



John Summers

December 31, 1969 - October 1, 2012

Obituary of John Summers John "Champ" Summers, a retired 10-year Major League Baseball player, arrived in Ocala 13 years ago for a very specific reason. "My husband wanted to live on a golf course, to get up in the morning and go play golf," said Joy Summers, his wife of 27 years. Champ Summers, 66, died Thursday after a long battle with kidney cancer. He lived at Spruce Creek Preserve since 1999, when he and his wife moved from La Jolla, Calif. Summers was a Vietnam veteran who played 10 MLB seasons for six different teams. His longest stay with one team was a three-year run with the Detroit Tigers starting in 1979, when he was traded from the Cincinnati Reds mid-season. Summers had arguably his finest season with the Tigers that year, when legendary manager Sparky Anderson sought him out to be his designated hitter. Summers batted .313 with 20 home runs, 51 RBIs and seven stolen bases in just 246 at-bats over the remainder of that season. Summers also played for the Athletics, Cubs, Giants and Padres in his career. During the final season of his playing career, in 1984, he was part of the Padres' first National League championship team and went on to face the Tigers in the World Series, where he struck out in his lone at-bat. He finished his career with 1,371 at-bats, 350 hits (.255 avg.) 54 home runs and 218 RBIs. He also played a prominent role in one of the more memorable brawls in baseball history during a Padres-Braves game in 1984. That game, which began with Braves starter Pascual Perez beaming Padres leadoff hitter Alan Wiggins on the very first pitch, erupted into a series of bench-clearing brawls.

During an eighth-inning melee, Summers boldly charged the Braves dugout by himself in pursuit of a heavily guarded Perez and wound up taking on an entire pack of Atlanta players. "He was such a colorful guy," Joy Summers said. "To know him was to love him." Summers later spent time as a hitting instructor for the New York Yankees. He was also inducted into the athletics hall of fame at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where he played both baseball and basketball. Despite all those athletic feats, Summers kept a low profile while in Ocala and was recognized as a former big leaguer only by those closest to him. "He was a private person," his wife said. "People here in Spruce Creek Preserve were aware (of his baseball fame). He left baseball and baseball was good to him, but he was happy to be retired and doing what he wanted to do. Having freedom and free time was precious to him."

Tribute Wall

DB

“ I remember late 70's early 80's as a 6,7,8 year old studying my Topps baseball cards, sorting g them out by stats etc I'd always come across Champ Summers for the Tigers, big smiling mustache guy.. died too young but just know he was among many that young kids aspired to be. Rest in Peace

Dan B - May 19, 2025 at 02:59 PM

JV

“ I played with Champ Summers while in Triple A Indianapolis back in the late 70's. Fantastic teammate, the most feared hitter from the opposing pitchers that I've ever seen in my 13 yrs of pro ball, and had the most remarkable hitting performance of anyone I've ever seen, the year I played with him. I was an outfielder but had good control when throwing batting practice and Champ would ask me to throw to him all the time. He would put on a hitting display off me, that Barry Bonds couldn't match. I wish the very best for Joy and his family.

John Valle - January 15, 2013 at 12:00 AM

R(

“ I met Champ when he was with the Cubs and loved his playing style. I moved to Michigan in 1978 and Champ got traded to the Tigers from the Reds. I got to see him play there and he became a fan favorite. I got to say hi to him again when he was managing the Gateway Grizzlies when they came to Kalamazoo. He was a real "Champ" R.I.P. Randy (Crip)Heim

Randy Heim (Crip) - October 17, 2012 at 12:00 AM

GL

“ Joy, my thoughts and prayers are with you these days. So sorry to learn of your loss. Am sure you have many happy memories to sustain you through the trying days ahead. Those wonderful memories will never, never die. With love, Ginny Lent

Ginny Lent - October 15, 2012 at 12:00 AM

BL

“ I was saddened when I heard about Champ. I worked at The Sandwedge for 8 years and I really enjoyed hearing his baseball stories. My deepest sympathy Joy and family.

Bonnie Long - October 15, 2012 at 12:00 AM

CS

“ We are so sorry to hear about Champs passing.

Carol & Mark Stansbury - October 14, 2012 at 12:00 AM

BL

“ To Champ's Family. I got to meet Champ once, several years ago. My brother, Ed Ewing, lived a couple of streets away. I felt like I had known him for years after talking with him just a few moments. I was saddened to see this news. May he rest in peace.

Bill Levy - October 14, 2012 at 12:00 AM