

## Thurman Munson Hall of Fame Committee

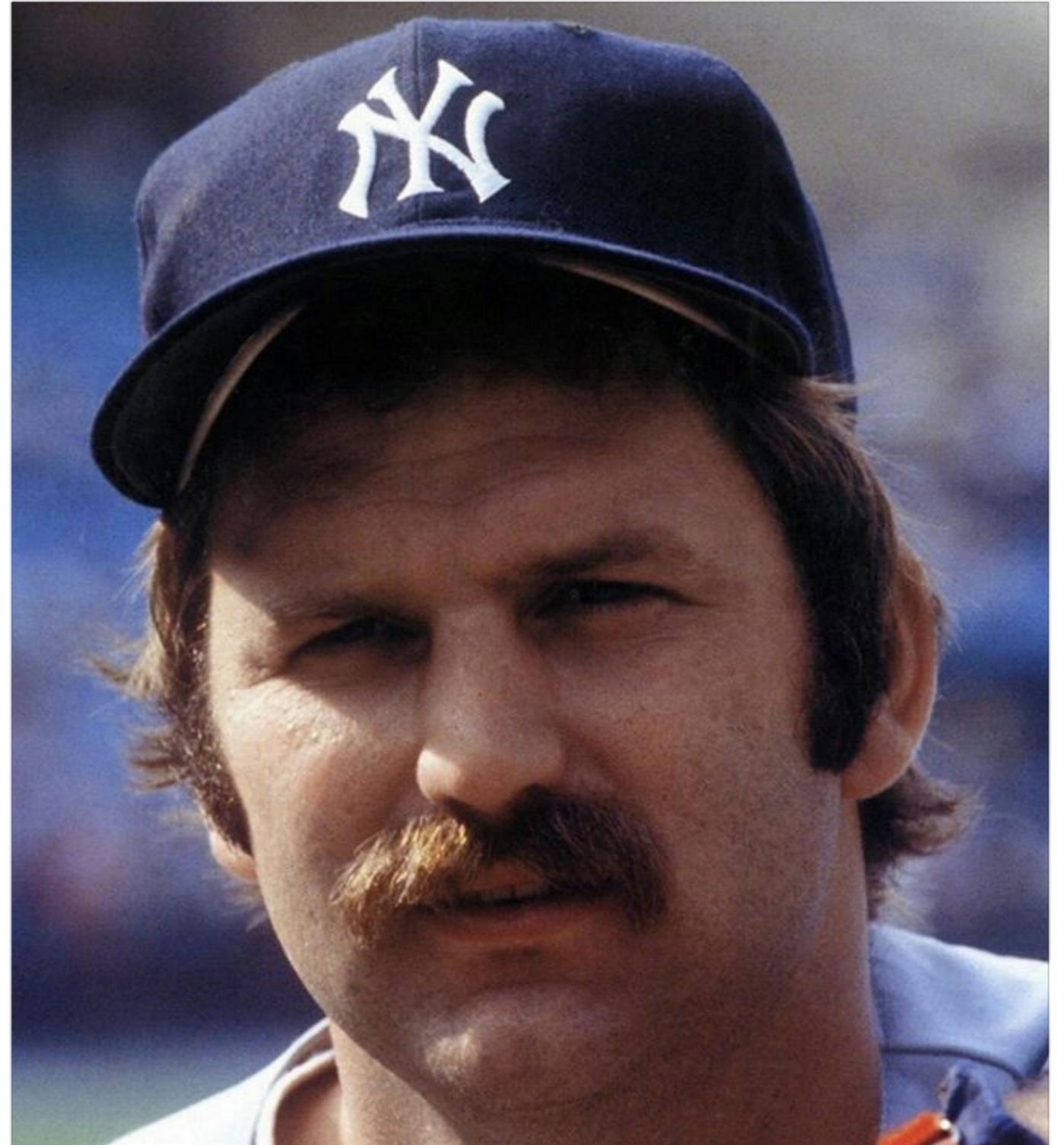
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# Thurman Munson

The Case For His Hall of  
Fame Induction

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#MUNSONHOF2019



# THURMAN MUNSON: THE CASE FOR HALL OF FAME CANDIDACY

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# MUNSON HOF 2019

## A Snapshot of Munson's Awards 1970-79

1970  
American League  
Rookie of the Year

1971  
American League  
All-Star (1)

1973  
American League  
All-Star (2)  
Gold Glove (1)

1973-76  
Sporting News  
\*All-Star

1974  
American League  
All-Star (3)  
Gold Glove (2)

1975  
American League  
All-Star (4)  
Gold Glove (3)

1976  
American League  
All-Star (5)  
MOST VALUABLE  
PLAYER

1976  
Sporting News  
American League  
Player of the Year

1977  
American League  
All-Star (6)

1977  
Baseball Manager's  
Clutch Player  
All-Star

1978  
Baseball Manager's  
Clutch Player  
All-Star Team

1978  
American League  
All-Star (7)

1978  
Ohio Governor's  
Award

1978  
Father of the Year  
Award

THE SPORTING  
NEWS names  
*Thurman Munson*  
catcher of the decade  
for the 1970's

# The Thurman Munson Hall of Fame Committee

Rene Leroux- Chair



*“Thurman Munson had the hardware: Most Valuable Player. Two time-World Series Champion. Rookie of the Year. Seven time all-star. Three Gold Gloves.*

*Beyond the hardware, his WAR numbers are powerful, clear and impressive. Beyond the statistics are the accolades, the tributes, the endorsements. The memories burn bright. Thurman left an impressive legacy to the game of baseball. And an even greater legacy as a man, father, husband, friend and humanitarian. The Hall of Fame meant a lot to Thurman, let's bring him home.*

*God bless you, Thurman.*

Larry Schnapf- Vice Chair



*“Thurman was the heart and soul of the Yankee championship teams of the 1970's. He was widely acknowledged as the best clutch-hitter in baseball and was considered by his contemporaries as one of the dominant catchers of his era. Many writers who saw him play said he was not only the best catcher in the American League but also the most durable. He was a complete player. He hit for average, had good power, was the batter his teammates wanted at the plate with runners in scoring position but was also an excellent baserunner. He was also renowned for his handling of pitchers and knowledge of opposing batters. The conventional wisdom is that he did not play long enough and that his career statistics fall short for the Hall of Fame. However, his accomplishments for the 10 year period. From 1970-79 are comparable to the best 10 years of catchers in the Hall of Fame using both traditional and modern analytical metrics. Many writers and opposing players felt he was on his way to the HOF when he died. Without him in the lineup, the Yankees would not have won three pennants and two World Series. It is time for Thurman Munson to be recognized for his outstanding career and be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.”*

