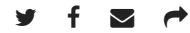




HOMEPAGE

## Former MDC star makes MLB debut, and 6 more prospects with local ties who could be next

BY WALTER VILLA MIAMI HERALD WRITER  
JULY 28, 2020 12:54 PM



The Toronto Blue Jays' Santiago Espinal, a former Miami Dade College standout, steals third base during the 10th inning of their victory against the Tampa Rays Sunday, July 26, 2020, in St. Petersburg. CHRIS O'MEARA AP

Santiago Espinal stood at the plate, trembling.

The former Miami Dade College infielder — now playing for the Toronto Blue Jays — made his major-league debut Saturday, starting at third base against the Tampa Bay Rays.

In his first at-bat, Espinal struck out on five pitches against Ryan Yarbrough.

### TOP ARTICLES

“I was completely shaking,” Espinal said. “But after that first at-bat, I felt normal.”

During his second at-bat, Espinal did much better, driving a pitch that was caught just in front of the right-field wall. He also fielded two chances flawlessly.

While Saturday was nerve-wracking, Espinal's path to the majors can be considered nearly miraculous. A native of the Dominican Republic, he moved to Orlando with his family at age 12. But due to the language barrier, he struggled in school and quit baseball from ages 18 to 20 in order to get his high school diploma.

At 20, he returned to his sport, competing in a summer league. That's where then-MDC coach Danny Price — acting on a tip — saw Espinal, and that got the ball rolling.

After one impressive season at MDC as the Southern Conference Player of the Year, the Boston Red Sox drafted Espinal in the 10th round. The Jays acquired him in 2018, and Espinal's unusual road to the majors led him to finally making the roster last week.

"It's incredible — I haven't eaten the past couple of days," Espinal told The Herald after his MLB debut on Saturday afternoon. "When they told me I made the team, I couldn't even speak. I was just smiling."

So now that Espinal has made his MLB debut, who's next?

Well, six players with South Florida ties are on the 60-player pools for their respective organizations, meaning they are close to the promised land.

---

They are: shortstop Jeter Downs (Boston Red Sox); ex-Delray Beach American Heritage third baseman Jonathan India (Cincinnati Reds); ex-Westminster Christian catcher MJ Melendez (Royals); ex-FIU recruit/outfielder Heliot Ramos (Giants); ex-

FIU third baseman Austin Shenton (Mariners); ex-South Dade High right-hander Alek Manoah (Blue Jays).

#### **THIS AND THAT**

- Four players with local ties made their first Opening Day rosters last week: ex-Miami Hurricanes catcher Zach Collins (Chicago White Sox); ex-Canes closer Bryan Garcia (Detroit Tigers); ex-FIU infielder Edwin Rios (Los Angeles Dodgers); and ex-Stoneman Douglas lefty Jesus Luzardo (Oakland A's). All four of those players made their major-league debuts last year.
- Miami Central coach Roland Smith told the Herald that his sophomore wide receiver Lamar Seymore — who started as a freshman last year on a state championship team — "is going to be special." Seymore is a 6-0, 170-pounder and has already committed to the Miami Hurricanes. His brother, Laurence Seymore, is a

6-2, 295-pound senior offensive guard who is also committed to Miami.

- MDC basketball standout Victor Hart has scholarship offers from Florida, Austin Peay and Florida Gulf Coast. The 6-7 wing averaged 18.8 points and 8.8 rebounds as a freshman this past season, shooting 50.9 percent from the floor and 43.3 percent on three-pointers.

His brother, Carlos Hart, is a 6-5 point guard who played at North Miami High this past season. In May, he signed to play for Benedict College, an NCAA Division II school in Columbia, South Carolina.