

# A LIFE IN BASEBALL

## A CARDINALS LIFER: ROBERTO ESPINOZA'S JOURNEY TO 200 WINS!

In the film *Moneyball*, a scout tells Billy Beane, "We're all told at some point in time that we can no longer play the children's game. We just don't know when that's going to be. Some of us are told at eighteen, some of us are told at forty, but we're all told."

For Peoria Chiefs manager Roberto Espinoza, that moment came in 2011 when injuries cut short his playing career. But unlike many, Espinoza never stepped away from the game. Now in his 12th year as a coach in the St. Louis Cardinals organization, he recently celebrated his 200th career managerial win, earned earlier this month on the road in Cedar Rapids. It was a milestone that marked more than just wins and losses; it reflected years of sacrifice, travel, and a relentless commitment to player development.

Espinoza, who turned 36 in March, grew up in Palo Negro, Venezuela. Raised in a military household, he credits his structured and disciplined upbringing for shaping how he approaches both life and baseball. He began playing the game around the age of seven and was inspired early on by his father, who played softball.

At just 16, Espinoza signed with the Cardinals and began his professional career at 17 in the Venezuelan Summer League. Soon after, he made his way to the United States, joining the Gulf Coast League Cardinals and then rookie-level Johnson City, a team he would later manage. His playing career also included time with the Quad Cities River Bandits (then a Cardinals affiliate) from 2008 through parts of 2010 and a stint with High-A Palm Beach before injuries forced him off the field.

Coaching wasn't always on Espinoza's radar. "I started asking the older guys about it, picking things up, not because I wanted to coach, but because I wanted to stay in the game as long as I could," he said. "It kind of came up toward the end of my playing days."

He officially began his coaching career in 2013 as a hitting coach in Johnson City. The following year, he joined the major league Cardinals as a bullpen catcher and Spanish translator. In 2015, he was named the organization's roving catching instructor, working with prospects across multiple affiliates.



Espinoza returned to Johnson City in 2016 as a hitting coach and was named manager the following season. In 2019, he led the team to an Appalachian League championship. From 2021 to 2024, he managed the FCL Cardinals, guiding young talent at the rookie level before being appointed manager of the Peoria Chiefs in 2025.

A self-described history buff and avid reader, Espinoza often draws coaching inspiration from the greats, including legendary UCLA coach John Wooden, whose philosophies came up in conversation.



"I'm really into the hard training sessions and competition," Espinoza said. "Wooden talked a lot about that. I took that from him."

One of Wooden's most famous maxims—"Be quick, but don't hurry"—is a phrase Espinoza said resonates deeply with his approach to development.

"It's all about putting your time in before the game, in the weight room or the film room, and being ready when the opportunity presents itself," he said. "That extra work is what separates guys who make it to the next level."

He also embraces the analytical side of today's game. "Even at a young age, I was into numbers and film," he said. "Now, I have to remind myself not to be so hard on myself. Sometimes I have to step away from film or the field and reset."

Espinoza remains deeply grateful to the Cardinals for the opportunities he's received throughout his journey. "My goal is to develop championship players and be a positive influence on these guys," he said.

In the offseason, he returns to Venezuela as a quality control coach in the Venezuelan Professional Baseball League. He also volunteers as an assistant coach with the Palm Beach Gardens Youth Athletic Association, where his son plays. His 200th win, he admits, didn't hit him right away. "Cody Schindler [Voice of the Chiefs] had been tracking it," Espinoza said. "The guys congratulated me in the clubhouse after the game, and it was a cool moment. But it really didn't hit me until the next day. That's when I started thinking about all the memories—being a hitting coach, managing, the long hours of film, the winter leagues. It all came back."

For "Espy," as his players call him, the game is much bigger than what fans see between the lines. "It's not just about the three hours on the field," he said. "It's the weight room, the film sessions, the bullpens, the swings in the cage, the early work. That's what matters."