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SPORTS

Former East St. Louis star pitcher dies at 79

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Former East St. Louis High School star pitcher Don Choate, a right-hander who was signed by the St. Louis Cardinals and pitched one season with the San Francisco Giants, died Sunday in Fairview Heights after a battle with cancer.

Choate, who graduated from East Side in 1956, was 79.

One of Choate's teammates with the Flyers was another pitcher, Tom McGraw.

"He was similar to (Bob) Gibson," said McGraw, 79, who lives in Springfield, Mo. "He was no one to mess with. He was a hard-nosed competitor. He was a great friend."

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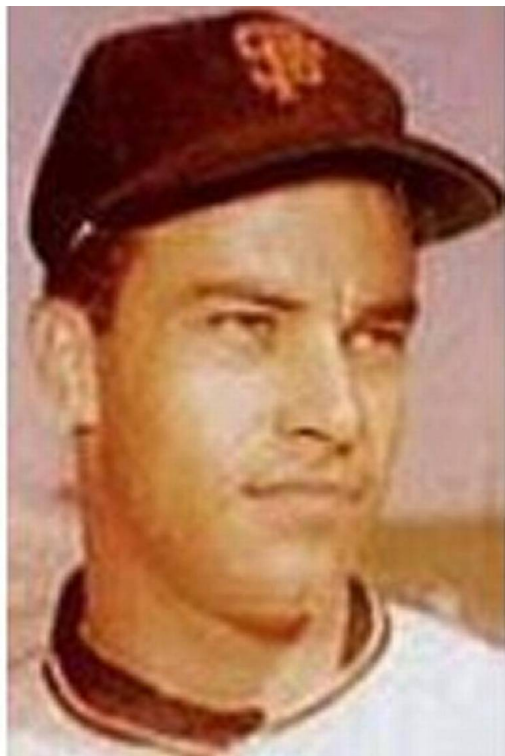
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Baseball Reference photo



Choate, who was born in Potosi, Mo., helped East St. Louis finish 22-1 in his senior year, posting a 0.33 ERA for coach Louis "Pick" Dehner. The Cardinals signed him after the season ended, but traded him to the Giants with pitcher Sam Jones for third baseman/outfielder Ray Jablonski and first baseman Bill White on March 25, 1959. White became a five-time All-Star in St. Louis.

McGraw said the Cardinals wanted to trade Gibson instead of Choate, but the Giants instead insisted on Choate. Thus, Gibson, a Hall of Famer, never was in the same rotation with another Hall of Famer, Juan Marichal, in San Francisco. Gibson (251) and Marichal (243) combined for 494 big-league victories.

Choate reached the major leagues in 1960 and was 0-0 with a 2.25 ERA in four games, all in relief, with the

Giants. He pitched just eight innings.

Choate's career was ended by an arm injury suffered when he was attempting to move a cabinet during spring training 1961. He eventually became a firefighter in East St. Louis. He retired in 1998 after a 27-year career.

McGraw, meanwhile, signed with the Chicago White Sox in 1956, but was out of baseball by 1957.

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