

# MLB: Chambliss back in big leagues with Mariners

By JOHN MAFFEI [jmaffei@nctimes.com](mailto:jmaffei@nctimes.com)

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SAN DIEGO ---- If it hadn't been for the Cleveland Indians, Chris Chambliss' career might have taken a completely different path.

"I scouted Chris when he was playing at UCLA," said veteran baseball man Dave Garcia, who was working as a coach and scout for the Padres. "I really liked him, and we were all set to draft him.

"But the Indians beat us to him."

Chambliss, grew up in Oceanside with his brothers Randy, Phil and Frank while their father was stationed at Camp Pendleton. Chris played football and baseball at Oceanside High and MiraCosta College before starring at UCLA.

The Indians beat the Padres to the punch and took him with the first pick of the January phase of the 1970 draft.

In 1971, Chambliss was the American League Rookie of the Year. Three years later, the Indians traded the slugging first baseman to the New York Yankees, with whom he won two World Series titles and played in the 1976 All-Star game.

Since concluding a 17-year playing career in 1988, Chambliss, 62, has criss-crossed the country working as a major league hitting coach for the Yankees (1988, 1996-2000), Cardinals (1993-95), Mets (2002) and Reds (2004-2006). And he compiled a 506-490 record as a minor-league manager with stops at Calgary, Alberta, Richmond, Va., Greenville, S.C., and London, Ontario.

He is in San Diego this weekend serving as hitting coach with the Seattle Mariners. "My father joined the Marines to see the world. I played baseball and have seen most of the U.S.," Chambliss said.

"It's really good to be back here and see some friends. My folks live in Virginia now, so I don't get back to San Diego as often as I'd like."

The Chambliss brothers were all stars at Oceanside High and at Oceanside/Carlsbad Junior College, which later became MiraCosta.

Last year, Chris was inducted into the Oceanside Hall of Fame.

"I really enjoyed growing up in Oceanside," Chambliss said. "There were plenty of sports to be played.

"I loved playing for men like Bill Corcoran and John Seeley."

The Mariners hitters have enjoyed working with Chambliss.

"Chris is awesome," rookie first baseman Justin Smoak said. "He has an old-school mentality that I really like.

"He preaches 'use your hands and get the body out of the way.'

"The man has a bunch of championship rings. He has been through a lot, seen a lot of baseball. He's a guy I really trust."

Chambliss is probably most famous for his walkoff homer against the Royals to end Game 5 of the 1976 American League championship series, a blow that sent the Yankees to the World Series.

Both Smoak and Mariners DH Jack Cust say Chambliss doesn't speak of that big hit. Both players, however, have seen his romp around the bases in Yankee Stadium on film.

"He had the kind of hit we all dream of," said Cust, who had 33 homers for the A's in 2008 and played four games for the Padres in 2006.

"It has been a real pleasure to work with him. He's always there for us.

"He was a really good major league hitter, and I respect what he did in the game. He's a Yankees legend.

"He's a real positive guy, always tries to pump up the hitters."

After spending the last three seasons managing in the minors, Chambliss is happy to be back in the big leagues.

"I'm as happy as I could be to be here, working with this group," Chambliss said. "We have a good, young team. There is something to build on here.

"The big thing is that I still enjoy what I do.

"I liked managing in the minors, but it's a lot of responsibility to run a ballclub.

"It's refreshing to come back to the big leagues as a hitting coach. This is what I do."

Asked if he aspires to manage in the big leagues, Chambliss hesitated.

"At the beginning of my career, that was a focus," Chambliss said. "But I'm not thinking beyond this season, not worrying about things that are out of my control.

"I'm in a good place, with a good organization.

"This team has my full concentration."