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Runners Left on Base:

Cuban Baseball Defection Experience and a Reevaluation of Baseball Diplomacy

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Latin American and Iberian Studies

by

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September 2014

The thesis of Marcus F. Cuéllar is approved.

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July 2014

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## ABSTRACT

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Cuban Baseball Defection Experience and a Reevaluation of Baseball Diplomacy

by

Marcus F. Cuéllar

Due to laws and restrictions in place in Cuba, baseball athletes born there—including many who are considered to be some of the most talented in the world—are not legally permitted leave the country to play for Major League Baseball (MLB) teams. Consequently, a phenomenon of baseball athletes defecting from Cuba to play in MLB emerged in 1991 and has since resulted in more than 250 Cuban ballplayers illegally emigrating from Cuba to play professionally in the United States. Even still, our understanding of their migration experiences, as well as those of their families remains incomplete. By using a lens of transnationalism, this study attempts to provide a more complete portrayal of these experiences. A baseball defection case study based on an original semi-structured interview is also presented to demonstrate the kinds of questions that have not been sufficiently asked regarding these experiences. Lastly, as a means of eliminating the circumstances that create and maintain the demand for baseball defections, an historical examination of “baseball diplomacy” is presented to scrutinize its potential for helping to renew US-Cuban relations in the current socio-political environment.

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## Introduction

On a cool August night in Oakland, California, the Oakland A's trailed the Houston Astros by three runs in the bottom of the eighth inning. However, with a runner on base, the crowd in attendance suddenly comes to life, dancing and cheering, as *reggaetón* music begins to blare throughout the stadium and Yoenis Céspedes strides up to home plate. Already in this contest, Céspedes has exhibited his ability to impact the game, having hit a single and a double in his first two at-bats. His reputation as home run hitter was solidified on a national stage the month prior when he was crowned champion of MLB's Home Run Derby. After watching the first two pitches go by, Céspedes smashes a belt-high fastball over the left-field wall. As he jogs around the bases, the crowd continues to celebrate in the kind of euphoria only sport can incite. Looking up to a group of fans donning head-to-toe Oakland A's regalia and seated only a handful of rows behind his team's dugout, Céspedes waves both hands to his family just before his teammates crowd around to congratulate him.

Céspedes' journey to that stage is unlike any of those who took the field with or against him that night because, as a Cuban baseball defector, he had to illegally emigrate from his home country to play in MLB. In fact, the only ones who may have been able to relate to his experience that night was the group of his family members in attendance who had to similarly endure their own illegal migrations to reach the United States. Despite the fame that Céspedes and many other baseball defectors have acquired over the past two decades, our understanding of their experiences, as well as that of their families, remains incomplete and warrants closer examination.

The United States has maintained a commercial, economic, and financial embargo against Cuba since October 1960. With the adoption of the Cuban Democracy Act in 1992, the



United States has declared its intention to maintain this embargo claiming concerns regarding human rights abuses and suppression of democratic freedoms on the island. Notwithstanding these long-existing tensions between the two nations, one commonality that has remained throughout the years in each country has been a passion for baseball. However, due to laws and restrictions in place in Cuba, baseball athletes born there—including many who are considered to be some of the most talented in the world—are not legally permitted to leave the country to play for Major League Baseball (MLB) teams where they would compete at the highest level the sport has to offer and be able to earn substantial salaries. Consequently, a phenomenon of baseball athletes defecting from Cuba to play in MLB emerged in 1991 when pitcher René Arocha separated from the Cuban national team while at Miami International Airport (Wulf 1993). Since Arocha’s defection, more than 250 Cuban ballplayers have illegally emigrated from Cuba to play professionally in the United States and it appears that neither their numbers, nor the media attention they garner will decrease anytime soon.

It is widely known that illegally migrating from Cuba in the manner that these ballplayers must undertake abounds with both legal and physical peril. However, most accounts provided in the media depict “rags to riches” journeys that involve passage from Cuba to the United States on makeshift rafts, but always conclude with a ballplayer fulfilling his dream of playing in MLB and living happily ever after. While these upbeat tales make for enjoyable reads, they leave us with an incomplete understanding. Instead, the reality of the Cuban baseball defection experiences is much more complicated and extends far beyond the moment that these players arrive in an MLB ballpark.

In addition to our lack of understanding of Cuban baseball defection experiences for the ballplayers, even less is known about the experiences of their families. Since the start of this ballplayer migration phenomenon nearly 25 years ago, the perspective of the athletes' families, including those who travel with them and those who remain behind in Cuba, has been almost entirely overlooked.

Chapter One seeks to examine assumptions regarding baseball defection experiences for athletes and their families and provide a nuanced understanding of them by viewing them through the lens of transnationalism. By utilizing information from an original interview conducted with a baseball defector, Chapter Two highlights the lines of inquiry in these experiences that have yet to be sufficiently examined and provides insight regarding the current state of baseball defection.

The need for Cuban baseball players to take the extreme action of illegally emigrating from their home country in order to pursue a dream of playing baseball for an MLB team is triggered by the strained diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba. Chapter Three proposes that the two nations may be able to find a starting point for renewed bilateral relations through the use of "baseball diplomacy." Starting with an historical examination of the attempted utilizations of baseball diplomacy over the past 43 years, the examination then compares it with the successful application of "Ping-Pong diplomacy" in 1971. In the end, an argument for the viability of baseball diplomacy as a means to renew US-Cuban relations is made given the current socio-political environment.

The main goal of this research project is to use baseball, a widely popular sport, to identify and highlight any injustices that may be present, not just within baseball defection experiences, but in US-Cuban relations in general, and offer a means to resolve them.

Indeed, if a privileged class such as high-profile baseball athletes is subject to mistreatment, then the implications for non-athlete migrants are likely to be much worse. As such, the onus is on all parties complicit in creating and maintaining the circumstances that lead to these injustices, whether they be nations, institutions, or individual researchers and journalists, to work towards their termination.

### **Theoretical Framework and Relevant Literature**

To examine contemporary Cuban baseball defection experiences as they pertain to athletes and their families, this study drew from various theoretical approaches. Although few sources have focused specifically on baseball defection experiences, the literature on sport and labor migration is more robust. Consequently, the theoretical discourses within these works became the starting point for this research project. Found among them were examples of the diverse approaches that have been taken to examine sport and labor migration, ranging from macro-scale migration, world systems, and development theories, to more localized ones like those seen in ethnographic studies grounded in transnationalism.

At a basic level, every baseball defector's move from Cuba to the United States is a form of labor migration. This is true in the sense that these migrations are manifest only through the professionalization of sport, including baseball, which has been "bound up in a sports industrial complex" (Maguire and Falcous 2010, 5). Anthropologist Thomas F. Carter refers to this sports industrial complex as NEOsport (New Economic Order sport) and defines it as the "intertwining of neoliberal capitalist regimes" into sport (Carter 2011a, 72). Given that professional sport produces only a form of "immaterial labour"—that is to say, "services that produce no material or durable goods"—it would not exist without NEOsport and its "processes of commercialization, corporatization and spectacularization" that are

ultimately motivated by profit (Carter 2011a, 98-99). As such, it is only through NEOsport that athletes are provided the means to capitalize themselves and thus undertake sport migration (Carter 2011a, 98).

Over the past 25 years, the majority of sport migration studies have been framed through macro-scale theories, such as world systems theory (i.e. globalization) and development theory (Carter 2011a, 11). However, as one examines works based on these theories, it becomes clear that these frameworks fail to consider the individuals who act in these migrations. Instead, attention is paid primarily to structures and institutions, and therefore provides us with perspectives that come only from corporate entities, media, and governing bodies (Carter 2011a, 67). By focusing on macro-scale models, individual experiences are effectively expunged, leaving us with discussions regarding migration that are pre-determined by global structures and do not attribute agency or choice to the migrants who take part in it (Carter 2011a, 7; Carter 2011b, 78). To illustrate this point, Carter cites the foundational global sport works of Toby Miller et al. in *Globalization and Sport* (2001) and Joseph Maguire in *Global Sport* (1999). However, Yoshio Takahashi and John Horne's "Moving with the Bat and Ball" (2006) and Joseph K. Adjaye's "Reimagining Sports" (2010) demonstrate the continued emphasis placed on structural factors over individual experience.

Likewise, sport migration studies centered on macro-scale theories have had a tendency to understate the role of the localities through which migrants pass during their journeys (Carter 2011b, 67), regarding athletes as a "freely moving cosmopolitan population" (Carter 2011a, 5). While sport migrants typically do experience increased mobility and the circumvention of local law is not uncommon, they nevertheless must still

interact and contend with various governments and laws that may “facilitate, inhibit, or otherwise contour” their migration (Carter 2011b, 72).

In response, Carter asserts that there is a need to “shift the theoretical premise from global institutional structures, typological categorizations and spatially constrictive theories that treat localities as discrete entities . . . to one that centers on the experiences of people and the spaces through which they move” (Carter 2011b, 67). Working through a framework of transnationalism accomplishes this.

A transnational approach to sport migration “allows for the specificities of local conditions and alters the discourse of sport migration from impersonal, structural moves to embodied movements” (Carter 2011a, 15). It also gives greater recognition and emphasis to states and the ways they affect migrations (Carter 2011a, 15). As such, we are ultimately able to acquire perspectives informed by “social institutions, states, families, governing bodies, employers, and individual migrants’ own social and professional networks,” rather than just by global factors (Carter 2011b, 68). Applying this approach to Cuban baseball defectors, we move beyond the deterministic discourses regarding MLB’s global reach and the natural movement of baseball talent to it. Instead, we are encouraged to closely examine the personal negotiations among families, baseball scouts, and others as they interact with their governmental and institutional circumstances, such as immigration laws and MLB eligibility rules. In short, transnationalism recognizes a sport migrant’s agency without denying the role that governments and other institutions play in shaping their experiences.

As I began to research the literature on Cuban baseball defection experience, specifically seeking perspectives beyond the prevalent “glossy reification of glamour that sporting celebrity brings” (Carter 2011a, 6) or what I refer to as the “rags to riches”

narrative, I found few sources that address the experiences of athletes and even fewer that mentioned the experience of family remaining in Cuba. Among journalistic accounts, many sources failed to provide specifics and/or used euphemistic phrases to gloss over defection experience (Kepner 2004; Lee 2013; McKinley 1999; Merkin 2009; Sanchez 2012; Wulf 1993). For example, *New York Times* reporter Eric Schmitt (1998) refers to the “certain reprisal” and “hardships” ballplayers may face if repatriated to Cuba, but fails to elaborate further. Likewise, sport journalist Tim Brown (2010) fails to provide additional details after noting that the situation for the families of baseball defectors “remain[s] dire” and that “repression [against potential defectors] is greater.” The regrettable consequence of reports such as these is that, because they generalize, downplay, or even neglect baseball defection experiences, the “rags to riches” narrative remains unchallenged and the public remains unaware of the more complicated and, at times, problematic experiences of those engaged in baseball defection. Fortunately, there has been a recent upsurge in interest regarding baseball defectors, which has led to more journalists examining baseball defection experiences and, in a few instances, expanding their focus to the experience of the athlete’s family (Eden 2014; Katz 2014; Passan, Robinson, and Getlin 2013; Saracevic 2013; Slusser and Bulwa 2013)

Fainaru and Sánchez’s *The Duke of Havana* (2001) is arguably the most thorough examination of a baseball defection experience, as it provides great detail regarding Orlando “El Duque” Hernández’s migration (the experience of his brother, Liván, is also discussed but only as it pertains to Orlando’s experience). However, because Fainaru and Sánchez’s

work constitutes a case study and “El Duque” Hernández’s defection was exceptional<sup>1</sup>, its applicability to other experiences is limited. Thomas F. Carter’s *In Foreign Fields* (2011a), on the other hand, uses ethnographic fieldwork based in anthropological discourses of sport migration to gain an understanding of the “experiences, concerns and strategies of transnational sport migrants” as they are affected by personal and local factors (5-6). Ultimately, his insight into the individual and familial experiences of baseball defection is unmatched and his approach serves as a model to future works on the subject. In spite of this, perhaps because Carter seeks conclusions and models that are generalizable to all transnational sport migrants, his discussion about the impact that illegality has in Cuban baseball defection is understated.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to his high profile status, Hernández received special considerations and treatment from the Bahamian and United States governments that have not been granted to others since.

## Chapter One

### **Scouting Report: Athlete and Family Experience in Cuban Baseball Defection**

Widespread sports media attention has been given to ballplayers who have defected from Cuba to pursue professional baseball careers in the United States since René Arocha's defection in 1991. But few have examined the experience of defection. Indeed, several publications have provided the lighthearted "rags to riches" narration of defection, where the ballplayer makes the difficult decision to leave Cuba, embarks on an arduous journey where hardship and the possibility of death are ever-present, but eventually makes it to the United States, onto a Major League Baseball (MLB) roster, and thus lives happily ever after (Nomai and Dionisopoulos 2002). Such triumphant stories make for enjoyable reads, but they are uncommon and ultimately incomplete. Typically missing from these accounts are the experience of defection, including the considerations that athletes negotiate within themselves and with their families, the various risks they assume by choosing to defect, and the effects their decisions have on those remaining in Cuba.

Undoubtedly, individual baseball defection experiences vary from person to person. Where one athlete may have been offered the assistance of a network of individuals to quickly arrive in the United States without any trouble, others have had to undertake the journey alone and overcome not only physical dangers, but complicated and slow immigration bureaucracy that may result in their becoming stranded or even detained along the way. Where one ballplayer's family may have been able to join them in the move to the United States, another's family may have been denied the opportunity to relocate outside of the island, and yet another's expresses no desire to leave Cuba at all. This study utilizes publications about baseball defection experiences that have appeared over time to discover



commonalities as well as differences, and ultimately seeks to complicate our understanding of them through detailed analysis of its various components.

### ***A. Surveying Prior Baseball Defection Experiences***

The stereotypical portrayal of a baseball defection experience is not much different than that of non-athlete Cuban migrants. Usually, the story involves a person who decides to leave Cuba, embarks on an improvised and unreliable raft, floats in the ocean for several days, and after becoming starved and dehydrated, arrives in the United States. While this telling may not be entirely inaccurate for some baseball defection experiences, it certainly does not represent the great majority.

Among the most comprehensive attempts to understand the experiences of Cuban baseball defection is Thomas F. Carter's *In Foreign Fields* (2011a). In it Carter employs anthropological ethnography in order to gain a "nuanced" understanding of transnational sport migration (Carter 2011a, 10). Although Carter dedicates much of his book to the establishment of transnationalism as a superior analytical framework (as opposed to globalization) with which to examine contemporary sport migration experiences, he nonetheless makes a substantive contribution to the topic of Cuban baseball defection experiences. In the chapter entitled "Family Matters: Risks and Costs of Mobility," Carter focuses on the "effects, affects and experiences of family in relation to a migrant's own mobility" (Carter 2011a, 13). Speaking generally about the experience of transnational sport migrants, he notes that the decision to migrate is "never simply an individual choice" (Carter 2011a, 127). As such, he explores the manner that families as "units" negotiate the concerns—global and local—that arise prior to and following a sport migration (Carter 2011a, 129-34). The concerns he identifies as applicable to most transnational sport

migration experiences are “who should travel, for how long, what route(s) should be taken, what risks such moves engender, and what will happen to those who stay behind” (Carter 2011a, 127).

### *Illegality*

Examining each of these considerations as they apply to the Cuban baseball defector experience, the uniqueness of the situation quickly becomes clear, since the most pertinent characteristic in each consideration is the underlying illegality of the migration itself. Just three years after the success of its 1959 revolution, the Cuban government under Fidel Castro enacted strict constraints on the ability of its citizens to travel outside the island. The government has maintained this tight control over the years, essentially making it impossible for the majority of its citizens, especially its baseball athletes<sup>2</sup>, to partake in legal foreign travel (“Families Torn Apart” 2005, 8-9). Consequently, of the more than a million Cubans that have emigrated from the island since the revolution, most, including virtually every one of the more than 250 baseball athletes, have had to do so through unauthorized means (Pedraza 2007, 1; “Complete list of known Cuban baseball Defectors” 2014)<sup>3</sup>.

Due to the centrality of illegality in baseball defection, the concern about the risks involved in this form of sport migration pervades each stage of the experience. Unlike the other transnational sport migrants Carter employs as illustrations of his thesis (e.g. athletes

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<sup>2</sup> Other athletes and artists, such as boxers, musicians, and dancers, have also been subject to similar restraints. However, these other groups have not garnered the same level of attention from the government, nor have they emigrated in as great of numbers.

<sup>3</sup> A review of the data provided by *Cubanball.com* on known defectors (see Appendix 1) reveals only two instances in which a player departed from Cuba legally before defecting. This number does not include ballplayers who defected while abroad with *Selección Cuba* since their departure from the team constituted an illegal act in the eyes of the Cuban government.

from cricket, tennis, golf, basketball, soccer, handball, field and ice hockey, rugby, and baseball athletes from countries other than Cuba), those negotiating a decision to defect from Cuba must preface their deliberations by considering the risk of illegality.

Furthermore, in surveying the risks of baseball defection, it becomes apparent they can best be viewed as a fusion of the risks faced by transnational sport migrants and those faced by non-athlete Cubans who attempt to leave the island through extralegal means. As such, we can see that the cause for any given risk may stem from the individual's status as a migrant athlete, from the illegality of their means of migration, or from a combination of both.

One significant risk encountered in defection, which is unmistakably an upshot of its illegal nature, emerges even before a Cuban athlete ever takes a migratory action. Whereas other sport migrants need not harbor fear about disclosing their consideration of migration and, in fact, typically incorporate many people into those deliberations (Carter 2011a, 127), Cuban baseball defectors must exercise much greater caution about whom they speak with because they are at risk of significant punishments if found out. If the government or INDER (*Instituto Nacional de Deportes Educación Física y Recreación*, Cuba's national administration for sport) even suspect a ballplayer may defect, they often move to suspend him from competing in the *Serie Nacional* (Cuba's premier baseball league) or for *Selección Cuba* (Cuba's international squad). A prominent example of this can be found in the suspensions of Orlando "El Duque" Hernández and Germán Mesa—the ace pitcher and star shortstop of *Selección Cuba*, respectively—immediately before the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. At the time of their suspensions, Hernández and Mesa were widely beloved in Cuba and, today, are regarded among the nation's all-time baseball greats. Nevertheless,

when government officials suspected that Hernández might defect<sup>4</sup> and perhaps convince his good friend Mesa to join him, they suspended them both first from *Selección Cuba*, then from participation in the *Serie Nacional* (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001). A second frequently cited example is that of Eduardo Paret, Osmani García, and Angel López who were banned from playing baseball in July 1997 for simply talking on the phone with Rolando Arrojo, a ballplayer who defected in 1996 (Jamail 2000, 88). In lieu of outright suspension, and given that many prominent ballplayers have defected while legally abroad playing in international tournaments with *Selección Cuba*<sup>5</sup>, another deterrent utilized on those the government considers to be potential defectors is to relegate them from the elite *Selección Cuba* team to the national squads that do not travel abroad. Although Cuban authorities have never officially admitted to this practice and would assert each athlete's performance is the sole determinant of his placement, both Yoenis Céspedes and Yasiel Puig claimed they were excluded from *Selección Cuba* for this reason and cite it as among their foremost motivations for defecting (Slusser and Bulwa 2013). Lastly, in much harsher instances, there are reports of government officials seeking to employ "preventative punishment"<sup>6</sup> whereby athletes have been detained, interrogated, monitored, and/or had their benefits or

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<sup>4</sup> Orlando Hernández's younger half-brother, Liván, defected in 1995 and had sent money and clothing to Orlando through a man the government suspected was preparing to help Orlando defect. However, at this time and even still today, sending gifts through individuals who can move more freely between the two countries is commonplace. Also, Orlando Hernández has steadfastly maintained he was never interested in defecting from Cuba until after he was banned.

