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## Rough Diamond

A Cuban embezzler built it, anti-Batista guerrillas trained in it, Nicaraguan refugees lived in it, and Frank Robinson played baseball in it. Now somebody has to step to the plate and save Bobby Maduro Miami Stadium.

By Robert Andrew Powell

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At the corner of NW 10th Avenue and 23rd Street in Allapattah, chips of orange- and cream-color paint litter the base of America's Finest Baseball Park, flecking the detritus that rots there. Shards from bottles and from the broken stadium office windows glisten among the wet clothing, pigeon carcasses, and other trash on the sidewalk -- dangerous glitter. Ten feet above the shuttered ticket booths, the red neon tubes are missing from the enormous letters that spell out M-I-A-M-I S-T-A-D-I-U-M.

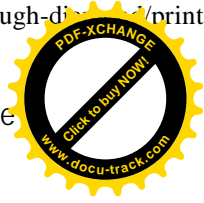
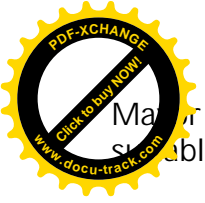
Inside, two community college teams pitch and hit baseballs across patchy yellow grass. Twenty fans laze in the stands, barely watching the game. As a Miami-Dade Wolfson Campus Barracuda laces a triple to deep center, they do not cheer.

Renowned Yale and University of Miami architecture historian Vincent Scully sits near the center of the group, his tweed-encased right arm resting on the back of an adjoining seat as his eyes scan from the outfield wall to the visitors' dugout. "I think it is a beautiful stadium," he declares. "It's that great roof more than anything, the way it comes out in that beautiful curve. And it is constructed with no columns. You look across the field and you know it is a great shape."

Kurt Schweizer, a preternatural baseball savant who has passed half his life in these very seats, flips through a souvenir book of Baltimore Orioles history, searching for any reference to the stadium where the O's trained for 31 straight springs. Joe Fleming, a lawyer and preservationist, boasts of speaking with someone in the Orioles organization who said the team might be willing to play an exhibition game or two here next year, provided the place is cleaned up a bit.

They have all come here on this spring day to root for 47-year-old Bobby Maduro Miami Stadium. For almost a year now, there's been strong talk of tearing down the structure. Father Jose Luis Menendez, leader of Corpus Christi Church and a civic activist, has asked Miami city officials to consider replacing the deteriorating, seemingly obsolete ballpark with something more tangibly useful: new houses affordable to the poor Hispanics who dominate this working-class enclave. "Bobby Maduro is costing us money," he told the Herald last year. "This can be a good push for the city -- 150 people paying taxes."

Menendez was only repeating a familiar refrain. As early as 1954, when the still-new stadium sat empty for a year, there was rumbling to tear it down. By 1965, when the park had yet to earn a profit,



Mayor Robert King High urged the city to sell. The proceeds could build a new facility in "a more suitable location," he argued.

The calls for destruction reintensified in 1994, when members of the Beacon Council, a pro-business partner of the Metro Commission, suggested replacing the ballpark with a Guess? jeans factory they hoped might relocate from Los Angeles. But Guess? ended up staying in L.A., and the ballpark remained in Allapattah.

The idea of tearing down the stadium still appeals to the leaders of cash-strapped Miami. No stadium means no maintenance costs or insurance premiums. And Allapattah needs housing. Many of the single-family homes in the 3.7-square-mile area have been subdivided into two or three units in order to meet demand. "That is what ruins neighborhoods," opines Vice Mayor Willy Gort, himself an Allapattah resident. "A person who rents does not take care of a neighborhood the way a homeowner does."

Besides, what need is there for a ballpark any more? The major league Florida Marlins play in Joe Robbie Stadium, and minor league teams are forbidden to operate within 30 miles of a big-league club's home plate. Finally, there's a pristine \$30 million complex in Homestead, just waiting for a spring training tenant. The chances that Miami will ever again host a minor league baseball team are virtually nil.

"The City of Miami has a vision that baseball isn't going to come back to Miami. If you don't agree with that vision, we can line up many people who can convince you," promises Jack Luft, the city's director of community planning and revitalization. "And if there is no baseball in Miami's future, then the city has no use for Bobby Maduro Stadium."

