

Bernie's Turn

Williams immortalized by Latino Baseball Hall of Fame

By Nathan Maciborski

Roberto Weill is not ashamed to admit that he is a copycat. Since founding the Latino Baseball Hall of Fame in 2009, Weill has tried to mimic what the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum has done in Cooperstown, New York.

"That is the Vatican of baseball," Weill said. "We are just a cathedral."

With former Yankees center fielder Bernie Williams being inducted into the Latino Baseball Hall of Fame, however, Cooperstown may be the one following suit.

On Sept. 1, Williams was the guest of honor at a news conference in the Commissioner's Office in Manhattan to announce the class of 2012. The next night, Williams was at Yankee Stadium, where he was recognized in a pregame ceremony along with fellow inductee and Yankees bench coach Tony Peña. The official induction will take place in the Dominican Republic in February.

"It is certainly a great honor," Williams said. "What I'm most proud of is that all of those [accomplishments], I did as a Puerto Rican, and I was able to represent my country in a very dignified way. Puerto Rico was where all those dreams started."

Among those on hand to welcome Williams into the *Salon de la Fama del Béisbol Latino* were Minnie Miñoso, Felipe Alou and Tony Perez, members of the Latino Baseball Hall of Fame's inaugural class. Having those Latino legends in

New York for the event meant a great deal to the 1998 American League batting champ.

"For them to make their presence felt, it just makes me feel great," Williams said. "You know how in families you've got people that you see all the time, and then you have people that they're still your family, but they're away and you never see them. That's what this is like here. I've got my Yankees family, which is my immediate family, and then I've got my distant relatives, the great uncles whose portraits you see all around the house. That's kind of how I feel because they treat you like family. We have such a great bond because of one strong thing in common, and that's the game of baseball. And at the same time, we have the language bond, the cultural bond, and it's just a neat thing to experience."

The Latino Baseball Hall of Fame ceremony was part of a number of special events and ceremonies the Yankees hosted and participated in throughout September in recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month. Robinson Cano and Mariano Rivera presented trophies to winners of the Dominican Sports Foundation's youth baseball tournament winners on Sept. 4; the fourth annual Hispanic Heritage Month Community Achievement Awards were presented on Sept. 20; and on Sept. 22, Dominican Republic Minister of Sports Felipe Payano threw out the ceremonial first pitch. ✎



REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LATINO BASEBALL HALL OF FAME WERE AT YANKEE STADIUM TO RECOGNIZE 2012 INDUCTEES WILLIAMS [FOURTH FROM L] AND PEÑA [SECOND FROM L].