

U.S. Cancels Cuban Baseball Telecast

By LES BROWN

An exhibition baseball series in Havana between all-star teams of the United States and Cuba, which was to have been financed by the sale of television rights to a network, has been called off by the State Department because of Cuba's military involvement in the Angolan civil war against pro-Western forces.

A State Department official indicated that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger had been favorably disposed to the plan several months ago, seeing it as an opening wedge in establishing communications with Cuba, but denied approval when Cuba supported the Soviet Union in Angola.

Although the planners of the event, Barry Jagoda and Richard Cohen, still have hopes that a resolution to the Angola conflict might permit the goodwill games to be played as scheduled, on March 21 and 22, the State Department source indicated that the project was dead.

An Intense Interest

Mr. Jagoda, a former producer for CBS News, and Mr. Cohen, an independent producer in Dallas, had negotiated successfully with the Cuban Government for the games to be played there, with the possibility of a Cuban team later visiting the United States. They

then obtained an agreement from Bowie Kuhn, the commissioner of major league baseball, to send a team to Havana consisting of seven players from each of the four divisions of the two leagues.

"Cubans are intensely interested in baseball, and the baseball commissioner's office here believes there are 19 or 20 players in that country—all of whom are considered amateurs—who could make the big leagues," Mr. Jagoda said.

Baseball diplomacy with Cuba was to have been a variation on Ping-Pong diplomacy with China, and Mr. Jagoda indicated that his plan was partly motivated by a desire to see improved relations with Cuba, which has not had official diplomatic contact with the United States for nearly 15 years.

\$165,000 for Telecast

He noted too that American baseball would have realized promotional benefits from the exhibition, which would have been played just before the start of the new season.

ABC Sports, which now has the TV rights for major league baseball, had agreed to pay \$165,000 for the opportunity to televise the Havana exhibition games in this country, despite technical problems that might have made it necessary to route the picture through

Europe in order for it to be presented live here.

The complex transmission logistics, which probably would have involved two trips across the Atlantic for the television signal, were bizarre in light of the fact that Cuba is only 90 miles away from the Florida coast.

The complication was caused by the fact that Cuba's only ground station—the facility for receiving and transmitting satellite signals—is tied into the Soviet satellite. Cuban and Soviet television operate on a 625-line screen, the standard for most systems in Europe, which is incompatible with the American standard of 525-line screen.

In order for a live picture to be received here, the signal would have to be bounced across the ocean by Soviet satellite, relayed from Czechoslovakia to France, where it could be converted to the American standard and then sent back across the Atlantic by an Intelsat satellite, operated by a consortium of countries that includes the United States.

Julius Barnathan, vice president of engineering and operations for ABC, said he believed it might have been possible to erect a temporary tower in Cuba that could microwave a signal to the United States shore, eliminating the need for satellite transmission.

But questions of how the coverage would have been achieved from Cuba now are academic, since the State Department has squashed baseball diplomacy, at least for this year.