

= Mike Garcia (baseball , born 1923) =

Edward Miguel " Mike " Garcia (November 17 , 1923 ? January 13 , 1986) , nicknamed " Big Bear " and " Mexican Mike " , was an American right @-@ handed pitcher in Major League Baseball (MLB) . Garcia grew up In Orosi California and entered minor league baseball at the age of 18 . After one season , he joined the U.S. Army and served for three years . Following his military discharge , Garcia returned to baseball . He was promoted to the MLB in 1948 . He played 12 of his 14 major league seasons for the Cleveland Indians . From 1949 to 1954 , Garcia joined Bob Lemon , Early Wynn , and Bob Feller on the Indians ' " Big Four " pitching staff . Historians consider the " Big Four " to be one of the greatest starting pitching rotations in baseball history . During those six seasons with the " Big Four " , Garcia compiled a record of 104 wins against 57 losses . He had two 20 @-@ win seasons and led the American League (AL) in earned run average (ERA) and shutouts twice each .

Garcia 's best season came in 1954 when the Indians won a league record 111 games . Baseball historian Stephen Lombardi said that Garcia may have been the best AL pitcher that year . Garcia remained with the Indians until 1959 , but never duplicated the success he had achieved in 1954 . In his last five seasons with Cleveland , he finished with losing records three times . After leaving the Indians , Garcia spent a season with the Chicago White Sox and a season with the Washington Senators .

Garcia retired from baseball in 1961 . He developed diabetes within a few years and suffered from kidney disease and heart problems until his death . Garcia died outside of Cleveland at the age of 62 and was buried in his home state of California . He was the only member of the " Big Four " not elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame , but he has been included on a list of the 100 Greatest Indians and has been inducted into the Cleveland Indians Hall of Fame . Baseball experts and former teammates have commented on Garcia 's overpowering pitching , his fine control and his low ERA .

= = Early life = =

Garcia was born in San Gabriel , California . He grew up on a ranch in Orosi , California , where his Mexican father , Merced Garcia , moved the family when Mike was two years old . Mike 's father raised horses , and Mike aspired to race them . He participated in one race and was thrown from the horse . Garcia played four years of high school baseball , the first three years at Orosi High School and the last at Visalia High School .

Garcia was pitching in semipro baseball when Cleveland Indians scout Willis Butler noticed him in Tulare , California . In 1942 Butler signed him as an amateur free agent to the organization 's Class D farm team , the Appleton Papermakers of the Wisconsin State League . Garcia earned a 10 ? 10 win ? loss record with Appleton . He spent the next three years as a signalman in the United States Army during World War II .

Garcia was discharged from the military at the age of 22 and returned to the Cleveland organization . He played for the Class C Bakersfield Indians of the California League . With Bakersfield , Garcia 's ERA and strikeouts led the league and he earned 22 wins . In 1947 he joined the Cleveland Indians during spring training , but he was assigned to the Class A Wilkes @-@ Barre Barons of the Eastern League by Cleveland coach Bill McKechnie . He finished the season with 17 wins and a 3 @. @ 24 ERA . In 1948 , he pitched for the Double @-@ A Oklahoma City Indians of the Texas League and earned 19 wins .

= = Major league career = =

= = = Early career = = =

Garcia debuted with the Indians on October 8 , 1948 , just before the Indians played in the 1948

World Series . He allowed three hits and no runs in two innings , and he struck out one batter . The Indians won the World Series in six games . It was the franchise 's second World Series victory , but Garcia did not make a World Series appearance .

Nicknamed " The Big Bear " by teammate Joe Gordon for his large frame , Garcia was listed at 6 feet 1 inch (1 @. @ 85 m) , 200 lb (91 kg) during his career . Garcia said that his actual playing weight was between 215 ? 220 lb (97 ? 100 kg) . Garcia also acquired the nickname " Mexican Mike " in the press . However , Garcia 's minority status was not a novelty . The Indians had signed Larry Doby , the first black player in the American League , in 1947 . The 1951 team would add manager Al López and Latino players Minnie Miñoso and Jesse Flores to a squad that already included Garcia and Mexican player Bobby Ávila . Early on , Garcia was paired to room with Avila , who had just signed with the team and did not speak English . Garcia served as a translator for Avila well beyond their first season together .

Garcia returned to the Indians in 1949 . A newspaper article predicted that Garcia might fill big needs in the Cleveland bullpen . Garcia saw action as a starter and as a relief pitcher that year , starting 20 of his 41 regular season appearances . He finished his rookie season with a 14 ? 5 record , a league @-@ leading 2 @. @ 36 ERA , 94 strikeouts and five shutouts . Fellow pitcher Bob Feller said , " From the beginning , Mike was a sneaky quick pitcher . For a big guy , he was certainly mobile . " One year removed from his rookie season , expectations from Indians General Manager Hank Greenberg and pitching coach Mel Harder were for Garcia to become a key piece of the Indians ' rotation . " Garcia has all the potentialities of a really great pitcher . I see no reason he should not reach greatness this season " , Greenberg said . Garcia finished the 1950 season 11 ? 11 .

