



Obituary

Born: Friday, November 12, 1926

Died: Tuesday, February 10, 2015

DON JOHNSON Nov. 12, 1926
– Feb. 10, 2015 Don Johnson, one of the most promising baseball pitchers to ever come out of the Rose City, died on February 10 at Good Samaritan Hospital at the age of 88. Don was born in Portland on November 12, 1926, the only child of Swedish immigrants, Gus and Judith (Burklund) Johnson. He attended Kennedy Elementary School and Jefferson High School. At Jeff, he excelled as a pitcher on Lindsay Campbell's baseball team and on the American Legion summer team. He was tall and strong and had a blazing fast ball. He pitched six no-hitters, which quickly attracted the attention of major league scouts. Joe Devine, a New York Yankee scout, won the competition, and in 1943 Don signed a contract for \$10,000. His professional baseball career started with the Kansas City Blues of the American Association and Newark Bears of the International League, but it was interrupted by World War II. While serving two years in the Army, he helped the Fort Lewis Warriors (a talented bunch of major league ballplayers) go undefeated in 46 games. In 1947, he went to spring training with the Yankees and made the team. At the age of 20, Don made his major league debut against the Philadelphia Athletics, going the distance in a 10-inning victory, 3-2. In his second start, he pitched another complete game, topping the Washington Senators, 3-1. After his first loss to the Chicago White Sox, one of the coaches, Charlie Dressen, tried to get Don to lower his "Bob Feller" high leg kick. He was reluctant to do so since it upset his pitching rhythm and momentum. Consequently, his pitching starts were cut back, and he finished the season with a 4-3 record. Nevertheless, he was still a proud member of an outstanding Yankee team that won the American League pennant and beat the Brooklyn Dodgers to win the World Series, a team that featured Joe Dimaggio, Vic Raschi, Allie Reynolds, Phil Rizzuto, and Don's roommate, another rookie by the name of Yogi Berra.

Later, Don was sold to the Senators but wound up in Toronto of the International League where he won 15 games and led the league with a 2.67 ERA and 156 strikeouts. Suddenly, he was back in the big league with the Chicago White Sox who used him as a starter and reliever; he recorded three shutouts and seven saves. He finished the season with an 8-7 record, but, eventually, found himself back in Toronto where he posted consecutive winning seasons, going 15-9 in 1956 and 17-7 in 1957 and was named the league's Most Valuable Player. He also pitched for Baltimore and St. Louis and finished his major league career with the San Francisco Giants. The road to glory was not always smooth. Perhaps it was because he experienced so much success so soon. Life was more difficult for him beyond the diamond, especially when his playing days as a

Service Summary

Memorial Gathering

6:30 PM Fri Feb 27, 2015

McMenamins Kennedy School

5736 NE 33rd Ave.

Portland, Oregon 97211

professional ballplayer were over. Some adversity he brought upon himself. His marriage to Betty Duncan, his high school sweetheart and mother of his three children, ended in divorce. Sometimes fate intervened. One night while working as a taxi driver for Broadway Cab, he was robbed, shot and almost died. But Don continued to live the dream. Baseball was an inescapable part of his life. He was one of the last three survivors from that great 1947 Yankee World Series championship team, along with Yogi Berra and Bobby Brown. In 2010, Don was invited back to the Bronx to be honored at an Old-Timers Day at the new Yankee Stadium. Yogi was on the disabled list and couldn't make it to the celebration, but Don received a congratulatory phone call from his old friend, one "rookie" roommate cheering on the other. And, once again, as Don walked out on the field in his old Yankee uniform, he heard the same enthusiastic cheers he heard from the Yankee fans in '47. He was also featured in an article in the New York Times. On the home front, Don was inducted into the Portland Interscholastic League Athletic Hall of Fame in 2006. More recently, on July 12, 2013, Don was honored where he grew up, at the old Kennedy School (now a popular McMenamin's restoration) with an evening that featured an interview and stories with Don, individual and team photos projected on a big screen and an opportunity for parents and kids to meet the star of the show and get his autograph. Don will be honored once more at Kennedy School (5736 NE 33 Ave, Portland), this time for a Memorial Gathering on Friday evening, February 27 from 6:30-8 pm. All are welcome! He is survived by his current wife Karen Morgan-Johnson, sons Steve (Oh Nim) and Don Jr., daughter Lori Grennan, grandson Keith Grennan (Kristi) and great granddaughter Kallie. Donations may be made to an animal shelter of your choice.