Luft's cool pragmatism rankles the partisan crowd. The stadium might not have much of a future as a baseball park, some argue, but it has a past that should not be discarded.

"When I first started looking into the stadium three years ago, I told people that it had an interesting cantilevered roof and a really neat facade," says Rolando Llanes, a UM architecture professor who finds himself the reluctant leader of the movement to save the stadium. "But as I looked deeper into it, I saw that it had a value well beyond its unique architecture.

"This is an important building in the history of Miami," he goes on. "A lot of people forget that. Buildings tell stories. And ballparks, more than anything, tell the most stories."

The decline of Allapattah cannot be traced to any single factor, though the arrival of I-95, which isolated the neighborhood from the rest of the city, gets much of the blame. Back in the 1920s, Allapattah was one of Miami's most fashionable addresses. And on August 31, 1949, it was the center of the baseball universe. Opening night was glorious.

Arriving as early as 6:00 p.m., the first of 13,007 fans -- the largest crowd ever to see a baseball game in Florida -- paid as little as 74 cents apiece to slip through the twenty turnstiles outside baseball's newest palace. "One red-neck with the accent of South Georgia homefolks approached the stadium from the flank, ran smack into a head-on view of the sign out front," reported Miami Daily News columnist Morris McLemore the next day. "His jaw went slack as he craned to read 'Miami Stadium' in letters 20 feet high. He grabbed his missus by the arm and muttered, 'Gawd, Martha, neon!'"

Most holders of the \$1.25 reserved tickets (which had sold out in four days) arrived closer to 7:00. Some 75 ushers whisked them through the lobby past the potted palms and flowers and the hand-painted murals of sports scenes. After pausing to take in the playing field's perfect dimensions -- 330 feet down the left- and right-field foul lines, 400 feet to straight-away center -- more than one box-seat holder ducked into the private cocktail lounge for a drink.



Those who remained in their seats took note that no supporting columns blocked the view of the sprawling field of smooth Bermuda grass that had been carved and transplanted from a golf course. They marveled at the electronic scoreboard and at the 40-foot-high wall in center field that, in a nod to Fenway Park in Boston, became known as the Green Monster. Gazing skyward, they could see clouds through the nearly completed cantilevered roof, and, perhaps, the gaggle of electricians scrambling to light all 612 reflectors in the 200-foot light towers, the best lighting system in any park in America.

Perched atop the roof, 83 feet above the field, the press box was equipped with thirteen different booths. Hungry reporters could snack between innings in a private lounge complete with kitchen and bar. McLemore of the Daily News thirsted for the spigot of beer that was slated to arrive within a few days. Women, of course, were not allowed.

While the visiting Havana Cubans dressed in their hotel, the Miami Sun Sox, their Class B Florida International League rivals, buttoned their jerseys in the home clubhouse, which included a team lounge. Spikes clacking along the parquet floor, the Sox marched through a tunnel carved from coral rock to their spacious dugout, which, like the stadium, was topped with a cantilevered roof.

After a military drill by the Greater Miami Boys Drum and Bugle Corps, seventeen-year-old Jose Aleman, Jr., whose dying father had given him the Sun Sox and the two-million-dollar stadium as a gift, offered the services of his ballpark to the City of Miami. Mayor Bob Floyd eagerly accepted. Baseball Commissioner A.B. "Happy" Chandler declared that he knew of "no more beautiful park anywhere than this new Miami Stadium."

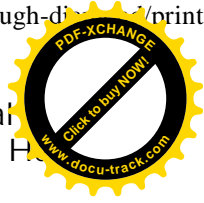
An organ played the national anthem as Native American soprano Princess Wah Nese Red Rock provided the words, and Manuel Velazquez, the Cuban consul general, threw out the first ball. The managers exchanged lineups at home plate, the umpire shouted "Play ball!" and the second-place Sun Sox raced out of their spiffy dugout and whipped the first-place Cubans by a score of 6-1. As Herald sports editor Jimmy Burns declared in the next day's paper: "It was truly the greatest night in Miami's baseball history."