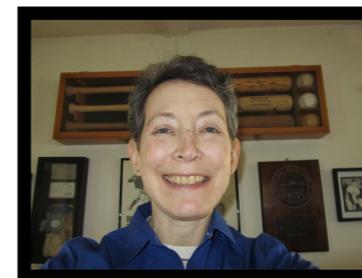
Tom Tunison- Vice Chair



*“Thurman Munson was one of the greatest leaders in the history of team sports. His field vision and blueprint for success, fueled by an inner strength and determination, unequaled, played out before our very own eyes on the biggest stage in baseball. He willed himself and his team to the top of the baseball world with his tremendous skill and a confidence that was something to behold. Thurman became known as one of the game's most clutch hitters and one of its toughest competitors. His impact on the great game of baseball, witnessed and respected by his teammates and opponents alike, cannot be overstated. Modern day statistical analysis and advanced metrics bear this out, and give us a clearer picture and a better understanding of the historical significance and greatness of his career. His love for his family and friends was on full display, while his love for children and others was a hidden gem, only later to be discovered. This was a very special man and a very special player.*

*With deepest respect for the Baseball HALL of FAME, there should be no question that this great institution that we know and love so well would be better served with the inclusion of THURMAN LEE MUNSON.”*

Adrienne Statfeld- Vice Chair



*“I started watching Thurman play in 1973, and even at the age of eight, I knew I was watching someone special. I remember standing in line with my dad for more than two hours at a local shopping mall that year to get Thurman's autograph. I loved watching him play day in and day out--which often meant staying up past my bedtime-- and he quickly became my hero. In softball, I used to copy his batting stance and play with the same kind of drive and determination I observed in Thurman. As the years went on and Thurman's career and my understanding of baseball evolved, I felt certain that his was the autograph of a future Hall of Famer. It has been an honor and a privilege to work to keep Thurman's memory alive and to promote Thurman's candidacy for the Hall of Fame.”*

Gary Kaschak- Vice Chair



*“Thurman Munson has always been one of my favorite players of all time. It was in the way he hustled and played every inning hard that caught my attention as a young boy watching him play during the 1968 season in Binghamton*

*Aside from being enamored with Munson as a young boy, the cause is real. He has an excellent chance. His numbers show that. And as the experience researching him as a player and then a person took its natural course, the realization of seeing Thurman Munson's name etched on a Hall of Fame plaque next to all the greats of the game grew exponentially. Considering all aspects to the HOF Criteria for a Hall of Fame player, and others that are influential, there's no doubt in my mind he belongs in the Hall of Fame.”*

## Introduction

It was 40 years ago this summer that Thurman Munson died in a plane crash. He played in an era before 24-hour cable, nightly highlight videos and inter-league play. As a result, many of Munson's truly historical contributions to the game have been lost to a generation of fans and writers who did not see him play or had limited opportunity to watch him play or appreciate how great a player he was.

This paper re-introduces the career of Thurman Munson to members of the Historical Overview Committee (HOC) since this year the HOC will be selecting the players for the ballot this coming December for the so-called Modern Baseball Era-- the time period that Munson played-for inclusion in the Class of 2020.

We believe that Thurman Munson should be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. We have spent six months crunching numbers, statistics, investigating his life, interviewing hundreds of people who knew him, played with him and against him as well as former Yankee beat sportswriters. When both Johnny Bench and Carlton Fisk both agree that Thurman Munson should be in the Hall of Fame, who can dispute these two incredible Hall of Fame catchers. They played against Thurman. They battled against him. If anyone knows his qualifications, it's Johnny Bench and Carlton Fisk.

When considered with this fresh perspective, a review of some of his generally unknown but truly significant feats suggests that Thurman Munson did more than enough to be considered among the all-time great catchers of the game. It is even arguable that Thurman Munson's body of work in the 1970s is among the most impressive decades of comprehensive play ever delivered by a catcher in the history of baseball.

We believe that Munson's 11-year career matches up with the peak years of catchers that have already been inducted into the Hall of Fame as well as those he played

against using traditional baseball statistic and modern baseball analytics.

This is not just our opinion, though. We have included contemporary accounts of teammates, opposing players and writers who covered him which show he was considered one of the best catchers in the game at the time and was mentioned as being a future hall of fame player (See Appendix C). We have included articles written over the last two decades by well-respected baseball analysts and writers arguing why Munson deserves to be in the Hall of Fame (see Appendix D).

We also include a comparative analysis of Munson's' career against every catcher that has been inducted into the Hall of Fame using both traditional baseball statistic and modern baseball analytics (See Appendix A). Modern baseball analytics were not available when Thurman Munson played nor during the 15 years when he was on the BBWAA ballot. When his career is evaluated through the prism of modern analytics, it is clear that Munson is perhaps the most undervalued and under-appreciated catcher s in baseball history by baseball observers (See Appendix A).

We also include a comparison of Thurman's career with Hall of Fame catchers Johnny Bench and Carlton Fisk, two of the very best to ever play catcher in the history of baseball (See Appendix B).

We have also enclosed a section on Thurman Munson the man titled ""OHIO"" that discusses his life growing up in Ohio. To understand a man, it is important to know about his roots. Thurman remained an Ohioan to the end and remained true to his roots, his family and his friends up until the day he passed at age 32.

Munson was also one of the most durable catchers. He was the toughest player on one of the toughest teams of the 1970s. He caught more "catcher complete games" than anyone in his 10 years. He never went on the disabled list. If Thurman started the game, he ended the game. He was a durable, consistent and clutch player. He was the heart and soul of the Yankee championship teams of the 1970s. He was the most valuable player of those Yankee teams. Without him in the lineup, those Yankees would not have achieved those titles. He was the very definition of a Hall of Fame player.

# MUNSON PLAYED LONG ENOUGH

The Hall of Fame eligibility rules provide that a player may be considered for induction into the Hall of Fame if the player had played at least ten years. Thurman Munson meets this requirement as he played 11 years for the New York Yankees.

Thus, in discussing and considering Thurman Munson's Hall of Fame credentials, it CANNOT be argued that "he didn't play long enough" or "he did not accumulate enough career statistics". Both statements are untrue. These statements also violate the spirit of the 10-year rule and render the 10-year rule meaningless.

If the 10-year rule is to mean anything and if the spirit of the rule is to be met, the HOC needs to consider a player's "total body of work" (e.g., statistics, awards, honors accumulated over a career). It also means that voters should not simply look at a handful of total career statistics against some arbitrary "magical" benchmarks but compare the player against his contemporaries. In Munson's case, this means comparing his decade of accomplishments against the performance of other catchers of his era as well as evaluate his decade of excellence against the peak performance periods of the other catchers enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

**Steve Jacobson** once said, "I voted for Munson for the Hall of Fame even though his major-league career was barely more than the minimum of 10 seasons. He was a dominant player."

Another famous sportswriter when asked about a player's resume for the Hall of Fame responded: "Does he have the hardware?" Translation: Did he win any awards? Did he win any World Series? How did he fare in the postseason? Was he ever the best at what he did?

Here are those answers for Thurman Munson:

- 1976 American League Most Valuable Player
- 1976 The Sporting News American League Player of the Year
- Named The Sporting News Catcher of the 1970s.
- 1977 World Series Champion
- 1978 World Series Champion
- 1970 Rookie of the Year (First American League Rookie of the Year as a catcher)
- 7 Times All-Star
- 4 Times Sporting News All Star Team
- 3 Times Gold Glove Winner
- First Team Captain Since Lou Gehrig

Thurman Munson ranks  
3rd all-time with 60+  
assists over 9  
consecutive seasons  
Schalk (11)  
Cochrane (10)



\*All-Time Leader  
9 straight seasons 1,000+  
innings caught, 100+  
complete games caught



He ranks 3rd all-time  
WAR (162 game avg)  
Cochrane 5.69  
Bench 5.65  
Munson 5.25



He ranks 3rd all-time with  
130+ complete games caught  
during a season:  
Carter (5)  
Berra (5)  
Munson (3)



What did Munson do in the Post-season? He took it to another level.

