



DRSEA INFORMER

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Dejavu Otra Vez (Déjà Vu All Over Again) – When I arrived in the Dominican Republic four years ago, it was on the eve of the presidential election that propelled Barack Obama into office. In fact, I wrote about it in the second issue of the **INFORMER**, saying:

“I watched the announcement of Obama going over the top alone at home, knowing I was going to be emotional. Not going to lie; the tears flowed, mostly with joy at the historic nature of what had just taken place, but a profound sadness that my parents, particularly my dad who was a poll watcher for years, were not around to witness what had transpired. I know that somewhere he was smiling, saying, “That’s my man. Obama, that’s my man!” My brother, who just happens to be a Republican, put it into perspective, saying that even though my parents weren’t around, they raised us to appreciate the moment. True that.”



I was more nervous than emotional this time around as I again sat alone at home watching the returns. Living in the Dominican Republic, I was relatively immune from the avalanche of political ads that bombarded the United States, but as an American citizen and voter, I had a vested interest in the process. I had done my part – voted by absentee ballot – so all I could do was watch and hope that my guy would again prevail. He did of course, and my tears flowed again. A black man *re-elected* president of the United States! And again I know my dad is smiling.

God bless America!

I recently returned to the U.S. for one of my periodic visits, and concluded some unfinished business that left me both complete and subdued – the interment of my father’s ashes and the placing of markers on his grave and that of my mother.

It is not that my brother and I had forgotten; we had talked about it many times since my father passed away in 2005 (my mother died in 2002), but with me in the Dominican Republic, scheduling the task had not been easy. But I needed a trip to the U.S. to take care of some business and some personal matters, so we were able to coordinate.

It was a modest affair, just as I imagine my father would have wanted; no pomp and circumstances, just a few friends and family gathered in the cemetery at Hosanna A.U.M.P Church adjacent to the gate of my father’s beloved Lincoln University. The church was once a station on the Underground Railroad and as fitting a final resting place as my parents could possibly have. Some of the earliest graves date back to 1853, a year before the founding of Lincoln; its many visitors included Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth.



Hosanna A.U.M.P Church

Even with the passage of time, the process was still emotional. I miss my dad every single day. Oh, I miss my mother too, but my father and I had a special bond that got stronger over the years and was cemented eternally in the last few months of his life. I had gone from him taking care of me as a child unable to take care of myself, to taking care of him when he needed me to take care of him. But we had also developed a friendship in the last few years of his life that became special; I was finally able to put so much into perspective, so many of the things he used to tell me in my youth that I would one day understand. How wise he was.

As I pass my four year anniversary of living in the Dominican Republic, his wisdom continues to help steer my ship. He was always one to advise me to follow my dreams; that I could accomplish anything I put my mind to, and I remind myself of that when I have doubts. It often gets frustrating living alone in a foreign country, often unsure of who believes in you, unsure if the next step is the right one, unsure of the promise of tomorrow.

And then I think of my dad as a young, gifted and black 16-year-old entering the gate at Lincoln University in 1930, in an America I can only imagine. Of being the oldest child of a domestic who had been abandoned by her husband, who wanted her son to be educated no matter that it was a strictly segregated America where the intelligence of black people was suspect.



A young H. Alfred Farrell

I think about how he prevailed, graduating second in his class, an English major who loved the language that he manipulated with such skill. I think about a young black man drafted into a segregated Army during World War II, going “kicking and screaming” all the way, he would later joke, and serving in the secretarial pool to make white officers seem intelligent on paper.

I think about him returning to segregated America to reunite with his wife and go on to become the first African American to receive a PhD in English from Ohio State University. He was a graduate assistant, a post reluctantly provided him by skeptics who felt that white students would not take his direction. Of course they did, and if you knew my father, it is easy to understand why.

But as gifted as he was, in a segregated America he returned to Lincoln University where he spent the remainder of his life teaching, guiding, nurturing and mentoring students. He later had offers to go elsewhere; he stayed, because his dream was to teach people who could benefit most from what he had to offer. Even after retiring after 32 years of teaching, he continued to help students; he created a student emergency fund with his own money, then continued to fund it by running a small canteen where he sold sodas and candy.