<sup>5</sup> A partial list of those who have defected while legally abroad with *Selección Cuba* includes some of the most famous ballplayers who have ever defected. They include René Arocha, Rolando Arrojo, Rey Ordóñez, Liván Hernández, José Contreras, José Iglesias, Aroldis Chapman, and Leonys Martín.

<sup>6</sup> A term used by Historian Roberto González Echevarría in the documentary, *Stealing Home* (2000).

employment opportunities reduced for allegedly considering defection (Brown 2010; Carter 2011a; Echevarría 1999; Fainaru and Sánchez 2001; Jamail 2000; McKinley 1999; Schmitt 1998; *Stealing Home* 2000).

An athlete also assumes substantial legal risks while attempting defection. If he—or any other Cuban citizen for that matter—is caught attempting to leave the country without first obtaining the proper authorization, he may be tried and sentenced to up to three years in prison (“Families Torn Apart” 2005). Although in recent years, baseball athletes caught trying to defect have more commonly faced the aforementioned suspensions from competition, the risk of imprisonment still remains.

While it is true that travel restrictions have eased for most Cubans as part of revised exit visa guidelines adopted in January 2013, the reforms have not been extended to baseball athletes due to the vague “public interest” clause included within the new rules (“Travel from Cuba” 2012). Specifically, as was indicated in an article published in *Juventud Rebelde*, Decree 306, Article 1 of the new travel regulations declares that in the interest of preserving the skilled workforce necessary for Cuba’s “economic, social, and scientific” development, “high-caliber athletes” whose skills are “vital” to the Cuban “sport movement” are included in the list of professionals who must receive special authorization to leave the island (“Respuestas a inquietudes del pueblo” 2012). It is important to note here that numerous international human rights agreements and international legal precedents guarantee the free movement of individuals to and from their home nation (“Families Torn Apart” 2005, 64). Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations, which Cuba voted for, asserts, “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” As such, the denial of exit visas to

ballplayers over concerns that they will take their athletic talents elsewhere represents much more than unfairness; it constitutes a violation of customary international law and basic human rights.

Simply making it off the island does not bring an end to an athlete's legal problems, since Cuban law is not the only one affecting their ability to reach their destinations. Due to the large influx of refugees fleeing Cuba in the early 1990s during the economic depression known as the "Special Period," the Clinton Administration enacted the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" rule (Solomon 2011, 166). This states that Cubans who are intercepted by US authorities while at sea will be repatriated to Cuba, but those who reach United States soil will remain protected under the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act and allowed to stay in the United States as political refugees (Frankel 2005, 394; Gibbs 2011, 69-70; Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 208). Furthermore, if an athlete comes under the jurisdiction of another country while in transit—there are numerous instances of Bahamian authorities intercepting baseball defectors—they become subject to whatever migration laws and bureaucracies that country maintains and may even get stalled there for an indefinite amount of time (Frankel 2005, 395).

### *Defection Routes*

Cuban ballplayers are also likely to encounter multiple risks to their physical safety, regardless of the route they elect to undertake their defections. Again, because of the illegality of their form of migration, defectors have only illicit options from which to choose and, thus, must assume certain risks. This is not to say, however, that their mobility is necessarily limited. "Mobility," as Carter discusses it, is a "highly valued commodity whose production is based on the local material conditions where the potential migrant currently is

and where he or she intends to arrive” (Carter 2011a, 17; author’s emphasis). In regard to a Cuban baseball player’s ability to travel abroad, their mobility is decreased by their status as baseball athletes. Indeed, the government’s continual efforts to limit a ballplayer’s ability to legally leave Cuba are only due to that athlete’s superior talent, a quality that amplifies their fame, or what Carter calls their “visibility” (Carter 2011a, 17). Simultaneously though, their heightened visibility increases their mobility being that it generates illicit emigration options for them that are not accessible or viable to most Cubans. This is true in the sense that as their visibility increases so does their earning potential if they defect and play professional baseball in MLB. Therefore, all those hoping to profit from those potential future earnings, such as agents, trainers, or smugglers, have greater motivation to facilitate an athlete’s safe and expedient defection.

Arguably the most preferred option a ballplayer trying to defect has is to do so while legally outside of Cuba. There have been numerous instances in which a ballplayer defected by separating himself from the Cuban team and Cuban officials while playing in an international tournament. For the player, this method is especially beneficial if he is in the United States when they defect because it eliminates many of risks that those illegally leaving Cuba encounter, such as crossing ocean waters. By defecting in the United States, they are also able to claim asylum and do not have a need to make further, potentially illicit and dangerous, travel arrangements to reach their ultimate destination. To find an example of this kind of defection, one need look no further than the case of René Arocha, the first Cuban baseball defector. In July 1991, while traveling through Miami International Airport with *Selección Cuba* following a series of exhibition games against Team USA, Arocha walked away from his teammates, passed through an exit door, and got in a friend’s car,

effectively defecting from his home county (Wulf 1993). While his defection was still considered illegal by the Cuban government, since he was the first defector, Arocha did not have to confront the various limits to his mobility put in place by the Cuban government now. His status as an athlete did benefit him though, as it increased his mobility by providing him the opportunity to legally travel to the United States where he could then accomplish his defection.

In instances when an ballplayer is not in the nation they ultimately hope to reach and must make potentially unlawful arrangements to get there, history has proven time and again there is almost no effect on their ability or willingness to defect. Liván Hernández's defection experience provides an example of this. While training with *Selección Cuba* in Monterrey, Mexico in 1995, Hernández fled from the team dormitory in the middle of the night to meet and leave Mexico with sports agent Joe Cubas<sup>7</sup> (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 92). By this time, the Cuban government had begun limiting the mobility of its athletes primarily by monitoring potential defectors. But Hernández's mobility was increased by his visibility as a promising baseball player. That visibility enabled him to legally travel abroad as part of the *Selección Cuba* squad and attract the assistance of someone who had made arrangements to facilitate his defection. A second instructive case is that of Aroldis Chapman who defected in 2009, while in the Netherlands with *Selección Cuba* (Carter 2011a, 178). Chapman's case is especially significant because it demonstrates the substantial impact of visibility and mobility in baseball defections. Following the wave of defections that occurred in the late 1990s after Liván Hernández's defection and the new era of Cuban government limitations on ballplayers' mobility, it became increasingly difficult

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<sup>7</sup> Joe Cubas is a Cuban-American sport agent who would became (in)famous for his assistance of numerous prominent baseball defectors.



for ballplayers to defect. Moreover, Chapman was under increased scrutiny at the time of his defection because he had been caught once before attempting to defect (Eden 2014). Nevertheless, the extraordinary demand for his mobility, generated by the visibility he garnered as a baseball talent, still overcame the restraints placed by Cuban officials.

When it became apparent that some Cuban ballplayers could earn millions of dollars if they were able to defect from Cuba, both athletes and agents were not willing to wait until the ballplayer was able to travel abroad before defecting, electing instead to coordinate defections from the island. In fact, approximately 16% of the 255 defections tracked by *Cubanball.com* were accomplished while the athlete was legally abroad (see Appendix 1), meaning most defectors left from Cuba. With this staggering demand, sport agents like Joe Cubas and Gus Domínguez emerged in the early 1990s to recruit and shepherd defectors to MLB using a network of contacts. Between the mid-1990s to early 2000s, this defection route became the leading method by which ballplayers left Cuba.

By defecting from the island, athletes assume many more risks than those who defect while abroad. Their experience becomes more comparable to that of the thousands of non-athlete Cubans who have fled from the island since the revolution (Jamail 2000, 91). At a basic level, this method of defection entails many of the elements of the stereotypical portrayal of Cuban emigration. It usually requires the defector to embark by sea in unreliable, inadequate, and ultimately unsafe boats (Echevarría, 389 1999; Frankel 2005, 408-210; Solomon 2011, 162). Many accounts note that the parties embarked with limited and, at times, insufficient supplies and were often on vessels captained by inexperienced individuals (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 205; Jamail 2000, 91; Passan 2013; Price 1998). Consequently, in addition to the legal risks of defection, athletes undoubtedly place their

lives in danger by defecting in this way. To be sure, since baseball defectors represent a revenue source for those involved in arranging defections, there are incentives to add precautions—i.e., precise coordination and reliable transport—to ensure a defector reaches his destination. However, given the demand (and desperation) to prioritize success over safety involved in these baseball defections, it is not uncommon for compromises of the latter to be made for the benefit of the former.

The defection of Orlando “El Duque” Hernández in December 1997 is perhaps the most famous and widely examined defection ever, having been the subject of many newspaper and magazine articles as well as the book, *The Duke of Havana* (2001). This case, then, is the clearest example of a defection from Cuba organized by outside interested parties. It was Hernández’s great-uncle, Ocilio Cruz, who ultimately masterminded the pitcher’s defection (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 182). Cruz reportedly collaborated with a man who went by the nickname “El Argentino”<sup>8</sup> who, in turn, made arrangements with a fisherman named Juan Carlos Romero who sailed the boat used to transport Hernández and those accompanying him away from the island. Upon leaving Cuba, the boat travelled to Anguilla Cay<sup>9</sup>, about 70 miles from Miami, where it left Hernández’s group (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 204). From there, the plan was for the group to be picked up by a speedboat Cruz had arranged and be taken to the United States. Once there, they could claim asylum—for those with the means, a speedboat allows them to evade Coast Guard

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<sup>8</sup> Fainaru and Sánchez note that in their one meeting with El Argentino, he introduced himself as Jorge Ramís, though it appears they reserve doubt about the validity of this name. It is also worth noting that Cruz’s agreement with El Argentino established that, in exchange for serving as liaison between Miami and Cuba, El Argentino would serve as Hernández’s agent upon defection (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 187-188).

<sup>9</sup> Anguilla Cay is the most southeastern island in the Cay Sal Bank of the Bahamas (see Appendix 3).

authorities and, thus, the potential to be intercepted and repatriated to Cuba. However, the speedboat never made it to Anguilla Cay and the group was stranded on the island for four days before a United States Coast Guard helicopter spotted the group and sent a boat to retrieve them. Since the island chain they had made it to is within Bahamian jurisdiction, the group was transported to the Bahamas where, according to a general agreement between the Bahamas and Cuba, they were to be processed for repatriation. This never occurred. Once news of Hernández's defection reached the United States, Joe Cubas, the Cuban American National Foundation, and various members of Congress, joined the effort to prevent Hernández's repatriation and facilitate his ultimate entry into the United States through several legal loopholes and exceptions (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 212-221; Jamail 2000, 91-92; Schmitt 1998).

What we can glean from Hernández's experience is yet another example of the clashing limits and increase to mobility found in baseball defection. As a famous ballplayer in Cuba whom the government considered to be a defection risk, Hernández did not have the option to either legally exit Cuba or defect while legally abroad. Instead, he was forced to undertake his defection through illicit means and risk substantial physical and legal repercussions. His visibility produced greater demand for his defection, leading interested parties to become involved in the effort, thereby increasing Hernández's mobility. These combined factors ultimately resulted in the botched defection attempt that put Hernández and his party in physical danger (marooning at Anguilla Cay), at legal risk (potential for repatriation). But it also allowed him to escape Cuba (coordination of transport) and ultimately gain entry into the United States (special treatment due to the involvement of influential individuals). Other examples of players who defected with the assistance of

agents are Jorge Luis Toca, Angel López, Jorge Díaz, and Maykel Jova (Jamail 2000, 94-97), as well as Osbek Castillo, Francisely Bueno (“Convicted sports agent” 2007), and Yoenis Céspedes more recently (Slusser and Bulwa 2013).

Despite the level of relative professionalization of agents aiding defections throughout the 1990s, as well as the fact MLB, for all intents and purposes, sanctioned and encouraged this defection route through its policies that allowed for the signing of defectors to lucrative contracts (Carter 2011a, 165; Cwiertney 2000, 417-419; Frankel 2005, 397; Greller 1999, 1664-1679; Solomon 2011, 160), it is not a stretch to say that this route is a form of human smuggling. Indeed, there are examples in Cuba and the United States of an agent being arrested and convicted for their roles in coordinating or aiding baseball defections. In Cuba, Juan Ignacio Hernández Nodar was sentenced to fifteen years in prison in October 1996<sup>10</sup> for “five counts of illegal departure,” one count for each of the five Cuban ballplayers he had reportedly encouraged to defect (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 148-151). In the United States, Gus Domínguez was convicted in April 2007 for conspiring to smuggle five ballplayers out of Cuba in 2004 (“Convicted sports agent” 2007). He was eventually sentenced to five years in prison, but was released after serving three years and nine months of his sentence (“Sports agent's conviction reversed” 2011). However, following the crackdown on these agents, and especially after the precedent set by the Cuban government with Hernández Nodar, fewer agents were willing to risk directly aiding defections (Carter 2011a, 178). Instead, as is seen most commonly today, agents are content with waiting for a defection to occur, then pursuing the ballplayer as a client after he has reached foreign soil. This places the onus of arranging defections much more on the athlete. Be that as it may,

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<sup>10</sup> Hernández Nodar ultimately remained in prison for 13 years, two months and 27 days and was released and deported from Cuba in November 2009 (Rhoads 2010).

the demand for these athletes and potential for profit have not decreased at all.

Consequently, a glut of facilitators—particularly criminally-connected human smugglers, many of whom had already been smuggling non-athlete Cubans away from the island for years (Brown D. 2002, 279)—have eagerly taken the place of agents in ensuring the mobility of baseball defectors in order to reap the available profits.

As is the case with most other Cuban émigrés who leave the island without permission, baseball defectors can attempt migration from Cuba on their own through whatever means they can contrive. However, in consideration of the significant danger present in migrating by sea, as well as the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” rule that severely lessens the likelihood that migrants will successfully reach their destination, most migrants, including baseball defectors, solicit the services of professional human smugglers (Brown, D. 2002, 279; Solomon 2011, 166). To do so, many ballplayers use Cuba’s widespread black market (Eden 2014) or interested parties living abroad (most often, family and friends) hire human smuggling networks after learning of the athlete’s interest in defecting (Eden 2014; Passan, Robinson, and Getlin 2013). Also, smuggling networks have begun recruiting ballplayers to defect, then auctioning them off to the highest bidder once abroad (Eden 2014). By taking this route, baseball defectors are provided with much more reliable, speedy, and maneuverable vessels, boat captains with an expertise in navigating these waters, and an underground network capable of providing the “necessary logistical coordination of the covert transit” (Brown, D. 2002, 279). Despite these advantages, this method of defection is by no means without its set of risks. Defectors still assume all legal risks mentioned prior. While defectors might encounter fewer risks to their physical safety given the more reliable vessels and more experienced captains, since the primary objective

of these operations is to maximize profit, the boats professional smugglers use to transport defectors are often dangerously overcrowded (Brown, D. 2002, 280). Because the professional smuggling operations are generally connected to organized crime networks, the employment of coercion and violence are much more prevalent than what is seen in any other defection route (Katz 2014; Passan, Robinson, and Getlin 2013).

Due to the potential for retaliation defectors face if they discuss their experience with these criminal human smuggling networks, there have been few baseball defectors who have discussed the particulars of their migrations. This makes the recently divulged experience of Yasiel Puig to *Los Angeles Magazine* (Katz 2014) and *ESPN The Magazine* (Eden 2014) that much more valuable. According to the articles, Puig and his three companions, including his friend Yuniur Despaigne who coordinated this and four of their prior defection attempts, enlisted a human smuggling operation with ties to Los Zetas, a crime syndicate that is among the most powerful and violent in Mexico, to accomplish their escape. Although it appears the 36-hour speedboat trip from Cuba to a Mexican island near Cancún was mostly uneventful<sup>11</sup>, Puig's experience following his arrival in Mexico exemplifies some of the unique risks that defecting via illicit human smuggling networks may entail.

Those hired to extricate Puig and his companions from Cuba were not hired by anyone part of the group migrating, but by Raúl Pacheco, a Miami resident who was a childhood acquaintance of Despaigne. As is common among human smuggling operations,

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<sup>11</sup> Eden only makes mention of the boat running out of fuel and how the group spent a night in the open ocean awaiting fuel from a colleague.

the smugglers were promised a prearranged sum of money<sup>12</sup> by Pacheco, which would be paid upon the group's arrival in Mexico. However, after they arrived in Mexico, Puig and Despaigne discovered that Pacheco had failed to come up with the money and that they would be held captive at the smugglers' complex until someone could pay the fee.

According to *Los Angeles Magazine*, Despaigne says about this time:

I don't know if you could call it a kidnapping, because we had gone there voluntarily, but we also weren't free to leave . . . If they didn't receive the money, they were saying that at any moment they might give [Puig] a *machetazo* [machete blow]; chop off an arm, a finger, whatever, and he would never play baseball again, not for anyone. (Katz 2014)

It was at this point that a man Eden identifies only as "El Rubio" (The blonde) stepped in agreeing to pay the smugglers who had increased the price to \$400,000. But before he paid the money, El Rubio executed an escape plan in which Puig and his companions were snuck out of the smugglers' compound in the middle of the night, taken to Cancún by boat, then flown to Mexico City where Puig was showcased and eventually signed to a \$42 million contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers. Unfortunately for Puig and his companions, due to these entanglements with criminal networks, their problems did not end there. Upon their arrival in the United States, they received continuous threats from representatives of the smugglers' and Los Zetas cartel they had crossed (Eden 2014). Although most of the threats they received were by phone, Eden notes that Puig was reportedly confronted one night by cartel members while training with the Dodgers in Arizona. Despaigne says that he was threatened with a gun to his head while in Hialeah, FL. It is unclear how it came to pass and whether the timing was simply coincidental, but soon after Puig spoke about their concerns over these threats with either El Rubio (Eden 2014) or

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<sup>12</sup> Eden notes that the standard price this particular group charges to smuggle Cubans to Mexico is \$10,000/person; however, given Puig's notoriety, Pacheco agreed to pay \$250,000.

with a man named Gilberto Suárez (Katz 2014), the body of one of the smuggling group's leaders was found in Cancún following an apparent execution. Also, Eden notes that El Rubio had gone missing and may have been kidnapped and held for ransom by members of the smuggling group.

