


2020

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Recommended Citation

Poyo, Gerald E. (2020) "Baseball in Key West and Havana, 1885-1910," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 87: No. 4, Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol87/iss4/6>

Baseball in Key West and Havana, 1885-1910: The Career of Francisco A. Poyo

by Gerald E. Poyo

In the midst of the political agitation and heightened nationalist fervor provoked by Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba, aged Francisco Andrés Poyo, known by his family and friends as Pancho, in early 1961 lay ailing in his Havana home in the Almendares neighborhood. Of his seven children only his daughter María, and a trusted housekeeper, remained to attend his needs as he approached his ninetieth year. His wife, Louisa died in 1954 and all his children except María had either died or left Cuba. María tried to convince her father to leave so not to be alone, but he refused saying that at his age there was no point. Besides, Cuba was his country, for which the family had sacrificed dearly. He died in March, sparing him the spectacle of the Bay of Pigs invasion launched by Cuban exiles in April. After the funeral, María, who by government policy could take only one suitcase, distributed family possessions and archives to friends and relatives and departed the island, leaving the house with the housekeeper and her family.

Pancho died disappointed for his country. The difficult socioeconomic and political trajectory of Cuban history since his arrival from Key West at the end of 1898 left him dispirited. He

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experienced the idealism, enthusiasm, optimism, and sacrifices associated with the struggle for Cuban independence in the 1880s and 1890s, but also the disillusionment of a Cuban republic gone awry with incompetent and corrupt politicians who ignored José Martí's promise of Cuba "with all and for the good of all" at the same time that they built statues to his memory. What he thought of the Cuban Revolution in 1961 is not known but he must have seen it as a further symptom of Cuba's troubled history.¹

On the other hand, what lifted Pancho's spirit was baseball which, at the end of his life, must have provided nurturing memories and eased life's disappointments. He loved baseball, playing, managing and even umpiring; with him it was a passion, indeed, part of his identity as a Cuban from Key West and later of Cuba itself. Pancho and many other Key West Cubans participated in the process of making baseball a Cuban game. Even before Pancho's birth, Cubans had learned the game while visiting and studying in the United States and took the sport home; he learned the game as a normal part of growing up in Key West. He played in the streets and neighborhood fields with his mostly Cuban and some American friends and became part of a Cuban baseball world that like tobacco, migration, and politics easily crossed back and forth over the waters separating Key West and Havana.

Like many others who circulated in the cigar making, working-class world of Key West, Tampa, New York and Havana in the era of the 1870s-1920s, Pancho belonged to a bicultural and bilingual community built on the success of a thriving Cuban cigar industry that sprouted across the Straits of Florida. Cuban cigars produced in Key West and later Tampa avoided United States tariffs and gained access to an important national market. In addition to cigar entrepreneurs from Cuba, Key West attracted talented cigar makers, many of whom established small *chinchales* (store-front cigar making shops) that occasionally grew into large factories employing hundreds of workers. The workers followed the jobs, and during the 1870s, Key West emerged as one of the important cigar producing cities in the United States employing thousands of

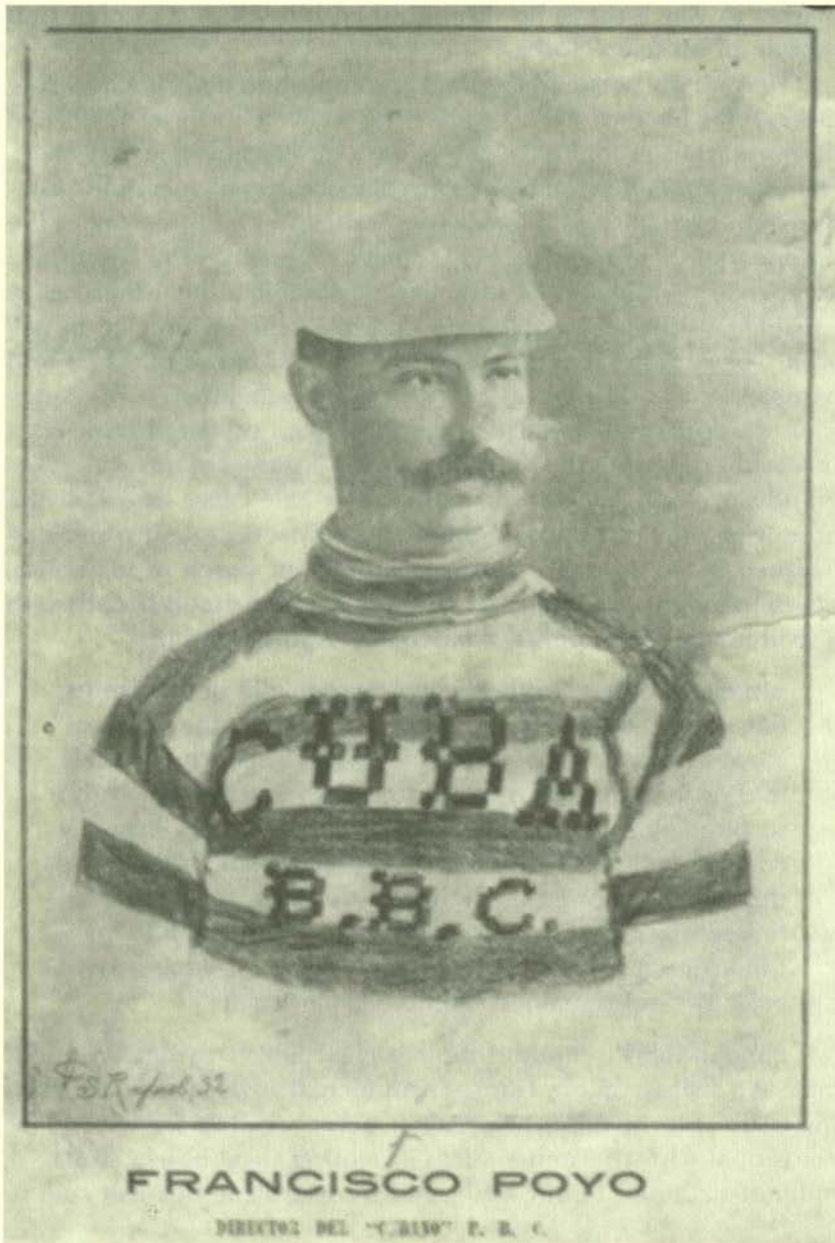
1. For background on the Cuban separatist movement in the United States, and especially Key West, see Gerald E. Poyo, *"With All, and for the Good of All": The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989).

