



Ivan Medina, left, and Ramphis "Richie" Marrero (who is traveling this summer with the Hamlin Park All-Star Baseball Team) stand outside Onward Neighborhood House, 600 N. Leavitt St. (Photo by Myles Golde)

## For Hamlin Park ball player, a good friend made all the difference in the world

By MYLES GOLDE  
Roving Correspondent

On May 15 at Wrigley Field, Clemente and Simeon high schools played for the City public league Baseball Championship.

Clemente won in extra innings, 4-1. Ramphis "Richie" Marrero pitched all nine innings for Clemente and blasted a home run into the left centerfield bleachers to lead Clemente to the win.

This summer he is traveling with the Hamlin Park All-Star Baseball team, representing the Humboldt Park community, in Puerto Rico.

In June, Richie graduated from Clemente with honors. He was number 11 in his class of 380. In the fall, he will enter the Universi-

ty of Wisconsin at Madison with a full academic scholarship.

On the sidelines both at Wrigley Field and the graduation was Richie's close friend and mentor, Ivan Medina, executive director of Onward House, 600 N. Leavitt.

Talking with the two helps you understand how one person can make a difference in this world.

Richie and Ivan met about seven years ago at Association House on North Avenue. Richie had just returned home from the East Coast where he helped his father through the last year of a terminal illness. The gifted athlete, then 11, was trying to become reacclimated to his

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Chicago home.

Ivan, meanwhile, was looking to help young kids in the neighborhood, especially those from areas where the gangs had a lot of influence with young boys. He took an interest in Richie when he began coming to Association House with his older brothers, noticing that the older brothers were not motivated in the same way as young Richie.

In the neighborhood, the Marrero boys were all known as good baseball players and Richie, even though younger, played a lot with much older boys because of his talent. Noticing his abilities and knowing of his last year with his dying father, Ivan tried to keep an eye on Richie. He quickly learned that his young friend was good at not only sports but had an inquisitive mind.

With the approval of Richie's mother, Ivan began urging Richie to do better in school and offered to oversee some of his studies. The more he encouraged Richie, the better he performed. Whether it was the playing field or the classroom, Richie loved the competition and challenge.

Knowing that Richie had played Little League baseball at 7 in Humboldt Park, Ivan recognized his athletic ability got him to play football at 11, in a Portage Park league. He soon became a top-rated quarterback.

With Ivan's help, Richie enrolled at Gordon Tech High School and distinguished himself by starring on their basketball, baseball and football teams. He also made his mark academically. In the meantime all his studies and report cards were regularly reviewed and discussed with Ivan.

To Ivan, a social worker who has made a career of helping people from underprivileged backgrounds in his work at Association House and now as director of Onward House, Richie represented all the potential that is often overlooked in these inner city areas. Richie, in turn, at the age of 11,

recognized almost immediately the opportunities that an education and a healthy interest in sports could mean to a young boy. Their partnership produced results and, as each success was celebrated, new goals were set.

In his senior year, Richie transferred from Gordon Tech to The Math and Technical Academy at Clemente High School, for their advanced academic classes. This school within a school is open to only 5 percent of Chicago high school students, and it was an honor to be accepted. He played on the basketball, football and baseball teams. But because of the school transfer rules, he was eligible to compete interscholastically only on the baseball team which went on to win the city championship.

This last year has been busy in other ways too. Richie was chosen as one of 50 gifted Chicago area students out of 1,800 applicants to be a member of the Posse program for Academic College Scholarships to major universities. In the fall, he and 11 other students in this group will enroll at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

He wants to study kinesiology, the study of muscles, for use in sports medicine or therapy.

Richie has lived almost his whole life in Humboldt Park, surrounded by poverty, gangs and crime, yet has managed to avoid becoming involved with that life. Instead, he chose work and play hard, find a way to educate himself, and embark on a new life that will undoubtedly lead to much better things.

For Ivan, watching these success stories unfold is his greatest reward. You can't help feeling better when listening to their story.

The story, of course, is far from over. Richie is destined to do something important with his life and Ivan will always be there for him - encouraging him and guiding him to make the right decision and accept the bigger challenge.

Good luck, guys! Whether it is major league baseball or a new discovery in medicine, the kids from Humboldt Park will be rooting for you.