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Boating accident victim honored

PORTLAND (AP) — With the team chaplain asking "Why Steve? Why now?" the ashes of Cleveland Indians pitcher Steve Olin were buried Sunday high in the Tualatin Mountains.

About 300 people jammed the small chapel of Skyline Funeral Home west of Portland, where Olin was remembered by family, friends and teammates as a loving husband and father with an infectious sense of humor. His ashes were interred with mementos of his life.

Olin, 27, and teammate Tim Crews, 31, were killed last Monday when their 18-foot bass boat hit a pier on Little Lake Nellie, near the Indians' training camp in Winter Haven, Fla.

"Life has many mysteries," team chaplain Tom Petersburg said of the suddenness of the deaths. "Why Steve? Why now?"

Petersburg urged the family and team not to despair, but to remember the good times they had shared with Olin.

"Memories keep us from moving toward resentment," Petersburg said.

Olin's wife, Patti, greeted friends at the chapel door with warm smiles and hugs between sniffles. She was surrounded by supportive family members, including her parents and Olin's sisters, Joell and Heather.

The crowd sat silently before the ceremony as rose petals from the bowls and baskets of flowers drifted to the floor beneath a large photograph of Olin in his Indians uniform.

Petersburg opened the ceremony and led the crowd in prayer.

"God is a refuge," Petersburg said. "We come here to sharpen the memories, to bring comfort to those who are feeling Steve's loss."

Despite Olin's abrupt death, Petersburg said, "God is no different this week than he was last week."

Andy Boone, a close friend, said he and Olin had known each other since Raleigh Hills Little League. They were roommates at Portland State University, where Olin had won an athletic scholarship.

Boone recalled Olin eating macaroni and cheese for breakfast in their college days. "Breakfast of champions," he said. The mourners smiled.

"Steve was the kind of man that I think every good man tries to be," Boone said, praising Olin's commitment to his children, Alexa, Garrett and

Kaylee, and his wife, Patti.

"As a husband, I don't think a woman could ask for a finer man," Boone said. "Their relationship inspired many people."

After sharing boyhood memories of Olin and Olin's family, Boone relinquished the pulpit to Cleveland pitcher Kevin Wickander, who was flanked by six teammates.

Wickander sobbed and cleared his throat.

"There was a side to Stevie that not a lot of you might understand," Wickander said, his voice wavering. "He was a major part of my life."

The tearful pitcher said no one expected he and Olin would become such good friends, but they were together in the bullpen for more than five years.

"We were like one all the time," Wickander said. "He was the best man at my wedding."

Drafted by Cleveland in 1987, Olin played rookie baseball in Burlington, N.C., and worked his way up through the farm system. He made his big league debut in 1989 and had his first full year with Cleveland in 1992, when he led his team in saves with 29.

Nobody expected Olin would be so good on the mound, Wickander said.

Olin "looked like Mr. Rogers," Wickander said. "He had a body like a bowling pin."

Olin had a great sense of humor, and "was always doing something mischievously to keep us going," Wickander said.

As a pitcher, he believed strongly in superstition.

"He wouldn't step on the third-base line when he walked out to the mound," Wickander said, adding that he believed Olin's superstitions and often followed his advice — like the time Olin told him to get married.

"Stevie was such a great family man. He would never do anything until he had Patti's permission," Wickander said, drawing a laugh from the crowd.

"He was my family," Wickander concluded.

The service closed with Garth Brooks' recording of "The Dance."

As Patti Olin slumped over and cried, her mother's arm slipped around her, and people throughout the chapel began weeping. Through the chapel window, behind Olin's photo, a hawk circled to the music.

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