

Rock Cats, N.Y. collection company to collect baseball equipment for D.R.

By: Kerry Heeran, Herald Staff

January 19, 2007

NEW BRITAIN - Besides playing for the New York Yankees, Melky Cabrera, Alex Rodriguez and Robinson Cano all have something in common. They all have roots in Dominican Republic. According to PBS.org, the Dominican Republic breeds more players to Major League Baseball than any other country outside the United States.

According to a recent ESPN special, growing up in the Dominican Republic isn't like growing up in the United States where children have a baseball glove, belong to a league and own their own baseball. Most young Dominican athletes play without shoes, use milk cartons for gloves, rolled-up cloths for balls and use sticks and branches for bats.

After the ESPN special, New Britain Rock Cats decided to launch the "Batter Up" sports equipment drive program. This season-long program will collect baseball equipment for children in the Dominican Republic. Monetary donations will also be accepted to pay for shipping costs.

"The program spurred from a couple of things," said Courtney Lawson, a representative of the New Britain Rock Cats. "The recent ESPN special and a former Rock Cats employee, who told us of the conditions these kids would play baseball in the Dominican Republic."

"As the Rock Cats Foundation, we knew we needed to do something because kids were playing with things that we (Americans) would most likely throw away, from milk cartons to balls made up of tape," Lawson said.

After doing some research, Lawson said the Rock Cats decided to partner up with Roberto's Kids to help with collections and shipping. Based out of New York and Pennsylvania, Roberto's Kids is a collection program designed to deliver new and gently used baseball equipment to children in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

New or gently used baseball equipment and monetary donations are now being accepted at the New Britain Stadium and will be accepted through the entire 2007 season.

The foundation plans to target children in the area surrounding Boca Chica, Dominican Republic. For more information, visit www.rockcats.com or call (860) 224-8383.

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