workers.² In the process, an active baseball community linked Key West, Tampa, Havana, Matanzas and other places, and anticipated the much broader baseball exchange between the United States and Cuban baseball during the twentieth century. Existing histories mention in passing the baseball relations between south Florida and Cuba in the late nineteenth century but do not develop the story.³

Although neither an intellectual nor a writer, in 1907 Pancho Poyo, produced a brief remembrance about Key West baseball in the 1880s and 1890s, demonstrating the importance of that experience for him.⁴ He had little use for “men of letters.” Pancho had particular disdain for those who made names for themselves writing about the glories of the independence wars “for monetary gain” while living lives that had little to do with the goals set out by the self-sacrificing patriot leaders of the nineteenth century. He held such suspicion and disdain for what he considered self-serving historians and intellectuals that in the 1950s he even refused his cousin’s request to place the papers of his nationalist father, José Dolores Poyo, in the National Archives.⁵

At the same time Pancho responded with enthusiasm when his baseball critic friends Ramón Mendoza, José María Herrero, and Manuel Francisco Calcines requested a brief essay on Key West baseball for their book, *El Base Ball en Cuba y America*, published in 1908. Francisco’s writing recalled in considerable detail the teams, players, and associated events he thought important and, though written in Spanish, throughout the text he sprinkled colorful English-language baseball terms favored by Cuban *aficionados*,

2. See L. Glenn Westfall, *Key West: Cigar City, USA* (Key West, FL: Key West Preservation Board, 1984) and Gerald E. Poyo, “Cubans in the United States, 1870-1940: Migration, Community, and Identity,” *Cuban Studies* 20 (1991): 19-36.
3. Baseball histories with references to Key West and Tampa include Roberto González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana. A History of Cuban Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1899); Peter C. Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007); and Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
4. Francisco A. Poyo, “El Base Ball en Key West,” 101-104, in Ramón S. de Mendoza, José María Herrero, Manuel Francisco Calcines, *El Base Ball en Cuba y America* (Habana, 1908).
5. This characterization of Francisco Poyo is based on conversations with his grandsons Sergio, José and Jorge Poyo, as well as Luís Alpízar, a cousin, who worked as an archivist in the Cuban National Archives during 1940s-1980s.



Francisco A. Poyo. Image courtesy of César S. López, Cuban Baseball Hall of Fame Website.

including “picked-teams,” “the muff,” “struck-out,” “sport,” “batsmen,” “manager,” “match,” “home,” and “championship.” Baseball critics of the day considered Francisco among the best

players in Key West as he distinguished himself as a catcher and captain of his team "Cuba."⁶

Despite his personal baseball accomplishments, Pancho wrote little about his own career preferring to sketch a brief history of the important moments of the game's development in Key West. Even his grandchildren heard only the occasional anecdote about his youth on that south Florida isle. Sometimes he spoke about the independence movement, for example, remembering José Martí as not very "simpático" (attractive personality) but nevertheless capable of winning people over "porque tenía el don de la palabra" (because he had the gift of the word). Other times he told baseball stories. His grandsons especially remembered his somewhat deformed left hand that resulted from repeated bone fractures suffered using the deficient catcher's gloves of the era.⁷ One grandson, Jorge Poyo, remembered a tale that revealed the humorous side of his grandfather's usually serious and restrained manner. One day while sitting on the front porch of his house, *abuelo* left eight-year old Jorge and his neighborhood friends with a vivid image of the perils of baseball. As Jorge told it:

Abuelo said that "In those days catchers did not use mitts, but gloves, only slightly thicker than the other players' gloves; so catchers always had a broken finger or two." He told us that his little finger on his left hand had fractured so often that it no longer worked as it should. While it could bend, the finger would not stay bent. On saying this, *abuelo* showed me and my little friends, pushing his finger down against his palm. Our mouths fell open when, much to our surprise and delight, it sprang right back up, and remained standing straight out.⁸

Pancho lived a modest life as a cigar maker in Key West and later as a civil servant in Havana's municipal government. He lived his entire life in these two places, never straying far except for occasional trips to Tampa, Miami or other locations in Cuba. A militant nationalist ethic dedicated to destroying Spanish rule in

6. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 104.

7. Conversations with Sergio, José and Jorge Poyo, grandsons of Francisco A. Poyo.

8. Conversations with Jorge Poyo, grandson of Francisco A. Poyo. This information is based on a conversation, and is a paraphrase not a direct quotation.

Cuba permeated Pancho's family and community life. His father, José Dolores, along with his mother Clara Camús and three sisters, Celia, America and Blanca, fled Havana for Key West in January 1869 in the midst of a repressive wave by pro-Spanish *voluntarios* against insurgents and sympathizers of a revolution that began the previous October 10. José Dolores turned his energies to exile political activism and preached independence in his newspaper *El Yara* and as *lector* (reader) in the Martínez Ybor, Ellinger and Gato cigar factories.⁹ Among José Martí's important collaborators in founding the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) and later president of the PRC's council in Key West, Poyo was one of the exile community's most influential personages in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁰

Clara gave birth to Pancho in Key West in 1872 and he grew up in this thriving town of perhaps twenty thousand, at least one third of which were Cuban. Though born in the United States, Francisco never doubted his Cuban nationality. He studied at San Carlos Institute, a school founded by the Cuban community in 1871 to ensure their children received a Cuban education in Spanish. Not only did he learn about Cuban history and society, but remained engaged with all aspects of Cuban culture. With teachers dedicated to ensuring students remained fully Cuban, Pancho grew up believing his Key West home was only a temporary residence until the family could return safely to Havana. His father and mother made sure of this and did little to encourage a broader relationship with the United States. In any case, José Dolores had few resources to send him off to continue his education after completing studies at San Carlos. The young boy never questioned the

9. For information on the factory readers see Araceli Tinajero, *El lector de tabaquería: Historia de una tradición* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2007) and Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, "The Reader Lights the Candle: The Reader and the Cigarmakers in Havana, Key West, and Tampa, 1865-1931," *Labor's Heritage* V (Spring 1993): 4-28. On the Ybor Factory see L. Glenn Westfall, "Don Vicente Martínez Ybor, the Man and His Empire: Development of the Clear Havana Industry in Cuba and Florida in the Nineteenth Century," (University of Florida Doctoral Dissertation, 1977).