Jose Aleman, Sr., the man who bankrolled Miami Stadium, was born into politics. According to the Miami Herald, his father was a "revered hero of the Cuban emancipation and a minister of education in Cuba's early days." Having been schooled in the United States, Aleman Sr. returned to Cuba after the death of his father and took a job as a clerk in the education ministry.

Laboring first in near obscurity under Pres. Fulgencio Batista, Aleman ultimately rose to a cabinet position in the administration of Pres. Ramón Grau-San Martín. With unrestricted access to the Cuban Treasury, Aleman's net worth began to multiply exponentially. Hiding behind shadow corporations, he purchased at least three cattle ranches in Cuba, as well as sugar mills, mines, and other holdings. He also managed to consolidate control of the funds of three other ministries, as well as the Lottery Revenue fund and the Special Works fund.

In the summer of 1947, some of that money found its way onto Confite, a tiny island off Cuba's north coast. With the blessing of President Grau, Aleman was financing the training and arming of a ragtag collection of 1200 soldiers. Their mission: to invade the Dominican Republic and topple dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. But when the U.S. government caught wind of the plan, Grau was pressured to abort the invasion. He complied, ordering his navy to surround Confite and capture the troops. Among the adventurers who escaped by jumping into the Bay of Nipe and swimming to shore was a young University of Havana law student named Fidel Castro.

Word of the aborted invasion leaked out, and Aleman found himself cast in the role of scapegoat. Grau stripped him of his cabinet position in 1948 and he fled with his wife and daughter, and his son by a previous marriage, to a mansion he had bought on Pine Tree Drive in Miami Beach. He



...purchased more than \$20 million in Dade County property. His holdings grew to include several apartments in Miami Beach, luxury hotels, parking garages, and the lower half of Key Biscayne. He also bought a stake in the Miami Sun Sox baseball club, and soon became majority owner.

Aleman remained a Cuban senator, often voting in absentia. He also maintained his access to the Cuban Treasury. Time magazine reported in 1950 that on the afternoon of October 10, 1948, Aleman and his "henchmen" had driven Ministry of Education trucks up to the Cuban Treasury building in Havana. "'What are you going to do, rob the Treasury?' joshed a guard. '?Quien sabe? Who knows?' replied the baby-faced Aleman. Forthwith his men scooped pesos, francs, escudos, lire, rubles, pounds sterling and about \$19 million in U.S. currency into the suitcases. The trucks made straight for the airfield where a chartered DC-3 stood waiting."

Ed Little, a former Sun Sox catcher who now lives on a ranch in Colorado, says he was with Aleman on that October day. "I was one of them! Back in those days, they kept the money in Cuba in the safe sort of loosely. We put \$19 million in the suitcases. The U.S. Customs department, with all kinds of glee, confiscated all the rubles and the pesos and all the other foreign currency that we had. But they weren't allowed to take the U.S. currency, and we carried in \$19 million in cash!"

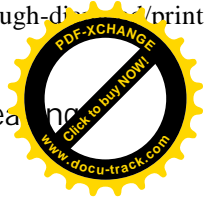
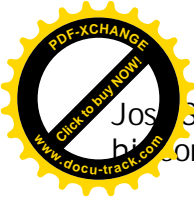
With money literally lying around his Miami Beach mansion -- Little says much of the cash was stashed in boxes and suitcases -- Aleman was open to investment possibilities. A new stadium for his baseball team was an attractive option. Miami Field, the only ballpark in town, had been ruined by the expansion of the neighboring Orange Bowl. New ramps outside the football stadium cut the distance from home plate to straight-away center field from 375 feet to a far-too-close 280. "I don't know exactly what can be done, but some solution probably will have to be worked out," City of Miami Welfare Director Jesse Yarborough had told the Herald in 1947, "since the stadium changes would make the baseball diamond inadequate."

Henry B. Taber, a sports promoter from Buffalo, introduced Aleman to the city, and the Sun Sox owner told Miami commissioners he'd be willing to swap a nice piece of property on Flagler Street for some land to build a ballpark. The city offered him fifteen acres in Allapattah that had long been earmarked for a sports stadium of some kind, and Aleman accepted the trade. On the Flagler property, the city built the Dade County Auditorium. In Allapattah, Aleman began building Miami Stadium.

