

Cinemateca 2012

Ballplayer: Pelotero First-Run

Friday, September 7 - Thursday, September 13, 2012

Special Screening: Thursday, September 13, 7pm, with a post-show talk featuring PELOTERO director Jonathan Paley and University of Pittsburgh professor Rob Ruck, author of *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game*. With complimentary pre-show cuisine from Maria Bonita.



Film Information

Directed by

Ross Finkel, Trevor Martin & Jonathan Paley

Language

English/Spanish

Running Time

72 minutes

Film Notes by Rob Ruck

When Jackie Robinson crossed major league baseball's color line in 1947, he did more than energize the movement for civil rights. The ebony-hued Robinson opened the door for Latin players of color. A few years later, Felipe Alou, Ozzie Virgil, Manuel Mota, and the incomparable Juan Marichal led a vanguard of young men from the Dominican Republic into the major leagues. Signing contracts for a few hundred dollars, they arrived in the United States with hardly a word of English, unprepared for the food and the culture, often confounded by this country's deeply embedded and uniquely binary notions of race.

They did more than survive; these men became some of the most celebrated players in baseball history. And what was a trickle of Latin players in the 1960s has now become a torrent. Over a quarter of all major leaguers and almost half of all minor leaguers currently hail from the Caribbean basin

But baseball is no longer simply a game or pastime in and around the Caribbean. It has become a billion-dollar business. Salaries and signing bonuses pump hundreds of millions into the regional economy each year, and a set of major league-owned academies has become the foundation for the Dominican Summer League,

the largest pro baseball league in the world. And that has caused a feeding frenzy over the boys seeking to make their mark in the game.

An engrossing and provocative documentary, *Pelotero* takes us into the world of these youth. It tracks the efforts of two young Dominicans, Miguel Ano Sano and Juan Carlos Batistam, seeking the golden ring—a contract with a major league organization. Abandoning their education, they have staked their futures and those of their families on signing contracts on 'signing day,' July 2nd of the year they will turn sixteen. Batista is hoping to sign for over a million dollars, while Sano, one of the most highly regarded prospects to ever emerge from the Caribbean, seeks to surpass the record high, multi-million dollar, signing bonus that Michael Inoa received just years before.

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More Information

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Featuring

Jean Carlos Batista
Miguel Angel Sano
John Leguizamo (Narrator)

Cinematography by

Ross Finkel

Film Editing by

Mary Manhardt
Isaac Solotaroff

Country of Origin

Dominican Republic

These sorts of numbers distress MLB, which had long signed boys for far less than comparable prospects in the United States. Future Hall of Fame Pedro Martinez, for example, received only \$6,500 when he signed in the 1980s, while Sammy Sosa got even less. Major league organizations, taking full advantage of the boys' poverty and lack of sophistication, traditionally signed bushels of boys for meager—by U. S. standards—amounts, discarding all but the few who excelled.

The filmmakers' choice of [Batista and Sano] to follow was risky, but inspired, given the dramatic turn of events that plays out before their cameras. Crisply edited, sharply filmed, and with a pulsing soundtrack, *Pelotero* moves quickly and captures the drama in these boys' dreams and predicaments. Given the global market in juvenile talent at a moment in history when the trafficking of children—and not just in sport—remains egregious, it is a timely piece.

—Excerpt from an essay by Rob Ruck.
Read the full essay at news.filmstreams.org.

Rob Ruck is a member of the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh. The author of "Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game" and "The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic," his documentary work includes THE REPUBLIC OF BASEBALL: DOMINICAN GIANTS OF THE AMERICAN GAME (with Dan Manatt) and KINGS ON THE HILL: BASEBALL'S FORGOTTEN MEN.

Part of **Cinamateca 2012**
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Film Streams in collaboration with
UNO's Office of Latino/Latin American
Studies (OLLAS) and El Museo Latino.

More information at
www.filmstreams.org
and
www.unomaha.edu/ollas.