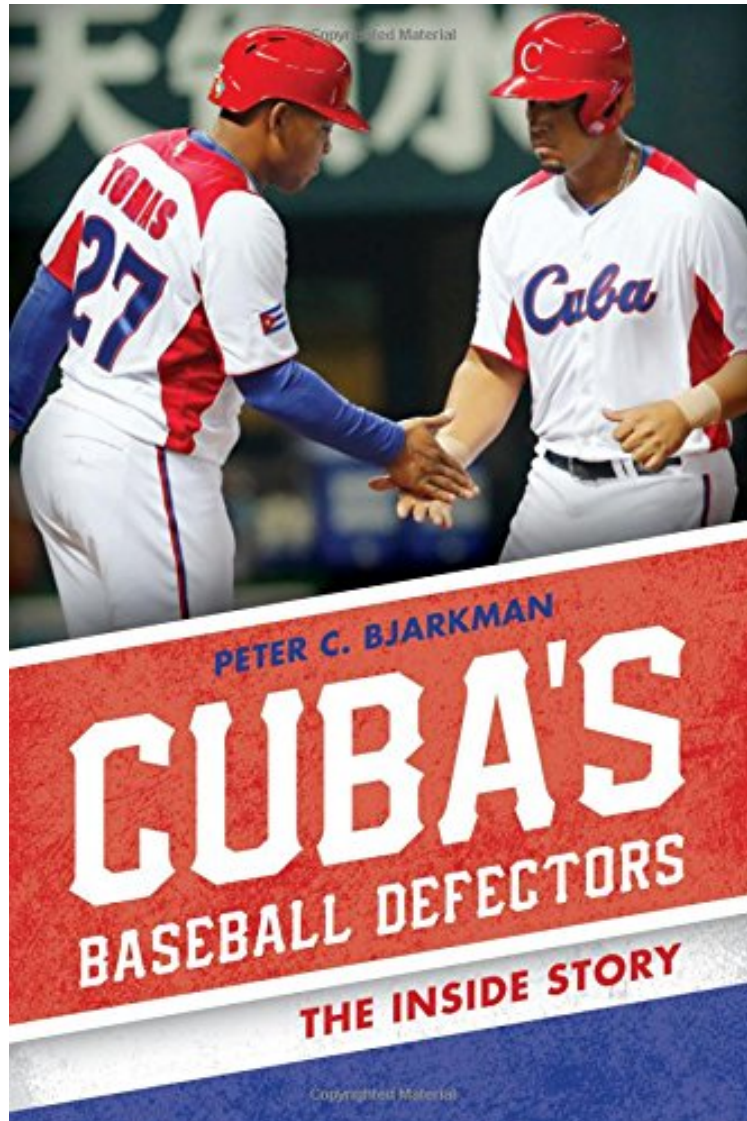


Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story

Peter C. Bjarkman

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Peter C. Bjarkman : Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Baseball America Review By Peter C. Bjarkman Some readers might assume a book about Cuban baseball defectors would take the Hollywood approach, shining a light on Puig and other stars who've risked life and limb for political freedom and major league glory. But Peter C. Bjarkman's new book, Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story, offers a more skeptical view of that narrative, as well as a scathing critique of the agents who turn a blind eye to the human trafficking that's behind many defections. He's focused less on

the star players and their sensational escapes and more on the sum total of those defections, and the impact they have on a community left behind. . . . The 'inside story' promised by the books title is essentially one of a special vantage point, of an isolated institution looking outward. Bjarkman, an American, gives the impression that hes adopted this 'alternate baseball universe' as his own, in the process renouncing his former allegiances, not in political terms but simply as a fan whos grown in love with a certain brand of baseball. Maybe its the natural result of someone attending hundreds of Cuban games as the author has, both those on the island and abroad in international competition. Its clear that after visiting the island more than 50 times since 1997 and reporting extensively on Cuban baseball, he brings expertise to the subject. Baseball America² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Cuba Baseball By avidreader An interesting read but not an easy one. There is a lot of information here and you will need several days to get through the book. Is the bad situation the fault of the US? Cuba? MLB? Now you will have a more informed opinion and understanding¹ of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book gives everyone the chance to better understand Cuban baseball and the way it operates By MR GAWAIN DL OWEN This book gives everyone the chance to better understand Cuban baseball and the way it operates. I could not think of anyone better to write on this topic due to the amount of time Pete has spent in Cuba and the connections/trust he has built over the years. A must read for anyone interested in Cuban baseball

