

# Akron Beacon Journal

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ZIPS

## Akron basketball legend, longtime high school coach Bobby Smith dies



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**Bobby Smith's** nickname was telling.

When a man's alias is “**Sumthin,**” he's expected to have a larger-than-life personality. Well, people who knew **Smith** can attest to him fulfilling the expectation his moniker created.

A legendary player and coach on **the Akron basketball scene**, Bobby “**Sumthin**” **Smith** died on Wednesday, Jan. 21, his sister Sandy Culver told the Beacon Journal by phone on Jan. 22. Smith was 79.

"He was witty. He was basically an entertainer. He was a showman," Frank Jessie, one of Smith's teammates at the University of Akron, said on Jan. 22. "He was obviously very good at his craft as a player and as a coach. He had a huge personality. He was a very likable, very interesting guy."

**More on Bobby "Sumthin" Smith:** [Ellet and Akron Zips legend enters Akron Public Schools Athletics Hall of Fame](#)

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Smith's history as a star guard at [Ellet High School](#) and with the [Akron Zips](#) propelled him into [the Akron Public Schools Athletics Hall of Fame's](#) third class in

2024. He was inducted into [the Summit County Sports Hall of Fame](#) in 1983 and UA's Varsity "A" Hall of Fame in 1985.

Smith coached boys basketball for 25 years at Norton, South and [East](#) high schools. He won four City Series championships — two with South and two with [East](#).

He also claimed unofficial titles for the best-dressed coach in the area. His powder-blue tuxedo on the South sideline became part of his persona.

“He was flamboyant at a time when that wasn't really the norm at all,” former APS assistant athletic director [Ron Linger](#) said in 2024. “The players loved him. He had some great teams.”

Smith graduated from Ellet in 1964 and held the school's scoring record until 2017.

With the Zips, Smith started for four seasons spanning 1964-68, helping UA advance to the NCAA College Division championship game during the 1964 season and compile a record 79-28. He finished his Zips career with 1,437 career points, ranking fourth in the Akron record book at the time.

“I think I was an overachiever — 5-9, 150 pounds. That's not the biggest guy,” Smith said in 2024, adding his scoring totals would have been more impressive if he had played when the 3-pointer existed.

**Greatest Akron Zips hoops player ever?:** [Bobby "Sumthin" Smith had an answer for the topic](#)

At UA, Smith acquired his classic “Sumthin” nickname.

“Red Cochrane, the old athletic director at the Zips, he walked in [the gym] with a couple people, and I happened to throw in a jump shot from a long ways away,” Smith recalled in 2024. “He said, 'Ain't he something?' It kind of stuck. I was a freshman when they nailed me with that title.”

Smith taught physical education for many years. When he was in his late 50s, he coached girls basketball for one season. He explained he didn't want to take the job,

but he did because East's 2002-03 team had been left without a coach, and he didn't want its season to be canceled.

Smith is survived by his sisters, Sandy Culver and Karen Maradich. He died at Culver's home in Randolph Township, she said.

Smith spent the latter years of his life in a wheelchair because of health issues. However, his condition couldn't prevent him from delivering an entertaining acceptance speech during his APS Athletics Hall of Fame induction in October 2024.

Linger summarized the scene by labeling Smith “one of the greatest of all time as far as characters.”

Smith never stopped being “Sumthin.”

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