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Pirates' Bill Mazeroski: 50 years later, shot still echoes

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By Harry Harris, AP

A joyous greeting awaits Bill Mazeroski, about to score the winning run of the 1960 World Series. It's the only World Series Game 7 to end on a home run.

By Mike Dodd, USA TODAY

At 3:36 p.m. ET Wednesday, the Oakland neighborhood in Pittsburgh will come alive again.

Bill Mazeroski will be there, along with eight to 10 of his old Pirates teammates. A crowd expected to swell to 500 or so fans will gather at the remnants of the Forbes Field outfield wall in Schenley Park and listen to the radio broadcast of Game 7 of the 1960 World Series.

Wednesday is the 50th anniversary of — arguably, of course — the greatest home run in 106 years of baseball postseason play.

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Leading off the bottom of the ninth inning, Mazeroski hit a one-ball, no-strike slider from New York Yankees pitcher Ralph Terry at 3:36 p.m. It barely cleared the ivy-covered wall as left fielder Yogi Berra waited anxiously for a carom that never came, and the sport had one of its most memorable moments.

It is the only World Series to end on a Game 7 walk-off home run, giving the Pirates a 10-9 victory and their first world championship in 35 years.

Fifty years later, the hero of the day is floored by the legend that has grown around it.

"Hell, I thought it would be just another hit to win a ballgame," says Mazeroski, 74, who still lives in the Pittsburgh area. "It's bigger now, I think."

As well-grounded as ever, Mazeroski says someone will mention the home run to him "just about every day, if I'm out."

It was an unlikely home run to give the title to an unlikely team. Mazeroski, a second baseman known more for the defensive prowess that earned him election to the Hall of Fame in 2001, had hit 11 homers that season. He hit double figures in homers six times in a 17-year career.

The Pirates were outscored 38-3 in their three losses to the heavily favored Yankees and trailed 7-4 in Game 7 entering the bottom of the eighth. But Pittsburgh scored five in the eighth, thanks to a bad hop off shortstop Tony Kubek's throat on a double-play ball and Hal Smith's subsequent three-run homer. The Yankees scored two in the ninth to tie, setting the stage for Mazeroski.

Terry and autographs

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While the hit is every bit as dramatic and important as [Bobby Thomson's](#) home run off [Ralph Branca](#) in the deciding game of the National League playoff nine years earlier, Mazeroski and Terry are not as inexorably linked.

"We've never gone on an autograph tour together," Mazeroski says. "We've played golf together a few times. Everything seems normal. I would never bring it up; every once in a while, he'd bring it up."

But autographs are a different story. "He wouldn't sign a ball if I had signed it," Mazeroski says, adding he thinks it involved a promise to a youngster.

According to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, reporting on the 40th anniversary in 2000, Terry would sign photographs and the like but refused to sign balls or bats with Mazeroski's signature on it, saying he didn't want anyone profiting from the event. He made two exceptions in the first 40 years, both for charitable purposes, the newspaper said.

Terry became a golf pro after his baseball career, and the first exception involved an assistant pro who was paralyzed below the waist in a golf cart accident. He gave the assistant a bat signed by the pair and told him he would not sign another so it was a unique item, the *Post-Gazette* reported.

Terry, who could not be reached for this story, is equally well-known for his World Series against the [San Francisco Giants](#) in 1962, when he won two games, including a four-hit shutout in Game 7 to earn the MVP award.

The television broadcast of the game had long been considered lost, but a copy emerged this summer and will be shown on MLB Network on Dec. 15.

The kinescope — a 16-millimeter film of the television broadcast — recently was found in a wine cellar at the home of entertainer [Bing Crosby](#), a former part-owner of the Pirates. [Bob Costas](#) will host the show — as he did the 2009 public unveiling of [Don Larsen's](#) perfect game on MLB Network — with Mazeroski and other Pirates commenting between innings. Costas also plans to interview Crosby's widow, Kathryn, and visit the wine cellar.

MLB Network is planning a preview of the show in Pittsburgh that week, with tickets available to the public. Mazeroski, who hasn't seen the film, is scheduled to attend.

Lost forever is the baseball that cleared the Forbes Field wall. One account is that a 14-year-old boy picked up the ball in Schenley Park and was allowed into the clubhouse to give it to the player, but Mazeroski signed it and told him to keep it. The fan says he later used it for a sandlot game and lost it.

Mazeroski has no such recollection, adding that the practice of autographing artifacts like that was unusual in the era.

"About six, seven or eight people came in and said this is the ball, give me five bucks," Mazeroski says. "I didn't know which one it was. ... I never did see the ball, I don't think."

Tradition of 'The Wall'

This will be his second visit to The Wall on Oct. 13. He came for the 40th anniversary.

Joe Billedeaux, Pirates director of alumni affairs, says a sidewalk plaque will be dedicated at the site before the game, and 11 members of the 1960 team are expected. The NBC Radio broadcast, with announcers [Chuck Thompson](#) and Jack Quinlan, will begin about 1 p.m., timed so that the call of Mazeroski's homer will come at 3:36 p.m.

It's the 25th year for the re-enactment, staged by a group of fans called the Game 7 Gang. It was started humbly in 1985 by fan Saul Finkelstein. "He took a cassette player and an audiotape ... and listened at the wall by himself," Billedeaux says. The event has been held every year since and typically draws 300 to 400 people, he added.

Mazeroski, who has always said he'd rather turn a double play no one else could than hit a home run, acknowledges growing up dreaming of winning a World Series with a homer.

"But it was with a broomstick and a bucket of stones," said the son of a Rush Run, Ohio, coal miner. "I wore out a lot of broomsticks, (pretending) 'I'm Babe Ruth and I'm hitting a home run to win the Series.' "

And yes, the reality did match the dream.

"It was so great," he says. "I don't know how to explain it."

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