

AUG 2, 2004

## *MR. SUNSHINE DAVID ORTIZ KEEPS THE RED SOX LOOSE--AND IN THE PLAYOFF HUNT*

**ALBERT CHEN**

There was considerable angst at Fenway Park last Friday night after the Red Sox lost to the Yankees, 8-7, and fell 9 1/2 games behind New York in the American League East. Righthander Curt Schilling, who surrendered seven runs in 5 1/3 innings, remained in the dugout, his head buried in his hands. In the silent clubhouse, rightfielder Trot Nixon, hands propped behind his head, stared blankly into his locker, seemingly frozen in his seat.

Into this funereal scene strode David Ortiz, Boston's lumbering 6'4", 230-pound designated hitter-first baseman, who was whistling as he made his way to his locker. "It's easy to get real down after losing [to the Yankees], with the history this [team] has," says Ortiz. "My attitude is, tomorrow's another day."

It sure was. The Red Sox bounced back on Saturday with a thrilling 11-10 victory that included a bench-clearing brawl in the third inning and a walk-off, two-run home run by Bill Mueller against the league's top closer, Mariano Rivera. After winning again, 9-6, on Sunday night, Boston was a half game ahead of the A's and the White Sox in the wild-card race.

Ortiz's sunny demeanor and offensive production have helped keep the Red Sox afloat. "This team has been so up and down all year," says first baseman Kevin Millar. "One constant has been David's hitting. He's saved us."

Batting third, ahead of All-Star leftfielder Manny Ramirez, Ortiz is having an MVP-caliber year. In addition to hitting .307 at week's end, he was second in the league in RBIs (88) and slugging percentage (.615) and was tied for second in homers (26). "Beyond his numbers, David is a huge clubhouse presence," says outfielder Gabe Kapler. "He knows exactly the right thing to say or do at the right time to fire us up and get us going again."

Ortiz is often seen flashing his wide, gap-toothed smile, but don't be fooled; he is a fiery competitor. On July 16, after being ejected for complaining about a called third strike, Ortiz threw two bats onto the field and narrowly missed hitting two umpires. (He received a five-game suspension but is appealing.) In Saturday's brawl Ortiz swung at Yankees starter Tanyon Sturtze (he missed), then wrestled the righthander to the ground. While most Boston players downplayed the melee after the game, Ortiz said, "I think it's the best thing that ever happened to us. It's the start of something good."

Ortiz has been good for the Red Sox since signing a one-year deal in January 2003, a month after being released by the cost-cutting Twins. At the time, he was known around the league as a good clubhouse presence but a flawed hitter. "When he first came up with Minnesota, he had some holes in his swing you could exploit," says Oakland manager Ken Macha. "You could throw the ball in hard on his hands, speed it up against him, then change speeds. Since then, he's closed the holes with a lot of hard work." After hitting .288 with career highs in home runs (31) and RBIs (101) last year, he signed a two-year, \$12.5 million deal.

Ortiz, 28, also forged a strong bond with Ramirez, a fellow Dominican, who has encouraged Ortiz to train more and be better prepared before games. The two are nearly inseparable in the batting cage and the dugout. "Manny pushes David a lot," says Red Sox hitting coach Ron Jackson, who instructed Ortiz to open his swing to help him catch up with inside pitches. "They are always bouncing things off each other."

With righthanders Pedro Martinez and Derek Lowe, shortstop Nomar Garciaparra and catcher Jason Varitek eligible for free agency after the season, the Red Sox could undergo a major overhaul this winter. Ortiz is a player Boston could rebuild around. "No one is thinking about next year," he says. "We've still got a long way to go this year."

COLOR PHOTO: HEINZ KLUETMEIER Ortiz is flat-out having his best season, ranking second in the AL in RBIs through Sunday.

### Three Up

#### Los Angeles Dodgers

L.A. had won 17 of its last 20 games through Sunday, thanks to the power surge of third baseman Adrian Beltre, who homered five times in seven games.

#### Greg Maddux, RHP, Cubs

The four-time NL Cy Young winner won his second straight complete game last week and moved within two wins of 300.

#### Rangers Attendance

Texas is drawing an average of 32,540 at Ameriquest Field in Arlington--up more than 18% from last year.

### Three Down

#### Roy Halladay, RHP, Blue Jays

After pitching a major-league-high 266 innings in 2003, last year's AL Cy Young winner was 7-7 with a 4.35 ERA.

#### Magglio Ordonez, RF, White Sox

Ordonez, who had just nine homers and 37 RBIs, landed on the DL last week with bone marrow edema in his left knee and could miss the rest of the season.

#### Mets Defense

New York led the NL with 87 errors, including 20 by shortstop Kaz Matsui, the most in the majors at his position.



JUN 19, 2006

## *WHO'S YOUR PAPI?*

WHAT DRIVES DAVID ORTIZ, THE SUPERSIZED RED SOX SLUGGER, IS HIS RESENTMENT OF THE BALL CLUB THAT DID HIM WRONG ... AND THE FIGHTING SPIRIT OF HIS LATE MOTHER, ANGELA ROSA

**TOM VERDUCCI**

Every ballpark seems smaller, every room brighter, every worry lighter when you're in the company of David Americo Ortiz, the friendly galoot of a designated hitter for the eternally grateful Boston Red Sox. In girth and mirth Ortiz evokes Babe Ruth, Santa Claus and your favorite stuffed animal from childhood. The only son of Enrique and Angela Rosa Ortiz—"I'm my mom's baby boy, you know?" he says proudly—grew up loved in Santo Domingo, D.R., and seems intent on loving the world back.

Runyon or Twain might have invented a character like Ortiz, if it were possible for even such expansive imaginations to conjure a 230-pound teddy bear who speaks like a California surfer with a thick Spanish accent; a Dominican who married a Wisconsin girl and has wintered part time in the state; a hip-hop, bling-covered fashion plate who underneath his cool threads wears black boxer shorts with "who's your daddy?" printed in all directions in Day-Glo colors; and—most amazing of all—one of the game's great sluggers, who, at 27, was released by the Minnesota Twins after no other major league club wanted him in a trade.



Ortiz, now 30, ranked fourth in the American League in home runs (18) and first in RBIs (56) at week's end, a pace that would leave him with 48 homers and 149 RBIs for the season and a three-year run in which he had no fewer than 41 homers and 139 RBIs. Only two players in history maintained such high production for three consecutive seasons: Ken Griffey Jr. (1996 through '98) and Ruth, who did so for six straight years (1926 through '31). A .300 hitter last season, Ortiz was batting .265, blaming the drop partly on the extreme defensive shifts employed against him.

In Ortiz there is a little bit of something for everyone to like, which helps explain why he received more All-Star votes from major league fans than any other player last year; why his Boston Red Sox teammates, in one of the more respectful acts in clubhouse culture, ceded him total control of the stereo; and why a terminally ill eight-year-old boy, given days to live, asked to visit Fenway Park to meet him in April. Ortiz's popularity, like his gap-toothed, omnipresent smile, crosses cultures and generations.

"He appeals to every demographic," Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein says. "People love watching athletes who you can tell enjoy what they're doing. And to have a guy who comes to work every day with a smile—that's especially huge in our clubhouse, where we had problems in the past."

Says Puerto Rican-born teammate Alex Cora, "People love to be around David. The unique thing about him is that he communicates just as easily with the American players as with the Latin players. Most of the Latin stars don't have that quality. He brings the team together."

Ortiz thrives on such interaction, preferring to spend as much time as possible around friends and family. Yes, he is outgoing by nature, but the company also keeps him from the dark thoughts that plague him sometimes when he is alone. Behind the smile there is pain. "I start thinking about life after death," Ortiz says. "I've got to quit thinking about it because it's very deep. Very deep. Sometimes you start thinking about it, and you don't feel like you want to be alive, so I don't like to get all quiet."

"Everybody goes through some tough times in their life, no matter what you do. Man, I've had my tough times."

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Eight minutes. Ortiz remembers it as exactly eight minutes. It is all the time needed for an elite runner to cover two miles, for an orchestra to play the second movement of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 or, as Ortiz found out, for your heart to break. On New Year's Day 2002, it was eight minutes from that awful phone call from his sister's boyfriend—*Your mom has been in an accident*—to the time Ortiz arrived at the roadside wreck near his home in Santo Domingo. A dump truck. His mom's car. And Angela Rosa ... gone.

"I was there eight minutes after it happened, and she was dead already," Ortiz says. "That's why I don't worry about baseball. I don't feel like I put any pressure on myself when I'm playing baseball. Not after that."

Ortiz was 26 years old at the time and still trying to establish himself as an every-day player with the Twins, who had plucked him from the Seattle Mariners' farm system in 1996, in one of those pennant-race deadline deals in which the anxious Mariners wanted veteran third baseman Dave Hollins. At the end of the '97 season Ortiz was promoted to the big leagues, and the first person he called was, of course, Angela Rosa. She and Enrique, whom everyone calls Leo, were always there for him. There was the day Leo, who sold auto parts, left work to watch his boy play Little League for the first time. David smacked a home run, and as he rounded third, Leo bolted from the stands and interrupted his son's trot to home by throwing a big hug around him. Though David still visits Leo regularly in Santo Domingo, things will never be the same without Angela Rose.

"She was one of the best mothers ever," Ortiz says. "She was pretty much my everything. It's tough, man. I come from a poor family, but I had a good education and a good home. That counts for everything. My mom, she wasn't like a baseball mother who knew everything about the game. She just wanted me to be happy with what I was doing."

Both his parents, Ortiz says, stressed the importance of education, but it was Leo, a former semi-pro ballplayer, who advised David to give up his other love, basketball, to concentrate on baseball. It was baseball that brought Ortiz to Wisconsin in 1996, where, while playing Class A ball at age 20, he met his wife, Tiffany, and started a family that includes two daughters, Jessica, 9, and Alexandra, 5, and a son, D'Angelo, 1 1/2.

**"It's mostly confidence," Ortiz says of his clutch hitting. "If you go up there thinking you might not get it done, you're out already. I know I'm going to hit you."**

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The year that began with his mother's death, 2002, would also be Ortiz's last with the Twins. He hit .272 with 20 home runs and 75 RBIs platooning at first base for a young team that reached the AL Championship Series. Minnesota, though, was not high on Ortiz, who seemed injury-prone (he missed chunks of time with wrist and knee injuries), was not a polished fielder and couldn't catch up with good fastballs on his hands. Minnesota G.M. Terry Ryan figured that Ortiz's development had stalled and decided to trade him. "He just wasn't getting it done here, for whatever reason," Ryan says. Then he admits, "I made a bad baseball decision."

