

# Sun-Sentinel

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## IMMIGRATION

# INS returns baseball star to Cuba

## Ballplayer doesn't qualify for asylum, official says

By VANESSA BAUZÁ  
STAFF WRITER

His dreams of freedom — and stardom — were shattered on Wednesday when U.S. immigration officials repatriated Cuban baseball star Andy Morales, along with 30 other Cubans who fled the island five days ago.

The group was just 25 miles south of the Dry Tortugas when a Coast Guard cutter intercepted them.

A U.S. official in Washington said Morales was returned because he did not qualify for political asylum.

Morales, 25, is a third baseman who hit a home run last year in a 12-6 victory by the Cuban national team over the Baltimore Orioles in Baltimore. He is the latest of about 35 Cuban baseball players who have fled the communist island in the past 10 years for multimillion-dollar careers in the major leagues.

Three years ago, Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez was in a similar position to Morales after he was intercepted in the Bahamas while fleeing Cuba. He had already been suspended from Cuban baseball for life after being accused of trying to help other Cuban players defect.

Unlike Morales, Hernandez was granted asylum.

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## LOCAL

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# Star ballplayer sent back

## ■ STAR

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He now pitches for the Yankees.

To qualify for admission to the United States, Cubans who attempt to flee must convince the INS they have a credible fear of persecution if they are returned. Under an agreement with Cuba, U.S. diplomats monitor repatriated Cubans to determine whether they are undergoing official harassment as a result of their decision to try to flee.

"Cubans, as a matter of course, do not reach the standard for asylum unless they have been imprisoned," said Jeffrey Brauerman, a Plantation immigration attorney and former immigration judge. "It is repressive. But if that's the standard, every Chinese person who comes here should be granted asylum."

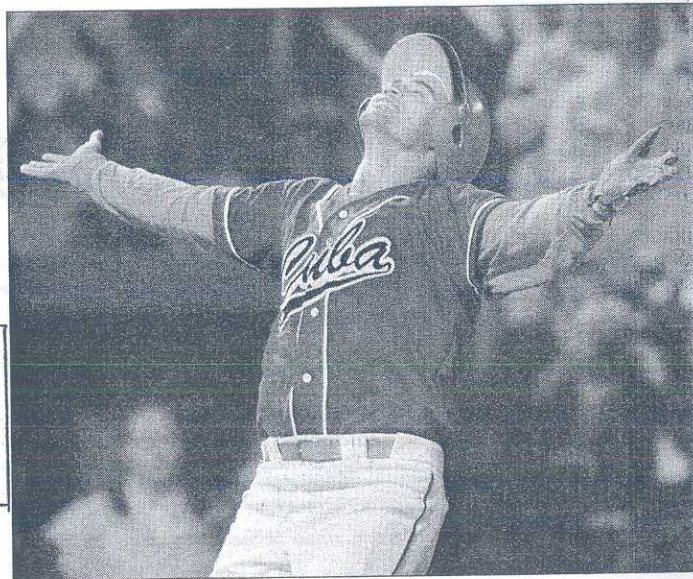
Morales' father-in-law, Carlos Castillo, who lives in Miami, contacted sports agents, politicians and even two members of Elián González's legal team to defend the ballplayer.

Castillo said Morales will face harsh reprisals in Cuba and be treated as a "traitor." He said his son-in-law was not involved in politics on the island.

"In Cuba they do what they want," Castillo said. "Now he'll never be anyone. He won't be able to play ball."

Jose Cardenas, Washington representative of the anti-Castro Cuban-American National Foundation, criticized the decision to return Morales.

"This shows that in the wake of the Elián González situation, there has been clearly a political decision in the White House to basically whitewash the situation in Cuba, to pretend it is some sort of



**NATIONAL WIN:** Andy Morales celebrates his three-run home run in the top of the ninth against the Orioles in this May 3, 1999, photo, AP file photo/Doug Mills.

normal country, where human rights are abused not any more than in the next country," Cardenas said.

Brauerman said Morales' notoriety may work in his favor, as human rights activists are likely to watch him more closely.

Morales' parents told a reporter in the Cuban town of San Nicolas on Tuesday that they had no objection to their son's attempt to migrate.

"I don't care what uniform — whether it be from here, from there, Colombia,

Venezuela or Japan," Adolfo Morales, Andy's father, said Tuesday. "But he has to play. It's in his blood."

Information from Sun-Sentinel wire services was used to supplement this report.

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