



**A DIFFERENT KIND OF**  
*homerun*

In 2007, St. Louis Cardinal's first baseman, Albert Pujols, had the third highest batting average in the MLB. Of his 1,344 career hits, more than 280 were home runs.

by austin light



**H**é's a six-time All-Star, 2005 National League MVP, 2001 Rookie of the Year, a recipient of the Hank Aaron Award, a World Series champion and the first player in history to hit 30 home runs in each of his first seven seasons. You don't have to be a baseball whiz to know that's an impressive stat sheet. Pujols is poised to become one of the greatest players in the game, but the allure of on-field success isn't what drives him. Instead, he's pushed forward by his faith in God and the love and support of a close family.

"All the credit, I give to God," Pujols said at a recent event he spoke at. "All those home runs, all the things I do, I give the glory to God, because I don't know where I'd be right now without Him."

Pujols said he likes to sit back and look at the amazing impact God has had in his life. From helping his family move to the United States when he was a teenager, to meeting his wife Diedre, to joining the MLB, every event has been shaped by God.

"I grew up in the Dominican but I never went to church. I just wanted to be a young teenager and play baseball like everybody else. When I was 17, Diedre brought me to church. I gave my life to the Lord September 16, 1998. Since then, God has changed my life," Pujols said.

That first big change came when he married Diedre and adopted her daughter Isabella, who has Down syndrome.

"At 18 or 19, I didn't have a clue of what Down syndrome was, but I was just so in love with Diedre and the baby, that I just decided to become a parent to her and forget that she has Down syndrome. To me she is normal," Pujols said.

In 1999, Albert was drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals. There were some bumpy times as he was tossed around in the minor leagues for while, but by 2001, the Cardinals called him up. As his baseball career started to take off, Pujols decided to use his success to help others.

In 2005 the Pujols Family Foundation was created to honor God and strengthen families through various charitable works. In all of its endeavors, the Foundation strives to mimic the priorities of the Pujols family, which are to put faith first and everything else a distant second.

"There are two legs that [the Foundation] stands on," vice president and executive director, Todd Perry said. "One is the work in the Dominican Republic, which is reaching the poor there and giving them relief. The second leg is within the

Down syndrome community ... It's something very near and dear to [Albert and Diedre's] hearts."

While there are plenty of other foundations and charities out there benefiting children with Down syndrome, Perry said no one does it quite like the Pujols family.

"There are a lot of organizations that do great things for kids with Down syndrome, but they're mainly focused on fixing something. At the Pujols Family Foundation, we aren't about fixing anything. We celebrate their lives," Perry said. "Last year we did 33 different events, most of those were focused on the Down syndrome community right here in St. Louis. We had a father-son bowling event, a mother-daughter tea, a prom for kids that never got to go to their prom, and a bunch of other events throughout the year."

In addition to the dozens of events held to benefit the Down syndrome community, Pujols also makes at least one major trip to the Dominican Republic every year. As a Dominican, Pujols said his heart is still with his people. He works hard each trip to give back both physically and spiritually.

"I think about my country and how hard it was to get here [to the United States]," Pujols said. "I couldn't do it without God."

Albert is a big believer in leaning on God, no matter the circumstance. The Pujols Family Foundations tries to capture the same spirit in all of its outreach opportunities.

"We deal in the power of hope," Perry said. "Whether it's in the Down syndrome community or it's in the Dominican Republic, if we can show them that there is hope, we can show them that there is a possibility of their dreams coming true."

Perry said the Pujols family works hard to help others so that God gets the recognition.

"The platform God has given them right now is for his glory, not for Albert's," Perry said. "That's why you'll never see him hit a home run where he doesn't step on home plate, put both hands in the air, and thank God."

It's true; Albert shies away from mentioning his incredible achievements in baseball, because according to him, even his greatest successes pale in comparison to his spiritual accomplishments.

Albert Pujols has the stats of a great baseball player, and the character of a great man. He doesn't let his baseball career determine who he is; rather he uses it to show others who God is. And that's what truly makes him a star athlete.

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COURTESY OF THE PUJOLS FAMILY FOUNDATION

In February 2008, Albert Pujols and other members of his foundation took a team of optometrists and technicians to the Dominican to examine eyes and distribute glasses to children. Within five days, the team had helped more than 1,800 kids. ←

Pujols is **POISED** to become **ONE** of the **GREATEST** players.