

## Introduction

Dominican baseball has changed so much over the past twenty-five years that it is hardly recognizable. In the baseball world I first encountered in 1987, when I began my fieldwork, the sport had essentially been ignored—one could argue, “spared”—by Major League Baseball (MLB) for a half-century. Garnering no special interest (MLB was busy in Cuba, and before that, it was racially segregated), baseball in the Dominican Republic (DR) had barely any neocolonial disruption to contend with. Instead, it enjoyed ample cultural breathing room. Even into the 1980s, only a handful of teams thought enough of Dominican baseball to have a full-time scout in DR.

By 2000, however, the relationship between Dominican baseball and MLB had evolved into something neither party could have imagined. Dominicans were a regular feature in every major league clubhouse and were winning every baseball award. The game came to rely on a steady infusion of Dominican talent. With this, the relationship between MLB and Dominican baseball morphed into a distinct and unstable system of player development different from anything either had ever known. The genie had been let out of the bottle, and it looked, at different times, like Pedro Martínez, Sammy Sosa, Manny Ramírez, and any number of others. Back in the DR, thousands of youngsters redoubled their already extravagant efforts to clamber aboard the MLB wagon. How had the relationship changed each party? And how had the relationship itself changed?

In its first century (1890–1990), baseball in the Dominican Republic had been ignored or dismissed by Major League Baseball but not by other baseball-rich circum-Caribbean environments. Dominicans were regularly playing against teams from Cuba, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico, as well as U.S. Negro Leaguers, busily crafting a distinctive playing style, a pantheon of heroes, and mythic dramas. The baseball being played in Dominican cities of the 1920s, at the sugar refineries of the 1940s, and in the makeshift fields at all times was woven into a tapestry of sound, aroma, music, and emotion derived from daily rhythms of Dominican social life. Sporting rivalries as intense as those found anywhere were followed by whole communities; the games themselves became mass social rites replete with folklore. It did not matter whether the games were between small refineries or professional rivals in the capital. Local heroes, little known outside the DR, became heroes as folks in the smallest towns retold their feats. Early on, Dominican baseball was the game of Enrique “El Indio Bravo” Hernández and Tetelo Vargas; later, it was the game of Felipe Alou and Juan Marichal; and later still, it was the game of Tony Fernández, and Sammy Sosa, followed by Albert Pujols and Robinson Canó. Anonymous youngsters always watch and follow.

Baseball in today’s Dominican Republic has to be characterized as a subsidiary of Major League Baseball and as a growing Dominican industry. Just about all aspects of the sport as it now exists on the island are directed toward the production of players for MLB: amateur and professional play, micro-enterprise and major facilities alike. The MLB Commissioner of Baseball has only one office outside of the United States, and it is in Santo Domingo. But while MLB structurally has become part of the woof and warp of Dominican baseball, Dominicans have emerged and entered the game at all levels of the industry as a potential harbinger of Dominican presence—their drive to do more than just supply talent. This new system is the outcome of the consensus and conflict between North America’s and the Dominican Republic’s notions of who should control the sport and for what end. Major league teams occupy state-of-the-art academies dotting the Dominican landscape that rival the baseball facilities of any minor league team in North America. These academies oversee all facets of player production. And the size of the revenue stream that flows into the Dominican economy (conservatively some \$75 million–\$80 million annually) is not lost on anyone either.

At the same time, within the Dominican baseball community one now finds a growing sense of pride and entitlement—people who want a more equitable partnership than MLB has offered. They are more than up for pushing their agenda. A Dominican has served as the general manager of an

MLB franchise; Dominicans have financed and built baseball academies and are now landlords to major league teams; and a score of young Dominican administrators who hold positions with major league teams could, if given an opportunity, run any enterprise in the game, including the Commissioner's Office itself. Perhaps, most importantly, Dominicans have gained control of the flow of talent that eventually forms the core of players on which MLB relies—against the wishes of MLB.

This book describes and examines the new system as informed by local culture, transnational links, and global forces. In this chapter, I set the table, so to speak, by laying out the context for and telescoping the study. The place settings at this table are as much about ideas and models (e.g., the informal economy and global commodity chains) as they are about the ethnographic details revealed through years of study, interviews, and observations.

