

Andruw Jones and Curacao - World Series Begins

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I had never heard of a language called Papiamentu and I had only a vague notion that Curacao was an island off the north coast of Venezuela. I suspect that by now Atlanta Braves fans are learning more and more about the largest island in the Netherlands Antillies and its capital city, Willemstad.

Curacao is the home of Andruw Jones who at 19 has become the youngest player to hit a home run in the NLCS, the youngest player to hit a home run in a World Series, and the youngest player to hit two home runs in a World Series, and only the second player to homer in his first two at bats in the World Series. He is the second player from the Netherlands Antilles to reach the majors, the first being former New York Yankee, Hensley "Bam Bam" Meulens.

With a population of 170,000, Curacao is a melting pot of fifty different ethnic groups. In addition to Papiamentu the three other common languages of the island are English, Dutch and Spanish which means that Jones can complain about those outside strikes to umpire Tim Welke in four different languages.

The original inhabitants of the island were the Caiquetio Indians, a branch of the Arawak, who melted into the diverse island population by the end of the 18th century. The Spanish controlled Curacao for just over a century, and in 1634 it was taken over by the Dutch West India Company. Peter Stuyvesant became governor in 1642 prior to his stint as the governor of New Amsterdam. Again the New York connection.

Curacao became a slave trading center, although very few Africans ended up on the island. In the 1730's a large number of Shepardic Jews fleeing persecution in Spain and Portugal arrived on Curacao, and the oldest synagogue in the western hemisphere is located there. Twice in the early 19th century the British took possession of Curacao, but the Dutch regained it in 1815 in the Treaty of Paris. In the 20th century the discovery of oil off the Venezuelan coast led to the construction of a refinery by Royal Dutch Shell and the arrival of Latin American and Chinese immigrant laborers.

Now Curacao is on the verge of becoming a cradle of heavy hitting outfielders for the Atlanta Braves, who apparently have a half dozen other players from the island in their farm system. Who knows, Curacao could be the next San Pedro De Marcoris.

Its most famous resident, at least in Atlanta and New York, is Andruw Jones first seen by Giovanni Viceisza, a Braves' scout, when Jones was fifteen. He signed a contract with the Braves at age sixteen. Starting this season at Class A Durham, he moved to AA Greenville in mid-June, to AAA Richmond in late July, and finally to Atlanta in mid-August. He took Atlanta by storm.

In Durham he had seventeen home runs in sixty-six games, at Greenville twelve in thirty-eight games, and in Richmond five in twelve. His batting average went up at each minor league stop. Two days after arriving in Atlanta he hit his first home run off current teammate Denny Neagle. Less than a week later he had his first multiple home run game. It is not surprising that Braves manager Bobby Cox compares Jones to a young Roberto Clemente.

In Game One of this World Series in Yankee Stadium Jones hit two towering home runs and drove in five runs as the Braves routed the Yankees 12-1. John Schmoltz did not have his good stuff, but didn't really need it, as he combined with his relievers to shut-down the Yanks.

In Game Two it was Greg Maddux who painted the masterpiece on the corners, showing everyone why he holds multiple Cy Young awards. This night belonged to Maddux and the Braves 4-0. Game Three in Atlanta saw another tremendous pitching battle. Tom Glavine made one early mistake and David Cone was dominant in the early innings. The Braves were unable to get the big hit when needed and lost 5-2. Game three also displayed the one glaring weakness in this powerful Braves team, a tired and inconsistent bullpen.

Then came Game four which started like Game one as the Braves jumped to a six nothing lead. Neagle was strong and Rodgers weak. After Neagle weakened and gave up three runs the Braves weakness in the bullpen again surfaced and Bobby Cox went to his closer in the 8th inning. Mark Wohlers could not close, giving up a three run homer to Jim Leyritz. Braves opportunities to win in the 8th and 9th slipped away and the Yankees struck for an ugly two runs in the tenth. Final 8-6 in ten.

The World Series was back to square one, and now a best two of three games. Both teams have their top three starters ready. No team has won at home yet. What remains to be seen is how dominant Schmoltz, Maddux and Glavine can be, or if the Yankees will just keep doing what they do best. Win.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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