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KCK native Ray Sadecki, standout major-league left-hander, dies at 73

BY BLAIR KERKHOFF - THE KANSAS CITY STAR

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Ray Sadecki won 20 games for the Cardinals' 1964 World Series champions. FILE PHOTO

Ray Sadecki, the Kansas City, Kan., native who won 135 games in his 18-year major-league pitching career — and the 1964 World Series opener — died Monday afternoon in Mesa, Ariz., from complications of blood cancer, according to his family.

Sadecki was 73.

He reached the majors as a 19-year-old lefty and started 26 games for the Cardinals in 1960. Sadecki enjoyed his best years in St. Louis and posted a 20-11 record in 1964, the season of the amazing Cardinals' charge.

St. Louis trailed the first-place Phillies by 6 1/2 games with 12 games remaining when the Cardinals started a rally that would earn them the National League pennant.

Sadecki got the ball in the World Series opening game, survived a three-run second inning by the Yankees and became the winning pitcher as the Cards won 9-5. Sadecki drove in a run with a single in the victory, which turned out to be the final World Series game for Yankees pitcher Whitey Ford. The Cards went on to a seventh-game triumph.

Sadecki was traded to the Giants in May 1966 for Orlando Cepeda, and later pitched for the Mets, Braves, Royals and Brewers. With the Mets, Sadecki appeared in his second World Series, in 1973, allowing one run in 4 2/3 relief innings over four games.

He was workhorse, pitching 2,500 1/3 innings over 563 appearances (328 as a starter, including 80 complete games and 20 shutouts) in a career that ended in 1977 without having spent a day on the disabled list.

His major-league record: 135-131, with 1,614 strikeouts and a 3.78 ERA.

Sadecki grew up on Polish Hill, attended St. Joseph's Polish Roman Catholic School and became a star athlete at Bishop Ward. He helped the school to an 18-0 record and state championship in 1958.

"He was our favorite son," said lifelong friend Fred Kamler of Lenexa. "And a great friend to grow up with."

The Catholic Charities of Kansas City and the Baseball Tomorrow Fund renovated a baseball field at 9th and Homer in Kansas City, Kan., in 2002 and renamed it Ray Sadecki Field.

After his playing days, Sadecki worked for an office supply company until 1990, when he was hired by the Cubs as a minor-league coach and roving instructor. He worked with Chicago for three years before spending one season as a roving instructor with the Giants.

In 2007, Sadecki was inducted into the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame. In an interview with The Star upon his induction, Sadecki reminisced about his career and keys to his longevity.

"I'm bullheaded, I admit that," he said. "But I'm just not of the era of pitch counts. I could not care less about radar guns. I would like to see these young pitchers pitch, build up their arm strength, get out of their own messes. I just don't think your arm will fall off. But I guess most folks don't feel that way now."

He was inducted into the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame in 2010.

The family will hold a private service.

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