

# Cuban-American players sit out to show solidarity

by Scott Wilson and April Witt  
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MIAMI — He only had a few hours to decide whether to leave a family he loved for a country he did not know and was taught to fear. The airplane that would take his Cuban national baseball team to a series of practice games in Connecticut sat waiting at a Miami airport.

At 17 years old, Michael Tejera, a promising young pitcher, chose the United States during the fateful layover, seeking political asylum at his uncle's urging without having considered the step before leaving Cuba less than an hour before. He called his mother, Lizette, from a Miami radio station with the news. "I've defected," he told her. "Then we all started crying. She couldn't say anything back."

Tejera wouldn't see his parents again for two years, when Miguel and Lizette Tejera jammed into a 25-foot boat with dozens of others and fled Cuba. Michael, then playing in the Florida Marlins' minor league system, left for Miami for a reunion that, in some ways, is still unfolding.

Tejera, now 23, was one of several Latin American Florida Marlins, most of whom are of Cuban descent, who did not suit up Tuesday night against the San Francisco Giants in support of the citywide work strike called by community leaders in Miami to protest the Saturday seizure of 6-year-old Elian Gonzalez.

In New York, Mets shortstop Rey Ordóñez and third base coach Cookie Rojas sat out Tuesday night's game against the Cincinnati Reds. Ordóñez and Rojas both were born in Cuba and live in Florida during the offseason. Cuban native Jose Canseco elected to not play in Tampa Bay's game against the Kansas City Royals.

The decision by the players, who include Marlins starting third baseman Mike Lowell, whose wife is Cuban and whose parents are Cuban exiles, was a joining of hands with a

community outraged over the treatment of a child who lived among them for less than five months.

But supporting the one-day strike is more than a political statement. It has become a story partly about the sacrifices and separation of fathers and sons. As with key elements of Elian's story, the boycott turns on deep memories and personal hardships endured to make the passage from Cuba to the Florida shores.

"I've been in this country 34 years, my parents came in 1966 with three small children, and I owe it to them and my community to show my support," said Fredi Gonzalez, the Marlins' third base coach who boycotted the game. "It's a fine line. You don't want to get involved in political arena. My parents took my brother and sister out of this situation and I owe it to them."

The general strike called by more than 30 community groups kept parts of this city shuttered throughout the day, but it failed to bring the city to a stop. The decision by some Marlins to boycott a home game, however, captured the city's attention.

The team's endorsement of the strike was viewed as a smart public relations move in a community with a large Hispanic population. After winning the World Series three years ago, the team's former owner traded some of its most popular players, including Cuban-born pitcher Liván Hernández, who was one of three Giants who honored the strike Tuesday night.

"I don't think it had anything to do with PR," said Eric Carrington, the director of media relations for the Marlins, who are averaging 14,000 fans per game in a stadium built to hold 42,531. "It had to do with the emotions and sensitivity of the staff, the people who work and play for the Marlins."

Since the Saturday morning raid that spirited Elian to a reunion with his father outside Washington, Miami's Cuban-American

community has denounced what they view as an unconscionable armed assault on the house. Many community members say Elian should be reunited with his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, but not if that means sending the boy back to a communist country some of them have fled at great peril.

Although the protests have divided the city, it has brought together generations of Cuban families who observed the strike together and found parallels between Elian's story and their own.

Tejera, who is currently on the disabled list, joined horn-honking protesters along Little Havana's busiest streets Tuesday. His father, Miguel, took the day off from his job at a Nissan dealership on Calle Ocho, a cultural main street in the community. Michael remembers longing for his family to join him after his 1994 defection, only to spend two futile years trying to secure their passage. His father said the family talked about supporting the strike, and eagerly decided to observe it together.

"This is a family decision," Miguel Tejera said. "We are all together on this and worried about this case. This decision is for the Cuban community, and all of us are very upset about what has happened with this giant deception."

Dominican and Puerto Rican players joined their Cuban colleagues in protest. Assistant general manager Tony Perez, a Hall of Fame inductee, was the most senior Marlins official to spend the day away from the ballpark. Javier Castro, a clubhouse assistant, also won permission from Marlins management to take the day off.

Cuban-American pitchers Alex Fernandez and Vladimir Nunez, closer Antonio Alfonseca, outfielder Danny Bautista, infield coach Tony Taylor and bullpen catcher Luis Perez also sat out the game for the Marlins. Giants catcher Bobby Estalella, a Cuban-American, also joined in the

work stoppage.

Gonzalez, the third base coach, arrived with his two siblings and parents on a flight from Havana in December 1966. Now he has a 6-year-old son of his own. "The laws should decide," Gonzalez said. "I want him to be here with his father — that's the best case scenario. But I don't know how it will play out."