- Hit .357 in six post-season series (94 points higher than next HOF catcher)
- Postseason OPS (.874) higher than every Hall of Fame Catcher except one
- Hit safely in 27 of 30 postseason games – no other player has ever done that!
- Hit safely in 10 consecutive world series games
- 7 consecutive hits in world series

In addition to awards and post-season achievements, Thurman Munson had one of the most impressive decades ever delivered by a catcher in the history of baseball.

#### **SUMMARY of KEY REGULAR SEASON TRADITIONAL BATTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- 1st catcher to have consecutive 4 seasons with 180+ hits -
- 1 of 3 AL catchers with 7 consecutive seasons with at least 130 hits
- 1 of 3 catchers with 3 consecutive seasons with a .300 avg. and 100 RBI
- 5 times finished in the Top 10 in batting average
- Finished 3rd, 4th and 4th in hits for a season – only catcher in history
- Batted .330 with 2 outs and RISP from 1975 to 1978 (team batted .243) Compare to – Fisk (.273), Bench (.255) and Carter (.220). only exceeded by Carew and Stargell for HOFers in same time period
- Hit .288 and .310 with 2 outs and RISP with a 46% caught stealing in 1979
- Career BA .292 - Compare to Bench (.267), Fisk (.269) and Carter (.262.)
- 1 of 8 catchers to finish multiple times in top 10 in Total Bases for a season and had 230+ TB (1975-1978).

#### **Defensive Statistics**

- Caught 120+ games for 7 consecutive seasons ('72 to '78) and '70 (117 games in '71 due to reserve duty) or would have been 9 consecutive seasons
- Top 5 for games caught - 8 seasons (Led the league 3 times with 1 runner up )
- Top 5 for Putouts - 6 seasons
- Top 5 for Assists - 8 seasons ( Led the league 3 times with 4 runner-up)
- Top 3 for DPs turned as C - 5 seasons ( Led league 2 times with 1 runner-up)
- Top 5 for runners caught stealing - 5 seasons (with 1 runner-up)
- Top 5 Caught % - 7 seasons ( Led the league 2 times with 1 runner up )
- Career 44% caught stealing
- led the league in COMPLETE games caught in the 1970's 3 times (Fisk 2, Bench 0)
- led the league in innings caught 4 times (Fisk 2, Bench 0)

#### **Modern Baseball Analytics**

- 10 consecutive seasons of WAR- 45.6 WAR
- One of 10 Catchers in history to catch 1000+ games and produce 40+ WAR in 10 consecutive seasons (only 6 catchers higher-all HOFers)
- 12th all- time in JAWS for catchers.
- 14th all-time in WAR for catchers.
- 7th in 7 yr. peak War
- 1 of 5 AL catchers with 9 consecutive years OPS% above league average (others HOFers).
- 1 of 4 AL catchers with 4 top 20 finishes in OPS+ (I-Rod, Fisk, Mauer and Posada)
- 3rd best WAR per 162 games with 5.25 WAR. (minimum 1,000 games caught)

Munson hit .529 in the 1976 World Series which began drawing comparisons to Johnny Bench. The Bench-Munson debate raged through the mid-1970s. In Baseball magazine's feature article written by **Dan Schlossberg**, players and managers rated both players over 10 categories covering the baseball gamut. It was a virtual standoff. Munson not only held his own, but graded higher in two most important categories— clutch hitting and team leadership.

*"Thurman's eyes light up when a run can be driven in,"* said **Ken Brett**. *"He's a better all-around hitter and RBI man than Bench because he's a contact hitter."*

Added **Jim Kaat**, *"The greatest strengths of Munson and Bench are durability and performance par excellence. I'm sure both will go down in history as two of the all-time great catchers."*

And in 1977 and 1978, Munson completed a cycle of excellence, winning back-to-back World Series over the Dodgers. Those same two years, 77' and 78,' Munson was chosen by the Baseball Manager's "Cash-on-the-line Clutch-Player All Star Team", outdistancing Bench and Ted Simmons, and, interestingly enough, zero votes going to Carlton Fisk. In announcing the selections, **Terry Catchpole** wrote that the award was *"testimony to the fact that Munson has finally outpaced his nemesis, Johnny Bench, in their Olympian mano-a-mano."*

Later, The Sporting News named Thurman Munson as its "Catcher of the Decade" for the 1970s.

**Sal Bando** said he had *"to give Munson the edge over Carlton Fisk as the best in the league"*

**Buddy Bell** added, *"He is the most consistent player in baseball. No club could give up enough to get him."*

**Phil Garner** said *"Munson's the guy who beats us. He's one guy in the league I don't know how to pitch to. He hits everything. I don't know how to get him out. If the bases are loaded, I think we should walk him. That way, he'd drive in only one run instead of three or four. He hits the ball everywhere. If you pitch him away, he hits it to the opposite field. If you pitch him inside, he's liable to hit it out of the park. If he hits everybody in the league the way he hits us, he shouldn't be here. He should be in the Hall of Fame."*

**Al Rosen** said. *"I think Munson is a great catcher-one of the greatest I've ever seen."*

Writer **Bill Conlon** wrote, *"Johnny Bench in the National League and Carlton Fisk and Thurman Munson in the American League were the models of what a great catcher should be."*

Writer **Graham Womack** wrote *"Munson was undoubtedly one of the best catchers of his era. In the years Munson played-1969 to 1979 -the only catcher better by wins above average was Johnny Bench."*

In his New Bill James Historical Abstract, **Bill James** noted *"Four of the top 21 catchers of all time were born in 1947 - Bench, Fisk, Boone, and Munson."*

In the mid-1970s, manager **Dick Williams** was asked what two players he would pick if he could choose from any roster. He said his first choice would be Robin Yount and then he would take Thurman Munson.

# MUNSON'S INTANGIBLES

From Rookie of the Year to  
the World Series, Thurman

Munson

helped raise the Yankees  
from the ashes



While the statistics and awards tell a story, they by no means tell a whole story. They don't tell us what the player meant to his team. Was he a leader or a selfish player? Did he inspire his teammates to play better? What did opposing players think of him? What impact did he have on the game? One way to measure a player's intangible quality is to assess his impact on his team.

When Thurman Munson joined the Yankees, the franchise had just suffered the worst six seasons since the team had been named the Highlanders. Munson had an immediate impact on the team and soon became its leader. He had an incredible will to win and played a major role the resurgence of the Yankees.

In his first full season in 1970, the Yankees won 93 games and unexpectedly finished second in the American League eastern division to the world champion Baltimore Orioles. This was the first time they won 90 wins since 1964.

In 1972, Munson's Yankees competed for the pennant race until mid-September. In 1973, his Yankees occupied first place during mid-summer for six weeks before fading towards the end of the season.

