

# Former Tigers pitcher Jeff Robinson, 52, dies

Tony Paul, The Detroit News 6:54 p.m. EDT October 27, 2014



(Photo: Detroit News Photo Archive)

Jeff Robinson, a promising pitching prospect in the early 1980s who went on to pitch in nearly 100 games for the Tigers, passed away Sunday afternoon after a seven-week battle with undisclosed health issues. He was 52.

Mike Henneman, Robinson's roommate in the minors and major leagues, confirmed his death to The News. Henneman flew from Texas to see Robinson in Kansas last week, knowing the prognosis was grim.

Robinson died at a hospice near home in Overland Park, Kansas, surrounded by his wife, Meredith, family and friends. He also is survived by twin sons who play baseball at Neosho County Community College, and a daughter.

Robinson was a third-round pick by the Tigers in 1983 out of Azusa Pacific University and made his major-league debut in 1987, tossing seven innings of one-run ball to beat the White Sox.

He helped the Tigers to an American League East championship, and appeared in one game in that year's American League Championship Series against the Twins, Game 5, and would go on to make 97 appearances in all for Detroit over four years, almost exclusively as a starter.

Tall, at 6-foot-6, the right-hander's best season in Detroit, by far, was 1988, when, in 24 games (23 starts) he was 13-6 with a 2.98 ERA. In 172 innings, he allowed just 121 hits. On a staff that included bigger names like Jack Morris, Frank Tanana and Doyle Alexander, Robinson was the most consistent that season.

Robinson never got back to that level, however. He struggled the next two seasons with the Tigers, and after the 1990 season, he was traded to the Orioles for power-hitting catcher Mickey Tettleton.

He spent a year in Baltimore and split the early months of 1992 between Texas and Pittsburgh. Detroit brought him back that July and sent him to Triple-A Toledo, trying him as a reliever, but he never got back to the major leagues, retiring before the following spring training.

For his career, he was 47-40 with a 4.79 ERA in 141 appearances.

After his playing days, Robinson returned home to California before moving to Kansas in 1998. He spent years teaching baseball to kids, including time as the pitching director at the Natural Baseball Academy in Olathe, Kansas.

"That was his passion," Henneman said.

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