Lowell, who leads the Marlins with 19 RBI and is batting .313, was born in Puerto Rico to parents who fled Cuba at a young age. He has characterized his decisions as one of "certain things you have to stand up for—things you believe in."

"I'm sure he had to struggle with this decision," said Carl V. Lowell, Mike's father who left Cuba when he was 11 years old and closed his Coral Gables dental practice Tuesday. "I am proud of him beyond the baseball. He's always made me proud as a person."

In the near-empty stands Tuesday night, reaction to the players' and coaches' absence broke down along ethnic lines, much as it has over the course of the Elian saga. Best friends Luis Mion, a Cuban-American banker, and Ken Kendal, an Anglo high school football coach, came to the game together but with different views on the importance of the protest.

"I believe in what they are doing," Mion said. "It's a statement of solidarity with the community." Kendal joked, "By looking at these stands, they need to get some solidarity going so they can get some fans."

Will Williams, a North Miami Beach television cameraman, came to the game looking for some traditional springtime escape from the drama that has dominated news and conversation in South Florida for nearly five months.

"They have a right to do it, but I'm not for the whole thing," Williams said. "Elián was used. It was all about Cuba and Castro, not about the kid."

# Beathard retires, leaving Chargers in familiar state

by T.J. Simers  
Los Angeles Times  
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SAN DIEGO — Bobby Beathard saved Alex Spanos, the owner of the San Diego Chargers.

Ten years ago, he came to town and bailed out an organization in chaos because of Spanos' blubbery and blundering way of conducting business.

Tuesday, Alex Spanos began the first day of his life without General Manager Bobby Beathard, 63, who announced his retirement, and Spanos immediately reverted to blubbery and blundering form.

The Chargers replaced one of the most instinctive, gutsy and proven judges of football talent in NFL history with an accountant.

The team announced that Ed McGuire, a former account representative for Met Life and a senior manager of labor operations for the NFL's Management Council, will now be the Chargers' vice president of football operations. He will be in charge of everyone but the owner of the team.

In a disappointing sign of the times, McGuire, the guy with the calculator, will be in charge of Billy Devaney, who will pick the football talent so long as it doesn't disrupt the bottom line, and Mike Riley, the guy who will coach the affordable players.

Would Bill Parcells or Jimmy Johnson let a bean counter determine their destiny?

Before Beathard came to San Diego, providing both credibility and stability and removing Spanos from the media spotlight, the Chargers were in disarray.

When Spanos purchased the Chargers in 1984, he began meeting with Al Saunders, an assistant coach, instead of Don Coryell, the head coach, thereby undermining Coryell. After promoting Saunders to assistant head coach eight games into the next season, Spanos fired the popular Coryell and elevated Saunders.

Spanos also sidestepped Chargers' General Manager John Sanders, and began taking advice from Ron Nay, who headed up the team's scouting department. When



Former San Diego Chargers general manager Bobby Beathard.



Nay fell out of favor, Spanos took Beathard," McGuire said. "It's a tough perception right now to overcome, and even if we do well, I'm not sure everyone in the league is going to start turning everything over to the cap guy or the salary guy. But I think it can work here."

The Chargers, meanwhile, were losing on the field, and Spanos routinely used the media to blame everyone in the organization except himself. Team officials cringed every time he opened his mouth.

When Beathard arrived, he did so with the understanding that Spanos would be muzzled. Spanos' son, Dean, became acting owner and the buffer between the elder Spanos and Beathard.

After four years, however, Beathard could no longer take it. He submitted his resignation to Dean Spanos because Alex Spanos wouldn't come up with the money to sign better players and would not discuss it without losing his temper.

Eventually, Beathard withdrew his resignation after Dean Spanos had a chat with his father. The Chargers then went on to play in the Super Bowl.

It has not always been the best of times with Beathard in control, but Spanos has remained in the background, knowing that his interference would probably prompt Beathard to walk away. Beathard has talked about retirement the past several years, a not-so-subtle reminder to Alex Spanos to keep his distance.

But now Beathard has decided to leave, and has done so just a few weeks after Alex Spanos infuriated the people of San Diego by demanding a new stadium in the next few years, with the implied threat that if he doesn't get it, he will move his team.

The people of San Diego have become increasingly irritated with the Chargers because of a deal that calls for the city to guarantee a sellout each week or purchase the remaining tickets as a credit against rent paid by the team. That would cost the city millions, because the Chargers haven't been much of a draw while going 17-31 the past three years.

At the same time Spanos has been claiming that other NFL owners are making more money because they have better stadium deals.