He wasn't alone. Ryan tried to trade Ortiz for two months. "Not one team made an offer," Ryan says. "Nothing."

Finally, in December 2002, the Twins released Ortiz. Finding a job at that point of the off-season looked so difficult to him that he told his agents, Fernando Cuza and Diego Benz, to check for openings in Japan and Mexico. "[The Twins] did me that bad," Ortiz says. "I never had a problem with anybody in that organization. Ever, bro. I was a good teammate. I respect everybody. I never had no argument with no coach, nobody. I never did anything wrong, but they did me wrong. No respect, bro. I was lucky I got a job with the Red Sox. There were other teams, but they were offering me way less money."

The Red Sox gave him \$1.25 million and figured he was one of five guys—along with Jeremy Giambi, Shea Hillenbrand, Kevin Millar and Bill Mueller—who would combine to fill three spots (first, third and DH). Six weeks into the season Ortiz showed so little power (two homers) that his teammates were calling him Juan Pierre (the light-hitting leadoff man who's now with the Chicago Cubs). Ortiz wanted out of Boston. "I called my agents," he recalls, "and said, 'If you guys are not here tomorrow, you guys are fired.'"

After the next day's game Ortiz and his agents met with Epstein in the players' parking lot outside Fenway Park. "I told Theo, 'I want you to trade me or release me,'" Ortiz says. "'I can't be sitting here watching this circus anymore, guys I know I can do better than. Me just watching from the bench? I'm not that kind of guy. I don't clap for something that doesn't deserve it.'"

"Give me a couple of days," Epstein recalls saying. "I promise you we've got something in the works to free up a spot for you."

On May 29, 2003, Epstein traded Hillenbrand to the Arizona Diamondbacks for righthander Byung-Hyun Kim, a forgettable trade for Boston except for the opportunity it gave Ortiz. Finally, he could smile.

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Ortiz had felt stifled in Minnesota, an organization that so emphasizes situational hitting that no Twin has hit 30 home runs in a season since 1987. The 6'4" Ortiz was the square peg who didn't fit in the round hole. "They wanted me to stay inside the ball," Ortiz says, referring to a style in which a lefthanded hitter tries to hit inside pitches to leftfield. "They were teaching that to everyone. That's why nobody ever hits home runs there. But when you're young in the big leagues and the coach tells you to do something and you don't do it and you get negative results, then you're f-----. They're going to sit you down."

The Twins, Ortiz says, so enthusiastically stressed small-ball tactics such as hitting behind runners that "if you moved the runner over from second base [with a groundout], you got high fives in the dugout like you just hit a homerun."

In his first at bat with the Red Sox, while batting cleanup in a spring training game, Ortiz happened to come up with a runner on second base and no outs. "I came in with that little pull, cheap-shot s---," said Ortiz, explaining his grounder to second base on an outside sinker. "I still had the Minnesota Twins in my system."

This time there were no high fives waiting for him in the dugout, just manager Grady Little with a word of advice. "Hey," Little said. "Next time? Bring him in."

Ortiz smiles at the memory. "I was like, O.K.!" he says. "I had a little more freedom than what I was used to."

Says Epstein, "We didn't know what we were getting. Nobody knew. We just let him be exactly what he is."

Ortiz, with a mechanical tune-up from hitting coach Ron Jackson, and freed of the wear and tear of playing in the field, started turning on inside pitches and closing that hole in his swing on inside fastballs. From June 1, 2003, through June 1, 2006, he slammed 132 home runs, second only to Albert Pujols's 140 in the majors.

He finished fifth, fourth and second in AL MVP balloting in the past three seasons while conjuring up so much late-inning magic—he has 13 walk-off hits with the Red Sox, including three in Boston's 2004 postseason run to a world championship—that last year the team presented him with a plaque declaring him the greatest clutch hitter in the history of the Boston Red Sox. Ortiz lived up to that billing on Sunday, hitting a three-run walkoff homer at Fenway to beat the Texas Rangers 5-4.

"He loves coming up in the big spot," says Epstein, whom Ortiz has persuaded to junk the sabermetrics principle that clutch hitting is not a skill. "He makes you rethink the objective analysis. The way he rises to the occasion and the quality of his at bats, the numbers don't reflect that human element."

Says Ortiz, "It's mostly confidence. If you go up there thinking you might not get it done, you're out already. I know I'm going to hit you. And I have confidence all around me here. In Minnesota, if we faced a good pitcher, guys would say, 'Oh, well, I'll get my hits tomorrow.' Here? We don't care who's pitching."

Ortiz is an icon in Boston already. "A larger-than-life figure," says second baseman Mark Loretta of the man called Big Papi. (Ortiz, forgetful of names, has a habit of calling people Papi, a Spanish colloquialism for daddy or pop. His frequent use of the word was turned around on him long enough ago that he can't remember when it began.)

Ortiz's transformation from released player to, as Toronto Blue Jays G.M. J.P. Ricciardi says, "a Hall of Famer with five more years like this" may be unprecedented. The Brooklyn Dodgers lost Roberto Clemente to the Pittsburgh Pirates in the mid-1950s version of the Rule 5 draft, but no other hitter this good has ever been willingly cut loose.

The Red Sox this spring signed the former castoff to a four-year, \$52 million extension, keeping him in Boston through 2010. It's just another reason why Big Papi is smiling. "I'm not going to lie, I got frustrated a lot before [Boston]," Ortiz says. "It's been tough. The worst was losing my mom. Losing her was something I couldn't figure out at the time. I was, like, lost and confused.

"When things weren't going good, she would always say, 'Son, you're always going to be my baby boy. Keep fighting. I love you.' Now, even though I don't have that voice, I feel that spirit to fight back when times are tough. My mom, she's still always there for me. Always."

OCT 3, 2016

## DAVID ORTIZ: THE EXIT INTERVIEW

### SI STAFF

The beloved Red Sox slugger sat down to reflect on the highs and lows of his stellar career and to answer perhaps the most perplexing question of all: Why would BIG PAPI retire when he's still at the top of his game?

TRADED AT AGE 20 and released at 27, David Ortiz will retire this year at 40 as one of the most accomplished players of his generation. The man known as Big Papi is the all-time leader among designated hitters in hits, home runs and runs batted in; one of the game's greatest postseason clutch hitters; and one of the most beloved players in Red Sox history. Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson and Ortiz are the only players to have hit at least 500 home runs and won three or more World Series titles.

Ortiz recently sat for an exclusive interview with SI senior writer Tom Verducci to look back on his career—including his proudest achievement, his biggest disappointment and the stain of steroids—and to look ahead to what he will do next. (The interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

SI: David, you decided before this season that this would be your last year. But nobody has ever walked away from this game with more than 30 homers and more than 100 RBIs, which you're doing in your last year—and you're slugging over .600. So why are you walking away?

ORTIZ: Well, like everybody knows, I've been dealing with injuries the past four years. Also, [I'm] not getting any younger, man. You look around, everybody's 20 years old. Also, this traveling thing, it catches up with you.

SI: But you can still hit?

ORTIZ: No question.

SI: If you wanted to keep playing, you could still hit at this level?

ORTIZ: Yeah, I think so. I work extremely hard to accomplish that. The reality is a lot of us give up on chasing things as we get older because our body, our mind, you know.... In my case, man, I want to be good. I want to continue being productive. My hitting coaches know that. I chase things still, knowing that I'm going to retire after this season. I'd like to give that to our fans.

SI: Vin Scully, who is retiring this year as well ...

ORTIZ: My man.

SI: He said he is going to miss the roar of the crowd. When Mike Schmidt retired, he said he would miss room-service French fries. What is David Ortiz going to miss most about baseball?

ORTIZ: I think being around my teammates. Plus, I think I play for the best fans in baseball. I'm going to miss the cheering, the competition. But I don't think I'm going to miss playing baseball, because I played baseball for so long, so much. Since, like, I can't remember, [there's] just been nothing but baseball.



We'll see how that plays out. I'm not trying to get ahead of the time [when] we end the thing. I'm taking my time. Also, I've been so busy, doing things here and there—your mind at some point will need [a] break.

SI: What about the criticism? I remember a lot of people writing that you were done years ago. Are you going to miss that?

ORTIZ: Well, to be honest with you, I really appreciated that, because that's what got me better. As you get older, you start getting mature, you start understanding things better. Looking at the whole picture now, when I was younger I couldn't understand the reason [for the criticism] if I was a very productive player still. The year they started that up [2009], I ended up with almost 30 homers and 100 RBIs. I went through some struggles, but it wasn't like it was a bad year completely, you know what I'm saying?

But then, after that season, I worked extremely hard to prove everybody wrong. So if that doesn't happen, probably my approach wouldn't have been the way it was from that day until this day.

I announced my retirement after last year, but I also in my mind said I want to give the fans one of my best seasons ever, so let me get prepared for that. So here we are, almost at the end of the season. Having a good year. And I'm very proud of it. And knowing that everybody is going to miss me, that's something that's made me super proud of myself.

SI: Speaking of being proud, you've done a lot in your career, David. What are you most proud of?

ORTIZ: I got to say the relationships that I have built with everybody around. You guys—the media—my teammates, the fans, the opposition. I think people are going to remember me more for that than what I had done on the field.

I think if you look at the whole picture, there's a lot of good players that have done a lot of good things in the game. But once they're done, they're done totally. You know what I'm saying?

In my case, I think, I always take my time to talk to everyone. I would like everybody to feel good about themselves. I want to help, you know. I want to make everybody's job easier. You and me, we got that relationship. We go back and forth. Whenever you come to me, I'm open. I'm pretty much the same way with everybody. I think at the end of the day that separates [me] from a lot of people.

SI: You help guys on the other team—teams that you're trying to beat.

ORTIZ: All I care about is [making] the game better, man. I want to sit down five, 10 years from now, watch one of those kids and be like, Man!

Last night I was having dinner with [Toronto outfielder] B.J. Upton. That's my boy. [Blue Jays pitcher Marcus] Stroman was there too. Whole group of kids. B.J. basically came to me and went, like, Man, what you did for my brother [Tigers outfielder Justin Upton] in Detroit the other day, it was like he hasn't stopped since. See, those are the kinds of things I like to hear. I'm pretty close with B.J. and his family. So we went to play the Tigers the other day. I sit down to talk to my boy [Justin] for a minute about his hitting. And everything's going really good, you know. It might be because of what we talked about. And he's got the talent, and he's young, and he swings really good. He was going through some things. I just want to make sure he's fine. But I do that with a lot of guys in the league. Just because I want the game to get better.