The first published estimate of construction costs was \$500,000. Before the stadium was completed, the bill skyrocketed. Aleman spared no expense: Huge tresses for the roof were assembled in Alabama and shipped down by rail, intact. More than 200 houses could have been built with the concrete poured into the foundation. Aleman approved architectural designs that placed 137 rooms on the stadium's four levels, some of them outfitted with private showers. He demanded that the stadium be ready for business only nine months after construction commenced.

As Miami Stadium's silhouette was ascending above the low-lying Allapattah skyline, Jose Aleman, Jr., was studying at the University of Miami and trying out for the varsity baseball squad. By opening night, the young student was the owner of Miami Stadium and of the team that called it home. Al Rubio, the Sun Sox general manager at the time, puts it succinctly: "The son liked baseball, so Aleman built him the stadium."

It wasn't the first gift the father lavished on his only son. Aleman kept young Jose well stocked with spending money and foreign cars to impress his friends. "The kid had every toy you could ever want," remembers Sonny Hirsch, who served as a bat boy on opening night and later as general manager of one of the several minor league teams that occupied the stadium. (Hirsch now broadcasts Miami Hurricanes football play-by-play on WIOD radio.) "At seventeen he had the biggest back yard in the world. How many other kids have a whole stadium to play with?"



Jose Sr., only 44 but stricken with leukemia, died less than seven months after opening night, leaving behind a son much of the family fortune.

At first Miami Stadium flourished. More than 100,000 people saw Ted Williams, Jackie Robinson, and other top stars play in ten major league exhibition games in the spring of 1950. Columnists nationwide celebrated the new baseball paradise in the tropics. "There isn't a more modern, more completely equipped ballpark in the land, major or minor," purred John Carmichael of the Chicago Daily News. The home team excelled that season: The Sun Sox defeated Havana to win the 1950 International League championship.

By 1952, though, attendance had dipped while expenses remained high. A year later the stadium ledger sheet showed more than \$100,000 in the red, and the Sun Sox lost an additional \$40,000. The crowds dropped off so sharply that in 1954 the Sun Sox chose to return to cramped Miami Field, preaching publicly that the move would bring their fans closer to the players.

Aleman had already sold his share of the team. He was hemorrhaging money, and the novelty of owning a baseball club had long worn off. Lacking a tenant and in desperate need of cash, he put Miami Stadium on the market in 1955. The asking price: \$950,000.

"Aleman Jr. was a spoiled boy and he didn't care anything about business," recalls Al Rubio, the former Sun Sox general manager. "All he did was spend. He had depleted his resources." Ed Little adds that Aleman's generosity was an inborn trait; the young mogul couldn't help buying gifts for his friends or giving aid to unfortunate strangers. "He was a sweetheart of an individual," Little recalls. "He was just the nicest guy."

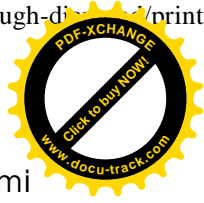
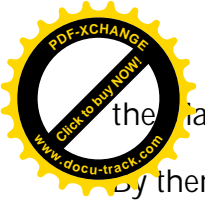
Aleman had blown most of his inheritance on Cuban politics. Passionately opposed to Fulgencio Batista, who had overthrown Pres. Carlos Prio Socarras in a bloodless coup in late 1952, Aleman began supporting Batista opponent Fidel Castro by supplying the rebel leader with cash and guns. "There were arms stored in the visiting team's manager's room, stocked to the ceiling," Rubio remembers. "He had rifles and bazookas and all that stuff. He had cartons and cartons of grenades."

Miami Stadium wasn't merely a storage shed for armaments. Castro's rebels also used the playing field to hone their combat skills: According to Little, Aleman let the guerrilla group live in his stadium and personally trained many of them, using broomsticks instead of guns. The logo Castro used to commemorate his July 26 arrest at Moncada was drawn up by the Sun Sox's Miami advertising agency.

