

Jose Caballero

Nominated as: Player

Nominator: Flip Harrison (HoF 2020)

References: Gerry Huppman (HoF 2016) & Wayne Shepperson

Nominee reviewed by Trustee: Mike Shevlin (HoF 2018)

Trustee comment: Jose is a great example and is living the American Dream.

Jose started playing baseball in Cuba as a youth and with only a few dollars came in a boat to Miami where he learned English and continued playing baseball thru high school. After high school he started an auto repair business and has become a successful entrepreneur with Miami real estate. During this time his baseball life continued. He recruited friends and whoever he could find to play on weekends— coached little league and mentored local youth.

Jose has been “The” team star at shortstop. His speed, bat and fielding sets him apart, but most important is his encouragement and leadership to and with his teammates.

The first game they played a top ranked South Dakota team. After the first inning, they were behind 12-0. He came into the dugout and called his team together and instead of berating them, he said “We had a bad inning we are better than this. Look at them, they are already talking and thinking about the team they are playing next. We just need one hit after another and we can win this game”. He didn’t give up and neither did his team. They won the game. He is always backing up his team.

At Jet Blue Field playing the Massachusetts Chiefs, with runners on first and second, Jose jumped high and caught a line drive, tagged the man on second and able to tag the man running from first to second, flipped the ball to the second baseman and said “You tag him”, a triple play he could have made himself but unselfishly let his teammate help make the play. Even after a fall that broke 10 ribs, and a head injury he still plays and excels at his favorite sport. He also reviews MVP’s from Roy Hobbs.

On another note is his patriotism for his country and ours. During the prayer and moment of silence at the beginning of the Roy Hobbs game on Veteran’s Day, Jose steps out in front and even though he is not a Veteran, he thanks all those that are for their time and sacrifice for him, all of us and for the love of the United States.

Achievements:

- He has been a two time Richmond Riverdog's MVP. (53's and 60's)
- He was the MVP for the Tidewater Drillers. (65's)
- He was the Orlando Freedom's MVP last year. (65's)

Nominator comments:

Nominator and references responded to questions. What follows are their responses to the questions or their letter of reference. (Some of this material has been edited for redundancy.)

Nominator: Flip Harrison

1. Please tell us how this individual and his character affect the game of baseball and his baseball colleagues on and off the field, and why. Use CONCRETE examples.

FLIP HARRISON: Jose "Pepin" Caballero is the epitome of the American Dream. Born in Cuba 69 years ago, he arrived in the US as 14-year-old with \$5 in his pocket. Unable to speak any English, he successfully learned the language and not only supported his family here but was able to send money to his family remaining in Cuba.

He played baseball as a young boy both in Cuba and in the US. He started and operated a successful body shop in Miami while he coached several youth teams and mentored young boys of all demographics. Some of those young boys grew up to play professionally.

Always excited about playing, he encourages each of his teammates to play their best. He truly leads by example and at the age of almost 70 continues to excel on the field. He plays for a couple of weeks every year. All you have to do is talk to the managers of the Tidewater Drillers and Orlando Freedom about his contributions to their teams as well.

GERRY HUPPMAN: Pepin's contributions are many. He is a positive influence on the field, in the dugout, and offers great feedback conversation when we go out after games.

Two years ago our manager overtly called out one of our teammates for making a physical mistake during the game. Our manager had an extremely competitive nature and at times, unbridled reactions. The player felt badly about this mistake and was planning to leave. Seeing this I pulled him out of the dugout, and a great distance from earshot of our teammates and assured him his contributions to our team and as our teammate were of great value and that we all make physical mistakes. I also told him I would speak to our manager regarding the situation. He returned to the dugout, and as I turned to locate the manager, Pepin already had him out of the dugout, discussing, with great vigor, the manager's actions, but not loud or animated enough to show up or embarrass him. Pepin then made his way down the bench to the player in question. They spoke for a moment, hugged, and we began to play ball again.