In 1974, Munson led his team into first place in September and they remained there until game 154 when they were finally overtaken again by the Baltimore Orioles

Behind the first of Munson's three consecutive seasons of batting .300 and driving in over 100 RBI, his Yankees stormed into first

place in June until a series of devastating injuries undermined the team.

By 1976, Munson had been named to four All-Star teams, been awarded three gold gloves and been named the first Captain of the Yankees since Lou Gehrig. What followed were three American League pennants and two world series championships.



A week before he died in 1979, Munson met with other leaders of the Yankees and vowed that the team would try for another come back like 1978. His death, though, essentially ended the Yankees championship dreams. Indeed, the Yankees would not win another world championship until 1996 when they were led by another Munson-like, future leader Derek A Jeter.

Reggie Jackson has said that if Munson had been alive in 1980 and 1981, the Yankees would have won those world series championships.

Appendix C contains testimonials from his owner, his manager, his teammates and opposing players. There are also several testimonials from people who knew him in Ohio about the kind of person who Thurman was. A man who visited sick children in the hospital without fanfare, without media, without telling anyone. A man who paid for the airfare of some sportswriters who couldn't afford the fare. A man who was a dedicated husband and father. A man who willed himself to play in pain, through pain. In other words, the kind of man who exemplifies the character, integrity and sportsmanship criterion that has long been a part of the formal rules for election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

# Munson HOF 2019

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Another intangible quality is how a player responded in high-pressure situations. Thurman Munson was widely viewed as perhaps the best clutch hitter of his time. Here are just a few contemporary accounts by teammates and opposing players (See Appendix C for a more complete compilation).

**George Brett** said, *"We hated the Yankees. But we also respected them – and we all respected Thurman. He was so tough in the clutch and we feared him because he usually came through."*

**Tommy Lasorda** said, *"Thurman Munson is probably the best clutch hitter in baseball."*

**Roy White** said, *"With the winning run on second base, Thurman was the guy you'd want to be up there at the plate. You knew he was going to get a base hit. He was such a tough out, especially with a runner on second."*

**Reggie Jackson** had this to say about Munson: *"Munson is the best pressure player I've ever played with"*

Said **Bobby Murcer**, *"He was the leader on those teams and everybody knew it. We all looked up to him because of his toughness and his ability to produce in the clutch. He had such an uncanny ability to come through when the pressure was on."*

Former Kent State roommate and major league pitcher **Steve Stone** said: *"In a real tough situation, it was not Reggie (Jackson) you feared most, it was Thurman. Thurman would always find a way to get the runner home. Whether it was with the arm or the bat, he found a way to beat you...This was a guy who absolutely detested losing. He always gave everything he had and for that he was appreciated by teammates and even opponents...every pitcher I knew would rather go through a lineup full of Reggies than face Thurman Munson with the game on the line."*

Another type of intangible value is known as baseball intelligence or instinct. Just as important as an offensive or defensive skill, this quality is a sense that is cannot be taught. It is an ability to "see" things that other players cannot, that helps a player rise to the occasion and help his team win. All the greats had this edge. Willie Mays had it. Mickey Mantle had it. And Thurman Munson had this trait as well.

**Steve Jacobson** wrote about the following instinctive play by Munson in a 1976 game. *"There was the game in August 1976, when the Yankees were winning their first pennant since the fall of the Dynasty 12 years earlier, in which Munson showed he could run about as well as any catcher can. More than that, he ran hard. The Yankees were behind 1-0 with Mickey Rivers on second base. Munson singled up the middle, and Rivers backtracked for an instant before heading for third. If Rivers had gone right away, Munson would have had the RBI, which he dearly coveted, but Rivers pulled up at third. So, Munson kept running right around first base into an obvious out at second. 'Sure, I know I'm a dead duck, Munson said. 'But I also know I'm going to take out that second baseman -- drive him into center field. No way he's going to have a shot at Rivers. And I know Rivers will be running. The second baseman was unable to make the throw with his back on the outfield grass, and Rivers scored. The Yankees eventually won 5-4. The moment came as close to defining Munson as a player as any physical act could."*

**Reggie Jackson** had this to say. *"Before at-bats, we would talk in the on-deck circle about who was pitching and what he and I were going to do together to drive in a run. Ninth Inning against Boston in September 1977. Game is scoreless. Thurman Munson tells Reggie 'I'm going to single between first and third, and then you get me home.' [Reggie followed with a 430 foot home run .]*

*There was a game against the Dodgers in the 1977 World Series at Yankee Stadium where a right-handed pitcher was on the mound, and since Thurman was a right-handed hitter and I was left-handed, he said to me, 'How do you hit the left-hander that might come in to face you?'*

*'I hit him okay.'*

*'Okay, then I'm going to move the runner over so you can get him in. And he did'*

**"Nobody plays any harder than Munson. Nobody plays hurt as much as Munson. He's been hurt for a long time but try and keep him out of the game. He's one of the greatest ballplayers I've ever seen."**

- Gabe Paul



**Reggie Jackson** also shared about another story. *"the Red Sox had a guy name Andy Hassler — who was really tough on me — on the mound, and Thurman said, "How do you hit this guy?"*

*"I don't hit him very good ... "*

*"Okay, then I'm going to try to get a hit and score the run."*

**Mr. October** summed up his teammate this way: *"Thurman was a guy who could do whatever he wanted at the plate. He may not have hit the long ball as often as I did, but he got as many clutch hits as I did when we played together — maybe more. This is a guy who hit .357 in the postseason in his career and got big hit after big hit, and I was lucky enough to have a front-row seat. There aren't a lot of guys who were as clutch as Thurman Munson."*

Another intangible was the way Munson he handled pitchers.

**Pat Dobson** had this to say about Munson: *"He is the best there is at calling a game"*

**Ron Guidry** said of his former batterymate: *"He made pitchers that were average good ones good. He made them win a lot of games because of his ability to take all the pressure and call the game. We all felt like 'that's the best pitch to throw. I'm not gonna second-guess it and say it's not'. I could have thrown a guy 20 sliders and made him look foolish but, if he called for a fastball, that's what I threw.....He always knew exactly when to say something and when to shut up. And that's why everybody admired him. When I started to become an established pitcher, all he told me was, 'Trust me, and you'll do it.' As a pitcher, just pitching to him, my job was easy because I didn't have to worry about whether he was right or wrong. He was the guy we looked to for guidance. Every game to him was like the biggest game he ever played."*

His former manager **Bill Martin** observed about Munson *"He's great behind the plate. Everybody talks about his hitting, but he's great with pitchers. He's the best I've ever had handling pitchers.....He's absolutely brilliant behind the plate.....Thurman is the best I've ever had at handling pitchers. He does one helluva job. "*

Another former manager **Bill Virdon** said of Munson: *"You don't find a better clutch hitter and you don't find anyone who handles pitchers better"*

**Gene Michael** recognized Munson's skills as well. *"He was smart behind the plate. He knew what the hitters could and couldn't do, and his leadership was unquestioned."*

**Mel Stottlemyre** said of Munson. *"He was known for his quickness behind the plate. He was a quick as anybody I've ever seen coming out from behind that crouch on bunted balls and on his throws to second base"*

Munson was also a good baserunner- especially for a catcher.

