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Lamorinda's doctor in the dugout

By Nick Marnell



Jorge Gutierrez Photo provided

South Orinda's Jorge Gutierrez plays in the Tri-Valley Men's Senior Baseball League, part of a national organization that includes ball players of all ages and experience levels. Gutierrez also works as a physician in a hospital intensive care unit. But Gutierrez does not sit in the dugout flipping through Boyd's Pathology textbooks; he is so unassuming that many of his teammates and opponents may not know his vocation until they read this article.

Gutierrez credits his years of playing ball and the lessons he learned on the diamond as major contributors to his success in the medical profession.

"Baseball was a great outlet. It kept me out of trouble," Gutierrez said. He grew up in Oakland, and his mother told him that if he did not get good grades, he would not play baseball. So he got good grades - good enough grades to propel him through UC Berkeley, Harvard Medical School and a 10-year residency at the UC San Francisco Medical Center. "Without the resiliency I learned playing baseball, I don't think I would have made it through Cal. I don't wilt when things get tough," Gutierrez said.

In 2005 he moved to Kaiser Oakland as a pediatric ICU physician, in charge of all in-patient pediatric services.

Gutierrez loves children, and he thrives on the

adrenaline rush. "Out of 100 kids that come to the emergency room, maybe one will be seriously ill. That one comes to the ICU. That's where the action is," he said.

Gutierrez leads a department of doctors, nurses, therapists, nutritionists, pharmacists and parents, and they all make the hospital rounds together. Adhering to such a team concept was an easily transferable skill from his days on the diamond, and that background also helps Gutierrez deal with the failures he experiences; according to the doctor, an infant fatality occurs in fewer than 1 percent of his cases. "We're batting .999, but that doesn't make it any easier," he said.

But miracles do happen. To this day, Gutierrez does not understand how one baby, in septic shock and with a number of organs damaged, came through. "When you save a kid, it's like when you get a big hit, or score the winning run," said Gutierrez, who would know because he has done all three.

Gutierrez plays baseball not only because he loves it but also to deal with stress. "You make an error, you strike out, you lose a ball game - it's not that big of a deal. I never get upset on the baseball field," he said. "When you strike out you're going to have to get back in the batter's box and try again. I love the challenge of hitting a baseball, and on defense I want the ball to come to me."

When it does it is a calming sight to Gutierrez' teammates. "He displays such great hand eye coordination on our infield at shortstop and second base, I can only imagine how great he is in the operating room," said his MSBL manager, Don de Cordova.

The smooth hands play equally well on the ball field and in the hospital. "You have to have good hands to insert breathing tubes, long catheters, IVs - they are hard to do on kids," Gutierrez said.

Some of those kids are walking around today thanks to his work at Kaiser. Cards from children he's saved hang all over his office wall. One of his first patients sent Gutierrez her high school graduation picture. A baby with a heart virus - her heart kept stopping - miraculously survived. She, too, sent him a picture: She just had her own baby.

"I would do this all over again," Gutierrez said of both his career in medicine and his passion for playing baseball.

Bobby Brown is the most famous doctor-ballplayer in Major League history. Brown studied for his medical degree while he played third base for the New York Yankees from 1946 to 1954. He appeared in four World Series, practiced cardiology in Dallas after his retirement from baseball and later became president of the American League.

Had Gutierrez stayed with baseball through college as he pursued his medical degree, who knows how far his own career on the diamond may have taken off.



Jorge Gutierrez Photo provided

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