

Sports

Former major-leaguer Chico Fernandez dies at 84

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Humberto "Chico" Fernandez, a former major league shortstop who was inducted into the Cuban Baseball Hall of Fame, died Saturday in Sunrise after complications from a past stroke. He was 84.

Fernandez, who lived in Florida since 1998 and at his current home in Sunrise since 1999, was inducted in 1997.

In his eight seasons in the major leagues (1956-63), Fernandez played for the Brooklyn Dodgers, **Philadelphia Phillies**, **Detroit Tigers** and **New York Mets**. He was a career .240 hitter with 40 home runs, but he had a 20-homer season with Detroit in 1962. The Detroit Free Press called him the first regular starting Latino player for the Tigers.

Perhaps his most famous major league moment came in 1961, when he stole home in the ninth inning at Yankee Stadium.

Fernandez and his wife, Lynne, moved to Florida to be near his baseball friends, and he attended old-timers baseball events in retirement. One summer — Lynne could not recall which — he coached an underprivileged baseball team in Miami.

"He loved Florida," Lynne said on the phone Monday. "The weather — it's like Cuba. It's the closest he could get to Cuba."

Fernandez grew up in a poor family in Havana before defecting to the United States in 1961.

In Lou Hernandez's 2003 book "Memories of Winter Ball," Fernandez recalled playing in Cuba during the revolution, including flyovers during games while the military jets conducted exercises. He said in the book that he left after the 1961 winter season, planning to return, until his parents told him not to come back.

"He always said he left without saying goodbye," Lynne said. Before he passed, they had talked about going

to Havana one more time.

Fernandez picked up the nickname Chico in his playing days, and it stuck. He introduced himself as Chico, and when he and Lynne first met, in Detroit, she thought it was his real name. And even in his old age, he was never shy about reliving his playing days.

"He talked about baseball to anybody that called, anyone that visited. We've got scrapbooks of each different team," Lynne said.

According to the Free Press, Hernandez was survived by his wife, Lynne, two daughters, two step-daughters, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

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