

Alan M. Klein, Sugarball: The American Game: The Dominican Dream. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991. Illus. pp. xi + 179.

Sport, like any other product or activity can be exported from one country, or culture, to another. Consistent with their penchant for understatement, the British developed two games - namely soccer and cricket - which frequently conclude with 'no result'. While soccer has been exported to virtually all nations, and should properly be regarded as the 'world game', cricket was only adopted in some of countries of the British Empire. While the British may have developed both sports their performance in them, at the risk of making a controversial statement, would be regarded as modest. Baseball, the national pastime of the United States of America, has been adopted in Latin America and parts of Asia and has been played in Australia for over a century as a minor sport. The success of North American baseball is such that they have played a 'World Series' since the turn of the century.

In *Sugarball* anthropologist Alan Klein examines the adoption of baseball in the Dominican Republic. His analysis is conducted through a colonial underdevelopment model where he examines the dialectic between North American hegemony and local resistance. Klein's basic thesis is that Dominican baseball, or sugarball, provides a rallying point and form of resistance against the economic, political and military power, and cultural ideology that flows from the United States. In arguing this, however, he seems to find it difficult to determine whether the Dominican Republic benefits from its connections with baseball. American major league clubs have set up academies in the Dominican Republic that provide employment for young hopefuls and a chance to play in the 'big time'. Baseball provides an escape route from poverty. With the best players going abroad the quality of Dominican baseball has declined.

Klein also notes that an inordinate number of young men devote themselves to baseball rather than other pursuits. While he sees much of this as wasted effort, he is unsure what position he should adopt given the lack of alternative employment opportunities. The question Klein has not considered is whether Dominicans would be better, or worse, off for their involvement with baseball.

Sugarball is organised into seven chapters. The first provides an historical account of colonialism in the Dominican Republic, with a particular focus on domination by the United States in the twentieth century. The chapter also provides a brief history of Dominican baseball from its introduction by Cubans in 1891 to the mid-1950s. The next two chapters examine various aspects of the labour market for players in the Dominican Republic, focusing on connections with the farm systems of North American major league clubs. Major league clubs have set up academics for young hopefuls that has robbed Dominican amateur teams of talent. In addition, the high incomes earned in North America has discouraged Dominicans playing at home in the off season because of injury fears.

Chapter four provides a 'history' of the life of players beginning with 'grooming' and training at Campo Las Palmas - the academy of the Los Angeles Dodgers through to problems, mainly cultural, with the transition to and playing in North America. Klein is somewhat fascinated by Campo Las Palmas Director, Cuban Ralph Avila who, in an earlier life, fought for and against Fidel Castro. In the fifth chapter Klein examines Dominican baseball as resistance to American hegemony. This is mainly based on an analysis of clothing worn by fans to Dominican games (whether it was of Dominican or North American clubs) and of sporting journalists whose reports focus on Dominican players abroad and attributing the problems of domestic baseball to North American influences. This chapter was somewhat unconvincing. Klein, in fact, admitted that he encountered problems finding examples of resistance amongst players, and that in their desire to

obtain a place with a major league club ‘wanted only to comply’ (p.132). The penultimate chapter examined how crowds at Dominican games behaved differently from those in North America, and that the game had a different (Latin) cadence (though why should he expect them to be the same?). The last chapter draws the threads of the study together.

Sugarball provides some valuable information concerning a sporting phenomenon that has, hitherto, attracted little attention. In saying this, however, the book does contain shortcomings. It is somewhat repetitive, and chapters contain a number of unconnected sub-headings that suggests a problem of organisation. Klein’s thesis concerning Dominicans using baseball as resistance against American hegemony seems overstated, and not well supported by evidence presented. Klein also has problems in distancing himself from his material. He is obviously a lover of baseball and has much respect and reverence for things Dominican; which is the source of his quandary of knowing how to decide whether the Dominican Republic is better or worse for its involvement with baseball.

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