

## Cal Ripken, Jr.: “...this will not be our last trip to Nicaragua.”

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Most of you know me as the Developer of Milagro del Mar at Gran Pacifica, but over the past few days, I have been blessed with the opportunity to do what I really love: play, teach and talk about the great game of baseball. We have just concluded our most recent version of the ongoing diplomatic program called “Estamos Unidos en Beisbol” (“We Are United in Baseball”), whereby the U.S. Embassy joins with Nicaragua in providing opportunities for the youth of this country to participate in baseball clinics, competitions and various levels of social interaction with the desire to develop baseball skills, create relationships, foster hope and promote progress for the future of Nicaragua.

I have spent much of the last 3 days with two former Baltimore Orioles, Cal Ripken, Jr., a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, and Dennis Martinez, a native Nicaraguan and former Major League pitcher with the most victories of any Latin American pitcher in the history of baseball. It was a real joy to have both of them here in Nicaragua promoting the game of baseball and interacting with the youth of this country. During my years in Nicaragua, I have developed a relationship with Dennis Martinez, but this was my first opportunity to meet Cal Ripken, and I enjoyed every minute of my time with him. Unlike many of the fallen heroes in sport, Cal lived up to every word that has been written over the years about him as a person. His charm, intelligence, work-ethic, graciousness and love of the game of baseball were evident at every moment. His appointment by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as Special Sports Envoy is well deserved (<http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=2972509>). Mr. Ripken is a true Ambassador of the game of baseball.

During our time together, as old baseball players often do, we were able to spend time telling stories and talking about our mutual friends in the game. Baseball players (and a lot of athletes), because of the nature of their lifestyles, are often most comfortable being “one of the guys”, rather than meeting the rigorous demands of their fame and the expectations of the general public. So, as we dined at the home of U.S. Ambassador Robert Callahan and his wife Debbie, I was fortunate to spend quality time with Cal talking about the future of baseball here in Nicaragua, his impression of the country and the vision of our foundation, The Nicaraguan Youth Baseball and Softball Association ([www.nybsa.com](http://www.nybsa.com)). NYBSA is a U.S. 501c3 (non-profit organization) established for the promotion and development of youth baseball and softball programs, as well as educational, health and social progression, in Nicaragua.

Cal said, and I quote, “I told Dennis (Martinez) this will not be our last trip to Nicaragua. We have had a wonderful first trip, and we’ve had the chance to impact many kids and lay down the

groundwork for future visits. Dennis loves his native country and would be very proud to bring baseball instruction to many young ballplayers here. It is clear that there is talent and a love of the game here” (in Nicaragua).

As for the vision of NYBSA, I specifically discussed with Cal our current plan to do the following in the community near Gran Pacifica:

1. Purchase 25-50 acres of land, outside the gates of Gran Pacifica, for the construction of a “National Baseball and Softball Complex (“the Complex”)”.
2. Host year-round events at “the Complex” where youth teams from the U.S. and other countries would travel to Nicaragua for competition, cross-cultural interaction and social projects. Coaches, parents and team members would stay in Gran Pacifica, utilizing the hotel, rental homes, golf course, restaurants and other amenities as part of a “baseball vacation”.
3. Host instructional clinics at “the Complex” where former and current Major League Baseball players would serve as instructors and counselors. Professional players at all levels would be attracted by the opportunity to participate in the clinics, while also bringing their families to the Gran Pacifica resort for a golf and beach vacation.
4. Host annual events at “the Complex” in conjunction with Score International (<http://www.scoreinternational.org>), an organization with which I have been involved for many years and serve on the Board of Directors (ScoreBaseball).
5. Construct a small stadium at “the Complex” and develop a professional level team for inclusion in the Nicaraguan Professional Baseball League, which season runs from November – March, thus providing entertainment to the Gran Pacifica population.
6. Host year-round clinics and camps for Nicaraguan youth at “the Complex” in an attempt to nurture their love and enjoyment of baseball, while providing relief from the various social and economic challenges they face in their homes and communities on a daily basis.

After discussing the vision of “the Complex” and NYBSA, I was simply thrilled to hear these words from Cal, “what you have described is a perfect model, and Ripken Baseball would love to find a small, or large, way to be involved. Let’s keep the dialogue going and know you have our interest and support”.

We at NYBSA will keep you posted on our progress and, of course, we would love to hear your feedback. You can always reach me by e-mail ([roger@hunterblair.com](mailto:roger@hunterblair.com)) or by VOIP at my Managua home (770-881-7725). In the meantime, please know that we are all diligently working to make Gran Pacifica and Milagro del Mar all that we have promised and more!

For more information on Ripken Baseball, please visit their website at: (<http://www.ripkenbaseball.com>)

With Warmest Regards,

Roger

**(Please see article below from La Prensa, Managua, Nicaragua)**

**From La Prensa, November 18, 2008 (translated to English)**

## **Gracias Ripken**

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Today, the legendary former player of the Major Leagues, Cal Ripken, leaves, but his lessons are going to remain among us.

The once-brilliant athlete, who, for 21 years was dedicated to spreading his talent in the field of the Majors with a style of play which stood out as a fortress of character and consistency, put the same vigor into every single moment of his visit to the country.

We appreciate his patience and dedication with which he treated the children. Without imposing anything, we saw him share his know-how with the coaches, and he was direct in his message to the youth: seek not shortcuts to arrive at success. Thus, they will be able to look in the mirror and feel pride at what they have obtained.

But Ripken was also here to show that greatness and humility are not divorced, that money does not change you and that challenges have to be faced, as he sometimes found he had to do.

God provided Ripken the ability to play. With dedication, Ripken took charge in deriving the best possible benefit from his talents. What he contributed to his country, and to baseball in general, has been more than catching and batting a ball—he has been an example.

He competed cleanly when steroids were being used; he never felt more important than his team; and he made history without pretension. He did only what was correct, thereby winning the heart of his country and the respect of the world.

The most durable man in baseball, a member of the Hall of Fame, 2,632 games played without rest, the batter of 3,184 hits, 431 home runs and 1,695 RBI's, the winner of two Most Valuable Players and a World Series, he was here among us. He did not dazzle us with his past, but with his present and with his simplicity in the middle of greatness.

When, at its epoch, baseball was becoming a great lie due to steroid use, there was Ripken showing that one could still be trusted, and that this great sport could still be loved.