SI: All right. Let's flip the coin and look at the other side. What is your biggest disappointment?

ORTIZ: My biggest disappointment has got to be the way my career started.

SI: Traded once by Seattle, released by Minnesota.

ORTIZ: Yeah. Because my career was supposed to begin the way it [will end]. I don't know if you know what I mean. Like I was a legit power hitter coming through the minor leagues. But you know what? I'm the kind of person that gets the positive side of things out of the negative.

At the beginning of my career, being an inexperienced guy, not knowing how pretty much everything works at this level, I was just a kid that was trying to play baseball, have fun and be who I am. But in those days it didn't work out that way. Plus, I [had] a manager at the time [Minnesota's Tom Kelly] that was hard with younger players. And he had his reasons. I don't really—I probably don't agree with the way things went down, but it probably was the best thing that happened to me. Like I always say, the reality is that what I ended up doing in my career, that is what I was projected to be like since Day One. And it didn't happen.

SI: You surprised me because I thought maybe you would bring up that survey test from 2003, the drug test.

ORTIZ: Uh-huh.

SI: Because I know you wrote on Derek Jeter's website [The Players' Tribune] last year that some people will always look at you as a cheater because of that one report. That was a list of players who were said to have tested positive, although the players' association and MLB agreed that not all were considered positives. We still don't know what substance the players were on that list for, including you.

ORTIZ: Uh-huh.

SI: What can you do to convince people, David?

ORTIZ: I don't think I can do anything. A noise comes out, and do you think I'm just going to sit down and believe what somebody I don't know comes off saying? That came out [in] 2009, [but it was] about 2003. [MLB's] drug policies started in 2004. I never failed a test. I kept on banging. So, you know, the reality is that it's a noise that I think was more damaging [to some players' careers] than anything else, because a lot of guys that were pronounced [as having tested] positive for things or having been caught using things, their careers went away. Yet I am [here]. Let me tell you, there's not one player in baseball, not one player, that has been drug-tested more than David Ortiz. I guarantee you that. I never failed a test.

SI: Let me ask you this, then, because you mentioned all the other players who did [use]. Back in the day when there was no policy, there was no testing for steroids, why wouldn't you use steroids, knowing that there were other guys you were competing against who were using them? You could see what was happening in the game.

ORTIZ: Yeah.

SI: Why wouldn't you use them?

ORTIZ: Because there's one thing that I have been afraid of my whole life: chemicals. I don't like to put chemicals in my body. I'm a happy person. I'm a person that believes in nature. I'm a person that believes in secondary effects when you start using things that you are not supposed to.

And it was something that never came to my attention. Yes, I used to go to GNC and buy supplements like everybody else. I mean, I'm an athlete. I'm a high-performing athlete. So it was legal to go to GNC. [Now] I don't even know where GNC is, since they told us not to go to GNC to buy any supplement. Now we get [information] from our trainers so you don't get caught in any kind of trouble.

SI: Certified.

ORTIZ: Exactly. But it was pretty normal for everybody to go to GNC and buy supplements, just like any other athlete. So that's the reason why I'm not going to sit down and have people pointing fingers at me, because I didn't go to GNC back in those days to buy steroids. So whatever comes up, or the way these people came out saying that I tested positive for whatever—something that they don't even know—I don't feel guilty, because I didn't go to no place to buy steroids from anybody, because that's not me.

SI: No trainer, no friend said, "David, try this"?

ORTIZ: No. Hey, if that [had] happened, somebody would have come out to say something. But me personally, David Ortiz, I don't like chemicals, man. I like to have a simple life.

You know, my dad is diabetic. My dad also had prostate cancer. And that runs in the family. God blessed me with being who I am, and gave me the opportunity to make money in this game so I can put my family on better financial terms. But I also want to be able to enjoy [life] once I'm done.

Everyone who knows me knows how I am when it comes down to that. But I don't think I can prove nothing else besides what I have done, what I have been doing through the years. And, like I say, not one player in MLB baseball has had more drug tests than David Ortiz, because I get drug-tested all the time. Blood, urine, all kinds of stuff. Never failed a test, man.

SI: So tell me this: Why at the age of 40 are you such a good hitter?

ORTIZ: Hey, like Barry Bonds said the other day, Some people got it, some people don't. I work extremely hard on my hitting, man. Like I'm a psycho when it comes down to hitting. Like I live for that. I always tell our younger hitters ... I mean, we sit down, batting practice, videos, stuff like that, and we just talk about it.

Like this is not something that just falls out of the sky. We go, and I make sure these kids, [Xander] Bogaerts, Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., all the kids on our ball club, I make sure they don't go to hit with an empty head, because trust me, when you go to hit with an empty mind or when you go to hit with [your] levels of confidence down, you're not going to get what you're looking for.

SI: Tell me what you do in between your at bats in a game. Say a home game at Fenway Park. Because we don't see you a lot in the dugout between at bats. What do you do?

ORTIZ: To be honest, my preparation, I do [that] before game time. Once in a while I go into the video room after an at bat. But I like to watch the game on TV more. I feel like I have a better view, especially when a guy is giving me a headache when I'm hitting. Watching a baseball game on TV now, especially the TVs we have in the clubhouse, it's like being in it.

But it's not like I watch the whole game on TV, because I go back and forth in the dugout, but I like to see the pitcher's expression, face, body language, what they do, how they approach. It's different things that as a hitter you get caught [up in]. It's hard not to look at it that way if you want to be successful. So when I'm doing that, I'm not just trying to do it for myself; I do it for everybody else on my ball club. We share ideas between at bats. We talk about the guy on the mound.

SI: You love that cat-and-mouse between the pitcher and the hitter?

ORTIZ: I love it. I love it. I even get caught up sometimes in between pitches.

SI: In the batter's box?

ORTIZ: In the batter's box, just trying to read the catcher's mind, stuff like that. I say things here and there. Not all the time. But it's the experience, man, that brings that up, you know. And I never stop. I never stop.

That will be probably one of the things that I'm going to miss about this game. It's competition, man. I don't do this just for doing it. My family can tell you, man. Like this is my life.

SI: Did you know what was coming when you faced Paul Quantrill, Game 4, 2004 ALCS?

ORTIZ: Front-door sinker.

SI: Because for me the legend of Big Papi began then. So that home run, you knew it was coming?

ORTIZ: Yeah.

SI: How?

ORTIZ: Because he threw it to me all the time. When you see him, ask him, What did you throw Papi back then to get him out? Front-door sinker. Because he's got a good one. It starts at you, and then boom, comes back.

But you know what, to be able to do that, you can't just go out there with an empty mind. You need to have that hard drive all set. Same thing with [Joaquin] Benoit, when I hit that grand slam against him [in the 2013 ALCS]. He threw me that pitch to strike me out two months before that. So when I saw him coming out of the bullpen, here comes my split again. Same thing. It was the playoffs. That's how I approach the game. You got to give something to get something.

SI: Your first game was in 1997, correct?

ORTIZ: Yeah.

SI: What's been the biggest difference in baseball since 1997?

ORTIZ: Well, I don't know how a lot of people are going to feel about what I'm going to say, but I think this game right now is at its best. Like I don't think this game is going to get better, or used to be better than it is right now.

SI: The quality of the game?

ORTIZ: Yes. All the way around, starting with you guys, the media, all the way down to where we are, the players. It's another level.

SI: How about pitching?

ORTIZ: The best that I have ever seen.

SI: Noticeably different from when you first broke in?

ORTIZ: Oh, yeah. A hundred percent. Like when I first got to the big leagues, there was only one Randy Johnson. You know how many Randy Johnsons there are in the game right now?



SI: How many?

ORTIZ: I see a starter coming out of the bullpen. Got a lot of arms like Randy's right now from the left side. I face four different angles per game pitchingwise pretty much every day. It's more matchup right now. And I'm not saying that the game wasn't good enough back then, because I was part of it. The game always has been one of the greatest. But it has reached a certain level right now that will blow your mind. Like the other day, there were 52 guys in the minor leagues throwing 100 miles an hour.

SI: They keep coming. More Randy Johnsons.

ORTIZ: They keep coming. And another thing that I got to tell you: When I first got to the big leagues, the guy that throws 95, you were going to see 95 regardless. Now you got guys throwing 98, 100, with three other pitches. You don't see them [throw just] fastballs anymore. Like you got to make up your mind to be able to hit right now.

SI: More homework for hitters?

ORTIZ: Oh, my goodness, you got no idea. So I think the future of the game is in the best hands ever. Guys at the age of 20 performing like the veterans used to perform at the age of 30. It's something that's remarkable.

SI: This time next year, what is David Ortiz doing? What do you want to do?

ORTIZ: This time next year? I don't know, man. Like I got to get through January, February, March, April, May, you know.... I don't know how it's going to be like by this time next year.

SI: Do you have plans?

ORTIZ: Plenty of them. Plenty. Being with the family. My wife, she has been able to keep everything under control through the years, something that I really appreciate. But I'm a family guy. I like to be with my family and do things with them, make sure everything is O.K. My kids are growing. They pretty much are on their own right now. It's not the same as when they were three, four. When they are 19, 15, it's a totally different schedule. But you got to keep your eyes on them more closely now than when they were little kids. So I'm up to the challenge: Make sure that their life is straight too.

I want to be good. I CHASE THINGS STILL, knowing that I'm going to retire after this season. I'd like to give that to our fans."

"No one has had more drug tests than David Ortiz. I GET DRUG-TESTED ALL THE TIME. I never failed one test."

"I work extremely hard on my hitting, man. LIKE I'M A PSYCHO when it comes down to hitting."

"This game is at its best. I don't think this game is going to get better, or used to be better than it is right now. It has reached a level right now that will BLOW YOUR MIND."



JUN 19, 2006

# THE ORTIZ SHIFT

WITH THE LOCATION OF EVERY BATTED BALL METICULOUSLY CHARTED, DEFENSIVE POSITIONING IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CUSTOMIZED

ALBERT CHEN

WITH A series against the Red Sox looming, Joe Maddon was pedaling away on an exercise bicycle one day in mid-April, pondering how to contain David Ortiz, when the idea came to him. The first-year Devil Rays manager came up with the 3-4 shift—a three-infielder, four-outfielder alignment especially designed for the most feared lefthanded hitter in the league.

