

Billy Connors, Yankee Pitching Guru, Is Dead at 76

By Richard Sandomir

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Billy Connors, a pitching coach and executive for the Yankees known for honing the reliever Mariano Rivera’s often unhittable cut fastball and for being a close adviser to George M. Steinbrenner, the team’s mercurial owner, died on June 16. He was 76.

The Yankees announced his death but did not say where he died or give a cause. He lived in Safety Harbor, Fla., on the west shore of Tampa Bay.

Connors turned a short, forgettable stint as a major leaguer with the Mets and Chicago Cubs into a long career as a coach known for teaching new pitches and rebuilding pitchers’ mechanics. He was the pitching coach for the Kansas City Royals, the Cubs (twice) and the Seattle Mariners before the Yankees hired him in 1989 for the first of three tours.

“The one thing all the writers told me when I got here,” he told The Daily News in 2003, was that Steinbrenner “always fires the pitching coach before he fires a manager. But I always said I wasn’t going to fear him because it would keep me from doing my job.”

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