### Global-Local Confluence

A globalized world is all about understanding quickened connections among disparate people, ideas, places, and things that have reached the point of straining conventional boundaries while pointing to new formations. Understanding Dominican baseball is no different, and grasping the Dominican game through its links to Major League Baseball enables us to gain a sense of what a dynamic and seamless transnational system it has become. The symbiotic nature of this evolving relationship has benefited both partners. North America's game has continued to remain healthy, while Dominican baseball has emerged as a major domestic industry, rivaling agriculture.

Oddly enough, this dramatic expansion is the outcome as much of serendipity as of design. Sociologist Robert Merton's sense of *unintended consequences* is particularly well-suited to not only understanding the trajectory of events over the past two decades but also framing the widely disparate interpretations of what is going on in the DR.<sup>1</sup> In MLB circles, a perception has been created of Dominican baseball as an incoherent mélange of maladaptive practices. The media regularly report about a "Wild West" environment surrounding the signing of players and include exposés of players who are dying from the use of animal steroids or committing identity fraud. Such reportage provides both explanations of and a rationale for MLB's intrusion into the DR and fuels outcries from the U.S. and Canadian public to protect innocent young Dominican players from becoming victims of unscrupulous compatriots.

Dominicans hold a very different—even contrary—view. They see an MLB-driven world that gives them very few formal opportunities to gain

entry and one that fails to consider the manner in which Dominican life makes it almost impossible to comply and succeed at the same time. The practices seen as legally and morally corrupt in the United States are regarded by Dominicans as essential—at times, laudatory—within a world they at once respond to and seek to circumvent. The old colonial Latin American maxim “*Obedezco pero no cumpro*” (I obey but do not comply) serves to underscore this very contemporary Dominican response to MLB’s presence in their midst.<sup>2</sup> Understanding baseball in the Dominican Republic as both fractured and still coherently part of a global system is the primary aim of this book.

At the most general level, one needs to be mindful of the role that modern neoliberal economics plays in Dominican events. The anthropologist Steven Gregory’s ethnography of tourism and globalization in the Dominican city of Boca Chica illuminates these connections. While visiting the shuttered sugar refinery of Boca Chica, Gregory was told that it was being left to die. “Ingenio Boca Chica and other government-owned sugar mills had been recently ‘capitalized,’ that is, leased to private corporations, which were expected to invest in them and enhance their profitability,” he writes. “As yet, the factory’s new operator—a Mexican multinational corporation—had not begun the renovations needed. . . . As a result some three thousand workers had lost their jobs. Once a bustling, albeit poor sugar settlement, or *batey*, Andres was now a community without an economy.”<sup>3</sup> Neoliberal economic policies had destabilized the local economy, forcing more and more people to seek a living—in this instance, on the periphery of the nearby tourist trade. Because they exist on the margins of that economic sector, with no opportunities to gain formal entry, their futures remain in doubt and their legitimacy as genuine citizens of the state is further weakened. The global-local links are as undeniable as they are tragic.

In a very real sense, Dominican baseball is susceptible to the same forces. The former Cincinnati Reds pitcher José Rijo’s sense of the links between neoliberal economic flows and baseball in his town echoes Gregory’s assessment. Defending the lengths to which Dominican players will go to gain a foothold in North American baseball, which includes identity fraud, he pointed out, “We used to have [a factory] with 5,000 jobs. It’s gone. We used to have the gun company. Gone. Duty-free. Gone. We used to have a hotel in this town [San Cristóbal]. We don’t have one anymore. We used to have three movie theaters. We don’t have movies anymore. All the job opportunities here are gone. What’s people going to do? Be honest? And get a job where?”<sup>4</sup> The Dominican player developer Astín Jacobo said essentially the same thing when he lamented the loss of jobs in his city, San Pedro de Macorís: “Look,

there's no more *ingenios*. When the *ingenios* left, we lost a large working population. Right now, all we have is baseball with a large number of people making a living from it.”<sup>5</sup> These comments point to how North American baseball interests simultaneously align and malign—that is, they align with neoliberalism and malign Dominican society. It was this link among Dominican economic travails, internationalizing forces, and baseball that prompted the title of my first book on Dominican baseball, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream*.<sup>6</sup> In the ensuing years, those links not only have grown stronger; they also have driven the transformation of the relationship between MLB and Dominicans.

