseball has taken to labeling such cases as “inconclusive,” but still locks questionable prospects out of the game.

In a recent case, Juan Carlos Paniagua, who had signed a \$1.1 million contract with the New York Yankees, had his contract voided by MLB – and the right-handed pitcher with a 95 mph fastball was suspended for a year – after his identification paperwork was deemed faulty. This came after he was suspended for a year in 2010 for providing false identification to the Arizona Diamondbacks under the name of Juan Collado.

According to *The Miami Herald*, Paniagua’s problems began when his grandmother registered his birth, declaring herself as his mother. A new birth certificate was issued under his correct name, listing his real mother, but then baseball investigators said his school registry appeared altered and he was ruled ineligible, his coach Dario Moreno Martes said, explaining, “He has never had a different date of birth. If he is not Juan Carlos Paniagua, then tell me who he is?”

Who he is – and dozens of others like him – is an ongoing problem. “We try to be as comprehensive as possible,” Major League Baseball Senior Vice President Dan Mullin told the *Herald*. “We try to be as fair as possible and try to help the player prove he is who he says he is. But if you can’t prove who you are, you can’t get a visa to come to the United States.”

The proof is often a mystery that resists unraveling, whether there is deliberate intent or not to deceive. Very often in the Dominican Republic, births are not registered until years after, when memories have become sketchy with regards to exact dates, locations and circumstances. A relative could take a child to register the birth and not recall the exact date, or be provided incorrect information by the mother and father who may be juggling the birth dates of several children in their heads. But, it would be a stretch of the imagination to believe that someone would falsify the identification of a 6-year-old in anticipation that 10 or 11 years hence that lie would benefit them in getting their child signed to a professional baseball contract.



*Dominican birth certificate*

Also, people in the Dominican Republic traditionally carry the last name of both the mother and the father, but in general usage prefer one over the other. Over years, if one parent is absent, a name that appears on a birth certificate could be dropped from use, but become questionable when an identity search is made. With that parent unavailable for verification, the matter could end as inconclusive.

I have also seen identification further compromised by the spelling of a name. In the U.S., I would generally call someone "Jimmy," but in the Dominican Republic, it might be written "Gemmy." Or, in many cases, someone has been called a nickname – Chico – all their lives; in school records, hospital records – and that becomes who they are – not Joaquin. But over the years, people would write "Jimmy" to the point that it would become the accepted spelling – until the question of identity surfaces. And Chico turns out to really be Joaquin when baseball checks his identity. While there was no deliberate attempt to confuse anyone, red flags go up in a system where there are so many covert efforts to conceal identity.

And, further adding to the problem, according to one development academy owner who had three prospects' contracts voided by identity questions, there is a cultural lack of understanding about

the problem. “They figure if the birth date is close, or the name is close, what’s the big deal,” he said. “They know it is their son, so they don’t understand why it is a problem. We really have to get parents – and these kids – to understand that their identities have to be solid, have to be accurate, or we can’t get them signed.”

But there are certainly those who forge their identities to profit in a baseball world where 16-year-olds become instant millionaires while an 18-year-old with the same skills commands far less or could go unsigned. Since I have been in the Dominican Republic, I have gotten to know Edgar Ferreria, one such casualty of growing old. At 19, his value was dropping quickly until he was convinced to forge a new identity, that of a 17-year old, in part by paying off a local school to say he attended. With a new age and identity, he was offered a \$75,000 contract with the Anaheim Angels.



*Edgar Ferreria (Where Baseball Is Born photo)*

When the lie fell apart, Edgar’s contract was voided. At 23, he now works as a trainer at a development academy, his big league dreams shattered. “I am worthless — an old man who nobody wants to sign,” he says, his sad, empty eyes reflecting his pain.