Evaluating this experience, we see both increased mobility and increased risk. Due to Puig's fame as a professional athlete, he had a network of facilitators—Despaigne, Pacheco, El Rubio, the cartel-connected smugglers, and eventually a professional sports agent—working to ensure his successful defection. Likewise, his notoriety gave him defection routes to which most Cubans do not have access. He was extricated from Cuba via speedboat and with high-ranking members of the smuggling network aboard to ensure the success of the operation (Eden 2014), he was freed from the custody of the smuggling network through a covert raid when the money they were guaranteed was not paid, and he was escorted through an expedited migration process by both his agent and the Los Angeles Dodgers once he had reached Mexico City. On the other hand, Puig also took on risks by utilizing this defection method. First, despite the added care and attention the smuggling group gave to Puig's extraction, the voyage between Cuba and Mexico still included a mishap that, given different circumstances, could have produced much greater danger to those aboard the vessel. Second, since Puig enlisted the services of cartel-connected smugglers, intimidation through the threat of violence (and the actual occurrence of it) was ubiquitous not only after he arrived in Mexico, but even after he had reached the United States.

A second documented example of a player who defected using this route is Leonys Martín. In 2010, Martín hired smugglers to transport himself and four others out of Cuba.



However, once the group reached Mexico, the smugglers reportedly held him and the rest of his group captive at gunpoint for several months until they coerced approximately \$1.35 million from him, which they claimed Martín owed for their services (Passan, Robinson, and Getlin 2013). Again, what we see in this experience is both the increased mobility of the ballplayer who was able to arrange for a private extraction of him and his group out of Cuba, but also the manifestation of the added risks that he assumes when utilizing this illicit route.

The route Cuban baseball defectors take to reach their destination consists of more than just the method by which they escape the island nation, as defection no longer entails simply travelling from Cuba to the United States. Rather, since the mid-1990s, defectors have sought third-party nations as their initial destinations. This indirect route taken by practically every baseball defector since Liván Hernández<sup>13</sup> stems from the rules that regulate the maximum dollar amount MLB teams can pay a ballplayer subject to the domestic draft versus a foreign free agent. Consequently, while a defector's "point of arrival," or the physical location they wish to reach, is ultimately the United States, they first seek at least one other "point" within Latin America or the Caribbean because their "place of destination"—that is to say the goal to which migrants (and other interested parties) aspire—is Major League Baseball and a lucrative contract (Carter 2011a, 19-20). This route has the defector avoid initially travelling to the United States because, upon their arrival, they would be deemed a refugee and granted residency. While this certainly would be a desirable outcome for any other migrant from Cuba, for professional baseball players, this would

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<sup>13</sup> Though it is unclear (Jamail 2000, 80), many sources credit Joe Cubas for discovering this loophole in MLB policy and this defection route has been called the "El Duque Model" (Greller 1999, 1673), "Joe Cubas' route" (Solomon 2011, 160), "Joe Cubas' 'New Route'" (Frankel 2005, 398; Chass 1995), "Joe Cubas Plan" (Fainaru and Sanchez 2001, 80), and even Cubas' "coup within the global baseball industry" (Carter 2011a, 165).

mean they are subject to the domestic draft and that their initial signing bonuses would be capped according to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiated between MLB and the Player's Association (MLBPA) (Frankel 2005, 395-396). On the other hand, if a defector travels from Cuba to any other country and establishes residency there, MLB classifies him as an international free agent and his initial signing bonus is unregulated<sup>14</sup>. In this way, baseball defectors employ a form of what Aihwa Ong termed "flexible citizenship" (1999)—referring to the various strategies migrants can use to exploit or circumvent the laws/regulations of one locale/jurisdiction so as to benefit them in another—in order to maximize their initial earnings.

Several problems can arise by taking this route, since athletes become subject to the complicated residency and migration laws and processes of whatever nation they select as their initial point of arrival. Due to these intertwining and, at times, conflicting laws and regulations, many ballplayers have found themselves indefinitely stuck in one nation awaiting residency papers or clearance to enter the United States, and some have even been held in custody for various immigration violations. For example, Orlando "El Duque" Hernández was held in the Bahamas until he received clearance to leave, at which point he secretly traveled to Costa Rica where he awaited approval of his residency there before he signed with an MLB team and was legally able to enter the United States (Fainaru and

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<sup>14</sup> This rule was changed slightly with the implementation of the 2012 CBA. It stipulates that those who have played less than 7 years in Cuba's *Serie Nacional* are subject to an International Signing Bonus Pool for which teams are allocated a certain amount each year and are penalized upon exceeding it. However, for those who played in the *Serie Nacional* for more than 7 years, there is still no limit to the dollar amount they can receive since their bonuses are not subject to this pool. The implementation of this new rule has had no effect on the number of ballplayers attempting defection.

Sánchez 2001, 212-221). A few other examples—though many more could be included in this list—are Rolando Arrojo, Andy Morales, and Yuniesky Betancourt (Carter 2011a, 166).

### *Length of Stay*

The length of time an athlete will remain away from Cuba after their departure was a wholly irrelevant matter in baseball defections until recently. Due to the illegality of their emigration from Cuba, ballplayers were effectively prohibited from returning to the island and could be subject to criminal charges if they did manage to return (Franks 2013). As a result, those who previously elected to defect from Cuba to play in MLB were doing so knowing that they would never return to the island. However, along with a larger easing of travel restrictions in January 2013, the Cuban government enacted a modification to the laws regarding a defector's return. Now, an athlete who has been living outside of the island as a defector for more than eight years may return without facing any legal repercussions (Franks 2013). Some baseball defectors, the most prominent of which have been José Contreras (Franks 2013) and Rey Ordóñez ("Cuba Travel" 2013), have taken advantage of this eased policy to return to the island for the first time in several years. But it remains to be seen whether those considering defection since this modification now negotiate over a specific amount of time they will live abroad before they return to Cuba. Nevertheless, ballplayers who defect from Cuba must wait a minimum of 8 years before having the opportunity to return to their homeland and reunite with those they left behind.

### *Migration Companions*

Up to this point, the focus of this examination has almost exclusively remained on the athletes who defect. However, it is not uncommon for baseball defectors to be

accompanied by immediate family members, girlfriends, and friends on their emigrations. The reason for is likely related to the forced separation that baseball defection entails. At the same time, the illegality and associated legal and physical risk inherent in a baseball defection prompts great concern about who, if anyone, will accompany the athlete leaving Cuba. For those who do travel with a baseball defector, they benefit from the increased mobility the athlete garners since they have access to the same privileged migration routes, including any guidance and/or special treatment the athlete receives<sup>15</sup>. If the ballplayer is able to successfully sign a contract with a Major League team, those who accompany him initially enter the United States in much better economic condition than almost all other non-athlete Cuban migrants. On the other hand, migration companions also assume all the same negative aspects of migration a ballplayer does when defecting. This includes increased restriction to their mobility through intensified monitoring, the potential for severe legal penalties, forced separation from those they leave behind, as well as all potential physical dangers of a defection. As was the case with the defection of Orlando “El Duque” Hernández, the family and friends that accompanied him experienced the same benefits of increased mobility throughout the defection process, as well as the same risks to their safety. Similarly, those who accompanied Yasiel Puig and Leonys Martín on their defections benefited from the private operations organized to ensure their successful extraction from Cuba, but also had to endure the same physical dangers (i.e. being held against their will and

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<sup>15</sup> There have been few instances when travel companions not immediately related to the athlete, such as coaches or trainers, have not been afforded the same special treatment as the athlete they accompanied. For example, Orlando Chinaa, a pitching coach, was repatriated to Cuba despite the fact that a ballplayer he accompanied, Jorge Luis Toca, was granted a visa upon arriving in the Bahamas (Jamail 2000, 94-96).

threatened with bodily harm) that resulted from the use of criminally-connected smuggling networks.

### *Family Left Behind*

Given the various considerations and substantial risks that comprise any defection from Cuba, it is not feasible for large groups of people to join the ballplayer in his defection. For those athletes who have defected with companions, the groups are always small and comprised only of those willing and able to assume not only the risks, but also the forced separation from their native country that this illegal migration entails. As a result of these constraints, there are typically numerous immediate family members (i.e. parents, siblings, spouses, children, aunts, uncles, and in-laws) who continue to live in Cuba after the ballplayer's defection. For those who remain in Cuba, there is the potential for both positive and negative impacts stemming from their close connection to a baseball defector.

A common motivating factor for migrants of every stripe is economic opportunity and the possibility of improving not just their own lives, but those of the family they left behind (Duany 2011, 147; Durand and Massey 2004, 6; Eckstein 2013, 96-100; Madianou and Miller 2012, 31-32). The same certainly applies for transnational sport migrants, as well (Carter 2011a, 135). Although the standard of living for Cubans today is not desperate<sup>16</sup> and remittances do not represent a replacement of the state-apportioned rations or wages, the economic conditions are such that many Cubans have used remittances to improve their standard of living (Duany 2011, 147-148). As such, when baseball defectors earn money as professional athletes abroad, they often immediately seek to send a portion of their earnings,

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<sup>16</sup> According to the latest United Nations Human Development Report, Cuba was rated as having "Very High Human Development" levels and shows low undernourishment rates (United Nations Development Programme 2014).

either in cash or material goods, to their families remaining in Cuba. When defectors send material goods, they typically include items that are difficult to acquire in Cuba regardless of financial means, such as electronics. When they send cash, it allows family members to purchase additional goods through government-run stores (i.e. food, clothing, shoes, and household supplies), as well as services (i.e. repair work) that would be difficult to acquire solely through state allowances (Eckstein 2013, 99). Hence, families left behind after a ballplayer defects experience a markedly improved standard of living.

On the other hand, family members left behind following a defection also experience negative results. For most families left behind in transnational sport migration, the risks they typically encounter stem from the change in socio-economic status they undergo as they become the benefactors of an influx of foreign capital from their athlete relatives abroad (Carter 2011a, 143). As a result, the most common concern is the potential for them to become the targets of theft, robbery, or kidnapping. While this may remain a consideration in Cuban baseball defection<sup>17</sup>, there are numerous other concerns since any ballplayer who defects to the United States—and into a baseball system Fidel Castro has derisively called “*pelota esclava*” (slave baseball) (Jamail 2000, 29)—can be regarded as a traitor to the Revolution and to Cuba (Frankel 2005, 401-402).

Families left behind after a baseball defection encounter a forced separation from the athlete. Most Cubans who migrate to the United States must wait approximately a year before they can return to Cuba to visit family, but given the added stigma baseball defection carries, defectors are unable to return to the island for a minimum of eight years. As a

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<sup>17</sup> Thus far, I have not found an account of family members of a baseball defector being targeted in this way.

result, the contact families in Cuba can have with an athlete abroad is limited to written correspondence, telephone calls, and email<sup>18</sup> and many have discussed the anguish this causes for them and their families (Frey 1994; McKinley 1999; “NY Yankees Pitcher” 2004; Slusser and Bulwa 2013).

The stigma attached to baseball defectors and those associated with them by the government has caused some families left behind to experience social isolation. In some cases, neighbors avoided association with families of defectors either due to disdain for the defector’s migration or fear of facing reprisal from the Cuban government (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 163). Fortunately, it appears less likely families experience this isolation nowadays since the prevalence of defections occurring throughout the 1990s resulted in more Cubans sympathizing with the defectors’ choice to migrate (Carter 2008b, 199).

While some family members of baseball defectors left behind choose to remain in Cuba, many have sought and been denied permission to travel outside of the island. In this way, families left behind often experience strict limitations to their mobility akin to the restrictions placed on ballplayers the government suspects of defection. In Orlando “El Duque” Hernández’s case, Cuban authorities refused to allow his family to join him in the United States after his defection and Hernández believed he would never be reunited with them. It was not until various people, including Archbishop of New York John Cardinal O’Connor, opened a dialogue with Cuban officials—initially with the Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, then with Fidel Castro himself—that Hernández’s mother, his two daughters, and their mother were granted permission to join him in the United States

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<sup>18</sup> Freedom House’s annual report on internet freedom notes that Cuba’s connection speeds are among the slowest in the world and make it nearly impossible for the use of multimedia applications, such as video chatting (“Cuba” 2013, 217).

(Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 284-293). Other prominent examples are the family (wife and two children) of José Contreras, who were repeatedly denied exit visas despite having been granted entrance visas by the Nicaraguan government (“NY Yankees Pitcher” 2004), and that of Yoenis Céspedes (Lee 2013; Slusser and Bulwa 2013). The latter two experiences are noteworthy because, unlike the extraordinary intervention to allow Hernández’s family to safely and legally leave Cuba, they represent a much more common experience. The Cuban government refused to grant family members exit visas—possibly as a way to punish the defector—and left them without any means to legally travel abroad. As a result, in both Contreras’ and Céspedes’ cases, their families were forced to undertake illicit, life-threatening emigrations in order to reach the United States (Kepner 2004; Slusser and Bulwa 2013). Their experiences ultimately demonstrate more violations of Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—guaranteeing an individual’s right to travel to and from their own country—perpetrated by the Cuban government.

There have been troubling claims that those remaining in Cuba have had their communications and movements subject to intense government supervision following an athlete’s defection (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 188-189; Frey 1994; Jamail 2000, 88; McKinley 1999; *Stealing Home* 2000). Several defectors have reported that family members left behind have been detained, interrogated, and/or arrested by government officials following their defection (Echevarría 1999, 395; Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 136-137; “NY Yankees Pitcher” 2004; Saracevic 2013; Slusser and Bulwa 2013). Even though both of these concerns raise serious questions about unjust treatment and potential human rights abuses perpetrated against family members left behind in Cuba, neither has been thoroughly investigated or discussed in prior studies.



Another potential concern lacking prior consideration is whether families left behind have experienced reductions in government-provided benefits or demotions in state-appointed employment, similar to those experienced by repatriated defectors (Fainaru and Sánchez 2001, 137-138; Jamail 2000, 96; McKinley 1999; *Stealing Home* 2000).

Overall, the clearest conclusion that can be drawn about the experience of families left behind in Cuban baseball defections is that despite the fact that these defections have been occurring for two decades now, few have ever asked about a defector's family remaining in Cuba. For those who have written on the subject, few have provided detailed accounts about these experiences, and even fewer have obtained testimony from family still living there. Unfortunately, given the time that has passed, it is possible that we may never know much about the experiences of the families of the first defectors—when it appeared the Cuban government treated defectors and their families more harshly. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we begin to examine these experiences not only to gain a clearer understanding of them, but to also enable ourselves to scrutinize and prevent any injustices occurring within them.

## Chapter Two

### **Game Notes: A Case Study and Reflection on Cuban Baseball Defection**

#### *A. Qualitative Research Considerations*

John Lofland and David Snow (2006) have asserted, “the structured [research method] seeks to determine the frequency of preconceived kinds of things, while the intensive qualitative interview seeks to find out what kinds of things exist in the first place” (17). Additionally, Bruce L. Berg and Howard Lune (2012) have suggested that qualitative methods in social science research are useful in allowing a researcher to examine the emotions, motivations, symbolism, meaning, and understanding of life experiences (15). Considering these points and given the overall lack of research into the individual and familial experiences found in Cuban baseball defection, I determined I could not rely solely on structured research methods, such as a survey of prior literature, to acquire the understanding I sought. Furthermore, I concluded that structured methods would not allow me to highlight the gaps in knowledge or misguided approaches that have persisted within this subject. Consequently, I chose to conduct original qualitative fieldwork in the form of in-person semi-structured interviews for this project.

The individuals I sought to interview consisted of Cuban baseball defectors within the United States who were actively still playing professional baseball. This group was “purposively selected” (Berg and Lune 2012, 52) because they were the most easily accessible individuals who could contribute to this project. Also, baseball defectors could serve the dual-purpose of acting as both research subjects, due to their personal experiences with baseball defection, and “key informants” (Berg and Lune 2012, 42) due to their ability to relate the experiences of their family members. Given that the eligible research subjects

for this project consisted of professional athletes, I was aware that the main obstacle I would have to overcome was the procurement of entrée and interviews. As such, it was vital that I select a research site in which I could feasibly acquire interviews.

I chose the Arizona Fall League (AFL)—a developmental league organized by MLB during the months of October and November in six cities around the Tempe/Phoenix area—as my research site. The AFL season consists of six teams made up of six of the best prospects<sup>19</sup> from each MLB club who are chosen to participate so they may have more time to develop before the end of the baseball-playing season. This was an ideal site for my research for several reasons. First, through background research on all the active Cuban baseball defectors playing for MLB organizations, I determined five were selected by their organizations to participate in the AFL this particular year, that two pairs were on the same team, and that the six teams that comprise the AFL play in stadiums that are short driving distances from one another. This meant that I would have a much greater chance of soliciting interviews not just from each of the five ballplayers participating in the league, but that I would have a greater chance of making contact with more than one research subject at a time. This was especially important since I had no more than seven days to conduct research in Arizona and needed to be as efficient as possible with gaining entrée. Second, since the athletes selected to play in the AFL are still in the developmental stages of their professional careers and have not yet gained widespread fame, they regularly welcome interaction with AFL spectators. Third, because attendance at AFL games averages approximately 300 during day games and 600 during night games—a relatively small number for professional baseball—and that fans have easy access to the ballplayers before

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<sup>19</sup> Ballplayers who typically have not yet made it to the Major League team, but are considered among the top baseball talents in their organization.

and after each game meant that the likelihood I would have face-to-face contact with the five potential subjects was very high.

When AFL officials informed me that I was not eligible to receive interview credentials and my attempts to utilize various gatekeepers<sup>20</sup> to gain entrée were unsuccessful, I began cold contacting the five potential research subjects—that is to say, I approached them without prior introduction or contact. To make initial contact, I approached the ballplayers before and after games. During this contact (and throughout all future interactions), I spoke only in Spanish and found that it made gaining entrée somewhat easier because there was a perceived sense of enjoyment they felt from being able to speak Spanish with a spectator—something they likely have not had many opportunities to do since arriving in the United States<sup>21</sup>.