"I read the Einstein line that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result," says Maddon, 52, who pores over spray charts (showing the location of each ball that a batter puts in play) on his laptop computer. "So I thought it was time to do something different. Why not? The guy kills everybody, so let's see if this works."

Maddon noticed that the vast majority of the pull-hitting Ortiz's balls to the right side were fly balls to the outfield. So the manager moved his second baseman and shortstop onto the shallow outfield grass between first and second, shaded his leftfielder and centerfielder toward right and sent his third baseman to leftfield, leaving the left side of the infield empty and creating a four-man outfield like that of a slo-pitch softball team. Other clubs, such as the Yankees, employ a more traditional shift against Ortiz, with three infielders on the right side (below).

"I try not to think about it," Ortiz says, "but sometimes it gets to you when you see all that room out there. I'm seeing [the shift] more and more. If I hit .300 this season, I'm a superhero."

It's a sign of the times in baseball. "When I played, you never heard of spray charts—it's something that's come into vogue in the last five to 10 years," says Brewers manager Ned Yost, who played in the majors in the 1980s and uses shifts on many hitters, from the Cardinals' Albert Pujols, a righty swinger, to the Phillies' Chase Utley, a lefty. Adds Yost, "The shift can mess with a guy's head. With a guy like Pujols, you know he can drive the ball the other way for a hit any time he wants. But that takes the home run away."

Maddon hasn't used the 3-4 shift against other hitters—yet. "I have to keep looking at the sheets," he says. "There's so much information, why not use it?"

## PLUGGING HOLES

When most teams face Ortiz, such as the Yankees (below), they position three infielders on the right side of second base because the lefthanded-hitting Ortiz pulls the ball most of the time (47.9% this season, through Sunday). The shifts have been somewhat successful: Ortiz, who hit .300 over the past two seasons, was batting .265 with 44.3% of his hits still going to rightfield.

[This article contains two complex diagrams. Please see hard copy or pdf.]

LEFTFIELD: PCT.OF ALL BALLS PUT IN PLAY  
16.8%

HITS: 13  
OUTS: 18  
HOME RUNS: 1  
PCT. OF ALL HITS: 21.3%

INFIELD LEFT:PCT. OF ALL BALLS PUT IN PLAY  
5.4%

HITS: 1  
OUTS: 9  
PCT. OF ALL HITS: 1.6%

CENTERFIELD: PCT. OF ALL BALLS PUT IN PLAY  
29.7%

HITS: 17  
OUTS: 31  
HOME RUNS: 3  
PCT. OF ALL HITS: 27.9%

INFIELD CENTER:PCT. OF ALL BALLS PUT IN PLAY  
1.1%

HITS: 0  
OUTS: 2  
PCT. OF ALL HITS: 0%

RIGHTFIELD: PCT.OF ALL BALLS PUT IN PLAY  
27.6%

HITS: 27  
OUTS: 24  
HOME RUNS: 14  
PCT. OF ALL HITS: 44.3%

INFIELD RIGHT:PCT. OF ALL BALLS PUT IN PLAY  
19.5%

HITS: 3  
OUTS: 34  
PCT. OF ALL HITS: 4.9%

### Spray Chart

With a wealth of data available to detect hitting trends—including spray charts that show the location of each ball that a batter puts in play—clubs are deploying unique defensive alignments more than ever. Ortiz's 2006 spray chart through Sunday (above) shows that the vast majority of his hits (blue dots) were to rightfield, including 14 of his 18 home runs.

- Hit
- Out
- \* Home run

Source: BaseballInfo Solutions

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

ILLUSTRATION BY DON FOLEY; PHOTOGRAPH BY CHUCK SOLOMON

ILLUSTRATION

Source: Baseball Info Solutions



NOV 11, 2013

## *BOSTON STRONGMAN*

DAVID ORTIZ IS BRUTE OCTOBER FORCE, INARGUABLY ONE OF THE GREATEST POSTSEASON SLUGGERS EVER, BUT THERE IS A TAO OF PAPI THAT GOES BEYOND THE RAW POWER AND THREE RINGS. AS A STUDY IN RESILIENCE AND IN SEIZING BIG MOMENTS, HIS STORY IS THE STORY OF BOSTON ITSELF

**TOM VERDUCCI**

THE BRISTOL Lounge in the Four Seasons Hotel in Boston does a splendid job of backing up its modest boast that it is the city's premier venue for power lunches. Last Friday was no exception. Well-dressed and well-mannered people filled nearly every table in a spacious room made warm by the cherrywood tables and the floor-to-ceiling windows that invited occasional peeks at Boylston Street and the fall palette in the Public Garden.

The peacefulness of the elegant tableau was broken by a big man walking through the entrance of the lounge, a man dressed entirely in black—black boots, black pants, black sport shirt, black Boss sport coat with the label still sewn on the left sleeve—except for a rakish red plaid scarf that had the same effect as an exclamation point at the end of a sentence. The big man ambled, like a boulder down a small hill, with a hitch in his slow gait. His legs, of more normal heft, seemed to understand the importance of sedulity in supporting that famously bearlike upper body.

It started with one businessman at the table nearest the entrance. He applauded, and the rest of his table joined him. The commotion caused the diners at the adjacent table to look up from their lunch; they too began applauding. Like ripples from a stone piercing the surface of a pond, the applause spread outward until the last table in the farthest corner of the room saw what the fuss was about and added to the applause.

No one shouted or approached the big man in black. The applause was a respectful, sincere display of gratitude. Now this was a power lunch: David Ortiz, everybody's Big Papi, was out in public for the first time since leading the Red Sox to the World Series title two days earlier. (He spent the day after the Game 6 clincher hosting a team party at his Weston, Mass., house, the fourth such shindig in the postseason alone. This one was a Halloween party; Ortiz dressed as a wolf.) Ortiz had done more than just win the Series MVP award with a performance that made him the leading career hitter (.455 batting average) and slugger (.795 slugging percentage) in World Series history among players with at least 40 plate appearances. He also became, in the debatable but entirely defensible estimation of Red Sox president Larry Lucchino, "probably the most beloved athlete in the history of Boston."

Every World Series story is one of resilience: The grind of a 162-game season played in a 182-day window, followed by the wilds of postseason play, would test even Lewis and Clark. But among baseball's 109 world champions there has never been a story of resilience quite like this one. No team—not the 1969 Mets, not the '91 Twins—has won the World Series in the year after being as bad as the Red Sox were in 2012 (.426 winning percentage). And only six months before the Series—just a half mile east on the same street where Ortiz was applauded—two pressure-cooker bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three people, wounding 264 others and terrorizing hundreds of thousands. Four days later the citizenry was ordered to "shelter in place" during a daylong citywide lockdown, while a manhunt for the bombers proceeded. The pleasant routines of life, including baseball, were put on hold. "I had to stay in my house the day we had a game because they were chasing those bastards," Ortiz says.

If any one person were to lead the Red Sox and—given the team's cultural importance in New England—by extension Bostonians through a terrible time, it was a man with an outsized capacity for resilience. Ortiz turns 38 this month. Since being signed out of the Dominican Republic at age 16 in 1992, he has been traded by the Mariners, cut by the Twins, accused (in 2009) of using steroids as far back as 2003, written off as finished virtually every year since '08 and branded by his manager last year as someone who quit on his team. What is the story of Ortiz if not the story of resilience?

The applause had stopped. The patrons of the Bristol Lounge had returned to their meals. Ortiz, asked to consider those who criticized him before this year turned out so well, gave a slight wave of his hand in the direction of the room. "Well," he said, "those are the same people who are clapping for me right now. That's always been my challenge in my career. Negativity is huge around here. And if you don't know how to deal with it, it will eat you alive."

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THE FIRST bomb went off at 2:49 p.m on April 15 and the second one 13 seconds later. Ortiz watched the aftermath on a clubhouse television in Pawtucket, R.I., home to Boston's Triple A affiliate, where he was on a rehab assignment as he worked his way back from an Achilles injury he suffered in July 2012.



Ortiz saw the pictures of Boylston Street, the restaurants and storefronts that were so familiar to him. He had trouble reconciling that familiarity with these pictures—the blood in the street, the fallen bodies, the shattered glass and the plumes of smoke. Wait, he thought, is that ... is that downtown? "I couldn't believe that was going on here in America, where a lot of good people [in the marathon] were trying to raise money to fight cancer," he says. "This is where God gets all of his angels and puts them together to raise money for a good cause. Who is thinking something bad is going to happen at something like that?"

Five days later baseball returned to Fenway. Serendipitously, so did Ortiz, for his first game of the 2013 season. Kenmore Square abuts Fenway, but today ballparks and arenas are our town squares. Those are the places we gather as communities, wearing the colors of the home team as a means of bonding, to open the public spigot of emotions. This day of gathering was complex. The people of Boston could leave their homes again, but no one could be sure what was on the other side of terrorism, even with one bomber dead and the other in custody.

The wounds were too fresh, and some will never heal. Somehow, during a pregame ceremony honoring the bombing victims and the law-enforcement personnel who hunted down the terrorists, a microphone wound up in the hands of Ortiz. The big moments seem to find him. "When I spoke on the field, it was just made up right there," he says. "I was just feeling like the fans feel. And when you feel like that, you need a superhero to come in and make you feel safe. I mean, we feel safe because of the police department and everything, but we need somebody to step up and say something to keep everything together. I think it was my time to say something. And it seems like I said the right thing even when it was wrong."

Ortiz lets out a belly laugh at the recollection of his famous vulgarity. On live television, Big Papi stepped up to the plate and with pride and defiance shouted, "This is our f----- city! And no one is going to dictate our freedom. Stay strong!"

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ON THE eve of the World Series, the Red Sox held detailed meetings to review the intelligence their scouts and other baseball-operations people had turned up on the National League champion Cardinals. The information could be excruciating in its detail, but two dominant themes emerged. For the Boston pitchers, the main takeaway was that St. Louis was an aggressive-swinging team—only two teams in baseball had more plate appearances end with just one pitch. Only four teams averaged fewer pitches per plate appearance. "We knew they'd keep swinging, even when they fell behind in games," Boston manager John Farrell says. "We used that to our advantage."

For the Boston hitters, the takeaway was that the Cardinals' pitchers brought premium velocity and were proud of it. They loved to challenge hitters with their fastballs. Ortiz heard all of this, and he watched extensive video of how the Cardinals worked the Dodgers' lefthanded hitters in the National League Championship Series. The videos confirmed how much St. Louis pitchers relied on their fastballs. When his preparation was done, Ortiz told Boston's hitting coach, Greg Colbrunn, "I'm ready to hit the fastball."

