

Baseball: Plainfield's Waldy Arias joins the rare 100 hits-100 runs-100 stolen bases club

By Andrew Mendlowitz

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A deodorant can or a soda bottle would work as the ball. A broomstick doubled as the bat. The quiet dirt road was their lush baseball diamond. For Waldy Arias and his friends growing up in the Dominican Republic, baseball was their main activity. They'd play for hours on sunny days until Mom called them in.

If a solid hit shattered the bottle, no problem. As Arias said, "then we'll go get a new one."

"That's all they do over there," he said of the country's pastime. "They play basketball, but it's very rare – only in some cities."

Those baseball pickup games are among the earliest memories for Arias, who moved to New Jersey with his family when he was 6 and in first grade. He played Little League Baseball in Plainfield, continued to improve and has started for the Plainfield High School varsity team since he was a freshman.

Now a senior, Arias recently achieved a rare feat – the 100-100-100 club, as in 100 hits, 100 runs and 100 stolen bases for his career. Plainfield coach Sean Radu is researching how many times it has happened throughout the state. So far, nothing definite.

One name that came up is possibly Willie Wilson, the former Summit High School star in the early 1970s who went on to achieve fame for the Kansas City Royals.

That's pretty good company.

"He's electric," Radu said. "As far as I'm concerned, he's about as exciting as it can get. He's a catalyst. He makes things happen."

The speedy leadoff hitter has signed to play at Campbell University in North Carolina. The Fighting Camels reached the NCAA Division I Tournament in 2014 after winning the Big South Conference Tournament. First, Arias still has much to do during the high school season, as Plainfield hopes to contend in the Union County Conference's Sky Division.

He entered the spring needing four more hits to reach the century mark. He crossed off 100 runs and 100 stolen bases in 2017. To get 100 career hits is an achievement. To do it at the beginning of your senior season is unusual. In the team's third game of the season, on April 9, Arias stretched a single into a double on the third pitch in a 13-3 win over Roselle Catholic.



Plainfield's Waldy Arias poses with the school's athletic director John Quinn (to his left) and coaches Sean Radu and Jared Pasko after getting his 100th career hit on April 9. (Photo: ~Courtesy Gloria Montealegre, Plainfield School District)

The umpires stopped the game as both benches cheered.

"I knew I had it when I hit it, but when I got to second, my heart just dropped," Arias said. "I saw my teammates come out and the coaches walking up to me."

Arias is believed to be the school record holder in all three categories, but some of the numbers from years past may be incomplete. Indeed, Plainfield has had a long baseball tradition. The field is named after alum Joe Black, the 1952 National League Rookie of the Year for the Brooklyn Dodgers and the first African-American to win a World Series game.

The 5-foot-9, 170-pound Arias is well known in his own right. As Radu said of Plainfield's youth and middle school players, "Even before they get to high school, everybody in the town knows who Waldy is. They know that Waldy's kind of the guy they're looking up to and that's who they want to emulate. Anybody that has picked up a baseball in Plainfield knows who he is."

Arias also has 72 career RBIs, giving him an outside shot to reach 100 RBIs. But Arias' forte is not power hitting. He's the ideal table setter, a blazing quick, line-drive hitter in the gaps who gets things started. Simply, he scans where the defenders are positioned and hits them where they're not.

Radu said, "He knows where the holes are and he knows how to find them. He's a very smart player. He knows as soon as he steps into the box what the defense is giving him. What his approach is going to be."



Plainfield's Waldy Arias takes a cut on deck. (Photo: ~Courtesy Gloria Montealegre, Plainfield School District)

A single can quickly turn into a double or triple.

“As soon as I get on the base, I look to steal,” Arias said.

As a junior, he was 44-for-44 in stolen base attempts. Snagging a bag, though, is more than pure speed. It’s knowing when to run, especially as the other team is expecting it.

“He gets mad when I don’t give him the steal sign,” Radu said with a laugh. “He’s one of the best base runners, as far as stealing third, that I have ever coached. Besides the technique that we practice, his timing is natural. He’s very good at reading the play and reading the pitcher.”

For all of his offensive success, Arias said his defense at shortstop is more of a priority for him. Arias can snag a ball with his backhand or deftly field a chopper or make a dive.

“I feel like if I don’t get dirty, I didn’t play,” he said.

His importance goes beyond the box score. Radu notes there are several native Spanish speakers on the team. The bilingual Arias helps bridge the gap.

“That helps our team tremendously,” Radu said. “And that’s one of the reasons why he’s one of the best leaders that we can have is because he’s able to reach everybody and everybody listens to him and knows when he says something, that that’s the way it’s got to be done.

“I lean on Waldy a lot. Whether it’s on the field, in the locker room or even in school, I lean on him a lot to kind of take on that role. He’s a lead by example guy as far as I’ve seen, but he has no problem getting vocal. He leads by example, but when he has to step up and speak, he speaks his mind. Everybody listens to him.”



Waldy Arias hits as a child in the Dominican Republic with his younger brother watching. (Photo: ~Submitted photo)

Initially, Arias didn't speak English when he arrived to the United States. Playing baseball helped him make friends. Swinging and throwing, after all, is its own language.

"A lot of the guys from the team now played in that (little) league," Arias said. "So we all grew up playing together. That helped a lot."

Arias still returns to visit family members in the Dominican Republic. He's hoping to one day give back to his home country. He intends to major in civil engineering at Campbell with a purpose.

"DR's kind of poor," Arias said. "The streets are all messed up and that focused me. I want to be able to build roads and stuff like that."

When it comes to baseball, Arias has no shortage of Major League players to follow who are from the Dominican Republic.

"I always looked up to (Robinson) Cano," Arias said. "But my favorite player of all-time is Manny Ramirez."

For good reason. The former Boston Red Sox and Cleveland Indians slugger is from near where Arias grew up in Santiago, the Dominican Republic's second-largest city in the north-central part of the country.



Plainfield's Waldy Arias at-bat. (Photo: ~Courtesy Gloria Montealegre, Plainfield School District)

It's now Arias who is continuing that great baseball tradition, even if an official hardball and a regulation bat has replaced soda bottles and a broomstick. The joy of playing remains.

"He's a relentless worker," Radu said. "He wants to be the best. ... Sometimes we have late practices and Waldy's always there asking if we can just take more ground balls. More BP."

Does he ever get tired of baseball?

"No," Arias said. "I can play it the whole day."