

50  
YEARS

REVOLUTION AND EXILE

Half a century after the triumph of Cuba’s revolution, its touted gains have faded.

**BY FRANCES ROBLES**  
frobles@MiamiHerald.com

Fifty years ago, an attorney turned bearded guerrilla declared victory over a departing dictator. Then he became a despot himself.

Fidel Castro forever changed the landscape of both Cuba and Miami. He jailed or executed his enemies, seized private property, divided families, and drove nearly two million Cubans into exile. His nation became a Cold War pawn.

At the same time, Castro launched a massive literacy campaign. The island churned out armies of new doctors. Cuba became an international player, inspiring guerrilla movements and supplying soldiers for “anti-imperialist” wars around the globe. Castro’s refusal to kowtow to the United States won him praise.

As the Jan. 1 anniversary of the revolution’s triumph approaches, many of the social welfare achievements that were the trophies of the communist regime have rusted. Years of failed economic policy, waves of mass exodus, and Cuba’s inability to recover from the collapse of its patron, the Soviet Union, have dulled Castro’s touted crown jewels — the advances in

Miami has become a haven for exiles who still wait — and hope — for a free Cuba.

**BY FABIOLA SANTIAGO**  
fsantiago@MiamiHerald.com

For Cuban exiles, people who left it all behind and started their lives anew, *el exilio* is a foster fatherland, a waiting room and safe haven to collectively yearn for a free Cuba.

The wait for the end of Fidel Castro’s regime stretched into a half century in which Cuban exiles built a city with the blueprint of their transplanted memories. They couldn’t carry Havana, Varadero or Pinar del Río in their sparse luggage, but they could replicate their essence in virtually every corner of a sleepy tourist town ripe for the makeover.

*El exilio* became synonymous with Miami, the undisputed capital of the Cuban exile, the largest Cuban enclave outside of Havana. It’s a bittersweet story of sorrow and triumph, a catalog of obstacles and accomplishments in the shadow of a homeland that is only about a 30-minute plane ride from Miami, yet so far from reach. It makes the Cuban exodus an immigrant experience like no other in America.

Nearly two million Cubans have fled the island since Castro’s revolution triumphed in

•TURN TO CUBA, 24A

ISSUES & IDEAS: Columns by Andres Oppenheimer and Executive Editor Anders Gyllenhaal, plus a full-color timeline of the major events that have shaped U.S.-Cuban relations.

COMING WEDNESDAY: A look at the Freedom Flights that brought thousands to the U.S. And The Miami Herald launches a database listing all who came by way of those flights.

WEDNESDAY EVENT: The Miami Herald will host an open forum on Cuba and exiles featuring Sen. Mel Martinez and a distinguished panel from 6-8 p.m. Wednesday at Freedom Tower, 600 Biscayne Blvd.

MIAMIHERALD.COM: Go online for a video, an interactive timeline and a photo gallery.



CUBA AND BEYOND: Fidel Castro, left, pursues revolution. Exiles came to Freedom Tower, center, where Carlomilton Aguilera shows the flag. Rafters, right, risked lives.

THE RECESSION



DAVID ADAME/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

CUTTING BACK: Dealers like Gus Machado, left, with general manager Victor Benitez, are known for philanthropy. Hard times are forcing them to retrench.

Car dealers’ suffering is contagious

■ Economic hard times have forced South Florida car dealers to cut back on community outreach and sponsorships.

**BY NIALA BOODHOO**  
nboodhoo@MiamiHerald.com

To get a sense of why the economic health of local car dealers matters, consider Gus Machado Ford in Hialeah.

The 24-year-old dealership prides itself on its community involvement, sponsoring the annual American Cancer Society golf tournament, the Hialeah-Miami Lakes Senior High football team, even the local mom raising money to send her daughter to a beauty pageant.

But this year, sales have declined almost 30 percent to \$70 million. Since April, the company has laid off 42 of its 152 workers. It has slashed its advertising budget in half. And it will also cut back on the scholarships it provides to aspiring college students,

which are based on the number of cars they sell.

“We have to survive,” general manager Victor Benitez said. “We have to trim down.”

Just as the car has become the center of American life, in some ways the local car dealership has found itself at the center of American communities. But as sales continue to drop and dealers rein in spending, a host of others, especially smaller businesses, have felt the pinch, too.

As the country’s biggest automakers seek government aid to stave off bankruptcy and massive job losses, the thought of local dealerships disappearing under the strain chills the local schools, churches and nonprofit organizations that rely on dealerships for funding and support.

The dealers, knowing that reaching out to the community makes good business sense, have been generous

•TURN TO DEALERS, 2A

DADE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Dreams of new fields finally become reality

■ Miami-Dade has some of the best high school football in the country - but few stadiums befitting that talent. However, times are changing.