The stellar play and fascinating backstories of exiled Cuban sluggers and hurlers in Major League Baseball (MLB) has become one of the biggest headlines in America's national pastime. On-field exploits by colorful Dodgers outfielder Yasiel Puig, American League rookie-of-the-year Jos Abreu, home run derby champion Yoenis Cspedes, radar-gun busting Cincinnati fast-baller Aroldis Chapman, and a handful of others have been further enhanced by feel-good tales of desperate Cuban superstars risking their lives to escape Fidel Castros communist realm and chase a celebrated American Dream of financial and athletic success. But a truly ugly underbelly to this story has also slowly emerged, one that involves human smuggling operations financed by Miami crime syndicates, operated by Mexican drug cartels, and conveniently ignored by big league ball clubs endlessly searching for fresh waves of international talent. In *Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story*, Cuban baseball expert Peter C. Bjarkman reveals the complete truth behind the wave of Cuban big league talent coming to MLB. Given rare access to Cuba and its ballplayers, Bjarkman has spent over twenty years traveling to all corners of the island getting to know the top Cuban stars and witnessing their baseball struggles and triumphs. In this book, Bjarkman places recent events including the apparent thaw in US-Cuba relations in the context of Cuban baseball history and tradition before delving into the stories of the major Cuban stars who have left the island. He reveals the personal histories of these players, explains the events that led them to eventually choose defection from their homeland, and details their harrowing journeys to reach US shores and achieve baseball stardom. Players whose big league dreams failed are also discussed, as are Cubas recent efforts to stem the defection tide through working agreements with the Japanese and Mexican leagues. Unique in its balanced perspective of Cuban baseball and its star players, *Cuba's Baseball Defectors* not only shares the authors first-hand account of many previously misreported events, it also provides a view of the illegal smuggling of ballplayers from the perspective of Cuban baseball officials whose voices have often not been heard. With a conclusion outlining a likely scenario for future relations between Major League Baseball and the Cuban League, this book will fascinate baseball fans, those interested in the history of US-Cuba relations, and those wanting to learn more about the unsavory story of human trafficking in the name of baseball glory.

Bjarkman, the senior writer of the *Baseball de Cuba* website, engagingly probes the sensational influx of Cuban baseball defectors who brave everything to get those mega-buck paydays in American major-league baseball, causing a talent drain on the island. The real-life stories behind Cuban refugees stellar appearances in American ballparks often involve greedy big-league scouts, speedy cigarette boats, and illegal smuggling and kidnapping financed by Miami crime syndicates and operated by deadly Mexican drug cartels. Stories of baseball dynamos Aroldis Chapman, Leonys Martin, Yasiel Puig, and others are cautionary tales of betrayal, peril, desperation, and corruption as racketeers and agents shake down the naive, talented, poor youths for a share of their multimillion-dollar salaries. The writer moves the reader through a summary of Cubas baseball history from the first game in 1874 to the excellence in the Cuban League under Castros regime, a prime distraction from El Jefe's grand social experiment. Bjarkman writes expertly of the raiding of local talent and the rapid thawing of political wills of America and Cuba, and he proclaims that the proud island 'will steadfastly remain the jealous owner of its domestic baseball destiny.' (Publishers Weekly) After the integration of major league baseball in 1947, Cuban ballplayers such as Minnie Mioso, Pedro Ramos, and Sandy Amors dotted rosters throughout the National and American Leagues. Later, legends including Tony Prez, Tony Olivia, and the incomparable Luis Tiant left Cuba before the start of the countrys revolution in 1953 prevented future stars from entering American baseball. Since that time, several players defected to the United States. The numbers increased as Cubas economy declined; from 23 in 2009 to 36 in 2013, including Yasiel Puig and Aroldis Chapman. Cuban baseball, with a proud and fascinating history of its own, has suffered from these losses. Now that U.S.-Cuba relations have warmed, prospects for the games future in the latter have seriously declined. In clear prose, Bjarkman

