



DRSEA INFORMER

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Enorme Nube Sobre El Béisbol Dominicano (Huge Cloud Over Dominican Baseball) – I was saddened but not surprised when Major League Baseball suspended 13 Latino players, including eight Dominicans, for use of performance enhancing drugs. They included Alex Rodriguez, the highest paid player in the league, whose parents are Dominican.

Besides the Dominicans, a Nicaraguan and three Venezuelans were suspended in the clearest signal to date that MLB is serious about addressing the issue of steroids use, unafraid to penalize some of the game's top stars. I was not surprised because the issue has been boiling to a head for some time. I am saddened because the scandal blemishes all Latino baseball players, in particular Dominicans, threatening their legacy on the game of baseball.

Besides Rodriguez, the list of suspended players includes the Dominicans Nelson Cruz (Texas), Jhonny Peralta (Detroit), Antonio Bastardo (Philadelphia), Jordany Valdespin (Mets), Faustino De Los Santos (San Diego), Cesar Puello (Mets), Fernando Martinez (Yankees) and free agent Jordan Norberto.

Also suspended were Nicaraguan Everth Cabrera (San Diego), and Venezuelans Francisco Cervelli (Yankees), Jesus Montero (Mariners) and Sergio Escalona (Astros).

Only Rodriguez appealed his suspension and is playing for the Yankees until the appeal is resolved.



Nelson Cruz, one of the suspended Dominicans

Not long after the mass suspensions, another Dominican, Miguel Tejada of the Kansas City Royals, was suspended after testing positive for amphetamines.

In addition to the Major Leaguers suspended, 15 of the 44 players suspended for steroid use in 2013 in the minors are Dominican.

Much of the blame for the use of steroids among Dominicans is being placed on *buscones*, the trainers who prepare young prospects for potential careers in baseball. But while *buscones* – or at least the corrupt and unethical ones – are part of the issue, it is far more complex than that, as I have been pointing out for years.

It has a lot to do with the Dominican passion for baseball and the poverty that fuels the dream. Baseball in the Dominican Republic depends on that passion, that lure, that pursuit of the game so intoxicating that people will take steroids to become bigger, faster and stronger; will lie about their age and identity; will abandon school for a chance at stardom, for a chance to escape poverty. But in reality, only a precious few will ever achieve the stardom the dream merchants peddle.



Too many Dominican kids see baseball as their only key to success

While I would never put myself in a position to appear to dictate to Major League Baseball or the Dominican government what they should do to address reform in Dominican baseball, I have made several suggestions over the years on what I think could be solutions to many of the issues. Some of those suggestions have actually been implemented, such as fingerprinting prospects to uncover age and identity fraud.

Major League Baseball has also taken important steps towards establishing education programs at all of its Dominican academies; currently only the Pittsburgh Pirates have a mandatory comprehensive education program.

Three years ago the Dominican government reportedly considered licensing *buscones*, a move that would presumably regulate their actions and at least address some of the corruption currently associated with them.

Why that hasn't taken place, I don't know. But I think Major League Baseball and the Dominican government need to take into account not only the safety of these children that play baseball but also the negative impact the scandals are having on the reputation of the game – and the players – in the Dominican Republic. The credibility of Dominican baseball is suffering and will continue to suffer if strong measures aren't taken on both sides to address all the issues plaguing the game on this island.



I already hear the whispers when a Dominican player demonstrates strong play, whispers that he must be doing some sort of drug. This devalues great performances and undermines the integrity of baseball in general.

I personally think that *buscones* are an invaluable part of the game in the Dominican Republic; they find and deliver the talent that Major League Baseball and its teams spend millions each year to develop. But *buscones* are like used car salesmen; a few bad apples give the whole barrel a rotten reputation.

If indeed *buscones* are such a major problem as MLB and others have said, it is time, in my opinion, for the Dominican government and MLB to come up with some logical resolution before the image of Dominican baseball and the credibility of baseball are further tarnished.

It would be a simple process for the government to license *buscones*, just as it licenses other industries. A part of the licensing process should be that *buscones* would agree to adhere to the laws of the country which include penalties for falsifying someone's age and identity, as well as providing minors with certain drugs. The laws are there; they just need to be enforced.

On Major League Baseball's side, it could then certify licensed *buscones*, again stipulating in the certification process that age and identity fraud and steroid use by a *buscone's* pupil would be dealt with harshly, such as not allowing teams to deal with that *buscón* again. Part of the issue has been that teams are fearful that if they confront *buscones* they could lose out on access to top talent. Someone's got to bite the bullet on this and if all teams operate on a level playing field and deal only with licensed and certified *buscones* – and agree not to work with those who violate certain fundamental rules, it will go a long way toward curbing the abuses attributed to them.

