



Strike?

Boys Need Baseball!

Juan Padilla is a short man with smooth skin and a slight Spanish accent. For the past three years he has fought and won a seemingly losing battle.

Juan explained in his office, at Action for a Better Community recently that he believes boys should be able to play baseball during the summer. Just about everyone would agree with Juan, but he claimed that the Roberto Clemente Youth Baseball League which he organized three years ago in memory of the baseball star whose plane crashed on a mercy mission to earthquake victims in Nicaragua, is the only organized recreation program for Puerto Rican youth in the city of Rochester.

Eight teams participating in league competition include 120 boys aged 8 to 15. It has been difficult operating the program. Juan reported that city playgrounds are often poorly maintained and difficult to rent since many adult groups also use them. But money has been Juan's biggest problem. Over 20 adults volunteer what Juan estimated to be \$10,000 worth of time a summer and this year the Council of Inner-City Parishes alternate ministries fund granted the project \$1,500. Even with that money the older teams had to start two weeks late. Juan explained that money is needed for uniforms, equipment, insurance, and umpires. "It's expensive," he said.

Juan understands why the baseball program is not a priority on funding lists. "We live in a pressure en-

vironment. Everybody is pressing for social reforms. Baseball is not a pressure program."

Nevertheless Juan Padilla said he feels that it is important. "Simple things can make a big difference. Sports help to prevent juvenile delinquency," Juan said. "If you have nothing to do you're going to get in trouble no matter what your background." Although not all the players in the league are Puerto Rican, baseball is important culturally to the Puerto Ricans who claim it as their favorite sport.

"It's not very realistic for us to keep struggling with both funding and organization," Juan admitted, but he is optimistic that somewhere there is a sponsor for the program, possibly within the Puerto Rican community.

In the meantime, however, Juan Padilla is continuing to accomplish the impossible. Last Thursday he left at one o'clock in the morning with 35 boys on a bus headed for Chicago. There they will compete with teams from all over the country. He didn't know until the last minute what his financial situation would be for the trip. He finally had to borrow \$475. During the five-day trip the players stayed in an armory.

Last year Juan took a smaller group to Puerto Rico to play. The year before that a group went to Cooperstown to the Baseball Hall of Fame where Roberto Clemente is remembered.

"Maybe someday we'll go to Nicaragua," Juan schemed.



Juan Padilla



Batter up!

Text by Bonita Baldwin
Photos by Sue McKinney



What does the catcher say to the pitcher?



Seventh inning stretch