

Agent smuggled players into U.S., prosecutors say

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MIAMI -- [Seattle Mariners](#) shortstop [Yuniesky Betancourt](#) and the family of [Chicago White Sox](#) pitcher [Jose Contreras](#) were among the Cubans allegedly smuggled into the United States by an agent and others accused of immigration violations, federal prosecutors say.

Betancourt and another Cuban baseball player, Zaydel Beltran, were among a group of Cubans smuggled to the United States by boat on Dec. 4, 2003, and then driven to Los Angeles, according to documents filed this week in the case against agent Gustavo "Gus" Dominguez and five other defendants.

The papers for the first time revealed the identities of players and family members allegedly involved in some of the smuggling ventures that resulted in a 53-count grand jury indictment announced in October.

Dominguez and the other defendants have pleaded innocent to federal alien smuggling, conspiracy and other related charges. A trial is scheduled to begin early next month in Key West. It was not clear from the documents whether Contreras or Betancourt might be summoned to testify.

The Cuban players eventually became free agents and Betancourt reached an agreement in April 2004 to play with the Mariners, the documents say. Dominguez had told U.S. Major League Baseball officials that both players had previously fled Cuba for Mexico, where they had purportedly established residence and obtained Mexican passports.

Betancourt was driven from Los Angeles to Mexico to obtain a visa to legitimize his entry into the United States, but his Mexican passport was "determined to be fraudulent," prosecutors said. He was arrested by Mexican authorities but later released and entered the U.S. again on Oct. 10, 2004, as a Cuban seeking asylum.

The 24-year-old Betancourt, who maintains a home in Boca Raton, Florida, has not been charged in the smuggling case. Last season he played in 157 games for the Mariners, batting .289 with eight home runs and 28 doubles.

Betancourt's agent did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment. No phone listing could be found for the player in Florida or Seattle.

Beltran, also not charged with any crime, was sent to the Dominican Republic to re-enter the United States, the court papers say. They do not provide any details about Beltran's subsequent whereabouts and he does not currently appear on any major or minor league team's roster.

Prosecutors also say that the wife and two daughters of Contreras were smuggled into the United States by boat at Big Pine Key, Florida, in June 2004 by another defendant in the case, Roberto Yosvany Hernandez.

Contreras, who has pitched in World Series with the Yankees and White Sox, was 13-9 with a 4.27 ERA and 134 strikeouts last season with Chicago. He defected in 2002 while playing with the Cuban national baseball team at a tournament in Mexico.

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