**Willie Randolph had this to say:** *"When you think of Thurman Munson, you think about the total package. This man could even run. Most catchers back then would just go base to base. Thurman would take you first to third in a minute. If you needed an RBI, he could hit that patented line drive to right to drive in runs. If you need a home run, he could turn on you and take you deep. The total package. I don't think, even when you talk about the great catchers of the game—and he was obviously up there—none of those guys really did everything well like Thurman did . He did everything that was necessary to win."*

**Gene Michael** said, *"What people forget about Thurman was how he could really run," Michael said. "He had that squatty body, which was deceiving. He was as good as anyone — well, maybe not (Dave) Winfield — at going from first to third. He had good power and would have hit a lot more homers if he hadn't played half his games in Yankee Stadium."*

# Munson HOF 2019

***“He was such a team man. He did all the things a Yankee of old would do to win games, run, hit, throw and break up double plays.”***

- Fritz Peterson



Former teammate **Brian Doyle** said, *“When something needed to be said, he’d go to the individual. He always waited for the opportune time if something needed to be said, and he said it. Everyone respected him.”*

And **Fritz Peterson** said, *“He was such a team man. He did all the things a Yankee of old would do to win games, run, hit, throw and break up double plays.”*

Even old Yankees, like **Elston Howard** and

**Whitey Ford** could see Munson's value.

Howard saying, *“If there’s one guy on your team you don’t want out of your lineup, it’s Thurman. I’d say he’s the best ballplayer on the team, a man who can do everything and do it well.”*

And **Whitey Ford** admitted, *“I never realized how good he really is till’ I saw him play every day.”*

**Willie Randolph** remembers studying Munson’s work habits when he first joined the Yankees, saying, *“To me, as a young player coming up and watching him work, he was the consummate leader. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy with a dry sense of humor, but he always meant well, and if you knew him and understood his sense of humor, then he was great. He’d give you the shirt off his back. He was the soul of our team.”*

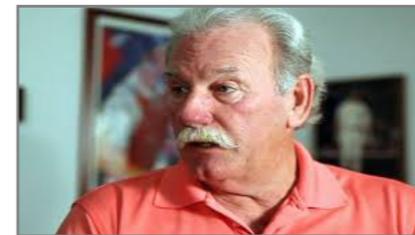
Even his contemporaries, **Johnny Bench** and **Carlton Fisk**, understood what Munson meant to the Yankees. Said **Bench**, *“I was always totally amazed at Thurman. I thought he was one of the greatest competitors I’ve ever known.”*

***“To me, as a young player coming up and watching him work, he was the consummate leader. He’d give you the shirt off his back. H was the soul of our team - Willie Randolph***



And for **Fisk**, who had a much closer look at Munson from his AL East standpoint, said, *“The resurgence of the Yankees as winners was due to one man’s efforts in particular, and that man was Thurman Munson.”*

***“Thurman will always be my captain. When I was traded to the Yankees, he told me not to worry about throwing my slider in the dirt with a runner on third base because it wouldn’t get by him. I have never met such a man who led by example and backed it up time after time - Sparky Lyle***



*pinstripes. Thurman helped me through those trying times. He had an uncanny ability, unlike any teammates that I have played with, to share a laugh or humorous moment on the field during pressure moments. He also epitomized the way in which the game should be played, giving maximum effort at all times and coming through in the clutch almost routinely. Thurman was the greatest catcher I ever threw to.”*

For a complete listing of quotes attributed to Thurman Munson, please read the enclosed, *“What They Said About Thurman Munson.”* (Appendix C).

And it doesn’t end there. **Sparky Lyle** said that *“Thurman will always be my captain. When I was traded to the Yankees, he told me not to worry about throwing my slider in the dirt with a runner on third base because it wouldn’t get by him. I have never met a man who led by example and backed it up time after time.”*

Fellow relief pitcher **Goose Gossage** said, *“Thurman and I came to be very close friends during my first season with the Yankees in 1978. I had just come over from the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1977 and was having a bit of a rough*

*time adjusting to the added pressure playing in Yankee*

***“He was a great competitor and a great athlete and he always busted his tail for me. No one played harder than Thurman. No one was a better leader on and off the field than Thurman. Thurman Munson was the perfect Yankee captain. Thurman was one of the things you could always count on. He was ready for anything back there.”***

- Billy Martin



Intangibles help define every player. They are what separate equally-talented players. In the Foreword to the best-selling baseball book, "Intangibles", by Geoff Miller, Vince Gennaro writes:

"The success of any athlete depends upon some difficult-to-define qualities that go well beyond his or her physical capability or talent level. These intangibles include confidence, focus, will, desire, and preparation."

Miller adds, "When most players and coaches talk about the mental game of baseball, they are really talking about two basic principles: knowledge and performing under pressure."



***"My criteria is if I'm looking at a ballplayer on the field, I say to myself, Am I looking at a Hall of Famer? Because it's 'The look' test for me. And, number two, did the man dominate the game at his position?"- Bill Madden***



***"I see intangibles as counting along with tangibles. I look for players who their teammates felt would make them better in a tough situation. I look for players who played the game to win and didn't care about the personal aspects, realizing that if they succeeded the personal accolades and stats would be there."***

Intangibles are what made Thurman Munson different from the others. He had a unique and natural charisma, and a swagger and confidence that affected his entire team. Here are a few quotes about his intangibles.

**Lou Piniella** said, *"In all the years I've played this game, he is the finest competitor I have ever seen, the most professional, the best example of a team player."*

And **Willie Randolph** said, *"To me, as a young player coming up and watching him work, he was the consummate leader."*

**Fritz Peterson** said, *"He was such a team man. He did all the things that a Yankee of old would've done to win games, run, hit, throw and break up double plays."*

And author **Peter Golenbock** stated it beautifully just weeks ago, saying, *"His greatness cannot be measured by batting average and home runs alone. Without him, the Yankees do not win those pennants and championships."*

**Chris Chambliss** said *"When you look at the way he played and the way he carried himself, it was the way you wanted to play. That's what made him the captain."*

**Ken Singleton** has said about Munson: *"He was the leader of the team that had been to the World Series three years in a row and won the last two. He'd been the MVP in 1976 and was just a well-respected player throughout the league and certainly one of the best competitors in the league. Definitely the leader of the Yankees."*

# THE MAN FROM OHIO

From grade school to Kent State, Thurman Munson made his mark on Canton.



**Grade 6 class photo.** Thurman Munson front row, 4th from left, sporting a cast.

Just ask Ron Lemmo, Jerome Pruett or Steve Fettman. They'll tell you about Thurman Munson. John Biskup, Doug Miller and Joe Gilhausen. They all know.

Childhood friends, teammates, opponents, coaches and neighbors. Each with Thurman Munson stories told in remarkable detail as if they'd happened yesterday. Stories that few

ever heard about the young Thurman Munson.

"I played for Canton-McKinley (high school) back then, and Thurman played for Canton-Lehman," recalled Ron Lemmo. "Thurman was in his senior year and I was just a skinny sophomore second baseman."

"I remember having two solid hits in the game," continued Lemmo. "But Thurman hit a homer, the only run in that game. We formed lines and shook hands after the game, and Thurman said to me, 'Way to hit the ball, little man.'"