10. For a good treatment of Martí's relationship with Poyo see, C. Neale Ronning, *José Martí and the Émigré Colony in Key West: Leadership and State Formation* (New York: Praeger, 1990). See José Martí's extensive correspondence to José Dolores Poyo in Centro de Estudios Martianos, *José Martí. Epistolario*, 5 vols (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1993). On the life of José Dolores Poyo see Raoul Alpízar Poyo, *Cayo Hueso y José Dolores Poyo. Dos símbolos patrios* (Havana: Imprenta P. Fernández, 1947).

ideals that supported his family's activities on behalf of Cuba's fight to gain freedom from Spain.¹¹

Pancho usually accompanied his father, mother and sisters to community patriotic events supporting revolutionary leaders seeking support for military expeditions to Cuba. He never forgot the visits of the fierce and legendary independence fighters Ramón Bonachea, Carlos Agüero, Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez, who, at different times during the period 1883-1886, traveled to Key West seeking money, arms and political legitimacy. Always a community spectacle, Francisco attended the speeches at San Carlos school and joined the parades honoring the visitors. Though the conspiracies failed to ignite revolution—and Bonachea and Agüero lost their lives fighting in Cuba—these events left a strong impression on Pancho and other youth who later enthusiastically supported the initiatives of José Martí when he arrived in Key West in December 1891 to found the PRC that organized the independence war against Spain in 1895.¹²

After his schooling, Pancho did what most Cubans in Key West did for a living—he found work in the tobacco factories. He obtained a job through the cigar makers union, starting as an apprentice and learning the trade from master cigar makers. After a period of apprenticeship he earned his own cigar making table in the factory. Making cigars supported his family and the Cuban insurrection against Spain. Like most workers, he contributed to the cause from his modest earnings.¹³

On February 27, 1892, Pancho married Louisa Skillin y Seguí, a young woman originally from Matanzas, whose father Louis Skillin, an Irish-American native of Portland, Maine, immigrated to Cuba and married Carmen Seguí. Sometime in the 1880s, the Skillins moved to Key West where Pancho and Louisa met, courted and married. Though not associated with a church and influenced by his father's Freemasonry, Pancho agreed to a religious ceremony perhaps at Louisa's insistence. Like most Cuban immi-

11. For detailed treatments of the Key West Cuban community see Gerardo Castellanos y García, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso* (Habana: UCAR, García y Cía, 1935); Manuel Deulofeu, *Heroes del destierro. La emigración. Notas históricas* (Cienfuegos, Cuba: Imprenta de M. Mestre, 1904).

12. See Gerald E. Poyo, "Cuban Patriots in Key West, 1878-1886," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 61 (July 1982), 20-36.

13. See Jose Rogelio Castillo, *Autobiografía del General Rogelio Castillo* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1973), 86-87.



Francisco A. Poyo and his wife Louisa Skillin y Segui c. 1940. *Image courtesy of Jorge Poyo.*

grants in Key West, Pancho opposed the Catholicism whose ties with Spanish colonialism caused wholesale defections from the church. Pancho and Louisa invited Episcopal pastor, Juan Bautista Báez, Rector of St. John's Parish to conduct the wedding. Three witnesses included Enrique Someillán, prominent Methodist pas-

tor and two revolutionary activists, Serafín Sánchez and Fernando Figueredo.¹⁴ The couple had seven children, including Francisco (c1894), José (1896), Luís (1898), Carmen (1900), Laureano (1904), María (1905), and Elena (1907).

Baseball in Key West

Pancho initially competed on teams composed mostly of tobacco workers who played friendly games on Sunday afternoons, but in 1887 baseball took on heightened importance and a semi-professional character as local enthusiasts created the first organized baseball league. That year, Francisco Díaz Silveira formed a team called "Cuba" which fifteen year old Pancho joined as catcher. Another Cuban, Luís Acosta founded "Esperanza" baseball club and Frank Bolio organized three additional teams: "Habana," "Fe," and the "Key West Grays," the third team composed of American players. Cigar selector, Alejandro Rodríguez and his wife Eva Adán, managed "Fe." Cubans and Americans competed regularly and Pancho remembered fondly *Americanos* like Parks, Bob Lewis, Charles Allen and Tim Crinims [Crimins?], "who were always on our side, not only in the game, but also contributing [to the independence movement] with their contributions at the factories where we worked."¹⁵ The league organizers also approached the cigar entrepreneur Eduardo Hidalgo Gato about using some land for a baseball field on the south side of the Key, close to the beach. He agreed, and they built stands for spectators, put up a fence, and launched the first formal baseball season with a "championship" during 1888/1889. They played on Monday afternoons since local religious codes prohibited professional contests on Sundays.

All these personalities fully embraced the independence ideal. Bolio was among a young group of tobacco workers who formed a

14. Marriage License of Francis Andrew Poyo and Louisa Skillin, February 27, 1892. On Protestantism in Key West see Castellanos y García, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso*, 243-248; Deulofeu, *Heroes del destierro*, 34-43; Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth Century Hispanic Caribbean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

15. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 103; Adrian Burgos, Jr., "Entering Cuba's Other Playing Field: Cuban Baseball and the Choice Between Race and Nation, 1887-1912," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 29:1 (February 2005), 15.

committee to invite José Martí to Key West for the first time during November 1891, while Díaz Silveira (just a year older than Pancho), a young nationalist poet, published verses in *El Yara* and accompanied military leaders Carlos Roloff and Serafín Sánchez in an expedition to Cuba in 1895 to fight in the insurgency. A military veteran, Rodríguez, arrived in Cuba after the Ten Years War and became a cigar selector, union leader, and enthusiastic baseball fan. Cigar entrepreneur Gato also supported nationalist initiatives beginning in the early 1870s.