Baseball has embraced numerous investigative techniques – including fingerprinting of prospects as first advocated in the **INFORMER** two years ago – and now uncovers more of the fraudulent cases. And, as the Dominican Republic adapts new measures to register births, the record keeping is becoming more accurate and less subject to tampering. But it will be years before those with the new accurate records reach 16 – the magic age when MLB teams can sign Dominican players. In the interim, baseball is saddled with the task of sorting out who is who, whether the prospect planned a deception or not.

The case of the Florida Marlins Leo Núñez – who is actually Juan Carlos Oviedo – is an example of just how pervasive identity fraud is. Nunez played under his assumed name – and an older age – for 10 years before coming clean, and I am told there are more than two dozen current major and minor league players in the same fix.

Recently, a television feature on Dominican baseball referred to me as a critic of Major League Baseball, an evaluation I have worked hard to avoid because it positions me as an adversary. I have never considered myself as an opponent of Major League Baseball, merely an advocate for education of the talent baseball mines in the Dominican Republic.

I avoid criticism in favor of observation and, based on those observations and my experience here, offer my opinions on problems in Dominican baseball that have become increasingly documented by others as well. These include the use of steroids among prospects, abuses at the hands of greedy flesh merchants, and most recently the errant age and identify fraud that undermines the integrity of the game.

The major problem leading to age and identification fraud has been and will continue to be the devaluation of Dominican players as they age. A 16-year-old with a 90 mph fastball is more valuable than a 19-year-old with the same skills, and with lax record keeping and a culture so rabid for baseball, the temptation to become someone younger, to fit the mold, is often irresistible.

I also try to offer viable solutions to the problems that plague Dominican baseball. I said it before and I will say it again that it seems to me that some of the age fraud could be avoided if these baseball Methuselahs could get a legitimate shot at the stardom all Dominican baseball players crave. Logic dictates that if a 19-year-old believes he still has a chance to reach his dream, he will be less likely to lie about his age. Sure, you would still be getting what many consider an aging diamond in the rough, but the upside is a more mature, more focused 19-year-old man as opposed to a 16-year-old boy.

I suggested more than a year ago that baseball teams in the Dominican Republic offer a combine similar to what the National Football League uses to evaluate talent prior to its annual draft, but only for those players 19 and over. Once, twice a year bring these so-called over-the-hill players to a location for workouts to assess their skills; make those workouts open to all teams who can then select promising players directly or via a special draft.

These players can easily be identified by the baseball's expanded scouting bureau that now covers all of Latin America, and giving those 19 and over one last shot at a baseball career can only help eliminate their need to lie about who they are and when they were born.

***Cambio De Guardia (Changing Of The Guard)*** – Rafael Perez, the first head of operations at Major League Baseball's office in the Dominican Republic, is returning to that post, the **INFORMER** has learned.



*Rafael Perez*

The return of Perez, who was Director of International Relations for the New York Mets, may signal a new, even tougher attitude towards reform in the Dominican Republic. As a Dominican who came through the system, he has an intimate knowledge of its complexities. When he

originally headed MLB's office in the Dominican Republic, he fought to curb the influence of *buscones*, the flesh merchants who peddle prospects to MLB teams and often encouraging age and identity fraud and the use of steroids, problems that have plagued Dominican baseball.

After graduating from high school in the Dominican Republic, he went to Chipola Junior College in Marianna, FL, transferring in 1987 to the University of South Alabama where he finished his college baseball career while obtaining a degree in accounting. He then played for two seasons in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization.

After a stint with an international software company, Perez became a consultant with the Toronto Blue Jays, advising players on transitioning to playing baseball in the United States. In 2000, he 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 Mets in 2005, despite an offer to remain in Santo Domingo.

With the Mets, Perez was 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.

While Perez is returning to old familiar places, the move can be viewed as a natural progression in the reform movement that started almost two years ago. Sandy Alderson, currently the Mets' general manager, originally led the reform effort in the Dominican Republic; he was also responsible for establishing MLB's office in Santo Domingo.

Alderson turned the reins over to Jorge Perez-Diaz, a lawyer from Puerto Rico who reportedly will continue as a legal consultant with Major League Baseball. Perez' familiarity with Dominican baseball makes him a great fit at this juncture of the reform movement; I believe he also brings with him a healthy respect for the value of education, having received a college degree, as well as working with several international education organizations.

