

Rich Garces - A Red Sox Player Profile

How Rich "El Guapo" Garces Was a Top Relief Pitcher for the Red Sox

Rich Garces, better known as "El Guapo" or *the handsome one*, was a relief pitcher for several seasons in Major League Baseball. Setup men typically don't get much love at all in the sports world, but in Boston, he would enjoy some fanfare. His breakout year was in 1999, which also happened to be my first full year following Major League Baseball. As a young devoted fan of my hometown Red Sox, Garces' remarkable performances stand out in my memory.

Rich Garces and His Early Baseball Career

Garces enjoyed two cups of coffee with the Minnesota Twins in 1990 and 1993. He certainly didn't embarrass himself, but the Twins never really gave him a chance. Still, because of his decent cuppa in 1990, Donruss, Fleer Ultra, Upper Deck, Bowman, Stadium Club, and Topps all gave him a rookie card. Topps even named him a Future Star. Despite Topps having a terrible track record with those Future Star predictions, at least Garces would have a couple of star-level relief pitching seasons in his future.

The Twins released Garces in October 1994 and he caught on with the Chicago Cubs in 1995. Remarkably, he pitched fairly well in 7 games, giving up just 4 earned runs in 11 innings as an adequate middle reliever. Unfortunately, by this point in his career, Garces couldn't be sent down to the minors without being put on waivers first, so he would be claimed by the Marlins. He didn't pitch so well for Florida, giving up eight earned runs in just thirteen innings. So, he would be released by the Marlins, and find his way to the Red Sox on a minor league deal.

Rich Garces and the Red Sox (1996 to 1998)

In 1996, Garces got his first real taste of the major leagues after impressing at Triple-A Pawtucket. It wasn't a pretty Major League performance with a 4.91 ERA in 44 innings with a high rate of walks, but he still managed to post 0.4 WAR in a high-offense era of the game. Garces certainly didn't embarrass himself in a middle relief role, and the Red Sox would keep him on for the 1997 season.

His 1997 season performance was good enough for the Pacific Card Company to name him one of their Gems of the Diamond for the 1997 Pacific Prisms set. Unfortunately in 1997, Garces pitched very little at the Major League level and was roughly replacement level when he did. But, his spectacular results at AAA prompted the Red Sox to give him another chance.

Garces was actually not too bad in 1998 with the Red Sox. While he posted unimpressive numbers in AAA, he got yet another chance to perform in MLB. This was while pitching in one of the biggest years of offense baseball has ever seen. Garces actually posted a career high 0.7 WAR with a solid 3.33 ERA in 30 games. Of course, like had happened so much already to Garces, he found himself released at the end of the season. Fortunately for "El Guapo", the Sox would change their minds and resign him.

Rich Garces as a Premiere Setup Man

Garces actually spent a good chunk of the 1999 season at Triple-A being dominant. It would take the Sox a bit to realize that keeping him down was probably a dumb idea. When he finally came up to stay, the portly Garces was already a fan favorite in Red Sox Nation - even if the Boston fan base wasn't officially called that yet. He would respond with his best performance yet for a playoff bound Red Sox team.

Particularly astonishing about Garces was his ability to stifle left-handed batters even as a right-handed pitcher. Despite not having much of a fastball, Garces made a living as a relief pitcher with a sharp curve ball and splitter. That splitter would be his bread and butter pitch at his peak. Sadly, Pitch Values weren't calculated until 2002, so we don't have run values. But, as someone who watched him pitch daily, I can assure you his curveball and splitter were good enough to squeak out of plenty of jams in his day.

Despite his 1.55 ERA and 1.7 Wins Above Replacement (WAR) in 1999, it would not be his career year. Even with an ERA of 3.25 in 2000, Garces was actually much more valuable, posting a 2.0 WAR according to Baseball Reference in 64 games that season. Whether you believe in WAR or not, his 2.0 mark along with his 1.7 WAR in 1999 is actually a fair representation of his actual value to those Red Sox teams. That's about the same value as your average position player gives his team, so that means Garces offered the same value to his team as a 10th league-average position player would. That's one extremely valuable relief pitcher!

The Twilight of Rich Garces' Career

Sadly for Garces, he was already just two seasons away from the end of his MLB career, which would end in 2002. In 2001 for the Red Sox, he wasn't quite the same, although he was worth 1.1 WAR in 62 games. After a dreadful showing in 2002, Garces was done in Major League Baseball. He did attempt a couple of comebacks, the first being Spring Training with the Rockies in 2003. A few years later, in 2007 and 2008, [Garces pitched for a couple seasons for the Nashua Pride](#) of the Can-Am independent league.

After retiring as a player after a brief stint in the Mexican League later in 2008, he became an independent league pitching coach. Overall, Garces was a decent, if unspectacular middle reliever, but for big Red Sox fans from 1998 to 2001, he is fondly remembered, and the numbers back up these fond memories!

Thanks for the memories, El Guapo!

~ *Amelia* <3