



J.R. Richard

At 6'8" and 240 pounds with a fastball that was suggested to touch 105 m.p.h., J.R. Richard terrorized National League hitters. At his peak, he won 74 games over 4 seasons while striking out 1044 batters. With a dose of wildness, no-one dug in on J.R. He led the majors in strikeouts in 1978 and 1979 with 303 and 313 k's, respectively. In '79, he also captured the NL's ERA title with a stellar mark of 2.71. In 1980, he was the NL All Star team's starting pitcher. Over his career, he ranks #4 all-time by allowing an average of only 6.876 hits per 9 innings pitched. The Houston Astros star pitcher was feared and in 1980 at age 30 he seemed to be coming into his prime.

At the mid-point of the 1980 season, J.R. was 10-4 with a miniscule ERA of 1.96. However, he had been telling the Astros that he wasn't feeling well for the previous couple of months. His arm felt dead and he had dizziness and blurred vision but given his performance on the field, he was believed to be a malingerer. On July 30, 1980 he collapsed while tossing a ball, the victim of a stroke. Actually it was later determined that he has suffered 3 different strokes due to blood clots in his neck and arm. That evening, life-saving surgery was performed to restore blood flow to his brain. His pitching career was over.

Richard eventually recovered physically but some poor business investments and divorce led to his financial ruin. He lost his home and spent nights sleeping on the couches of friends. In the winter of 1994, he was found to be living under a Houston freeway bridge only 3 miles from the Astrodome, the site of some of his greatest feats. He had \$20 in his pocket, all he had left in the world.

A local church pastor took interest in J.R. and helped him, through faith in God, to overcome his despair. Richard began mentoring youth at the church and working with the same homeless people he once was a member of. Richard turned his life over to Christ completely and became a minister. He now works with disadvantaged youth in Houston to teach them the game of baseball and is an advocate for the homeless in addition to his duties at the church.

The man who, in his first MLB game at the age of 21 struck out the legendary Willie Mays three times, hit rock bottom and, through the grace of God, rebounded to his greatest heights.

Your organization would love to hear J.R.'s story. Contact us today.