Now the Chargers have lost Beathard, who had the credentials to tell Spanos to take a hike, because he was there in Miami when the Dolphins were winning Super Bowls and in Washington when the Redskins were winning Super Bowls.

"There's only one Bobby

# It's finally over

by Sam Smith  
Chicago Tribune  
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AUBURN HILLS, Mich. — So many other seasons have ended like this for the Bulls, with a loss in the Palace, to the Detroit Pistons. But not quite like this.

Not with thousands of empty seats and Matt Maloney trying to get by John Crotty.

And so this Bulls team, losing to the Pistons 112-91 Wednesday night, slips into infamy with a 17-65 record, the poorest season in franchise history.

"We were a team that was picked 29th with Toni [Kukoc], and without Toni it was a struggle," coach Tim Floyd acknowledged. "By and large, from the All-Star break on we did give ourselves opportunities to win basketball games, but we didn't have enough to get over the top in a lot of those games."

"It was a high-character group, a group I'll look back on and have good memories about because of how they approached the difficulties we had to

take on this season."

Floyd finishes his second year with the Bulls with a 30-102 career record, but he wasn't the fastest coach in NBA history to 100 losses. That was Brian Winters with expansion Vancouver. Floyd would have to win 50 games in each of the next four years to get to .500 for his NBA coaching career.

The Bulls fell behind by 10 at halftime and put in an uncharacteristically lackluster effort as the Pistons, playing without the injured Grant Hill, shot 63.8 percent and had a double-figure lead the last 18 minutes.

Elton Brand closed out his rookie season with 32 points and 11 rebounds. Brand averaged 20.1 points and 10 rebounds and was one of just seven players to average a double-double for the season.

"The toughest thing I faced was the back-to-backs, the traveling," Brand said. "It was tough. I think I played pretty well. I feel I was productive at my position, but I still have a lot to work on."

"Now I know what I have to work on, in the post, left hand, get

something going to the baseline, free throws, and get stronger so I can help on defense more."

Brand joins a select group of rookies—David Robinson, Shaquille O'Neal, Alonzo Mourning and Tim Duncan—to average at least 20 points and 10 rebounds in the last decade. He's the first Bull since Artis Gilmore in 1979 to average more than 20 points and 10 rebounds. So will lead to the Rookie of the Year award?

"I don't have a feel [for the vote]," Brand said. "I think it will be pretty close. I don't even know how they do it, first, second, third, whatever."

"It's definitely meaningful [to win]. It's a great honor. I definitely would like to win. If it doesn't happen, I've still had a good rookie campaign. I think I proved I can play in the NBA. I think I've proved some people wrong."

It was a disappointing conclusion for veteran Will Perdue, who didn't play for the second straight game after playing a total of nine minutes in the previous two. Perdue averaged just 2.5 points, 3.9 rebounds in 15 minutes a game.

# CNBC reaches agreement to televise senior events from 2001-2004

by Steve Zipay  
Newsday  
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In a deal that pairs blue chips and chip shots, CNBC, the cable network specializing in financial news, will televise up to 33 Senior PGA Tour events a year from 2001 through 2004.

Although CNBC also will broadcast Olympic events from Sydney, Australia in September and will continue to carry some NBA Finals post-game shows, the new partnership doesn't signal a change in programming direction.

"CNBC is not a sports network," Bob Wright, president and CEO of parent NBC said Tuesday. "This is just a highly compatible package. Sixty-five percent of CNBC's audience is either interested in, watches or plays golf," said CNBC President Bill Bolster. "For the past five years, during major tournaments, we've put up leaderboards during the business day."

ESPN had carried Senior PGA Tour events since 1982, starting with one event and culminating with 24 this year. But ratings slipped from a 1.4 in 1990 to a 0.5 last year, and with the Tour proposing a later weekend

time slot, ESPN declined to renew the arrangement.

Although financial terms weren't disclosed, Jim Colbert, a player and member of the Senior Tour's advisory board, said purses will increase by at least 10 percent and golfers will appreciate the expanded corporate marketing opportunities. "Palmer and Nicklaus can't represent everybody," Colbert said.

ESPN usually carried the Senior Tour events in late afternoon, but CNBC will air the events live and on tape on Saturdays and Sundays from 6 to 8 p.m. to reduce overlap between the Seniors and the PGA Tour events.

ESPN shows college football, NFL and major league baseball programming in that time frame.

CNBC is available in five million fewer homes than ESPN, and Bolster predicted ratings "in the area of point-six." But consistent starting times will help, he said, and the measure of success will be "the quality of the audience that really dovetails with golf." Not all Senior events are on cable. Separate four-year deals with NBC and ABC to televise the four major Senior Tour events run through 2002, and those events will remain on network TV afterward.

will be followed shortly by the blundering.