

# Ex-Cub Bill Hands, 20-game winner in 1969, dies at 76



Former Cubs pitcher Bill Hands, shown in a 1968 photo. (AP)



By **Paul Sullivan**  
Chicago Tribune

MARCH 10, 2017, 10:35 AM | MESA, ARIZ.

**F**ormer pitcher Bill Hands, a 20-game winner for the 1969 Cubs, died Thursday in an Orlando, Fla., hospital after a brief illness. He was 76.

Hands won 111 games over 11 big-league seasons, including a 92-86 record with a 3.18 ERA in seven seasons with the Cubs.

Signed by the Giants as an amateur free agent in 1959, Hands, whose nickname was "Froggy," was part of the one of the best trades in Cubs history, coming over after the 1965 season with catcher Randy Hundley for outfielder Don Landrum and reliever Lindy McDaniel.

It was the Cubs' first trade after bringing in Leo Durocher to manage the perennial losers.

"We're looking to rebuild," Durocher said at the time. "And the only way to do that is with the young. Hundley is only 23 and Hands 25."

Hands and Hundley became part of a core of young Cubs who turned the franchise from a laughingstock into a contender in only a few seasons. They broke a million hearts in '69 but remain one of the most beloved teams in franchise history.

"At the end of the '66 season, when we'd just lost 103 ballgames, Leo took Bill Hands, Joe Niekro, Rich Nye, Kenny Holtzman and myself, and he told us, 'You five young guys will battle for four spots in the rotation starting in '67,'" Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins recalled Thursday.

Hands started and relieved in '67, when the Cubs won 87 games and started to turn things around. He went 16-10 in '68, establishing himself and setting the stage for '69.

"He was the third pitcher," Jenkins said. "I opened, Kenny was second and he was third. He was a hell of a pitcher. ... Froggy was a good teammate."

Jenkins said Hands was an "even-tempered guy" with a good sinking fastball and sharp slider who did his job and never complained about being underappreciated on a team full of stars. Unlike Jenkins, Hands wasn't much of a hitter — he struck out 14 times in a row from June 1 to July 11, 1968.

The next year he was part of one of the best rotations in baseball with Jenkins (21-15, 3.21 ERA) and the left-handed Holtzman (17-13, 3.59). The Cubs were in first place in mid-August before blowing a 9 1/2-game lead to the eventual champion Mets.

Hands won 18 games in 1970, but the Cubs couldn't win the division and eventually began to back up the truck. They dealt Hands and Joe Decker to the [Twins](#) after the '72 season for Dave LaRoche, and when Twins owner Calvin Griffith cut his pay by \$4,500, Hands asked for a trade in [spring training](#) of '73.

"You know I'm not a rebel," he said. "Never have been. But I'm not happy pitching for this club."

Hands retired in '75 and lived in Orient, N.Y., where he owned a gas station where locals congregated.

"The gas station was like the barber shop in 'Andy Griffith,'" Orient resident Carol Gillooly told the Suffolk Times. "Everybody would be trying to solve the problems of the world and talking about baseball."

Hands was modest about his major-league career and remained a Cubs fan, often wearing a Cubs cap at work. When he attended a Cubs game at Shea Stadium in 1985, equipment man Yosh Kawano wanted to bring Hands into the clubhouse to meet the players.

"No, don't do that," Hands replied. "These guys don't want to meet a ghost from the past."

Reminders of the ghosts of '69 haunted the Cubs for decades, but they finally won it all last year, ending a 107-year drought. Hands was ecstatic, his friend Bill Fish told the Suffolk Times.

"He stuck around long enough to see it," Fish said. "We were all happy about that."

That '69 team has lost Ernie Banks, [Ron Santo](#) and Jim Hickman in recent years. Jenkins said Hands will also be missed, though he was glad "Froggy" saw those ghosts of '69 finally put to rest.

[psullivan@chicagotribune.com](mailto:psullivan@chicagotribune.com)

*Twitter @PWSullivan*

Copyright © 2017, Chicago Tribune

A version of this article appeared in print on March 10, 2017, in the Sports section of the Chicago Tribune with the headline "Hands gave '60s Cubs reliable arm in rotation - 'Froggy' won 20 games as No. 3 starter in '69" — Today's paper | [Subscribe](#)

**This article is related to:** [Minnesota Twins](#), [Ron Santo](#), [Spring Training](#)