"That's all I hit," says Ortiz, laughing. "I got two or three hits on off-speed pitches. After that, everything was hard. Nobody throws me that many fastballs. I don't want to throw all my secrets out there. But I'm a good fastball hitter, man. I do my homework. I don't like to go out there naked."

Ortiz batted .688 in the Series—the rest of the Red Sox hit .169—and had the second-best OPS (1.948) ever in a Fall Classic among hitters who have made at least 25 plate appearances. He made the Series his own beginning with a critical at bat in Game 1. The average major league lefthanded batter makes 20% of his plate appearances against lefthanded pitching. So worried are opposing managers about Ortiz that 36% of his plate appearances are against lefties. Opponents know it is particularly important to match up tough lefthanded relievers against Ortiz late in games. The Cardinals were sure they had one of those specialists to neutralize Ortiz: Kevin Siegrist, a 24-year-old rookie and one of those St. Louis pitchers who was proud of his fastball. Siegrist held lefthanded hitters to a .118 batting average without a home run all year.

St. Louis manager Mike Matheny could not wait to match up Siegrist on Ortiz, even if the score in Game 1 was 5--0 in favor of Boston in the seventh inning. Ortiz had never before faced Siegrist, but he had done his homework. "I watched the video," Ortiz says. "He only has a fastball. Well, he tried to make something up my last at bat [in Game 6], but it was too late. On the video everything was fastball."

As Siegrist warmed up, Ortiz made sure to study every one of his pitches from the on-deck circle. Every time Siegrist drew his arm up to throw, Ortiz picked up his right foot and put it back down while his hands drew the bat back into a loaded position. He did not swing in these virtual at bats. He simply was timing Siegrist's delivery. So intense was his focus that the normally ebullient Ortiz ignored the pleas of a young boy in the seats behind him. "This kid was calling, 'Papi! Papi! Papi!' " Ortiz says. "I was like, Dude, relax.

"I know I'm going to get a fastball first pitch. I don't know where it's going to be, but I knew I was getting a fastball. When I went inside to watch the video [later], Yadi [Molina, the catcher] asked for a fastball away, but he threw it right down the middle of the pike.

"Boom!"

Ortiz smacked a 96-mph fastball over the wall in rightfield for a home run. It took just one pitch to render useless the weapon with which St. Louis planned to neutralize Ortiz.

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I'VE PLAYED with a lot of superstars," Boston catcher David Ross said, "but I've never been around a superstar who cared more about winning than David. He could go 0 for 4, but if we win the game, he's the happiest man in the room."

As closer Koji Uehara observed in the blog he keeps for a Japanese website, "The team seems to be in a good mood when Papi hits."

Ortiz is the team's leader in every imaginable way, a man of imposing size (6'4", 250 pounds) yet easy accessibility. He delivers the right words and mood for a club as reliably as he does big hits. He is a baseball philosopher—thoughtful, colorful, profane—and his well-scarred career and outsized personality serve him well in big situations that can rattle others. "You can be the real deal today and s----- tomorrow," he says. "That's how the game goes. On the day you feel your best, you can go 0 for 5. You go home and say, 'I feel like Superman, and I went 0 for 5.' That tells you how tough this game is: On your best day you had a bad day."

Imagine the hurt to Ortiz, then, when former manager Bobby Valentine told Bob Costas in a television interview shortly after the team's 93-loss, last-place finish of last year that Ortiz quit on his teammates after the blockbuster August 2012 trade that sent high-priced stars Adrian Gonzalez, Carl Crawford and Josh Beckett to the Dodgers. Valentine, who was fired as soon as the season ended, said, "[Ortiz] realized that this trade meant that we're not going to run this race and we're not even going to finish the race properly, and he decided not to play anymore."

You do not have to imagine—Ortiz will tell you how much it stung. When Valentine later texted him, Ortiz did not respond, and he does not use Valentine's name in discussing his former manager. Ortiz said he stood up for Valentine in April 2012 during a player insurrection aimed at getting him fired. He also said Valentine thanked him in a conversation at the end of the season for showing "me some guts. You played for me this year. I appreciated that."

Says Ortiz, "The same guy three weeks later said what he said. I didn't know if I wanted to be angry or I wanted to laugh at the time. Then he wants to talk and tell me he wasn't trying to hurt me? You either need some medication or you're an ass----."

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AFTER THE home run off Siegrist, the Cardinals spent the rest of the Series getting burned by Ortiz when they pitched to him and getting burned by others when they decided not to.

In Game 2, Ortiz tagged phenom righthander Michael Wacha for a two-run homer in the sixth inning for Boston's only runs in a 4--2 loss. Wacha threw Ortiz four straight changeups, the last one on a 3-and-2 count. Ortiz was not fooled. It was the first time all season that anybody hit Wacha's changeup for a home run. "My at bat before, he threw me a 3-and-0 changeup and then another changeup for a ball," Ortiz says. "My first at bat he threw me one fastball up here"—he motioned toward his neck—"and three changeups. So what would you be looking for?"

Only three batters before the home run, Ortiz was in the clubhouse on his cellphone frantically trying to track down the driver who was picking up his father at the airport and taking him to Fenway Park. Ortiz finally received word that his father had just walked into the park.

"You know, my dad was just telling people the other day, 'This kid, he always liked the big show,' " Ortiz says. "My dad knows that. My dad was the one who wanted me to be a baseball player because he always saw it. That night, I know my dad's in the stands, and the next thing you know I'm going deep over the Monster."

"When I go to watch my son, D'Angelo, he plays his best games. That's how I always was with my dad. Still am."

In Game 4, with the Cardinals up two games to one, starter Lance Lynn avoided Ortiz with the score 1--1, two outs and a runner at first in the sixth inning by throwing four pitches well outside the strike zone.

Matheny then chose rookie righthander Seth Maness to pitch to Jonny Gomes, who belted a three-run homer that turned the Series. The Cardinals, who never held another lead over Boston, were done.

What happened in the dugout minutes before that rally will live on in Red Sox lore. Ortiz gathered his teammates in the dugout for an impromptu pep talk. "The inning before, I'm watching everything," Ortiz says. "Watching my teammates, and knowing what they're capable of, and watching a lot of them with their heads down, and in a situation where we really weren't coming through against their third or fourth starters.... Don't get me wrong, all those guys have good stuff, but there's a different pressure when you're facing their ace.

"So that [Joe] Kelly kid was dealing. Good stuff. Lynn, great stuff. But we are the Red Sox! The team was really good offensively the whole season."

And so this is what Ortiz says he told his teammates, at least with the saltier modifiers deleted:

"Hey, guys, come here, and let me share a secret with you. Yeah, it seems like it was easy to get here from where we were last year, but guess what? Nobody here knows when you will be in the World Series again. This is unique. This is a one-time-in-your-life kind of thing. Enjoy. Try your best. You're putting too much pressure on yourself. We haven't played a game like we normally do. Why is that? Because we're in the World Series? It should be just the opposite. We get our asses kicked and lose tomorrow and then you're going to be sitting at home, like, Yeah, I was in the World Series, but I didn't realize it until now."

Says Boston pitcher Ryan Dempster, "You hear all the time about guys who have to 'step up' in the postseason. With him, it's just the opposite. He has the amazing ability to play the game the same way as the stakes get higher. His pulse rate stays the same for a World Series game as it is for a game in the middle of April. That's what makes him so special."

St. Louis ace Adam Wainwright said he decided before Game 5 that he would challenge Ortiz, not pitch around him. That plan was tested immediately. Ortiz came to bat with Dustin Pedroia on second base and one out in the first inning. With first base open, it was the classic opportunity to walk or pitch around a hot hitter. Wainwright wanted none of it. "I love facing aces," Ortiz says, "because I know they will challenge you. The minute I saw Yadi sit down and start calling pitches, I was like, O.K., it's on!"

It took just one pitch for Ortiz to burn Wainwright. He ripped a 91-mph cut fastball for an RBI double.

In Game 6 the Cardinals went back to avoiding Ortiz. They walked him four times, including three times intentionally—the first time anybody had been avoided so many times in a World Series clincher. Ortiz scored twice after intentional walks in a stress-free 6--1 Boston win, the first championship clincher for the Red Sox in Fenway in 95 years. That it occurred just six months after the marathon bombing added to the loud mix of relief and joy that shook the 101-year-old ballpark to its brick and mortar.

Ortiz reached base 19 times in 25 trips to the plate to walk away with the MVP trophy—though not literally so. Last Friday he stopped by the Boston clubhouse looking for the trophy. "It's in here somewhere," he said.

Following Game 6, Ortiz didn't leave the clubhouse until after 2 a.m., when he headed toward a team party. As he left the clubhouse with family and friends, assorted ballpark workers and police officers began joining him in the narrow, dark concourse underneath the old ballpark. Like rock stars and four-star generals, Ortiz never walks alone: Where he goes, people follow. One of his entourage at this late hour was Jeffrey Silva, the police chief of Westwood, Mass., who was assigned to help with crowd control and was overjoyed at the good fortune of running into Ortiz. Silva's eight-year-old son had asked him when he left for work for an Ortiz autograph, but now it was Silva whose eyes gave away the wonder of an eight-year-old.



"He represents everything Boston is about," Silva said. "Hardworking people who look out for one another. The way he handled everything from the bombing to the whole season tells you how much he cares. The epitome of leadership is when people look to you in time of trouble and you want to be the one to provide the help. That's what people see in David: a true leader."

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ORTIZ WAS so good in the World Series that his teammates started calling him Cooperstown. If that is where Ortiz is headed—as a man with 431 home runs; more hits, homers and RBIs than any designated hitter in history; the greatest World Series batting record in history; and the first man to win three championship rings without playing for the Yankees since Jim Palmer of the Orioles 30 years ago—then his road there will have been one of wooden wheels over cobblestones. It is one of the bumpiest ever traveled.

Before the Red Sox finally gave him a real shot midway through the 2003 season, Ortiz had been traded as a minor leaguer by Seattle for veteran Dave Hollins, a third baseman who would play only 28 games for the Mariners; had been cut by the Twins so they could make room on their roster for prospect Jose Morban, an infielder who would hit .141 in 61 major league games, none with Minnesota; and had been forced to split time with Jeremy Giambi, a DH who would be out of baseball after the Red Sox used him for 50 games in '03. Ortiz was 27 years old that season, his first with 500 plate appearances. He hit 31 home runs and finished fifth in MVP voting.