One other thing about impact and leadership. I catch and Pepin plays short. When there is a play between short and third, or up the middle, one of the things you will hear Pepin say is "go for it, I'm behind you." My interpretation: try your best, don't give up, if you don't get there it's ok. And, I'm behind you 100%, so don't worry about not making the play, I have confidence in you!

2. What qualities and/or accomplishments make this individual special ... that they STAND APART from their peers and should be recognized through induction to the Roy Hobbs Baseball Hall of Fame? Use CONCRETE examples.

HARRISON: When he was a young man, he risked everything to travel back to Cuba to bring his baby sister to the United States. Every year, during our week in Ft. Myers, we take time out to honor those among us who served in the armed forces. After those who've served step forward for a well-deserved round of applause, Pepin always speaks up to thank them for allowing him to achieve his dreams in a country as great as the United States.

Falling from a ladder while trimming trees in his back yard, Pepin landed on a small retaining wall and broke 10 ribs and suffered a bad head injury. Taken to a hospital where he was treated for 2 broken ribs and released. A couple of days later he began to feel worse and passed out at home. His wife called an ambulance, and he was med flighted to a major trauma center in Miami where they diagnosed additional broken ribs and then had holes drilled into his skull to relieve the pressure. He remained hospitalized for nearly a month. I called him nearly everyday to check in on him and he was always upbeat, looking forward to when he could get back on a field and start throwing.

HUPPMANN: The RH HoF is full of men and women with diverse backgrounds. These are not only represented in their baseball backgrounds, but where they've come from and their many contributions on the way. Aside from Pepin's skill set being equal or better than some of his teammates, I believe the path he's taken to get here has been an exceptional one.

Regarding his Cuban roots, Pepin returned to Cuba to bring his sister out and return with her to America. He risked everything. Not just his home, his business, and his family, but his freedom! I asked him once if he was afraid, he said "yes, but I was more afraid for my sister, that's why I did it."

***3. From your list of character qualities and/or your line of reasoning in support of your candidate, if you could pick only 2, which would they be and why? These should be compelling, and your stories should demonstrate how your candidate is EXCEPTIONAL.**

HARRISON: Two items ...

1. Pepin's fight to get back on the field after suffering a debilitating injury. One that would have kept most of us from ever playing again. The resolve to get back on the field with us inspired all of us.

2. His patriotism. The way he expresses his love for America, and the fact that he is not afraid to tell anyone how good we have it here.

HUPPMANN: Mike Shevlin made a valid point when he first phoned me about Pepin. He said "there are thousands of people that compete in the RHWS. Many are very good ball players, but a Hall of Fame member must be more than just that." Pepin is an exceptional player. Plays consecutive weeks, with different teams, and has been voted MVP of those teams by his peers.

That is important, but Mike's words rang true to me. Pepin is a very strong influence on the field and in the dugout. This influence is demonstrated by the way Pepin treats his teammates. Good day or bad, good play or bad, he builds on and reinforces the positive contributions and coaches up and peps up players who have had a challenging day or even week. All of these actions are performed in a manner which brings out the very best in the player and our teammates take notice of this positivity.

The difference Pepin makes off of the field is demonstrated by his involvement in promoting and growing baseball in the youth and adult communities in Miami. Encouraging their involvement while finding creative ways to assist those with limited financial resources. He also gives copies of the book "The Baseball Codes" to many young and older players so they understand the unwritten rules of the game. Teaching them to respect the game, teammates, and competitors.

Pepin's effect on me is simple. I had planned to play for 20 years, but after playing with a person of Pepin's character, I want to play ball with him as long as I can. It's a pleasure to be his teammate!

Reference: Wayne Shepperson

Jose "Pepin" Caballero came to the United States as a youngster from Cuba during Fidel Castro's regime. He didn't know the language and had no money but got a job and eventually started his own body shop repairing cars. He went back to Cuba to get his baby sister to bring her back to the States. He then invested his hard-earned money in rental property which allowed him to put his kids through college. He loves this country greatly and can't say it enough about how well we have it here compared to a country like Cuba. When we celebrate Veterans Day at the Fall Tournament, he is the first to go and personally thank each veteran on the opposing team as well as his own teammates.