That first season, "Fe" won the championship. The next season (1889/1890), "Habana" emerged victorious, while in the 1890/1891 season "Cuba," Pancho's team, triumphed. During each of these seasons some teams folded while others remained and became stronger. In the third season, three teams, "Cuba," "Habana" and the "Key West Reds" competed in this increasingly professional league. Besides competing against each other, Key West teams also played regularly against teams in Ybor City (Tampa) formed after a new cigar industry attracted hundreds of workers from Key West and Cuba. The first Ybor City Cuban team, the "Niagara Baseball Club," formed in 1887 and was soon joined by "Cubano" and "Porvenir."¹⁶

Key West clubs "Habana" and "Fe" took their names in honor of well known teams in Cuba, reflecting their knowledge and respect for baseball in their homeland, which they followed closely. Baseball arrived in Cuba during the early 1860s with returning Cuban students who attended school in the United States. At this time the long tradition of sending students for their studies to Europe, especially Spain, gave way to a preference for the United States, which had growing interests in the island's sugar industry. The Spanish banned the game during most of the 1870s, but at the end of the failed war of independence that had forced the Poyo family to leave home, the game reappeared in Havana with the founding of the "Almendares" baseball club. Others like "Habana" and "Fe" formed during the next years. Recognized baseball in Cuba during the late 19th century was a mostly white, middle class "gentlemen's" game associated with social clubs, but in Key West baseball emerged among a multiracial tobacco work-

16. Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898," *Journal of American History*, 81:2 (September 1994), 499.

er population that enthusiastically played on teams organized in the factories.¹⁷

While baseball leagues began independently in the two cities, in the 1890s the sport broadened the already numerous activities linking Cuba and south Florida. During these years, the quality of Key West baseball improved markedly, attracting competition among the best clubs from Cuba. The earliest game that matched Key West and Havana Cubans occurred in 1888, but Pancho especially recalled a game in 1890 when "Habana" arrived to take on the Key West players. "As expected," explained Pancho, "in the first game they gave us a great *zura* [beating], scoring thirty-one runs and allowing us to step on home only once."¹⁸ Not deterred, the Key West players prepared for another visit a few months later. This time, "Fe" baseball club traveled to the isle bringing with them many well known players, including pitching star Francisco Hernández and Alfredo Arcaño, who would be the batting leader for "Habana" in Cuba's 1894-95 season.¹⁹ But the now better prepared Key West players beat them. "Fe" scored only once because of an error, which Francisco thought may have been intentional to avoid a humiliating shutout of their visitors, an action which he suspected "Habana" had earlier done for the Key West team. "They only escaped the fatidical collar of nine pearls," explained Francisco, "because of the muff of a *fly de faldeta y maruga* (short-field fly), as we fans like to say, by our second baseman Francisco Martín Veguí, allowing Arcaño who was on third to reach home, thus scoring his club's only run." "I don't know," he concluded his story, "if Panchito Veguí at that moment considered the previous gallant gesture of the "Habana" club and wanted to reciprocate."²⁰ "Progreso" baseball club from Matanzas also traveled to Key West with a stable of famous "batsmen" and they too lost to the Cuban conchs (natives of Key West). The Key West pitcher, José Jiménez, or "Chicho Frasquito," as he was known, struck out fourteen batters, including the *matancero* star, "El Isleño," who he

17 Roberto González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 89-92.

18. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 102-103; Burgos, "Entering Cuba's Other Playing Field," 15.

19. According to Gonzalez Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 92, Manuel Sanguily took Fe Baseball Club to compete in Key West in 1881. This is not likely since Key West's baseball teams had not yet formed; the reference must be to the encounter in 1890 described by Francisco Poyo.

20. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 102-103.

fanned three consecutive times. Though Pancho did not mention that Key West teams travelled to Cuba, one source asserts this happened in 1890, taking with them funds for delivery to insurgent conspirators.²¹

Players from Cuba even played in the Key West league. In 1890, teams on the isle each agreed to recruit three or four professional players from the United States or Cuba, attracting prominent Cuban stars like “el Inglés, Valentín González and Prats.” Francisco competed with and against these legendary ballplayers in Key West during the Cuban off-season. Known as “El Inglés” because he spoke English fluently, Antonio María García played for “Fe” in Cuba and during each of the four seasons between 1887 through 1893 won the batting title with averages ranging from .362 to .448. Observers in the early twentieth century considered him the best Cuban player ever. Valentín González and Miguel Prats also held batting titles in Cuba in the 1890s and played for “Habana.” During the 1890/91 Key West season these Cuban stars participated, Francisco noted, “in hard fought encounters in a stadium too small to accommodate the numerous fans, at the end emerging victorious the club “Cuba,” defender of the blue colored banner.”²²

Key West players, in turn, also competed in Cuba after the visiting Cuban teams saw the local talent and recruited. Pancho’s friend, Agustín (Tinti) Molina, for example, born in Key West in 1873, played in Cuba for “Matanzas” in 1894/95 and “Fe” in 1897/98. Also from Key West, Florentino González and Alfredo Crespo played for “Matanzas,” as did Rafael (Felo) Rodríguez for “Havana.”²³ Though Pancho would have accompanied his friends, his father’s high profile anti-Spanish activism as editor of *El Yara* and close relationship with the martyred José Martí made this inadvisable. In any case, his father would have disapproved him playing in Cuba so long as Spanish rule persisted. During the early 1890s, then, Cuba not only recognized Key West for its intense political nationalism and insurrectionary sentiment but also for its baseball prowess.

21. Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball*, 85.

22. Poyo, “El Base Ball en Key West,” 102-103.

23. Jorge S. Figueredo, *Who’s Who in Cuban Baseball, 1878-1961* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 17-18, 61; González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 410, fn 2.

The success of Key West baseball had its drawbacks however. The increasingly competitive and professional nature of the league alienated many fans who enjoyed the community nature of local baseball that provided opportunities for many local athletes to participate. As the teams became increasingly professional and attracted outsiders, the league lost much support and attendance declined at the games. In time, those with professional ambitions left Key West and the game returned to the informality of the mid-1880s when established cigar maker teams like "Cuba" played often against "pick-up" teams.

