

Tim McCarver, Catcher in the Hall of Fame as a Broadcaster, Dies at 81

Twice an All-Star, he played on four teams over four decades and won two World Series titles. Then he took his baseball smarts and gift of gab into the TV booth.



Give this article



239



The broadcaster Tim McCarver, himself a former All-Star catcher, interviewing the Mets catcher Gary Carter in the mid-1980s. Focus on Sport/Getty Images

By [Bruce Weber](#)

Feb. 16, 2023

Tim McCarver, a durable big-league catcher who played in four decades, made two All-Star teams and won two World Series championships, but whose greater renown derived from his career as a Hall of Fame broadcaster, died on Thursday in Memphis. He was 81.

His death was announced by the National Baseball Hall of Fame, which said the cause was heart failure.

Known for his shrewd analysis of strategy, his literate use of metaphor and his penchant for predicting what was about to unfold on the field, often correctly, McCarver was sometimes a play-by-play announcer but most often a color man, a role that better suited his gift of gab.

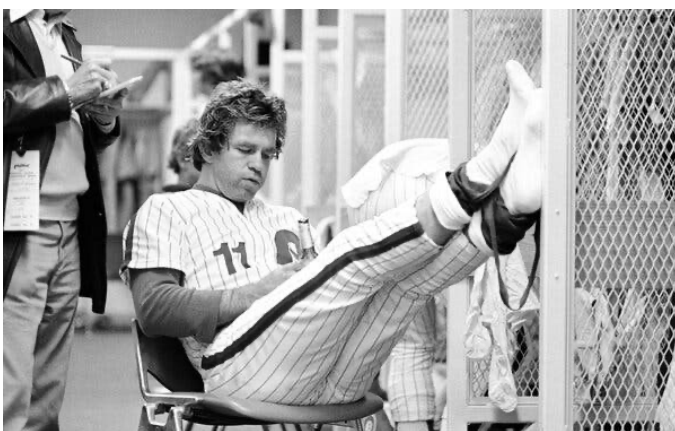
His career spanned more than 30 years, from his start in Philadelphia in 1980, to his famous pairing with the former slugger Ralph Kiner in the Mets' booth, to his national appearances on four different networks, to stints with the Yankees and the San Francisco Giants.

Throughout, his informed, perceptive and articulate observations of the game were widely admired, and his gravelly tenor with a hint of his Tennessee upbringing in it became one of the game's most familiar voices.

Like all long-serving talking heads, McCarver had his detractors. Some said he talked too much, belabored the obvious, too often tangled his grammar and was overly thrilled by his own cleverness; examples abounded on a now-defunct web page, shutuptimmccarver.com, and [he was mocked on "Family Guy."](#) The Atlanta Braves outfielder Deion Sanders once took exception to a McCarver criticism and dumped a bucket of ice water over his head in the locker room after a game.

But more numerous were those who appreciated his independence of mind and his alertness to situational nuances in the game.

In defiance of a broadcasting norm, McCarver was not averse to criticizing the play of a team that employed him; when he was fired from the Mets job in 1999, after 16 seasons, it was reportedly because of just such candor. And his forthrightness often came with a flash of wit or wordplay. In a game in 1992, after watching the Mets' David Cone strike out Casey Candaele (pronounced can-DELL) of the Houston Astros on three pitches, McCarver quipped, "Looks like Cone burned the Candaele at both ends."



McCarver in the Philadelphia Phillies' locker room after the team lost the National League Championship Series to the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1977. He was with the Phillies from 1970 to 1972 and again from 1975 to 1979. Credit...Rusty Kennedy/Associated Press

A Ninth-Inning Call

Perhaps his most famous moment as a broadcaster came in the final seconds of the 2001 World Series. In the bottom of the ninth inning of the seventh game, with the score tied, one out and the bases loaded, the Arizona Diamondbacks' Luis Gonzalez, a left-handed hitter, faced Mariano Rivera, the closer nonpareil of the Yankees. The Yankee manager, Joe Torre, elected to pull his infielders all the way in to the edge of the infield grass, so that any one of them gloving a ground ball would have a better chance to throw home and prevent the deciding run from scoring. His other option was to play the fielders only partway in and hope that a ground ball might be turned into a third-to-first or second-to-first double play.

With the count 0 and 1, McCarver, augmenting the play-by-play of his partner Joe Buck, said:

"The one problem is Rivera throws inside to left-handers. Left-handers get a lot of broken-bat hits into shallow outfield, the shallow part of the outfield. That's the danger of bringing the infield in with a guy like Rivera on the mound."

As advertised, Rivera threw the next pitch on the inside corner. Gonzalez swung, hit the ball off his fists and blooped it into the air. It landed just beyond the infield dirt to the left of second base, where Derek Jeter, the shortstop, would have likely made a catch had he not been playing in. The game, and the Series, was over.

McCarver called a total of 24 World Series. For the first, on ABC in 1985, he was a replacement for Howard Cosell.

In some ways, McCarver's progression from behind the plate to behind the mic was a natural one. A catcher is often a ball club's on-field professor, its gatherer of knowledge and dispenser of experience. Many have become managers; many others, [Joe Garagiola](#) and Bob Uecker among them, have become broadcasters.