Rubio doesn't think the training had much of an impact back in Cuba. "These people were con artists," he grumbles. "I used to tell Jose that they were bleeding him blind. They'd get \$50,000 or \$60,000 from him and load a bunch of boxes and say they were flying to Cuba, but they never did. They milked him like they were milking a goat. They used to tell me to mind my own business, so I didn't say nothing: I didn't want to get shot."

Baseball returned to Miami Stadium in 1956, in a big way. The Dodgers held their spring training in Allapattah, and summer saw the debut of Triple A ball, only one notch below the major leagues. A team from Syracuse, New York, relocated to town as the Miami Marlins, the first of several teams that would come to use that nickname. The squad's principal drawing card, aging pitching legend Satchel Paige, arrived for the home opener in a helicopter that landed on second base, sending a spray of sand into the faces of the crowd.

Political leaders had predicted that Miami Stadium would turn a profit with a Triple A tenant. "I think the people of Miami will support baseball if it is in a higher league," Welfare Director Knox Eldredge theorized in a November 1955 Herald story. But Eldredge was wrong. Even with the Marlins, the stadium's economic returns were disappointing. And they remained disappointing. Within four years,



the Marlins relocated to San Juan.

By then Aleman Jr. was long gone. In April 1958 he had finally lowered his asking price for Miami Stadium to \$850,000, a figure the city could live with. Almost as soon as the sale closed, Aleman took his pile of money and happily donated it to Castro. "My greatest pride is finding myself in bankruptcy," he told Cuba's Bohemia magazine in January 1959.

After the sale, he'd stop by the stadium only occasionally. "He came around a few times, not so much that people would know who he was," recalls Sonny Hirsch. "Then he sort of just drifted out of sight. He just drifted out of sight."

Now that they owned the stadium outright, city officials aggressively strove to make it profitable. The city manager landed the major league Baltimore Orioles as a spring training tenant to replace the Dodgers, who had moved to a new complex in Vero Beach. The Oriole partnership would last 31 years, during which time the team became synonymous with the stadium and fans got to watch Hall of Fame-caliber players such as Frank Robinson, Brooks Robinson, Jim Palmer, Eddie Murray, and Cal Ripken, Jr., honing their skills. Several of the Orioles' Class A affiliates, including the Miami Orioles and two more teams called the Miami Marlins, took turns as the stadium's summer lodgers.

In an effort to adapt the stadium to more than just baseball, a giant concert stage was constructed along the left-field wall. A new press box arrived in 1987, the same year that Bobby Maduro, the man who had brought organized baseball to Cuba, died in Miami, his adopted hometown. In honor of the extensive role Maduro played in the development of baseball in Florida, especially in the Latin communities, the Miami City Commission voted unanimously to rename Miami Stadium in his honor. (In a cost-saving move, city workers painted Maduro's name on a plywood board and simply bolted it to the stadium's facade.)

"While Baltimore was here, the city really put a lot of money into the stadium," says Sonny Hirsch. "They redid the press box, and they redid some of the field. They upgraded the seats from the old wood to plastic. They did a good job with it. But as things wore on, the neighborhood gradually deteriorated. People were reluctant to go into that particular area. It got to the point at the end there where Baltimore didn't want to play any night games."

In 1980 several cars parked in the stadium lot had been pelted with rocks during the McDuffie race riots. Between games of a double-header later that year, witnesses in the scattered crowd of 542 saw a man walk up to a fan and shoot him in the neck with a .22 pistol. The victim survived and was able to drive himself to nearby Jackson Memorial Hospital. Two others were not so lucky. One fan was found dead on a stadium ramp, a bullet wound in his chest. A third, wearing a T-shirt and gym shorts, lay dead on a sidewalk outside.

"It was a highly publicized crime, and its notoriety ensnared the stadium itself," notes former Miami News editor Howard Kleinberg, now a regular Herald contributor. "From that point onward, the baseball stadium was a place to be avoided."

By 1988 the minor league Marlins were so fed up with Miami Stadium that they used it only to dress, and played their home games at Hialeah-Miami Lakes Senior High School. The Marlins, the last minor league team to play in the stadium, were sold the following year; the new owners changed the team's name to the Miracle and moved them as far away from Allapattah as they could. "The perception about Miami Stadium is that it's not a great facility and that it's not a great area to go to," owner Stuart Revo told the Herald in 1989, when he took the team to Florida International University's campus on SW 107th Avenue. "We can't change that perception and felt we'd be wasting money if we played there."