Ortiz and the Red Sox won two World Series in the next four years, but most seasons since then have been trying, if productive. In 2008 he injured his left wrist and missed 53 games. The next year he was hitting .219 as late as Aug. 15, the result, he said, of a loop in his swing caused by compensating for the wrist injury. "People were saying, 'Oh, my God, this guy is done,' " Ortiz says.

"The epitome of leadership is when people look to you in times of trouble and you want ... to provide the help," says Silva. "That's what people see in David."

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It was during the 2009 season that The New York Times reported that Ortiz was on a list held by the federal government of more than 100 players who tested positive for a banned substance during major league baseball's survey testing in '03, the last year of testing without penalties. The Times did not report the name of the substance. The players' union explained that the number of players on the government's list exceeded the number that MLB considered to have tested positive, and the union also said over-the-counter supplements could have produced a positive test result at the time. Ortiz, who hasn't failed a drug test under the anti-PED policy baseball adopted in 2004, says he never used steroids and that he never found out what substance landed him on the government list. "The one thing I can tell you straight-up," he says, "is I am not going to screw up my career by using some s--- just because I want to look better. I'm so afraid not just of that, but afraid of life after baseball, who I am going to be. I come from a family where my dad got cancer. He's got it under control, but it's in my genes. I know those things you put in your body, they take you there faster."

Ortiz hit .238 in 2009. It took only one week into the following season for his critics to write him off. Boston Globe columnist Dan Shaughnessy, writing for SI.com, opined after five games, "Ortiz will never again be the slugger he once was. Good pitchers toy with him." He advocated giving Ortiz's DH job to Mike Lowell and Jeremy Hermida. By May 4, 2010, Ortiz was hitting .149 with three home runs. He hit .288 with 29 homers thereafter.



Ortiz and Tigers slugger Miguel Cabrera are the only hitters in baseball to put up an OPS greater than .950 in each of the past three seasons. Ortiz is the rare older player still slugging away at a high rate in the testing era: In the last nine seasons he is the only qualified player at least 37 years old to exceed a .950 OPS.

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IT'S ALWAYS something, isn't it?

The Celtics keep calling: They want to know if they can host him at their Nov. 1 home opener. (No, he's spending quiet time at home with his family. Maybe next week.) All the late-night talk shows want him and upping their perks to land him. (Letterman wins, clinching the deal with a private jet to ferry him to and from New York.) The Country Music Awards want him to present one of their trophies.

The glow of one of the greatest World Series performances by one man has put Ortiz in demand, but ... there's also always something negative, isn't there? Just after winning the series, Ortiz found out that a national radio host suspected that his performance might be explained by the use of steroids. Ortiz had gone 2 for 22 in the ALCS before he went 11 for 16 against the Cardinals. "First you hear, 'This guy needs to step up his game,' " Ortiz says. "Then I must be on something to hit like that in the World Series.

"What world are we living in right now? A week later? Really, what is it that we need to do?"

Cynicism and snark have become accepted American social mores, often carried out to outright vitriol. The eyes and ears of the foreign-born player provide an interesting point of observation for this shift. Uehara, blogging in his native Japanese, expressed puzzlement about Boston articles cataloging "nightmares" in the Red Sox' postseason, including a loss in the Division Series when Tampa Bay's Jose Lobaton hit a walk-off home run off Uehara. "Why do people write such negative articles when I'm trying to be optimistic and trying my best?" he wrote.

Ortiz is such an aficionado of baseball that he helped Molina with a batting tip about his leg kick during the World Series. "I want the game to be good," he says. He is worried, though. He is worried we have become so cynical that nobody will accept greatness from a player without thinking it was chemically enhanced. "That's the world we live in now," he says. "It's like there are no true players. I guarantee there are people doubting about Cabrera and my boy Christopher Davis [of the Orioles] and [the Angels'] Mike Trout. But there are true players in this game. A lot of them."

Ortiz has one year remaining on his two-year contract. He will be paid \$15 million next year, the highest salary of his career. He doesn't know how much longer he will play. He doesn't know because it depends on how long that big body holds up.

"When I don't feel good, it's over," he says. "If this body keeps treating me well, I go on. I don't want to be in a wheelchair when I'm done with baseball. Sometimes you keep pushing, and the next thing you know you hurt something that is not fixable. I want to enjoy my kids and come to the field and help some other kids."

Ortiz got up from the cherrywood table and, with that little hitch in his step, walked through the restaurant toward the exit. As he wound his way around the tables, stopping for pictures with a mom and daughter, as well as a group of young ladies, another round of applause went up, this one a little longer and a little louder than his entrance accompaniment. "Stay strong" is what he had advised them all back in April. A prolific baseball career, even a possible Hall of Fame one, was built on those words. The applause recognized that those words, this season and this city had never belonged more to Big Papi than they did at that moment.

JUN 15, 2009

# A LONG AND WINDING ROAD

HOW DID DAVID ORTIZ GO FROM STUD TO DUD? TRACKING A MEGASLUMP, ONE DAY AT A TIME

## SI STAFF

- July 25, 2008

Ortiz returns to the Red Sox lineup after missing 45 games with a torn tendon sheath in his left wrist. "It's like making a huge trade at the deadline," says Boston outfielder J.D. Drew. "His impact will be immediate."

- Aug. 5

After going 10 for 38 with one homer in his first 10 games, Ortiz tells reporters he's bothered by a clicking sound in his wrist when he swings. "It gets in your head," he says. "Should I take another swing? Should I hold it?"

- Oct. 19

The Red Sox lose to the Rays in Game 7 of the ALCS, ending a disappointing season in which Ortiz slugged .507 with an on-base percentage of .369—his lowest numbers since joining Boston in '03—and batted .186 in the playoffs. Says Ortiz, "I tried my best, but it's not going to be roses and flowers all the time."

- Feb. 16, 2009

Ortiz arrives in spring training and pronounces himself healthy. "I'm fine, my hand is doing good," he says.

- April 17 (.176, 0 HRs, 3 RBIs)

The 230-pound Ortiz gets teased in the clubhouse by Red Sox Hall of Famer Jim Rice: "You're supposed to hit your weight, you know." Ortiz laughs, goes to his locker and returns with a T-shirt. "I don't know if you know how to read," he says to Rice, "but read this." The shirt's message: IT'S NOT HOW YOU START, IT'S HOW YOU FINISH.

- April 20 (.196, 0 HRs, 6 RBIs)

Ortiz fires back at a growing number of columnists and talk-show callers suggesting he's washed up and the Red Sox should cut ties with him. "I'm not done," he says. "I'm going to hit, so the people need to stop panicking."

- May 4 (.208, 0 HRs, 12 RBIs)

Ortiz admits that his slump has taken a psychological toll. "[I need to] clean up my head and go out there and not try to go too crazy," he tells The New York Times, adding that the ordeal is "something that the baseball gods want to teach me," to show him that hitting is "not as easy as you make it look, big boy."

- May 10 (.224, 0 HRs, 14 RBIs)

After ESPN cameras catch him screaming with frustration in the dugout, Ortiz says he receives more than 50 calls and text messages from fellow major leaguers telling him to stay strong. "[Carlos] Delgado and I, we talked for like an hour," he says, referring to the Mets' first baseman, who endured a horrible slump in April 2008 and rebounded to finish with 38 home runs. "Last year, when he was going through all that, I was one of the guys really worried about his situation."

- May 14 (.208, 0 HRs, 15 RBIs)

After going 0 for 7 and tying a team record by stranding 12 runners against the Angels, a disgusted Ortiz tells reporters, "I'm sorry guys, I don't feel like talking now.... Just put down, 'Papi stinks.'"

- May 15

Manager Terry Francona benches Ortiz for a three-game series in Seattle, saying his DH needs a break to clear his head: "It looked like he had been fighting his pillow."

- May 19

Francona says he won't move Ortiz out of the third spot in the lineup, where Big Papi has hit since May 2005. "If we move David around, everybody moves," the skipper says. "I don't think it puts us in the best position."

- May 20 (.210, 1 HR, 17 RBIs)

Ortiz's father, Enrique, has flown to Boston from the Dominican Republic to comfort his son. It works: Big Papi hits his first home run and is rewarded with a curtain call at Fenway Park. "I feel good, man. I feel like I just got that big ol' monkey off my back," he says. Ortiz may have also had help from a higher power; after the game he shows a Boston Herald reporter a set of handmade wooden rosary beads sent by a fan: "See how beautiful they are?"

- May 24 (.195, 1 HR, 18 RBIs)

After an 0 for 5 against the Mets drops his average below the Mendoza Line, Ortiz laments his bad luck. Referring to a hard line drive off his bat that was caught, he says, "I came this close to crying ... [but] I've got to keep my boys rolling. I figure if I'm down, a lot of people are looking at me, and it can get contagious."

- May 26

Francona drops Ortiz to the sixth spot in the order, the first time he's hit lower than cleanup since May 2004.

- June 4 (.187, 1 HR, 20 RBIs)

Ortiz, whose vision tested 20/20 during a spring training exam, tells reporters he's going to have his eyes checked again because they have felt dry, and he's been blinking a lot. The exam was scheduled for Monday. "It's just when I try to focus on something," he says the next day. "And I focus on hitting. When you've got that blinking thing going on, it just doesn't feel right."

- June 6 (.196, 2 HRs, 22 RBIs)

The slump is such a hot topic around baseball that an anonymous scout offers the New York Post his uninformed opinion on the reason for the slump: Ortiz is older than his listed 33. "The chances of his birth certificate being accurate are zero," the scout says. Later, Ortiz hits his second home run and raises his average to .196. "I'm feeling good. I just have to keep swinging, swinging. If I swing, swing, swing, good things will happen."

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He has just two homers, but Ortiz STAYS POSITIVE: "If I'm down, it can get contagious."

ILLUSTRATION

ILLUSTRATION BY DARROW





JUL 29, 2019

## DAVID AND THE D.R.

### SI STAFF

He might be the most beloved—and famous—person in the Dominican Republic. SO WHY WOULD SOMEONE SHOOT DAVID ORTIZ? And how could it be mistaken identity, as police have said? A visit to the country yielded few answers—but raised plenty more questions

DR. JOSE ABEL Gonzalez was settling in to watch the Chicago Cubs take on the St. Louis Cardinals on Sunday Night Baseball when he got a call from his clinic. It was 9:33 p.m. on June 9, and a patient had just arrived with a gunshot wound. Gonzalez knew it was serious. His clinic was one of the most expensive in the Dominican Republic, the kind that catered to the rich and powerful. It wasn't the kind of place gunshot victims in Santo Domingo typically got sent.