Nationalist politics also contributed to the return of baseball to its community roots, especially with the foundation of the PRC. Throughout the final third of the nineteenth century Key West's tobacco workers passionately supported the independence movement promoted by the local nationalist leaders. Besides providing political legitimacy to aspiring insurgent and political leaders who visited the Key, workers provided financial backing with weekly quotas from their wages. In late 1891, José Martí arrived in Key West for his first visit and gained almost immediate support from the workers reflected in an album, *A Martí*, prepared for the occasion by the employees of the Eduardo H. Gato cigar factory. Each worker penned a *pensamiento* (a thought) in honor of the distinguished visitor. Pancho's notation reflected the general tone of the entries: "To be free, it is necessary to comprehend the rights and duties that liberty requires, and among the apostles that teach these [rights and duties], you illustrious Martí, are among the best."²⁴

As political activists in Key West led by José Dolores Poyo, Fernando Figueredo, Serafin Sánchez and others reorganized the community during 1891-1895 to help Martí launch the second war of independence, the baseball competitions on Sunday afternoons became even more overtly patriotic events and the proceeds went to the nationalist organizers. On one of his visits to Key West, Martí accompanied José Dolores to a game that pitted "Cuba" baseball club against a team of Americans. With Martí watching, Tinti Molina hit a homerun that won the game for the Cubans. Martí congratulated Tinti after the game telling him that "he considered this baseball victory by the Cubans a good omen for the struggle that was about to begin." Committed to Martí's cause,

24. *A Martí* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales del Instituto del Libro, n/d).

Tinti later smuggled messages to activists on the island when he traveled there to play baseball for Matanzas.²⁵ In 1896, after the outbreak of war and Martí's death in battle in Cuba, a community group, *Sociedad de Instrucción y Recreo José Martí*, organized another formal "championship" designed to support the war effort.²⁶

Despite the close link between baseball and patriot events, some nationalists expressed concern about what they considered Key West's exaggerated love affair with baseball. In an 1897 speech, socialist and nationalist activist, Diego Vicente Tejera, for example, criticized Cubans' obsession with the sport. Unlike most local political leaders who welcomed baseball as a good fund raising activity, Tejera and other socialist and labor leaders had their doubts. Tejera thought the sport a distraction. In his comments to the *Sociedad de Trabajadores*, Tejera argued that rather than passing their time playing baseball, workers should prepare themselves for an independent Cuba which was about to become a reality.

Cubans would have to transform a country that had labored under colonial rule creating indolence in the population that had to be overcome. "Yes, my friends," Tejera declared, "we must kill our colonial self; liquidate the indolent, frivolous and vice-ridden man that inhabits us; we need to find a way for the torrents of blood being spilled in Cuba to become a baptism for the new man, the republican."²⁷ Cubans are energetic, he noted, and capable of transforming their culture and way of life. Key West's commitment to the revolutionary movement for thirty years was ample evidence, he thought, but frivolity and lack of seriousness still distracted many. Baseball drained passions and energy better directed to serious tasks:

For four months, at all hours, day and night, we live in the midst of the constant humming sounds of baseballs in flight and the dry cracks of the bat. With solemnity the balls fly through the breeze on Mondays; they only fly a bit less in improvised games during the week. And they fly without any solemnity at all, in kids' matches that never end, from sun-up to sun-up, on all the city's street corners,

25. "José Martí y el juego de pelota en los Estados Unidos," *Opus Habana*, 9:1 (2005), 52-57; González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 83.

26. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 103.

27. Carlos del Toro, ed. *Textos Escogidos. Diego Vicente Tejera* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1981), 169.

and patios, and yards. We men shorten our work day so not to miss the game and we discuss at length whether the base runner who reached second actually stepped on first; in our kitchens our soups evaporate and the rice burns while we puzzle over how Felo could strike out; our beautiful *cubanitas* shyly prepare their fresh lips to articulate the barbarous [baseball] jargon, and they no longer conceive of Cupid except armed with a bat and blue or scarlet socks, and our children...oh!...Our children, tomorrow's hope, are falling behind in school, are abused and becoming addicted and ill with such disproportionality; furthermore, what can be done, especially since they follow the example of grown-ups?

But it is not my intention, dear compatriots, to criticize this diversion, though it is acquiring the disproportionate character of a calamity. My only objective is to demonstrate, with this vibrant example, that Cuban indolence is not physical indolence, the Cuban is alive and passionate when he wants and is very capable of long-term willfulness. Rather, Cuban indolence is more accurately mental, and consists of an almost absolute indifference to seriousness, especially in public life.²⁸

Despite Tejera's exaggerated scolding, Cubans, including Pancho, remained enthusiastic about baseball. Many Cubans considered the sport a symbol of a new era; a sport of the future, of progress, that would displace the bullfights they regarded a retrograde and brutal characteristic of Spanish civilization.²⁹ These kinds of criticisms caused the editors of Tampa's newspaper *El Sport*, dedicated to baseball, to somewhat defensively respond: "We who write in *El Sport* are not required to profess our ideals; we have always been in our place [in support of independence]." "While it is called '*El Sport*,'" the editor declared in another issue, "its principal sport is to make war on our oppressors."³⁰ In any case, Tejera misread Florida's Cuban ballplayers if he thought their activity frivolous and a sign of complacency. Besides playing

28. Del Toro, *Textos Escogidos*, 171-172.

29. For a discussion of this idea see Pérez, Jr., "Between Baseball and Bullfighting."

30. *El Sport*, October 2, 30, 1897.

to raise funds for the insurrection, many Key West players joined the insurgent army after 1895 and lost their lives on Cuba's battlefields. The local PRC council headed by José Dolores Poyo helped organize expeditions to Cuba and encouraged single men to join the insurrection, but instructed married men to remain to care for their families, work in the factories, and contribute quotas from their wages to fund the expeditions. Cuba had sufficient men to fight; they needed weapons. In his baseball essay Pancho memorialized those Key West players who joined the expeditions to Cuba and died as soldiers in the liberation army. Among those killed in Cuba was his good friend Chicho Frasquito, the great Key West pitcher who struck out fourteen players from Matanzas several years earlier. Pancho remembered that "in addition to playing in matches for the benefit of the homeland...they also gave their lives on the fields of the liberating revolution; resting today in unknown graves, without their families and friends having the consolation of giving them Christian burial and shedding tears on their tombs."³¹

A new moment began for Pancho's baseball career on July 17, 1898, when Spanish forces surrendered to the commander of the United States intervention army. Immediately the family made plans to return home and for the first time in his life he booked passage with his family on a steamer to Havana³² Eager to return home, José Dolores and Clara joined Pancho, his wife, Louisa, and their three sons on the overnight voyage. The family gathered on the vessel's deck at dawn to view the defensive walls of Morro Castle and the flickering lights of the city of Havana directly across the harbor. Pancho, for the first time, saw the near mythical city his parents had spoken about since he could remember.

