



Beltran: 'The glory is not mine'

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By Joshua Cooley

NEW YORK (BP)--These are the kind of moments ballplayers dream about.

Last October, New York Mets center fielder Carlos Beltran stepped to the plate in an electric atmosphere at Shea Stadium. The Mets, who entered the National League Championship Series against the St. Louis Cardinals with the best regular-season record in the NL (97-65), were trailing, 3-1, in the bottom of the ninth inning of Game 7.

But the bases were loaded and the Mets had their star switch-hitter coming up. Beltran had already clubbed a career-high 41 home runs in the regular season and another three in the NLCS.

Cardinals closer Adam Wainwright worked the count to 0-2 and then threw a devilish curveball that froze Beltran stiff. St. Louis went on to win an improbable World Series title, while the Mets went home.

Concerned about his friend after such a big letdown, Mets chapel leader Cali Magallanes sent a text message to Beltran with a note of encouragement after the game. Beltran's reply: "It's OK, brother. God is in control."

That, more than any on-the-field exploit, spoke volumes to Magallanes about the type of person Beltran is.

"That really impressed me," Magallanes said. "He's a man who has learned it's not all about winning."

Early on, life for Beltran was about simply getting by. He grew up in Manatí, Puerto Rico, a beautiful but meager town on the island's north-central shore. His loving Catholic parents taught their children a disciplined, moralistic way of life, but it wasn't until 2001 – his third full major league season with the Kansas City Royals, the team that drafted him – that Beltran fully realized there was more to life than baseball and good deeds.

Following a game one night, he and his wife, Jessica, accepted Christ after hearing the gospel from a Puerto Rican pastor in the apartment of Luis Alicea, a former Royals teammate.

"I thought, 'I don't have anything to lose,'" Beltran said. "I had heard so many good things about Christ."

Since then, Beltran, 30, has displayed an unquenchable thirst for God's Word. He and Magallanes hit it off during an early road trip to Philadelphia in 2005, Beltran's first season with the Mets. There, he opened up his hotel room to any interested teammates for a post-game Bible study, a practice he and Magallanes have continued on the road ever since.

Over the years, Magallanes has seen Beltran evolve from a quiet, reserved person to one who readily asks for spiritual insight and also dispenses godly wisdom to seeking teammates.



Carlos Beltran is a four-time All-Star with Silver Slugger and Gold Glove awards to his credit. - Photo by New York Mets

“His knowledge of Scripture is above most athletes because he has the desire to learn,” Magallanes said. “He doesn’t just sit down to listen. He asks questions. He always seems to be thinking and willing to ask. So [teammates] always seem to come to him.”

Beltran’s life is a rare portrait of humility and spiritual dependency in a profession fraught with vanity and avarice. From a secular standpoint, he has it all. The switch-hitting, five-tool star is one of baseball’s best talents. He plays for the big-market Mets, who are once again the NL East frontrunner, and is enjoying one of the most lucrative free-agent contracts in history (7 years, \$119 million).

Still, Beltran refuses to live in a narcissistic bubble of fame and fortune. He is keenly aware of the impact he has on others.

“Kids follow me,” he said. “I have to be an example to them.”

“I think he likes it when people feel comfortable around him,” Magallanes said. “I don’t think [his celebrity status] affects him.”

Baseball success, it seems, has always been in Beltran’s back pocket. He began his career by winning American League Rookie of the Year honors after hitting .293 with 22 home runs and 108 RBI in 1999. Since then, he has been selected to four All-Star Games (2004-07) and won National League Silver Slugger and Gold Glove awards in 2006, when he batted .275 with a career-high 41 homers and 116 RBI, and committed only two errors in 372 outfield chances.

This season, Beltran is batting .263 with 19 home runs and 62 RBI in 96 games through August 3. And, his season-ending strikeout last year notwithstanding, he has proven to be quite adept at October heroics. During the 2004 postseason, he was an RBI machine for the Houston Astros, helping them come within a game of reaching the World Series by socking eight homers, driving in 14 runs and batting .435 in two playoff series against Atlanta and St. Louis.

Last season for the Mets, he belted three more dingers and hit .278 in the playoffs. His .366 career postseason batting average is the third-highest in major league history (minimum of 80 at-bats).

Despite all his success, Beltran remains remarkably grounded and willing to give back. He supports youth educational programs and a charitable celebrity golf tournament in Puerto Rico. **In New York, he runs clinics and has donated a large amount of money to the Harlem RBI’s REAL Kids program, which teaches inner-city kids literacy, team-building and other developmental skills.**

It is this kind of Spirit-inspired altruism that helps keep Beltran from falling into the trap of self-absorption. He knows he has been given much in this life, but he can see past the temporal and into the eternal.

“God gives talent to every single person in the whole world,” Beltran said. “The difference between some people and me is that the glory is not mine. I don’t own anything here.”