



Diaz Will Honor Fernandez By Playing

by Brian Stull

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<http://www.stlbaseballweekly.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/16-9-27-Diaz-edit.mp3>

(Busch Stadium) Shortstop Aledmys Diaz is back in the starting lineup tonight for the St. Louis Cardinals. He and the team will have a little extra inspiration as they will hang a 16-Fernandez jersey in their dugout, in memory of the late Jose Fernandez.

“This reminds me how fun this game is,” said Diaz of his childhood friend. “He loved this game. He liked to compete. I think that’s what he’d ask of baseball players and friends. Moving forward, for me, I have to love the game even more. Every time I get the chance to put on the uniform, go out there and give everything to the fans.”

Diaz spent Monday in Miami for with family and friends of Fernandez before returning in time for last night’s game.

“When you have a friendship—like a brother, sometimes you don’t need to text everyday or call everyday, but he knew that me and my family were there for him,” said Diaz. “It’s pretty sad. Yesterday, when I got there—his mom and grandma...I can’t describe that one.”

The emotions were still too tough for him to watch the full Marlins tributes during their game last night, but Aledmys did see the highlight of Dee Gordon’s home run.

“It was great,” he said. “The way that organization loved him, I think everybody loved him. The way he played the game and behaved in the clubhouse. It was sad, I couldn’t view the game. It’s pretty tough for me and everybody.”

The two friends were able to spend time together this season as both made the National League All-Star squad. And when the Marlins played at Busch Stadium a few weeks ago, Diaz made the most of his first at-bat against Fernandez with a home run.

“That was a moment I’ll never forget,” said Diaz. “He told me that next year ‘I’m going to strike you out three times’ and yeah, that’s tough. A shame losing a guy like him. He means so much for baseball, for his family. I pray for his family right now and hopefully they can handle this because it’s tough.”

Even though Diaz has also defected and now made it to the Major Leagues, he explained that like most of the Cuban population he looked to his friend for inspiration.

“He’s the perfect example for every Cuban to live the American dream,” said Aledmys. “He opened a lot of doors for us. He got...in 2013 and then I think the teams started looking at the Cuban guys differently. Want to give him thanks for that, I hope that in the future, the Cubans who come here to the United States will look at him as an example. It’s tough. When you grow up in Cuba—we don’t have anything. He’s an example. He came here with the American dream. He played hard every day. He took nothing for granted. I think that’s the legacy he gave us.”

“The best way to honor him is to play this game every day because that’s what he loved the most.”

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