

# "Where my heart is"

## MLB player Strange-Gordon pays tribute to the Avon Park Boys and Girls Club

By **INGRID UTECH**  
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — Major League Baseball star Dee Strange-Gordon has never forgotten his roots despite his exceptional success in a world far removed from his hometown of Avon Park.

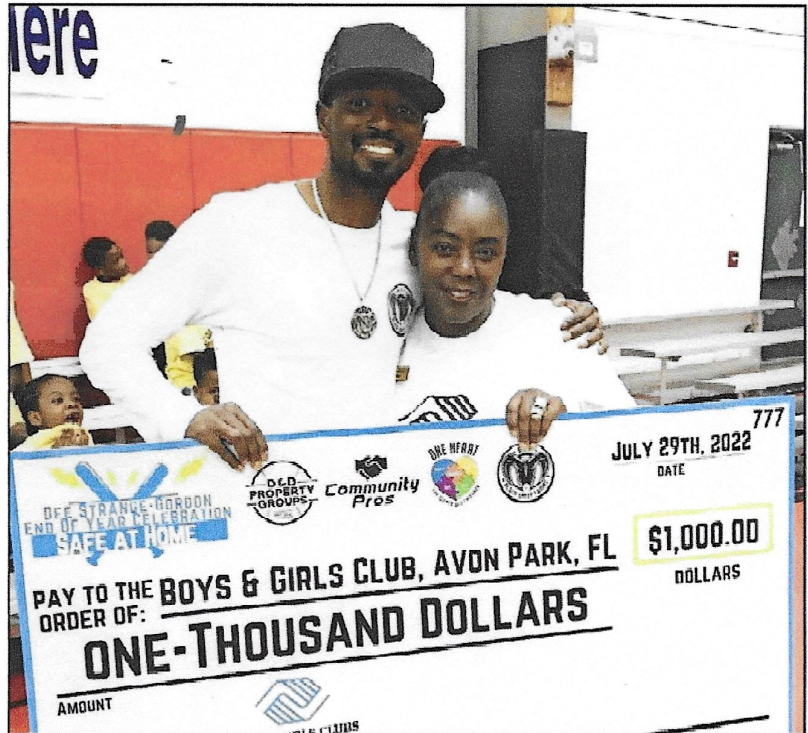
Strange-Gordon played for the L.A. Dodgers from 2011-2014, the Miami Marlins from 2015-2017, the Seattle Mariners from 2018-2020, and briefly this year for the Washington Nationals.

Even though he's had an exciting career with some impressive accomplishments, he often can be heard saying, "Avon Park is where my heart is, and I'll always come back whenever I have an opportunity."

Recently, Strange-Gordon sponsored a celebration for the 66 members of the Avon Park Boys and Girls Club, marking the end of summer camp and the start of the new school year.

The event is clear evidence that Strange-Gordon appreciates the community that nurtured him and is committed to giving back to that community. A banner he requested for the event includes this quote from Jackie Robinson, "A life is not important except in the impact it has on others' lives."

Dylan Schimka, founder and director of Community Pros, an Orlando-based company that arranges and markets the charitable endeavors of professional athletes, and Stephanie Bowman, founder of One Heart for Women and Children, one of Orlando's largest food pantries, organized the Boys and Girls Club



COURTESY PHOTO

**Dee Strange-Gordon and Florine Anderson, Avon Park Boys and Girls Club site director, with the baseball player's generous gift.**

celebration.

Schimka and Bowman delivered 100 backpacks filled with school supplies plus 150 boxed breakfasts and 150 boxed lunches for the event. Each boxed lunch contains five days worth of meals. Any backpacks that weren't distributed at the event will be retained by the Boys and Girls Club for distribution at a later time.

They also arranged for the boys and girls to enjoy a water slide and sack races.

Strange-Gordon also donated \$1,000 to the club. He said that the club had been a very positive influence upon him when he was growing up.

The biggest highlight of the day occurred when he addressed the boys and girls and fielded their questions.

"How does one get to be a professional athlete? What's it like to play in the majors? What was it like to grow up in Avon Park when you were little?" were among the questions they asked.

Florine Anderson, Avon Park Boys and Girls Club site director, expressed appreciation on behalf of the staff and the children for the wonderful day, the very generous gifts, and Strange-Gordon's personal involvement with the Boys and Girls Club over the years.

"It's important for kids to see that hard work pays off and that you can be anything you want to be and not just in sports," Anderson said.

Anderson also presented the baseball star with a plaque in recognition

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of his dedication to the club.

Strange-Gordon is modest about his baseball accomplishments, but he has been recognized as “the best” on several occasions and received some prestigious awards throughout his career, especially while playing with the Marlins.

In 2015, he led the National League in batting average (.333), total hits (205), and stolen bases (58). He became the first player to lead in both batting average and stolen bases in the same season since Jackie Robinson did so in 1949.

In 2015, he also won a Gold Glove Award

for superior fielding at second base and a Silver Slugger award for being the best offensive player among second basemen.

He was twice chosen to play in the All Star Games (2014 and 2015). Always known for his speed, he also led the National League in stolen bases in 2014 and 2017.

Strange-Gordon is not the first family member to play professional baseball. His father, Tom Gordon, was a pitcher who played from 1988 to 2009. In 1998, he led the American League in saves and games finished.

Also in attendance at the event was Strange-Gordon's wife, JoJo Deshay, who recently gave birth to their first child, and Strange-Gordon's uncle Donald Gordon, who is a home

builder. Strange-Gordon and his uncle are co-owners of Donald & Devaris (Dee's first name) Property Group.

In 2020, Strange-Gordon changed his last name from Gordon to Strange-Gordon to honor his late mother, DeVona Denise Strange. His mother was shot and killed when he was just 7 years old. His grandmother, Annie Gordon, and his uncle helped raise him.

Also attending the event were Tara Jeffries and Cullen Wheeler, realtors with The Heartland Group, Keller Williams Peace River Partners Realty. They recently made a donation that enabled the club to purchase shoes for four Boys and Girls Club members.





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**Javell Fleurival, Bralin Hawthorne, and Tiana Perry stand ready to open some of the boxes loaded with backpacks, breakfasts and lunches.**