

01/23/2017 - Yordano Ventura's heart was as big as his smile, as evidenced by his work with charities

Fox 4 News

BY DAVE D'MARKO, UPDATED AT 10:51PM, JANUARY 23, 2017

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- There's been a lot of talk about Yordano Ventura's big smile since his tragic loss this weekend in a car accident in the Dominican Republic. But many Royals fans may not realize the pitcher known as "Ace" had just as big of a heart.

"I am thankful to be here. We are very happy to be a part of the donation to renovate the field," Ventura said in Spanish in a video released on Twitter by Royals Charities on Monday.

The video was taken in the Dominican Republic earlier this month, less than two hours from the spot where he died in a car crash over the weekend.

Ventura was helping Royals Charities break ground on their first ever international baseball field.

Royals V.P. Of Community Relations Ben Akin joined Ventura on the trip to his native country. He couldn't understand most of what Ventura was saying, but he could see his enthusiasm as he took selfies and signed autographs for the nearly 300 children in attendance.

"You could really tell that they looked up to him, and he didn't seem to be bothered by it at all, he was really interested in sitting there and talking to him and just really wanted to be a part of it," Ventura said.

Ventura also oversaw charity drives here in the Metro. He took part in signings at Gloves For Kids events and for the past three years served as Baseball Tomorrow Fund Ambassador for Royals equipment drives.

DeJohn Bailey was next to Ventura on the field last season when the Royals presented his Della Lamb team with \$5,000 to buy new baseball equipment.

"He didn't just look over it and say it was just another thing. I'm happy that he stopped what he was doing and actually helped us," Bailey said.

Fans continue to leave messages to their beloved "Ace" outside the stadium where he helped bring Kansas City its first World Series title in 30 years.

Meanwhile, the video taken outside what will one day be a baseball field in the Dominican Republic, now serves as his final chance to say "Gracias."

"Thank you to the Royals Charities," Ventura said in his rapidly-improving English.

Royals Charities are still finalizing plans to hold a benefit in Ventura's honor and hope to have more information on that as early as Fan Fest this weekend.