By the 1951 season , media sources had given the nickname " Big Four " to the pitching combination of Garcia , Bob Feller , Bob Lemon and Early Wynn . Garcia had learned to control the curveball that Harder taught him in spring training of 1949 . Harder said that Garcia already had a terrific fastball , but that he became a good pitcher by learning the curveball and working on his control . Cleveland sportswriter Hal Lebovitz wrote , " Garcia , until the day he died , would tell me how much of the success he owed to Harder . " Garcia also once admitted to throwing an occasional spitball , an illegal pitch . " Maybe a dozen in my life . I 'm sure plenty of the great pitchers did " , he said .

Garcia pitched a 10 @-@ hit complete game on June 4 , 1951 in an 8 ? 2 Cleveland win , helping the Indians beat New York Yankees pitcher Ed Lopat for the first time in two years . Before the game , Lopat 's record was 8 ? 0 on the season . Garcia improved his season mark to 5 ? 3 . On August 7 against the St. Louis Browns , Garcia reached a career @-@ high 15 wins . In a 5 ? 1 victory , he also recorded his second career home run . Garcia won 20 games in 1951 and finished fifth in the AL with six saves .

= = = All @-@ Star seasons = = =

In 1952 , Garcia made his first of three consecutive All @-@ Star teams . As the Indians battled for the 1952 American League pennant heading into September , he began the month with three consecutive shutouts during an eight @-@ game Indian win streak . The Indians faced Ed Lopat and the Yankees again on September 14 in what Associated Press columnist Jack Hand labeled " one BIG game . " In a 7 ? 1 loss , Garcia gave up four earned runs on five hits in three innings . He finished the 1952 season with a 22 ? 11 record , 143 strikeouts , an AL @-@ best six shutouts and four saves . He was second in the league in ERA (2 @. @ 37) , games (46) and innings pitched (292 @. @ 1 , behind Lemon) . Only Wynn had more wins (23) among right @-@ handers ; Garcia and Lemon had 22 each , and the pair tied for the league lead with 36 starts . Garcia finished ninth in the 1952 MVP voting .

In 1953 , Garcia and Lemon were named pitchers on the AL All @-@ Star squad . Doby and Al Rosen were also on the team , with Rosen selected as the game 's MVP . Garcia finished the season 18 ? 9 ; he pitched a career @-@ high 29 complete games with 134 strikeouts and a 3 @. @ 25 ERA . Like the previous season , Lemon and Garcia finished first and second in the American

League in innings pitched . Garcia was labeled " one of the hardest @-@ throwing pitchers in the game " by The Cleveland Press Guide . As Feller 's dominance faded in the latter part of his career , Garcia , Lemon , and Wynn were increasingly referred to as the " Big Three " .

On May 16 , 1954 , Garcia pitched a one @-@ hitter against the Philadelphia Athletics in a 6 ? 0 Indians win . Garcia called it the finest game of his career . He was selected for his third and final All @-@ Star Game when American League manager Casey Stengel added him , Lemon , and Doby to an American League roster that already featured Avila and top vote @-@ getter Al Rosen . During a late July exhibition game , Garcia learned that his father had died at the age of 65 ; Garcia 's son Michael was born the same day . He missed several games that year with a broken blood vessel in his throwing hand , but he managed 45 appearances on the season .

Entering the final regular season game in 1954 , Garcia had 19 wins ; he would have received a bonus if he collected 20 wins . After pitching 12 innings , he left with the score tied at 6 ? 6 . The Tigers won after 13 innings , 8 ? 7 . Earning a no @-@ decision , Garcia failed to reach the 20 @-@ win mark . However , Greenberg had assured Garcia he would receive a bonus whether he won 20 games or not . Garcia pitched six innings or more in six out of his seven August appearances . He earned wins in three out of his last four appearances , and pitched seven innings or more in all four appearances . The team finished 111 ? 43 . The win total broke a 154 @-@ game season record , and the team had the lowest team ERA (2 @.@ 78) in the AL since the Dead @-@ ball era season of 1919 . Garcia was 19 ? 8 with 129 strikeouts , again leading the AL in both ERA (2 @.@ 64) and shutouts (5) .

In the 1954 World Series , the heavily favored Indians were defeated by the New York Giants . Garcia started game three , but was replaced by a pinch hitter in the bottom of the third inning , already trailing 4 ? 0 . Author Jonathan Knight described the progression of the game : " ... a throwing error by George Strickland , and Mike Garcia had struggled in the opening frame , allowing three baserunners , as panic began to creep into Municipal Stadium . For the first time all year , it was warranted . " The Giants won the game , 6 ? 2 , and would win game four to claim the Series .

