

= Aurelio López =

Aurelio Alejandro López Rios (September 21 , 1948 ? September 22 , 1992) was a Mexican professional baseball player . After pitching for several years in the Mexican League , he spent eleven seasons (1974 , 1978 ? 87) with four teams in Major League Baseball (MLB) . He acquired the nickname " Señor Smoke " in Detroit , while he was known as " El Buitre de Tecamachalco " (The Vulture of Tecamachalco) in Mexico . López was discovered in his hometown by Mexican League scouts and converted from a starting pitcher to a relief pitcher .

López led the Mexico City Reds to the 1974 Mexican League World Series , then made a brief MLB debut with the Kansas City Royals before returning to the Mexican League . López was named the 1977 Mexican League Most Valuable Player (MVP) . He returned to the major leagues with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1978 and pitched for the Detroit Tigers between 1979 and 1985 . López finished seventh in the Cy Young Award voting in 1979 . He earned a 10 ? 1 record and 14 saves for Detroit 's 1984 World Series championship team .

López returned to the postseason with Houston in 1986 , but he was the losing pitcher in Game Five of that year 's National League Championship Series . By the end of his MLB career , López earned a 62 ? 36 win ? loss record , 93 saves and a 3 @.@ 56 earned run average (ERA) . After his retirement from baseball , López served as municipal president of his hometown of Tecamachalco , Puebla , Mexico from 1989 until his death . He was killed in an automobile accident in 1992 . López was inducted into the Mexican Professional Baseball Hall of Fame the following year .

= = Early life = =

López was born on September 21 , 1948 in Tecamachalco , Puebla , Mexico , to Aurelio López Hernández of Veracruz and Félix Rios Torres of Tecamachalco . He grew up with five siblings . In his youth , López enjoyed both soccer and baseball but chose to pursue the latter , which was in its peak in Mexico ; he found it more difficult to locate practice facilities for soccer . He studied public administration at the Autonomous University of Puebla .

López caught the attention of scout Ramon " La Chita " García of the Mexico City Reds in the Mexican League . He debuted with the team 's minor @-@ league affiliate in Las Choapas in 1967 . He was promoted to the parent club the next season at the age of 19 . After starting the 1969 season with Mexico City , López joined the Minatitlán Red Devils . In 1970 , López rejoined Mexico City . During his time in the Mexican League , he was converted from starter to reliever by coach Wilfredo Calviño .

The Kansas City Royals purchased López 's contract in August 1974 , shortly after he led the Mexico City Reds to the Mexican League World Series title in four straight games . The Royals also purchased the contracts of Mexican League players Orlando Cepeda and 16 @-@ year @-@ old Germán Barranca in the same month . The Royals planned to use López in the September pennant race and throughout the next season . Lopez pitched in eight games in 1974 , and he was bought back by the Mexico City Reds in early 1975 .

During the 1977 Mexican League season , López earned a 19 ? 3 win @-@ loss record , a 2 @.@ 01 ERA and 165 strikeouts over 157 innings in 73 games . Despite being a closer , he was fifth in the league in wins , and he set a new single @-@ season save record (30) . He was named the league 's MVP . For several years in the mid- to late @-@ 1970s , López pitched winter baseball in the Mexican Pacific League . He broke league records by leading the league in games pitched three times , by earning eight consecutive relief wins in 1977 ? 78 , and by leading the league in relief appearances in four consecutive seasons . Among Mexican baseball fans , López became known as " El Buitre de Tecamachalco " (The Vulture of Tecamachalco) .

= = MLB career = =

López 's contract was purchased by the St. Louis Cardinals from Mexico City on October 26 , 1977

. He joined the Springfield Redbirds of the Class AAA American Association for 1978 , but returned to the major leagues during the 1978 season , earning a 4 ? 2 record with the St. Louis Cardinals . After one season in St. Louis , López was traded to the Detroit Tigers with Jerry Morales for Jack Murphy and Bob Sykes . López posted some of his best individual statistics in the 1979 season , when he had a 10 ? 5 win ? loss record , 106 strikeouts , and a 2 @.@ 41 ERA (an Adjusted ERA + of 181) . He was third in the AL in saves (21) and seventh in the Cy Young Award voting . López earned another 21 saves in 1980 . In the 1981 season , he shared closer responsibilities and collected only three saves before the 1981 Major League Baseball strike ended the season .

