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Former Cub Milt Pappas dies at age 76



1972: Milt Pappas. Pappas won 17 games for the second consecutive season that included a no-hitter against the Padres. (Chicago Tribune archive photo)

By **Chicago Tribune staff** • **Contact Reporter**

APRIL 19, 2016, 8:47 PM

Milt Pappas, the former [Cubs](#) pitcher who famously came one pitch from a perfect game, died Tuesday, Beecher police have confirmed.

Pappas was 76.

Pitching for the Cubs on Sept. 2, 1972, Pappas, then 33, had a perfect game against the [San Diego Padres](#) at [Wrigley Field](#). With two outs in the ninth, pinch-hitter Larry Stahl worked the count to 3-2 before plate umpire Bruce Froemming called a close pitch a ball.

Pappas then began yelling obscenities from the mound, half of them in Greek.

Pappas got the next batter out, securing a no-hitter.

"To this day, I just don't understand it," Pappas said in 2009.

Pappas, who was born in Detroit in 1939, pitched in the majors from 1957 to 1973, the last four years for the Cubs.

Cubs executive chairman [Tom Ricketts](#) said in a statement Tuesday the organization was sad to learn of Pappas' death and that "we will always consider him part of the Chicago Cubs family."

Pappas was seen often at Wrigley Field and stayed connected to the franchise at the Cubs Convention and other events.

"Milt will forever be remembered for one of the most dramatic pitching performances in team history as he delivered a no-hitter that neared perfection in 1972," Ricketts said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with his friends, relatives and fans as we mourn this loss."

Pappas was preceded in death by his wife, Carole, whose body was found inside her car in a Wheaton pond in 1987, after she had been missing for five years.

Her death was ruled accidental and an autopsy confirmed she had drowned after driving her car into the water. She had gone missing in September 1982 after she left the family's home to do some shopping.

Milt Pappas said he had no idea why his wife ended up in the body of water less than a mile from the family's home in Wheaton.

"That's a question that may never be answered," Milt Pappas told the Tribune in 1987. "Why she went that way; why nobody saw a car fly through the air into the pond."

Pappas pitched in 520 games with the [Orioles](#), [Reds](#), [Braves](#) and Cubs during his career, including 465 starts. He was 209-164 and struck out 1,728 and had a 3.40 ERA in 3,186 innings. Pappas also delivered 43 shutouts during his career.

The starting pitcher for the [American League](#) in the 1965 [All-Star game](#), Pappas gave up first-inning home runs to Willie Mays and [Joe Torre](#). After that season, Pappas was one of three players the Orioles traded for Hall of Famer Frank Robinson, who won the MVP and [Triple Crown](#) and led Baltimore to the World Series title in 1966.

Aside from being known for his near-perfect game with the Cubs, Pappas was remembered for one of the 298 home runs he allowed -- Roger Maris' 59th in 1961, when Maris surpassed Babe Ruth's then-record 60 home runs by one.

Pappas said in 1998 that he told Commissioner Ford Frick he threw nothing but fastballs to Maris because he was upset that baseball was going to put an asterisk next to Maris' record if he didn't break Ruth's record in 154 games.

Pappas also hit some during his career, 20 to be exact, including four in 1962 while with the Orioles. He also drove in 67 runs in 17 seasons.

In 1971 while with the Cubs, Pappas turned in the 10th [National League](#) perfect inning by striking out three Phillies on nine pitches in the fourth inning of a 6-1 loss on Sept. 24.

Pappas was the first 200-game winner to never win 20 games in a season. Pappas' no-hitter in 1972 was the only one the Cubs were involved with – for or against – until [Carlos Zambrano](#) threw one for them in September 2008.

Pappas, a three-time All-Star, moved to Beecher in 1990 and married his second wife, Judi Bloome. In 2013, he was seriously injured in a one-car crash in Kankakee County after he hit a utility pole.

He is survived by his wife, Judi, and children Steve from his first marriage and Alexandria from his second marriage. A daughter, Michelle, from his first marriage, died last year.

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