A second call followed. The voice on the line told him the name of the victim: David Ortiz. Gonzalez hurried to his car, his mind racing: How could this happen? Who would shoot David Ortiz?

When he pulled up to the clinic, Gonzalez saw the Rolls-Royce SUV that had ferried Ortiz from Santo Domingo's Dial Bar and Lounge, where the slugger had been shot in the back minutes earlier. Inside the facility, Ortiz was lying on a gurney, being interviewed by the police. He was in pain and kept asking for the surgery to begin. The doctor and his team would operate for 4½ hours, removing his gallbladder, a segment of his liver and large intestine, and repairing his small intestine.

The clinic turned chaotic during the operation. It filled with friends, family, media and well-wishers, all wondering why someone would shoot so beloved a figure. A video would later emerge of a woman getting into a screaming match in the lobby, leading to rumors of a love triangle. There were even concerns that the shooter might show up to finish the job. Gonzalez, though, knew not to ask out loud the questions that had been running through his mind. "I learned really fast that the less you know as a doctor of a patient's situation, the better," he said.

In the aftermath of the shooting, no one seemed to know much—and yet stories about what happened proliferated. Rumors flowed, with tales of women, money and assorted improprieties filling social media and then leaking into print. One infamous narcotrafficker would be rumored to be responsible and then suddenly another. Theories were easy to come by, answers less so.

The national police arrested new suspects every few days, but the more progress authorities claimed to make, the murkier the situation became. When they took the alleged gunman into custody three days after the shooting, prosecutors and police practically mocked him for saying he targeted Ortiz in a case of mistaken identity—only for authorities to turn around a week later and try to convince a skeptical nation that this was, in fact, exactly what happened.

I spent 10 days in late June traveling throughout the country, looking for answers. To put it bluntly, I did not crack the case. But I did find something fascinating: Nearly every person I spoke with—from high-ranking newspaper editors to corner drug dealers—expressed a deep skepticism that anyone would, or even could, definitively solve the riddle of why Ortiz was shot. Whatever story the government produced, who would believe it?

Though the Dominican Republic is a country of a wide variety of natural resources, a robust tourism industry, a proud history and a plethora of cultural contributions, two of its exports seem to grab the most headlines: a disproportionate number of extremely talented baseball players, and cocaine. In recent years—as the drug trade has led to government corruption—the country has, to no small extent, been shaped by demand from the United States for both.

Those forces now seemed to have intersected with devastating consequences. As I moved from barrio to barrio, I found that the story of Ortiz is much bigger than simply determining why he was shot. His saga reveals the most consequential fault lines in Dominican society today.

ONE OF MY first stops was Ortiz's childhood neighborhood, Barrio Invi, in the town of Haina just outside Santo Domingo. "We were poor, and our neighborhood was teeming with violence and crime," he wrote in his 2017 book, *Papi: My Story*. He told of stabbings, shootings and drugs, of his parents showing him a bag of cocaine at a young age and warning him about it. In a 2015 *Players Tribune* video, Ortiz detailed how his father would make him practice baseball in the backyard, because it was too dangerous out front. In his autobiography, Ortiz recounted seeing someone killed when he was a child. "I saw things that no one should see, especially a kid," he wrote. In numerous interviews, Ortiz comes across as scarred, yet proud of where he came from and that he was able to make it out.

On the drive in, nicely paved roads bordered by factories lead to narrower potholed streets, where young men zip by on small 150cc motorcycles and vendors hawk fried pork at small stands. When I arrive at a town square a block away from where Ortiz grew up, the neighborhood looks anything but dangerous. It's a festive scene, complete with loud Latin trap music booming from a speaker set up on top of a car, children romping in a nearby playground and a crowd seated on folding chairs downing Presidente beer.

The neighborhood's central base is Colita Peluqueria, a one-seat barbershop that doubles as a bar. Inside Anna Vazquez sits at the counter, sipping from a bottle. "There's no way to describe David Ortiz. And what happened to him, there's no words to describe that either," she says. At this moment, Ortiz is hospitalized in Boston, but his presence in the town is palpable. Vazquez says she lived next door to David when he was growing up, and that she cooked for him and helped sew his clothes. She was there when he signed his first contract. He was never in trouble and was known as a good kid who was friends with everyone.

In the barrio there are mixed opinions on what has become the government's official story. A day earlier, Attorney General Jean Alain Rodriguez had declared in a press conference that the shooter's true target was not Ortiz, but his friend David Sixto Fernandez, who happened to be with the slugger that night. The attorney general said that a drug trafficker named Victor Hugo Gomez Vasquez believed that, eight years ago, his cousin Sixto provided information to narcotics investigators about him. That caused Gomez, who maintains his innocence, to assemble a hit team—a ragtag crew of men with nicknames like The Bone, The Surgeon and Carlos Nike. Initially prosecutors said the job cost a mere \$7,800, though the number would balloon to \$30,000 within a week.

The cause of the mistaken identity, authorities said, was a grainy photo snapped on the night of the shooting by one of the men surveilling Sixto, which made it appear as though Ortiz's much smaller friend was wearing white pants. When the gunman arrived at the club, he saw Ortiz—dressed in white pants—sitting at a table with Sixto, the reggaeton artist Secreto and Jhoel Lopez, a television host, who hours before the shooting posted a photo with Ortiz captioned, "You know we are from the street."

As widely shared security footage shows, the shooter, allegedly confused, approached the table and shot the most recognizable man in the Dominican Republic in the back at point-blank range before fleeing. Police say the team that attacked Ortiz included two getaway cars and a motorcycle (an enraged crowd caught the motorcyclist and, in a widely seen video, beat him to a pulp).

Inside the bar cum barbershop, Vazquez says she believes the police are telling the truth, because why would anyone want to hurt David? Ortiz's lawyer had put out a statement declaring his client "innocent in what happened" and denying he had any illicit or unsavory connections—that is good enough for Vazquez. Jose Pinales, the barber and proprietor of the establishment, agrees. He shows off a photo of David in the shop from more than a decade ago. "He's like an idol here. Not just for the neighborhood, but for the country, as an example to follow," he says.

Sitting outside the shop in a plastic green lawn chair with a cigarette and beer in hand, Kendy Correa is more skeptical. He says David was a low profile guy who loved to go to parties. In the neighborhood nobody trusts the police, Correa says. He thinks Ortiz was the target, and it was someone who was jealous or hated him. "It felt like a part of the family got shot," he says. "For the poor kids here, he did so much. So many people who needed help would go to his foundations."

My fixer, a Dominican journalist, speculates that we're witnessing an ongoing battle between people's distrust of the authorities and their wanting to protect Ortiz's reputation.

Later in the week Nathaniel Perez, a senior sportswriter with the newspaper *Diario Libre*, will explain the love affair to me. "David Ortiz wasn't better than Sammy Sosa. He didn't hit 600 home runs. His games weren't as popular as Pedro Martinez's," Perez says. "He didn't have a complete career like [Albert] Pujols. But no other Dominican player has been as popular here as David Ortiz."

Perez tells me how Ortiz was known for being a man of the people, someone who could go to the roughest neighborhoods without a worry, someone who did so without a trace of arrogance. Other players might go visit the barrio they grew up in, but Ortiz would go to all the barrios. He was constantly raising money and, through his foundation, regularly provided life-saving surgeries for needy children. In 2006, he raised \$200,000 to start the first pediatric cardiovascular unit in the Dominican Republic. "No other baseball player or athlete has done more for Dominican children," says Perez.

"He has stolen the hearts of Dominicans, Perez adds. "Dominicans see him as someone who has never forgotten the place he comes from."

In the end, that might have been what led to him lying on that operating room table.

"The reason that he was attacked in that place is that he has never forgotten about those places," says Perez. "When he wants to socialize, he goes to the barrios."

ORTIZ HAS always seemed acutely aware of the thin line between a life of baseball riches and one of poverty. Leaving his old neighborhood, I head to the nearby barrio of Manresa, where my fixer tells me he's well-connected and I meet someone who ended up on the other side: a drug dealer who appears to be in his early 30s but goes by El Viejo, or The Old Man. When I ask him whether he fears for his own safety in his line of work, he tells me he doesn't because it's him that does "bad things" to people. He's slight, wearing a tank top and flip flops, with a nose ring and a Yankees hat.

Cars are triple parked and music is blasting. Children swim in the dirty beach water, and the sand is littered with plastic bags and bottles. It's a decidedly rougher area than Haina. El Viejo tells me three major leaguers have come from nearby: Cleveland All-Star Carlos Santana, plus former bit players Eddy Garabito and Rafael Perez.

El Viejo, too, wanted to be a baseball player when he was younger. A buscon—a scout who trains young players in exchange for a slice of future earnings—came to the neighborhood and told all the kids to get into a circle and do some exercises. He chose a few from the group but told El Viejo that he was too small. He eventually turned to drug dealing. "We search for jobs, we look, we look, we look, but drugs? It's always easy to find someone who has drugs to sell," he says. "We don't choose the world we're living in." He knows parents who don't send their children to school because they can't afford it. "The easiest way out is to sell drugs. That's the way to get out," he adds. "Baseball can save kids from having to live this life."

El Viejo doesn't know what to believe about the Ortiz shooting, but he definitely doesn't trust the police. For many Dominicans, the notion that anyone in the country would have trouble recognizing David Ortiz is absurd. Sixto and Ortiz look nothing alike. A photo of the two together is plastered everywhere. Sixto is light-skinned and dwarfed by the darker-skinned Big Papi. Others point to the video of the shooting, noting how one of the members of the alleged seven-person hit team was captured in the background barely reacting after Ortiz gets shot, instead just casually grabbing his beer. If the wrong target was hit, wouldn't he show some level of surprise?

Even a recent presidential candidate, Luis Abinader, tweets out that no one he spoke to believes the official account, and that an independent investigation needs to be commissioned.

"The lack of institutional trust is a real problem. The people don't trust in the justice system," Guillermo Peña, a project coordinator for Participation Ciudadana, a nonprofit focusing on criminal justice and human rights, would later explain to me. Peña says the country is dealing with huge issues of corruption, poor policing and impunity for the powerful. "There's a vulnerability in the system for the biggest cases."