Ultimately, I was able to arrange and complete one interview during my time at the AFL. My interview subject was Henry Urrutia, an outfielder and designated hitter in the Baltimore Orioles organization, who was playing for the Surprise Saguaros during the AFL season. For the sake of convenience and Urrutia's comfort, we conducted the interview in the team weight room at Surprise Stadium immediately following a game on November 9, 2013. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner,<sup>22</sup> it was audio recorded digitally, and I took handwritten notes to supplement the recording. In the months after our

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<sup>20</sup> Individuals who have the ability to grant a researcher access to certain research sites (Berg and Lune 2012, 214-215).

<sup>21</sup> For more on the strategy of utilizing a group's "*argot*"—the language, jargon, or slang of a particular group, see Berg and Lune, 213.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 2 for the interview guide.

interview, I sought follow-up contact with Urrutia to clarify and expand on some of his responses. Unfortunately, I could not reestablish contact with him.

Certainly, no one experience exemplifies all that can occur in baseball defections and, as it will be discussed, Urrutia's defection is at times typical—that is to say it echoes the experience many other baseball defectors have related prior—and at other times unique. As such, I do not proffer his experience here as an archetype of all baseball defection experiences. Instead, I present it as a case study of a recent baseball defection (he defected in September 2011) that scrutinizes the experience so as to acquire a nuanced understanding of its complexities as they pertain to the athlete and his family, as well as attempts to analyze what this experience may indicate about the current state of baseball defection in Cuba. Furthermore, it demonstrates the kinds of questions that have not been sufficiently posed thus far and have resulted in our oversimplified and incomplete understanding of Cuban baseball defection experiences.

### ***B. Urrutia Family Defection Experience***

Henry Alexander Urrutia Rodríguez was born on February 13, 1987 in Las Tunas, Cuba. He describes his life growing up as like any “normal Cuban.” He attended and completed primary and secondary school and spent his childhood playing baseball. He began playing when he was about 6 years old and says he only ever dreamed of playing at the highest levels. However, unlike most Cubans, he grew up in a family of Cuban baseball royalty. His father, Ermidelio Urrutia (born 1963), played in Cuba's premier baseball league, *Serie Nacional*, for 16 seasons and was a key member of the Cuban national team for several international competitions, including the 1992 Summer Olympics where he earned a gold medal. By the time he retired, Ermidelio's career offensive statistics were

among the top-50 all-time in most categories and he was tied for 20<sup>th</sup> most career home runs. After his playing career ended, Ermidelio eventually became the manager of Las Tunas in *Serie Nacional*, a position he still maintains today. As if his father's legacy was not enough to live up to, Henry's cousin, Osmani Urrutia (born 1976), compiled an even more impressive career in Cuba during his 16-year playing career and is considered to be among the greatest Cuban hitters ever, having won five straight batting titles, setting the single-season batting average record (.469 in 2003-2004), and retiring with the second highest career batting average in *Serie Nacional* history. Given this prestigious family lineage and his success at a young age—making it on a *Serie Nacional* roster by 18 years old and being among the top hitters in the league each season after his first—it shocked the Cuban baseball community when Urrutia defected in September 2011.

As Urrutia makes clear, his motivation for defecting from Cuba was purely baseball-related and he asserts that financial considerations never crossed his mind. As he notes, his life in Cuba was one of “privilege in certain ways” both because of his family's legacy and because Urrutia was a top-level ballplayer himself. He and his family were never in want; they never lacked food, they lived in a good house, and even had a car. He mentions that he knows many Cuban ballplayers have chosen to defect because they earn only \$12 per month and they realize the significant financial assistance they can provide for their families if they defect. However, Urrutia said that was never something he never considered because his family was always happy. In fact, up to 2010, Urrutia's career goal was to achieve the level of success in Cuba that his father and cousin did, hoping especially to contribute to the Cuban national team as they did. But his attitude changed when he was not selected to participate in training with the national squad in 2009 and again in 2010 despite maintaining

one of the better batting averages in the country, and he was compelled to begin preparing for defection by September 2010.

Urrutia's motivation for defecting because of feelings he was being undervalued by the Cuban baseball system is a sentiment that has been echoed by other recent baseball defectors, including Yoenis Céspedes (Slusser and Bulwa, 2013), Yasiel Puig (Katz 2014), and a ballplayer given the pseudonym "Carlos Entrada" (Carter 2011a, 181). To better understand this motivation we must remember that Cuban ballplayers of this caliber are fully aware of the shortcomings of the Cuban baseball system—they especially see the stark contrasts in lifestyles between them and others when they participate in international competition. Moreover, they know that MLB offers the best baseball competition in the world and that many prior defectors have achieved great success, both financially and as ballplayers. If a ballplayer's sole motivation for remaining in Cuba is to compete at the highest levels at all times, but they feel that opportunity is unjustly denied to them, then professionally (and personally) speaking, the arguments for defection begin to outweigh those for them to remain in Cuba.

It remains unclear how government officials discovered his plan<sup>23</sup>, but soon after Urrutia began planning to defect from Cuba, he was suspended from all baseball activities for one year. His suspension from baseball mirrors other experiences discussed prior, such as that of Orlando "El Duque" Hernández, Germán Mesa, Eduardo Paret, Osmani García, and Angel López, and provides us with yet another example of the government exercising

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<sup>23</sup> In our interview, Urrutia stated he began planning his defection in September 2010 after he participated in and returned from the World University Baseball Championship in Japan the month prior. In another interview, the translator/narrator said that Urrutia attempted to defect while in Japan for the World University tournament (Hoffmeister 2013).

“preventative punishment” to try to dissuade a ballplayer from defecting. However, like these other instances, Urrutia’s resolve to successfully defect from Cuba was only strengthened by his suspension.

When I questioned him about what concerns he had when deciding whether to defect, Urrutia stated his only concern was in regards to the illegality of his migration, noting, “the only thing that worried me was what could happen . . . to me in my country.” For these same reasons, he said he avoided telling anyone, except for his mother<sup>24</sup> about his plans to defect. “I really talked with absolutely nobody about this decision . . . because it is a decision that one cannot talk openly about in my country.” In both these statements, we see the central role that illegality plays in baseball defection. Urrutia’s concerns neither focused on the separation from his family or country, nor on the potentially dangerous journey he would have to undertake to accomplish his defection. His only concern was about the illegality of his action and his desire to avoid punishment.

Further encouraging Urrutia in his efforts to defect was his certitude that multiple agents and teams were interested in signing him if he ever left Cuba. Since 2009, he had received multiple propositions had been made to him to defect by *buscones*<sup>25</sup> on the island. From what Urrutia recalls, his successful defection from Cuba began on September 4, 2011. In order to accomplish it, he notes he did not have to consult with anybody about how to defect. “I never asked or talked to anyone, I did not have to ask anything . . . I never had to

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<sup>24</sup> “[T]he only person that I talked to was my mother because she is very close to me, you know, to avoid health problems caused by depression over this. I decided to tell her but I did not tell my father or my brother. I did not talk to absolutely anyone.”

<sup>25</sup> Illegal scouts prevalent throughout Cuba who, typically under the employ of criminal smuggling networks, secretly recruit ballplayers to defect in order to profit off them through smuggling fees and/or by auctioning them off to baseball agents once abroad.



stop and ask at any moment, ‘What will happen?’ ‘What will it be like?’ ‘What do I have to do?’” It is certainly possible that Urrutia may have received assistance in defecting from Cuba, yet he does not want to provide details about who helped him out of concern of jeopardizing their wellbeing, their operations, or even due to the potential he could face reprisal from them if he divulges too much. However, taking him at his word, the ease with which Urrutia was able to arrange a defection from the island points to the widespread and accessible network human smugglers have established in Cuba that have enabled an increasing number of ballplayers to leave each year.

Urrutia describes his defection trip as “one of the most difficult times of [his] life.” Before his departure from the island, he and several others, none of whom were baseball defectors, had to remain hidden for more than ten days as they all tried to get closer to the Holguín coast to rendezvous with a boat that could take them off the island. During these days, he says, everyone in the group struggled, as they were forced to subsist without adequate provisions or any semblance of suitable living conditions. After they were able to finally depart the island by boat en route to the Dominican Republic, they faced more dire conditions after their boat broke down and forced them to spend the next 3 days at sea without food or water, waiting for help to get them the rest of the way to the Dominican Republic. Left without legal migration options, Urrutia’s departure required that he travel both lightly—that is to say, with nothing more than a few canned food items—to maintain his mobility, and in an unreliable vessel that left him stranded at sea. Thus, we see that his defection, like the majority of those discussed in this examination, involved several instances when his physical safety was at extreme risk. Urrutia’s defection route is also worth noting, as it involves the use of the now-conventional plan made famous by Joe Cubas

in the 1990s in which a ballplayer's "point of arrival" is anywhere but the United States. By taking this route, Urrutia was able to exploit his "flexible citizenship" as a transnational sport migrant and avoid any limitations to his initial MLB contract.

Upon arriving in the Dominican Republic, Urrutia quickly connected with Cuban trainers on the island and, within a week, signed a six-year contract with the Baltimore Orioles worth \$800,000<sup>26</sup>. Although one would think that since Urrutia had arrived in the Dominican Republic and signed with an MLB team, his troubles would be over, this was not the case. In an interview Urrutia gave a week after his arrival in the Dominican Republic, he stated that he planned to establish residency in that country within a week's time (Hoffmeister 2013). However, in our interview he related, "In the Dominican we could not get residency because they deceived us—they asked us for money, we [paid and] lost that money, and they did not give us residency." Setting aside the specific reasons for the delay, as a result of his difficulties with the Dominican migration and residency systems, Urrutia spent the next ten months in the Dominican Republic indefinitely awaiting a resolution. As we have seen in other cases, the significant delay Urrutia endured while trying to establish legal residency is not unique—Rolando Arrojo, Andy Morales, and Yuniesky Betancourt are just a few of many other examples. Its frequent occurrence is not difficult to comprehend either considering the assorted circumventions of legal migration routes that baseball defectors must undertake in the course of their defections.

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<sup>26</sup> The rapidity with which Urrutia signed with the Orioles for nearly \$1 million demonstrates that the Orioles had scouted him before, in anticipation of his defection. Thus, their (and other organizations') willingness to invest resources to scout Cuban ballplayers reveals not just their level of interest in Cuban baseball talent, but also their expectation that many will defect.

To obtain legal residency outside of the United States, Urrutia, along with various other baseball defectors who were unable establish residency, decided to circumvent the migration system once again by leaving the Dominican Republic and crossing into Haiti by car. In this second circumvention, we see Urrutia employing his “flexible citizenship” as a transnational sport migrant again, yet this time to a degree that had not been previously considered. By choosing to leave the Dominican Republic and crossing into Haiti, Urrutia utilized the added mobility afforded to him as an athlete and effectively bypassed one country’s migration system for another’s because the other’s was not working in his favor. Though it took another six months, Urrutia was ultimately granted residency in Haiti and he completed his migration to the United States soon thereafter.

Urrutia notes he is the only one in his family who has emigrated from Cuba and, as far as he is aware, he is the only one who ever has desired to do so. Surprisingly, he related that while he was in Haiti, the Cuban government permitted his father to visit him for one month. This consent from the government is surprising for a number of reasons. First, the eased exit visa guidelines that have permitted many Cubans to travel abroad in recent months were not yet implemented. Second, the government has displayed a consistent track record of limiting the mobility of baseball defectors’ families after a defection. And third, the government would have been fully aware of the fact that Urrutia was establishing residency in Haiti at that time. Given these factors, it remains unclear how to interpret Urrutia’s father’s visit in the larger context of the Cuban government’s treatment of baseball defectors and their families, especially since Urrutia’s father maintains such good standing with Cuban authorities as evidenced by his recent renewal as a *Serie Nacional* baseball manager. Perhaps it was their attempt to use Urrutia’s father to convince him to return to

Cuba—though Urrutia notes his father never tried to convince him of this<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, perhaps it demonstrates a less hard-nosed attitude the government is beginning to take with defectors and their families.

Supporting the latter suggestion, Urrutia notes that after he defected “absolutely nothing” happened to his family. There was no investigation, no interrogations, nobody was detained and, to his knowledge, his family has not faced any serious repercussions. He said his family’s life continued normally—his mother has kept working her same job, his father has maintained his position as the head coach of the Las Tunas baseball team, and his brother has continued studying in university and playing baseball—and that he feels many people “somewhat exaggerate the things that happen in Cuba.” The only possible consequence of his defection that he mentioned—though he is quick to point out this is just a matter of his own opinion—is that it may have hindered his brother’s opportunities to compete at the highest possible level in the Cuban baseball system. Urrutia stated, “After I left, he had two opportunities and they did not put him on the team. We think that this is because I came here, but it is something that we will never be able to prove because they can rebut ‘We did not put him on the team because he did not perform well enough.’” It is true it would be difficult to prove these claims especially since his brother made a *Serie Nacional* roster for the first time in his career this past season. However, if the Cuban government has in fact kept his brother from competing at higher levels because it would entail he travel

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<sup>27</sup> “My father—I cannot lie to you—he did not support [my defection] because he does not want to be separated from me, he did not support me because of the ideals he has, but he always respected me.”

abroad for competition<sup>28</sup>, then it would demonstrate the government's continued practice of limiting ballplayers' mobility so as to prevent potential defections.

When asked about the contact he has had with his family since arriving in the United States, Urrutia alluded to many of the same difficulties that several other defectors have mentioned prior:

I have actually not seen my family for two years . . . there is family I have not spoken to for a year. With my mother, I have been able to speak to her by telephone two or three times per week, but I have not been able to see her by video. It is very difficult. . . . [W]e do not have the internet technology [for video communications]—the government has limited internet. . . . I cannot see my mother by video camera, I cannot see her through Facebook chat, or anything else. She can write me through email and I can write her and [talk to her] over the telephone.

It is clear in these statements that Urrutia and his family are experiencing the difficulties that come with forced separation in baseball defection. Though he regularly communicates with them by telephone and email, he regards their ability to connect through these means as lacking and would undoubtedly prefer to be able to at least see them.

Also, as many other defectors and their families have reported, Urrutia strongly believes the government is monitoring his communications with his family in Cuba. “Yes, there is [supervision]—there always is. . . . Disgracefully, that is the way it is. They screen telephone calls. They screen emails. They monitor it all.” Despite this supervision, though, Urrutia says he is not worried, because, “when [he] talks to [his] family, it is to know how they are doing.” Further stating, “What I talk about or say in an email or phone call, it does not bother me if [the government] hears it because I do not say anything bad.”

Like most other defectors, Urrutia stated that he sends his family packages containing money, clothes, or whatever else they may need. Although he stated his family

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<sup>28</sup> His name has not appeared on the roster of any baseball team that has travelled abroad for competition in the past two years.

has always been comfortable in Cuba, he feels he has been able to improve their standard of living some with the things he sends them. He also noted that, in contrast to the monitoring of his communications, he does not believe the government has ever tampered with the packages he sends his family because everything he has sent has always arrived. Yet, at the same time, he knows that other people have had items seized from packages they sent to their families in Cuba.

In the near future Urrutia hopes his family will visit him in the United States and notes that his mother has specifically expressed her desire to do so. Again, because Cuban law does not permit him to travel to Cuba until eight years after his defection, he has no hope of returning to his country to visit them until 2019. He did not indicate whether anyone in his family has applied for an exit visa to visit him in the United States under the new guidelines, but given his family's visibility and good standing in Cuba, this is something that should continue to be monitored because their situation would present a good test as to whether the Cuban government is easing its control over the mobility of a defector's family.

In regards to his brother's future, he stated that his brother has never mentioned any interest in defecting, but at the same time, Urrutia did not rule out the possibility that his brother may attempt to do so someday. "I advise him as much as I can but I have never asked him if he wants to come here to play or if he wants to come here to live. . . . It is a decision only he can make and I think, knowing my brother, that when he feels the need to come to this country, he will tell me then." Keeping in mind the Urrutia baseball legacy, including Henry's father's and cousin's dedication to the Cuban baseball system throughout the defection era, if his brother does decide to defect it could indicate a significant

generational shift in attitudes towards baseball defection not just within their family, but in the country as a whole.

Along these lines, Urrutia expressed his belief that the baseball system in Cuba is in an era of change especially in regards to its attitudes towards professionalism, referring specifically to the permission the government is now giving to ballplayers who desire to play professionally abroad. Furthermore, while he is not certain that baseball can be a tool for change in US-Cuban relations today, he is hopeful that it can be in the future given our nations' mutual passion for the sport and the changes he is seeing in the Cuban baseball system. "I think that, with God, it can [help]. . . . I think that one day we will be able to try [baseball diplomacy] again, and that is a beautiful thing." He concluded our interview with the following:

It is good for people, teachers, all those who listen, who watch, who want to know, to learn as much as they can about [Cuban baseball], about these [baseball defectors]— [that is why] whatever you ask me, I answer the best that I can. . . . I hope, truly, that this helps.

### ***C. Thoughts on the Current State of Baseball Defection***

Considering Urrutia's defection experience along with those discussed previously, it does appear that we are in the midst of an era of great change in the attitudes surrounding baseball defection in Cuba. Unquestionably, illegality remains at the fore of the situation and continues to compel defectors and their families to undertake actions that entail severe legal and physical safety risks. Furthermore, some continue to report troubling experiences that may even constitute human rights violations, such as limitations to their mobility and illegal detention. Nevertheless, the Cuban government appears to have accepted that they are incapable of stopping baseball defectors and, as Urrutia mentioned, are making many more compromises to placate those who may be unsatisfied with only having the Cuban

baseball system available to them. In addition to allowing ballplayers to participate in professional leagues around Latin America and Asia, the Cuban government took the unprecedented action of granting a young shortstop, Yoan Moncada, permission to legally leave Cuba for the stated purpose of pursuing a career in MLB (Sanchez 2014). It is too soon to speculate what this surprising action will mean for the future of baseball defection and the Cuban baseball system, but what is undeniable is that it represents yet another marked change in attitude and policy towards baseball defection within Cuba that was previously unfathomable.

Ultimately, given the limitations of both the prior accounts discussed and the case study presented here in providing us with a sufficient representation of Cuban baseball defection, it is clear that what is desperately needed now are many more close examinations of baseball defection experiences. Knowing the little that we do about these experiences, it is untenable for us to continue to accept the “rags to riches” narrative that has become commonplace over the past two decades. Moreover, it is equally unacceptable that those concerned with social justice continue to permit the circumstances that allow for these experiences to occur. As such, improved knowledge about these experiences will help generate more widespread awareness of them, but we must also strive to uncover whatever avenues there may be to overcome world injustice.