"I wish I could turn on a curveball the way you can," Lemmo recalls saying to Munson. "Without hesitation, Thurman Munson says to me,

"Meet me down at Cook Park tomorrow. I'll throw you some curves. Show you how it's done." Lemmo pauses and says, "Thurman Munson said that to me as if he knew I was going to ask him for help. And I'm glad that he did."

Lemmo credits Munson, in part, helping him become an All-Ohio second basemen two years later. "He spent some quality time with me, offering tips on how to hit and time the curve. Me... an opponent... who does that? And you know what? We were friends from that point on."

***"We were riding our bikes, trying to get the courage up to knock on his door, to ask for his autograph. It was right after the 1978 World Series. He saw us out there, and he let us in. I still have that autograph today."* - Steve Fettman**

—**Steve Fettman**

Family friend Steve Fettman recalls the day he and a friend were riding bikes around Munson's neighborhood, hoping to catch a glimpse of Thurman, or better yet, get his autograph.

"We were in the 6th or 7th grade," recalls Fettman. "We were riding our bikes, trying to get the courage to knock on his door, to ask for his autograph. It was right after the 1978 World Series. He saw us out there, and he let us in. I still have that autograph today."

In Munson's, *Thurman Munson*

autobiography as told to Marty Appel, he writes, "Back in high school, there was a pitcher who threw so hard no one could catch him except me." Although not named in the book, flame-throwing Jerome Pruett shares those memories.

"That story is true," recalls Pruett. I could throw 100 at times, and nobody could handle me. That's when they put Thurman behind the plate and my speed didn't faze him in the least. And that didn't surprise me at all. He was able to catch me easily."

# MUNSON HOF 2019

***“You want to know what kind of guy Thurman Munson was? Unselfish, that’s what he was. He loved his teammates and he loved his team. I’ll never forget him for that.”*** - Joe Gilhausen

Childhood friend Joe Gilhausen recalls the day Thurman approached him on the schoolyard. “We were in grade school. Playing Little League ball on different teams. I was wearing my Indians hat and he was wearing his Orioles cap. He told me he was pitching that night against us, and he would beat us. That’s one of those things I’ll remember about him. He was so competitive, always wanting to win. And usually, he did.”

“He was such a great natural athlete. I saw it first hand when we played Pony ball together. We went 54-0 and he was our star player. But you know what I remember most about Thurman? He was a *team first* guy who wanted all of us to share in victories. I was a sophomore running back on our high school team when Thurman was a senior. He was our starting back and rarely came out of the game. On those rare occasions when they took him out for a breather, he would yell to our quarterback, “*Give Joe the ball.*” And he did that every single time I went in for him. It was important for him that I got involved.” Gilhausen paused then said, “You know what kind of guy Thurman Munson was? Unselfish, that’s what he was. He loved his teammates and he loved his team. I’ll never forget him for that.”

“Thurman and I were competitive with one another from Pony League on up. And it was a good competitiveness. It brought out the best in both of us. He always wanted to be the pitcher I was, and I always wanted to be the hitter he was. But I never could be. Even at a young age, he knew how to find the pitch and go with it. He was extremely disciplined and as absolute pleasure to watch him hit.”

Thurman was named to the Canton Repository all-star teams in 1964, 65’ and 66’ at three different positions.



“One more thing about Thurman,” recalled Gilhausen. “One thing that really separated him from other great players was he truly believed no pitcher could get him out, and if they did, it was an accident— especially on rare occasions when he’d strike out. That kind of mindset made him a standout.”

While Munson tore through the Little League, the Canton Junior Boys Circuit League, the Huskies Junior League (league champs in both 1961 & 62’) and the Pony League, excellence didn’t end with baseball. He lettered in baseball, football and basketball, captained all three teams, and was named *All-City* in each sport. But it was during one of Munson’s many days when he and some friends were whacking the ball around for fun, when he was noticed by Ralph Miller, coach of the local Seran Agency team. That Ohio Inter-city League was a tough league, full of ex-minor leaguers and semi-pros. Serious players that wanted to win. And as Miller, just by chance caught a glimpse of Munson hitting the stuffing out of the ball, he pulled his car over for a better look. His son Douglass, bat boy for the team, remembers that day well.

***“He spent some quality time with me, offering tips on how to hit and time the curve. Me... an opponent... who does that?”***

- Ron Lemmo



Steve Fettman’s Thurman Munson Shrine. “These are common here in Canton.”

“Dad asked, “Who is that?” “Thurman Munson,” I said. “Let’s go ask him to play for us,” he said. “And he did.”

“Thurman was only 16 but was one of the top players in the league,” said Miller. “He started with us as a middle infielder, but when veteran

# MUNSON HOF 2019

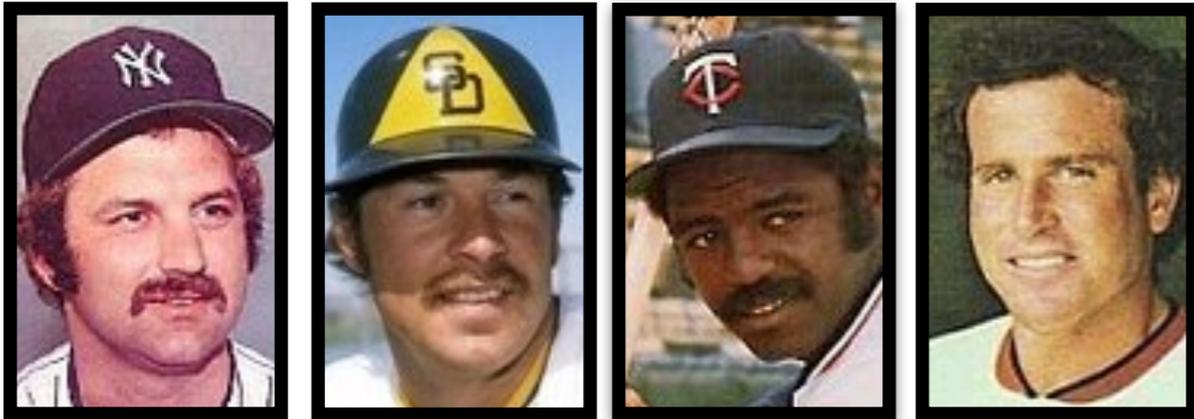
catcher, John Biskup broke his arm, Thurman went in for him. When Biskup came back, everyone knew Thurman was our catcher. He was that good.”

“That’s how it happened,” said Biskup from his home in Florida. The 92 year-old had little trouble recalling those days, when losing your position had meaning. In retrospect, Biskup realized the writing was on the wall.

“I still found a spot in the outfield, and we won the Canton City championship, mainly because of Thurman. We went to the states and won in both years, 66’ & 67.’ It was in that national tournament in Battle Creek when Thurman started getting noticed by the scouts. I think what stood out for them, aside from the great hitting and defense behind the plate, was that he didn’t stand for laziness from any player. He was mighty impressive.”

But Thurman hadn’t yet switched to catching full time. In fact, he made it as an all-Ohio high school all-star as a shortstop in 1965. A team loaded with the likes of Gene Tenace, Larry Hisle and Steve Stone- Munson’s college roommate at Kent State.