**BY ANDRE C. FERNANDEZ**  
alfernandez@MiamiHerald.com

From the playgrounds of Homestead to the parks of Miami Gardens, Miami-Dade County boasts some of the best youth football talent in the country. Future NFL stars like Frank Gore, Ted “the Mad Stork” Hendricks and the late Sean Taylor were first groomed for stardom on the gridirons of Greater Miami.

But while Miami-Dade has talent to spare, it has always lacked the places to play,

especially for high school players in the public school system.

Now that is beginning to change.

In January, ground will be broken for a 1,500-seat football field at Moore Park in Allapattah that should be ready by the start of the next season in August.

It will serve youth leagues and high school teams in a section of inner-city Miami whose fierce devotion to football is chronicled in Robert Andrew Powell’s *We Own This Game*, a book about a year in the life of two youth football teams.

And that is just the latest in

•TURN TO FOOTBALL, 2A

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INDEX

ACTION LINE.....7B	JOB.....7E
BOOKS.....5M	LOTTERY WEEK.....27A
CLASSIFIED.....1F	MOVIES.....13M
CORRECTIONS.....3A	NATION.....3A
EDITORIALS.....4L	OPPENHEIMER.....1L
CARL HAASEN.....1L	PEOPLE.....8A
HOME & DESIGN.....1H	LEONARD PITTS.....1L
HOROSCOPE.....13M	TRAVEL.....1J
ISSUES & IDEAS.....1L	TROPICAL LIFE.....1M

TRAVEL, 1J

GIFTS FOR THE TECHY TRAVELER

OUR PICKS FOR CAMERAS, BLUETOOTH HEADSETS, PORTABLE SPEAKERS AND AUDIO RECORDERS



TRAVEL, 8J

GETTING TO THE INAUGURATION

A FULL-PAGE GUIDE ON HOW TO GET TO - AND AROUND - D.C. FOR THE BIG EVENT


TROPICAL LIFE, 1E

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THE RECESSION

Car dealers’ pain is shared

•DEALERS, FROM 1A

givers. “The community you live in is part of your family — and your customer base,” said Gus Machado.

Monarch Dodge in Lauderdale Lakes sponsors everything from the Davie rodeo to local bowling teams, said President Mark Hodos.

“We just helped the JCC golf tournament last Friday,” he said. This year, however, they’ve been able to sponsor just two or three tournaments instead of the usual five or six. “We’ve had to cut back.”

Besides employing more than 60, the dealership helps support a network of other businesses, such as an alarm company and a uniform company, Hodos said.

ADDING UP EXPENSES

After rent, labor and the price of inventory, one of the biggest budget items for a dealership is advertising. Cutbacks mean tens of thousands of dollars less spent each month on ads for radio, television and newspapers, including The Miami Herald. At Gus Machado, ad spending went from \$150,000 a

month to \$70,000.

The automotive industry tends to be local television stations’ biggest advertiser, on average making up about a third of that revenue.

“There’s no doubt that we’re feeling it,” said WPLG Channel 10 vice president and general manager David Boylan. “Advertising is down for TV stations across the country and here in Miami. Certainly that includes us.”

Boylan said that while the Big Three manufacturers and dealers had cut back on advertising, other car companies, especially imports, had added more advertising — but not enough to make up for the shortfall.

“The television business is very dependent on the automotive business,” he said. “We’re doing all we can to work with them.”

Small, local businesses like the Las Culebrinas restaurant a few blocks down the street from Gus Machado are similarly impacted.

Manager Osmel Valverde said the dealership used to have a promotion: When you bought a new car, you got dinner at the Latin restaurant. Workers from the deal-

ership would also come by for lunch. All of that changed this year.

“We’ve been affected across the board,” he said, adding that all of his customers have started to view eating out as a luxury.

For every Ford car sold by Gus Machado, it donates money to the South Florida Ford and Lincoln Mercury Dealers Association, for its Salute to Education program. The program gives out 250 college scholarships for \$1,000 each.

The Machado contribution is \$40,000 less than previous years, said Benitez, who sits on the association’s board. That translates to 40 fewer students getting scholarships.

FINDING A WAY

Joaquin Azar, sales manager at Lexus of West Kendall, said the company has stopped much of its local community funding, with a few exceptions, but is trying to show support in other ways.

Local painters and artists can display their work in the dealer’s showrooms for a month. It’s opening up its

conference room space at the dealership for local groups.

“In different ways that aren’t monetary, we’ll still contribute to things in a community,” he said. “It’s just a different way to do business.”

Not all dealerships are cutting back on their giving.

Norman Braman, president and CEO of Braman Motors, said he commits about \$2 million a year to philanthropy and has no intention of reducing that.

Braman has contributed \$1 million to United Way and given \$5 million to the Braman Family Breast Cancer Institute at the University of Miami.

Braman, which operates in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties, and Denver, sells GM’s Cadillac model but is broadly diversified, selling even BMW, Mercedes, Honda, Porsche and Audi.

“We’re committed to this [philanthropy], and we’ve been fortunate financially,” he said, adding it was part of his life.

