

Sports News Roundup July 02



SA-Cuba Series Mirrors World Events

The relationship between the United States and Cuba has been fractured along political and economic lines for a generation, our governing systems diametrically opposed for much of the last half century.

Yet there is one issue on which Cuba and the United States have never been at odds -- a common love for baseball. If baseball is America's "National Pastime," it's Cuba's national obsession.

"When people watch the exchange that goes on between our two nations on the baseball field," said USA Baseball President Paul Seiler. "Hopefully it enters into the processes and conversations like 'if that can happen, maybe we can figure some other things out.'"

On the same day the Associated Press reported the United States and Cuba have agreed to open embassies in Havana and Washington, a step toward ending the half-century diplomatic freeze between the two nations, the two countries' national baseball teams were united in Durham to announce their 5-game friendship series, which started yesterday July 1st.

The parallels between baseball unity and political *detente* are hard to ignore. "There was never a political intention," said Seiler. "But at the end of the day, sports is a bridge to relationships."

For 16 years, that bridge was underwater. The two baseball-crazed nations stopped playing games against each other. But in 2012, the USA and Cuba revived the tradition of playing a yearly international friendship series.

When asked about the symbolic diplomacy of this series, Seiler recalled a meeting in Havana with Tony Castro, son of Cuban leader Fidel Castro. At a press conference to announce the resumption of the friendship series, Seiler was anticipating political questions from the media. Perhaps noting Seiler's apprehension, Tony Castro jotted something down on a piece of paper and handed it to him. It simply said "Baseball spoken here."

"I thought that was a very poignant few words," Seiler said. "Like, this is about baseball. That's the language we're speaking today. We're not talking politics, we're not talking government. The language of the day for us is baseball."

Retired Cuban star Omar Linares speaks the language of baseball fluently. Arguably the greatest player ever in Cuba -and thus, one of the nation's most famous celebrities, Linares is now a scout for the Cuban national team.

His career is one of history's great "What ifs?" An icon in Cuba, he is a relative unknown in the US. A former 3rd baseman by trade, Linares drew comparisons to *Hall of Fame* Mike Schmidt. But Linares chose not to defect, reportedly turning down numerous overtures from Major League teams; instead, he embraced Cuba's socialist baseball system, warts and all. "I'd rather play for 11 million Cubans than \$11 million," he was once quoted as saying.

Yet, Linares admits there is something special about seeing his national team get a chance to play on US soil.

"I'm very happy, despite the fact that I didn't have the possibilities had relationships been better during that time," Linares said, adding that "...now, at the end of the road, as you could say now they're greatly improving and Cuba is opening up the doors for their athletes to go out and play throughout the world."

Chapter and verse have been written about sports bringing people together and breaking down barriers. Chalk the USA-Cuba series down as another chapter, and another verse in the long legacy of diplomacy through sports. It seems to be working.

Chess

The first figures of Cuban chess experienced slight decreases in the world ranking, which was updated yesterday and will rule throughout July.

GM Leinier Dominguez had the highest Elo decrease as he lost 10 units and now owns 2 736 points and went down from 18th to 21st seat, according to the digital site of the International Chess Federation.

The best Cuban chess player today had a poor *Capablanca Memorial Tournament* with just 4.5 points from possible 10, and that cost him the new placement, but he remained the best in Latin America and 4th in the continent.

Americans Hikaru Nakamura (2814), Fabiano Caruana (2797) and Wesley So (2780), the latter two were since very recently representatives from Italy and the Philippines, in that order, appear above him.

Lazaro Bruzon also suffered a decline in his location since going down from 60th to 70th seat, and now owns 2 669 points, 8 less than his total in June.

Yuniesky Quesada, Cuba's 3rd man, was another with depleted digits as his current amount of 2 643 units is 4 points fewer than that of the previous updating.

On the contrary, the current national monarch Isam Ortiz, added 5 points to his Elo, which arose to 2 577, remaining thus 4th in Cuban ranking, ahead of Juan Carlos Obregon who did not change his total of 2 560.

The top 10 is completed by Yuri González (2550), Carlos Hevia (2540), Jose Angel Guerra (2533), Yusnel Bacallao (2525) and Camilo Gomez (2519) while among women, Lisandra Ordaz remained on top, now with 2 357 points, higher by 19 to her previous amount.

The world ranking continued headed by Norwegian Magnus Carlsen and although his 2 853 Elo is still astronomical, it is 23 units lower than the last one because, amazingly, he finished 7th in the *Norwegian Chess Tournament* with only 3.5 points of a possible 9.

However not all are sad news, because we knew that the Cuban Dylan Berdayes Isidro is located today in the 1st place of the *Pan-American Youth Chess Tournament* which has its seat in the Colombian city of Cali, after the first 2 rounds.

The *Youth National Champion* of the island, with a rating of 2,346 ELO points, is considered one of the favorites for winning the *U-18 category* of the contest in the capital of Valle del Cauca, as he has 2 wins and no defeats.

Copa America

Peru and Paraguay face off tomorrow for the 3rd place of the *Americas Football Cup*, after falling in semifinals of bitterness for both teams.

The Peruvian team feels that the early expulsion of Carlos Zambrano weakening its chances against Chile (2-1) and stole them the possibility of reaching the final, which would be crowned with the good championship pace so far made by the Inca team.

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