

Longtime Reds scout, cross-checker Jeff Barton dead at 50



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(Photo: Provided/Cincinnati Reds)

During a conversation last month, longtime Reds scout and cross-checker Jeff Barton was looking forward to many things — the Reds' No. 2 pick next June, the possible election of Trevor Hoffman to the Hall of Fame and joining his father in winning the Scout of the Year Award for the West Region, honoring a lifetime of scouting achievement.

Barton, though, died on Thursday at age 50 after battling cancer.

"Jeff was a part of the Reds' family for more than 26 years and touched not only our organization but also the baseball scouting fraternity," the Reds said in a statement released on Friday. "He made countless contributions to the success of the Reds franchise and was instrumental in the signing of many former and current Reds players. At December's upcoming Winter Meetings in Nashville, Jeff will be recognized as Scout of the Year for the West Region. Our thoughts and prayers are with wife Karen and daughters Allison, Makenna and Avery."

Barton's grandfather, Larry Barton Sr., scouted for the Reds, as did his father, Larry Barton Jr., who signed Eric Davis.

"You could say I was born into it," Barton told The Enquirer last month.

All three worked for the Reds for years, and the older Bartons were part of building the Big Red Machine and the 1990 Reds.

Larry Barton Jr. won the Scout of the Year Award for the West Region in 2004.

When Jeff Barton scouted University of Arizona shortstop Trevor Hoffman, he saw a player that couldn't hit and couldn't run — but could he ever throw.

"He had the best arm I'd ever seen," Barton recalled more than 25 years later. "When you see someone with those kinds of tools, you don't go by them. Those are the tools that impact the game."

Barton was entering his first draft as a scout for the Reds — a position both his father and grandfather had held before him — but he knew Hoffman had a chance to be a big-leaguer, but as a pitcher.

Barton was right. Hoffman finished his career as the game's all-time saves leader (although he has since been surpassed by Mariano Rivera) and [is up for election to the Hall of Fame this December \(/story/sports/mlb/reds/2015/11/09/ken-griffey-jr-hall-fame-ballot/75467098/\)](#).

Although Hoffman never played for the Reds — he was taken by the Marlins in the expansion draft — Barton used his vision to see something similar in a recent center field prospect from Cal State Fullerton.

Unlike Hoffman, Michael Lorenzen could run and hit, but his right arm was just as special. While Lorenzen had a shot to be a big leaguer as a position player, pitching seemed to be a quicker route.

"You try to have an imagination and see where a kid's tools best fit him," Barton said. "I know he wanted to play outfield, but he had the type of arm where he could progress real quick. And now he's learning in the big leagues, which is a tough thing to do."

Scouting is at times a lonely pursuit, but it also puts the scout as part of a bigger team. As a cross-checker, Barton oversaw several scouts in the west for the Reds. A team's scouts are the backbone of an organization, and with the Reds getting the No. 2 pick in next June's draft, Barton was looking forward to once again having a large say in the Reds' future.

As a cross checker, Barton had an influence on the Reds taking not just Hoffman and Lorenzen, but also Joey Votto, Robert Stephenson, Jon Moscot, Tony Cingrani, Justin Turner, Mike Leake and Brad Boxberger.

"Nobody represents the way scouts work more than Jeff does," Terry Reynolds, the Reds' senior director of professional scouting, said last month. "He's been nose-to-the-grindstone, not looking for any glory or reward. He loves what he does, he's a lifetime baseball guy, grew up in a baseball family, and certainly has gotten this award for a reason, because he deserves it."

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