

Democracy on the Diamond

PEDRO DE LA HOZ

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Pedro de la Hoz and Jackson Goosh knew why they were sweating in the relentless tropical sun as they carried thick boards for the bleachers at the stadium in Calabazar. Months before, these teenage students and baseball lovers from a high school on the Pacific Coast of Canada got involved in a solidarity effort that would go way beyond their expectations.



Fourteen students of Richmond High School in Ladner, Canada, along with 16 parents and teachers traveled to Cuba for a week to play baseball with Cuban teenagers, but more than anything to take part in the renovation of the Calabazar Stadium in the Havana municipality of Rancho Boyeros. For over a year, the Richmond students and practically their entire community carried out an intense fund raising campaign to enable the purchase of cushions for the

stadium bleachers, field markers, paint, and an indispensable backstop behind the plate. An earlier class of students that visited the island had done volunteer work to help repair the roof of a junior high school in the Matanzas community of Calimete, damaged by a hurricane.

When they were told the place to benefit from the efforts would be Calabazar, Ken Lawrence, an English language and literature teacher understood and made others understand the choice. "More than us contributing, it has contributed to us. My students and I have received a lesson about how the society operates in a country whose reality is not all told around the world."



Ken and his wife Jane, also a teacher, were the chief promoters of the idea.

AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

For more than two decades, Jonathan Watts, has promoted exchanges between Cuba and Canada by way of the Cuba-Canada Sports and Culture Festivals. In this case, helping to make possible the project of the Richmond High School, he discovered new problems.

"We have seen that community participation is one of the pillars of democracy in Cuba," Watts told Granma. "The population of Calabazar had dreamed of having a first rate baseball field, and had made that desire known at the different levels of local government," where it was approved. "My compatriots and I were very much impressed to see the local representative from the area of the stadium and other community leaders working among the people in a spirit of cooperation and unbeatable participation. You know that in the majority of countries democracy is a formal act or purely electoral act. Here it is just the opposite."

FRATERNITY AND COMMITMENT

On the baseball field the Canadians and Cuban teenagers didn't compete, they shared. Just as they worked together in the construction, they played on teams with players from each country. Jorge Andrade and Rosendo Ruenes, baseball promoters in the community, said the effort was a beautiful way to strengthen fraternal ties. When bidding farewell to the Canadians, tour operator Jorge Debasa said he could feel the positive effects of the encounter. Local delegate Oasis Banderas said: "People show support when you give them a way to participate in accomplishing their ideas. We are grateful for the solidarity, and also take on the commitment to maintain what we have accomplished."

Ken Lawrence made another commitment: "When we return to Ladner, our community of 15,000 inhabitants will know a lot more about a country that resists and triumphs, of marvelous people, and of the ethical values of simple people that opened their hearts to us." JUVENTUD REBELDE