The booming industry that Dominican baseball has become is built on the production of baseball players. The sense of “new pride” Dominicans feel refers to the American acknowledgment and the Dominican exaltation associated with the remarkable numbers of players the tiny country supplies to Major League Baseball. In the 2010 season, the Dominican Republic—a country of 10 million—had 139 players in the major leagues. In that year, the United States—a country with more than 300 million people—had 982 players. These numbers indicate that, per capita, Dominicans are 4.3 times as likely to make it to the major leagues as Americans. The number of Dominicans in the U.S. minor leagues is even more impressive: It is now estimated that Dominicans make up anywhere from 25 percent to 49 percent (depending on how they are counted) of all minor league players.<sup>7</sup>

Being understood simply as Dominicans supplying labor to an industry, however, should dampen their pride. Defining success in terms of a neoliberal commodity chain wherein Dominicans supply either partially or wholly assembled ballplayers to Major League Baseball merely continues a century of Americans’ extracting Dominican resources cheaply for profit elsewhere. It also misses important new developments.

Less flashy, and hence not as visible, has been the mosaic of Dominicans moving up the baseball commodity chain into positions of responsibility and power—a development that, while still small, has begun the process of reconfiguring relations with MLB. Some of these emerging relations have been consciously fashioned, while others are unintended consequences of a system in flux. Dynamism often comes with tumult, with contestation, and Dominicans have fought with MLB for access to the chain. This book describes the most important of these changes. They include high-profile advances in which Dominicans have risen to key administrative positions in the sport—most notably, Omar Minaya’s becoming the first Dominican general manager of a major league team. Other changes are less obvious but even more important. They involve the emergence of Dominicans in key

positions farther down the chain. Most significant of these is the rise of a sector of Dominican independent trainers (also known as player developers or *buscones*), who are responsible for producing the youngest ranks of players. Together with entrepreneurs and power brokers such as Junior Noboa (see Chapter 5), Dominicans no longer provide just a talent base; they are vying with MLB to work as equals in the industry. At best, MLB has been lukewarm about this prospect.

Changes in Dominican baseball include much subtler shifts, such as in how talent flows up and down the chain of player development and how players feed back into baseball-related activities after their careers. For instance, the widely known one-way flow of Dominican talent from the DR to the United States has begun to change. Dominican trainers, so successful at finding Dominican youth and developing them as players, are now being sought out by an international clientele. Consider the case of Javier (a pseudonym), who was born and raised in the heavily Dominican Washington Heights area of New York City and who opted to repatriate to the DR after failing to garner any interest in the MLB's annual draft. There he entered one of the many programs run by Dominican trainers for Dominicans. Or consider the efforts being made by Dominican player developers to sign their players with countries other than the United States. All of this is part of an emerging seamlessness associated with the transnational process that has come to define Dominican baseball.<sup>8</sup>

### **Twin Conditions Driving Dominican Baseball**

Understanding Dominican life in general, and baseball in particular, includes a number of key realizations, but two stand above the others. First, foreign presence on the island—particularly, the presence of the United States—has always been of a boot-to-the-throat nature. Following this, as both precondition and consequence, is the chronic realization that for the vast majority of Dominicans, life is truly hard, and survival hinges on the ability to move deftly and creatively in and around institutions. If these sound like harsh or overly simple pronouncements, one need only peruse Dominican history and observe Dominican society to sense how these twin realities have resonated in all sectors, baseball included. The majestic swing of a bat or the grace of an infielder can find links to acts of guile and desperation one sees on city streets in San Pedro de Macorís or the oft-resented imprint of corporations, the U.S. military, or the U.S. State Department on the soul of Santo Domingo.

For Dominicans, the passion and beauty associated with baseball simultaneously represents the steel hand inside the velvet glove and a well-trodden

path out of poverty. But while these tendencies form a compass that reveals the magnetic and political North of the transnational baseball world, they do not completely define the topography of the game in the DR. As indicated, that terrain has been shifting in the more than two decades since *Sugarball* first appeared, but the direction events are taking remains far from clear. As far as MLB is concerned, the Dominican game has matured from an afterthought into a rich player-producing industry that helps alleviate a chronic player shortage occurring in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Thus, haphazard recruiting of players has metamorphosed into an established commodity chain that begins in Dominican communities, moves into U.S. cities, and ends up back home. Dominicans take genuine pride in this, particularly because baseball is the only area of Dominican-U.S. relations in which they can feel on par with Americans.

