

BASEBALL

Tony Phillips, Whose Play Sealed 1989 World Series, Dies at 56

By DANIEL E. SLOTNIK FEB. 19, 2016

Tony Phillips, a veteran infielder and outfielder whose final defensive play sealed the Oakland Athletics' sweep of the San Francisco Giants in 1989 in a World Series that was interrupted for 11 days by a powerful earthquake, died on Wednesday in Scottsdale, Ariz. He was 56.

The cause was apparently a heart attack, The San Francisco Chronicle reported.

In an 18-year major league career, Phillips spent half of it with the A's and experienced World Series glory with them when he scooped up a ground ball hit by Brett Butler and tossed it to pitcher Dennis Eckersley at first base to complete a four-game sweep of the Giants — the first Series sweep since the Cincinnati Reds swept the Yankees in 1976.

It also ended one of the most momentous World Series in history. Just before the third game, a powerful earthquake struck California, delaying the Series for 11 days, the longest delay in any World Series, and overshadowing the baseball that had been played.

“Lest anyone forget, Dennis Eckersley pitched the ball, Matt Williams hit it, Tony Phillips fielded it and Mark McGwire caught it for the last out of the second game of the World Series,” Murray Chass wrote in The New York Times in 1989.

The next season Phillips left the Athletics for the Detroit Tigers. He also played for the Mets, the Tigers, the Angels, the White Sox and the Toronto Blue Jays. He returned to Oakland for his final season, in 1999, and retired with a career .266 batting average — he was a switch hitter — 160 home runs and 819 R.B.I. in 2,161 games.

Keith Anthony Phillips was born on April 25, 1959, in Atlanta. He attended the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell before he was drafted by the Montreal Expos in 1978.

Phillips was arrested on a charge of buying a small quantity of cocaine in 1997 and pleaded guilty to one count of felony cocaine possession.

Information about survivors was not immediately available.

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