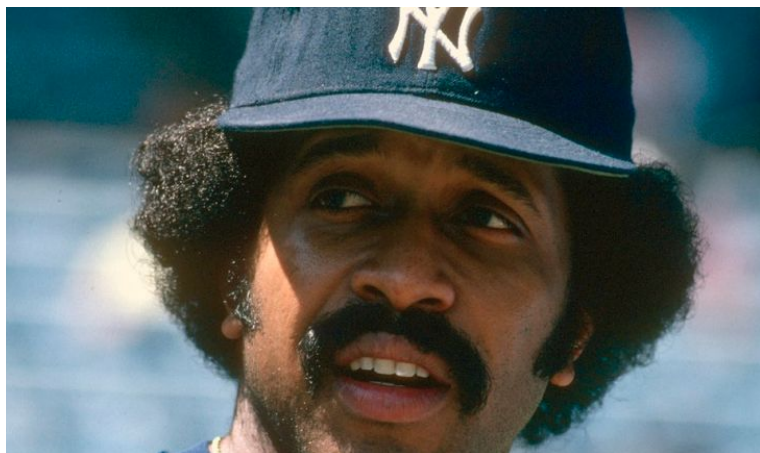


SPORTS / BASEBALL / YANKEES

Oscar Gamble dead, former Yankee was 68

Outfielder spent seven seasons with the Yankees in two stints, playing for AL pennant winners in 1976 and 1981.



Oscar Gamble of the Yankees looks on prior to the start of a game circa 1982 at Yankee Stadium. Photo Credit: Getty Images / Focus On Sport

By Steven Marcus

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Oscar Gamble was hours away from beginning his Yankees career in the spring of 1976 — and a potential confrontation with owner George Steinbrenner over the length of Gamble's trademark Afro hairstyle.

Gamble's hair was his calling card and would remain so even after it disappeared. Gamble, who had two tours with the Yankees and played in two World Series in his 17-year career, died Wednesday in UAB Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama, from a rare tumor in his jaw, according to his wife, Lovell Woods Gamble. He was 68.

Though many players of his era chewed tobacco, his wife told The Associated Press that Gamble never did.

Former Yankee Oscar Gamble waves to fans during Old-Timers' Day at Yankee Stadium on Sunday, June 12, 2016.
Photo Credit: Kathleen Malone-Van Dyke

Gamble had been making public appearances through Wish You Were Here Productions and the Yankees and appeared regularly at the annual Yankees fantasy camps in Tampa, Florida, agent Andrew Levy said.



Mickey Rivers recalled from Miami that Gamble could have been on a collision course with Steinbrenner that day in 1976.

“Mr. Steinbrenner, oh he was serious about that. I said, ‘He ain’t cutting his hair. He didn’t need to cut no hair to play no ball.’ ”

It fell to media relations director Marty Appel to inform Gamble that his hairstyle,

one that Yankees teammate Rick Cerone called a “major league-leading Afro,” would have to be substantially trimmed.

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Appel went to Gamble’s room. “I don’t know what to expect, he opens the door, I introduce myself,” Appel said from Manhattan. “I take a deep breath and I said, ‘Oscar, we’ve got to get your haircut today or you’re not going to be able to work out tomorrow.’ And he says, ‘That’s fine,’ which was the greatest news I ever had in my life.”

And with that, Gamble’s hair ceased being an issue, though it remained an indelible part of the outfielder’s persona.

“When he pulled that hat over the hair it stuck out like Bozo the Clown,” Cerone, who was also Gamble’s teammate in Cleveland with the Indians, said from Long Branch, New Jersey. “To see him over the years [after retirement], he went completely bald. Here’s the guy who had the No. 1 Afro of anybody who ever played the game, but unfortunately lost his hair as he got older.”

Teammates remembered Gamble as a fun-loving and terrific player in his role. Cerone recalled Gamble

Reggie Jackson may have bristled a bit when Gamble got attention for some of his blasts. “I used to love it when he and Reggie used to go at it,” Cerone said. “Reggie tried to be funny, but Oscar was great with one-liners.”

Gamble had a lifetime average of .265 and hit 200 career home runs. His best season came in 1977, hitting 31 homers and driving in 83 runs for the White Sox.

At Yankee Stadium, his homers came with a humorous twist, Hall of Fame reliever Rich (Goose) Gossage said from Colorado Springs.

“He would hit a home run and would go, ‘Bat boy!’ and the bat boy would have to come out so he could hand him his bat before running around the bases,” Gossage said. “It was hilarious. He was hysterical, one of the best teammates I ever had on the buses, in the clubhouses. Funnier than most professional comedians.”

In 1977, Gamble was traded to the White Sox in exchange for Bucky Dent, but in July 1979 he was reacquired from the Rangers in a deal for Rivers — one that Rivers objected to. “I said I ain’t going right now, so you can send Oscar back.”

“Mickey and I used to bust his chops [that] we both got traded for him,” Dent said from Lake Worth, Florida. “We used to tease him all the time.”

Gamble played in 110 games in rightfield for the Yankees in 1976. He appeared in only one as a designated hitter but did seek the advice of teammate Ron Blomberg, who was the first DH in Major League Baseball.

“He asked me how did I do it,” Blomberg said from Atlanta. “I said, ‘You want me to be honest with you?’ I have no idea.”



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