

SPORTS > HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Bob Bailey, 'the Babe Ruth of Long Beach' who played for the Dodgers in 17 MLB seasons, dies at 75



Bob Bailey was signed to the Pittsburgh Pirates after he graduated from Wilson High School. Bailey played for the Pirates from 1962-66 and was named after Bob Lemon, a friend of his father's. ///ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: lbr.kirkorian.0316 D 3/13/15 D SAM GANGWER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER D

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1 COMMENT

Bob Bailey is one of the most accomplished baseball players to ever come out of Long Beach. The Wilson High alum played 17 years of Major League Baseball, and earned a world championship ring with the 1976 Cincinnati Reds alongside Johnny Bench, Pete Rose and Joe Morgan.

Bailey died Tuesday in Las Vegas at the age of 75.

"I'm stunned," said Jeff Severson, a Wilson High and NFL alum who has been friends with Bailey since they played softball together as kids. "Bob was a Long Beach superstar."

Severson said Bailey had plans to play in an upcoming fundraising golf tournament full of former Bruins.

"All I remember about those days was running over the fence to retrieve the ball that Bob hit," Severson said. "He was the Babe Ruth of Long Beach."

Bailey attended Naples Elementary and Rogers Middle School where he met his wife, Karen. He played baseball and football at Wilson where he was the 1961 CIF Baseball Player of the Year. The Pittsburgh Pirates signed Bailey to a deal that came with a \$175,000 signing bonus. The amateur draft wasn't instituted until 1965, so Bailey was picked to sign with the Pirates, and he was one of the last "bonus baby" players in the MLB.

After struggling in the minors for a season, Bailey was called up in September of his second year out of high school. He was labeled a bust by the media, but Bailey hit .281 with 11 home runs and 52 RBIs in his second season with the Pirates.

Bailey was traded to the Dodgers for Maury Wills in 1966. He also played for the Montreal Expos, Cincinnati Reds and Boston Red Sox. Bailey posted a .257 batting average with 189 home runs and 773 Runs batted in in 1,931 games played over his 17-year career. He was with the Red Sox for the famous Carlton Fisk and Bucky Dent games, and coached in the minor leagues with the Expos organization after retiring in 1978.

"He was a loyal guy who was easy to get along with," said Bailey's childhood friend, Mike Economou.

Bailey is a member of the Long Beach Century Club Hall of Fame, and was the Century Club Athlete of the Year in 1976. He and his wife of 55 years, Karen, lived in Las Vegas for the past few years where he played golf about three or four times a week, according to Economou.

"He never wore his (athletic achievements) on his sleeve," Severson said. "He was just a regular guy who would always finding a way to help other people. I'll always cherish the baseball and football stories we shared while playing golf together."

One of Bailey's most notorious stories was about the day he hit a three-run home run for the Reds. Back then, when players were removed from the game, they would routinely return to the team hotel before the game was over. Bailey was replaced after his home run, and went to the hotel where he waited for his teammates at the bar. While watching the game on TV, he told the bartender that he had hit a three-run home run earlier in the game. The bartender scoffed, and told Bailey he needed another drink.

In 2014, Doug Krikorian wrote a column about Bailey for the Orange County Register. In it, Bailey told Krikorian about his life after baseball.

"I don't think I've ever been happier in my life than I am right now," Bailey said. "And, remember, I was young once."

Bailey is survived by his wife, Karen; son Robert Jr.; daughters Stephanie and Caroline; 18 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. Services are to be announced.

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