Several trainers I know endorse licensing and certifying *buscones*, saying it would help to legitimize their stigmatized occupation. One told me, "The only (*buscones*) who would be against it are those who are dishonest and want to continue with that. But something needs to be done or no one will trust any of us."

I still think education is the ultimate weapon in reform in Dominican baseball. The game is being sold as the only chance out of poverty, the only chance for success for thousands of Dominican kids when only two out of 100 top prospects will ever succeed, and those who fail to make it simply don't have other opportunities to succeed in life, most often because they don't have a good education.

We have to change this mentality in poor, young Dominican players that baseball is their only means to success. If there were better educated kids, they would make better decisions. Currently, if they don't make it to the major leagues they think they are a failure. That's a very sad state of mind for a kid to have.

And it is time to take measures so that kids aren't in a position where they think they have to improve their chances of success in baseball with a pill or needle.

I don't feel sorry for the dozen or so suspended from baseball, but the system that produces them, that makes winning at all costs part of career planning, needs to be addressed sooner as opposed to later – for the sake of thousands of Dominican children chasing the dream, for the sake of the game itself.

Amigos; Cuántos De Nosotros Los Tenemos? (Friends; How Many Of Us Have Them?) – I recently reunited with an old friend of mine during his visit to the Dominican Republic, a friend who made a difference in where I am in life and what I am currently doing.

Ricky Clemons was in the Dominican Republic with the North Carolina A&T University basketball team that played three exhibition games in Santo Domingo as well as held a couple of clinics for some kids. NCA&T is coached by Cy Alexander, who has had a long and storied coaching career, including leading his team this year to the NCAA Tournament.



Together with my buddy Ricky Clemons in Santo Domingo.

Ricky is an assistant professor of public relations at NCA&T, and also teaches public relations at Howard University. He is also president of his own PR firm, ARC Connections, Inc.; host of The Sports Insider Show on Sirius XM 141 and founder of the Howard Sports Network.

His career started at Howard University in sports information; he was also with the 1983 USOC Sports Festival and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

He joined Major League Baseball in 1991 after working for Miller Brewing Company and Howard University, working his way up the corporate sports professional ladder to serve as Vice President of the National League of Major League Baseball. He served as Director of

Communications for The UniWorld Group and Vice President of Communications for The National Urban League.

His client list with ARC Connections has included ESPN, Major League Baseball, the National Association of Black Journalists and several professional athletes.

I first met Ricky in 1990 when I was doing an annual conference called The Black Athletes In America Forum in Washington, DC at Howard University. The purpose of the forum was to bring together sports insiders to discuss important issues as they affected blacks in sports and offer solutions.

We literally had no budget to put on the conference, so when Ricky approached me about doing public relations for the event I figured it was going to be a short conversation. Remarkably, he offered to take on the event if we could just cover expenses. Through Ricky's hard work, the event went on to be a great success; we held nine annual forums in total, but wouldn't have gotten past that second one without Ricky.

He and I always stayed in contact; a phone call here, and e-mail there, and a couple of times when I was a little down on my luck, he had work for me, generally helping him run the press room at certain events. He always seemed to know just when I needed the work, when I needed to feel relevant and he helped to carry me through a couple of rough spots in my life.

So naturally when I got an e-mail saying he was coming to the Dominican Republic with the A&T basketball team, I was excited to see my old friend in my new country. We got to spend some quality time together as I showed him around a little bit of Santo Domingo and I also got to see a little basketball, something I rarely get to enjoy in the Dominican Republic. Not that it doesn't exist; there are some very good basketball players here, but the sport generally takes a back seat to baseball.



NCA&T Coach Cy Alexander talks strategy with his team in Santo Domingo

A&T won two of the three games it played against Dominican teams; the team has some good young players that I expect to see make an impact on college basketball in the next couple of years. I also got to talk with Coach Alexander briefly; we have a number of mutual friends.

Ricky also did an interview with me which aired on The Sports Insider radio show that he does at Howard University.

It was just so nice to see someone you respect so much come onto your stomping grounds and have the knowledge and background to understand what I am about and what the DRSEA is about. We are looking for ways to collaborate as I am sure Ricky's expertise can help carry the DRSEA to another level.

Thanks Ricky..... for being a friend.

Sueño Diferido (Dream Deferred) Sad news reached me recently when I learned of the death of former basketball star Dean Meminger, 65, whose body was discovered in a Harlem hotel. Cause of death was under investigation, but the police said there were no signs of trauma.

Dean had battled an addiction to cocaine for years, dating back to when he playing in the NBA. I wrote about him in the **INFORMER** back in 2009 when he was hospitalized in a critical condition after being found unconscious in his room following a fire at a dilapidated rooming house in the Bronx. Fire investigators initially looked into the possibility that Meminger may have ignited the blaze while smoking crack, but that link was eventually eliminated.

