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Luis Tiant



Luis is fondly remembered as a Boston Red Sox great but he didn't join the Red Sox until mid-career. A balding, overweight starter whose age was often estimated at several years higher than his official listing, Tiant speaks with a thick Cuban accent and would smoke cigars anywhere, including in the clubhouse whirlpool and shower. He was a renowned locker-room prankster but was serious on the mound, winning 20 games three times for Boston. He baffled hitters with a rocking, twisting windup and an assortment of release points that ranged from over-the-top to nearly underhand. Or as announcer Curt Gowdy noted, "He comes from everywhere except between his legs".

In 1964, Luis broke into the Majors with the Cleveland Indians and went 10-4 with a 2.83 ERA as a rookie. Luis really broke through in 1968 after he altered his delivery so that he turned away from the plate during his motion, in

effect creating a hesitation pitch.

The Indians were overly protective of their new hot property and ordered Luis to skip his usual winter ball. This strategy backfired when he led the AL with 20 losses. After the season, Cleveland traded him to the Twins. Luis started the 1970 season with six straight victories, but suffered a hairline fracture in his shoulder, missing the months of June and July, and wasn't the same when he returned. Minnesota then released him at the end of spring training in 1971.

Luis was the Comeback Player of the Year in 1972 for a contending Boston Red Sox team. He captured his second ERA title with a 1.91 mark and a record of 15-6. He followed his 20-13 mark in 1973 by going 22-13 in 1974. After helping the Red Sox to the 1975 AL pennant, he got national attention for the first time during postseason play. He beat the three-time World Champion Oakland A's in the ALCS opener with a three-hitter and followed up with a five-hit shutout of the Cincinnati Reds to open the World Series. He also won Game Four, 5-4. Luis got a hit in each game after batting only once all season. His adventuresome trips from base to base (he scored each time) while bundled in a warm-up jacket provided comic relief in an otherwise tense series.

Tiant won 20 games for the last time in 1976 by going 21-12. However, he was no longer the overpowering pitcher he had once been. He had been increasingly relying on deception with masterful changes of speed to go with his wide variety of pitching motions. He pitched less but he kept winning during his last two seasons with the Sox. He signed with the Yankees as a free agent before the 1979 season and went 13-8. Luis' father, Luis Tiant Sr., was one of Cuba's greatest pitchers.

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