

Ollie Brown, baseball's 'Original Padre,' dies at 71

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By **GARY KLEIN**

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**O**llie Brown, who played 13 years in the major leagues and was known as the "Original Padre" after the San Diego team claimed him with their first pick in the 1968 expansion draft, has died at his home in Buena Park. He was 71.

Brown, who grew up in Long Beach, died last month from complications of mesothelioma, his brother Willie Brown said.

Brown was the middle child in a trio of brothers who all played professional sports. His older brother, Willie, played football and baseball at USC and three seasons in the NFL. He later coached at USC and in the NFL. His younger brother, Oscar, played baseball at USC and spent five seasons in the major leagues with the Atlanta Braves.

During his baseball career — which included stints with six teams — Ollie Brown batted .265 with 102 home runs and drove in 454 runs. He also was known for his strong throwing arm.

Brown broke into the major leagues in 1965 with the San Francisco Giants, and in 1968 became the first player chosen by the San Diego Padres in the expansion draft. He batted .292 with a career-best 23 homers and 89 RBIs for the Padres in 1970.

"As our franchise's first pick in the expansion draft, Ollie truly was the 'original Padre,' a beloved member of the Padres family," the team said in a statement Friday.

Chris Cannizzaro, a longtime major league catcher who played for the Padres from 1969 to 1971, said Brown was a valuable teammate.

"He was one of the better people I played baseball with," Cannizzaro said during a phone interview Friday. "He was quiet, did his job, played hard and he was just a good person."

Cannizzaro was a teammate of Hall of Fame outfielder Roberto Clemente with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1968. "Next to Clemente," Cannizzaro said, "Ollie had the second-best arm I have ever seen in a

right fielder."

Ollie Lee Brown was born on Feb. 11, 1944, in Tuscaloosa, Ala. His parents took the family west shortly after he was born, settling in Long Beach.

"Our mom and dad came out to California from Alabama to give us an opportunity," said Willie Brown, 73, who works as an academic monitor and life-skills mentor at USC. "We spent all of our time out at the playground.

"Ollie was one of the good guys."

Ollie Brown's upbringing in California shaped his pro baseball career.

He went to Long Beach Polytechnic High School, and signed as a teen with the San Francisco Giants in 1962; he was assigned to a minor league team in Salem, Va., in the Appalachian Rookie League. During a 2013 appearance at USC, Brown told students that on a road trip in West Virginia, he and other African American players were informed by their manager that they would not be allowed to stay in the team hotel but would be taken to the home of an African American family.

"We were raised in Long Beach," Willie Brown said. "We had not been around segregation. He was not used to being treated that way."

When the team returned to Salem, Ollie Brown told his manager to tell the Giants to move him to another team and location or he would quit baseball.

He was sent to an affiliate in Decatur, Ill., and later flourished for Fresno in the California League, where he hit 40 home runs. Some of the blasts were so prodigious they earned him the nickname "Downtown."

"I hit a lot of balls to center field," he told MLB.com in 2012. "And the way the ballpark was situated, when you did hit it over the fence, the ball was going the direction of downtown.

"One day, after I hit a home run, the radio announcer said the ball was going downtown. That's how I got my nickname."

Brown made his major league debut with the Giants in 1965 and played on teams that featured Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Bobby Bonds and Juan Marichal.

The Padres tabbed him with the first pick in the expansion draft in 1968, when four teams were added to Major League Baseball.

"I figured that once the Giants might put me on the expansion list, thought I might have a good chance of getting picked," Brown told MLB.com. "But I had no idea I would be the first one picked. It came at a good time in my career because I got the chance to play on an everyday basis."

Brown played just over three seasons for the Padres before he was traded to the Oakland Athletics during the 1972 season. He later played for the Milwaukee Brewers and Houston Astros before finishing his career with the Philadelphia Phillies.

He is survived by his brothers; his wife, Sandra; daughter Danielle; and five grandchildren.

*[gary.klein@latimes.com](mailto:gary.klein@latimes.com)*

**Twitter:** *[@latimesklein](https://twitter.com/latimesklein)*

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