However, MLB has continued a burnished tradition—or, more accurately, an old prejudice—in which foreign interests have entered the country as conquerors or colonists in search of resources, demanding authority and subservience. Consider that the DR government agency charged with defending Dominican players in their dealings with MLB has never been able to stand up for those who have been victimized by MLB's policies and operatives. Dominican Commissioner of Professional Baseball Luis Rosario has lamented, "This office should be able to defend cases like this, but . . . [MLB is] a monopoly, and it's their monopoly. They're the ones who govern the business and make the rules of the game. People take advantage of poverty."<sup>10</sup> Rosario is referring not only to the manner in which MLB historically has operated in the DR but also to Dominicans' ignorance of how MLB's operatives work, their resulting compliance, and the government's inability to alter the conditions of this relationship.

### *Resented Foreign Presence*

Dominican baseball institutions, such as Dominican Baseball Commissioner Rosario's Office, have long been seen as nothing more than a rubber-stamping institution for MLB, but this is only the latest example in a long history of Dominican-U.S. relations. In 1869, Dominican President Buenaventura Báez lobbied the U.S. Congress to officially annex the Dominican Republic. He had the support of U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant but narrowly lost in a congressional vote. Relations with the United States have resulted in virtually complete dominance over the Dominican economy and politics, prompting at least one scholar to conclude that the Dominican Republic is "the most unsovereign sovereign country in the world."<sup>11</sup>

In 1904, the United States drew up the “Roosevelt Corollary” (an addendum to the Monroe Doctrine of the previous century), a list of Caribbean countries that would be shielded from potential European threat. If needed, U.S. Marines would be dispatched immediately to “protect” these nations, thus ushering in America’s most imperialist phase. The Marines actually did occupy the Dominican Republic twice. The first time, for eight years (1916–1924), they ran all of the DR’s major institutions in an effort to stabilize what Americans interpreted as chaotic political and economic systems that made the country vulnerable to European intervention. The second time (1965–1966), they occupied the DR again to “stabilize” a government that the U.S. decided was unstable (this time, the freely elected government of Juan Bosch, which had strong populist programs and friendly relations with Cuba). These occupations had lasting effects on the nation and on the Dominican soul. Thirty years later, a Dominican friend of mine pointed to a hotel window that he proudly remembered driving by and shooting at during the 1965–1966 occupation.

### *Life Is Hard; Baseball Is Easy*

World Bank data indicate that through the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Dominican poverty rate was higher than 50 percent, with poverty defined as living on \$1.25 or less a day. That comes to more than 5 million Dominican men, women, and children having difficulty finding food to eat.<sup>12</sup> If they were given an additional 50 cents a day, that number would certainly be lower. But is it any more acceptable to have 4.5 million people struggling to survive than 5 million?

The case of Alfonzo (a pseudonym) illustrates these conditions—and a reason that so many people in the DR consider baseball a lifeline. Alfonzo was a prize prospect working with Astín Jacobo, one of the country’s most successful buscones and was on the verge of being signed by a major league team. Jacobo said:

His mother gave him away when he was three days old. He doesn’t know who his dad is. . . . [He was] left with his grandmother, who would come and go, leaving him alone. . . . The kid went to school for the first time when he was about nine. He said that ever since he could remember, he was working—cleaning backyards and things. When he was eight, he was put to work in a bicycle shop. During baseball season, he would sell water and oranges at the fields. When he came to my program, all he had was a pair of shorts and two T-shirts [and]



a towel that looked like someone had cleaned the floor a thousand times with it. When he came to my *pensión* [dormitory], he watched TV with the other players, and when we turned it off so they'd go to bed, he went to sleep on the floor. . . . [H]e was used to sleeping like that all his life.<sup>13</sup>

Dominican humor, though dark, both highlights and dampens this kind of pain, as related by the former Cincinnati Reds pitcher Mario Soto: "An American boy grows up eating hamburgers, but in our country there is a saying: 'When you come home hungry and there is no food in the house, don't worry. You can never overcook a rat.'" <sup>14</sup>

