Special Edition Winter 2012

John M. Pfau Library
The third annual Latino Baseball History Project reunion took place on July 6, 2011. Mr. Alex Montoya, born in Medellin, Columbia, now Manager of Latino Affairs for the San Diego Padres, gave the keynote address.

Thalidomide was prescribed to calm Alex Montoya’s mother’s morning sickness. The drug caused Alex to be born without arms or a right leg. The journey he took from that beginning to his current job in baseball took drive, determination, and a love for the game. At four years old he immigrated to the United States for medical care, including being fitted with prosthetic arms and a prosthetic leg.

Mr. Montoya inspired the audience with his description of being a young child in a culture that was unfamiliar to him, and falling in love with baseball. He was determined to find a job in the sport he loved. He graduated from college and took a job in public relations, but he moonlighted as an usher for the San Diego Padres. When a full time job opened up with the Padres he applied, and did not get the job. That did not stop him, he applied for the next job and the next, until he was hired into the front office. He likened that first rejection to striking out – you go up to bat again and again, you keep swinging no matter how many times it takes. In his own life he hit the ball right out of the park! His job now is the one he dreamed of, serving his community and the sport that he loves!

He spoke about the parallels between his experience, the struggles he faced and the determination he had to have to overcome them, and the experience of Latinos who wanted to play baseball. He said, “I was amazed that teams have been formed in barrios, and in times of war, and as a means of keeping communities together. But I was not surprised at our level of passion, and perseverance, and pride. It’s in our blood. It’s in our DNA.”

Mr. Montoya stressed the importance of keeping the history of Latino baseball alive. He spoke of this history as a legacy that must be passed on. He urged us all to: “…use baseball as your inspiration, your catalyst, your fire. Embrace adversity. Embrace struggle. Dream large. Overcome. And always, always – Keep Swinging!”
coming out and playing on Sundays, how Sunday was the best time of the week, a time to relax. Memories included everyone in the community coming out to the games, parents watching from the stands, good food and music, how baseball brought the family together, playing...winning! People talked about the sheer talent in the community, how there was too much talent there for players to sit idle. Mr. Segovia summed it up when he said: “Aren’t we blessed? Look where we are now... Thank you, Lord.”

Richard Santillan, Professor Emeritus at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona in the Ethnic and Women’s Studies Department, author of several books on Chicano history, community, and politics, and co-author (with Francisco Balderrama) of Mexican American Baseball in Los Angeles, moderated a panel discussion with players who had lived the history of Latino baseball in Southern California. The players were:

- Al Vasquez (Chino/Cucamonga)
- Jose Felipe (Placentia)
- Al Padilla (East Los Angeles)
- Marcelino Saucedo (Catalina Island)
- Danny Carrasco (Inland Empire)
- Jim Segovia (Placentia)

Dr. Santillan’s first question was, “what did baseball mean in your life?” Mr. Vasquez spoke about beginning to play when he was 13 years old. His talent and passion for baseball were passed on to his grandson, who won a scholarship to Santa Barbara and was picked up by the Kansas City Royals. Mr. Felipe talked about traveling with the Merchants and enjoying playing every game. Mr. Padilla called himself a “has-been pitcher” and said that his love of the game led him to a 43-year career as a teacher and a coach. (He was one of the first Latino coaches.) Mr. Padilla talked about his father who played for Southern Pacific, and the link between the railroads and Mexican immigration at that time. Wrigley (as in chewing gum) owned Catalina Island, where Mr. Saucedo grew up. The Chicago Cubs came to the island every year for Spring Training. Team members brought their families to stay on the island, donated uniforms, and even helped the island kids train for their own baseball series. To Mr. Carrasco baseball meant family, his parents were very involved. Mr. Carrasco started playing when he was 11 and was selected for the Little League series team that played against Schenectady New York. The team traveled to the White House and met the President. His experiences drove him to get an excellent education. (He was in the first class at California State College San Bernardino!) Mr. Segovia started playing ball at 8 years old. He received baseball scholarships to go to college. It took him a few tries to find the college that was the right fit, but when he went to Chapman College, he stayed. He credits baseball with teaching him discipline.

Further questions about baseball, community and memorable moments had players talking about everyone...