Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
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Thank you for inviting me to speak here tonight- it is a great honor to be a part of the birth of organized baseball in Guyana. Baseball provides us with an opportunity to continue bring our countries together through another shared experience. Baseball is often referred to as "America's pastime," but it is one we are happy to share with others. Indeed, Major League Baseball players have come from 45 countries in the Caribbean, South and Central America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Neighboring Venezuela has had over 280 players in the Majors, while Jamaica has had 4, the Bahamas 6, Curacao 12, and the Dominican Republic 558!

Saul Steinberg, an American cartoonist who drew for New Yorker Magazine said, "Baseball is an allegorical play about America, a

poetic, complex, and subtle play of courage, fear, good luck, mistakes, patience about fate, and sober self-esteem."

And it teaches lessons of life. Baseball franchise owner, the late Bill Veeck observed, Baseball is almost the only orderly thing in a very un-orderly world. If you get three strikes, even the best lawyer in the world can't get you off."

It is a special, and in many ways a unique game. It is one of the only games, together with Cricket, in which the defense gets the ball. Baseball's positions each requires different skill sets, an aspect that enables men, women, and children of all sizes and strengths to play; with each bringing their own unique abilities and insights to the game.

Perhaps no other game defines the United States and its history like baseball -- many of our colloquial expressions have their roots in baseball: "three strikes and you're out," an expression that has carried over into our daily lives in so many ways. For example, it is very common in the United States to give someone three chances at work or play. It has its hold in our legal system; for instance many states have

the “three strike rule” as part of their judicial and penal codes. Another common phrase in U.S business and politics is to “cover all your bases.” We are “thrown curveballs” in life, and frequently give “ballpark estimates” in real estate or for repairs. We like it when people “step up to the plate” and then “hit one out of the park” and are unhappy when someone is “out in left field.” Baseball also affects our style and dress-with baseball caps being a common fixture in U.S. society whether as part of sports uniforms, or fashion statements. Baseball is not only our national pastime but it also ingrains itself as part of our language and our way of life.

As many of you probably know, baseball evolved from the British games of “rounders” and “cricket.” Watching a baseball game from the outside, it can seem like a simple game. It does not require a lot of equipment in order to play: a ball, a bat, and some gloves, though even those can be improvised. It can appear to be a very relaxed game, with much of the action occurring between the pitcher, the batter, and the catcher while most of the other players may appear to be casually

standing around the field. But to those of us who know baseball, we realize it is full of complexities from the positioning of fielders to the choice of pitches – it is the execution of throwing a pitch at dazzling speeds and the split second decision of a batter whether to swing or not- and if the ball is hit, the ability of the fielders to react instantly in order to make a play, springing to life and in an effort to make the play.

Yet looking at baseball today, a multi-million dollar industry with stadiums that seat tens of thousands of fans, it is almost hard to imagine that the game began with very simple beginnings, without clear cut rules, leagues, or even formal teams.

In the United States, baseball is a game of greatness that played itself throughout our history and in many ways paralleled events and culture in America. We played baseball through the long and hard years of our own Civil War, through industrialization, and the building of the transcontinental railroad. It was played in city parks as the United States urbanized and in farms after the day's work was done. As the United States expanded, the game expanded with it and baseball

enthusiasts transformed the game from a simple recreational pastime into a sport. They defined a common set of rules, developed permanent fields of play, professional teams, and eventually leagues just as you in the Guyana Baseball League are doing here in Guyana right now.

It was initially a uniquely American game which, for the most part, remained a mystery to the international community despite efforts by private enthusiasts to bring it to other countries. Baseball took its first steps outside the United States in the 1860's as sailors first brought it to Cuba. In the 1870s sugar cane workers spread the game across the Dominican Republic and gave birth to the great baseball tradition that the Dominican Republic shares today.

In 1874 two professional teams travelled to England in an attempt to spur British interest in the game. They played several exhibition games only to be told by the unimpressed English spectators that they were just playing a game of "rounders" which the unenthused Brits explained was an old English game for children. Another tour included

a game played in the shadows of the great pyramids at Giza, now remembered only by the surreal photos taken that day of baseball in the desert and the players posing in the shadow of the sphinx.

This all changed in 1878, when a young Japanese engineer by the name of Hiroshi Hiraoka returned to Japan. While working in the iron industry and studying railroads in the United States, he developed a love for watching and playing baseball. Hiraoka took that new found passion back to Japan and introduced the game of baseball into Japan -- first by teaching it to his coworkers on the railway and making it a game of railway workers. It was here as Japan industrialized that it also began its love of baseball. Hiraoka organized baseball Japan by founding Japan's first team. Japan now recognizes Hiraoka as the "father of Japanese baseball."

By the 1890s, organized baseball already had taken hold and the Japanese baseball tradition was born. Shortly after the turn of the century, Japanese university teams frequently travelled to the United

States to play against their American university counterparts, professional exhibitions between Japanese and American teams also developed. In the 1920s, professional baseball established itself in Japan and Baseball went from being an American game into being a truly international game. Similar to its predecessors in the Americas, Japan brought its own style to the game and baseball in Japan developed along its own path. Japan developed a distinctly Japanese form of baseball that reflected Japan's social balances and Zen mentality. These differences in style and emphasis remain visible today -- even in the Japanese players actively playing in the U.S major leagues, such as Ichiro Suzuki -- an all-star player and long time fixture in Seattle, now playing for the New York Yankees, the arch-rival of my own team, the Boston Red Sox (with their own Japanese player, Daisuke Matzuzaka, who unfortunately has been a bit of a zen mystery pitcher despite his $150 million price tag).