That corruption and vulnerability is a consequence of the country's rising status as a bridge for transnational cocaine smuggling. As authorities have cracked down on the corridor through Central America and Mexico, narcos moving drugs out of Venezuela and Colombia have increasingly used the Dominican Republic as a transit point to Europe and the United States, according to the Latin American crime-focused research and journalism foundation InSight Crime. A high-level Dominican police source told InSight Crime that about 15% of cocaine produced globally passes through the country.

Multiple high-level Dominican officials have been accused of ties to drug trafficking, including a former president who was alleged by a well-known narco-trafficker of refusing to pay him back a \$4.5 million loan. A director of the antinarcotics police was sentenced in 2016 to 20 years in prison for stealing nearly 1,000 kilos of cocaine. And a high-level prosecutor told the newspaper El Diario in March 2015 that police and military are involved in 90% of organized crime cases. Last year, the Dominican ranked 129th worst of 180 countries in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index.

With that backdrop, fairly or not, initial rumors of Ortiz running afoul of a notorious capo, as Dominicans call narco-traffickers, were accepted as fact by many, whether over a money laundering dispute or a woman. Corrupt police officials and government officials, tied in with the capos, couldn't be expected to really reveal the truth.



Peña shares a meme that shows an astronaut in space, and the caption says he's a new suspect in the David Ortiz shooting. "Dominicans like to make jokes about these kinds of things," he says. "The smiling is almost a defense mechanism."

Another meme making the rounds at that time had a photo of Ortiz with the caption, "You're not a real Dominican unless you've been arrested in the David Ortiz shooting."

As rumors continue to spread about cover-ups and capos, I encountered an almost blasé acceptance that a definitive story may never emerge. When the authorities can't be trusted, people are free to choose their own truth. As the deputy director of *Diario Libre*, Ines Aizpún, tells me, "Everyone here talks a lot, and no one says, 'I don't know.'"

DESPITE its frequent media portrayal as an unsafe country—especially in the wake of this summer's spate of alcohol-related tourist deaths—the Dominican Republic had a murder rate in 2018 of around 10.4 killings per 100,000 people. That's lower than that of Uruguay and perennial vacation favorite Costa Rica. The murder rate is also substantially lower than dozens of American cities, and it has dropped substantially over the last decade.

Though the economy is also improving—growing at one of the fastest rates in Latin America over the last 20 years—poverty and inequality remain major problems. The World Food Programme estimates that 40% of the country lives below the poverty line, with 10% suffering from extreme poverty. In many neighborhoods, especially those removed from the tourism and agricultural industries, the opportunities can be few.

Guajimia, the neighborhood on the outskirts of Santo Domingo where five of the ultimately 14 suspects arrested hailed from, is like that. I headed there, traveling down narrow streets choked with traffic and litter. Low-slung concrete houses with aluminum roofs and iron bars over the windows dot the roads.

Reynaldo Rodriguez Valenzuela, alias El Chino, was allegedly a go-between who helped coordinate the attack. His family says he runs a small mechanic shop and was always working steady jobs. Outside her house, his grandmother shows me photos of El Chino, one at a bartending school, another when he worked as a dance teacher. The family proclaims his innocence. "It's a show, they're capturing everybody so they can say this investigation is working," his father, Fernando Rodriguez, tells me. "It doesn't matter who they take."

"They're trying to save David's reputation," a neighbor chimes in. The small crowd believes the shooting was over a woman, and the authorities are colluding to save Ortiz's reputation to ensure his entry into the Hall of Fame when he becomes eligible in 2022.

El Chino's family say his only mistake was being friends with Joel Rodriguez de la Cruz, known as Calamardo—the name in Spanish-speaking countries of the character Squidward from *Spongebob Squarepants*. Calamardo has more of a reputation as a small-time hood and has been jailed on drug charges. In the Ortiz case, prosecutors accused him of helping assemble the hit team. I greet his father outside his home. He admits that some of the men arrested proposed a hit to Calamardo, but says that his son turned down the offer.

We're soon joined by Calamardo's sister, Carolina Rodriguez, who was arrested and held for three days as the police hunted for her brother. She says she overheard the police talking about how the shooting was over a feud with a capo over a woman. "They're covering for someone big," she claims.



THE ALLEGED shooter, Rolfi Ferreira-Cruz, captured on the infamous video, grew up in a little barrio outside of Mao, a city three hours north of Santo Domingo known for massive organic banana plantations. The neighborhood there is noticeably poorer than those in Santo Domingo and Haina. Along dirt roads, a young boy shepherds a herd of scrawny cattle. There are few shops and cars. A fetid canal runs along the streets. Many of the residents are Haitians who have fled their country. Some of the houses lack indoor plumbing, others are nothing more than wooden shacks. This is where Rolfi Ferreira-Cruz, now 25, spent the first 20 years of his life, before he went to the United States with his father.

"After he came back, he was a different person," his cousin, Gabriel Reyes, 20, tells me. I meet him outside a bodega, and he takes us to a small crowd of men and older women lounging in the hot sun under a tree. They say they don't know why he came back after spending three years in the U.S., but the arrest warrants issued for him in New Jersey offer one explanation. Ferreira-Cruz is wanted by police there for armed robberies committed in 2017. After the Ortiz shooting, officials in the same state would charge him with drug trafficking and possession of a firearm related to a Jan. 22, 2019, incident.

Members of the crowd say Ferreira-Cruz has been back about three months. Some of them deny it's him in the video. "It's a lie," his cousin says. But his mother says she recognized him. "If he did something wrong, he'll pay for it in front of God," Lerdy Cruz says.

They were here when the police snatched up Ferreira-Cruz and other members of the group. Reyes remembers thinking that he'd never seen so many police in his entire life. "They came like they were going after El Chapo," his mother says, and the crowd chuckles. But she's not laughing. The police haven't been back since then. She can't afford to visit him. She's worried he's going to get killed, by the police or by other prisoners. "My God, I haven't eaten, I haven't slept, I can't watch TV because news is always on about this," she says.

"I gave him all he needed," she adds. "Everybody works here. He liked good clothes and shoes, but had money from work." He didn't even drink alcohol, she says. "I don't know what he was doing in the U.S. He came back and I don't know what happened."

Next, I meet Joey Reyes, Ferreira-Cruz's uncle who is fresh out of jail. He says he was grabbed when the raid happened, held, beaten and then released. The police punched him in the face and stomach, and smashed his ears, he claims, saying he thought he was going to be killed. He shows me the scars on his wrists left from the handcuffs. Police did not respond to a request for comment.

Joey used to work with Ferreira-Cruz in the banana fields. "He was fine with everyone, but when he got to the United States, he got lost," he says the uncle. That's where he met Luis Alfredo Rivas Clase, otherwise known as El Cirujano, The Surgeon.

Ferreira-Cruz wouldn't have been the first young man to fall under El Cirujano's influence. The Surgeon, 31, was wanted for orchestrating a 2018 shooting in Reading, Pa. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that police considered him a crime boss.

El Cirujano showed up back in the barrio two months ago, according to the uncle. He set up shop across the street from him, he claimed, in a one-story pension house with half a dozen rooms. It served as the gang's hideout. The uncle says Calamardo was arrested there. El Cirujano escaped the police dragnet and has yet to be caught.

Reyes believes that, whatever his nephew did or didn't do, the police will not go after the right people. "There are so many high-up guys they don't investigate," the uncle says.

The "high-up guys" not being investigated is a common refrain. Generally, it's understood to be referring to one man: Cesar Emilio Peralta, better known as Cesar El Abusador, or Cesar the Abuser. Dominican media refers to him as one of the top narcotraffickers in the country, and he has somehow remained out of prison, despite multiple arrests for drug trafficking and violence. One set of rumors allege that he targeted Ortiz over a woman, or a money laundering dispute. Those theories became so rampant that they got picked up in local newspapers as well as some tabloids abroad, including the New York Daily News and Post and the UK's Daily Mail.

Through intermediaries, I'm told Cesar is unwilling to talk. On my second to last night in the Dominican Republic, I send a message to an Instagram account believed to be his, telling him I want to hear his side of the story. He greets me politely, but only offers a brusque answer: "I do not have any problems, everything has already been cleared up."

AS OF mid-July, new developments in the case have slowed down. The 14 suspects alleged to be part of the conspiracy have been arrested, while two are still fugitives, including El Cirujano. A trial date has not been set, and the suspects will be detained for at least a year. Ortiz had a third surgery in Boston. His representatives, as well as those from the Dominican Attorney General's office, did not reply to request for comment.

The story no longer occupies the front page of the papers every day. To many of the Dominicans I spoke with, it seemed like it almost didn't matter whether or not Ortiz was the intended target, or who he hung out with at nightclubs. What mattered was the pride he inspired in them, the love he had for his country and the work he did with children.

I visited Parque del Este in Santo Domingo, a sprawling complex that hosted the 2003 Pan American Games. On any day with decent weather, you can find a handful of baseball teams practicing there.

It's a few weeks short of the official start of the signing period, a date so significant it is known simply as July 2, but the kids playing here in mismatched uniforms most likely won't be gobbled up by any of the MLB-affiliated academies. "They just love playing so much," says Joel Gomez, who works with the Ministry of Sports and on this day is training 10 kids ranging in age from 12 to 20. Pointing to a skinny 12-year-old, he says, "He cries sometimes when he can't play. He'd rather not eat than not play, it's everything for them."

Gomez says that a lot of his players are at a vulnerable age, and come from tough neighborhoods. Leonardo Daniel Medina, the 12-year-old, is all skin and bones, with fierce eyes and clad in a faded red hat. He plays shortstop and first base and says that instead of toys, his mother buys him baseball equipment.

He lives in the neighborhood of Los Mameyes, where he's already witnessed a stabbing and has to do his best to avoid the local street gangs. Like the other players, he's heartbroken by the Ortiz shooting. He idolizes him and wants to be just like him.

"Because he's from the bottom," he says. "His mother couldn't even buy him anything, and look where he is now."

"The reason that he was attacked in that place is that he has NEVER FORGOTTEN ABOUT THOSE PLACES," Perez said. "When he wants to socialize, he goes to the barrios."

"The lack of institutional trust is a real problem. THE PEOPLE DON'T TRUST IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM," says Peña, who runs a nonprofit focused on justice and human rights. "There's a vulnerability in the system for the biggest cases."

Some of the crowd outside the bodega deny that Ferreira-Cruz is the shooter shown in the video. "It's a lie," his cousin says. But his mother says she recognizes him. " IF HE DID SOMETHING WRONG, HE'LL PAY FOR IT IN FRONT OF GOD," she says.