

Introduction

“It’s a beautiful day for a ballgame; let’s play two!”

—Ernie Banks, Chicago Cubs

I recently stopped by my favorite book store. In the sports section, I found book-after-book about Major League Baseball (MLB) players—Hank Aaron, Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Satchel Paige, Ted Williams, Ty Cobb, Willie Mays, Lou Gehrig, and almost every book imaginable about Babe Ruth, and numerous others. All players, who in one way or another, left their mark on the game. Those bookshelves appeared to sag from the weight of so many books. I wondered why so many anthologies on baseball?

The obvious answer: the sport has so much to offer writers and readers. I have published two books on baseball. It’s time for me to write my third book about my favorite sport. With more than a century of history, the game is filled with many great and exciting stories, including those little nuggets and traditions that don’t go down in the record books. The ones that happen in the dugout, the locker-room, or on the field, even in the stands. For me, no other books on sports are as entertaining as those written on baseball.

I started writing this book the day I trotted onto the baseball field at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C. It was April 16, 1953 and I was wearing the uniform of the World Champion New York Yankees! My dream had come true. At the age of thirteen, I had become the batboy for the visiting team, whenever the American League’s Washington Senators played at Griffith Stadium. For two years, I “*worked*” with and wore the uniform of each

of the seven American League teams that visited Griffith Stadium. I rubbed elbows with some of the game's most talented players, and was also privy to hearing several incredible stories of baseball's past. Team managers, coaches, and players held me spellbound with their tales during those special times we spent together in the clubhouse, the dugout, and on the field during batting practice.

My story actually came to life here at...

Griffith Stadium, Washington, D.C.



As a major league batboy, I made Griffith Stadium my second home. I loved that old ballpark. However, to get to the stadium wasn't so easy. I rode the streetcar across town from southeast Washington to the upper northwest side. I estimate that I made this trek 170 times. But still, I was one lucky kid!

I learned quickly that while Major League Baseball is packed with history, it is also loaded with surprises. I was fortunate to see a number of incredible events take place directly in front of me: a few fielding plays that will likely never be duplicated, several home runs that can only be described as spectacular, plus a few other heart-wrenching undertakings. Some of them were hilarious, some sad, some downright dumb, but that's baseball!

Today as I write, I am sad. Three days ago we lost one of baseball's greatest, most colorful and caring legends of all time, Yogi Berra. I met Yogi in 1953.

He was fun to be around, told great stories about the past, and the two of us enjoyed sharing and trading comic books. Once in a while, Yogi would deliver some line that would grab everyone's attention, like "*I didn't say everything I said.*"

Yogi Berra became an almost instant and respected friend. I never heard anyone say a single negative thing about Yogi. He was not only an extremely talented player, he was exceptionally kind and caring—rare qualities in the world of sports. Yogi Berra will be sorely missed!

No other sport comes close to matching the number of surprising and inconceivable things that have taken place throughout Major League Baseball's many decades of play. In this book I share with you some of those nuggets I picked up along the way, and a few other amazing *Hits and Misses*—unconventional, bizarre, wacky, and legendary happenings that took place on and off a big league baseball field. Furthermore, if you are not interested in being bombarded with statistics, you will be pleased to find that I refer to statistics only to make a point or two about a specific player or event.

This book is filled with amazing true accounts of situations—from A to Z, from *amazing* to *zany*. I think you'll have fun with this book.

Nostalgia is important to baseball. It allows each of us to bring back fond recollections of some of the game's most memorable and exciting moments. Join me in reminiscing about this all-American sport.

Jack L. Hayes

Batter up!

CHAPTER ONE

Spectacular Home Runs

"It's going, going, gone."

—Mel Allen



The home run is perhaps the most exciting feat in all of baseball. When the slugger connects and delivers the mighty power that sends that long ball deep into the stands or over a fence, it's magic.

In the early 1900s, the “Dead Ball Era” in baseball, home runs as we know them today were rare. The distances to fences or stands were often too far for a well-hit ball to reach. For example, at Boston Braves Field, the distance down the lines measured over 400 feet and was nearly 500 feet to dead center; the Chicago Cubs’ West Side Grounds, 560 feet to the center field fence; the Boston Red Sox’s Huntington Avenue Grounds, 635 feet to the center field fence; and at the Philadelphia Athletics’ Shibe Park, the distance to the center field fence was 515 feet.

Even if the distances to the parks’ perimeters had been reachable, the poor condition of the baseballs in play almost guaranteed that powerful hitters would fail at any attempt to “go for the fences.” Most balls were kept in the game for 100 pitches or more, even if lopsided, lumpy, dirty, or “dead.” That was until a MLB player was killed by a pitch in 1920.