Education, in my mind, has to be a top priority of Major League Baseball if true reform in Dominican baseball is to be achieved.

***Pompa Y Circunstancia (Pomp And Circumstance)*** – I recently had the honor and privilege of attending graduation ceremonies for a group of young Dominicans receiving their high school diplomas. What made the event unusual was that it was held at the Pittsburgh Pirates Dominican Republic baseball academy and the graduates are all Pirates' prospects.

The Pirates are the only Major League Baseball team in the Dominican Republic that provides a mandatory education program for its prospects, and the ceremonies – the second since the program was instituted – reflect what can be accomplished if MLB teams make a commitment to education.

It was not the first time I visited the Pirates academy, a state-of-the-art complex that includes administrative offices, recreation facilities, a spacious kitchen, and a dormitory. The baseball facilities have a modern weight room, training room, locker room, film room, and more, and immaculately groomed fields. There are large classrooms that include computers and video setups. When the facility opened, the Pirates vowed to offer educational programs to all players and not only have they been promise keepers, they have set a standard all Major League Baseball teams need to emulate.

At the graduation, I met face-to-face for the first time with Trevor Gooby, senior director of Florida and Dominican Operations for the Pirates, who told me awhile back that the Pirates embrace a philosophy to develop the whole player. “This means physically, mentally, educationally and culturally,” he said.

He added, “I truly believe that it is our duty to develop the person. We can’t be blind to it.....Realistically, many of our (prospects) will never make it to the majors. 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.”

The program is not without a price tag – estimated to be around \$75,000 a year – which may be why the Pirates are the only Major League Baseball team with such an education program, but Gooby says the Pirates believe the money is an investment in the future. The education program is conducted by CENAPEC, a nonprofit education company hired, in part, because the organization understands and incorporates Dominican education requirements into its curriculum.



The recent graduation ceremonies were held in a batting cage converted for the day into center stage. An array of fans circulate the air on a humid day as the graduates, and their fellow students, filed into the building in their baseball uniforms, accompanied to the strains of the *Chariots of Fire* theme song.

The graduates donned traditional cap and gown as beaming parents and friends gathered behind them to cheer their success – not on the baseball diamond – but in the classroom, a place many of them left years ago in pursuit of a dream.



The scene was inspiring as the graduates crossed the stage to receive their degrees, the sense of pride – of accomplishment - etched in their faces. They appeared to have a renewed swagger as they exited the stage, clutching their diplomas. One student, Yuniar Antonio Valdez, choked back tears as he expressed his appreciation for the opportunity afforded him and the others, opportunity unavailable to the majority of Dominicans seeking the pot of gold at the end of the baseball rainbow.



*Yuniar Antonio Valdez*

Life is a process of growth and learning, and education is a crucial component in that process. The promise of education is to empower its recipients with knowledge, with confidence, to raise self expectations and expand the promise of a successful future.

That the Pittsburgh Pirates understand that gives me hope that other teams will follow their lead, and also gives me renewed confidence that the DRSEA mission is a sound one. I commented to Gooby that next year the team should invite baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to attend. I think he would be as inspired as I was.



*"Some men know the value of education by having it. I know its value by not having it."  
– Frederick Douglass, U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, 1890-91.*

# Dominican Republic And Its Diaspora



By Ambassador Raul Yzaguirre

*This is the text of the keynote speech given by the United States Ambassador to the Dominican Republic Raul Yzaguirre at the 14th Annual Summit of the Dominican American National Roundtable (DANR) on October 8, 2011 in The Bronx, New York.*

Thank you for that generous introduction and for your invitation to share some thoughts with you.

First of all, you should know that the Dominican Republic was my first choice when I was offered an ambassadorship. And, as I approach my one-year anniversary in Santo Domingo, I am so pleased that I made that choice. Words like "*un chin*" have become part of my vocabulary. I am now, as they say, "*completamente aplatanao*."