As if that was not enough, in his 80’s he got a part-time job editing the local newspaper. He had taken to correcting the paper and sending the corrections to the editors who were wise enough to recognize his expertise and hire him. He also stayed active as an officer in the local senior center.

My father was an extraordinary man; he was and is my hero. He once told me that all he wanted to do is leave this Earth a little better than he entered it.

His grave, and that of my mother, are marked with simple stone tablets, engraved with their names; the dates of their birth and death separated by a simple dash. In the end, that is a simplification we are all reduced to; what makes us individually remarkable is what we accomplish during that dash.

H. Alfred Farrell, Feb. 14, 1914 – Sept. 29, 2005, put an amazing amount into that dash, and left the world a far better place than when he entered. I take a lesson from that every day and hope I can say the same one day.

Llevar Una Idea A La Realidad (From Concept To Reality) – The Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy is now scheduled to open in January 2013, bringing the dream to reality. It has taken a lot of effort, an enormous amount of blood, sweat and tears, and while it may not be opening on the scale we had once hoped it would, we have much to be proud of what we have accomplished since my co-founder, Harold Mendez, and I first started discussing the concept back in 2005.

The need has been evident much longer, dating back to 2000 when I led a delegation at Major League Baseball's behest to take a look at its teams' academies in the Dominican Republic and finding so many of them lacking, particularly in educational opportunities. Some of the academies were fantastic and reminded me of some of the camps where I spent summers when I was young, but many – most – were decrepit beyond belief, including one that had a dormitory that looked more like a jail. After my report was filed, MLB opened an office in the Dominican Republic for the first time.

In 2004, I was part of a group that held a conference in the Dominican Republic on Latino participation in the sports industry. We invited prospects from MLB teams to sessions on financial planning, on picking a sports agent, on acculturation. I will never forget that the first question asked by one of these prospects was, "How do I open a bank account?"



2010 DRSEA retreat in Dominican Republic

I think it was that moment that convinced Harold and me that things needed to change. Here was an industry in one of the poorest countries in the world that puts over \$125 million annually into the economy of the Dominican Republic to mine the country for baseball talent. Here is an industry where only two in 100 prospects succeeds. Here is an industry dependent on the talents of 16-year-olds, many who cannot point on map where they live. It is as if baseball is willing to plant 100 apples trees, yet let the fruit rot on 98, harvesting from just two.

I grew up in a family where education had been the salvation, had been the vehicle to escape poverty, had been the commodity that once obtained cannot be taken away.

The main goal of the DRSEA was, and remains, to position young Dominican baseball players academically and athletically to receive scholarships to U.S. colleges and universities, but along the way we have also become an advocate for reform in baseball in the Dominican Republic. Much of what we advocated – addressing age and identity fraud, eliminating steroid usage, and education for prospects in MLB academies – has been embraced by MLB and its academies, but

much is left to be done, and the DRSEA intends to remain a key voice for baseball players in the Dominican Republic.

I remember when I first arrived in the Dominican Republic and a colleague at the time basically said that some people were not embracing the DRSEA, didn't believe in the project, because they perceived me a dreamer. I told her it was a label that I not only embrace, but covet.

Where are we without dreams? I wonder what would have happened if, 35 or so years ago, someone had pulled young Barack Obama aside and told him not to dream of being president of the United States?

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the hot Dominican sun, withering and disappearing? Maybe it stinks like rotten meat, becoming a sickening reminder of what will never be? Perhaps the dream will crust and sugar over, like a sweet pineapple left in the night air? Or does the deferred dream explode, the obvious severity of a postponed dream.

The DRSEA is a dream I refuse to defer, and now we stand on the brink of reality. I think my dad would be proud.

Ciudadano Canó (Citizen Canó) - 2012 is turning out to be a banner year for New York Yankee star Robinson Canó, who recently became a U.S. citizen. The 30-year-old second baseman, who grew up in the Dominican Republic but lived in New Jersey for three years during his middle school years tweeted, "Very proud day for me, I just became a US citizen, God bless America!"



Canó: proud to be an American

He also came in fourth in the American League MVP vote this year, and picked up a Golden Glove as well. Besides living in American as a youth, Canó is named after a true American hero; his father named him after Jackie Robinson because he admired how that Robinson broke baseball's color line.

