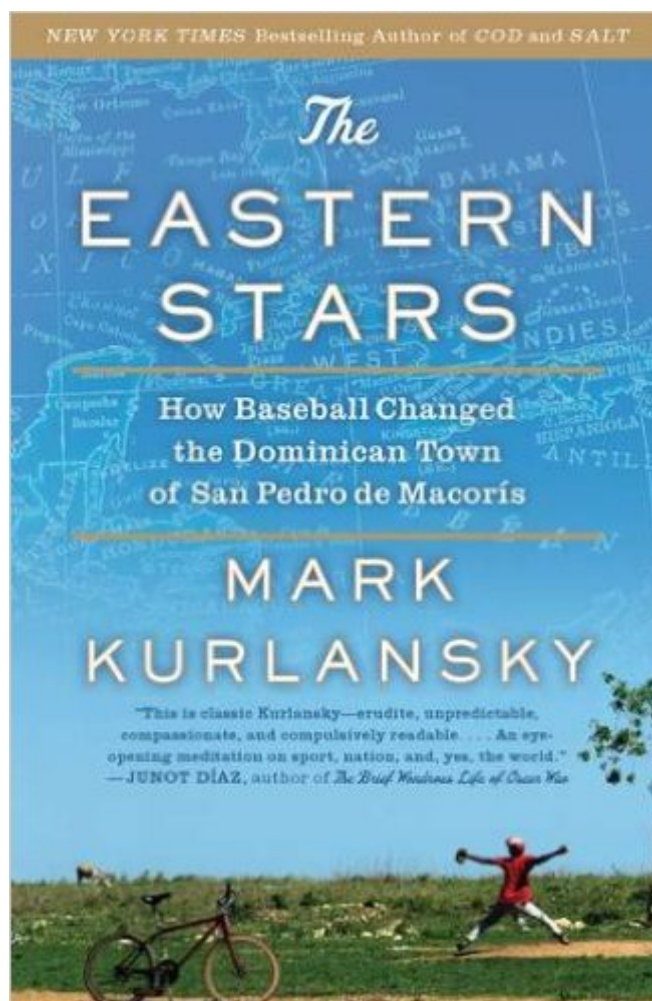


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The Eastern Stars: How Baseball Changed The Dominican Town Of San Pedro De Macoris



Synopsis

"A fantastic social history" from the author of *Salt and Cod* (USA Today) In the Dominican Republic town of San Pedro de MacorÃ­s, baseball is often seen as the only way to a better life. For those who make it, the million-dollar paychecks from Major League Baseball mean that not only they, but their entire families as well, have been saved from grinding poverty. The successful few set an example that dazzles the neighbors they left behind. But for the majority, this dream is illusory. In *The Eastern Stars*, New York Times bestselling author Mark Kurlansky reveals the connection between two countries' love affair with a sport, and the remarkable journey of impoverished San Pedro and its baseball players-including Rico Carty, Albert Pujols, Robinson CanÃ­o, Sammy Sosa, and Alfonso Soriano-who have sought freedom from poverty through playing ball.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most of the baseball books I've read (such as the one I reviewed most recently, *The Baseball Codes*) are about the *game* of baseball. Kurlansky's is different. Unlike your average book about the sport, in *The Eastern Stars* you'll rarely find the phrase, "The count was 3 and 2, with 2 outs." Instead, this book is about the cultural history of baseball in a place and economic system that is foreign to most of us. It's fascinating -- assuming that you are as attracted as I am to anthropology, or "how one item can impact an entire society." Kurlansky is no stranger to this kind of writing, as his previous books (such as *Salt: A World History*) demonstrate. But I hadn't realized until I read *The Eastern Stars* that he has a long journalistic history in the Dominican Republic, and the depth of his knowledge really shows. This isn't someone who flew in for a few weeks worth of interviews;

Kurlansky is well aware of the frequency with which the power goes out in the Dominican Republic, and people's dependence on motorbikes (I once saw five people on a two-person motorbike -- plus a guitar). In fact, if you're interested in the Dominican Republic without any reference to baseball, this would be an excellent overview. I certainly wish I'd read his chapter on the country's history before I spent a week in the country in the mid 90s. (I stayed with friends, cooking on a gas stove powered with rum. It was a very long way from any resort hotel.

As a huge fan of baseball and a bigger fan of baseball books, I was a little surprised by Kurlansky's latest book. Most other baseball books are written by authors who are clearly passionate fans of the game. With this comes a focus on details of the sport that includes literary representation of games--or particular moments from games--and heavy reliance on statistics. Kurlansky's focus here is not the details of games but how professional baseball has impacted the culture and way of life of the Dominican Republic in general with a focus on San Pedro de Macoris, a small town that has produced 79 major league ball players between 1962 and 2008. Further, Kurlansky demonstrates himself as a journalist who knows a lot about the country. His focus is on the cultural history of the island and the impact of baseball on the culture and economics of the island. He does share anecdotes of famous players but most of these focus on their life outside of the diamond. We see how these famous players and their wealth have inspired a nation and a city to stress baseball to their male children as a way to overcome widespread poverty. It is fascinating to consider that even a modest (by today's standard) signing bonus is the equivalent of years of salary. Kurlansky shares that even players who have had very moderate success in baseball are able to return to the Dominican as heroes and set their families up in comparative luxury and security. In addition to the impact of the game on the city and country, Kurlansky focuses on why this area has become such a fertile birthplace for baseball talent.

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