### Chapter 3

#### **Runners in Scoring Position: Baseball Diplomacy's Past and Its Potential Future**

Bearing in mind the injustices prevalent in Cuban baseball defection experience discussed in the previous chapter, in addition to the countless others who have endured traumatic and difficult times due to the embittered relationship between the United States and Cuba over the past five decades, it is imperative that we continue to explore and reevaluate any plan that has the potential to advance our stalemated dialogue. One idea that has repeatedly arisen throughout the years is to use cultural exchanges, including baseball, to build empathy between our nations in the hope that it will create enough popular support for restarting our relations. Given the power of popular culture to effect political and societal change, exchanges of these kind certainly warrant reconsideration.

“Baseball diplomacy” has become the term most commonly associated with attempts at improving US-Cuban relations through their shared national pastime, baseball (Carter 1999; Carter and Sugden 2012; Elias 2011; Greller 1999; Turner 2010). Unfortunately, all efforts to reestablish normalized ties through this form of cultural exchange—or any others for that matter—have been unsuccessful thus far. Nevertheless, scholars, journalists, and politicians alike have been encouraged to explore the prospects baseball diplomacy may offer due to the prior success of sport diplomacy in restarting US-Sino relations, as well as the ever-evolving political and economic circumstances that exist both within and between the United States and Cuba (Cwiertney 2000; Frankel 2005; Greller 1999; Kornbluh 1999; Noyes 2004; Schneider 2001; Solomon 2011; Turner 2010; United States 1999). In this chapter, I will consider past attempts at baseball diplomacy, assess why “Ping-Pong diplomacy” was successful at improving US-Sino relations in the 1970s and how that relates

to US-Cuba relations, and examine the role baseball diplomacy might play in helping to improve US-Cuban relations given the current socio-political situation.

### ***A. Baseball Diplomacy through the Years***

In the midst of the Cold War, the United States grew concerned and eventually angered with Fidel Castro's newly formed Cuban government. This animosity arose from Cuba's enactment of numerous socialist and communist policies, resulting in the appropriation of large amounts of property owned by private US interests in the early 1960s. As time passed, diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba only worsened and ultimately led President John F. Kennedy to prohibit all economic exchange with Cuba. Since that time, there have been numerous attempts to repair US-Cuban ties (Bernell 2011; Castro Mariño and Pruessen 2012; Erikson 2011; Gibbs 2011), and among these diverse efforts, baseball diplomacy has repeatedly surfaced as a viable option (Bjarkman 2007; Carter 1999; Carter and Sugden 2012; Elias 2010; Turner 2010). This would especially become the case following the success of "Ping-Pong diplomacy in 1971."<sup>29</sup> As such, there is a long history of politicians and those involved with MLB advocating for baseball diplomacy to pave the way for renewed US-Cuban relations.

In 1971, just one month after the success of "Ping-Pong diplomacy," San Diego Padres manager Preston Gómez, a Cuban native, attempted to organize a tour of Cuba with an all-star team of Cubans playing in MLB. Gómez hoped to achieve a similar outcome to that which was seen between the US and China and had even reportedly garnered the

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<sup>29</sup> In April 1971, members of the US Table Tennis team played a series of exhibition games against their Chinese counterpart in Mainland China. These games, dubbed "Ping-Pong diplomacy," are widely credited with reigniting US-Sino relations. More about this event and its relation to baseball diplomacy will be discussed in the next section.

support of MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn (“Ball Stars’ Tour of Cuba Is Sought” 1971). Unfortunately, Gómez never received an endorsement from the US State Department, then headed by William Rogers, Richard Nixon’s Secretary of State, and thus Gomez’s goodwill mission never materialized (Jamail 2000, 123; Turner 2010, 69).

A second attempt at baseball diplomacy arose in January 1975 with a similar cast when Kuhn and Gómez began discussing the possibility of arranging a series of games between Cuban and American baseball teams in Cuba with the director of the *Instituto Nacional de Educación Física y Recreación* (INDER), Cuba’s national sports agency. Encouraging Kuhn in his efforts even more was the fact that during a conversation he had with then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger just one month prior, Kissinger appeared open to this type of exchange with Cuba (“Letter from Bowie K. Kuhn to Henry Kissinger” 1975). Feeling optimistic about his chances of succeeding this time, Kuhn continued meeting with INDER officials in Mexico City and began seeking Kissinger’s formal approval to arrange the games. However, despite Kissinger’s initial willingness to consider the baseball diplomacy series and the support given to it by his own aides (ironically including Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs as well as former Secretary of State William Rogers), by February 1975 Kissinger disapproved of plans to move forward with the series “at [that] time” (“Response to ‘Baseball Team to Cuba’ 1975). After, Kuhn and others alleged Kissinger would not allow the series to move forward because he was “angry at Cuba for sending troops to fight U.S.-backed right-wing forces in Angola” and also did not want to allow the Castro government to win favor with Americans (Elias 2010, 236).

With Kissinger no longer serving as Secretary of State following the inauguration of Jimmy Carter’s administration in 1977, the State Department began urging Kuhn to reopen a

dialogue with his Cuban counterparts about a baseball diplomacy series. Despite this, the efforts did not advance any further than its antecedents and Kuhn yet again blamed Cuban officials and the State Department for the failure. In this instance, though, it was Kuhn who halted the discussions because of his publicly acknowledged annoyance with Cuba's steadfast policy to prevent its ballplayers from signing with MLB organizations—an annoyance that developed into full-fledged “anticommunist and anti-Cuban sentiments” (Elias 2010, 236). Fully resolute in his anti-Cuba stance, this attempt in 1977 marked the last time Bowie Kuhn was directly involved in baseball diplomacy negotiations, though it would not be the last time he had an impact on them.

Still hoping baseball could resurrect diplomatic relations with Cuba, President Carter and his State Department arranged for the general manager of the Cleveland Indians, Gabe Paul, to directly negotiate with Cuban officials in 1978. While this effort initially appeared promising, negotiations again broke down. This time the cause was Fidel Castro feeling insulted on two separate occasions. The first perceived insult occurred when American sports broadcaster Howard Cosell was forced to prematurely end an interview with Castro during the 1980 Winter Olympics so the network could return to coverage of speed skating (Elias 2010, 236). The second and much more blatant insult resulted from comments made by Bowie Kuhn that his “principle [sic] incentive” in arranging games between US and Cuban teams was “to facilitate the availability of star Cuban players to American baseball” (Elias 2010, 237). While it may not appear to be an insult on its surface, this statement deeply offended Castro because the basic tenet of the “revolutionary baseball” system he established on the island rejected any professionalism in sport; moreover, Cuban athletes—especially baseball players—were considered embodiments of the revolution (Carter 2008b,

169). With Kuhn asserting that he wanted to arrange exhibition games between the two nations mainly to lure these top symbols of the Cuban Revolution away from the island, he was in essence attacking the revolution itself. Following these two failed efforts, Carter's optimism for moving forward with baseball diplomacy was quashed and no more attempts were undertaken during the remainder of his presidency. In fact, another effort was not made in earnest for approximately twenty years, due to the continued prevalence of Cold War politics through the 1980s and the emergence of high-profile Cuban baseball defections in the early-1990s.

Analyzing the failure of baseball diplomacy in the 1970s, it appears that Cold War politics were partly to blame. Throughout the decade, the Florida-based anti-Castro lobby, which has maintained sway in Washington since the 1959 revolution, made any politician's move to mend relations a political risk. In 1971, the State Department's lack of interest in a baseball diplomacy series can be traced to the Nixon Administration having no real intent in normalizing relations with Cuba (Gibbs 2011, 19). In the mid-1970s, Cuba's involvement in the anticolonial conflict in Angola discouraged Kissinger under the Ford Administration from permitting exhibition games (Gibbs 2011, 19; López-Oceguera 2012, 233).

In the late-1970s, the blame can be placed on Bowie Kuhn, a fact that is ironic considering that it was Kuhn who was initially the driving force behind baseball diplomacy and was even characterized by William Rogers as "[wanting] to be the ping-pong diplomat of Cuba" (Elias 2010, 236). During these years, Kuhn became the primary reason the Carter administration's attempts were undermined. Indeed, his transparent motivations for promoting baseball diplomacy with Cuba solely as a means to access Cuban baseball labor

and increase revenues for his league ultimately killed some of the most promising opportunities that arose.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s several MLB clubs, including the Seattle Mariners, Milwaukee Brewers, Texas Rangers, California Angels (now known as the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim), and Baltimore Orioles, inquired about playing exhibition games against a Cuban squad (Jamail 2000, 125-126). However, not until 1999 would any of these efforts pay off, as Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos was granted the opportunity to arrange for his team to travel to Cuba for a preseason exhibition game on March 28—marking the first time in forty years an MLB team played in Cuba. Additionally, he was allowed to host the Cuban national team for an exhibition game at Camden Yards in Baltimore on April 3 (Jamail 2000, 143). Despite the anticipated criticisms and political protests—including a protestor who ran onto the diamond during the game in Baltimore—the exhibitions ensued without incident and received widespread media coverage.

Since those games, there has been widespread and often varied speculation regarding the Clinton and Castro administrations' political motivations for moving forward with these exhibitions (Bjarkman 2007, 411-412; Carter 1999, 581-582; Carter and Sugden 2012, 115; Elias 2010, 239; Jamail 2000, 142). What is undisputed, though, is that regardless of the widespread hope that preceded the exhibitions, the games failed to produce any meaningful or lasting changes in US-Cuban relations.

The reasons for the failure of the 1999 exhibition games to bring an end to the diplomatic standoff between the United States and Cuba have been examined extensively. In the very same year that the exhibitions took place, sport anthropologist Thomas Carter (1999) noted that the games “did not constitute a diplomatic exchange but rather a cultural

one that lacked the direct involvement of the two nation states. Instead, there was a state-sponsored Cuban team playing against a professional Baltimore team with no state ties” (Carter 1999, 581). Milton Jamail wrote in 2000 that “there [were] no indications that either side softened their hard-line positions or that either the United States or Cuba care[d] about an immediate change in the relationship” (Jamail 2000, 149).

Historian Robert Elias (2010) examined the reasons for failure in a larger political context and ultimately blamed the continuation of US-Cuban tensions on two incidents. He notes that the Elián González affair, which occurred approximately one year after the exhibitions, undermined any goodwill created by the ballgames<sup>30</sup>. Secondly, and much more importantly, he cites the aftereffects of 9/11, which shifted all American foreign policy attention towards matters of terrorism and security—including a drastic tightening of its borders—thereby relegating any efforts at conciliation with Cuba to the bottom of its priority list (Elias 2010, 240). In short, although there were noteworthy incidents that damaged the chances for diplomatic reconciliation in the years following the exhibition games, the principal hindrance was that that neither side entered into the arrangement with any explicit intent to improve relations with the other. When a fundamental change did not occur, neither nation felt disappointed or betrayed. In the end, the exhibitions were nothing more than spectacles for the fans that provided Selig an opportunity to gain positive publicity for MLB and Castro an opportunity to grandstand before his entire nation.

### ***B. The Example of Ping-Pong Diplomacy***

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<sup>30</sup> See Gibbs (2011, 109-112) for more regarding the political circumstances surrounding the Elián González affair.

The United States terminated all formal diplomatic relations with the newly formed communist Chinese government when, in 1949, Mao Zedong's Red Army defeated the Nationalist Chinese army after a prolonged civil war. From that point on, US-Sino relations remained in a stalemate due to Cold War politics that recognized the national government in Taiwan as the only true Chinese government. A break in the stalemate came when members of the United States national table tennis team were in Japan for the World Table Tennis Championships in 1971 and they accepted an invitation to play a set of exhibition games from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China. This invitation and the ensuing matches began what would be referred to as "Ping-Pong diplomacy" and is generally recognized as the moment when US-Sino tensions were eased, allowing for the resumption of formal diplomatic dealings. Thus, when considering the potential for baseball diplomacy to improve US-Cuban relations, one cannot overlook the big historical precedent of sport diplomacy set in the early 1970s.

To better understand the success of Ping-Pong diplomacy, it is first necessary to examine the circumstances that preceded it. For some years prior to the 1971 World Table Tennis Championships in Japan, where arrangements for the "Ping-Pong diplomacy" exhibition games would take place, frictions between the Soviet Union and PRC had been growing (Carter and Sugden 2012, 103). By 1969 the two nations, both of whom possessed a nuclear arsenal, were feared to be moving towards full-scale warfare (Carter and Sugden 2012, 103). Though the US ultimately hoped a "Sino-Soviet War" did not occur, it did see the hostilities as a chance for the PRC to "[identify] Russia as its sole antagonist, in contrast with the rest of the world and particularly with the United States" ("Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications for U.S. Policy" 1969). In this way, the United States believed the PRC



would be more willing to collaborate with them and serve as a counterbalance to the USSR in the region. Such was the case, as the communist Chinese government regarded the opportunity to improve ties with the United States as a chance to improve their military positioning against the Soviets with whom they shared a long border—through both technological and political support—as well as a chance to gain a new economic trading partner (Carter and Sugden 2012, 105).

For those reasons, by the time the World Table Tennis Championships began in 1971, the United States and PRC—both of which sent competitors to the tournament—were already open to dialogue, but likewise desired a “relatively risk-free pretext to explore the possibilities for closer political, economic and military relations” (Carter and Sugden 2012, 104). On April 4, 1971, when American team member Glenn Cowan began conversing with Chinese team member Zhuang Zedong on the Chinese team bus, the “relatively risk-free” situation the governments desired was presented to them. While the specifics of how the invitation from the PRC to the US Table Tennis delegation in Japan transpired are uncertain, just ten days after Glenn Cowan and Zhuang Zedong’s conversation took place, Cowan and eight of his teammates (along with spouses, officials, and journalists) entered China to play a series of exhibition games and tour the country (Carter and Sugden 2012, 104). By February 1972, following months of preparation, President Nixon arrived in Beijing to formally reestablish diplomatic associations with China.

Analyzing the Ping-Pong diplomacy events that eventually led to the revival of US-Sino cooperation, it becomes clear that both the United States and the PRC had a great deal to gain from the exchange. As previously noted, communist China was at odds with the Soviet Union and needed to improve its capability to oppose the superpower to their north.

Moreover, China needed a respite from the US-imposed trade embargo that made economic development difficult to achieve. For Nixon, in addition to the strategic advantage the United States would gain against the Soviet Union by allying more closely with China, he hoped better relations with China would help bring an end to the Vietnam War, which was highly unpopular in the US by 1972. This latter aspiration was particularly important to Nixon given that he was slated to run for reelection against George McGovern, a staunch opponent to the Vietnam War. Consequently, Nixon believed it was politically necessary to demonstrate to the American people that he was actively trying to bring the war to an end (Carter and Sugden 2012, 106).

The circumstances surrounding the successful utilization of Ping-Pong diplomacy in the 1970s and the attempt at baseball diplomacy in the 1999 exhibition games between the Baltimore Orioles and *Selección Cuba* (the only baseball diplomacy attempt that ever materialized) show some noteworthy similarities despite their different outcomes. This is true in the sense that both China and Cuba were communist states whose leaders—Mao Zedong in China and Fidel Castro in Cuba—maintained stable control over their respective nations. Also, both Mao and Castro were regarded as the embodiments of all that anti-communists within the United States opposed. The mere participation of American politicians even in indirect dialogue with these two was politically risky. At the same time, each situation presented an opportunity for Castro's and Mao's respective nations to be relieved of severe economic sanctions imposed through US embargos. Finally, the United States stood to gain significant international favor if their relations with these governments were normalized.

Regardless of these similarities, the differences between the Chinese and Cuban situations ultimately had a greater impact on their outcomes. First, there was no equivalent to the rising tensions seen between the Chinese and Soviet Union, which pressured Mao to seek a new political alliance in the United States. Indeed, by 1999 the Cold War was over and Cuba had no comparable rivalries that compelled them to seek assistance from the United States. Moreover, despite the fact that Cuba was in the midst of the “Special Period”<sup>31</sup> and could have greatly benefited from a suspension of the US-imposed economic embargo, Castro likely calculated that he had more to gain from the propaganda he could generate by remaining steadfast in his opposition to the United States and using the exhibition games to promote *béisbol revolucionario*<sup>32</sup> (Bjarkman 2007, 411-412).

In late 2000 when President Clinton was serving out the final months of his second term, he was not facing the same kind of pressures to win favor with the American people as Nixon did while seeking reelection in 1972. Nevertheless, if Clinton was perceived as advocating for improved relations with Castro’s government, he risked damaging Vice President Al Gore’s chances of winning the upcoming presidential election. As a result, it was politically prudent for the Clinton Administration to proceed cautiously with Cuba in 1999 in order to not upset the conservative Cuban-American communities in Florida and New Jersey (Jamail 2000, 142). Lastly, whereas there was an obvious strategic advantage for the United States to gain by supporting China against the Soviet Union in the 1970s, no such prospect would have arisen by the United States starting a dialogue with Castro’s

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<sup>31</sup> The “Special Period” refers to the economic depression in Cuba that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was characterized by famine and severe oil shortages.

<sup>32</sup> This refers to the amateur baseball system Castro established in 1961, which also brought an end to professional baseball in Cuba.

government in 1999. Taking all this into account, it is clear that the political circumstances surrounding the sport exchange were not conducive to significant diplomatic progress.

Symbolically, the baseball exhibition games did not carry nearly the same significance as was seen with “Ping-Pong diplomacy” either. Thomas Carter (1999) noted that, unlike the “Ping-Pong diplomacy” matches, the baseball diplomacy games were not contested between two national teams, but between an MLB team and team consisting of Cuban all-stars. It is also important to note that the Baltimore Orioles did not have any ballplayers of Cuban descent on their roster or among their coaching staff, they were not one of the premier teams in MLB, and they in no way embody the United States to those outside the US in the same way that the New York Yankees organization arguably does (the word “yanqui” is used to refer to Americans in much of Latin America). Furthermore, the timing of the exhibitions was not ideal for the members of the Orioles being that the arduous 162-game MLB season began on April 5. Their first matchup with *Selección Cuba* took place just before the start of the season, while the second was held after they had already played 24 regular season games. Not surprisingly then, some questioned the effort that would be put forth by the Orioles ballplayers—especially in the second exhibition—and noted that they seemed inconvenienced by the two games, rather than seeing US or even MLB pride at stake (Bjarkman 2007, 412; Jamail 2000, 147-148). All things considered, Milton Jamail (2000) and Thomas Carter’s (1999) characterization of the 1999 exhibition games as an insincere attempt at baseball diplomacy is apt since neither the Baltimore Orioles, nor the leaders of either government were truly striving for success.

