

BY MICHAEL O'KEEFFE

Two moms & a pitcher beat odds

JOE VALENTINE HASN'T POSTED the kind of stats that make baseball fans sit up and take notice — he has a 2-4 career major league record with a 6.70 ERA and four saves — but the pitcher from Long Island is most definitely a hero for a growing number of families.

Valentine was raised by two lesbians and is the only professional athlete who has openly discussed growing up in a gay household. He spoke publicly for the first time about his childhood yesterday at a fundraiser in Philadelphia for Mountain Meadow, a non-profit that runs a summer camp near Vineland, N.J., for the children of gay parents.

"He has taken a great step in talking about his family and he's been a great role model for our youth," says Mountain Meadow executive director Carolyn Thompson, whose camp will name one of its playing fields after Valentine. "It's important to have role models, someone who came from a family like yours. Joe is a good guy. He wants to do something for the kids."

The sports world has never been at ease with homosexuality, and anti-gay slurs are as common in locker rooms as smelly socks. But the 26-year-old pitcher, who is heterosexual, says he has never felt uneasy about his family, and he describes his childhood as "normal."

"I never felt different from other kids," says Valentine, who played in the Reds organization last year, but signed a minor-league contract this winter with the Houston Astros. "It's just the situation I grew up in."

Valentine's father has never been a part of his life. His biological mother, Deb Valentine, has been the life partner of a woman named Doreen Price for more than 30 years.

Price, an outstanding softball player, gets a lot of the credit for instilling Valentine with his love of the game.

Valentine's two moms were regulars at his games at Deer Park High School, and their North Babylon home was a team hang-out. Deb and Doreen followed Joe down south when he played ball at Jefferson Davis Community College in Brewton, Ala., and befriended his teammates there.

His parents' sexuality has never been an issue, Valentine says.

"Of course, I've heard stuff in locker rooms, but it never really offended me," Valentine says. "You can't argue with people who don't like gays. That's just the way they grew up."

More and more children are growing up in non-traditional households, and Valentine says kids who are uneasy with their gay parents need to look at the bigger picture. "For some people, it's going to be tough," he says. "Not everyone will accept you. But if you're being loved and treated the way a kid should be treated, you can't ask for anything more than that."

The Score
hears...