From their vantage point behind the plate, catchers are the only defensive players who are stationed behind the hitter, facing outward, and whose field of vision embraces the entire diamond. A catcher's partnership with his pitcher is a crucial element of any game, one that controls the pace and progress of the action. His pitch calls and glove placement help determine his teammates'

defensive alignment, and his knowledge of opposing hitters is an indispensable boon to his battery mate in pitch selection and location.

Indeed, the position requires a level of braininess and concentration unmatched at any other position. And as much as anyone, McCarver, whose reputation for deep baseball knowledge led more than one team to show interest in him as a manager, was the personification of the cerebral catcher.



Perhaps McCarver's most famous moment as a broadcaster came in the final seconds of the 2001 World Series, just before the Arizona Diamondbacks' Luis Gonzalez hit a game-winning single against Mariano Rivera of the Yankees. McCarver's commentary proved remarkably prescient. Credit...Colin Braley/Reuters

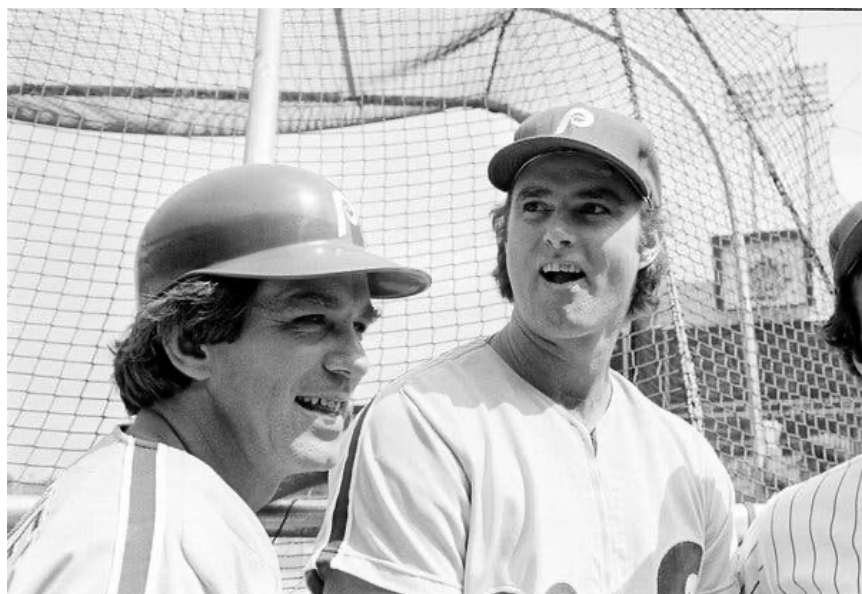
That said, he was a solid big-league ballplayer but not a candidate for Cooperstown as a player. He spent most of his career, which stretched from 1959 to 1980, with two National League teams, the St. Louis Cardinals and the Philadelphia Phillies. His power numbers were low; he hit fewer than 100 home runs in his career and never drove in as many as 70 runs in a season. Still, his career batting average of .271 was respectable, especially for a catcher.

"Did you ever try to figure out why a catcher's batting average isn't usually as high as that of most other players?" McCarver asked in "Oh Baby, I Love It!" (1987), one of the half-dozen books he wrote (this one with Ray Robinson). "The answer: His hands are swollen and always in pain. Try swinging a bat when your hands hurt."

Almost an M.V.P.

McCarver ran well; for the Cards in 1966, he led the league in triples with 13, the only time in baseball history a catcher did such a thing. That was his first year as an All-Star; the next year was his second.

In 1967, he hit .295, had career highs with 14 home runs and 69 runs batted in and finished second (behind his teammate Orlando Cepeda) in voting for the National League's Most Valuable Player award. With McCarver in the lineup, the Cardinals won the pennant in 1964, 1967 and 1968. He was a leading figure in the Cards' victory over the Yankees in the 1964 World Series, hitting safely in all seven games, batting .478 and blasting a 10th-inning three-run homer to win Game 5. McCarver hit poorly and was less of a factor in the Cards' 1967 Series win over Boston, but he hit .333 in the '68 Series against Detroit, though the Cardinals lost in seven games.



McCarver, left, with the Phillies pitcher Steve Carlton in 1977. For several seasons McCarver was Carlton's personal catcher. Credit...Associated Press

As a player, McCarver is probably best known as the battery mate of choice for two of the greatest pitchers in big-league history, [Bob Gibson](#) and Steve Carlton. Both were on the Cardinals in the 1960s, and McCarver was behind the plate for Gibson's 1968 season, in which his earned run average was a minuscule 1.12, the lowest for any pitcher in over a century.

Carlton joined the Cardinals in 1965, and McCarver caught his first two all-star seasons, 1968 and 1969; after that, they followed each other.