### ***C. The Political Environment and Baseball Diplomacy Today***

As we have seen in the case of “Ping-Pong diplomacy,” sport can have the potential to serve as a form of “soft diplomacy” between rival nations. That is to say, it allows for nations to indirectly negotiate with each other under the premise of a cultural exchange, rather than traditional channels, such as diplomats or top-level government officials. Generally, by pursuing improved relations via “soft diplomacy,” the pressure on each nation to find immediate solutions or compromise is lessened—even to the point that the exchange becomes “relatively risk-free” (Carter and Sugden 2012, 104)—because the primary public focus shifts to the lighthearted cultural event. Instead of concentrating on serious diplomatic meetings with stern-faced officials, the spotlight is on a cheerful exchange among young and energetic athletes, enthusiastic about the opportunity to represent their nation in sport. Sport diplomacy exchanges also have the potential to ease tension among the government leaders involved in the discussions, since they have an opportunity to “break the ice” with their counterpart over a shared pastime, in a relaxed setting. Speaking specifically of the United States, Cuba, and baseball, the sport has a long and beloved history in each nation. Even more than that, baseball is regarded as fundamental both to the American and the post-revolutionary Cuban character. It provides a clear cultural commonality that is ideal for sport diplomacy if the political will to engage in it is present.

This is not to say that sport diplomacy is a panacea for international relations. Indeed, by considering the failed attempt at baseball diplomacy in 1999, one example in which sport diplomacy was ineffective has already been presented. Nevertheless, “soft diplomacy” through sport can serve as a starting point and catalyst for renewed relations between two governments if the political circumstances are favorable and the lessons of history are heeded.

The next logical question then becomes, what are the ideal circumstances needed in order for a fundamental change in US-Cuban relations to transpire? Daniel P. Erikson (2011) asserts “renewed interest” by American businesses will go a long way towards pressuring the US government to make changes. Similarly, he notes that reforms to the Cuban economic structure can create more support for a new relationship. Lastly, he argues the death of Fidel Castro and a shift to new political leadership can make the process of reconciliation between the two governments more likely (112). Jessica F. Gibbs (2011) contends domestic politics in each nation is, and always has been, the primary force that has either moved the governments towards or away from improved relations (151). Along the same lines, LeoGrande and Jiménez (2012) claim that a renewed effort to mend relations with Cuba will result from the “political capital and presidential mandate” that comes with President Obama’s reelection (371). Taking these perspectives into account, there are various signs that the United States and Cuba may be ready to move beyond their Cold War era stances—something Obama called a move towards “a new beginning” (Lowenthal 2011, 2)—and that sport diplomacy is especially suited to aid in that endeavor.

The first indication that Cuba may be ready to move towards normalized diplomatic ties with the United States can be seen in its recent easing of travel restrictions. Since the policies that previously restricted Cuban citizens from travelling abroad have been relaxed, many more Cubans have been permitted to travel outside of the island (“Travel from Cuba” 2012). In one of the more significant examples, Yoani Sánchez, a prominent dissident blogger, was granted a passport in 2013 in order to travel to several nations, including the

United States (Chávez 2013)<sup>33</sup>. In addition, the Cuban government has eased laws prohibiting high-profile defectors from returning. In the new policy, defectors who have been away from the island for at least 8 years can return without facing criminal prosecution. This allowed José Contreras, one of the most prominent baseball defectors, to return to Cuba for the first time in a decade (Franks 2013). Ultimately, these changes signal a deviation from the government's stern attitude towards individuals it perceived as threats, which pervaded the past five decades. Consider also that, with an impending visit from the pope, the Cuban government released approximately 3,000 political prisoners—known as “prisoners of conscience”—between 2010 and 2011 likely in an attempt to boost its profile as the eyes of the international community shifted to them (“Cuba to release nearly 3,000 prisoners” 2011; Haven 2011; LeoGrande and Jiménez 2012, 370).

In addition to changes in travel restrictions, the Cuban state has undertaken what some see as monumental economic reform and political reorganization in recent years. Attempting to improve the country's stagnant financial state, the government has instituted changes to its economy that allow for increased private entrepreneurship and the ownership of private property (“Cuban economy to undergo changes after travel reform” 2012). These changes demonstrate an historic shift in post-revolutionary economic policy since they insert more market economics into Cuba's strongly socialistic system, and suggest to many that the government is open to exploring economic avenues that were previously unfathomable. This has many business people, especially in the United States, eager about the prospects of expanding their operations into Cuba, and has even caused some economic observers to

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<sup>33</sup> Sánchez returned to Cuba after several months and, despite having criticized the policies of the Cuban government in public on several occasions during her trip, she has faced no known repercussions.

wonder if Cuba will become the next big emerging market in Latin America (van Sickle, 2013). If Cuba continues to open itself up to market economics, perhaps modeling itself after the Chinese system, we may see the American business sector increase pressure on the US government to expand cooperation with the Cuban government so they can do business on the island.

Even more significant than the economic reforms, the end of the Castro brothers' reign is in sight, as Raúl Castro announced he would not seek another term as President after his current tenure expires in 2018. Looking towards Cuba's political future, it becomes quickly apparent that the emerging leadership is much more open to the kind of reforms already enacted. In fact, this new generation of party leaders, led by Miguel Díaz-Canel, the current Vice President and apparent successor to Raúl Castro, is credited with inducing the recent moves towards economic liberalization on the island ("Cuba's leaders" 2013; Tamayo 2013). Taking into consideration that the next generation of political leadership will be the first to not have fought in the 1959 revolution and, given their demonstrated willingness to restructure Cuba's Cold War-era policies, it is not implausible to think they will continue to move Cuba away from the hardline positions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century once in power.

Within the United States, President Obama made it easier for Americans to travel to Cuba through so-called "people to people exchanges." As a result, many more Americans have travelled to the island since 2009 (Bachelor 2011). In 2012, the Cuban National Statistics Office reported that more than 98,000 Americans travelled to Cuba, about 25,000 more than the previous year and double the amount of 2007 (Frank 2013). The Obama Administration also reformed guidelines for the 1.5 million Cuban-Americans who have family living in Cuba. Along with other changes, including the removal of a limit on the



dollar amount Cuban-Americans can send to their relatives on the island, the administration now permits unlimited travel to Cuba for those with family ties there (Silva and Wilkinson 2009). While the idea of normalizing relations with Cuba has been routinely proffered by each administration since the enactment of the embargo, actions that reflect a true willingness to improve relations have rarely accompanied the rhetoric. However, Obama's decisions regarding travel policies represent a change in this trend and suggest his administration is much more willing than his predecessors to enhance cooperation with the Cuban government.

In further consideration of current US domestic politics, the sway of the radical Cuban-American population that heretofore fervently opposed any change in US-Cuban relations has substantially diminished. In the 2008 presidential election, Obama received only 35 percent of the Cuban-American vote in Florida—a percentage that ranks highly among Democratic presidential candidates—yet still won the state's 27 electoral votes. Even more telling is the fact that 55 percent of Cuban-Americans under the age of 30 voted for Obama. Clearly a generational shift has occurred in the state (Erikson 2011, 102). Furthermore, despite having pursued the changes in policies towards Cuba, Obama improved on his 2008 election result in 2012 when he received 49 percent of the Cuban-American vote (Lopez and Taylor 2012) and 60 percent of the vote from Cubans born in the US<sup>34</sup> (Campo-Flores 2012). Having won reelection, Obama is now serving the final years of his presidency and is no longer burdened with having to win reelection himself. In light of this, as well as the encouraging shifts in Florida voter trends, Obama is seemingly freer to

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<sup>34</sup> While data specifically referring to Cuban-Americans under 30 could not be found for the 2012 presidential election, this demographic effectively represents the same population.

pursue a foreign policy initiative like improving diplomatic relations with Cuba, which would have been too politically risky before.

Reappraising the criteria necessary for a fundamental shift in US-Cuban relations as established prior, it is evident the present circumstances are promising. First, with the economic reforms already enacted in Cuba, and with more likely to come in the future, Cuba appears poised to insert itself more into the global market as a means of growing their economy. This has piqued the interest of a number of business sectors in the United States and will likely place increasing pressure on American politicians to do away with any policies that prohibit American businesses from dealing within Cuba. Second, while ex-President Fidel Castro is not yet dead and his younger brother Raúl remains President, the next generation of political leadership has not only begun to form, but has already made a considerable impact on the island as seen through the previously mentioned economic reforms. Third, a shift in domestic politics within Cuba is occurring and is giving rise to more moderate stances. Recent economic reforms, as well as the easing on travel restrictions and the release of numerous political prisoners exemplify this. Fourth, a shift in the United States' domestic politics has also taken place. This change is primarily represented by the diminishing influence of the anti-Castro lobby that made any attempt to improve relations with Cuba politically impossible throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In its place is a younger Cuban-American generation that was born in the United States and is not entirely opposed to reconciliation with Cuba. In addition, through his rhetoric and limited actions towards Cuba—specifically the change in travel and financial remittance policies—Barack Obama has conveyed a willingness to transform US-Cuban relations. Thus, bolstered by the various economic and political changes taking place in Cuba, the

weakening domestic opposition to improved relations, and the fact that he is now serving out the waning years of his presidency, Obama should be poised to finally find the means by which he can thrust the United States and Cuba into a new era of diplomatic cooperation.

With these factors in mind, MLB has the opportunity to utilize its status as a transnational organization to facilitate dialogue between the American and Cuban governments. Even prior to Obama's presidency, while the Bush Administration was making it nearly impossible to arrange for any cultural exchange with Cuba (LeoGrande and Jiménez 2012, 369), MLB exemplified its clout by convincing the government to allow *Selección Cuba* to travel to the United States for the newly established World Baseball Classic (WBC)—an international baseball tournament first hosted in 2006 that is akin to the World Cup in soccer. Since then, and especially after Obama took office in 2009, the use of baseball as a means of cultural exchange between the two nations has become commonplace, albeit on a small and mostly unnoticed level. Given this, MLB is well positioned to generate the kind of meaningful impact that can present Obama with an opportunity to begin a dialogue with Cuba that is aimed at reconciliation.

The use of baseball as a diplomatic tool is not a novel idea; indeed, many have considered the avenues MLB could take in order to foster better collaboration between the United States and Cuba. Some ideas that have been suggested are the institution of a worldwide draft, the sanctioning of unrestricted participation by Cuban ballplayers in MLB, and the promotion of the Baseball Diplomacy Act (also known as H.R. 187 and House Bill 2311, "A Bill to Waive Certain Prohibitions With Respect to Nationals of Cuba Coming to the United States to Play Organized Baseball" 1999) (Cwiertney 2000; Frankel 2005; Greller 1999; Schneider 2001; Solomon 2011). However, each of these proposals only seek

to generate loopholes that will create a legitimate process under the current system by which Cuban ballplayers can play in the United States, thereby eliminating the need for baseball defections. While the aims are noble, none of these plans address the fundamental issue of US-Cuban relations.

Given the present political situation, MLB and the leaders of each nation should have loftier ambitions, as each stands to benefit from improved diplomatic relations (Solomon 2011, 183-185). Cuba could gain a substantial economic trading partner in the United States and make significant strides towards resolving their economic woes as they move towards a new era in their nation's history. The United States could gain a new and potentially emerging market in Latin America, increase their prospects of bringing democracy to Cuba through increased interaction with the Cuban public, and win favor with Latin America as a whole—a region where the United States has historically struggled to maintain a positive reputation. Lastly, as MLB has sought to globalize their operations and have especially focused on Latin America in these attempts, they could gain a new Latin American market comprised of a nation full of baseball fanatics, as well as many MLB-caliber ballplayers. Rachel D. Solomon also contends that MLB can motivate baseball diplomacy efforts by removing restrictions instituted under Bowie Kuhn—particularly the Kuhn Directive—which were enacted as a way to prevent MLB from collaborating with the Cuban amateur league (Solomon 2011, 185-186).

While Solomon makes reasonable proposals, MLB Commissioner Bud Selig and his successor<sup>35</sup> could extend their objectives further by setting their sights on coordinating a baseball diplomacy series in collaboration with each nation's leaders. Already, Selig has

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<sup>35</sup> Selig announced that the 2014 MLB baseball season will be his last as commissioner.

exhibited a willingness to use baseball for this purpose, as exemplified by his approval of the 1999 exhibition games between the Baltimore Orioles and *Selección Cuba*. In order to succeed in these attempts, however, MLB should arrange for the contests to take place either between the two national squads or an equally symbolic pair of teams (i.e. New York Yankees and Industriales, the two most recognizable teams in each nation), plan an exhibition in each country, and announce the repeal of the Kuhn Directive. Most importantly, under the premise of bringing the system of Cuban baseball defection out of the shadows and thus boosting its humanitarian record, MLB should ensure that representatives from the United States and Cuban governments accompany the teams. Not only would the inclusion of government officials in these discussions allow MLB to find a more permanent solution to the issue of baseball defections and allow it to reap the other aforementioned benefits, but it would have the additional advantage of giving the US and Cuban governments a starting point for further cooperation.

At this point in US-Cuban relations—more than fifty years since the Revolution and start of strained bilateral relations—the need for back-channel negotiation between the two governments is no longer politically necessary. The Cold War has been over for more than two decades and the worldwide consensus is that a change in their relationship is long overdue. As a result, the United States and Cuba can begin expressing their desires for improved relations in a more explicit manner, especially given the benefits each stands to gain if their relations were mended. Taking into consideration the present circumstances in Cuban and American domestic and international politics, the figurative bases are loaded for a new era of cooperation between them. Using baseball diplomacy, and an understanding of its history, the United States and Cuba can commence the process of diplomatic

normalization on a field of a mutually beloved pastime, celebrating their cultural commonality while moving beyond their political differences.

## Conclusion

It is early November, but in Phoenix, the 80-degree weather accompanied by a light breeze is ideal for Arizona Fall League baseball. The crowd at Camelback Ranch Stadium is sparse and made up of mostly retirees and baseball scouts nearing retirement age, all of whom have come to watch a ballgame played by young men who are billed as “MLB’s future.” Along the left field foul line of this immaculately manicured baseball field, Henry Urrutia stretches alone in preparation for a game against the Glendale Desert Dogs. Just as he completes a few 90-foot sprints, the stadium public address announcer asks those in attendance to rise and remove their caps for the playing of the national anthem. Urrutia jogs to the foul line to join his Surprise Saguaros teammates and stands alongside a fellow Cuban baseball defector. They both know this routine well by now and stand with their arms casually placed behind their backs staring towards the American flag just beyond the wall in left-center field while a recorded orchestral version of “The Star Spangled Banner” plays.

As they stand there together listening to the anthem of their adopted country, one cannot help but reflect on the circumstances that brought them to this place and point. Certainly, we have a greater understanding of the experience that Urrutia underwent in order to reach professional baseball, including the central role that illegality played in it. We also know that his baseball defection experience, like many others, has been anything but a “rags to riches” story. He and his family continue to be burdened by the forced separation that baseball defection entails. Moreover, though the specific details of the second defector’s experience are unknown, we know that as a baseball defector he potentially experienced violations to his human rights in the form of unjust restrictions to his mobility, illegal detention, supervision of his communications, or perhaps even worse. Also, we are much

more familiar with the numerous legal and physical risks he had to first negotiate, and then assume in order to accomplish his defection.

Unfortunately, given the lack of insight into family experiences in Cuban baseball defection, our understanding of the upshots of baseball defection especially for those left behind in Cuba remains severely lacking. On this front, our charge is to seek more novel perspectives and to scrutinize these experiences in the manner of the Urrutia case study so that we can continually challenge our expectations and ultimately obtain a more nuanced and thorough understanding of these experiences.

Our present understanding of the individual and combined familial experiences of Cuban baseball defection also compels us to identify paths through which we may begin to renew US-Cuban relations and bring an end to the need for baseball defections. Given the current socio-political environment, as well as ability for sport to effect change, one way for us to fundamentally improve our relations with each other may be through baseball diplomacy. As such, we should strive to hold each party—the United States, Cuba, and MLB—responsible for their part in creating and maintaining the circumstances that encourage baseball defections and implore them to seek improved relations.

Ultimately, we cannot ignore the negative impact that strained US-Cuban relations has had not just on baseball defectors and their families, but on thousands of others with ties to either or both countries. As a result, I contend that we must recognize that the obstinate stance each nation has maintained for the past fifty years is a relic of the Cold War era that has long since been without sufficient justification and that we are all morally obligated to end its prolonged application in order to increase social justice.