Along with better baseballs and safer pitching rules, came Babe Ruth and his mighty swing. This new combination changed baseball forever. The sport shifted from a strategic, low-scoring, speed-dominated game to one that was built around the hitter’s power as it evolved into an exciting and high-scoring event. Baseball fans loved this new era of excitement; the game’s popularity and attendance increased significantly.

The events related in this chapter are not about the longest home runs ever hit, nor the most impactful, but each contributed plenty to the game, as did the men who hit them, and will live forever in the annals of Major League Baseball.

Shot Heard ‘Round the World’

In mid-August 1951, the New York Giants trailed the first-place Brooklyn Dodgers by thirteen and one-half games, and Dodgers’ manager Charlie Dressen had announced, “The Giants is dead.” Dressen’s proclamation appeared to be a jinx for his team as the Dodgers commenced to lose game after game and the Giants came to life. The Giants went on a 16-game winning streak on August 12th that ended on August 28th. By the season’s final weekend, the Giants had not only tied the Dodgers for the National League’s lead, they had forced a three-game playoff to determine which team—Dodgers or

Giants— would advance to play the American League’s New York Yankees in the World Series.

The Giants won the playoff opener, 3-1, at Ebbets Field, behind Thomson’s two-run homer off Branca, the Dodgers starter. The next day at the Polo Grounds, the Dodgers crushed the Giants 10-0. On Wednesday, October 3, 1951, the two teams met to play their third and final game of the National League playoffs. The winner would advance to the World Series. Millions of viewers were expected to watch the first major league game ever televised nationwide. Millions more would be listening to the game on the radio, including thousands of American servicemen tuned in on the Armed Forces Radio network.

Crowd anticipation and excitement, spurred on by the deep-rooted, cross-town rivalry between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers, set the stage for an epic game. Over the last few weeks of the regular season, the Giants had claimed an unbelievable string of victories over the first place Dodgers, winning 37 of their last 44 games to force a three-game playoff series to decide the National League’s championship.

Excitement? You bet there was excitement! On television, the game moved along at a decent pace, and when this third and deciding game went into the top of the eighth inning—the two teams were tied 1-1. But not for long! The Dodgers came to life. They scored three runs, giving the Dodgers a comfortable 4-1 lead before the inning was over.

The Giants went down in order in the bottom of the eighth, and their pitching staff did not allow any Dodgers runs in the top of the ninth. Hope for the Giants was rapidly vanishing; it was now their final time at-bat. With a comfortable three-run advantage, the Dodgers sensed a win as did their fans. They were now only three outs from victory, and a trip to the World Series.

Let the celebrations begin! But...in the words of Yogi Berra, *“The game ain’t over till it’s over!”*



Up first in the bottom of the ninth was Giants shortstop, Alvin Dark. With the score 4-1 he singled. Don Mueller hit a single and Dark moved from first to third. Monte Irvin popped out, but Whitely Lockman drove a double down the left field line, scoring Dark and advancing Mueller to third. Unfortunately for Mueller, he broke his ankle during his hard slide into third. Clint Hartung replaced him as a pinch runner.

What unfolded next was one of the most thrilling instances in organized baseball, often cited by players and historians alike as Major League Baseball's most memorable moment... ever!

With the New York Giants down by two, Bobby Thomson stepped into the batter's box. On the mound was Dodgers pitcher Ralph Branca. The count worked to no balls and one strike. Branca wound up and delivered his next pitch, a high fastball; Thomson swung and connected. The crowd was on its feet.

"There's a long drive...it's gonna be...I believe..the Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! Bobby Thomson hits into the lower deck of the left-field stands! The Giants win the pennant, and they're going crazy, they're going crazy. I don't believe it, I don't believe it, I do not believe it!"

Announcer Russ Hodges was shouting into the microphone. The Sporting News christened this single event the greatest moment in baseball history. *Sports Illustrated* ranked this spectacular ending as the second-greatest sports moment of the 20th century (only after the U.S. hockey team's victory over the Soviet Union in the 1980 Olympics).

Blemish or black-eye?