For the poor, few options exist, and baseball as a path to upward mobility looms large because it values only skill, not patronage, race, or social position. Baseball has always been more democratic than Dominican society at large. Most Dominicans personally know someone who has played professional baseball. That is even more likely among the poor. Any Dominican can articulate the path out of poverty provided by the sport. Take, for instance, the pitcher Francisco Cordero, a major league closer, who said, "I don't know if I've ever seen a guy who's been rich since he was little playing baseball."<sup>15</sup> Enrique Soto, perhaps the most successful (and notorious) player developer in the DR, made a similar statement: "A person who cuts sugarcane should earn \$80 a day but gets only \$7. Who's going to cut sugarcane when he sees Alex Rodriguez [of the New York Yankees] get \$252 million? It's very clear: You play baseball."<sup>16</sup>

Virtually every young player signed by a major league team beams at his newfound ability to build a better life for his family. But the elation associated with saving one's family, and oneself, fades into guardedness when one faces the sheer number of needy people who radiate out in all directions. With hands outstretched, these people remind the newly minted player of his obligations at every turn. "Remember all of the times I bought you breakfast?" one neighbor complained to a newly signed ballplayer. "You bought me some eggs once," the player corrected, but he wound up giving the man a small wad of bills anyway.<sup>17</sup> Still, for most young signers, the receipt of countless acts of kindness along the road to success causes less a sense of burden than one of gratitude that they can repay that kindness—a television set here, a roomful of furniture there, and baseball equipment for just about every kid who plays the game.

The possibility of going from worthless to worthwhile can take oblique, somewhat sad turns, as well, as it did for one young man whose family had been too poor to care for him. He ended up living on the streets and under the

grandstand at the local baseball stadium for years. Miraculously (or maybe not), he found solace in honing his baseball skills and signed a contract with a U.S. team at sixteen. His family invited him back home to take up residence in the chicken coop behind the shanty they inhabited—an opportunity he leaped at. He spent his bonus freely on their needs. Rather than resentment, the boy felt elation at being deemed worthy to move into the chicken coop.<sup>18</sup>

Talent, while crucial, is not always sufficient, and escape from poverty commonly demands that one find ways around obstacles. Lying about one's age or identity, for example, has become identified with Dominican baseball. Even the MLB's threat of banning for a year does not stop the attempts. In 2002, the Los Angeles Dodgers signed Jonathan Corporán, a seventeen-year-old Dominican pitcher, for \$930,000. His was among the first wave of big signings. What the Dodgers saw in Corporán was a wonderful combination of size (he is six-foot-two) and velocity (he threw regularly in the low 90s). The Dodgers needed only to verify his age. In a post-9/11 world, however, increased vigilance stirred questions about his identity, and soon the U.S. Embassy had enough evidence to determine that fraud had been committed. Overnight, seventeen-year-old Corporán turned into twenty-one-year-old Reyes Soto. His skills had not changed, however, so after nullifying his bonus, the Dodgers decided to re-sign him at the much lower figure of \$150,000. "I'm glad we have closure," Jeff Shugal, the Dodgers' head of international scouting, wryly commented. "He's the same guy we thought was Jonathan Corporán. He just wasn't Jonathan Corporán." In a rare show of humor in such matters, Dan Evans, then the general manager of the Dodgers, quipped, "He just truly is 'the player to be named later.'"<sup>19</sup>

Why, if his skills remained the same, would a seventeen-year-old be so much more valuable than a twenty-one-year-old? Major League Baseball viewed Corporán/Soto as having committed an offense and concluded that he had intentionally set out to defraud. (If his deceit had been detected a few months later, he would have paid by losing a year in signing.) More recently, in January 2012, Fausto Carmona, a pitcher and All-Star with the Cleveland Indians, was charged with identity fraud. His name is actually Roberto Hernández, and he is three years older than his fake identification indicated. When pressed, Dominicans openly justify these attempts as responses to a market that wrongly skews age—independent of skill—to an extreme that ignores players who would be of ideal age in the United States. "You want sixteen-year-olds? We'll give you sixteen-year-olds" is their reasoning. Dominicans contend that it is wrong to be punished for an irrational market fetish for young boys spawned in North America.