details the shift of Cuban stars to the major leagues at the expense of Cuban baseball. His latest book is a revelation, specifically its documentation of the often shady U.S. role in recruiting top talent. VERDICT Bjarkman presents an original social history for sports enthusiasts and readers interested in past and future Cuba-U.S. ties. (Library Journal) Bjarkman is senior writer for BaseballdeCuba and the author of many books, including *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006*. In great depth, this volume examines the story of the 59 Cuban defectors who played in Major League Baseball through 2015 comprising 31 percent of all Cuban big leaguers. Based on primary research and 20 years of travel to Cuba, Bjarkman describes how the Cuban baseball system achieved great international success, and discusses the impact of the historic relations between the US and Cuba on recent limited athletic contacts. He analyzes how and why star players illegally left their country to play baseball overseas, for reasons such as mistreatment by coaches, the lure of millions, and a desire to test themselves against the best at the price of leaving families behind. Some defected while on overseas tours, but others left on dangerous boat trips, leaving these individuals beholden to gangsters who helped finance trips. Bjarkman is very critical of the entire process and fears for the future of Cuban baseball. The book is thorough [and] does contain illustrations and endnotes. Summing Up: Recommended. . . . Lower- and upper-division undergraduates; general readers. (CHOICE) Peter Bjarkman is scrutinizing exceptional athletes such as Gourriel and the forces that push and pull them, allowing readers to draw conclusions about the future of Cuban baseball. Bjarkman probably the foremost expert of Cuban baseball in the United States who is close to many of the players he writes about doesn't spare the corporate machine that is U.S. Major League Baseball either. He points out how the official MLB policy of forcing Cuban players to cut all ties to their homeland not only triggered the stream of talent, but also produced tales of human trafficking and violations of Cuban law. And it contributes to the destruction of the Cuban model. Bjarkman draws an unusual conclusion for the future of U.S. baseball: 'Baseball's salvation as a twenty-first century sport depends on the continued health of alternative baseball worlds' such as the Cuban one. A big-league book! (Cuba Standard) When Peter Bjarkman writes about Cuban baseball it is always a 'must read.' One may agree or disagree with his premises, but his decades of study and presence in the stadiums of Cuba confer on him a knowledge about this subject that cannot be denied, one born from his first-hand knowledge and closeness to his subject. (translated from the original Spanish) (el Nuevo Herald) Some readers might assume a book about Cuban baseball defectors would take the Hollywood approach, shining a light on Puig and other stars who've risked life and limb for political freedom and major league glory. But Peter C. Bjarkman's new book, *Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story*, offers a more skeptical view of that narrative, as well as a scathing critique of the agents who turn a blind eye to the human trafficking that's behind many defections. He's focused less on the star players and their sensational escapes and more on the sum total of those defections, and the impact they have on a community left behind. . . . The 'inside story' promised by the book's title is essentially one of a special vantage point, of an isolated institution looking outward. Bjarkman, an American, gives the impression that he's adopted this 'alternate baseball universe' as his own, in the process renouncing his former allegiances, not in political terms but simply as a fan who's grown in love with a certain brand of baseball. Maybe it's the natural result of someone attending hundreds of Cuban games as the author has, both those on the island and abroad in international competition. It's clear that after visiting the island more than 50 times since 1997 and reporting extensively on Cuban baseball, he brings expertise to the subject. (Baseball America) If you have an interest in Cuban baseball, then this is the book you need. Bjarkman is the end all, be all authority on Cuban baseball. He knows every inside story on every player in the country and understands the Cuban culture, which allows him to understand the mindset of the players. He is the man ahead of the headlines and shares with his readers the back stories of the players that have come into the U.S. over the past few years, how Cuban baseball factors into the lives of those who live in the country and how baseball has aided in helping the relations between Cuba and the U.S. This is a very comprehensive work and Bjarkman is second to none on his knowledge of the Cuban game, their players and the proud society of Cuba. If you want to learn about Cuban baseball, I will say it again, you need not look any farther than here. Bjarkman has spent 20 plus years on this subject and it shows through in this body of work. (Gregg's Baseball Bookcase) From a baseball standpoint, Bjarkman convincingly illustrates the one-sided nature through which MLB executives imagine total US control over Cuban labor and consumer markets in the development of academies, exhibitions, memorabilia, and television broadcast rights.... [T]here is much to appreciate in Bjarkman's thorough treatment of the current plight of Cuban baseball. (Sport in American History) Cuban baseball is largely unknown to most American baseball fans. What most do know are the current crop of players from that island, like Yasiel Puig, Aroldis Chapman and Jose Abreu. They all have fascinating backstories, and author Peter Bjarkman, one of Cuban baseball's foremost authorities in the US, has put together a fascinating look at the island's baseball history in *Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story*.... If you enjoy Cuban baseball, *Cuba's Baseball Defectors* is a book you must read. Bjarkman goes into some minute details about it, and at the end of the book lists not only the Cubans who have played in MLB since 1871, but has a comprehensive list of all players who have defected from the island since 1980. There are plenty of stats, but there's even more intrigue and cloak-and-dagger stuff behind those men who left the country for various reasons to play ball in America. (The Mighty Quinn Media Machine) As usual, Peter Bjarkman is the go-to guy for the best information about all things baseball cubano. He has seen these players long before most of us ever heard their names. This is a fabulous read! (Eric Nadel,

