

BASEBALL, THE GREAT PASSION

For Dominicans, baseball is more than a sport, it is a constant passion. The sport, also called “*pelota*” (ball) by locals, is the favorite sport to practice and enjoy in the Dominican Republic, an encounter that goes beyond social status, gender and age.

HISTORY

Opinions differ as to the date when baseball began in Dominican Republic. There are versions that say it was introduced to the country by the Cuban brothers Ignacio and Ubaldo Alomá in September 1886, in the city of San Pedro de Macorís. Others maintain it began between the years 1894 and 1896 by Cuban citizens living in the country, with Ozama and Cauto being the first known baseball teams.

Another version indicates the date as September 25, 1886, when Cuban sailors gave a demonstration of the game on a plot of land near the port of San Pedro de Macorís, leaving behind the bats and balls they used, and so beginning this sport’s history in the country. There is also an opinion that differs from previous theories: baseball was introduced by Americans when they installed the first brewery in Santo Domingo.

Regardless of which version indicates the origin of baseball in Dominican Republic, what is clear is that the passion and pride for this game is here to stay.

Amateur baseball began to develop during the 1940s through the tournaments held in honor of the dictator Rafael L. Trujillo. Another significant stepping point for baseball was the construction of the first stadium in 1946 in Santo Domingo with a capacity for 4,000 fans.

Organized and professional Dominican baseball began in 1955 with the creation of the Professional Baseball League in Dominican Republic (LIDOM) and its inclusion to the Major League Baseball (MLB) in the United States.

In 1956, the first formal baseball game was played in the evening hours in the then new Quisqueya Stadium, today called Juan Marichal Stadium, in honor of the great and renowned Dominican pitcher.

To enjoy a game of “*pelota*” is a unique and fun opportunity to travel around the country to major stadiums in the cities of Santo Domingo, Santiago, San Pedro de Macorís and La Romana.

11 FUN FACTS

1. The first broadcast of a Dominican baseball game took place on October 21, 1917, at La Vega, and was transmitted by telephone.

2. In 1928, the first baseball game between the teams *Licey* and *Escogido* was broadcast by the radio station HIJK.
3. In 1936, the Cincinnati Reds were the first MLB team to visit Dominican Republic as part of its tour through the region.
4. The first national baseball tournament was organized that same year with the *Licey*, *Escogido*, *Estrellas Orientales* and *Sandino* teams. The *Sandino* team subsequently changed its name to *Águilas Cibaeñas*.
5. Dominican Republic made its debut in an amateur world series in 1941.
6. The country has more than 500 professional players in major leagues, making it the largest foreign producer. In 1956, the player Osvaldo Jose Virgil Pichardo, also known as Ozzie Virgil, became the first Dominican-born player to debut in major league baseball.
7. More than 65 players have been selected as MLB All-Stars, including Manny Ramirez, Juan Marichal, Vladimir Guerrero, Albert Pujols, David Ortiz, Pedro Martínez, Sammy Sosa, Alfonso Soriano, Miguel Tejada and Tony Fernández.
8. Five players from the country have won MLB MVP honors: George Bell (American League, 1987), Sammy Sosa (National League, 1998), Miguel Tejada (American League, 2002), Vladimir Guerrero (American League, 2004), Albert Pujols (National League, 2005, 2008, 2009).
9. Dominican Republic's professional winter baseball tournament is held between October and January. The regular season ends in late December and then there is an elimination or "round-robin" series for the entire month of January. The season concludes in the Final Series, which designates the championship team that will represent our country in the annual Caribbean Series.
10. The Caribbean Series is a competitive event between Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. Teams from Dominican Republic have won 19 titles, more than any other country. The *Tigres de Licey* have 10 victories, the most of any team.
11. Juan Marichal and Pedro Martínez are, for the moment, the only two Dominicans to be inducted into The National Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown, New York, USA.

DOMINICAN PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUE

Six professional teams currently participate in the Liga de Béisbol Profesional de la República Dominicana (LIDOM - Dominican Republic Professional Baseball League): [Tigres del Licey](#), founded in 1907 in Santo Domingo – 21 championships; [Estrellas Orientales](#), founded in 1910 in San Pedro de Macorís – 2 championships; [Leones del Escogido](#), founded in 1921 in Santo Domingo – 16 championships; [Águilas Cibaeñas](#), founded in 1936 in Santiago – 20 championships; [Toros del Este](#), founded in 1983 in La Romana – 2 championships; and [Gigantes del Cibao](#), founded in 1996 in San Francisco de Macorís – 1 championships.