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Sea Dogs pitcher honors his late father by relishing the game he loved

Rio Gomez lost his father, former ESPN reporter Pedro Gomez, in February of 2021.

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James Corrigan

Reporter

PORTLAND, Maine — Sea Dogs pitcher Rio Gomez has lived and breathed the game of baseball ever since he was little, and it isn't hard to see why.

“My dad,” Gomez said. “It was just one of those where a baseball was given to me before I can even remember. Ever since then, the game’s just grown on me.”



Rio's father is Pedro Gomez, the longtime ESPN national baseball reporter who passed away suddenly on February 7, 2021, at the age of 58. Rio says his father would give him tips from Major League pitchers on how to improve his craft. He says, though, that his father didn't just teach him the game of baseball, but also the game of life.

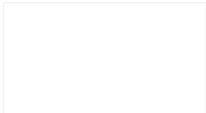
"How to be your own person," Gomez said. "How to be comfortable in your own skin. How to gain that self confidence as a human."

Those values helped Gomez break into Double A as a 36th-round pick after a career that saw him get cut from his high school team as a senior and never playing varsity baseball in high school before walking on to the team at Mesa Community College in Arizona and doing the same at the University of Arizona.

After his father passed away, Gomez says coping with his grief was difficult.

"The entire grieving process was a lot longer, a lot slower, a lot more waves than I could have ever imagined or anticipated to encounter," Gomez said. "I heard this quote once and it was 'You don't know pain until you've lost a parent.' And that's always resonated with me and stuck with me. 2021 was one of the hardest years of my life, and I thought 2022 was going to be easier and it wasn't."

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Gomez says that both time and the comfort of baseball have made things easier for him in the years since.

"People will say, 'oh, give it time,' and 'time heals all,' and at that moment, it feels like a load of lies," Gomez said. "But as time moves on, you realize that time is comforting."

Gomez was able to reach a goal set by himself and his father earlier this year when he pitched in the World Baseball Classic for Columbia, the nationality of his mother Sandi. He says his father would have cherished the moment, but would have also sweated it out.

"He was always a nervous wreck whenever I was on the mound," Gomez said. "So I don't know how many words would have been said. I think there would have been a lot more pacing and a lot more anxiety and nervousness going through his body the entire time."

Gomez is now in his third season in Portland, and has made Hadlock Field his baseball home. But he says no matter where he goes, a piece of his father will always go with him.

“Everywhere I go, I have this gold bracelet that was his,” Gomez says. “I wear it every day 24/7. The only time I ever take it off is when I’m pitching it and I put it in my back pocket. It’s to know that he’s here. He’s with me. And that I have the strength of him behind me.

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