

# *Cuba and U.S. Major League Baseball sign agreement to protect Cuban players*

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Major League Baseball (MLB) in the U.S. has signed an agreement with the Cuban Baseball Federation (CBF) that will allow players on the island to sign with any team in the United States without having to defect from their country.

MLB Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem said that the agreement provides a safe and legal framework for Cubans to reach the Major Leagues without having to resort to dangerous trips through traffickers. MLB teams will pay the Cuban Baseball Federation a percentage of the bonus granted to any player.

"Our main objective in this agreement is to provide players in Cuba with a path to the Major Leagues without having to endure the difficulties that many of our players have already experienced," Halem said.

Thanks to the MLB-CBF Agreement, players from the island "will be able to perform in the U.S. professional league without losing their residence in Cuba, nor their link with Cuban baseball," the parties said in a statement.

Cuban baseball players like Yuliesky Gourriel (Houston Astros), Jose Dariel Abreu (Chicago White Sox), and Yasiel Puig (Los Angeles Dodgers), among others, had to defect to sign on U.S. major league teams.

Cubans hired over 25 years of age or with six years of service in the local league will be free to sign with U.S. major league teams, Halem, who clarified that the players of less age will have to ask permission, said. If they desert, they will have to face a waiting period of one to two years, he added.

Negotiations in baseball began when former presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro agreed to work to restore diplomatic ties in 2014. The Cuban Federation becomes the fourth to reach an agreement of this nature with the MLB, following their counterparts from Japan, South Korea and China.

The economic blockade that the U.S. government still has on Cuba, however, could prevent the agreement from being fully carried out, Enrique Rojas, a sports reporter, said through his Twitter account, explaining that the blockade regulates relations between U.S. companies, such as MLB, with Cuban entities.

Since the arrival of U.S. President Donald Trump to the White House -- recalled Albat, a baseball media critic -- any progress made by the Obama Administration had been scrapped. In addition to the economic blockade, there is the possibility that entities such as the U.S. National Security Council, or hard-line conservatives who see any deal with Cuba as a danger, can seek to veto the MLB-CBF agreement.

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