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## Keeping the faith: Jorge Lopez stays upbeat as son battles rare condition

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Shuckers pitcher Jorge Lopez's son, Mikael, then 25 months old, had multiple medical issues that kept him in the hospital for much of the first 2 years of his life. **Courtesy of Jorge Lopez**

The grind of a long baseball season never seems to get to Biloxi Shuckers pitcher Jorge Lopez. He is quick to flash a broad smile and offer a warm tap on your shoulder.

Lopez claims that sunny disposition is the result of his upbringing in Puerto Rico.

"I always smile," he said. "When I was a kid, I always smile. I think where I come from, it's humble people. That's where I learned it from, my family."

Lopez keeps his upbeat approach to life despite the fact his young son, Mikael, has only spent two weeks of his 25 months of life outside of a hospital.

"When I have Mikael, that's more reason to keep smiling," Lopez said. "Life provides a lot surprises, but we have good faith in God."

A little more than two weeks ago, Mikael was given four diagnoses: familial Mediterranean fever, renal Fanconi syndrome, osteoporosis and early-onset inflammatory bowel disease.

The 2-year-old is undergoing treatment at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center as doctors do their best to keep his fever at bay.

Lopez left the Shuckers a month ago to take part in two days of tests in Cincinnati as doctors tried to determine if what Mikael was dealing with is the result of a genetic condition. The results came back as doctors suspected, with the Lopez family genetics playing a role with the familial Mediterranean fever.

For Lopez, it was a relief to finally find out what was causing his son's problems after more than two years of uncertainty.

"I don't want to hear, 'He doesn't have anything,'" the 6-foot-4 right-hander said of the early response from doctors in Puerto Rico. "It was frustrating, because I can't do anything."

After he was born premature, Mikael spent his first four months in the hospital. He left the hospital for a couple of weeks, only to return.

He was moved to a Miami hospital to be closer to his father, and then to Cincinnati.

While he was in Miami a year ago, the doctors believed the best course of action for Mikael was an intestinal transplant.

"While he was in Miami, he got an obstruction in his intestine," Lopez said. "They thought he needed a transplant. They were looking for that. But when they sent him to Cincinnati, they did every analysis and every test. They say he will probably need a transplant, but not now. They're trying to look to see how they can take out that fever. So he just waits."

### **Progress in his smile**

At the moment, Mikael is doing well and Lopez can see the progress in the smile of his son.

"He's doing good. He is stable," Lopez said. "He keeps fighting his condition. I'm glad every day, because he's a good fighter. No matter what, he shows a smile all the time. That's big for me."

With Lopez 800 miles away in Biloxi and often bouncing around different towns in the Southern League, the two see each other the most through iPhone's FaceTime feature.

"I'm always in FaceTime," Lopez said. "I try to see him every day. I try to see that smile."

Lopez is popular in the Shuckers' clubhouse and manager Carlos Subero admires how he has put together an outstanding 2015 season despite dealing with the uncertainty of his son's health.

### **Popular player**

"He's a great kid with good character," Subero said of Lopez. "He's a kid that's very well liked. He's been able to put his off-the-field stuff off the field and concentrate. He's definitely enjoying a great season."

Lopez entered the season ranked by Baseball America as the No. 15 prospect in the Brewers' system. He has likely helped his stock with an 8-4 record and a 2.70 ERA in 17 starts this season.

"He's been able to become a pitcher and recognize what pitches to throw and when to do it, instead of just throwing those pitches he's got," Subero said. "He knows when to do it and against who. He's following better sequences."

The Brewers have afforded Lopez whatever time he has needed away from baseball to be there for his son. Last season, when he was a member of the Class-A Brevard County Manatees, a golf tournament was held in Florida as a fundraiser to help Lopez with the overwhelming expenses.

“I’m glad they helped me a lot and support just not me, but my son,” he said. “I really appreciate it.”

UPDATE: Mikael Lopez left the hospital in March 2016 and saw his dad pitch for the first time.