

<p>Baseball is a Way of Life Unit 1 Lesson 6 Passage-Life in Latin America <i>Written by Colette Weil Parrinello</i></p>  <p><i>Boys playing a practice game in the Dominican Republic.</i></p> <p>lifestyle. Kids and adults play everywhere. If a field is not available, streets, alleyways, and other open spaces are used for the game. Astoundingly, this small country of 10.8 million people (a little more than the population of the state of Georgia) produces more players for US Major League Baseball (MLB) than any other country in the world, other than the United States. In fact, 9.5 percent of all the players in the major leagues (2018), 25 percent of the upper minor league rosters (2013), and nearly half of the lower minor rosters (2013), come from the Dominican Republic.</p>	 <p>Notes</p> <p>Section 1</p> <p>Baseball has been the heart and passion of the Dominican Republic since the late 1800s. The sport is not just a pastime, but also a</p>
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Section 2

The Dominican Republic's baseball roots started in Cuba. In 1866, American sailors brought the game to the country. When Cubans fled to the Dominican Republic after the **Ten Years' War**, the game was passed to Dominicans, and their passion for *béisbol* exploded.

Workers in the sugarcane fields formed baseball teams for entertainment. The game turned competitive with neighboring countries in the 1920s, and the Dominican Baseball League was born. In 1937, the sport was forced to **weather a financial downturn** that threatened to end Dominican baseball forever.

Luckily, despite these setbacks, professional baseball in the Dominican Republic resurfaced in 1951. Ozzie Virgil Sr. was the first Dominican-born player in the MLB in 1956.

The **Ten Years' War** (1868–1878) was a Cuban war for independence from Spain. It was not successful, and many people fled Cuba to avoid punishment after the war had ended.

"weather a financial downturn": to survive a period when the sport was not making any money

Section 3

But why are there so many professional baseball players from this small country? The answer lies in a combination of factors contributing to the success of Dominican players in the MLB: passion, economic need, and training infrastructure.

The Dominican Republic is a poor country, with 30.5 percent of the population living below the poverty level. Many kids love the sport and see baseball as a respected way out of poverty.

Famous Dominican players, such as Albert Pujols, Adrián Beltré, and

Pedro Martinez, bring pride and respect to all Dominicans and serve as role models for kids throughout the whole country. They demonstrate Dominican power, speed, grace, and joy of the game. Along with their outstanding accomplishments of elite athleticism, fame, and fortune, they have also given back to their local communities.



Albert Pujols, 2012



Pedro Martinez, 2008



Adrián Beltré, 2007

Section 4

Baseball thrives because passion and talent for the sport are encouraged. The number of Dominican players in the MLB skyrocketed in the 1980s when MLB teams started building professional training academies. Today, all 30 MLB teams have an academy in the Dominican Republic. These academies provide training, food, education, and housing to nurture young talent. Acquiring a player in the Dominican Republic is far cheaper for MLB teams than in the United States, and Dominican players are not subject to the **US player draft**.

At age 16, Dominican teens can try out for the MLB team academies and earn a signing bonus if they make it on a team. The average annual 2017 income in the Dominican Republic was less than \$5,000. In 2011 the average academy signing bonus was

US player draft: the system by which the MLB selects first-year players and assigns them to teams. The draft pulls from US, Puerto Rican, and Canadian high schools, colleges, and amateur baseball clubs. Players from other countries are not included in this system.

\$131,000—and ranges today from thousands of dollars to more than a million. This is a tremendous boon for the young player and his family, who may now be able to buy a house or a car, pay health care, or fund a business. All of this success can be found even before a player has made it to the US leagues!

Talent is identified and nurtured at early ages by *buscónes*. *Buscónes* are independent scouts or agents who find players or have talent come to them. When a player is ready, the *buscón* contacts the MLB team scouts if they haven't already seen the prospect.

Section 5

The business of baseball is a source of pride for communities and gives them an economic boost. Successful players return to invest in their local towns. Academies have brought new construction and jobs. The academies employ local people for services like coaching, education, food service, maintenance, and upkeeping the grounds. Local small businesses serve the needs of the players' families, *buscónes*, academy employees, and visitors to the academies.

Kids see baseball as hope for a change in their lives. They are motivated by their deep passion for the game and the opportunities that the game may offer. The infrastructure of *buscónes* and the MLB academies helps make this dream a reality for many, and successful athletes are continually a source of national pride.

