

Jim Morris, “The Rookie”



Imagine growing up as a nomadic, lonely kid with your parents fighting and struggling to make ends meet. In the midst of all this misery, you have a dream to escape and make something of your life, perhaps becoming a baseball player—a major league baseball player.

Jim Morris couldn't get away from home soon enough and signed a pro baseball contract with the Milwaukee Brewers. After a series of injuries, he retired from minor league baseball at the age of 24, got married, got his college degree at the age of 29, and raised a family. He probably worked every low paying job there was trying to make ends meet. Eventually he became a high school science teacher and a baseball coach in the small Texas town of Big Lake.

One day Morris was lecturing his demoralized high school baseball team about pursuing their dreams and about becoming winners. A bet was born: If his high school team won the District Championship, something they had never done, then he would try out for a major league baseball team. Miraculously, they small town team came from behind and beat the best team in the area to win the District Championship. Morris then went to an open tryout, where, after changing his daughter's diaper, he went out and threw 12 consecutive pitches at 98 mph to the amazement of scouts in attendance. After some heated discussion with his family, Morris signed a pro contract to play baseball at the age of 35.

Over the next three months, Morris got his body in shape and started playing baseball with kids 10 to 18 years younger. He was suddenly in Double-A, higher and closer to the big leagues than he was when he quit 11 years before. His arm was holding up too. Then he got called up to Triple A and agents and Hollywood came calling. On Sept. 17, 1999, Morris, age 35, was called up to the big leagues by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. Morris then proceeded to strike out Royce Clayton with a 98 mph fastball in his first big league appearance. That night the whole country was talking about this 35 year old high school science teacher who made a bet with his high school kids that led to a tryout and eventually to the big leagues.

Five days later, Morris's life story rights had been purchased by Disney and “The Rookie” went into production, starring Dennis Quaid. Morris not only served as a consultant to the film, but he also co-authored a book, *The Oldest Rookie*, which was published in 2001. *The Rookie* has been rated one of the greatest baseball movies ever and it won the first annual ESPY for Best Sports Film of the Year. Morris' story has become an inspiration to anyone interested in living their dreams.