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## Appendix 1: List of Known Cuban Baseball Defectors

Player	Defection	Notes	Cuban Team	AS of
1 Henry Abad		OF	Santiago de Cuba	February 1, 2010
2 Jose Abreu	August 2013	First Baseman - signed with the White Sox in October 2013 . Made MLB debut on March 31, 2014.	Cienfuegos	April 7, 2014
3 Michel Abreu	February 2004	First Baseman - signed with Mets. Currently with Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters of Nippon Professional Baseball	Matanzas	April 7, 2014
4 Pablo Miguel Abréu		Pitcher - in Italy	Industriales	February 1, 2010
5 Rubelman Acosta		Pitcher		July 6, 2001
6 Roidany Aguila		Catcher - currently with South Bend Silver Hawks (A Arizona)		April 10, 2012
7 Waltari Agusti		Pitcher		May 1, 2005
8 Ivan Alvarez		Pitcher	Industriales	July 6, 2001
9 Dariel Álvarez	2012	RF - Signed with the Baltimore Orioles in July 2013. Currently with Bowie Baysox (AA).	Camagüey	April 7, 2014
10 Roberto Alvarez	February 2005	Center Fielder - Signed with Braves. Played last with the Brockton Rox (Ind.)	Matanzas	July 24, 2008
11 Luis Alberto Alvarez			Mineros	July 6, 2001
12 Luis Alvarez Estrada			Industriales	April 10, 2012
13 Jesus Ametller	2B defected in November of 1996 through Mexico	Play with Double A Arkansas (Cardinals). Last played in the Italean League.	Industriales	July 24, 2008
14 Leslie Anderson	September 2009	First Baseman - Signed with Tampa Bay Rays. Currently with the Yomiuri Giants organization in Nippon Professional Baseball.	Camagüey	April 7, 2014
15 Noel Arguelles	July 2008 - from IBAF World Junior AAA in Edmonton, Canada	Pitcher - Signed with Kansas City Royals. Currently with Northwest Arkansas Naturals (AA).	Habana	April 7, 2014
16 Rene Arocha	Defects on July 4, 1991	Signed for \$15,000 with St. Louis in 1991 - Played for St. Louis 1993-95 - injured elbow in 1996 - Pitched in Mexico in 1999.	Industriales	August 13, 2002
17 Rigoberto Arrebató		P - Currently with Tampa Yankees (A-Adv)		April 10, 2012
18 Rolando Arrojo	Pitcher defected in 1996 just before the Atlanta Olympics	Signed for \$7 million by Tampa Bay and made 1998 All-Star game - Played Rockies then Red Sox in 2000 to 02.	Villa Clara	April 23, 2003
19 Erisbel Arruebarrena	November 2013	Shortstop - signed with the Dodgers to a 5 year contract worth a reported \$25 million.	Cienfuegos	April 7, 2014
20 Danys Baez	Pitcher defected at Pan Am Games in 1999	With Indians 2001-03, Tampa Bay 2004-05, Braves and Dodgers 2006, Orioles 2007 and 2009, and with Phillis 2010-11.		April 10, 2012
21 Yasiel Balaguert	Defected in 2010	Signed with Cubs for \$400 K.	Junior Natinal Team	April 10, 2012
22 Jose Ballester		With Indians 2001-03 and Tampa Bay 2004-05. Last with the Orioles organization.		July 6, 2001
23 Leugim Barroso		IF - Signed with Cubs	Industriales	April 10, 2012
24 Evel Bastida	December 2000	Last with Inland Empire 66ers (A), Mariners	Industriales	April 23, 2003
25 Yenier Bello	2013	Catcher - Signed a Minor League deal with Braves		April 7, 2014
26 Saidel Beltran	December 2003	Signed with Yankees. Last played with Sussex in the independent CANAM League		July 24, 2008
27 Edisbel Benitez	April 2004	Last with the Leones de Leon (Nicaragua 07-08).		July 24, 2008
28 Reinier Bermudez	Late 2005	Pitcher - Played with the Spokane Indians (A) in 2009.	Industriales	April 10, 2012
29 Rigoberto Betancourt		Pitcher	Occidentales	July 6, 2001
30 Yuniesky Betancourt	July 2003	Signed a 4 year \$2,826,000 contract with the Mariners. With Mariners in 2005-09, with Brewers 2011 and Royals 2008-10 and 2012	Villa Clara	April 10, 2012

31	Elieser Bonne		CF - Signed with Cubs. Currently with Daytona Cubs (A-Adv)		April 10, 2012
32	Smailly Borges	February 2005	Last with the DSL Cubs2 2009, Habana City Junior Daytona Cubs, 2010 and Peoria Team 2011.		April 10, 2012
33	Yasser Alberto Borges	February 2005			March 13, 2005
34	Francisley Bueno	June 2004	Signed with the Braves. Currently Omaha Storm Chasers(AAA)		April 10, 2012
35	Juan Carlos Bruzon	Outfielder gained political asylum in 1999	signed with Winnipeg of Northern League in March 2000		May 30, 2000
36	Yaniel Cabezas	November 2009	Catcher _ Currently with the Boise Hawks (A-Sh Cubs)	La Habana	November 2, 2009
37	Alexis Cabreja	Outfielder defected in 1992	signed with Texas Rangers but never made it past Single A.	Industriales	May 30, 2000
38	Eduardo Cajuso				July 6, 2001
39	Dimitri Camareno		Pitcher - with Western Oklahoma State College	Holguin	November 2, 2009
40	Barbaro Cañizares	February 2004	Signed with the Braves. Currently with the Guerreros de Oaxaca of Mexican League	Industriales	April 7, 2014
41	Jose Cano		INF - Last played with the El Paso Diablos of the Central League (Ind) in 2005		July 24, 2008
42	Leovet Cardoso	defected in 2007	Pitcher - Last played for the Everett Merchants of the Pacific International League (Ind)		July 24, 2008
43	Reinier Casanova		P - Currently with the Tampa Yankees (A-Adv)		April 10, 2012
44	Alexander Carreras		Picture - Signed with Diamondbacks for \$400 K. Currently with Visalia Rawhide (A-Adv)	Industriales	April 10, 2012
45	Francisco Casanueva		Pitcher		July 6, 2001
46	Gregorio Casares				July 6, 2001
47	William Castellanos	December 2009	Catcher	Metropolitanos	February 1, 2010
48	Alberto Castillo	Defected in Canada after the Junior Baseball Championships - 1993	Pitcher - with Orioles 2008- 10 and with Diamondbacks 2011 . Currently with the Lancaster Barnstormers.	Junior National Team	April 7, 2014
49	Carlos Castillo		Infielder - Last with the El Paso Diablos (Ind).		August 3, 2005
50	Osbek Castillo	July 2004	Pitcher - Last with the Mobile BayBears (Arizona) AA.		July 24, 2008
51	Rusney Castillo	December 2013	Center Fielder - Free Agent	Ciego de Avila	April 7, 2014
52	Amaury Cazañas	April 2005	Outfielder - Currently with the Rojos del Águila de Veracruz in the Mexican League.	Matanzas	April 7, 2014
53	Bienvenido Ceballos				July 6, 2001
54	Yoenis Cespedes	Summer of 2011	OF - Sign for \$36 million contract with the Oakland Athletics	Granma	April 7, 2014
55	Ramiro Chamizo	April 2004			March 13, 2005
56	Mario Miguel Chaoui	May 2000		Equipo Caribe	August 3, 2005
57	Aroldis Chapman	July 1st 2009 from World Port Tournament in Rotterdam	Pitcher - Signed with Reds. Currently Reds closer.	Holguin	April 7, 2014
58	Juan Chavez		Pitcher	Industriales	July 6, 2001
59	Joan Chaviano	April 2009	Catcher	Isla de la Juventud	November 2, 2009
60	Roberto Colina	1B defected in November of 1996 through Mexico	Last with in the Italian League.	Industriales	August 3, 2005
61	Gerardo Concepcion	June 2011	P - Signed with Cubs. Currently with the the Kane County Cougars of the Class A Midwest League.	Industriales	April 7, 2014
62	Jose Ariel Contreras	Defected on October 1, 2002 from the Americas Cup in Mexico	Signed with the Yankees for \$32 million for 4 years. Traded to the White Sox in 2004. Currently with the Toros de Tijuana of the Mexican League.	Pinar del Rio	April 7, 2014



63	Jose Angel Cordero	Left Cuba by boat October 2004	Pitcher - Last with the Grand Metropolitanos Prairie Air Hogs (Ind)		November 2, 2009
64	Lazaro Costa				July 6, 2001
65	Raidel Costa	April 2004			March 13, 2005
66	Arian Cruz	Flew to Costa Rica on a visa in 2002	A pitcher signed with the St. Paul Saints in June 2002. Last with the Chattanooga Lookouts (AA Reds).		August 3, 2005
67	Frank Del Valle		Pitcher - Currently with Daytona Cubs (A-Adv)		April 10, 2012
68	Odrisamer Despaigne	2013	Pitcher - nearing deal with Padres.	Industriales	April 7, 2014
69	Aledmys Díaz	2012	Signed a four-year contract with the St. Louis Cardinals worth \$8 million on March 9. Currently with Springfield Cardinals (AA).	Villa Clara	April 7, 2014
70	Alexander Diaz	April 2004			March 13, 2005
71	Juan Carlos Diaz	Dodgers get player out of Cuba by having a Dominican woman pose as his wife in June 1999	Played with Red Sox in 2002. Last with the Winnipeg Goldeyes (Ind).	Habana	April 7, 2014
72	Jorge Diaz	smuggled out of Cuba in August 1998	Second baseman - Last with the El Paso Diablos (Ind).	Villa Clara	August 3, 2005
73	Reynar Diaz	December 2003	Pitcher in Dominican Republic trying out		March 13, 2005
74	Ricardo Diaz		Pitcher		July 6, 2001
75	Yobal Dueñas	Left Cuba in Speed boat October 2003	Second Baseman. Signed with the Yankees. Last with the Tuneros de San Luis (AAA).	Pinar del Rio	June 1, 2006
76	Roman Duquesne				July 6, 2001
77	Roenis Elias	2010	P - Currently with Seattle Mariners.		April 7, 2014
78	Yunel Escobar	Left Cuba by boat October 2004	Infielder. Signed with the Braves and played 2007-09. Currently with the Blue Jays.	Industriales	April 7, 2014
79	Sergio Espinosa García	November 2008	Pitcher - Last with the Montgomery Biscuits (AA Rays)	Isla de la Juventud	April 10, 2012
80	Ricardo Estévez	November 2009	P - Last with DSL Cubs1	Camagüey	April 10, 2012
81	Osmani Estrada		Infielder drafted by Rangers in 1993 - reached AAA before being released - Last Played in Taiwan.		May 30, 2000
82	Leonardo Fariñas			Industriales	April 12, 2012
83	Jose Fernandez	2008	Pitcher - Currently with the Miami Marlins		April 7, 2014
84	Osmany Fernandez	Pitcher defected at junior tournament in Illinois in 1996	living in Dominican Republic.		May 30, 2000
85	Oswaldo Fernandez Guerra	Defected in Tennessee	Pitcher signed for \$3.2 million with San Francisco. Played for the Giants in 1996 -97 and Reds 2000-01. Last with the Tabasco Olmecas (Mexican AAA).	Ciudad Havana	June 1, 2006
86	Oswaldo Fernandez Rodriguez	Pitcher defected in Barbados	out of the game.		May 30, 2000
87	Rodolfo Hernandez	December 2009	RHP	Industriales	February 1, 2010
88	Alexis Fonseca	April 2004	Catcher		March 13, 2005
89	Luis Yadiel Fonseca	April 2009	Center Fielder	Isla de la Juventud	November 2, 2009
90	Walter Frias	December 2003	Shortstop in Dominican Republic trying out		March 13, 2005
91	Joel Galarraga		Catcher - Currently with the Sacramento River Cats (AAA)	Industriales	April 10, 2012
92	Rafael Galbizo	Left Cuba by boat October 2004	Pitcher. Signed with the Marlins. Last with the Jamestown Jammers (A).		July 24, 2008
93	Gary Galvez	Defected August 2002	Signed with the Red Sox. Last with the Sussex Skyhawks (Ind).	Junior National Team	November 2, 2009
94	Barbaro Garbey	Left Cuba through Mariel in 1980	Played with the Tigers 1984-85 and for Texas in 1988. Currently a Batting Coach for the Tennessee Smokies of the Southern League (AA).	Industriales	July 24, 2008

95	Adonis García	January 2011	OF - Signed with the Yankees on May 2, 2012 for \$400,000. Currently with the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders (AAA)	Ciego de Ávila	April 7, 2014
96	Angel Garcia		Pitcher		July 6, 2001
97	Onelki Garcia	Defected in 2010	P - Drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the third round of the 2012 MLB Draft. Currently with Dodgers.	Guantanamo	April 7, 2014
98	Osmani Garcia	Smuggled out of Cuba in August 1998	Third baseman Last with Rangers organization.		May 30, 2000
99	Alexei Gil	November 2008	Pitcher	Industriales	November 2, 2009
100	Yasser Gomez	December 2008	Outfielder - Played with Mississippi Braves (2010)	Industriales	April 10, 2012
101	Mario Gonzalez			Industriales	July 6, 2001
102	Miguel Alfredo González	2013	Pitcher - Signed Gonzalez to a 3-year, \$12 million contract with Phillies. Opened 2014 season on the 60-day DL.	La Habana	April 7, 2014
103	Yasmani Guerra	September 2008	Short Stop	Industriales	November 2, 2009
104	Alexander Guerrero	2013	SS - Signed with Dodgers for \$28 million over 4 years. Currently with Albuquerque Isotopes (AAA).	Las Tunas	April 7, 2014
105	Yamel Guevara	Left Cuba by boat October 2004	Pitcher - Currently with the Lancaster Barnstormers of the Atlantic League (Ind)	Industriales	July 24, 2008
106	Rolando Gum				July 6, 2001
107	Adeiny Hechavarria	Defected to Mexico in 2009	SS - signed \$10 million contract with the Toronto Blue Jays. With Toronto Blue Jays (2012) and Miami Marlins (2013-present).	Junior National team	April 7, 2014
108	Adrian Hernandez	Pitcher left Cuba on New Year's Day 2000 flying out of the Airport	Signed a \$4 million contract for Yankees. Made pitching debut in 2001. Last with the Vaqueros Laguna (Mexican AAA)	Industriales	June 1, 2006
109	Alain Hernandez	Pitcher smuggled out of Cuba in August 1998	unsigned.		May 30, 2000
110	Alberto Hernandez		Catcher played parts of two seasons in Taiwan and had tryout in Seattle system - living in Costa Rica.		May 30, 2000
111	Alexis Hernandez	Catcher gained political asylum in 1999	With Winnipeg of Northern League and the Yuma Scorpions (Ind). Last with the Leones de Leon (Nicaragua 07-08).		July 24, 2008
112	Livan Hernandez	Defected in Mexico	Pitcher was World Series MVP in 1997 - With Florida (1996-99), Giants (99-02), Montreal Expos/Washington Nationals (03-06 & 09-11), Arizona (06-07), Minnesota Twins (08), Mets (09), Braves and Brewers (12).	Isla de la Juventud	April 7, 2014
113	Luis Hernandez		Pitcher		July 6, 2001
114	Manuel Hernandez		Pitcher	Occidentales	July 6, 2001
115	Michel Hernandez	Catcher defected in 1996	Made his debut with Yankees on September 6, 2003. Currently a minor league catching coach with the New York Yankees organization.	Industriales	April 7, 2014
116	Orlando Hernandez	Defected in boat December 1997	With Yankees 1998 to 2002 and again 2004. With the White Sox in 2005-06 and traded to Mets in 2006. Last with the Oklahoma City RedHawks (AAA).	Industriales	November 2, 2009
117	Roman Hernandez		OF - Signed with Royals for \$550K. Currently with Wilmington Blue Rocks(A-Adv)	Matanzas	April 10, 2012
118	Vladmir Hernandez	Defected in 1999 in Mexico during Pan Am Games.	Signed by Mets and assigned to Brooklyn Cyclones. Last with Cancun Lobsterman.		April 23, 2003

119	Rigoberto Betancourt Herrera	Coach defected May 1999 in Baltimore when the Cuban national team was playing the the Baltimore Orioles			May 30, 2000
120	Yoslan Herrera	Arrived in Miami via boat on June 13, 2005	Pitcher - Made his debut with the Pirates on July 12, 2008 . Currently with Salt Lake Bees (AAA).	Pinar del Río	April 7, 2014
121	Dalier Hinojosa	February 2013	Pitcher - Signed with the Boston Red Sox in October 2013. Currently with the Pawtucket Red Sox (AAA).	Guantánamo	April 7, 2014
122	Manuel Hurtado		Pitcher	Industriales	May 30, 2000
123	Adalberto Ibarra	November 2009	Catcher - Currently with Salem Red Sox (A-Adv)	Camagüey	April 10, 2012
124	Yosandy Ibañez	February 2004	Pitcher - Last with the Fargo -Moorehead RedHawks (Ind).		November 2, 2009
125	Jose Iglesias	July 2008 - from IBAF World Junior AAA in Edmonton, Canada	Infielder - Sign with Red Sox . Made MLB debut in 2011. Currently with the Detroit Tigers.	Cuban Junior National Team	April 7, 2014
126	Raciel Iglesias	November 2013	Pitcher - Free Agent	Isla de la Juventud	April 7, 2014
127	Felix Isasi	Defected in Spain	OF - Currently playing for the F.C. Barcelona team in the Liga Nacional Beisbol (Spain).		November 2, 2009
128	Hansel Izquierdo	Defected at Miami Int'l Airport in 1993	Drafted by Marlins in 1995. He had his debut in 2002 with	Cuban Junior National Team	April 10, 2012
129	Maikel Jova	Defected in 1997	signed for \$150,000 by Blue Jays. Last with the Sussex Skyhawks (Ind)	Villa Clara	November 2, 2009
130	Ángel Leocadio Díaz			Industriales	April 10, 2012
131	Reinier León	October 2009	Center Fielder	Pinar del Río	November 2, 2009
132	Johan Limonta	Left Cuba by boat October 2004	Outfielder - Currently with the Tacoma Rainiers (AAA Seattle)	Industriales	April 10, 2012
133	Donell Linares	February 2005	Outfielder - Currently with the Vaqueros de la Laguna of Mexican League (AAA).	Industriales	April 10, 2012
134	Juan Carlos Linares	November 2009	Outfielder - Currently with Portland Sea Dogs (AA Red Sox )	La Habana	April 10, 2012
135	Serquey Linares	April 2004	Pitcher - Last with the Hickory Crawdads (A Pirates).		July 24, 2008
136	Omar Llapur	February 2005	1B - Last with the Leones de Leon (Nicaragua 07-08).	Industriales	July 24, 2008
137	Angel Lopez	Catcher smuggled out of Cuba in August 1998	Last with the Jupiter Hammerheads (A) Marlins	Villa Clara	April 23, 2003
138	Cesar Lopez		Pitcher - Currently with the GCL Pirates (R)		April 10, 2012
139	Elio Lopez				July 6, 2001
140	Omar Luis Rodriguez	2012	Pitcher - On June 20, 2012, the Yankees signed him to a bonus between \$4 and \$5 million.		April 7, 2014
141	Oscar Macias		Second Baseman - Last with the El Paso Diablos (Ind).	Industriales	August 3, 2005
142	Agustin Marquetti		Pitcher - was with Erie Seawolves and the El Paso Diablos (Ind).	Industriales	August 3, 2005
143	Yadel Marti	December 2008	Pitcher - Currently with Pericos de Puebla (AAA) of the Mexican League.	Industriales	April 7, 2014
144	Alejandro Martin				July 6, 2001
145	Leony Martin	2010 World University Games	OF - signed \$15.5 million contract with the Texas Rangers. Currently with Rangers.	Villa Clara	April 7, 2014
146	Carlos Martinez		P - Signed with Cubs for \$250 K	Industriales	April 10, 2012
147	Osmany Masso		SS - drafted by the Diamondbacks in 2006	Industriales	July 24, 2008
148	Yuniesky Maya	September 2009	Pitcher - Currently with Gwinnett Braves (AAA Braves)	Pinar del Río	April 7, 2014
149	Juan Medina		Pitcher still unsigned.		May 30, 2000