I have known Dean for several years and was well aware of his history of drug and alcohol abuse; it was sad to see someone fall further and further into the abyss.

Dean was known as "Dean the Dream" during his basketball career, including his days as a key reserve for the 1973 NBA Champion Knicks. This followed a storied history as a high school phenom in New York and an All American at Marquette University.



But after his basketball days ended, Meminger struggled, once saying that his longest drug free period as an adult was three years. He coached briefly in the Continental Basketball Association; interestingly, when he was let go from the Albany Patroons partway through the 1982-83 season, Phil Jackson became the coach and went on to greater glory delivering NBA championships as the coach of the Bulls and the Lakers. Meminger was never so fortunate; he conducted basketball clinics over the years, focusing on the defensive side of the game that was his specialty. He also worked for a time as a drug counselor.

I always liked Dean, who I simply called Dream when we worked on several projects together for The Sports Foundation in the Bronx. As someone who has had my own problem with alcohol abuse, I could definitely sympathize with his struggles.

Addiction is a horrible beast that, even under control, lurks in the shadows every day, waiting for the chance to resurrect its stranglehold. I know alcohol nearly destroyed my life; I am one of the fortunate ones to realize how dependent and pathetic I had become.



There were many times I was with Dean when I knew some sort of substance use was in play. I also know that professional athletes have a high incidence of substance abuse, particularly after their playing days are over.

The theories abound, but all seem to have some roots in the adrenaline rush these stars get from the cheers, and the absences of the thrill when the cheering stops. Drugs and alcohol become the substitute, filling the void with empty promises.

I was never that professional athlete, but I do believe alcohol filled a vacuum, keeping me company, promising to be my friend during both highs and lows in my life, masking my fears, accentuating my joys, but ultimately delivering only misery.

I prayed for Dean back in 2009, prayed he would fulfill his dreams. I pray now that he has found peace.



Una Tragedia Americana (An American Tragedy) – The legacy of the Jesse Jackson family took a crushing blow recently when Jesse Jackson Jr. was sentenced to 30 months in jail for stealing campaign funds. Having worked for Jackson Sr. and with Jackson Jr., the matter touched me personally with feelings of heartache and disappointment.



Jesse Jackson Jr. and wife, Sandi, at their sentencing hearing

When we worked together, Junior had the office right next to mine, so it was impossible for us not to interact, and for the most part it was positive. Junior was a neat freak who not only vacuumed his office every day, he vacuumed mine – and this was after a cleaning crew had completed their work.

He was also an incorrigible prankster and I was often his target, much to my consternation; the more he knew it annoyed me, the more he did. I tried my best to ignore him and even that backfired on me once. One day, Junior stood outside of my office imploring me to come to the door. Knowing something was afoot, I declined, but Junior insisted. “What do you want, Junior,” I asked. He said, “I want you to come meet Aretha Franklin.”

Naturally, I didn’t believe him, but he kept insisting. Finally, in an effort to end the charade, I went to the door of my office and there – in all her majesty – was the Queen of Soul herself, obviously in on the joke and loving it as much as Junior. Naturally I was flabbergasted, but impressed with Junior for taking his pranksterism to such heights.

He was also a brilliant strategist, often thinking off the cuff to develop spur of the minute plans to pull the organization either out of the fire or into the fray. The plans were generally successful; the only problem was it usually involved most of the office staying after hours to implement them. He was totally committed to the organization and expected everyone else to be.

His wife, Sandi, who was sentenced to a year in prison for her role in the campaign funds misappropriation, was a wonderful lady who brightened any room she entered. As a result, she could defuse tensions easily and quickly, often pulling me aside to encourage me not to take the rants of either Junior or Senior Jackson too seriously. “Charles,” she would remind me, “I married into this family. How do you think I feel?” Her advice helped me to survive.

I remember the day Junior won election to Congress. We popped champagne in the office as Junior declared his intentions of being the best Congressman he could and also to carve out his own destiny.

He went on to serve six terms as Congressman and there were those who felt his political future was bright and potentially promising enough to include U.S. senator, mayor of Chicago and – who knew – maybe president of the United States.

It all collapsed when Junior admitted skimming \$750,000 in campaign funds, but what disturbed me most were the ridiculous things he spent the money on. A Michael Jackson fedora? I mean, come on! Such illogic supports his claims of being bipolar, but again it is no excuse for his actions or those of his wife.

I did not part with Jesse Jackson Sr. on the best of terms, but never wished him or his son anything but the best. I saw Junior and Sandi over the years and both were always extremely cordial, with Junior continuing his kidding nature towards me. And I kept hoping that Junior would carve his own legacy apart from his father.

That, he has done. He and his wife should have known better, but it is sad to see two lives in ruin, and the legacy of the father further damaged.

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