

Fall 2007

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Harold Mendez

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus

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Center for International Education

Fall 2007

MENDEZ '96 LEADS INTERNATIONAL BASEBALL IN A NEW DIRECTION WITH DOMINICAN REPUBLIC SPORTS AND EDUCATION ACADEMY

Harold Mendez earned his B.S. in Kinesiology and International Affairs at UNH in 1996. Three years later he graduated with a Doctorate/J.D. from the Temple University School of Law. Mendez lives in New York City.

by **Harold Mendez '96**

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Mendez, president of ESTRELLA Management International, in his office in New York

Imagine yourself at age sixteen, 3000 miles away from home in Lancaster, CA, in the middle of ranch country and home to the Lancaster Jethawks, Single A Advanced affiliate team of the Boston Red Sox. This is your first time away from home. Actually, it is the first time you have set foot off your tiny island of the Dominican Republic where the yearly household income of \$8,500 is about one-third of what you received for a signing bonus--or at least it was before taxes and the local agent and trainer got their cuts. This money must now carry you and dozens of family members back home for possibly three or more years. At the same time, you have left the island with prospects of being the next "Big Papi" and, as such, with the expectations that you will spend money as lavishly as the other big league players do. Did I happen to mention that you do not speak the English language? In fact, you only have an elementary understanding of your own Spanish language, because you dropped out of school in the 5th grade to join a baseball "academy" where you spend eight hours a day fielding ground balls.

In the last eight years since opening up ESTRELLA Management International, a sports and entertainment management company that focuses on representing Latino talent, I have seen countless kids channel

all of their efforts on the dream of Major League fame and riches. In fact, my life aspirations prior to setting foot on UNH's campus were very similar. It wasn't until a fateful day in November of 1992, after realizing that my family was making great sacrifices to enable me to become the first college student in the family, and being told by the head baseball coach that I would need some further development before making the squad, that I decided a life off the playing field and behind the scenes was possible.

Once at UNH, it was a meeting with Dr. Stephen Hardy about the Sports Studies Program in the Department of Kinesiology that lead me to bring together my experience and interest. While developing a keen understanding of the historical significance and business side of the sports industry, I also longed to make my education a global one and turned to the International Affairs (IA) dual major program. Combining my studies in kinesiology with the depth of IA's core courses opened up my view of the sports industry to encompass the international arena. My IA 701 Senior Seminar research paper topic actually helped to mold the direction that I took, and continue to take, in my career. In my paper, I looked at the impact of sports on Cuban baseball players and society, coming to the realization that it was clearly more than just a game to them and the rest of the world. While I enjoy negotiating player contracts, endorsements and marketing deals for my clients, I take just as much pleasure in preparing my clients for life after sports.

This awareness has lead me to create the Dominican Republic Sports and Education Academy, which will be the first-of-its-kind Sports & Educational Academy in the Dominican Republic where kids as young as 14 will not only get expert training as athletes, but will be able to flex their academic muscles as well. The mission of the academy is to prepare these gifted student-athletes for sports and academic scholarships at U.S. colleges and universities, thereby giving them the tools needed to survive the harsh reality of professional sports: 95% of Dominican players in Major League Baseball academies never make it to the pros.

My aspirations in the international sports world were clearly defined through the support of the forward-thinking professors and support staff at UNH's International Affairs program. My experience in the IA program continues to serve me as I apply my vision to the entire sports world and help create greater opportunity for those who partake in the global sports market.



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223 Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824
tel: 603-862-2398 • fax: 603-862-0169
study.abroad@unh.edu • international.affairs@unh.edu