Thomson's three-run homer brought a stirring conclusion to the New York Giants' late-summer comeback that became known as the "Miracle of Coogan's Bluff." Naturally, Bobby Thomson was the Giants' hero! However, years later, Dave Anderson of *The New York Times* in his book *Pennant Races* (1994), told of allegations that the 1951 Giants had conducted a signal stealing operation at the time of Thomson's home run. Not to be outdone,

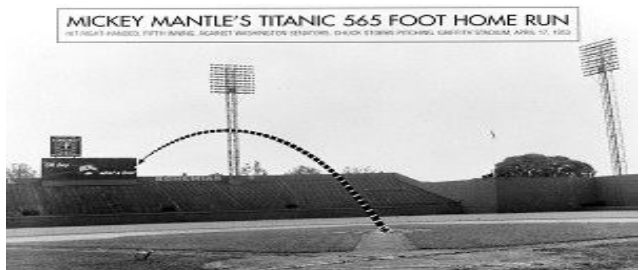
reporter Joshua Prager wrote a similar article in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2001 and followed up again in his book *The Echoing Green* (2006) by reporting that several players on the Giants' 1951 team, including Thomson, had confirmed that they stole opposing catchers' signals for much of the season via a buzzer system using a "spy" with a telescope in the center-field clubhouse at the Polo Grounds. Thomson allegedly told Prager that he was not tipped-off to the kind of pitch Branca would be throwing when he hit his pennant-winning homer. In an interview, Ralph Branca said he felt that Thomson did receive a signal from the Giants' bullpen that a fastball was coming on that fateful pitch. "When you took signs all year, and when you had a chance to hit a bloop or hit a home run, would you ignore that sign?" Branca said. "He knew it was coming. Absolutely!"

Tape-Measure Homer

As a kid, I had a saying, "If you don't swing the bat, you can't hit the ball." Mostly, I used those words to motivate myself into going after things that I considered practically unachievable—sometimes my saying paid off, other times, it didn't. My greatest dream in the early '50s was to become a major league batboy. Unfortunately, I did not know a single person, even remotely connected to professional baseball. But I believed and never let my dream die.

In 1953, my dream came true!

On Friday afternoon, April 17, 1953, my second day at "work" as visiting team batboy for the New York Yankees at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C., little did I know that this day would not only go down in baseball history, but also take its place in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.



In the top of the fifth inning, batting right-handed, Mickey Mantle of the Yankees stepped into the batter's box to face the Washington Senators lefty,

Chuck Stobbs. With two outs and one man on base, New York was ahead 2-1. Hank Bauer and I were crouched on one knee in the nearby on-deck circle.

The first pitch from Stobbs was called a ball by the plate umpire, Jim Honochick. Stobbs wound up, took a quick look at the base runner, and delivered his second pitch, a chest-high fast ball. Seeing Mantle's mighty swing and hearing the ball crush against the bat, left little doubt he had hit a home run. I expected Mantle's well-hit ball to land somewhere in the stadium's left-field bleachers, as I had seen three or four times before during the Yankees' two days of batting practice. Not this time. It was as if time was standing still. The ball just kept going and going, higher and higher. It appeared to glance off the fifty-six foot "Mr. Boh" (beer ad) sign in the bleachers as it sailed totally out of the stadium.

This tremendous home run by Mickey Mantle was the first ball ever to clear Griffith Stadium's left-field bleachers since they were built in 1924. Ruth didn't do it, nor did any of those other powerhouses in years before. Mickey Mantle's homer was calculated to have traveled 565 feet, and it became known as the "tape-measure" home run.

Mr. October

To get my juices flowing, a friend of mine—with World Series tickets—invited me to join him at Yankee Stadium for Game 6 of the 1977 World Series. I'd lived in New York for three years. This would not be my first trip to "The House that Ruth Built." I had made this trek at least four times before, but tonight, Tuesday, October 18, 1977, was special. It was my first World Series game, and the Yankees were facing the tough National League champs, the Los Angeles Dodgers. As Game 6 got underway, the Yankees were up three games to two over the Dodgers.

As my friend and I took our seats, we talked briefly about an ongoing rumor being hyped by the sports media. Seems that Yankees manager Billy Martin had accused Reggie Jackson of loafing on a ball that was hit into short right field during a June 18th game against the Boston Red Sox. Martin, known to have a short temper, had pulled both his pitcher and Jackson, and replaced Jackson with Paul Blair in the sixth inning of what would end up a 10-4 thrashing by the Red Sox.

Had the conflict between Martin and Jackson passed, or would it resurface? We mused over the question, then got down to the serious stuff—getting ready to watch the ballgame.

Looking back, little attention focused on Jackson's first at-bat when he was walked on four straight pitches by Dodger pitcher Burt Hooton. As the game moved along, Jackson again came to bat against Hooton in the bottom of the fourth inning, with the Yankees trailing 3-2. With Thurman Munson on first, Jackson hammered Hooton's first pitch for a home run, sending the Yankees ahead with a 4-3 lead; knocking Hooton out of the game.