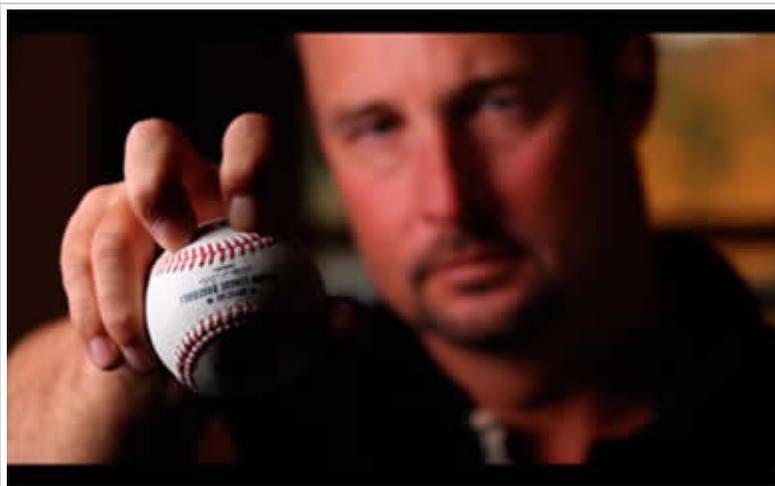
The new citizen is going to be able to afford the American Dream, as bigger riches are coming his way. The Yankees picked up his \$15 million option for 2013, after which he will hit the free agent market.

While Canó, who is from San Pedro de Macoris, is obviously proud to be an American, he continues to keep close ties to his roots in the Dominican Republic by playing for his hometown team, the Estrellas Orientales, in the Dominican Winter Baseball league. San Pedro, incidentally, is where the DRSEA will initially open its doors.

Poniéndose Los Nudillos (Knucking Down) – For the third year in a row, I have been fortunate enough to get an invitation to the Dominican Global Film Festival, which annually presents a selection of international films intended to promote and encourage discussion and understanding of global issues including social, political and economic.

I was fortunate to catch one film that was surprisingly inspiring as well as entertaining and enlightening.

“*Knuckleball!*” is a documentary about a select few pitchers in the entire history of baseball who have carved careers by throwing a pitch that has been known to baffle both the batter and the thrower. The film follows Major League Baseball’s only knuckleballers in 2011; Tim Wakefield of the Boston Red Sox and R.A. Dickey of the New York Mets as they maneuver their way with a slow and unpredictable pitch in a world that favors speed and accuracy. Also featured are former knuckleballers Phil Niekro, Charlie Hough, Wilber Wood, Jim Bouton and Tom Candiotti.



Tim Wakefield “knuckles” down

What is interesting is the film provides, with the help of great film footage from Major League Baseball’s archives, a peek at the vibrancy of baseball through the eyes of a single pitch and the people who throw it. Wakefield was close to washout when he was urged to develop a knuckleball; when he retired earlier this year after a 19-year career, he was the oldest active player in the majors. Dickey was in similar straits, a journeyman who had bounced from team to team before taking up residence with the Mets; he recently topped off his 17th year in the majors with a Cy Young Award.

What I took inspiration from was the determination all knuckleballers seem to embrace. While the unconventional pitch is virtually unhittable because of its erratic and unpredictable motion, it is also difficult for pitchers to control, so its practitioners are rare, with many embracing the pitch after failing to have careers at other positions, or failing to master more conventional pitches like the fastball or curve.

As a result, knuckleballers are labeled as having a trick, circus, freak or gimmick pitch; conjurers and illusionists as opposed to skillful masters of the art of pitching, no matter how effective they are.

I can empathize, as I have often been questioned both on the motive and method behind the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy, having to defend on far too many occasions why the DRSEA is important, why I pursue this unconventional dream despite all the obstacles and all the detractors. Just like the knuckleballers, I struggle against all odds to stay in the game. As Dickey says about the film, "The narrative is not about a pitch as much as it's about man's quest to be more than what people think that he can be."



R.A. Dickey

And so I persevere.

UN PASO MAS Y LLEGAMOS

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

Myspace: Myspace.com/drseaorg

Twitter: Twitter.com/drseaorg

Facebook: www.facebook.com/drseaorg

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