Propelled by rumors that they could find safe haven in Miami, hundreds of refugees who had fled



Nicaragua arrived by way of Texas that same year. City Manager Cesar Odio, overwhelmed by the influx, turned Miami Stadium into a massive outdoor relief shelter, where approximately 200 Nicaraguans per night camped out under the cantilevered roof and hung their laundry to dry on the baseball batting cages.

When the Orioles finally pulled out in 1990, one Baltimore player cracked that the infield tarp was riddled with bullet holes.

"This may not look like it, but this is actually the Bobby Maduro Miami Stadium Museum," announces Kurt Schweizer as he conducts a tour of his grandmother's house in South Dade, near Parrot Jungle. The 25-year-old curator's hand sweeps in an arc from a silent organ to a matched set of mahogany cabinets to a crystal lamp shining on a silver bowl of wax fruit. On a gold couch of plush velour, below a still life painting of a floral arrangement, sits Schweizer's grandmother herself, perusing a newspaper with the aid of a magnifying glass. "Can I get you anything? A Dr Pepper?" she asks.

The stadium paraphernalia sits in boxes in Schweizer's bedroom, but his grandmother, who is putting him up while he works toward a degree in sports administration at St. Thomas University, has declared that the room is too messy to be shown to visitors. So Schweizer reluctantly carts the boxes into the dining room.

Schweizer is one of those people who beam in on baseball very early in life and never shift focus. Considerable portions of his brain are devoted to crucial statistics -- box scores, home run totals, and the dates of baseball milestones. His entire frontal lobe may be occupied by Miami Stadium, the ballpark he discovered when his fourth-grade gym teacher handed him a free pass to a Miami Orioles game.

"Look at this one here," he says, pulling out a plastic-encased post card, circa 1948, an aerial shot of the stadium with "America's Finest Baseball Park" displayed in a banner of cursive at the top. Another box yields pennants, picture books, yellowed newspaper clippings, and ten-year-old photos of Schweizer in his back yard wearing several different authentic Marlins uniforms. Just last week he acquired a 1969 Marlins program from a man in Wilsonville, Oregon. "It was only ten bucks," he coos. "For me it was a major find."

He leaps up suddenly, runs back to the bedroom, and returns cradling a mass of concrete decorated with orange paint and Baltimore Orioles team stickers. "I can't believe I almost forgot to show you the chunk!" he blurts, explaining how he salvaged the twelve-pound boulder after it fell from one of the stadium's walls. In a storage shed in the back yard, Schweizer keeps four seats he personally removed from the grandstand.

"There is no more historically important baseball stadium that I can think of in the entire Southeast," he asserts. "I mean, Miami Stadium is it. I'd say that Miami Stadium is one of the top ten most important baseball stadiums that there is, major or minor."

"When you think of all the Hall of Famers that have played there, it's mind-boggling. Joe DiMaggio played there in his last two years in the majors. Mickey Mantle played many games there against the Orioles. Of all the people who have been voted into the Hall of Fame in the past 35 years, I dare say that around 75 percent have played a game in Miami Stadium, either in spring training or in a minor league game."

He takes a swig of his soda.

"If they ever tear down Miami Stadium, for me it would be a catastrophe."

Schweizer isn't the only one. University of Miami architecture professor Rolando Llanes has spent much of the past three years compiling a history of the stadium for a book he's working on. The



ball park's unique architecture is what first caught his eye, but as he learned more of the story behind the stadium, he found himself inching into a leadership role in the movement to save it. "I never really wanted to get involved in the preservation thing, you know, to go out there and stand in front of a bulldozer," says Llanes. "But the city was going to tear it down and then wait around and see what they were going to do with the piece of property. That's not right. That's dumb."

In one furious April weekend at the university, Llanes and some of his students brainstormed possible uses that would keep the stadium intact. In 48 hours, they came up with three proposals. One plan was to convert the dozens of rooms inside the stadium into a community center with a police substation and satellite city offices. Another sketch incorporated a municipal pool. All the ideas included new affordable housing. When Llanes showed the proposals to Jack Luft, the city planner described the possibilities as "exciting."