award-winning radio announcer for the Texas Rangers) This is the book we fans of Cuban baseball have been waiting for! Insightful, intriguing, and filled with invigorating stories. Author Peter Bjarkman bats 1000 with this one! (Byron Motley, author and photographer of *Embracing Cuba*) *Cuba's Baseball Defectors* is a detailed account of the hundreds of players that have left the island over the past quarter century and decimated the country's powerhouse national teams. But more important, it is an up-to-date narrative of the role baseball plays in the new political dynamics between the United States and Cuba. This is a must-read book for anyone interested in contemporary Cuba. (Milton Jamail, author of *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball*) Nobody knows more about the intertwining of politics and baseball in Cuba than Peter Bjarkman—he is the dean of information on this topic. Bjarkman has traveled to Cuba for many years and has formed relationships with officials in both these areas. (Omar Minaya, Senior VP of Baseball Operations, San Diego Padres) Peter Bjarkman is the ultimate chronicler of Cuban baseball. His latest book takes an inside look into the wave of player departures that has rocked the game both in Cuba and the U.S., while providing historical perspective on the complicated relationship between the countries. (Jorge Ortiz, USA Today) Peter Bjarkman is the only authoritative commentator on baseball in post-revolution Cuba. *Cuba's Baseball Defectors* combines scholarship and the author's insights gained from his close personal ties to Cuban players, officials, and ordinary Cubans. *Defectors* is not only a great book about Cuban baseball, but an important book about contemporary Cuba. (Kit Krieger, *Cubaball Tours*) No American understands baseball's role in Cuba better than Peter Bjarkman, and in *Cuba's Baseball Defectors* he is our guide behind the headlines. With a historian's eye, he both charts the game's past and explains why baseball matters to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of Cuba today. (Ben Strauss, coauthor of *Indentured: The Inside Story of the Rebellion Against the NCAA*) Daring, honest, exceptional Peter C. Bjarkman has written a must-read primer for anyone considering the truth behind Cuban baseball's impact on Major League Baseball. Read this book and learn from one of the best. (Ray Otero-Alonso, director of BaseballdeCuba.com)

About the Author Peter C. Bjarkman is the senior writer for www.BaseballdeCuba.com, the leading source in Spanish and English for current Cuban League and Cuban national team coverage. He is the author of *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864-2006* (2007) and coauthor of *Smoke, the Romance and Lore of Cuban Baseball* (1999, with Mark Rucker). Bjarkman has made numerous media appearances as an expert on Cuban baseball, including a featured role as Anthony Bourdain's guide to island baseball on the 2011 Travel Channel episode *No Reservations Cuba*. He appears as a featured head on ESPN's 30 for 30 documentary, *Brothers in Exile* and has appeared several times on the popular ESPN feature *Outside the Lines*. Bjarkman was a recipient of the Society for American Baseball Research's 2017 Henry Chadwick Award, established to honor the game's great researchers.