“But all that happened added up for him being a catcher,” recalls Pruett. “He was the only one who could catch my fastball, and he was noticed by Ralph Miller. John Biskup breaks his arm and the scouts start coming. When I was about to sign with Kent State, coach Paskert of Kent State asked me, “If you’re gonna sign, what about that Munson kid. What kind of kid is he?” “I knew that Ralph Miller had already watched Munson. I just told him the truth. That he was great.”



Members of the 1965 Ohio all-state high school team:  
Thurman Munson. Gene Tenace. Larry Hisle. Steve Stone.

“Then in 1967, off he goes to the Cape Cod League,” said Lemmo. “He told me he wouldn’t sign for anything less than \$100,000. Said, “I can hit Koufax. I can hit McDowell. He was that confident and he was right.”



And while Paskert had Munson for just two years at Kent State, it was enough for him to know what he had and how special he was.

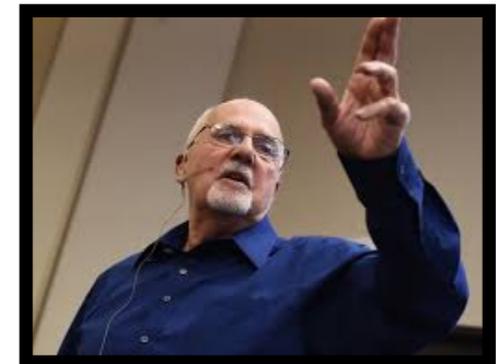
“He reincarnated the pickoff play and he educated the American baseball fan in the dyed-in-the-wool art of hitting behind the runner, He was the greatest at hitting behind the runner of any baseball player I have ever seen.”

And at Cape Cod, Munson set the batting average record for the league, a staggering .420 for the Chatham A’s. One year later, the Yankees selected him with the 4th overall pick in the draft. In honor of Munson and his remarkable season, the Cape Cod batting champion is awarded the, Thurman Munson Batting Trophy at the end of each season.

Munson decided on Kent State to be as close as he could to his high school sweetheart, Diana. Despite offers from 50+ schools, he stayed in Ohio, married Diana and headed for New York.

***“He reincarnated the pickoff play and he educated the American baseball fan in the dyed-in-the-wool art of hitting behind the runner. He was the greatest at hitting behind the runner of any baseball player I have ever seen.”***

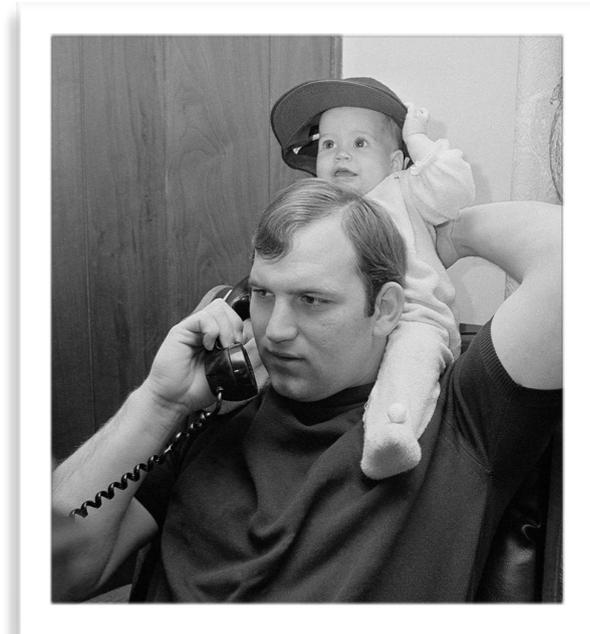
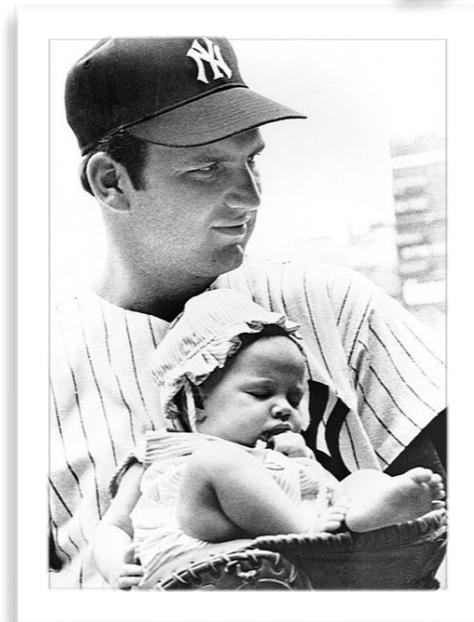
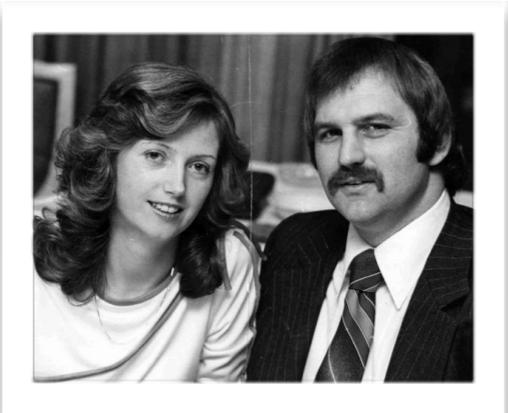
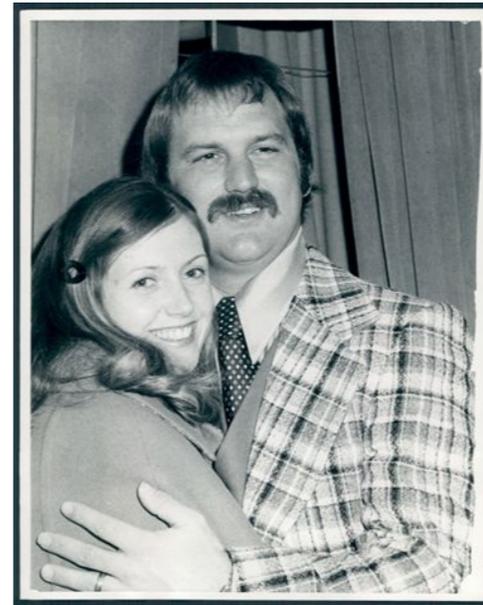
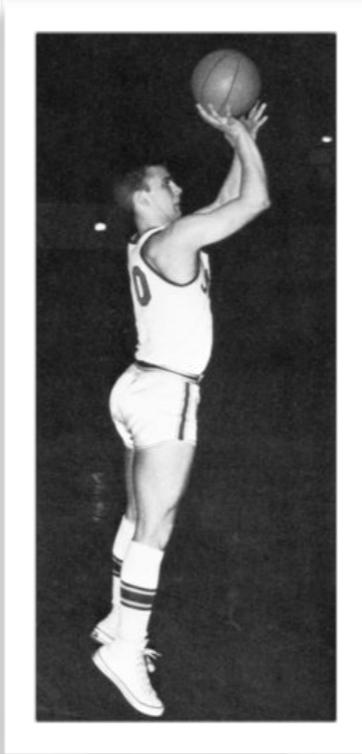
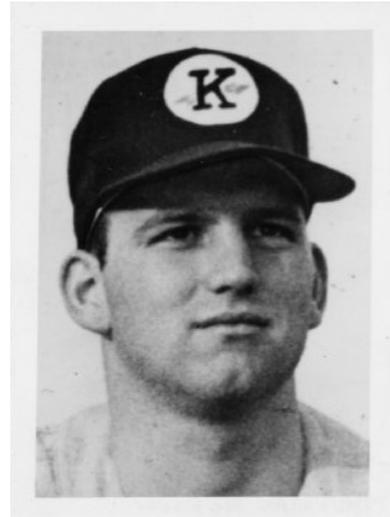
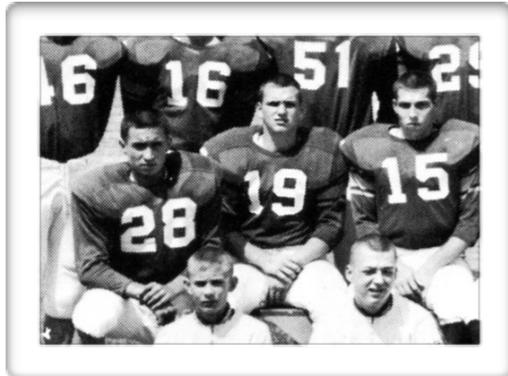
Moose Paskert, Kent State coach