Baseball also expanded into South and Central America—initially catching hold in Columbia, Venezuela, and Mexico. Today all these

countries have strong baseball traditions and are well represented in international play, as well as in the Major Leagues in the United States alongside many others. Baseball transformed from a North American game into being a truly American game, North, South, and Central. It became the game of the new world, complete with its own rules, new found heroes, and newly developing traditions, like the Americas themselves.

In the United States, baseball evolved from a game of fields to a game of giant stadiums, tens of thousands spectators attended games and while the game enthralled millions more across the nation. Box scores and statistics were introduced to measure and track players bringing new dimensions to the game. This was followed by the introduction of baseball cards featuring the players' photos and their individual batting and pitching statistics. Baseball inspired new industries as early enthusiastic entrepreneurs, such as Warren Spalding, himself a former professional baseball player, began manufacturing balls, gloves, and

uniforms at a time when the United States was emerging as a global manufacturing leader.

Baseball created a level field and gave everyone a chance to win regardless of size or ethnicity-- it developed into a game of skill that people of all ages could play. Baseball engrained itself in our national psyche and gave birth to our first truly national sports heroes as players such as Ty Cobb, Cy Young, and Babe Ruth became household names.

One of baseball's greatest moments occurred in 1947, when a young African-American man by the name of Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier becoming the first black player since 1880 to play for a major league team. Jackie Robinson demonstrated poise, great personal character, in addition to legendary baseball talent. He stepped into the crucible with the remark, "This ain't fun. But you watch me, I'll get it done." In a time when the United States still struggled with issues of inequality and discrimination, Jackie Robinson demonstrated greatness and poise both on and off the field, daily proving the arguments of

segregationists wrong and he got it done. Even more importantly, Jackie Robinson inspired a new generation of Americans of all ethnicities, helping to set the stage for the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s.

Baseball is a game of dreams for both children and adults. Many of us in the United States grew up with dreams of playing in that great game, pitching a world series shut out, hitting that famous winning hit, or making that great play that saves the game. Baseball lets its fans hang on to those dreams, lets us be young, and creates a common bond that transcends generations, backgrounds, politics, and nationalities. It gives us something we can discuss with complete strangers. We expect Baseball will bring those same types of discussions to Guyana, though those discussions initially may tend to spark debates about the merits of cricket.

Being from New England, naturally my favorite team is the Boston Red Sox. The Red Sox were infamous for their eighty-six year long championship drought and their bitter rivalry with the New York

Yankees. In 2003, Boston finally won the World Series coming from behind three games to none in the American league championship series against the New York Yankees. They won the win the World Series by winning eight straight games in a row- a feat never done before in the playoffs and helped make up for the years of frustration and futility. It was a moment that inspired a region and fans across the country.

Another inspiration is one of my favorite players for Boston, Dwight Evans, who was a twenty year fixture in Boston's outfield. Evans too served as an excellent role model for young and old alike -- for twenty years, he worked hard and his numbers steadily increased making him a viable member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. But like so many of our baseball heroes, Dwight Evan's contributions went beyond baseball -- when his two sons were diagnosed with neurofibromatosis, Evans became a sponsor and contributor to the charity, NF Inc Northeast. This organization promotes advocacy and actively supports research for a cure as well as care for families coping with the disease. He is not alone as many players contribute time, money, and their skills

towards helping their communities. We see baseball players visiting sick children in hospitals, teaching kids at baseball camps, or working with foundations to help make the world a better place. It is a game that helps build character in children as they grow up. It teaches us value and demands skill and excellence but most off all, lets us have fun.

Looking forward, I think we all can imagine a time when Guyana celebrates its first major league baseball player and along with that player a whole new generation of Guyanese and American children growing up and sharing a common hero; learning more about one another's country and culture through their heroes and through baseball. Through baseball and through the Guyana Baseball League Inc., I think we can all imagine the birth of a new set of dreams this evening.

It is the beginning of a new era for Guyanese sports. I am excited to share this moment with you to share in the birth of baseball in Guyana and all the possibilities this brings for the future of Guyana and its children. Looking around this room, I think back to those pioneers in

the United States, players, fans, and entrepreneurs, whose love for the game took it from being the children's game of "rounders" and transformed it through their love and passion into the national sport of the United States. I am sure that in the beginning of this league, many Guyanese will be as puzzled by baseball as the majority of Americans are by cricket and that like baseball's original enthusiasts that you too will win them over in time.

I believe that the pioneering spirit that has brought us all here tonight will carry baseball forwards and carry your league into success and that one day, the Guyana Baseball League will be remembered as the founders of Guyanese baseball and when we are all watching Guyana's first major league player, you will be able to say, we were there at the beginning, we were the dreamers, the enthusiasts, the pioneers, and founders who brought baseball to Guyana.

Thank you and I wish you the all the success with your league and for Baseball in Guyana.