Though José Dolores and Clara raised their family in Florida and saw numerous grandchildren born there as well, they never thought of staying after Cuba's independence from Spain. The return of the entire family to Cuba revealed the depth of nationalist commitment and hope that the new Cuba would provide opportunities for them all. They returned in time to witness the January 1, 1899 ceremony at the Palace of the Captain Generals in Havana, when General John R. Brooke, the military governor of Cuba appointed by President McKinley, received formal command of the island from Spanish authorities. Spain's rule ended, formal

31. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 104.

32. S. T. Solloso, "Tiempos pasados. A la memoria de Cuba y Cuba-no," 144.

United States occupation commenced, and José Dolores began publishing *El Yara* in Havana to combat ideas he believed still threatened Cuban independence. For his part, Pancho resumed playing baseball.

Baseball in Cuba

During 1895-1898, many players and leading baseball organizers in Cuba also joined the rebellion or suffered imprisonment for their sympathies, but the sport continued. When Spanish authorities arrested and deported the most prominent baseball entrepreneur, Emilio Sabourín, who died in a Spanish prison in 1897, others stepped in to organize a championship in early 1898. Baseball entrepreneurs Abel Linares and S.T. Solloso, formed a team called "Cuba" (not related to the Key West team of the same name) which included Key West players Tinti Molina, Felo Rodríguez, and Florentino González.³³ Though successful in winning six games, Linares and Solloso quickly disbanded the team when authorities learned they secretly funneled funds to several insurgent Generals fighting the Spanish. Due to pressure from the government the league suspended play after nine games with "Habana" holding the best record.³⁴

After the Spanish surrender, Solloso reorganized his team and again recruited the by now well known players from Key West that had been playing for "Habana," "Almendares," and other teams, including Molina, Rodríguez, González, and Alfredo Crespo. Pancho also joined the reconstituted "Cuba" baseball club and participated in Cuban baseball during the critical years in the development of the sport. Organized baseball in Havana not only developed into a fully professional sport, but transformed its social composition from a game exclusively for whites to one open to all who could compete.

On joining the "Cuba" club, Solloso named Pancho team captain and club director.³⁵ He and Tinti—both catchers—shared

33. Jorge S. Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: A Statistical History, 1878-1961* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 34.

34. S. T. Solloso, "Tiempos pasados. A la memoria de Cuba y Cuba-no," 141-142; Mendoza, Herrero, Calcines, eds. *El Base Ball en Cuba y America*; Jorge S. Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: Statistical History*, 34, does not show "Cuba" participating in the Jan-April 1898 championship probably because it disbanded early.

35. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 104.

player-manager obligations and during February through July 1899 they each played and managed six games.³⁶ That first short and somewhat disorganized twelve-game season included three teams ("Habanista," "Almendarista," and "Cuba"). "Habanista" dominated the championship and "Cuba" came in third winning only four of twelve games.³⁷ Under the leadership of Francisco Chenard, a former Key West exile, the *Liga Nacional Cubana* was established.

That same year, the new baseball league encountered controversy as change swept the island in the aftermath of Spain's defeat. Some immediately challenged the "social vice" of racial segregation and discrimination, "one of the many *hurts* of colonial times."³⁸ Conforming to the tradition of racial segregation in Cuban baseball in the nineteenth century, the bylaws of the newly formed *Liga Nacional Cubana* included "Statute 98" which explicitly prohibited teams from recruiting black players. Blacks and mulattos formed their own teams such as "Universo," "Alejandría," and "San Francisco," but were not allowed to participate in the league championship.³⁹ Nevertheless, the professional instincts of many baseball managers and directors interested in recruiting black players prevailed, and after the short 1899 season "Habanista" and "Almendarista" agreed to play a series of informal games against "Alejandría" and "San Francisco" at the Almendares Park baseball stadium, the official site for league games. The black teams did well against their white colleagues, demonstrating clearly their proficiency and "de primera" (first rate) category.⁴⁰ As the *Liga Nacional Cubana* prepared for the 1900 season, the integration agitation gained ground leading to a wholesale rebellion against league officials. Dissidents in the important white clubs, including "Habanista," "Almendarista" and "Cuba," demanded full integration, but this did not occur without considerable debate and threats of violence.⁴¹

"Cuba's" owner, Solloso, refused to allow his team to participate in the informal games with the black clubs and was among those

36. Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: A Statistical History*, 9, 61.

37. Figueredo, 34-35.

38. Tomás Chappoten, "El Club San Francisco," 111, in Mendoza, Herrero, Calcines, eds. *El Base Ball en Cuba y America*.

39. "El base-ball y la raza de color," 77-78, in Mendoza, Herrero, Calcines, eds. *El Base Ball en Cuba y America*.

40. Chappoten, "El Club San Francisco," 112.

41. For a more comprehensive discussion about race and baseball in Cuba see Adrian Burgos, Jr. "Entering Cuba's Other Playing Field," 9-40.

most opposed to the integration of Cuban baseball. "This gave rise," he wrote, "to a very 'black' atmosphere against 'Cuba' and its 'inspirator,' referring to himself. 'I remember a Liga meeting...we had to close the windows because the Franciscans ['Franciscano' team members] wanted to crawl through and eat us raw without even chewing."⁴² As a result of the controversy, the *Liga Nacional Cubana* disbanded and a new desegregated *Liga Cubana* formed. So much did Solloso oppose integration that he gave the "Cuba" club to Pancho and Tinti, but insisted they change the team name.⁴³ Unequivocally supporting the integration of Cuban baseball, Solloso's restriction irritated the new owners who called the team "Cubano." They registered their protest by writing the team's new name, including on the uniforms, as "Cuba-no" to remind fans that in fact this was not the segregated Cuba team of before.⁴⁴

Having lived in Florida during the Jim Crow Era in the 1890s they knew the damage of segregation and opposed it, as did most in the Cuban nationalist community that for years had debated issues of nationality and race. In his career as a nationalist, Pancho's father had championed the need to free Cuba's slaves and integrate them into Cuban society, and in the late 1880s and early 1890s Martí had called for the full integration of blacks into Cuban nationality. Pancho and Tinti witnessed the efforts of Florida's authorities to impose statewide school segregation laws that forced the integrated San Carlos Institute to temporarily suspend classes. Lamenting, but having to cope with, the new reality, José Dolores assigned a stipend of \$50 per month from the PRC treasury to pay tuition fees for 50 poor black children at the Escuela Politécnica, presumably a school for people of color.⁴⁵ The action taken in 1900 to dismantle formal segregation in Cuban baseball certainly did not alleviate the racism and discrimination faced by Cuba's players of color, but it did remove an important legal barrier that gave them opportunity to display their skills.

