

Cubans' Victory Over Americans Due to Their Clever Defense

Baseball fans throughout the United States, in trying to dig up an answer that will explain the walloping that have been handed our big league ball teams by the Cubans during their annual winter pilgrimages to the "sunny isle," have probably attributed the success of the Cuban players in a great measure to the change of climate, the fact that our players are out of training and, being under no strict discipline, take little care of themselves and accept the games as merely a side issue to a joy ride, and other causes irrelevant to the playing of the Cubans themselves.

While change of climate and lack of condition no doubt affect our players to some extent in the first few games played on the island during the winter time, those who have witnessed the games down there and those players who have participated in them will tell you that the Cubans'

success against the class of our big leagues is due in a large measure to their admirable defense.

It is this strong defense that has been the stumbling block to our teams cleaning up in Cuba, and the biggest individual obstacle in their path down there has been Jose Mendez, star pitcher of the Almendares team, known in Cuba as "The Black Mathewson."

Mendez, although he has been playing ball but four years, has proved a most consistent winner against our big league teams, and he has won his game with very little hitting behind him, always holding our heavy hitters down to a small number of hits and beating them solely on the defensive. The "Black Mathewson" had the pleasure of beating the great white Mathewson during the Giants' recent trip to Cuba, going in and relieving Pedrosa, his teammate, after the Giants had touched him for four runs and holding the Giants scoreless, and giving them but two hits in the final four innings of the game. Here is what the white Mathewson has to say concerning the "Black Mathewson:" "This fellow Mendez is a great pitcher. It's too bad he is a negro, as his color bars him from the big leagues up in the states. If he was a white man or an Indian he'd be the star of the leagues up there in no time."

Lobert's Opinion of Mendez.

"Honus" Lobert, who managed the Phillies during their recent tour of Cuba, says: "Mendez is a wonder, and so is his catcher, Gonzalez. If we could give those two coons a good coat of white paint and ring them in with the Phillies next summer we'd win the pennant on the chin strap."

Here is the record Mendez has made against our big league teams that played in Cuba: In November, 1908, on the occasion of the first opportunity that has been granted the Cuban teams to measure their efficiency against our major leaguers through the first visit of the Cincinnati National league team to Cuba, and during Mendez's first season in baseball, he was chosen to pitch the opening game against the Cincinnati team and the first game that any Cuban team had played against our big leaguers in recent years. Mendez not only showed his ability as a pitcher, but his nerve and absolute immunity from stage fright, by going in and shutting out the Cincinnati team in this game with but one little hit, and that one was a little scratch affair made by Miller Huggins in the ninth inning. Mendez fanned nine of the Reds in this game, and as his own team could get him but one run to win with, you will see that he had to go some to win even with that great pitching.

47 Innings Without Score.

Following this game Mendez again shut out Cincinnati in nine innings

on December 3, 1908, and pitched 47 consecutive innings without allowing his opponents a run, 18 of these being in the two games against Cincinnati, and the balance again Key West and Havana, making five consecutive shut out victories and two additional innings pitched against Havana before a run was scored against him. That's the kind of defense our fellows have to beat when they stack up against "the Black Mathewson."

In November, 1910, Mendez pitched against Summers in a game with Detroit during the Tigers' tour of Cuba, and held Detroit to three hits in 10 innings, the game ending 2 to 2 tie. In this game Mendez showed the great ability as a fielding pitcher by being credited with eight assists. He followed this up in December of the same year, when the Philadelphia Athletics, who had just won the world's championship by slamming the Chicago Cubs' pitcher all over the lot, went on their tour of Cuba, by beating the world's champions with Plank in the box by the score of 5 to 2, holding the slugging Athletics to five hits. In this game Mendez had five assists from the pitcher's box, and struck out five men.

In November 1911 Mendez pitched

ed against the Philadelphia National league team and shut them out 4 to 0, letting them down with four hits, and striking out eight men, and repeated a week later against the Phillies by beating them again 3 to 1 and giving them five hits, striking out six men. The Phillies, however, have the honor of handling Mendez the worst beating he has ever taken from a ball team, when they got to him for 13 hits on the occasion of his third appearance against them after a rainstorm had interrupted the game in the fourth inning and made the ball so slippery that Mendez could not control his great speed or work his fast curve.

Then came the chance for the "Black Mathewson" to measure his effectiveness against the white Mathewson when the Giants appeared in Cuba. Mathewson's fadeaway drop had the Cubans at his mercy, they never having seen anything like it before, so that Mendez, with all his great pitching, had little show to win unless he held the Giants absolutely runless. Mendez got one victory over his white rival, however, when he went in to relieve Pedrosa, whom the Giants had touched for three runs in the first inning, after the Cubans had

got to "Matty" for enough runs to tie the score, and Mendez held the Giants scoreless and allowed them but two hits in the four innings he pitched, beating them out by the score of 7 to 4.

Mendez's Great Record.

Mendez's complete record since 1908, his first season in baseball, is as follows: In 1908, his first season, Mendez pitched seven games in the regular Cuban league season and won them all, pitched three games against the Brooklyn Royal Giants in the United States and won all three, pitched two against the Cincinnati National league team and shut them out in both games, and pitched two against Key West, both of which he won. Giving Mendez a clean slate for his first season, 1908, of 14 games won and none lost, an average of 1.000, and two of these games were against a team of our big leaguers and three others were against semi-pro teams.

Mendez's chief asset in a pitching way is terrific speed with a fast-breaking jump to the ball, which he mixes with a fast-breaking curve, and excellent control and fine judgment in working the batsman. Ball-players from the states who have batted against Mendez, or tried to, rather, assert that there is no pitcher in baseball today barring possibly Walter Johnson, who has as much "smoke" as this "Black Mathewson" of Cuba.

Jose Mendez is a Cuban negro, and was born in Cardenas, a city of ten hours' distant from Havana, on March 19, 1887. He worked as a cigar maker until he and others discovered that he had something that Cuban ball-players couldn't hit with any great degree of success, when the Almen- dares team of the Cuban league grabbed him and he pitched his first real game of baseball for that team on a tour of the United States with the

All-Cuban team in the summer of 1908, and he performed well against the strong semi-professional teams here.

The Evening Times, Grand Forks, ND

Saturday, February 3, 1912, Page 3, Columns 4 to 6