## Linking Dominican History to Baseball

Baseball played a valuable role in the imperialist spread of American influence throughout the world. No less a luminary than Albert G. Spalding, America's first baseball superhero, toured the globe in 1888–1889 with a team playing exhibition games in Hawaii, Australia, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and Egypt and making stops in Europe along the way. In his book *America's National Game*, Spalding boldly articulated the notion that the role of baseball was “to follow the flag”—that is, to lay the groundwork for early, or soft, imperialism.<sup>20</sup>

Americans held a naïve view of baseball as working for their benefit, whether by promoting admiration of the U.S. way of life in foreign lands or ameliorating rancor that might be directed at them. Even State Department officials bought into the belief that baseball served the United States in resolving cultural or political tension. In a communication to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan dated November 1, 1913, James Sullivan, dispatch minister to the Dominican Republic, opined:

The manifestation of resentment toward Americans, this is merely on the surface, I believe, and will disappear if the American Government makes any attempt to win the good will of Dominicans. . . . I deem it worthy of the Department's notice that the American national game of baseball is being played and supported with great enthusiasm. The remarkable effect of this outlet for the animal spirits of the young men is that they are leaving the plazas where they were in the habit of congregating and talking revolution and are resorting to the ball fields. . . . [Baseball] satisfies a craving in the nature of the people for exciting conflict and is a real substitute for the contest on the hillsides with the rifles.<sup>21</sup>

Sullivan, however, miscalculated the depth of Dominican resentment toward the United States. Had he remained at his post another decade, he would have seen baseball fueling both anti-American sentiment and Dominican nationalism. During the occupation itself, Dominicans viewed competitions against U.S. teams as surrogate warfare. When Enrique (El Indio Bravo) Hernández, a standout pitcher, defeated a team of U.S. sailors in 1914, the torrent of Dominican nationalism was overwhelming—Dominicans' equivalent to the U.S. hockey team's victory over the Soviet Union in 1980. “The [U.S. Marine Corps] teams will not win even one baseball chal-

lenge here, as they are simply inferior to our players,” one editorial gushed. “The physical fitness of our underfed boys is superior to that of the chubby, ruddy-faced whites.”<sup>22</sup>

Major League Baseball formally began its relationship with the Dominican game in 1951 when it laid the groundwork of what came to be known as a “working relationship.” With no regard for the integrity of Dominican baseball, MLB simply decided that Dominicans should change the season in which they played, from summer (where it conflicted with MLB’s season) to winter. In exchange, MLB would send some of its coaches and players to the DR to share their expertise. The assumption that Dominicans played an inferior brand of baseball that needed to be enlightened is, itself, rank ethnocentrism.

In the past quarter-century, MLB has further entrenched itself in how talent is developed in the DR and where that talent goes. Producing Dominican players has become a particular kind of global commodity chain, and while the concept is in serious need of revamping, it remains heuristic.<sup>23</sup> People in Dominican baseball circles initially had no response to this, simply gloating each time one of their native sons got to the major leagues. But over time Dominicans have managed to ascend to positions of power within, alongside, and outside official MLB circles. Those developments are what I examine herein. Perhaps most important, *Dominican Baseball* argues that we can no longer really think of Dominican baseball and Major League Baseball as separate, even as we chronicle them as distinct. They have become a system, but not as either has intended or would like. The result is a system that is simultaneously rational and irrational, collegial and acrimonious. It is a system that requires an anthropologist’s touch to be fully understood.

## Chapter Outline

Understanding how MLB and Dominican interests intersect and affect each other requires a perspective that is simple enough to be utilitarian yet sufficiently nuanced to get at subtleties. The global commodity chain (GCC) is offered as well suited, but in need of modifications. There is no simple way to grasp the transnational nature of what MLB-Dominican relations have come to be. So while I apologize for digressing into the realm of political-economic models, I believe it enhances the subsequent analysis. I have tried to avoid unnecessary arguments and controversies, as well as arcane language.

The GCC model has been used primarily by sociologists but also by some geographers and anthropologists. While it has serious limitations, it

can be modified to be useful. In Chapter 1, I frame the way in which I look at Dominican baseball. Exploring labor as a “neoliberal exception” affects how the GCC, in this case, should be treated. I critique the GCC, modifying it to allow for a more critical and ethnographic perspective. Another key conceptual ingredient in this work is the informal economy. This concept is particularly well suited to providing understanding of global-local interconnections and disjuncture.