150	Rogelio Mediavilla				July 6, 2001
151	Joel Monzon Mejia	Pitcher defected in Spain	unsigned.		May 30, 2000
152	Carlos Mesa		OF - Currently with the State College Spikes (A-Sh Pirates )		April 10, 2012
153	Jose Mesa				July 6, 2001
154	Juan Miranda	February 2005	Outfielder - Last with Vaqueros de la Laguna (AAA Mexican).	Piñar del Rio	April 7, 2014
155	Neylan Molina	Fourth-leading hitter on Cuban national team recently defected to South America	awaiting residency.		May 30, 2000
156	Andy Morales	March 2001	signed a \$4.5 million contract with the Yankees which was later nullified. Signed a Minor league contract with the Red Sox in February 2002. Last with Trenton Thunder of the Eastern League.	La Habana	April 7, 2014
157	Kendry Morales	June 7, 2004 via boat to Miami	Signed with Angels. With Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim (2006-2010, 2012) and Seattle Mariners (2013). Currently a Free Agent.	Industriales	April 7, 2014
158	Juan Carlos Moreno	June 2008	SS - Currently training in the Dominican Republic	Isla de la Juventud	July 24, 2008
159	Yadil Mujica	July 2009	Short Stop - Last with Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Yankees (AAA) in 2012.	Matanzas	April 7, 2014
160	Juan Carlos Muñiz		Signed with Marlins. Currently playing in Japan for the Chiba Lotte Mariners.		November 2, 2009
161	Ronnier Mustelier	September 2009	Second Baseman - Currently with Trenton Thunder (AA Yankees)	Santiago de Cuba	April 10, 2012
162	Yoannis Negrin	November 2009	Pitcher - Currently with Olmecas de Tabasco (AAA Mexican)	Matanzas	April 10, 2012
163	Maikel Neninger	February 2004	Last with Leones de Leon (2007)		March 13, 2005
164	Roberto Noriega	Defected in Spain	P - Currently playing for the El Llano Beisbol Club in the Liga Nacional Beisbol (Spain).		November 2, 2009
165	Vladimir Nuñez	Pitcher signed for \$1.8 million with Arizona after defecting in Venezuela in 1995	With Arizona 1998-99, with Marlins 1999-2003, Colorado in 2004 and Braves 2008-09.	Industriales	April 10, 2012
166	Osbiel Oiz	April 2004			March 13, 2005
167	Edilberto Oropesa	Defected in Buffalo in 1993	He had his debut in 2001 with the Phillies. With Arizona in 2002-03 and Padres in 2004. Currently coaching High school baseball.	Citriculotores	July 24, 2008
168	Rey Ordoñez	Shortstop defected in 1993 in Buffalo	With Mets 1996-2002, Tampa Bay in 2003 and Cubs in 2004. Currently out of baseball.	Industriales	June 1, 2006
169	Reinier Orozco	Sometime in 2009	Catcher	Metropolitanos	February 1, 2010
170	Rafael Ortega				July 6, 2001
171	William Ortega	Outfielder defected in November of 1996 through Mexico	Outfielder signed \$200,000 bonus in '97 - He had his debut in 2001 with the Cardinals. Currently out of baseball.	Industriales	June 1, 2006
172	Ayalen Ortiz	February 2005	Outfielder		March 13, 2005
173	Jorge Padrón	October 2009	Outfielder - with Red Sox Organization 2010-11.	Pinar del Rio	April 10, 2012
174	Rolando Pastor		Pitcher	Industriales	July 6, 2001
175	Andy Paz		Catcher - Currently with the DSL Athletics (R)		April 10, 2012



176	Brayan Peña	May 1999 in Venezuela	Catcher signed \$1.25 million bonus with Braves at age 18. Made ML debut in 2005. With Braves 2005-08 and Royals 2009-12. Detroit Tigers (13) and Cincinnati Reds (14-present).	Cuban Junior National Team	April 7, 2014
177	Hassan Peña		Pitcher - Currently with the Northwest Arkansas Naturals	Industriales	April 7, 2014
178	Maikel Peña	October 2007	Outfielder	Holguín	November 2, 2009
179	Félix Pérez	June 2008	OF - Currently with Louisville Bats (AAA Reds).	Isla de la Juventud	April 10, 2012
180	Joel Perez	Left Cuba by boat October 2004	Outfielder. Last with the GLC Yankees (R).		June 1, 2006
181	Josue Perez		Outfielder signed \$850,000 bonus with Philadelphia after being declared free agent. Last with AZL Rangers (R).		June 1, 2006
182	Miguel Perez		Pitcher. Reached up to the Norfolk Tides (AAA Mets). Last with the Tigres Del Chinandega (Nicaragua 07-08)		July 24, 2008
183	Nestor Perez		Last played in Spain (2009)		November 2, 2009
184	Omar Perez				July 6, 2001
185	Yohannis Perez		SS - Last with the Huntsville Stars (AA).	Matanzas	November 2, 2009
186	Yordanis Pérez	December 2009	OF - Currently with the Pensacola Blue Wahoos (AA Reds)	Ciego de Ávila	April 10, 2012
187	William Plaza	From Cuban national Junior team in Edmonton , Alberta, Canada in August 2001	Catcher. Currently with the Tlantic City Surf of the CANAM League (Ind).	Junior Team	July 24, 2008
188	Pablo Pozo				July 6, 2001
189	Yem Prades	To the Dominican Republic in 2008	OF - Currently with the Northwest Arkansas Naturals (AA Royals)		April 10, 2012
190	Jose Prado		Pitcher		July 6, 2001
191	Ariel Prieto	Came to US in 1994 on a visa	\$1.2 million signing bonus in 1995 with A's. With A's 1995-2000 and with Tampa Bay in 2001. Spent time in the Pirates and Tigers organizations. Last with the Caribes de Oriente (Venezualan Winter League 07-08).	Isla de la Juventud	July 24, 2008
192	Yasiel Puig	2012	OF - Signed seven-year deal worth \$42 million with Dodgers. Currently with Dodgers.	Cienfuegos	April 7, 2014
193	Mayque Quintero	December 2000	Pitcher. Last with the St. Lucia Mets (A-Adv).	Industriales	June 1, 2006
194	Rodney Quintero		P - Currently with the Greeneville Astros (R)		April 10, 2012
195	Alexei Ramirez	Defected to the Dominican Republic in September 2007	Signed with the White Sox and made team out of spring training. Currently with White Sox.	Pinar del Rio	April 7, 2012
196	Roberto Carlos Ramírez	2011	Shortstop		April 7, 2014
197	Yolexandry Reina	From Cuban national Junior team in Edmonton , Alberta, Canada in August 2001	With Toronto Maple Leafs	Junior Team	August 3, 2005
198	Nataniel Reinoso		Outfielder signed for \$87,000 in 1999 - just sent down from Double A to Single - batting .214 at Myrtle Beach (Braves).		May 30, 2000
199	David Remedios		C - Signed with Yankees	Industriales	April 10, 2012
200	Mayke Reyes		Center Fielder Last with the DSL Cubs1 (R)		April 10, 2012
201	Armando Rivero		Pitcher - Trying out in DR		November 7, 2011
202	Jorge Rivero		SS - Currently with the GCL Mets (R)		April 10, 2012

203	Dunieski Rodriguez Flores		Pitcher - Signed with Braves for a bonus of \$100,000. last played with Indios del Boer (Nicaragua).		July 24, 2008
204	Eduardo Rodriguez		Pitcher - Last with El Paso Diablos (Ind)	Metros	November 2, 2009
205	Kenny Rodriguez	Defected July 2006 in Ecuador	Pitcher - Last with the Dunedin Blue Jays (A-Adv).	Habana	April 10, 2012
206	Larry Rodriguez	Pitcher signed for \$1.2 million with Diamondbacks after defecting in 1995	released last year after developing arm troubles.		May 30, 2000
207	Maels Rodriguez	Left Cuba in Speed boat October 2003	Pitcher. Last with Missoula Ospreys (R Diamondbacks).	Sancti Spiritus	June 1, 2006
208	Ryde Rodriguez	left Cuba legally to join his mother in Argentina	OF - Last with the Palm Beach Cardinals (A-Adv).		April 10, 2012
209	Reinier Roibal	October 2009	Pitcher - Currently with the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes (A-Sh Giants)	Santiago de Cuba	November 2, 2009
210	Euclides Rojas	Defected on a raft in 1994	the all-time saves leader in Cuba - he played in minors - was bullpen coach with Red Sox.		August 3, 2005
211	Julio Rojo		Pitcher	Habana	July 6, 2001
212	Reinier Roll	March 2009	Pitcher	Industriales	April 9, 2009
213	Jose Julio Ruiz	March 2009	Infielder - Last with Round Rock Express (AAA Rangers)	Santiago de Cuba	April 10, 2012
214	Roberto Sabates	Defected late 2005 or early 2006	Catcher - Last with the Rockford RiverHawks (Ind).	Industriales	November 2, 2009
215	Roberto Salazar				July 6, 2001
216	Alex Sanchez	Defected in 1994	Drafted by Tampa bay in 1996. With the Brewers in 2001-03, Tigers 2003-04, and Tampa Bay and San Francisco in 2005		November 2, 2009
217	Gerald Sanchez		Outfielder - Trying out in DR		November 7, 2011
218	Raydel Sánchez	July 2008 - from IBAF World Junior AAA in Edmonton, Canada	Pitcher - Currently with the Ogden Raptors (R Dodgers)	Cuban Junior National Team	April 10, 2012
219	Yunesky Sanchez		SS - Last with the Altoona Curve (AA Pirates)		April 10, 2012
220	Amaury Sanit	February 2004	Pitcher - Played for Yankees in 2011. Currently with Tigres de Quintana Roo of the Mexican League.		April 7, 2014
221	Osmany Santana		St. Paul (ind.)		August 13, 2002
222	Americo Santiesteban				July 6, 2001
223	Francisco Santiesteban	Catcher defected in Colombia in 1997	signed minor-league contract with Mariners in 1998 and was released before last season.		May 30, 2000
224	Yennier Sardinias	April 2004			March 13, 2005
225	Juan Serrano		Pitcher - Last with the Daytona Cubs (A-Adv)		April 10, 2012
226	Yalian Serrano	Catcher defected at age 15 in 1996	released by Devil Rays in 1999.		May 30, 2000
227	Rubi Silva		Outfielder - Currently with Daytona Cubs.	Habana	April 10, 2012
228	Misael Siverio	2013	Pitcher	Villa Clara	April 7, 2014
229	Alay (Alain) Soler	December 2003	Signed with Mets. Debut with Mets on May 24, 2006. Last with the Long Island Ducks (Atlantic League Ind).	Pinar del Río	April 7, 2014
230	Jorge Soler	2011	OF - Signed a nine-year \$30 million contract with the Chicago Cubs. Currently with the Tennessee Smokies (AA).		April 7, 2014
231	Israel Soto	April 2009	Pitcher	Isla de la Juventud	November 2, 2009
232	Julio Soto				July 6, 2001
233	Roberto Sotolongo	December 2003	Signed with Cubs. Last with the Peoria Chiefs.		June 1, 2006
234	Deynis Suarez	March 2009	Pitcher - Last with Rochester Red Wings (AAA Twins).	Industriales	April 10, 2012
235	Yaibel Tamayo Martínez	December 2009	Third Baseman	Ciego de Ávila	February 1, 2010

236	Michael Tejera	Defected at Miami Int'l Airport in 1993	Drafted by Marlins in 1995. With the Marlins 1999-2004 and with Texas 2004-05.	Cuban Junior National Team	April 10, 2012
237	Jose Carlos Thompson		2B - Currently with Corpus Christi Hooks (AA Astros).		April 10, 2012
238	Jorge Luis Toca	Smuggled out of Cuba in August 1998	Outfielder signed \$1.4 million with bonus in 1998 - With Mets in 1999-2001. Currently out of baseball.	Villa Clara	June 1, 2006
239	Maikel Torres	March 2009	Pitcher	Metropolitanos	April 9, 2009
240	Yusdel Tuero		Pitcher - Last with the AZL Cubs (R 2007)		July 24, 2008
241	Yoankis Turino	Defected to Los Angeles From the Dominican Republic	Pitcher - Last played with the Long Beach Armada of the Golden Baseball League		July 6, 2006
242	Alfredo Unzué Reina	December 2009	OF	Ciego de Ávila	February 1, 2010
243	Miguel Urra				July 6, 2001
244	Henry Urrutia	September 2011	Outfielder - Signed with the Baltimore Orioles, receiving a \$778,500 signing bonus. MLB debut on July 20, 2013 for the Baltimore Orioles. Currently with the Norfolk Tides (AAA).	Las Tunas	April 7, 2014
245	Bernardo Utset				July 6, 2001
246	Rafael Valdéz		Second Baseman - Last with the Daytona Cubs (A-Adv)	Pinar del Rio	April 10, 2012
247	Raul Valdes	December 2003	Signed with Cubs in 2005. Made MLB debut in 2010 with Mets. With Cardinals and Yankees in 2011. Currently with Oklahoma City RedHawks (AAA Houston)		April 10, 2012
248	Ramon Valdivia	Shortstop defected after Olympics in 1996	never signed a major league contract.		May 30, 2000
249	Ernesto Verrier		P - Last with DSL Braves (R)		April 10, 2012
250	Dayan Viciedo	Left Cuba May 2008	3B - Signed with White Sox - Made debut in 2010.	Villa Clara	April 7, 2014
251	Rolando Viera	Left Cuba with Visa in April 2001	Drafted by the Red Sox. Currently with the Brockton Rox (Ind)	Industriales	June 1, 2006
252	Julio Cesar Villalon		Pitcher had brief stay in Tampa Bay and Reds organizations. Last with the Leones de Leon (Nicaragua 07-08)		July 24, 2008
253	Omar Yapur			Industriales	April 10, 2012
254	Juan Yasser	March 2009	Pitcher	Villa Clara	April 9, 2009
255	Alejandro Zuaznabar	Defected to Venezuela 2004	Signed with the Mets in Jan. 2005. Last with Kingsport Mets	Metropolitanos	June 1, 2006

Credits: The Miami Herald, The Boston Globe, Diario de las Americas and Joe Kehoskie.

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

### Negotiation of decision to defect:

- What was life in Cuba like & what was life expected to be like in U.S. (hopes)?
- Who consulted (incl. prior defectors, individuals in U.S.)?
- What was considered (safety, will others follow to U.S., same decision w/o baseball)? What were the decisions about each consideration? Who decided?
- When & how defection occurred (logistics & feelings)?
- Were there any difficulties or obstacles in gaining entry to US or other countries?

### Life as a defector/results of defection (Cuba):

- Who was left behind in Cuba and who is in U.S. now?
- With whom do you remain in contact?
- Any difficulties with communication?
- What's going on in Cuba w/family (incl. changes in life, community opinion)?
- Government intervention in life (questioning, monitoring, seizure of property, benefits, work)?
- Travel issues (their return to Cuba, family's ability to move freely)?

### Life as a defector (U.S.):

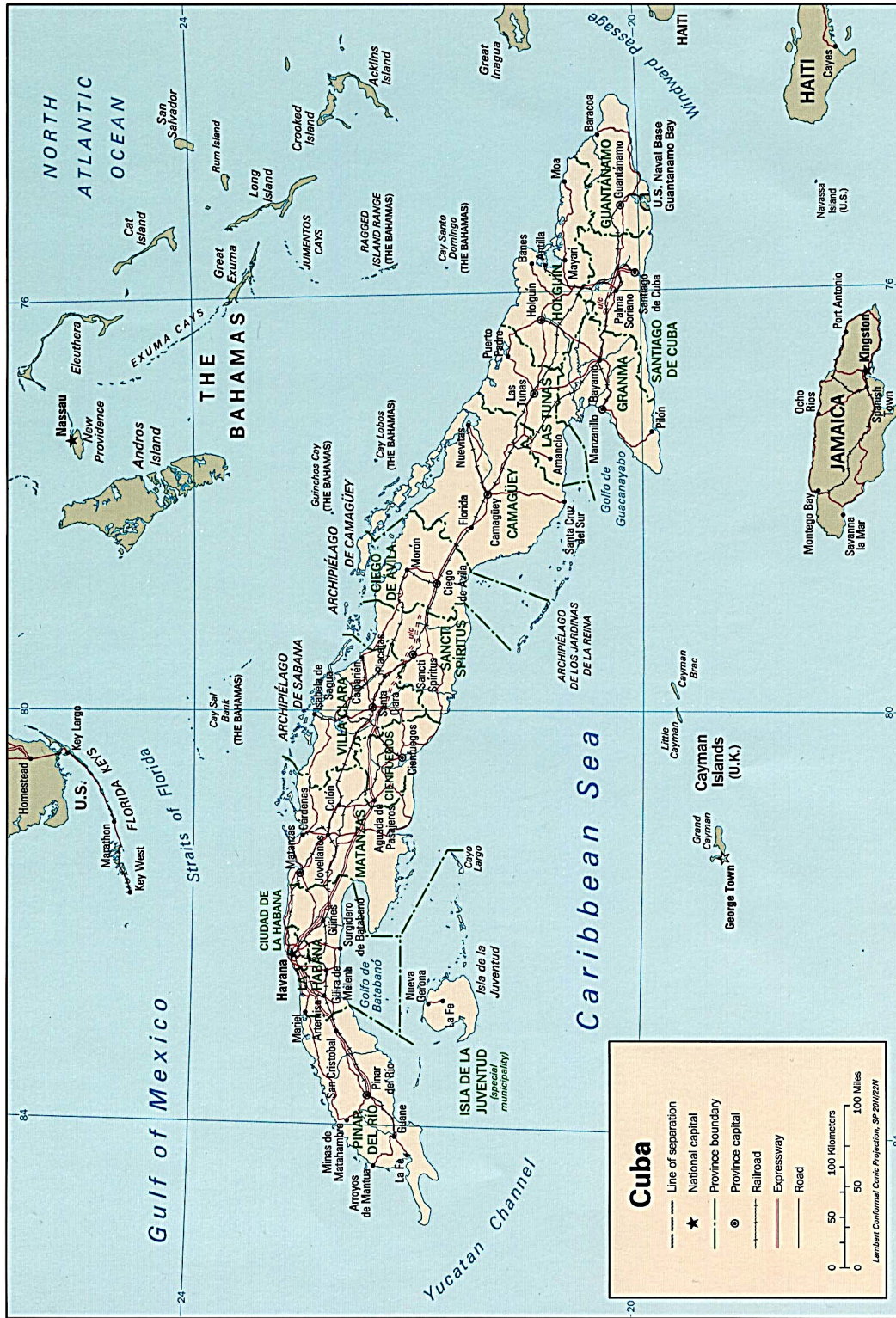
- How is life now?
- Expectations of life vs. reality?
- Who has helped adjustment to life here (former defectors, other Cubans, family)?
- Hope for future (for self and family)?

### Opinion of defector issue as a whole:

- Current state of Cuban baseball?
- How are defectors regarded in Cuba?
- What would you like to see happen in the future with this situation? Baseball diplomacy?



Appendix 3: Map of Cuba



Source: Cuba (Political), 1994, University of Texas Libraries

Appendix 4: Map of Central America and The Caribbean



Source: Political Map of Central America and The Caribbean, GeographicGuide.net