# MUNSON HOF 2019

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And Steve Fettman, put in best, saying, “If your formative years took place near Canton, Ohio, in the mid-1970’s, the raw and scrappy leadership style exhibited by hometown hero and New York Yankee, Thurman Munson, was one worthy of pride and replication. There has never been an athlete who has played so fierce and propelled a team so unapologetically forward in such a lifespan.”



# MUNSON HOF 2019



In Stark County, Ohio, the Stark County Foundation sponsors *The Thurman Munson scholarship*— established in 1983 by the Akron Professional Baseball Club. The annual award is given to Stark County graduating baseball or softball playing seniors going on to college, who, “Must have

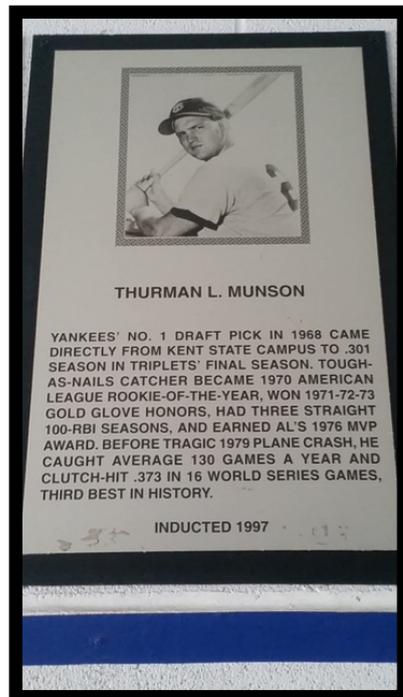
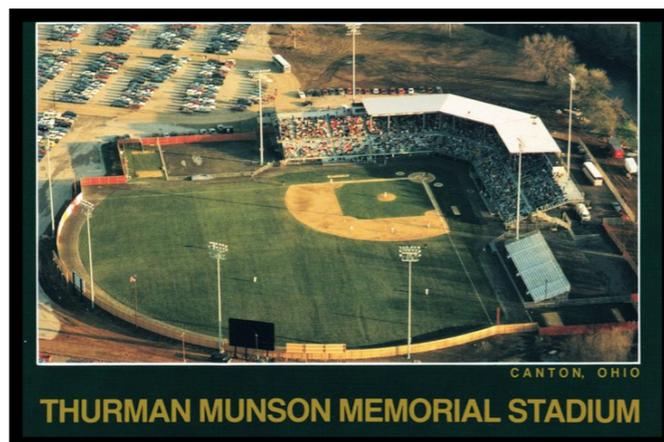
financial need and demonstrate academic achievement.” To date, 35 graduates have received this award.

In 1993, Munson was voted into the Greater Akron Baseball Hall of Fame, and in 1997 into Binghamton Baseball’s Shrine. In 2014, Stark County voters selected Munson onto Kent State’s All-Time Baseball Team— one that includes Steve Stone and Rich Rollins. The all-time team was part of the



100 years of Baseball Celebration, culminating in a home game against Akron.

*Thurman Munson Memorial Stadium* was built in 1979 in Munson’s honor. Home to a number of minor league clubs, the 5,700 seat facility plays host to a number of summer, high school and men's leagues, and is the home park to Malone University baseball.



A lasting tribute to Thurman Munson’s memory and important part to his legacy is the retirement-- not only of his number 15— but of his locker.

It stood next to Derek Jeter’s locker until 2008 when the Yankees closed down the old stadium. It was moved to the Yankees Museum



in 2009. Munson’s uniform, glove and the rest of his uniform remained intact, a motivating reminder of what he meant to the Yankees.

Munson’s Monument Park plaque and dedication shortly after his death is yet another reminder of the part he played in Yankees lore.

To be placed alongside Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig , Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Bill Dickey, Whitey Ford and Casey Stengel-all enshrined in Hall of Fame- perhaps says it all. He belongs next to them in the Hall of Fame.

# Thurman's Legacy

*“The most truly generous persons are those who give silently without hope of praise or reward.”*

- Carol Ryrrie Brink

Sometime during the 1970's, Thurman Munson was found out. His wife, Diana, discovered— inadvertently— that Thurman had been donating to charities, several in fact, without her knowing.

Such a discovery likely led to something. And it did. When she asked Thurman why he never told her, he replied, “Because you might go and tell the press.”

Phil Pepe once asked Munson to suggest a brand of catcher's mitt for his 14-year-old son. Munson gave him one of his. And when Pepe was experiencing family issues, badly needing to see his son during spring-training, Munson offered his help, saying, “If you need money to bring your son to Spring Training, all you have to do is ask me and you've got it.” It stayed between them.

He donated to Easter Seals. Nobody knew. He visited sick kids in hospitals. No press. He helped opponents become better baseball players when he was in high school. No problem. Gabe Paul once said that “Thurman Munson is a nice guy who doesn't want anyone to know about it.” And Diana Munson said, “He didn't want me to be his cheerleader.”

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It was 40 years ago when Thurman began donating to the AHRC of New York City. As an organization supporting children and adults with intellectual and development disabilities, it moved Thurman enough to get involved. And it motivated the AHRC to do more when he died.



“I see where the money goes.” Says Diana Munson.

Diana Munson was contacted by the organization to speak about Thurman. And while that dinner was emotionally difficult to navigate, she persevered. With no way of knowing what impact Thurman's name had on people from that audience, the Dinner grew. And it grew. And it grew.

And what started as just a few thousand dollars raised has climbed to over 10 million today.

“What an honor for Thurman,” said Diana. “What a wonderful way to honor his legacy by doing so many good works. I see where the money goes. It's so touching and means so much to our family. What a good way to honor Thurman and what a wonderful way to help all the individuals.”

In fact, over the past decade alone, *Alliance Building Services* has hired over 200 individuals

supported by AHRC NYC. “We should never forget that as part of the business community of New York City, it is our responsibility to provide jobs for these individuals,” said Gary Green. “We are thrilled to make a difference.”