López suffered from shoulder problems during spring training in 1982 , and he was demoted to Detroit 's Class AAA minor @-@ league affiliate in Evansville by July . He was called back up to Detroit on September 1 , but later that month he shocked his teammates by announcing that he was giving up his MLB career and returning to Mexico . López said that his reasons were personal , and he cited his family , the education of his children and the Mexican economy as motivating factors for the decision . He came out of retirement and returned to Detroit in time for the 1983 season . In February 1983 , López became the first player in MLB history to receive a pay cut through salary arbitration . López had earned \$ 285 @,@ 000 in 1982 , asked for \$ 315 @,@ 000 for 1983 and was awarded \$ 250 @,@ 000 . He finished 1983 with a 9 ? 8 record , 2 @.@ 81 ERA and 18 saves .

López is perhaps best known for his role as the setup reliever for the Tigers during their 1984 championship season , when he finished with a 10 ? 1 record , 14 saves , and a 2 @.@ 94 ERA . López had a 1 ? 0 record in both the 1984 American League Championship Series (ALCS) and 1984 World Series , and he did not give up an earned run in over six innings pitched that postseason . He faced seven batters in Game Five of the 1984 World Series , retiring them all . After the pitcher got out of two extra @-@ inning jams to earn a 1984 ALCS win , Detroit manager Sparky Anderson said , " Nothing surprises me about Lopez . I 've had him for five years and believe me , there 's nothing like him . He 's got heart and there is none better . He 's one of the all @-@ time hearts . " While in Detroit , López had earned the nickname " Señor Smoke " , as he hailed from Mexico and threw a powerful fastball .

By early 1985 , López stated his intentions to enter free agency after the season . He placed his Detroit home up for sale , but appeared to soften when Detroit opened to the possibility of new contract negotiations . He said that he wanted to pitch another year or two and then enter the fast food business in Detroit . In late May , the Associated Press reported that López and Detroit reached a " gentleman 's agreement " which would allow the pitcher to finish his career in Detroit , though no contract was signed . López finished the 1985 season with a 3 ? 7 record and five saves . The Tigers made López a free agent in November of that year . He temporarily retired again in early 1986 before signing with the Houston Astros .

López reached the postseason again that year with Houston . In the 1986 National League Championship Series , he pitched 1 1 ? 3 scoreless innings in Game Two , but he was the losing pitcher in Game Six when the New York Mets won the series . López pitched the fourteenth through sixteenth innings and surrendered the lead twice . During spring training before the 1987 season , López was arrested in Florida on charges of driving while intoxicated and driving with a suspended license . He earned his final major league save on May 12 , 1987 . He finished his MLB career with a 62 ? 36 win @-@ loss record , 93 saves and a 3 @.@ 56 earned run average . López 's career save total was the highest among Mexican pitchers in MLB until Joakim Soria surpassed the mark in 2010 .

= = Later life and death = =

After retiring from baseball , López moved back to Tecamachalco . He was elected municipal president of the city in 1990 , a position that he held until his death . The post is equivalent to that of mayor . Early in his political service , he oversaw the installation of new water and drainage systems . Facing great opposition from the previous ruling family and even enduring shots fired at his home , he described his post as " like coming into a game with the bases loaded . " As late as 1991 , López

mentioned the possibility of returning to baseball in a coaching role .

López was killed in an auto accident a day after his 44th birthday in Matehuala , San Luis Potosí . He was driving a car that overturned , and he was thrown from the vehicle . His wife Celia and another passenger were injured in the crash . López was buried in Tecamachalco Cemetery . He , Aurelio Rodríguez and Aurelio Monteagudo are the only three players in MLB history named Aurelio , and all three were killed in car accidents between the ages of 44 and 53 .

= = Legacy = =

López was inducted into the Mexican Professional Baseball Hall of Fame in 1993 . He has been described as the pitcher with the highest velocity in Mexican baseball history . López had a reputation as a friendly player who got along well with other members of the team . Former Astros teammate Terry Puhl described López as " always upbeat , " while fellow Astro Craig Reynolds noted that López was " everybody 's friend . "

Detroit rock band Electric Six named their album Señor Smoke (2005) in López 's honor . In September 2012 , a youth sports complex in Tecamachalco was named in honor of López .