

Father-Son Story: Cuban Connection by Jesus Delgado

I have been a Strat owner since my first baseball set arrived sometime in 1976 after the 1975 season. My family had immigrated to the US in 1970 and I immediately became a sports junkie. I immersed myself in the Miami Dolphins and Atlanta Braves (Miami Heat, Florida Marlins and Florida Panthers were more than a decade away from existence). I knew the rosters of those two teams completely.

It wasn't until I began purchasing all the Strat games that I became an expert on all sports and all the teams. I purchased the 1976 football and 1976 basketball seasons later the following year. I would primarily play football with my older brother (all teams), baseball with my cousin (Braves vs. Cubs) and basketball with my best friend (he loved Pete Maravich). But, it was a connection that I made with my dad thanks to the game that affected me most of all.

My father, Francisco, was not a heavy duty sports fan as I knew him. I was barely five when my family, which consisted of my parents, four sisters and two brothers, got to the US in 1970. I would see him very rarely as he worked six days a week. On Sundays, we would enjoy time together watching Abbott and Costello and he would take us out to lunch. The majority of the time we spent together was when I was his assistant when he was doing projects around the house. Then one summer, I saw that big beautiful Strat-O-Matic ad and I was hooked.

I put together all my allowance money, put it in an envelope and sent it Glen Head, NY. Two problems though: First, I forgot to put postage on the envelope. Well I didn't forget, the concept of postage was foreign to me... Second, I sent my cash and coins in the envelope. That's right no check or money order for me... Amazingly, some kind soul at the post office returned the envelope and my father realized what I had done. Instead of embarrassing me and making me feel worse about the stupid thing I had done, he explained the correct procedure and told me that he wanted to see the game that I had spent my money on when it arrived.

So when it arrived, I explained the way the game worked. Immediately, he asked about two players in particular, Luis Tiant and Tony Perez. They were of course two of the Cuban players that were playing in the majors. We proceeded to go through the card set to find more Hispanic and especially Cuban players. I remember finding out about Jose Cardenal and Cookie Rojas in addition to the more well-known players like Bert Campanaris.

He told me about how he rooted for his local Cuban team in Cuba and how his family responsibilities didn't allow him to continue to follow baseball with as much passion as before. We actually played games with regular major league teams against his collection of mostly Cuban players and I learned great stories about his relationships with a couple of old time Cuban baseball players that played in the majors before the Castro Revolution. One name that still stuck with me was Sandalio (Sandy) Consuegra who had one spectacular season for the Chicago White Sox in 1954 when he went 16-3. Although we didn't play a ton of games together, I really appreciated those moments and they live with me to this day. It is one of many warm memories that I have kept and have been so important after he passed in May 2010.