= = = Final years with Indians = = =

From 1955 ? 1959 , Garcia finished with losing records in three of five seasons . The 1955 season represented Garcia 's first losing record (11 ? 13) and his first season ERA over 4 @.@ 00 . The 1954 ERA leader finished 1955 with a 4 @.@ 02 ERA . The Indians finished in second place in the AL at 93 ? 61 , three games behind the Yankees . Garcia repeated a losing mark on the 1956 season (11 ? 12) , the only time in his career he finished with consecutive losing seasons . He and Wynn were among those who tied for second place in shutouts on the season (4) behind fellow Indian Herb Score . Cleveland finished 88 ? 66 and nine games behind first place , which went to the Yankees again . Lopez was replaced as manager by Kerby Farrell . In spring training before the 1957 season , Farrell observed that the league 's best pitching staff could not carry the team alone . Garcia ended the season 12 ? 8 with a 3 @.@ 75 ERA , but the Indians finished sixth in the American League . Their 76 ? 77 finish was the club 's first losing record since 1946 .

Bobby Bragan replaced Farrell as manager to begin the 1958 season . During a spring training game in March , Garcia slipped on a wet pitcher 's mound and injured his back . He did not make his first regular season appearance until April 27 and he underwent surgery in June for a herniated disc . He finished the season with a 1 ? 0 record in six appearances and eight innings of work . That same month , Bragan was fired as manager . He was replaced by former Indians player Joe Gordon , and the Indians finished 77 ? 76 .

Garcia elected to become a free agent in the offseason , but he returned to the Indians , saying that his home and his dry cleaning business were in Cleveland . " Everything being equal , I 'll sign with the Indians if I decide I 'm able to pitch ... This is a friendly city and I like it " , he said . During a spring training game in March 1959 , Garcia was hit in the knee by a Billy Consolo line drive and was carried off the field on a stretcher and taken to a Tucson hospital . He did not make his first season start until May 3 , when he allowed four hits and no earned runs in a complete game loss . He finished with a 3 ? 6 record , a 4 @.@ 00 ERA and 72 innings pitched in his twelfth and final

season with the Indians .

= = = Chicago White Sox and Washington Senators (1960 ? 61) = = =

Garcia signed with the Chicago White Sox for the 1960 season , reuniting with manager Al López and former Indians owner and team president Bill Veeck . Veeck said , " Our reports on Mike were real good . He might help us in 1960 . " He appeared in 15 games and pitched 17 @. @ 2 innings with 4 @. @ 58 ERA and 0 ? 0 record . In July 1961 , the expansion Washington Senators signed the 37 @- @ year @- @ old Garcia to a contract . The Senators placed him on waivers before the end of the season . He finished with a 0 ? 1 record , pitched 19 innings in 16 games and earned a 4 @. @ 74 ERA . Garcia finished his major league career with a 142 ? 97 record , 1 @, @ 117 strikeouts , a 3 @. @ 27 ERA , 27 shutouts and 23 saves in 428 games (281 starts) and 2 @, @ 174 @. @ 6 innings .

= = Outside of baseball = =

Garcia married Gerda Martin on January 13 , 1951 ; they had three children . He served as a sponsor for Camel cigarettes during his playing days . Garcia raced midget cars during and after his baseball career . Garcia injured the index finger of his throwing hand while working on a midget car in late 1959 , but the wound was repaired without lasting effects .

= = Illness and death = =

Garcia developed diabetes in his forties . As a result , he suffered from kidney disease and heart damage in the last years of his life . Faced with dialysis three times per week , Garcia joined his former teammates at fundraising events to defray his medical expenses . He died in Fairview Park , Ohio on January 13 , 1986 at the age of 62 . He died on his thirty @- @ fifth wedding anniversary . He was buried in his hometown of Visalia , California . Garcia , whose annual salary was never greater than \$ 35 @, @ 000 , died with more than \$ 100 @, @ 000 in outstanding medical bills .

= = Legacy = =

Garcia was not selected a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame . His normal window of eligibility has closed , and he would only be elected by decision of the Hall 's Veterans Committee . Baseball historian Bill James dismissed Garcia 's low ERA due to the " cold , cavernous Cleveland Municipal Stadium , which at that time had a pitcher 's mound higher than white cliffs of Dover " . Referring to Garcia 's great seasons of 1949 to 1954 , baseball historian Wayne Corbett countered , " Garcia 's more famous teammates enjoyed the same home @- @ field advantage , but it was Garcia who recorded the staff 's lowest ERA in four of those six seasons . " Historian Stephen Lombardi wrote , " It is a shame that Mike Garcia is sometimes disregarded . A career such as his does not deserve to fade away from the memory of the overall baseball public . " Cleveland sportswriter and Hall of Fame voter Hal Lebovitz wrote , " If Garcia had pitched long enough , he probably would be in the Hall of Fame . "

Teammates have recalled the difficulty that Garcia presented for opposing hitters . George Strickland , who roomed with Garcia on road trips for several seasons , described Garcia as " a big , strong , powerful pitcher " who threw a " very heavy ball . " Bob Lemon describes his pitches similarly . " Hitting a Garcia pitch was like hitting a shotput " , Lemon said . Lemon also commented on his deceptive control . " Mike was a sneak . His physical size belied really fine control " , said Lemon .

Garcia was named one of the 100 Greatest Indians in March 2001 and inducted into the Cleveland Indians Hall of Fame on August 11 , 2007 . Each year , the Indians organization gives the Mike Garcia Award to an area high school student who demonstrates " outstanding success in the classroom , on the field , and in their community . "

