

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Domingo Germán's rise to the top of New York's rotation has surprised everyone but himself

By Gary Phillips

Domingo Germán loves horses. He has since he was 14. His late uncle cared for the animals and other livestock on a ranch in Alejandro Bass outside of San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic. There, Germán assisted his uncle, looking after the horses and riding them around the property. It was time well spent after the teenager quit playing baseball.

"I still love horses," Germán, now 27, says with the help of Yankees bilingual media relations coordinator Marlon Abreu. "That's my favorite animal. I still have a passion for horses. So, I did that for about a year."

Long before Germán surged to the top of the Yankees' rotation, his days as a ranch hand were the product of unprophetic youth league coaches who refused to let him take the mound. Germán grew up playing all over the diamond, "but I didn't really like it." His friends, however, would marvel at his arm strength whenever they threw together, and so, sometime around age 12 or 13, he decided he wanted to become a pitcher. Coaches balked at the idea, though. "I really don't know why," Germán says, still perplexed and mindful of the irony.

The stubborn youngster insisted that he was going to pitch, or he wasn't going to play. And so, Germán gave up the game for nearly a year. "Come back, come back!" his friends would tell him as he passed them on the ballfields. It didn't take long for him

to miss the game, but he was only going to return if he could do what he wanted.

A short time before his 17th birthday, Germán got the help he needed. He began training with two older friends — pitchers who had previously signed professional deals. They never came close to the bright lights that now illuminate Germán's performances, but they did have connections. Germán had only been practicing for a few weeks by the time they lined up auditions for major league clubs. The first few bullpen sessions yielded 85-mph fastballs and concerns over a too-slender frame — today, Germán is listed at 6-foot-2, 175 pounds — but the Marlins were able to see his potential. Just four days after he turned 17, the skinny kid who wasn't allowed to pitch in youth leagues officially signed with Miami — as a pitcher.

"It was very exciting, very surprising," he says. "When I went home and told my parents, nobody could believe it because it happened fast after I decided to become a pitcher. I had only been training as one for a short time. I couldn't believe it myself!"

Flash forward to present day, and the parallels are obvious. Germán was not supposed to be a member of New York's pitching staff when spring training began; he certainly wasn't expected to anchor it if the team hoped to contend. Yet, as others have battled injury and inconsistency, Germán has been the most reliable starter for a Yankees club that has spent the majority of 2019 atop the American League