42. Solloso, "Tiempos pasados. A la memoria de Cuba y Cuba-no," 145.

43. González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 83; Solloso, "Tiempos pasados. A la memoria de Cuba y Cuba-no," 144-145; Chappoten, "El Club San Francisco," 113-114.

44. González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 119; Bjarkman, *A History of Cuban Baseball*, 85.

45. *La Revolución del 95 según la correspondencia de la Delegación Cubana en Nueva York* 5 vols. (Havana: Editorial Habanera, 1932), 4:95.

As if to highlight their point about the validity of integration, the black "San Francisco" club went on to win the 1900 championship with a season record twenty-seven wins and seventeen losses, ahead of "Habana" by three games.⁴⁶ "Cuba-no" contested the season with a first rate roster including players like Carlos Royer (pitcher), Esteban Prats (first base), Simón Valdés (2nd base), Bernardo Carrillo (short stop), José María Magriñat (center field), José María Baeza (left field), and Key West colleagues "Felo" Rodríguez (3rd base) and Florentino González (right field).⁴⁷ Pancho did most of the managing while Tinti caught but the team managed only third place, ahead of "Almendarista."⁴⁸ As Solloso noted, "the Cuba-no nine...did not comport itself badly, but disappointed expectations suffering inexplicable defeats, when in reality it was a formidable nine."⁴⁹ That November "Cuba-no" also participated against the visiting Brooklyn "Superbs" of the United States' National League. "Cuba-no" did not fare well, losing both games, but helped initiate what became the "temporada americana" (American season) tradition, when United States clubs travelled to Cuba to compete against local teams.⁵⁰ The 1901 season included five teams, adding a reorganized "Fe" baseball club. Pancho again mainly managed, playing in only three games, but, having lost its formidable pitcher Carlos Royer who switched to "Habana," "Cuba-no" won only four while losing fourteen, beating only "Fe" in the league standings. Royer pitched 12 wins and only 3 losses for his new team and became Cuba's preeminent pitching star during the next few years. "Habana" won the championship handily followed by "Almendares" and "San Francisco."⁵¹

No longer economically viable, "Cuba-no" folded after the 1901 season and most of the players found spots on other teams. Unlike other teams like "Habana" and "Almendares" with long histories and traditions in Cuban baseball with a significant following,

46. González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 122.

47. González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 121; Figueredo, *Beisbol Cubano: A un paso de las Grandes Ligas, 1878-1961* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 20.

48. Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: A Statistical History*, 37-38.

49. Solloso, "Tiempos pasados. A la memoria de Cuba y Cuba-no," 146; Chappoten, "El Club San Francisco," 13.

50. Jorge Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: A Statistical History, 1878-1961* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003), 39.

51. Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: A Statistical History*, 40-42; Figueredo, *Who's Who in Cuban Baseball*, 9.

the upstart "Cuba-no" club failed to compete adequately on the field and obviously to raise the necessary capital to continue. Tinti joined "Habana" and later managed and became a well-known baseball promoter. Miguel Prats also went to "Habana" and Esteban Prats and Heliodoro Hidalgo joined "San Francisco." "Felo" Rodríguez joined "Almendares."⁵² Pancho, however, retired; a decision likely influenced by family finances. Pancho and Louisa had four children, the youngest born just the year before and the eldest about to start school at San Agustín Catholic School. Perhaps Pancho also realized he could no longer compete at his age against a new generation of players entering an increasingly professional league. He may have considered managing another club, but few opportunities existed in such a small league.

Whatever the case, just as "Cuba-no" disbanded, a job opportunity appeared that promised Pancho some security in an economic environment made difficult by the devastation of war and uncertainty of foreign control. On June 16, 1900, Havana held its first municipal elections under the U.S. occupation government resulting in the election of General Alejandro Rodríguez as mayor, the very same man who helped organize the baseball championships in Key West over a decade before.⁵³ He secured for Pancho a civil service job in city government and he rose in this career over the years to Jefe de Sección y Despacho (Chief-of-Staff) of the Municipal Secretariat. There he remained until his retirement sometime in the 1930s.⁵⁴

But Francisco did not cut his ties with baseball. He remained engaged with baseball as a part-time umpire during this formative period when the sport became firmly established professionally and the nation's "favorite past-time." He gained a reputation as an excellent umpire, especially for his "knowledge, rectitude and honesty."⁵⁵ For the next decade the Cuban league prospered, the players became increasingly proficient, and baseball in the United States took notice. The competition between Cuban and United States teams begun during the first occupation (1898-1902) con-

52. Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball. A Statistical History*, 40-43.

53. José M. Pérez Cabrera, "La ocupación militar norteamericana," 7:61, in Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, et al. *Historia de la Nación Cubana*, 9 vols. (Havana: Editorial Historia de la Nación Cubana, 1952).

54. See Francisco A. Poyo y Camús, *Acuerdos del Ayuntamiento de la Habana* (Habana: Imprenta "El Figaro," 1923).

55. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 104.

tinued. Baseball entrepreneur Abel Linares organized the "All-Cubans" to tour the United States, which in 1900 included "Cubano" players Carlos Royer, José María Baeza, Bernardo Carrillo, Miguel Prats, and "Felo" Rodríguez, initiating a tradition of taking among Cuba's best to play against US teams.⁵⁶

Within a few years, Cuban teams regularly beat US clubs during the "temporada americana." Fluent in English, Pancho umpired many of these games. In 1903, with Pancho as umpire, an all-star Cuban team called "Criollo" defeated 4-0 the "Cuban-X-Giants," a US team that despite its name included no Cuban players. The next year he umpired another game in which "Habana" defeated the same team 9-3. The "All Americans," composed of many well known "big-leaguers," traveled to Havana in early 1904 and Pancho umpired in a game won by "Habana" 5-0 although the Americans won the series 7-4 against several Cuban teams.⁵⁷

Later, US Major League and Negro League championship teams, including the "Detroit Tigers" and "Philadelphia Giants" respectively visited Cuba and found "Habana," "Almendares," and other Cuban teams very competitive. "Detroit" traveled to Cuba in 1909 and again in 1910. Knowing of the "Tigers" American League titles the previous three years, in October and November 1910 Cuban fans flocked to see the twelve game series between "Detroit" and Cuba's best teams, "Habana," and "Almendares." Cuban fans especially wanted to see Ty Cobb and were disappointed when they learned he did not accompany the team because he did not want to play with blacks. For an extra \$1000 and travel expenses, the series promoters finally persuaded him to compete, and when he arrived the series stood at 3-3-1. Cobb's presence made a great difference and the series ended with the "Tigers" winning seven, losing four, and tying one. Though disappointed with the overall result, Cuban fans were ecstatic when in the last game "Habana" pitcher, José Méndez, one of Cuba's many black stars, struck out the great Ty Cobb.⁵⁸

Pancho's grandsons remembered a story he related of umpiring a game involving the visiting "Tigers" and Ty Cobb. According

56. Figueredo, *Beisbol Cubano: A un paso de las Grandes Ligas*, 39; González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 126.