An inning later—in the bottom of the fifth—Jackson reappeared against relief pitcher Elias Sosa. On his first swing, Jackson sent the ball into the bleachers—chalking up an impressive two home runs on two swings.

As Jackson—the first batter up in the bottom of the eighth—stepped into the batter's box to face knuckleballer, Charlie Hough, fans went wild chanting Reg-GIE! Reg-GIE! Reg-GIE! The cheers echoed through the stadium so loudly that we could barely carry on a conversation without having to shout. Then it happened! On the first pitch, Jackson electrified the crowd of 56,407 with his third home run into the center-field bleachers. With that historic blast, Jackson had now belted three homers on three consecutive first pitches thrown by three different pitchers. Those three home runs in a single World Series game tied Babe Ruth's record (Ruth accomplished this twice; once in 1926 and again in 1928).

When the reporters later compared Jackson's blasts to Ruth's feat, Jackson responded, "Babe Ruth was great. I'm just lucky." (Albert Pujols (Game 3, 2011) and Pablo Sandoval (Game 1, 2012) would later join Ruth and Jackson as the only players in history to hit three home runs in a single World Series game.)

Reggie Jackson "Mr. October" also set the mark in 1977 for the most homers hit in a World Series with five.

On January 5, 1993, "Mr. October" was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The Mazeroski Moment—October 13, 1960, Pittsburgh's Forbes Field

In the winner-take-all showdown Game 7 of the 1960 World Series, some 36,680 fans crammed the stands as the final game between the New York Yankees and Pittsburgh Pirates began.

Having already won seven of the past eleven World Series, the New York Yankees were heavily favored, especially since they had already won three games in this Series with blowout scores of 16-3, 10-0 and 12-0. The Pirates had won the three lower scoring (6-4, 3-2, and 5-2) games, and they hadn't won a single World Series championship since 1925.

Game on: Vernon Law started for the Pirates as he had beaten the Yankees in two previous games. Manager Casey Stengel¹, gave Bob Turley the nod to take the pitcher's mound for the Yankees.

As the game progressed, the lead shifted three times before the Yankees rallied with two runs to tie the game at 9-9 in the top of the ninth inning. Once the Yankees were retired, their fifth reliever, Ralph Terry, returned to the mound in the bottom of the ninth. His job was to not allow the Pirates to score a run, so the Yankees could bat again in the top of the tenth inning.

The first batter to step up to the plate was Bill Mazeroski, or "Maz," as he was affectionately called by local fans. Terry's first pitch was a fastball down the middle, but high. Ball one. The crowd's anxiety built as Terry went into his windup and delivered a slider that moved right over the plate. "Maz", never known as a power hitter, unleashed his bat and solidly connected. An enormous blast! The crowd began screaming wildly—could it be...could it be...ah, yes! The Yankees left fielder, Berra, turned around to chase the ball, but it was all in vain. The ball flew over the 18-foot high wall and disappeared as it passed beyond the 406 marker. Game over.

As Mazeroski rounded the bases, waving his batting helmet over his head in jubilation, Ralph Terry walked silently off the mound, headed for the dugout. New York's remaining players simply stood and watched in stunned disbelief. The Pirates had pulled off the nearly



impossible: They were outscored, outhit, and outplayed, but still managed to pull out a victory.

With that mammoth “walk-off” home run blast off the bat of Bill Mazeroski, the Pittsburgh Pirates won the 1960 World Series championship. Years later, Mickey Mantle was quoted as saying that losing the 1960 Series was the biggest disappointment of his career. For Bill Mazeroski, it was the highlight. Although only one official error was recorded, Yogi Berra said, the Yankees had “made too many wrong mistakes.”

Game 7’s final stats showed that the lead had shifted between the two teams four times. In total, the two teams had compiled 19 runs, and 24 hits, without a single strikeout. Equally astounding was the length of this high scoring game: 2 hours and 36 minutes—the shortest game in World Series history.

The Impossible Has Happened!

Let’s travel back in time to Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, California, and arrive there on October 15, 1988: It’s Game 1 of the World Series; the National League’s champion, L.A. Dodgers against the American League champs, the Oakland Athletics (A’s).

Unfortunately, during the National League playoffs, Kirk Gibson, star player for the L.A. Dodgers, suffered injuries to both legs. Also ill with a stomach virus, he was not expected to play.

With the Dodgers at-bat in the bottom half of the first inning, Mickey Hatcher hit a two-run homer and Los Angeles took an early lead. In the next inning, Jose Canseco hit a grand slam homer, making the score 4-2 in Oakland’s favor. In the bottom of the sixth inning, the Dodgers scored a run, cutting Oakland’s lead to just one run. The Dodgers retired the A’s in the top of the ninth.

