

THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF THURMAN MUNSON

One of the most rewarding aspects of this profession has been the opportunity to meet many individuals within the baseball community throughout the years. I can easily state that my initial visit to Canton, Ohio to meet with Diana Munson was one of my more memorable, yet simple excursions. Viewing Thurman Munson's collection within his very office is a privilege that I will recall many times in the future. The awards, significant baseballs, bats, photos, and various paper materials all provided some sort of tangible validation for the player that we all remember. By any standard, and for any era within the game, Thurman Munson's accomplishments on the field are significant.

Born on June 6th, 1947 in Akron, Ohio, Munson was a multi-sport star in high school. He attended Kent State University on a baseball scholarship and was an All-American catcher. Thurman's pro career began with brief stints with the Binghamton Triplets in the Eastern League, and the Syracuse Chiefs, prior to being called up by the Yankees during the '69 season. Munson played so well during the remainder of the '69 season that he won the job of Yankees starting catcher in spring training of 1970. After batting .302 with 7 home runs, 57 RBIs, and 80 assists, he was named the American League Rookie of the Year.

From the start, Munson's leadership by example was apparent. His demeanor and hard-nosed style of play earned him instant respect, and ultimately, the position of team captain. Bobby Murcer was already a Yankee in 1969 when Munson joined the team after fewer than 100 games in the minors, and made quite an impression. "Back in those days, rookies were guys that kind of walked quietly and did what they were told, but Thurman was a little bit different from that," Murcer said. "He felt like he belonged the first time he stepped on the field here at Yankee Stadium."

With the quickest release in baseball in throwing out baserunners, Munson was fearless behind the plate. Manager Ralph Houk told the rookie catcher that he could win more games with his catching than he ever could with his bat. In the end, Houk's prediction couldn't be more debatable. Munson hit over .300 with 100 or more RBIs three years in a row (1975-77), won the MVP Award in 1976, hit .529 in the 1976 World Series, and .320 in the 1977 and 1978 World Series. He was also a six time All-Star.

On the occasions when I visit such player collections, I typically expect certain items, related stories, and supportive materials to be present. Inevitably, my most treasured experiences are learning the stories "less traveled". Often it may be a random account of a personal experience with the player's family, or a previously undocumented interaction with a fan that prove to be most interesting. In the case of meeting Diana Munson, what I learned from her was far simpler and yet extraordinarily more profound than any one story.

Given the unique events surrounding Thurman's baseball career and tragic passing, it became immediately obvious to me how much this man meant to his family. This reality was not brought to light by his death, but was reflected in how he lived his life each and every day. The remembrances over lunch with Diana Munson were not of those tragic days and subsequent events, but of how he valued the time with his children. Or how he stayed grounded as a great husband and friend even while becoming one of the most recognizable sports celebrities of the era. Even something as simple as learning that a man with the reputation of a tiger on the field would often spend his evenings jotting random notes on a legal pad while his three children climbed over his lap was captivating.

So, let it be clear, this very special offering of materials from Thurman Munson is not in any way a demarcation of his passing. It is intended to be a celebration of his life; to shine light on a man who exemplified the way athletes should play the game, and more importantly, on a man who regarded his family with the greatest affection. The lessons of his life are ones we can all appreciate. In that regard, we are truly honored to present the collection of New York Yankees Captain, father, and husband, Thurman Munson.

David Hunt
President, Hunt Auctions

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All items from the personal collection of Thurman Munson, represented in Lots 154-305, will be accompanied by a letter of provenance signed by Diana Munson.

LETTER OF PROVENANCE

THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF THURMAN MUNSON

The following lot was offered at public auction on July 14, 2008
by the Munson Family:

Lot 154. Collection of Thurman Munson Lehman High School athletic letterman's sweater patches and related items c.1963-65. Grouping of original embroidered athletic letterman's patches awarded to Thurman Munson while attending the Canton, OH high school. Includes (3) football, (3) basketball, "1965" football patch, "1965" basketball patch, "W" patch, tassel with "65" charm, and a 1961 "Worley Playground Junior Boys City Champions" Volleyball title award ribbon, which features Munson's name along with Canton Recreation Dept. titling: VG-EX

I certify that the lot described above originates directly from the personal collection of my late husband, New York Yankees catcher, Thurman Munson.


Diana Munson

 HUNT
AUCTIONS

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Thurman Munson and I came to be very close friends during my first season with the New York Yankees in 1978. I had just come over from having played for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1977 and was having a bit of a rough time adjusting to the added pressure of playing in the Yankee pinstripes. Thurman helped me through those trying times. When I was trying too hard he would always settle me down by providing humor on the field. He had an uncanny ability, unlike any teammate that I have played with, to share a laugh or a humorous moment on the field during pressure moments. Even in World Series play, he always had a way about him that kept the players calm and enabled us all to be the best we could be on the field. Although Thurman always managed to keep the mood relaxed, 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.

While his excellent play on the field was evident, Thurman's love and devotion to his family might be his greatest attribute. Even with all of the success that he and the Yankees enjoyed during the mid to late 1970s, Thurman greatly missed his wife and children, taking every opportunity to fly home to visit them on off days. I noticed during his final season of 1979, that while he was a true professional on the field, who continued to play at a high level, his demeanor had changed off the field as he began to miss his family more and more. Thurman's passing was one of the greatest tragedies of my life and I look back on the times that we shared both on and off the field with great fondness.

Several years ago, when the Major League Baseball All-Star Game was played in Chicago, I decided to visit a restaurant that had always been a favorite of Thurman's and mine named Gene & Georgetti Steakhouse. I was by myself, and the restaurant was kind enough to seat me at a quiet table in an upstairs room for some privacy. I ordered a glass of wine for myself and one more for Thurman, looked up to the sky and gave a toast, "Here's one for you Thurman."

