

# National Foundation for American Policy

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## **New Report Finds Foreign-Born Baseball Players Making Key Impact on Game; Proportion Highest in Major League History**

**ARLINGTON, VA.** – Baseball and immigration, two forces in the history of America, come together in a new study released to coincide with the 2006 World Series. In the first comprehensive study of baseball and immigration, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, VA-based public policy group, examined both historical records and 2006 rosters and found the impact of foreign-born players on major league baseball is at an all-time high. A complete copy of the report *Coming to America* can be found at [www.nfap.com](http://www.nfap.com).

The study has relevance to the debate on welcoming skilled immigrants to the United States. “Baseball fans benefit from the enormous contributions made on the field by foreign-born baseball players, just as we do from the entry of other skilled professionals. We gain from America’s openness,” said Stuart Anderson, executive director of NFAP and co-author of the report with L. Brian Andrew. “Even though professional sports are highly competitive one never hears complaints from major league players about immigrants taking away jobs from Americans.”

Among the findings in the study:

- In the American League in 2006, 7 of the top 9 batting averages belonged to foreign-born players, while the leading home run hitter (David Ortiz) and the two leaders in runs batted in (Ortiz and Justin Morneau) were foreign-born. In the National League, two of the top three hitters for average (Albert Pujols and Miguel Cabrera) and home runs (Pujols and Alfonso Soriano) were foreign-born. Dominican-born pitcher Johan Santana led the major leagues in strikeouts, earned run average and wins (tied at 19 with Chien-Ming Wang).
- Foreign-born players accounted for 31 percent of the players selected for the 2006 All Star Game, higher than their proportion of 23 percent on major league active rosters. Seven of the 16 starting position players at the 2006 All Star Game – 44 percent – were foreign-born: David Ortiz, Vladimir Guerrero and Ichiro Suzuki started for the American League and Jason Bay, Edgar Renteria, Albert Pujols and Alfonso Soriano started for the National League.

- Foreign-born players have been key components of the Detroit Tigers, St. Louis Cardinals, New York Mets, New York Yankees and other 2006 playoff teams.
- More than 23 percent of major league baseball players on active rosters in 2006 were foreign-born, the highest in baseball history. The percentage of foreign-born players in the major leagues has more than doubled from 10 percent since 1990. As of August 31, 2006, 175 of the 750 players on major league 25-man rosters were foreign born. This total does not include 40 foreign-born players on the disabled list on August 31, 2006. Players born in Puerto Rico, U.S. territories, or to U.S. parents abroad are not included since such individuals are U.S. citizens by birth.
- The Dominican Republic with 81 players tops the list of country of origin among active major leaguers, followed by Venezuela (45), Mexico (10), Canada (10), Japan (8), Panama (6), Cuba (4), South Korea (3), Colombia (2), and Taiwan (2).
- The Angels, Twins, Orioles and Diamondbacks each had 9 foreign-born players on their rosters as of August 31, 2006, the most among major league teams. The Mariners, Yankees, Dodgers, Cubs and Royals each had 8 foreign-born players on their active roster as of that date. The Indians, Rangers, Tigers, Mets and Rockies each had 7 foreign-born players. The Blue Jays and Padres had only 2 foreign-born players on their active rosters. The Reds and Phillies had only one foreign-born player each on their active rosters as of August 31, 2006.
- Even though only a fixed number of jobs exist on active major league rosters – unlike the ebb and flow of jobs in the rest of the U.S. economy – one never hears complaints about “immigrants taking away jobs” from Americans in the major leagues.
- Increased competition from foreign-born players has not resulted in lower salaries for native ballplayers. Since 1990 average major league player salaries more than quadrupled (in nominal dollars) from \$578,930 to \$2.87 million, while the proportion of foreign-born players in the league more than doubled (from 10 percent in 1990 to 23 percent today).
- A sustained or increased quality of play, to which foreign-born players have contributed, may have helped increase revenues, as major league ballpark attendance rose from 54.8 million to 74.9 million between 1990 and 2005.
- Foreign-born players enter the major leagues on P-1 temporary visas, which are good for up to 10 years. To obtain green cards (permanent residence) many baseball players must endure long waits that affect other employment-based immigrants.
- In recent years, the lack of H-2B temporary visas has prevented “hundreds” of

foreign-born players from starting jobs as minor league players in the United States, according to the Major League Players Association.

- Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in 1947 paved the way for the entry of many foreign-born players.
- The percentage of foreign-born players in the major leagues fluctuated between 2.5 and 4.6 percent from 1900 to 1920, and dropped below 2 percent in the 1920s and 1930s. It started to rise after World War II and stayed at approximately 7 to 9 percent between 1960 and 1985, before increasing dramatically in the 1990s with the influx of players in particular, from the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.
- Communist-led Cuba denies its star baseball players the freedom to become major league players, resulting in only 4 Cuban-born players on major league active rosters in 2006, all of whom defected.

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#### **About the National Foundation for American Policy**

Started in 2003, NFAP is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to public policy research on trade, immigration and other issues of national importance. Its Advisory Board members include economist Jagdish Bhagwati (Columbia University), economist Richard Vedder (Ohio University) and others.

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