*Miami Herald staff writers Martha Brannigan and Karen Burkett contributed to this report.*

DADE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Dade teams get field improvements

•FOOTBALL, FROM 1A

a series of football field improvements that should make life more palatable for players, fans, coaches and those who schedule the games.

“It’s been a challenge to schedule high school football for as long as Miami-Dade Public Schools have existed,” said Cheryl Golden, executive secretary of the Greater Miami Athletic Conference, which runs the county’s high school sports. “We build more schools and their athletes have less and less facilities to use.”

To be a high school coach or player in Miami-Dade generally means sharing a home field with five or six other teams and riding to your home stadium by bus. The games are played at regional stadiums — a contrast with many other football hotbeds, where each high school has its own field on campus.

“It’s tough when your kids play schools from other counties and they see those places have big stadiums on campus and state-of-the-art places to practice,” said North Miami Beach High coach Jeff Bertani, who has built his team into a perennial playoff team over the



MIAMI HERALD FILE, 2007

**RECENTLY UPGRADED:** Northwestern High defensive lineman Ronald Jackson, back, and teammate David Dixon practice in 2007 at Traz Powell Stadium.

past 12 years. “When college coaches come down to recruit our kids, it’s embarrassing. They think no one cares about what we do.”

RECRUITING MAGNET

Ah, but the recruiters care. Miami-Dade is a wellspring of college talent. Last year, state Class 6A champion Northwestern was the top-ranked team in the country. This year, the Bulls are back in the state championship game. Although Northwestern is not that far from Moore Park, it would not

play games at the new stadium. Its fan base is far too big.

High school football has never been hotter. The movie and TV drama *Friday Night Lights* has broadened the sport’s appeal; so has the Internet. Game highlights are on webcasts, including on MiamiHerald.com. Websites such as Rivals.com and Scout.com size up the players’ potential and are a must-read for rabid fans.

This year’s leveling of the Orange Bowl, the setting for many stirring prep games during its 70-year-run, was a blow to nostalgic devotees of high school football. But the death of the old bowl gave birth to the idea of building the Moore Park football stadium, which will be named Orange Bowl Field.

The Orange Bowl Committee and the city of Miami committed a combined \$5 million to build the football-track stadium at 765 NW 36th St.

“When I played high school football at Miami High in 1965, we were blessed to have the Orange Bowl as our host stadium,” said Orange Bowl Committee President Daniel Ponce. “Our hope is to have a place with a durable field where many athletes in different sports can have a place to play in their community.”

With schools cutting back staff and reining in extracurricular activities, you could argue this is no time to be building new stadiums and refurbishing old ones. Or that those former schoolboy stars now raking in millions in the NFL might want to pick up the tab, for old time’s sake. After all, baseball’s Alex Rodriguez gave \$3.9 million to kick off baseball stadium renovations at the University of Miami and he didn’t even attend the school.

In fact, improvements under way or recently completed have generally not been funded by the schools.

The Miami Dolphins paid to install field turf — a synthetic grass that is both low

maintenance and easy on the knees — at Traz Powell Stadium near Miami Dade College’s north campus and at Curtis Park near downtown. The team is hoping to play a role in building a stadium in the Miami Gardens area. The city of North Miami donated field turf for North Miami Stadium, adjacent to Florida International University’s north campus. Hialeah did the same for Ted Hendricks Stadium, named for the former University of Miami star and NFL Hall of Famer.

Golden, with the Greater Miami Athletic Conference, said there is just one public school in Miami-Dade that can host host football games.

Miami Southridge, whose new field has lights, parking and can seat 1,000, played host to Booker T. Washington in the final week of this regular season. It is hoping to add 1,000 more bleacher seats, which would cost close to \$2 million if they are wheelchair accessible.

“If we could get one more set of bleachers there, we’d be extremely happy,” Golden said.

“The problem is there’s no money allocated for it. It’s something we deal with every year. We’re grateful for anything we can get.”

The pros who learned the game on the fields of South Florida do, in fact, come back to mentor the new generation, but thus far none has underwritten the substantial cost of a field. (And none makes as much as Alex Rodriguez.)

“A lot of the guys will donate a little bit here and there individually to one school, but I think we should have some sort of general fund to help the county’s situation as a whole and then our superstars can contribute to that,” said Bertani, the North Miami Beach coach.


PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Until then, even some of the private schools must go begging. Archbishop Curley High School, north of Miami’s Design District, was able to install field turf recently thanks to a \$100,000 gift from the Dolphins.

“Our main goal is to help schools in South Florida have stadiums with synthetic field turfs,” said former Miami Dolphins and UM linebacker Twan Russell, who is one of the franchise’s directors of Youth and Community Programs. “Having the turf helps schools have facilities that can be used year-round for football and other events.”

And the field turf has other benefits, said Curley Athletic Director Greg Magner.

“It’s the first time in 17 years that I don’t have to worry about cutting the grass,” he said.



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