



BASEBALL: VENEZUELA'S PASSION

While most countries in Latin America are fanatics about their soccer, Venezuela more closely resembles some of its Caribbean neighbors in its passion for baseball.

Baseball was introduced in Venezuela at the turn of the 20th century, brought back by Venezuelans who had studied at U.S. universities and by U.S. citizens working the country's fast-growing oil industry.

While the sport remained popular yet informal in its early years, starting in 1945 the first professional baseball league was established in Venezuela.

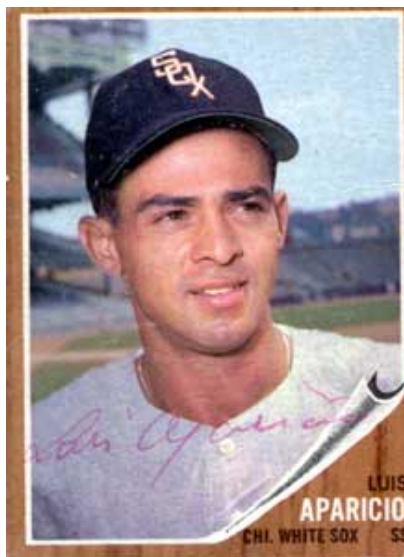
Since then, Venezuela's passion for baseball has become almost unrivaled in the region. Additionally, many Venezuelans have gone on to play in the U.S., including a number of baseball heavyweights.

VENEZUELANS IN THE U.S.

As baseball became more and more popular in Venezuela, Venezuelan players, recognized for their athleticism and passion for the game, began migrating to the U.S. to play on Major League (MLB) teams. Over the years, they have made their presence known, joining numerous teams, setting records and winning championships.

According to historical records, the first Venezuelan to play on a MLB team was Alex Carrasquel, who debuted with the Washington Senators as a pitcher on April 23, 1939. He played until July 26, 1949.

Venezuela's first notable MLB baseball player was Alfonso "Chico" Carrasquel – Alex Carrasquel's nephew – a shortstop who debuted for the Chicago White Sox on September 23, 1950 and in 1951 became the first Hispanic ever chosen to an All-Star Team. Carrasquel was already a star in Venezuela – in 1946, he hit the first ever homerun of the country's new professional league.



Luis Aparicio, only the sixth Venezuelan to play on a MLB team, became one of Venezuela's most famous baseball exports when he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1984. During his career, Aparicio – who played for the Chicago White Sox, Baltimore Orioles and Boston Red Sox – won the Rookie of the Year Award in 1956, played in 10 All-Star games, won a World Series Championship in 1966, and claimed nine Golden Glove Awards. His number – 11 – was retired in 1984 by the Chicago White Sox and later given, with Aparicio's permission, to another Venezuelan player, Omar Vizquel.

Since Carrasquel's debut in 1939, more than 225 other Venezuelans have played on MLB teams. **For the 2010 season, a record 58 Venezuelans joined the rosters of MLB teams, second only to the Dominican Republic in terms of foreign-born players in U.S. professional baseball.**

Additionally, in May 2010, Venezuela gained its first Major League umpire in history, when Manuel Gonzalez worked third base in a game between the Florida Marlins and the Arizona Diamondbacks.

VENEZUELAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Accomplishments by Venezuelan players in Major League Baseball are numerous.

On June 2, 2010, Detroit Tigers pitcher Armando Galarraga almost became the 21st player in baseball history to pitch a perfect game – until a botched call by an umpire cost him a hit. His accomplishment was still recognized by baseball fans around the world, including Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez – himself a baseball fan who once aspired to make the sport a career.

As of June 22, 2010, fellow Detroit Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera currently leads the league in homeruns (19), RBIs (60) and slugging percentage (.632). Cabrera joined New York Mets pitcher Johan Santana as the fifth



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States

and sixth highest-paid players in the Major Leagues for 2010.

Santana, considered one of the best pitchers in baseball, is a two-time Cy Young Award winner, the highest honor given to pitchers. Fellow Mets pitcher Francisco “Kid” Rodriguez set a record for saves in 2008 with 62.

In terms of hitters, Detroit right fielder Magglio Ordoñez had his best season in 2007, when he claimed the AL batting championship, the first Tiger to do so since 1961.

The accomplishments even extend to team management, with Chicago White Sox manager, Ozzie Guillen, claiming the honor of being the first Latin-born manager to win a World Series Championship in 2005.

A BASEBALL LANDMARK

A Bostonian once said, “London has Big Ben, Paris has the Eiffel Tower. Boston has the CITGO sign.”

Indeed it does. Just outside Boston’s Fenway Park is the landmark CITGO sign, which has stood in the same location next to the stadium since 1965. When Venezuela’s state-owned oil company purchased a majority share in CITGO in the 1990s, it purchased with it the CITGO sign and its legacy.

In 2005, the CITGO Corporation spent \$1 million to refurbish the sign and make sure that it remained part of Boston’s skyline and a visual representation of Venezuela’s presence in U.S. baseball.

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