But speaking here to this audience of proud Americans who maintain strong ties to their land of origin, I want to begin by saying something about the character of the United States, the thing that I believe makes our nation unique.

It's often said that almost all Americans have immigrant roots, but this is true of other countries as well. What I believe makes America unique is that, throughout our history, Americans have maintained these roots to their nations of origin. And it is these immigrant communities – diasporas – that have helped make our nation what it is today.

This is true of the Dominican American community in the United States, a community whose impact on the United States is felt more profoundly each year.

For most Americans, the most visible Dominicans are on the playing field. Dominicans were among the eight Major League teams that made it to the playoffs this year. And even if David Ortiz and the Red Sox didn't make it, Robinson Cano and Albert Pujols are leading the Yankees and Cardinals into the post season.

But Dominicans in the United States - the Dominican diaspora - are making their mark off the field as well.

Dominicans like Thomas Perez, whose grandparents came to the United States in the wake of Trujillo's totalitarian regime, and who now serves as the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice; Judge Rolando T. Acosta, who came from Santiago de los Caballeros, and now is a Justice of the Supreme Court of New York County; Camelia M. Valdes, who is a lead prosecutor in Passaic County; and Juan M. Pichardo, who is a State Senator in Rhode Island.

Indeed today, there are over two dozen mayors, local officials and state legislators of Dominican descent in the states of Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. And their professional priorities, in part, are the offshoot of the diaspora experience.

The Dominican Diaspora has also been active in the financial world and in philanthropy: for example, the group Dominicans on Wall Street champions educational initiatives that inspire students to pursue careers in the financial markets.

And the Dominican Diaspora has blazed new trails in literature. Names like Junot Diaz, Julia Alvarez, Nelly Rosario, Norbeno James Rawlings, and Angie Cruz are at the forefront of today's literature.

Finally, I would be remiss in not noting the appointment of my colleague, Julissa Reynoso, as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central America and Caribbean Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Originally from Salcedo, and of self-described "Dominican Bronx" roots, Deputy Assistant Secretary Reynoso now promotes U.S. interests in Latin America.

All of these Dominicans draw on the proud history of those who fought for freedom and democracy in the Dominican Republic. Men like Juan Pablo Duarte, who dreamed of creating a free and democratic Dominican Republic. Like Gregorio Luperon, who fought against Spain for the continued independence of the Dominican Republic. And not just men - women too - like the Mirabal sisters, whose courage and bravery in the face of one of history's most repressive dictatorships, continue to inspire us.

Our two nations' histories have often intersected. Every morning when I walk to my office, I pass by the photos of my predecessors, including Frederick Douglass, a man who was born a slave, but became one of the United States' greatest advocates against slavery, and later represented the United States as the head of the American delegation in Santo Domingo. Even the geography of our cities pays tribute to the close ties between our nations. Just as there is a high school in New York named for Gregorio Luperon, in Santo Domingo, I can drive down Avenida George Washington, make a right onto Avenida Abraham Lincoln, and continue up to the intersection with Avenida John F. Kennedy.

Of course, our joint history is not without controversy. As I drive up Lincoln, I would also pass Avenida Charles Sumner, another American, a senator from the 19th century who is far from a household name in the United States today. But in the Dominican Republic he is remembered for having blocked the U.S. Senate's ratification of a treaty that would have annexed the Dominican Republic to the United States. Similarly, the two U.S. interventions in the Dominican Republic during the twentieth century still can stir passionate debate.

But whatever the history, there can be no question that, as we move forward today, we are two nations united in our vision.

The Dominican Republic has come a long way in the past five decades since the end of the dictatorship. But important challenges remain. Many of you are familiar with these challenges. Health care concerns persist about contaminated school lunches, the spread of HIV AIDS, and the recent return of cholera to the island of Hispaniola. Poll after poll shows that most Dominicans believe crime is increasing, a belief no doubt encouraged by trafficking in narcotics. Unemployment and underemployment are serious problems.