Defining the modern era of Dominican baseball is open to interpretation. Some would cite 1950 as the onset, when structural relations between MLB and Dominican baseball began in earnest. Others would argue that the modern era began when the first Dominicans reached the major leagues in 1954. Others still would claim it started when significant numbers of players began to enter the major leagues. In Chapter 2, I argue that the modern era began when MLB established a structurally significant presence in the DR in the 1980s. This presence is defined by the baseball academy system, and it took yet another decade for that system to fully take root. The rise of the academy system is part of a long, historic transnational string that dates back to the origins of the sport. What is potentially troubling about the academy system is that Dominicans’ ability to have any impact on it is in doubt, and it has had pernicious effects on the Dominican game. I also look at the academy system ethnographically as a key production site in the commodity chain, examining the range of practices it uses to produce players. An account of the academy in terms of the social structure (e.g., players and coaches) sits at the center of the chapter.

The emergence of buscones, or independent trainers, has proved particularly vexing for MLB’s system of signing talent in the DR. While their rise came about unexpectedly, buscones must be understood as having developed as part of the game, and they have gone on to form the only sovereign Dominican presence in the system of player production. Chapter 3 looks at the range of buscones operating in the DR today and how they have evolved into the most potent force confronting MLB’s domination. The full range of their work is explored, and their essential links to the Dominican social fabric are described.

Chapter 4 focuses on five cutting-edge Dominicans who have had an impact on the game from a contemporary Dominican perspective. Astín Jacobo is a well-known trainer of talent who has emerged as a leading force in the counter-hegemonic push that the buscones represent. He occupies the lion’s share of the chapter (and has a commanding presence in the book) because he is unique. He is at once respected and feared by MLB and heeded

by other player developers; thus, there is no one who commands as much social space as he does.

Most people regard the Dominican legend Felipe Alou as a pioneer rather than someone who is currently at the forefront of Dominican baseball. Alou is a man of “firsts”: the first Dominican from the island to make it to MLB and the first Dominican to manage a major league club. He is also the most consistent and poignant voice for Dominicans even after forty years in the public eye. Omar Minaya is well known to North Americans as the first Dominican general manager in the major leagues. After a successful stint as general manager of the Montreal Expos, Minaya took over at the helm of the New York Mets. He proceeded to create the first and most transnational organization in the industry, one that drove the cause of Dominican identity. Junior Noboa, following his journeyman career in the major leagues, returned to his homeland and launched a career as a broker in building full-service baseball academies. Success breeds more success, and soon Noboa was the man everyone sought when building state-of-the-art facilities. And Rafael Pérez is one of the most dynamic young administrators in the sport. Were baseball truly a meritocracy, Pérez would be in line to become the MLB’s commissioner himself one day.

The academy represents MLB’s most strategic production site in the DR (its way structurally to pursue its ends). As a system, the academy’s cultural and ideological rationale for operating as it does in the DR “demonizes” Dominicans. By presenting Dominican baseball as inept and corrupt, MLB justifies creating policy. Chapter 5 looks at the anthropology of difference, or the manner in which organizations or societies maneuver around intractability between parties by diminishing one while inflating the other. This is particularly the case in intercultural dealings. Dominican practices are interpreted in this manner by MLB, and Chapter 5 explores how MLB has diminished Dominican claims to legitimacy.

In the past few years, the vitriol has reached unprecedented levels. Several crises have rocked the MLB establishment. For example, a kickback scheme was uncovered in which MLB employees were caught receiving illegal rebates from scouts in the Dominican Republic, and identity fraud has continued at disproportionate rates among Dominican players. As its “go to” guy to stop this, the baseball establishment chose Sandy Alderson, who, before going to the Mets in 2010 as Minaya’s replacement, was arguably the second most powerful man in the MLB Commissioner’s Office (after Bud Selig himself). Alderson brought experience to his charge of getting Dominican affairs in order insofar as MLB was concerned. He also brought an attitude that many in the Dominican Republic considered unacceptable, and resistance against

both Alderson and MLB was mounted by outraged buscones. Chapter 6 looks at that tussle.

The conclusion, an epilogue of sorts, is built around the latest issues and how the two sides are currently poised to respond to each other. One outcome—again an unintended one—has the system that is now in place shoring up a vacuum that was created by that same system twenty-five years ago. I refer to the withering of amateur baseball, a casualty of the rise of the academy system, which is now, oddly enough, being resurrected by the buscones in their efforts to respond to the latest restrictive policies of MLB. This is truly ironic, yet oddly poetic.