57. Figueredo, *Beisbol Cubano: A un paso de las Grandes Ligas*, 28-31.

58. "Joy in Cuba When Cobb Strikes Out: Detroit Club Only American Team that Won Series of Games from Islanders," *New York Times*, 18 December 1910.

to grandsons José and Sergio Poyo, when Pancho made a call Cobb disliked, the American, known for trying to intimidate umpires, rushed to argue and in a threatening gesture placed his cleat on Pancho's shoe. Poyo simply stared while Cobb yelled and applied pressure on his foot. Not seeing the umpire flinch, Cobb finally removed his spike.⁵⁹ The grandsons did not remember anything more about the story, but Francisco, among the most respected umpires, was, in fact, one of two umpires hired for the "Detroit" series and worked eight games before resigning in a heat of controversy.

Perhaps a part of "Detroit's" strategy to rattle the Cubans, even before the first game, player-manager George Mullin publicly complained about the umpires after watching the final match of a series between the visiting Negro league team "Leland Giants" and "Almendares."⁶⁰ Once the "Detroit" series began, Mullin immediately criticized the two umpires contracted for the series, Gutiérrez and Poyo. The "Tigers" protested many of Gutiérrez's calls behind the plate causing him to apologize and offer to resign, but they especially resented a call by Pancho in the field.⁶¹ Despite a public admission by Poyo that he had erred, Mullin the next day threatened not to field his team again "until we are assured of a square deal," prompting Pancho to resign.⁶² Hoping to keep the "Tigers" happy, the Cuban promoters invited an umpire from the United States to replace Pancho, though they asked him to remain until the American arrived.⁶³ If rattling the Cubans was Mullin's strategy, it worked.

In the meantime, Ty Cobb arrived in Havana and Poyo umpired in his first appearance with Detroit. In that game, "Detroit" faced "Almendares" and another melee began when Poyo called safe a Cuban stealing third base.⁶⁴ This was when Cobb rushed in from right field and confronted Poyo in his effort to intimidate the Cuban umpire. The US umpire, Evans, arrived for the next and remaining games and worked with Gutiérrez, while Poyo enjoyed the rest of the series from the

59. Sergio and José Poyo told slightly different versions of this story.

60. "George Mullin's Opine," *Havana Post*, 8 November 1910.

61. "New Mascot for Tiges [sic]," *Havana Post*, 16 November 1910.

62. "Got Jump on Cubans," *Havana Post*, 14 November 1910; "Umpire Resigns," *Havana Post*, 19 November 1910.

63. "Umpiring and Victory," *Havana Post*, 21 November 1910.

64. "Cobb Made Good," *Havana Post*, 28 November 1910.

sidelines with his children and pocketed a memorable anecdote for his grandchildren.

Conclusion

After his career as umpire, Pancho remained an avid baseball fan especially of "Almendares" and kept up with his baseball *compañeros* Tinti and Felo. Tinti, born a year after Francisco, passed away just a month before Pancho in 1961. Pancho's grandchildren remembered in their youth in the 1930s attending games with him at El Tropical ballpark not far from their home, which replaced the old Almendares Park.⁶⁵ Despite Pancho's only brief playing and managing career in Cuba, he earned the respect of the baseball establishment. "It may be said, with regard to baseball," noted the editors who requested Francisco's baseball essay, "he is among the most knowledgeable about this most beautiful of sports."⁶⁶ This reputation as well as the memory of his career in Key West endured, earning him in 1946 election to the Cuban Baseball Hall of Fame. Earlier, in 1942, his friend Tinti received the same honor. Hall of Famers not from Key West but who played there included Antonio María García (1939), Valentín González (1939), José Méndez (1939), Alfredo Arcaño (1940) and probably others.⁶⁷

The elections not only honored Pancho and Tinti, but, in effect, Key West baseball, which for about two decades was really part of Cuban baseball. Pancho, Tinti, Felo, and many other Cuban conchs competed with Cuba's best. With the end of Spanish rule in Cuba, Key West players aspiring to play professionally or work in baseball moved to Cuba as the sport reorganized and took off like never before, depleting the Florida island of its best talent.⁶⁸ The competition and baseball exchange that occurred between Key West and Havana during the 1890s continued into the twentieth century for a time. In 1908, for example, "Almendares" played a visiting team from Key West composed of Cubans and Americans, and José Méndez, now playing for "Almendares" shut-out the visitors 4-0. The next week,

65. El Tropical was inaugurated as the site of Cuba's professional league in 1930. González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 186.

66. Poyo, "El Base Ball en Key West," 104.

67. See Figueredo, *Cuban Baseball: A Statistical History*, 508-509.

68. González Echeverría, *The Pride of Havana*, 133.

"Almendares" traveled to Key West where Méndez repeated the shut-out and added a no-hitter.⁶⁹ But baseball activity between the two countries in the twentieth century expanded and shifted north as Cuban players improved and their baseball talents became generally known in the United States. Cuban promoters like Molina, Linares, and, later, Alejandro Pompez ensured the continued cross-fertilization of Cuban and American baseball traditions.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in Cuba the memory of the Havana-Key West baseball exchange persisted. In electing Pancho Poyo and Tinti Molina, whose careers began in the Key West leagues of the 1880s and 1890s and continued later in Havana, the Cuban Hall of Fame electors acknowledged Key West's integral place in Cuban baseball history.

69. Ibid.

70. Adrian Burgos, *Playing America's Game*, 111-138.