Armed with their proposals, Llanes and his supporters that same month helped persuade the Miami City Commission to grant a community-development group a year to finish what Llanes had started: draft a working plan to build affordable housing and save the stadium. "We have very little of our history," Father Menendez said, adding his approval after the commission voted. "If there's a way to save Bobby Maduro Stadium and put in housing, that's good."

Still, there's no guarantee the stadium will be preserved. Six months after the commission gave the go-ahead, the community group has not even hired a consultant to study different alternatives. "All the commission vote means is that everything is on hold right now," explains Llanes, who intends to incorporate the stadium issue into his courses this fall. "The only victory we were able to receive was twofold: We were able to shed light on the potential of the building; and if there was a plan to demolish the stadium, it ain't going to happen for at least nine months. Those are not major things, but they are not insignificant things either."

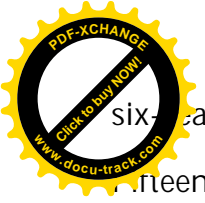
Jose Aleman, Jr.'s love of Castro faded with the revolution. The new president seized all of Aleman's Cuban assets, including the cattle ranches. The last of the young owner's resources, his Miami Beach hotels, were filled with homeless Cuban exiles as often as they were with paying customers. With the exception of *The Unkillables*, a 1965 Hollywood film in which he was an extra, Aleman toiled anonymously in executive positions at the Gulf and Mobil oil companies.

Things began to unravel in 1978. In testimony before the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations, Aleman claimed that in 1963, mobster Santo Trafficante had bragged to him that Pres. John F. Kennedy was "going to be hit." Trafficante denied the charge the next day; but from then on, Aleman's friends say, Aleman feared Trafficante or some other mobster would murder him.

The fear played a role in the breakup of his second marriage about a year later. He lost his job at Mobil and refused to take a new position as a traveling salesman; the more he traveled, he felt, the easier he was to kill. "He trusted very few people. He was convinced the Mafia was after him," pardoned Watergate burglar and close friend Eugenio Martinez later told the Herald. "He trusted very few people."

In 1983 Martinez helped the 50-year-old Aleman land a job as a leasing agent at Anthony Abraham Chevrolet, but the former baseball magnate quit after less than three weeks. When he lost most of his possessions in a robbery of his Miami Springs apartment, he reluctantly moved into his birth mother's crowded bungalow in a working-class section of Miami. "He spent the days nervously pacing in his room, smoking cigarettes and drinking black coffee," according to one published report.

Shortly after 7:00 a.m. on July 31, 1983, Aleman found a Browning 9mm semiautomatic handgun his mother had tried to hide from him, and threatened to kill her. Shouting invectives against Castro and communists, he began shooting his family members. Maria Gonzalez, a 36-year-old cousin, was shot in the neck. Cousin Sofia Ampudia, 74 years old, took a bullet in the hand. Maria's daughter,



six-year-old Carina, was shot in the head. (All survived.)

Seven police cars, a SWAT team, and two canine units surrounded the bungalow, where Aleman had taken hostage his 69-year-old aunt, Maria Candarez. For two hours, as police tried to coax him outside, he fired bullets and hurled glass out a front window and across a tiny porch.

At 9:07 a.m., fearing for Candarez's safety, two SWAT members entered the house through the back door and found her lifeless body on the dining-room floor. Upon seeing the officers, Aleman fired a single errant shot before running into a bedroom. A split-second before an officer shot him in the stomach, Aleman pointed his gun at the right side of his own temple and pulled the trigger. "He died almost instantly," Dr. Charles Wetli, Dade's acting medical examiner at the time, told the press.

Aleman had scheduled an appointment to see a psychiatrist the following day. "He was just a playboy," says 86-year-old Al Rubio, now nearly blind and living alone in Southwest Dade. "You couldn't talk to him about anything. He didn't want to hear nothing. He had a garage downtown, six hotels, two mansions. His boats were tied up on the river."

Rubio pauses. "The poor kid could have gone out a millionaire."