McCarver was traded to the Phils in 1970. (That trade is better remembered as a landmark in baseball's labor history. Along with McCarver, the Cardinals tried to send the outfielder Curt Flood to the Phillies, but he refused to report, and his subsequent lawsuit went to the Supreme Court. Unsuccessful in the

end, it was nonetheless the start of the unraveling of the reserve clause, the part of a standard baseball contract that bound a player to his team in perpetuity, which in turn led to the era of free agency.) Carlton was sent to the Phils, an awful team, in February 1972, and that year had one of the most remarkable seasons ever for a pitcher, winning 27 games for a team that won only 59.

McCarver was his catcher for the start of that season; he was traded to Montreal in June, later back to the Cardinals and from there to the Red Sox, where his career stalled.

Released by Boston in June 1975, he was brought back to the Phillies, where Carlton's production had grown modest, and for the next few seasons he was Carlton's personal catcher while a younger player, Bob Boone, caught the other starters. The result: From 1976 to 1979, Carlton won 77 games, and the second of his four Cy Young Awards, and the Phillies reached the postseason three times.

McCarver was released after the 1979 season and began his broadcasting career the next year, but the Phillies brought him back in October 1980 so that he could join the short list of big leaguers who played in four separate decades. He appeared in six games; had one hit, a double; and occasionally handled two jobs at once, conducting television interviews in his Phillies uniform.



In 2017, the Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Gibson and McCarver took part in a ceremony in St. Louis observing the 50th anniversary of the Cardinals' 1967 World Series victory. Credit...Jeff Roberson/Associated Press

A Son of Memphis

James Timothy McCarver was born in Memphis on Oct. 16, 1941, one of five children, and grew up in a tough neighborhood where his Roman Catholic family was a minority. His father, G.E. McCarver, known as Ed, was a Memphis police officer who became a private detective. His mother, Alice, was a religious woman who, McCarver recalled in “Oh Baby, I Love It!,” lived vicariously through his athletic exploits and “used to make the sign of the cross on my back before I went out to play ball.”

A multisport star at Christian Brothers Academy in Memphis, a segregated school, he was recruited by football powerhouses like Notre Dame, Alabama and Tennessee. But he was also pursued by the Cardinals, the Giants and the Yankees, and he decided to play baseball because it offered him the chance to earn money right away.

He signed with the Cards for \$75,000 and was just 17 years old when he began his professional career in the low minor leagues, in Keokuk, Iowa, in 1959. That September he played his first big-league games. He started each of the next two seasons in the minors, appearing briefly with the Cardinals in September. By 1963, however, he was the team’s starting catcher.

McCarver married Anne McDaniel, whom he had met in high school, in 1964. The marriage ended in divorce. They had two daughters, Kelly and Kathy, who survive him, as do two grandchildren. His four siblings died before him.

Over the years, McCarver’s prominence offered him other opportunities. Beyond his game-day appearances, he was host of “The Tim McCarver Show,” a long-running program, first on radio and later on television, in which he interviewed athletes and other sports celebrities. He was a co-anchor, with Paula Zahn, of the 1992 Winter Olympics for CBS.

His books, written with co-authors, consisted largely of tales from the locker room and the diamond and instructions to fans about how to watch a ballgame. He was a fine bridge player who was cited in the bridge column of The New York Times. He appeared in a handful of movies, including “Moneyball,” “Fever Pitch” and “The Naked Gun.” And he even recorded an album, “Tim McCarver Sings Songs From the Great American Songbook.”

But those were sidelights. In 2012, McCarver received the Ford C. Frick Award, essentially a lifetime achievement citation presented annually to a broadcaster by the National Baseball Hall of Fame for “major contributions to baseball.”

Four years later, he was inducted into the Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame.

“If you’re going to talk about the best baseball analyst in the history of television,” [Dick Enberg](#), himself a Frick Award winner, said on that occasion, “Tim McCarver’s name has to come up immediately.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/16/sports/baseball/tim-mccarver-dead.html>

It’s hard to have unmixed feelings about an announcer who talked as much as Tim McCarver with as much evident delight at being onstage. But I always welcomed his presence, lyricalness, and Tennessee tenor. (Or baritone? My ear is unschooled but “tenor” goes better with “Tennessee.”) I even remember thinking what he did when “Lugo” came up to bat against Mariano Rivera and the centre field camera showed Derek Jeter being moved in. At least it allowed the D’Backs to win the only World Series title they will ever have. No one else would have dared question Joe Torre and the mighty Yankees braintrust.

It needs to be pointed out that, not only did Tim have the talents as a catcher to survive in the majors as his hitting abilities declined to episodic levels, but he, more important, had the professional stature and “big personality” required to work with and earn the (grudging) respect of two of the most irascible and formidable pitchers in big league history, Bob Gibson and Steve Carlton (“Lefty”, whose opinions were and remain anything but “left-wing”). Tim was a tough dude; that “confidence” enabled him to hold his own with overbearing personalities on the mound and in an interview. No one else could have proven “acceptable” to those two, and brought out the greatness of each in as full a measure. Both at their best were unhittable; and when not at their best, still unbeatable.

Tim joked that when they were both in their graves, he and Lefty would forever be placed 60’ : 6” apart. Lefty is still on the loose, somewhere reclusive. Bob Gibson died last year.

TJB