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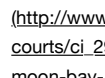
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Jim Davenport, former Giants third baseman, dies

By Daniel Brown | dbrown@mercurynews.com (<mailto:dbrown@mercurynews.com>)

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REDWOOD CITY -- Jim Davenport, the slick-fielding third baseman who broke in with the original San Francisco Giants and became a fixture in the organization for a half-century, died Thursday night in Redwood City. He was 82.

Though Davenport was overshadowed during his playing days by Hall of Fame teammates such as Willie Mays, Willie McCovey and Orlando Cepeda, the soft-spoken Alabaman was a steady contributor for the powerhouse Giants teams of the early 1960s.

"He did so many things that could help you win a game," former teammate Felipe Alou recalled Friday. "He was really an incredible person."



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Infielder Jim Davenport played for the San Francisco Giants from 1958-70. (San Francisco Giants)

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Davenport spent his entire 13-year playing career with the Giants and later worked in various roles including scout, coach, minor league instructor, big league manager. He served last season -- his 51st in the organization -- as a special assistant for player development.

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Jim Davenport won a Gold Glove in 1962 as the Giants third baseman. (Courtesy of Topps)

"He loved talking about young players," manager Bruce Bochy said

Friday. "You were honored when Jim Davenport wanted to come by your office and talk to you."

The team announced the cause of death as heart failure.

"The passing of Jim Davenport brings great sadness to our organization," Larry Baer, Giants president and chief executive officer said in a statement. "Jim had a wonderful spirit and was a great Giant. We will always remember Davvy. We express our deepest condolences to his family and will have them in our thoughts and prayers."

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Davenport played 1,501 games for the Giants from 1958-70. The only men to play more games in a San Francisco uniform are McCovey (2,256), Mays (2,095) and Barry Bonds (1,976).

A lifetime .258 hitter with 77 career home runs, Davenport is best remembered for his glove. He led National League third basemen in fielding percentage three consecutive times starting in 1959 and won the Gold Glove for defensive excellence in 1962.

"As a left fielder, you know when you have a good third baseman," Alou said. "There were too many line drives, hard-hit balls between third and shortstop (or) hitters over the bag, and I don't know how he got to them. ... It was a pleasure to play with a guy like that."

Davenport was one of three rookies to crack the 1958 opening day lineup when the team played its first game in San Francisco after arriving from New York.

The right-handed batter took the Giants' first at-bat on the West Coast, striking out against Don Drysdale of the Los Angeles Dodgers in the bottom of the first inning at Seals Stadium on April 15, 1958.

Things got better from there. Davenport went on to lead the N.L. in sacrifice hits in '58 and was named to the all-rookie team by The Sporting News.



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His finest overall season was in 1962 when he batted .297 with 14 home runs, 58 RBIs and 83 runs and made the All-Star team for the only time in his career.

Former San Francisco Giants player Jim Davenport is shown before a baseball game between the San Francisco Giants and the Pittsburgh Pirates in San Francisco, Friday, April 13, 2012. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu) (Jeff Chiu)

He capped that '62 season by nudging San Francisco into the World Series. In the finale of a three-game N.L. playoff against the Dodgers, Davenport drew a bases-loaded walk off Stan Williams to force home Alou with the go-ahead run in the ninth inning. San Francisco held on to win 6-4, capturing its first N.L. pennant.

Davenport still ranks among San Francisco's all-time leaders in hits (eighth) and triples (tied with Will Clark for seventh). He was voted by the fans as the third baseman on the Giants' 25th Anniversary Dream Team in 1982 and remains regarded as one of the best defensive infielders in team history.

Davenport also has a claim to infamy in the organization, serving as the manager for the 1985 team that lost 100 games for the only time in franchise history.

James Houston Davenport, born Aug. 17, 1933 in Siuria, Alabama, grew up dreaming of being a professional football player. He attended the University of Southern Mississippi on a football scholarship and earned a spot in the school's athletic Hall of Fame as a quarterback.

But he realized baseball was his true calling and signed as an amateur free agent in 1955. Davenport spent most of the rest of his life in a Giants uniform. He had brief coaching stints over the years with the San Diego Padres, Philadelphia Phillies and Detroit Tigers but returned to the Giants for good in 1993.

Davenport met his wife, Betty, when he was a junior in high school. They moved to San Carlos in 1963 and raised five children: Randy, Cathy, Ken, Don and Gary.

Staff writer Andrew Baggarly contributed to this report from Scottsdale, Arizona. Follow Daniel Brown on Twitter at twitter.com/mercbrownie (<http://twitter.com/mercbrownie>)

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