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RUCK, ROB. *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic*. New York Carroll & Graf Publishers/Richard Gallen, 1991. Pp. 205. Index. No bibliography, no notes. \$10.95.

Rob Ruck's *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic* is impressive literature that captures the spirit of the sport as it is played in the Dominican Republic. Moreover, Ruck examines those Dominicans whose notable careers in the major leagues were instrumental in providing inspiration to their younger countrymen—many who have known life only in the most impoverished region of that island nation. Clever chapter titles such as “Los Muchachos of Winter,” “Have Baseball—Will Travel,” and “Peloteros in the Banana Fields,” characterize Ruck's prose in this attractive study

Ruck saturates his text with comments from such high profile names as Juan Marichal, Tony Pena, and Rico Carty, among others. But the insights of local baseball aficionados such as Cuqui Cordova, Rafael de la Maza, Pedro Julio Santana, and Fernando Arturo “Bolo” Vicioso also portray a vivid picture of baseball and the Dominican heritage. Readers come to understand life in the Dominican Republic, not only on the ball diamond but beyond the lines as well. Ruck, a professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, chronicles the Dominican saga since the late nineteenth century and lays a good historical foundation for his tale. We learn that baseball there is rooted in the strong elements of nationalism and anti-Americanism. “These games were not a form of collaboration with the North Americans, nor would I consider them acts of friendship... [Baseball] was seen as to go beat the North Americans,” claimed deposed president Juan Bosch of Dominican baseball in the early twentieth century (p. 27). Indeed, the reader comes away with the impression that Dominicans of yesteryear carried a love-hate relationship with the game. And it is clear that the bond between player and national heritage is never abandoned, even after success is attained in the United States.

Ruck has plenty of meaty chapters that take readers into the inner sanctum of the Dominican hunger for baseball. His interview with Juan Marichal, the “Dominican Dandy,” is especially good. Marichal's persona and career capture many sides of the Dominican character—nationalistic, tenacious, pious, and

appreciative. In his conclusion, the author assesses the game within the realm of contemporary economic blight. To many, the survival of baseball there lies in question. But the circumstances surrounding its survival are intriguing. Here, the Dominican sense of heritage is challenged by the reality of an economic crisis. To further complicate the scenario, there appears to be only one alternative to their plight—American economic assistance in the form of greater major league investment. Problematic, of course, is the fine line Dominicans face between assistance and hegemony. At what point might Dominican baseball lose its identity? Ruck, however, suggests that baseball's strong heritage remains vibrant at the grassroots level. Locating a small group of boys playing the game in a tiny sugar cane community north of Santo Domingo, Ruck states, "As long as baseball captivates boys like these, I think, the sport will make it through its current malaise" (p. 194).

*The Tropic of Baseball* wears different faces. At times, it appears to be a travel catalogue. Indeed, it is a chronicle of Ruck's ventures in the Dominican Republic. At other times, however, this book carries the elements of a sociological study dressed in narrative garb. Ruck does little in the way of interpretation. Inevitably, however, it is a history book that revolves around a contemporary topic. Readers should also know that Ruck's *Tropic of Baseball* is, in fact, a book of selected articles which previously appeared in various journals. Hence, this manuscript is not original. Scholars of this area, presumably, will already be familiar with the text. Finally, there are no notes. Though Ruck is a well-established and credible historian and author, notes do add much to a text and allow readers access to research on the topic.

Still, Rob Ruck's study of Dominican baseball, in this and other essays, always provides important insight not only into the baseball world of that nation, but how the game reflects the society at large. *The Tropic of Baseball* is good reading for those not familiar with the author's prior works. Ruck, indeed, deserves praise for his contribution to this facet of Latin American culture.

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