



Lessons from Juan Marichal

For any baseball player, induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York is like reaching the top of Mount Everest. For it is there, where the greatest ball players are permanently assembled and forever chiseled into the mountain of baseball history. Of the 207 former major leaguer players enshrined in Cooperstown, nine players are Latino, including, Ted Williams, whose mother was born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and Roberto Clemente from Puerto Rico, who many would think to be the first Latino inductee. Among the Latino Hall of Famers, there is only one pitcher, Juan Marichal, who also happens to be the lone inductee born in the Dominican Republic, and is aptly nicknamed the “Dominican Dandy.”

Marichal starred for 16 seasons, from 1960-1975, mostly with the San Francisco Giants. A nine time All-Star, known for his high-kicking style, Marichal ended his career with 243 wins, 2,303 strikeouts, six 20-win seasons, and was voted into the Hall of Fame in 1983. In his book, *Juan Marichal: My Journey from the Dominican Republic to Cooperstown*, Marichal narrates his story, including his love and passion for baseball as a kid, how former Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, recruited him, racism in America, playing with and against other baseball greats, and regret and redemption on the field.



Commitment and Opportunity

Marichal fell in love with baseball as a little boy. Introduced to the game by his older brother, Marichal and his friends used branches from wassama trees as bats and got in trouble with his mother when he skipped school to play. Even back then, Marichal would tell his mother she was going to be proud of him when she heard his name on the radio. When not playing baseball, Marichal worked on his family’s farm, but, by 1956, Marichal was good enough that he dropped out of high school to play for the Grenada Company, a division of the United Fruit

Company, for \$18 per week.

Following a win against the Dominican Air Force Team, a lieutenant from the Air Force delivered a telegram to Marichal from Ramfis Trujillo, dictator Rafael Trujillo's son and the commander in chief of the Air Force. The telegram directed Marichal to report right away to join the Air Force. In those days, Marichal recalls that documents like these were considered "orders from God" and with his mother noting that "he could not say 'no' to those people," he reluctantly joined the Air Force. He soon discovered, however, that his job in the Air Force, was not to fly planes. Instead, it was to pitch every week and play games in Aruba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Venezuela. This allowed Marichal to further develop as a pitcher, and scouts, from the few teams that scouted players in Latin America back then, noticed.

Coming to America

Unlike the multi-million dollar signing bonuses often paid out today, the Giants signed Marichal for \$500 in 1958. Speaking little to no English, he came to a country riddled by racism and discrimination. In the South, the Jim Crow laws affirmatively enforced segregation, including, criminalizing interracial marriage and prohibiting intimate relationships between Blacks and Whites. Homesick and earning \$300 per month, Marichal remembers being told that Latinos and Blacks could not date White girls and that, in many places, he, along with other Latino and Black players, could not get off the bus to eat with the rest of the team. In fact, the team had an official inform all Latino and Black players what to do and what not to do in public. Even housing was different because the White players could stay in the hotels, while Marichal, who is "light brown," had to stay with Black families. Instead of caving in and wilting, Marichal continued undeterred and, in 1960, was called to the majors.

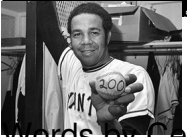
Hard Work

Beginning in 1960, Marichal improved each year to become the anchor of the San Francisco pitching staff. Motivated by playing with Hall of Famers such as, Willie Mays, who Marichal calls the greatest player ever, Gaylord Perry, Willie McCovey and Orlando Cepeda and dueling the likes of Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale and Warren Spahn, Marichal always worked hard. In June 1963, he became the first Latino pitcher to throw a no-hitter, and several weeks later, pitched against Warren Spahn, in what many call the greatest game ever, with both Marichal and Spahn hurling double shut-outs into the 16th inning, before Willie Mays homered to win the game.

For his part, Marichal was as dedicated off the field as he was on it. He studied opposing hitters, wrote notes in books on how other pitchers got batters out, would go to bed early and lead a healthy lifestyle. For Marichal, there was no time to relax. It was this discipline and preparation that allowed him to win more games than any other pitcher from 1960 to 1969. According to Marichal, "some players are good, but they are not the best because they do not have discipline or are not willing to work harder...[a] lot of pitchers like to drink and party but if you want to be the best, you can't do it." All of his accomplishments, however, were almost overshadowed by one unfortunate incident.

Urban Latino Sports

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