

# THE CITY

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## *Graderías Deportivas:* **Latino Sport Activity in New Orleans**

Greater New Orleans has a long history of relationships with Latin America and is host today to a large population of Hispanic residents. Unlike many cities in the United States whose Latino population is dominated by one or two national groups, the national origins of Greater New Orleans' Hispanics are extremely diverse, with Central Americans making up a prominent portion. Honduras is the country of origin for the greatest number of New Orleans Latinos.

For immigrants there is often a conflict between trying to adjust to the culture of a new land and to retain contact with the culture left (temporarily or permanently) behind. Connections may be maintained with the culture of the nation or region of origin through language use, membership in social clubs, participation in social activities with other Latinos, especially those from the same country. In the case of New Orleans participation in sport teams based partly on national origins, especially origins in Central America and the Caribbean, serves this purpose.

In South Louisiana, most long-term residents with Hispanic roots no longer identify in any way with them. Early Latino residents of the New Orleans included Spanish colonists in the late eighteenth-century Spanish-owned Louisiana Territory and Cuban immigrants who arrived during the revolutionary years between 1868 and 1898. Latinos who arrived relatively recently tend to be identifiable as a distinct sub-group of the city's population, through their appearance, language use, religion, social customs, and other cultural elements.

It is possible that Cuban immigrants formed baseball clubs in New Orleans as they did in Key West and Tampa, Florida in the 1880s and 1890s. At least by the 1920s, Latinos were playing soccer in New Orleans. More recently Latino sport has featured principally softball and soccer. An exclusively Latino softball league was established in 1986, sponsored by the Spanish language monthly magazine *Que Pasa New Orleans*. The Liga Panamericana de Softbol was a social nucleus for Latinos. Its teams were heavily Cuban and Nicaraguan, but there was a Dominican team for several years, and a variety of other Latinos and even some Caucasians played. Games were held in New Orleans' and Gretna's City Parks and Metairie's Lafrenier Park. Spectators were mainly family members and friends of the players, and the Sunday games were occasions for cooking out, eating, and socializing for family member of all ages. Each team had its 'queen' and

one of them was selected to represent the league in New Orleans' annual Senorita Hispanidad contest.

New Orleans' Latino soccer league has more teams and a longer history (since 1972, at least) than that of softball and has continued to the present. The soccer teams have a different country-of-origin base, including Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile, and Colombia. Skill level is relatively high, some teams in the veterans' league even boasting members with World Cup playing experience.

Spanish language periodicals published in New Orleans spotlight athletic accomplishments within the Latino community. As fans, Hispanic citizens support a variety of sports, including the American football Saints (los Santos) whose games are broadcast in Spanish by the two Spanish language radio stations of the city.