

# Riggins on Garcia

by Brian Stull

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The St. Louis Cardinals will send Jaime Garcia (2-2) to the mound tonight as they continue their series in Los Angeles against the Angels. Garcia is coming off a scoreless 7-inning performance against Philadelphia last Thursday, a game which similar to the one-hitter he threw in early April showed strong command of the movement on his pitches.

While it looks natural, Garcia has explained that it has actually taken a lot of work to perfect the different finger pressures and grips he uses for the movement. One of the coaches he credits with help in the process is Mark Riggins, who was in Johnson City when Jaime first joined the Cardinals organization.

“Back in those days, that was quite a while ago, we believed in attacking the strike zone and getting movement on the fastball,” explained Riggins, who was recently in town as the pitching coach for the Cincinnati Reds. “His fastball was really straight, so we just went to a 2-seam fastball. He took to it really well.”

A pitcher in the Cardinals system from 1979-83, Riggins then became a coach for the team and was the St. Louis pitching coach in 1995. After that, he served as Minor League Pitching Coordinator from 1996 until 2007. Riggins then took the same role with the Chicago Cubs and also served as their pitching coach before moving to Cincinnati.

And of all the hundreds of pitchers Riggins saw, Garcia is one that has stood out—and not because of his stuff on the mound.

“The one big thing about him, he was such a great competitor even when he signed—he wanted to be the best,” recalled the coach. “There’s very few, I’ve been a coordinator

for quite a while, and you can just tell the drive in guys. He's one of the top 5 guys I've ever seen with the drive to be the best he can be."

"I remember Molina when he signed. He was in Johnson City also. They were kind of on their own—in a good way. When the game was going on, Jaime was just studying the game. Didn't really relate to the guys too much—he did off the field, but when the game was going on he really paid attention—he and Molina both, they really paid attention to the game and studied the game. You could just peak over there and see these guys are really into the game and trying to learn, where other guys were just letting the game go by."

An example of that desire came very early upon his arrival in Johnson City, when it was thought Garcia could be in better shape.

"He was a little overweight when we signed him and some kids are out of high school," said Riggins, who visited with Jaime about those days during the recent visit at Busch Stadium. "I asked him if he remembered me running him in Johnson City around the track and he goes 'oh yeah'. I just told him he had to lose some weight, so he did. He worked hard on his own. He went to the Instructional League and I don't think he gave up a run in the instructional league. His curveball was always his best pitch. We knew we really had something then, but he had lost 15-20lbs between signing and the instructional league."

Garcia can still regularly be seen running outside before games—around the track or even up and down the stadium stairs.

"You've got to get out in the open air, you've got to get out in the heat and humidity," said Riggins. "That's part of your job, when you're pitching you're out there in that kind of air. So your running and your conditioning needs to be in that also."

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