We are working with our planners in the Dominican government and society to confront these problems, but it is my opinion that none of our efforts will be able to succeed unless we can tackle the country's serious problem: the continuing low quality of education in the country.

In case there are any doubts, let me highlight three recent studies about education in the Dominican Republic.

**One study from Harvard University found that the top 10 percent of students in the Dominican Republic ranked at the same level in test scores and achievement as the bottom 10 percent of students in countries such as South Korea and Canada.**

**In another study, the Dominican Republic ranked last in math and science among 16 countries in Latin America.**

**In another study, the Dominican Republic came in 66th place among 67 participating countries worldwide.**

These data are even more worrying given that 40 percent of the Dominican population is under 15 years old.

And this matters. Economists will tell you that there is a direct relationship between a country having a well-educated population and enjoying sustained economic growth. But even if you are not an economist, you know that in today's global economy, you need a good education to compete and be successful. And you know that education is key in developing an equitable society that provides opportunities to all its citizens.

Dominicans understand this, and it is Dominicans who will play the leading role in improving its educational system. The private sector is already working on this cause. Civil society organizations have highlighted this issue and have initiated a wide debate. And the United States, through USAID, has provided millions of dollars in assistance to support the Ministry of Education and its 10-year program to improve the quality and development of basic education in the country.

But I say to you today, it is time for the Dominican diaspora to increase its involvement. I know that many of you have stepped in where others are unwilling or unable to do. I know that others are looking for ways to help. In the coming weeks and months, I hope to meet with many of you and talk about how you can be part of the effort to help the Dominican Republic where it needs the help most.

When I first arrived at the Embassy, almost a year ago, I asked to see my mission statement. I was surprised to see that there did not exist a satisfactory document that met our needs. So I called for a retreat for the Embassy staff in which we looked at State Department mandates, President Obama's speeches and Secretary Clinton's policies. At the end of the day we agreed on the following statement as our mission statement. And I quote:

*"Promover los intereses y valores de los Estados Unidos, trabajando juntos con los dominicanos para lograr un desarrollo continuo de una Republica Dominicana democratica, equitativa y próspera."*

In English:

"To promote the interests and values of the United States by working together with Dominicans for the continued development of a democratic, equitable and prosperous Dominican Republic."

The essence of the statement is that American security and prosperity are dependent on the existence of neighbors who are democratic, just and prosperous. I believe that doing the right thing for the right reasons is the only long run way to insure stability. We do well by doing well for and to others.

Or, as the much admired 19th century President of Mexico, Benito Juarez, once said, "*El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz.*"

These principles, I believe, should be the guiding principles of the Dominican diaspora as they seek to interact with the Dominican Republic.

I agree with Secretary Clinton that one of our greatest foreign policy tools as Americans – not only in our governmental activities but throughout our society – is to reach out and, frankly, model for others what it means to live with diversity, to be respectful and even proud of one's own traditions.

More than 60 million Americans are first or second generation members of a diaspora community – there are more than a million people of Dominican origin living in the United States. To achieve what we need to achieve in the Dominican Republic, we need to expand and deepen the connections between the Dominican diaspora community and the Dominican Republic.

You, the Dominican diaspora, have the potential to be the most powerful asset the United States has in achieving our goals in the Dominican Republic. Because of your familiarity with the nation, your own motivations, your own special skills and leadership, you can be, as Secretary Clinton has said, "Our Peace Corps, our USAID, our State Department, all rolled into one."

President Barack Obama has called for a "new era of partnership" between the countries of Latin America and the United States, saying the region's economic growth and increased democracy means it must assume a greater role in the world. The diaspora community needs to be a big part of that partnership.

I'll close with the President's words:

"In the Americas today there are no senior partners and there are no junior partners; there are only equal partners. Of course, equal partnership, in turn, demands a sense of shared responsibility. We have obligations to each other."

Thank you for your attention.



*Charles S. Farrell*

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