Going into the Dodgers’ final at-bat in the bottom of the ninth, Oakland’s closer Dennis Eckersley—baseball’s best closer with 45 saves—was brought in to pitch and seal the win for Oakland. Facing the bottom of the batting order, Eckersley retired the first two batters, and then walked pinch hitter Mike Davis, a power hitter. Dave Anderson, who had been waiting in the

on-deck circle to pinch hit for the pitcher, abruptly turned and headed back to the dugout. (Manager Lasorda would later reveal that he sent weak-hitting Dave Anderson to the on-deck circle as a ploy. He said, "I figured Eckersley would pitch more carefully to Davis with the right-hander on deck. If he'd seen Gibson on deck, he would have pitched Davis differently.")

To the great surprise of everyone—fans, announcers, and Oakland's ball-players—Kirk Gibson hobbled from the dugout and took his place in the batter's box. Once a 2-2 count was reached on Gibson, Davis stole second. Now with two outs, Gibson worked his way to a 3-2 count. With everyone in the stadium frozen—Eckersley threw his next pitch. Gibson, using nothing but his wrists, took an awkward swing, but connected solidly, and the ball rocketed off his bat and sailed over the right-field fence bringing the Dodgers a miraculous 5-4 win. With Gibson limping around each of the bases and pumping his fist, his ecstatic teammates stormed the field and the celebration began.

According to NBC broadcaster Vin Scully, *"the impossible just happened!"* The L. A. Dodgers won the game, 5-4. Gibson would not have another appearance in that World Series. The Dodgers went on to defeat the Oakland A's in the World Series, four games to one.



Ultimate Sports' Fantasy, October 23, 1993

This story takes us back to Game 6 of the 1993 World Series between the Toronto Blue Jays and Philadelphia Phillies, being played at Toronto's Skydome. The Blue Jays, vying for their second straight World Series championship, held the lead in this Fall Classic, three games to two, but were in serious trouble, thanks to the Phillies' five-run seventh inning that included Lenny Dykstra's three-run homer. (Dykstra, having a great post-season for the Phillies, had already hit nine home runs, scored eight times and driven in five runs in this World Series.)

As they moved into the bottom of the ninth, with the Blue Jays trailing the Phillies 6-5, the Phillies and their fans had hopes and visions of a Game 7. The Phillies manager ordered a pitching change. Relief pitcher, Mitch “Wild Thing” Williams came in to secure the final three outs that would send the Series into a Game 7 final. Williams didn’t just inherit his “Wild Thing” nickname; he was known to be wild, whether “on” or not. So no one was surprised when he walked the Blue Jays’ leadoff batter Rickey Henderson on four straight pitches to open the bottom of the ninth. With one on base, Williams threw nine pitches to Devon White before White flied out to left field; Henderson, played it safe, and remained on first base. Paul Molitor, designated hitter for the Jays, stepped up to the plate. Molitor, who had previously tripled and hit a homer in this game—was batting close to .500 in this Series. After working the count to 1-1, Molitor drilled the next pitch to center field for a single. Henderson held up at second base.

With runners on first and second and one out, Joe Carter stepped into the batter’s box. Philly fans, on their feet began chanting, “wild thing, wild thing...double-play.” They knew that a double play would end the game with a Phillies win, and send the Series into a final, winner-take-all, Game 7. Blue Jays fans not to be outdone, began standing, clapping in synch, and shouting in hopes that a single would bring home the runner from second base, making it a tie game, and keeping the opportunity alive for a Jays win and possible championship.

Williams’ first two pitches to Carter were called balls with both out of the strike zone.

Working his way back to a 2-2 count, Williams delivered his next pitch. As the ball reached the plate, Carter took a powerful swing and connected solidly. The ball exploded like a bomb off his bat, and traveled towards the foul pole mounted at the left-field stands. Those who watched appeared mesmerized, possibly thinking...foul or fair? Carter, as he sprinted towards first-base, followed the flight of the ball, perhaps wondering the same...fair or foul ball? All

doubt faded as the ball disappeared over the left-field wall in fair territory. The Blue Jays had turned what looked like a probable Game 6 loss into an 8-6 win and a World Series victory.

Joe Carter later said, "I actually dreamed of that moment many times. I dreamed of that moment when I was a little kid. I'd be sitting at my father's garage and daydreaming about that moment. I even wrote it down a few times: My dream is to hit a home run to win the World Series." It was the ultimate sports fantasy.