I still think about Thurman Munson very often, and can say that while I was fortunate to play with many great players, he was my favorite teammate of my career.

Richard "Goose" Gossage

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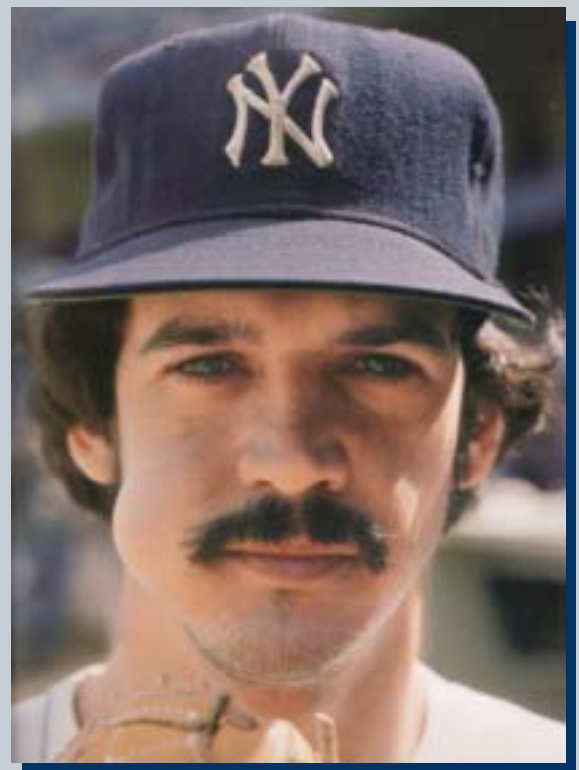
Interestingly, I first met Thurman at Shea Stadium in 1975. It was my rookie season with the Yankees and we were playing our home games at Shea Stadium while Yankee Stadium was being renovated. Since my initial years with the Yankees were spent primarily out of the bullpen, I did not become very close to Thurman until I became part of the starting pitching rotation during the 1977-78 seasons. Upon working with him on a regular basis, my pitching abilities began to excel. He used to tell me, "Catching you is easy because you have two pitches and great control." Thurman also once remarked to me that he had never caught a better power pitcher with an effective breaking ball. Understanding the many fine pitchers that Thurman had caught throughout the years, I took this as a great compliment. It was during this late 1970s era that I became recognized as a premier starting pitcher in the American League. There is no question in my mind that Thurman was a big part of my success. I would place his intellect as a catcher with any of the greats. He made me better, and in fact made all of us on the Yankees better, through his leadership and demand for excellence on the field.

One story I recall was during a game against the Angels on June 17, 1978. It was the game in which I struck out 18 batters. The game started out slowly, and truthfully, I did not know how many strikeouts I had until the 7th inning when Billy Martin told me to look up at the scoreboard. It was at this point that Thurman got excited. He said, "The record is 19 and we're going for it." I told him that we were in a pennant race and that I wanted to win the game. Thurman compromised, saying, "OK, but if you have 16 strikeouts before we go to the 9th inning then we are going for it...right?" Knowing that Thurman would have chewed my head off if I said no, I replied "Sure thing". I ended up with 18, and Diana Munson later told me Thurman was so excited that night he couldn't sleep. It meant a lot to me to hear that from Diana and it again showed Thurman's genuine concern for his teammates.

Off the field, I developed a very close friendship with Thurman. We shared a lot in common, most notably our deep devotion to our families. Thurman spent every waking moment thinking about his wife and children back home in Ohio. We used to kid him that he was such a tough, hard nosed competitor on the field, and then a big teddy bear off the field when was time to go home to his family.

Thurman was one of those rare guys, the type of person people always listened to, and always wanted to be around. If Thurman walked into a room and began to speak to me, I listened, but so did everyone else around us. We all looked to him for leadership. One story that really sums up the type of person that Thurman was occurred in 1979, when I had a very serious back spasm condition. I had to be admitted to the hospital and was in great deal of pain. We had a game that night, and after the game was over, Thurman stopped by to see how I was doing. He brought me a cheeseburger and a Coke. He was the only teammate that came by the hospital and it was a simple statement to say that he was concerned. That spoke to the type of unselfish, caring individual that Thurman Munson was, and I am proud to have called him a teammate and friend.

Ron Guidry



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Thurman Munson was just a pudgy guy from a middle class family in Canton, Ohio. A sports nut who may have had more heart than talent. A guy who loved a challenge and never backed down. A guy who loved to sit around the poker table with old friends and a bad cigar. He was also Rookie of the Year, captain of the three-time pennant winning, and two-time World Champion, New York Yankees, and he was a grumpy guy in front of the media. But, he was accepted by the people of New York as one of their own.

Most importantly, Thurman Munson was a husband and father whose self-proclaimed greatest accomplishment was his family. He was 12 and I was 10 when we first met. I tagged along on his newspaper route just to be with him, and then I would take the 30 cents my parents gave me as a daily allowance to buy him potato chips and a Coke. Thurman always told me it was the best investment I ever made! Our children were just nine, seven, and four when Thurman passed away, but they all have precious memories of their dad...how he so gently brushed their hair...the outrageous plaid and striped ensembles he wore...and how he drove them to school in the winter wearing only his robe and hiking boots!

Thurman Munson was a self-made man who packed an incredible amount of joy and life into his 32 years. He was driven, almost as if he knew he would leave us too soon; so the place he found in our hearts had to be deep and eternal. As my family and I share some of his life with you through these personal mementos, we ask that you honor his memory by finding inspiration in them. It's not Thurman's worldly treasures that are his legacy. It's his legacy that will always be our treasure.

Diana L. Munson