

Fernando Valenzuela: The Selling of a Mexican Baseball Hero

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No one from Mexico has had more impact on baseball than Fernando Valenzuela, the pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Within weeks after the start of the 1981 major league session, Valenzuela had become an international media event and a genuine Mexican national hero. To the Mexicans, he was a patriotic symbol, a representative of their country who had succeeded in a foreign land. Every move he made was closely watched and commented upon. He became the object of a publicity blitz, memorabilia hawkers, product endorsements, and he attracted the attention of politicians. While Valenzuela was subjected to much of the same commercialization and promotion in the United States, the selling of his image in Mexico went even further. He was also used to project to the Mexican public a picture of his host country, the United States, revealing much about Mexicans' feelings toward their northern neighbor as well as, indirectly, themselves. This paper, then, will describe the phenomenon of "Fernandomania" and what it reveals about Mexicans' views of the United States.

The ambiguity demonstrated in Mexico's pride of Valenzuela's success in the United States combined with a deep skepticism of his treatment as a Mexican in the north manifests the dichotomy of a great deal of Mexican's feelings toward the United States.

Mexicans are genuinely proud that one of their compatriots has "made it big" in the major leagues. There exists the feeling that only in the United States could Valenzuela have accomplished so much, this implicit attitude of praise or at least approval of the United States is often combined, however, with a critical attitude toward Mexico. Nevertheless, this nationalistic pride in the accomplishments of Valenzuela also causes the Mexicans to look critically at his reception in the United States as well as at other aspects of society north of the border. Charges of less than just treatment both on and off the playing field and the difficulty of living in the United States are commonly found among the general public as well as in the press of varying political persuasions.



Bill Baker and Larry Gerlach engaging in conversation prior to another day of sessions.