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THE LEAD

The last night at Tiger Stadium

Cody Stavenhagen (/author/cody-stavenhagen/) Sep 24, 2019

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“Will you remember that last base hit? The last out? How about that last pitch? Or maybe it’s the first time as a child when you saw that green, green grass that will be forever be etched into your mind and soul? Tonight we say goodbye, but we will not forget.”

— Ernie Harwell, Sept. 27, 1999

Here is Al Kaline, sitting on a bus, cutting through the darkness of old Detroit. It is 1953. Summer. Kaline is 18 years old, the newest member of the Detroit Tigers. He joins the team in Philadelphia, then plays a four-game series in Washington. The Tigers take a train deep into the night, arriving in Detroit around 2 o’clock the next morning. They pull into the old train station, then board this bus. The date is June 30, and as the kid from Baltimore rolls through his new city, he looks out the window. There in the distance, he can’t miss it: a towering, dark box of steel. “It looked like a battleship,” Kaline will say years later, repeating this tale once more.

Kaline is sitting next to Johnny Pesky, a 34-year-old second baseman in the back half of his career. Pesky turns to Kaline and tells him: *Here's where you're going to spend the rest of your life.*

The next day, Kaline wakes and ventures to what is still called Briggs Stadium. Security guards will not let the pimple-faced boy into the venue. *I'm the new player*, he says. *Nah, you're too young*, they tell him. Someone finally calls upstairs, and they let Kaline through the gates. He cuts past the aisles and goes straight to the field. Everything is green. The seats, the grass. He feels peace. He senses magic.

Sixty-six years later, Mr. Tiger sits on a bench in the Comerica Park dugout. It is a perfect late-summer afternoon, the sun shining on his face. It reminds him of that first day. Kaline is 84 now, his hair white and wispy. What's left of that hair still flows behind his head, a remnant of the style and grace that captivated Tigers fans for 22 seasons and so far beyond. Kaline says he still has the big No. 6 that once hung on Tiger Stadium's right-field facade. He also has the seat where his wife, Madge, always sat, right on the aisle. Al and Madge are thinking about downsizing soon, but when you are a Hall of Fame baseball player, there are complications. "I told my two sons, we got to get rid of all this memorabilia," Kaline says.

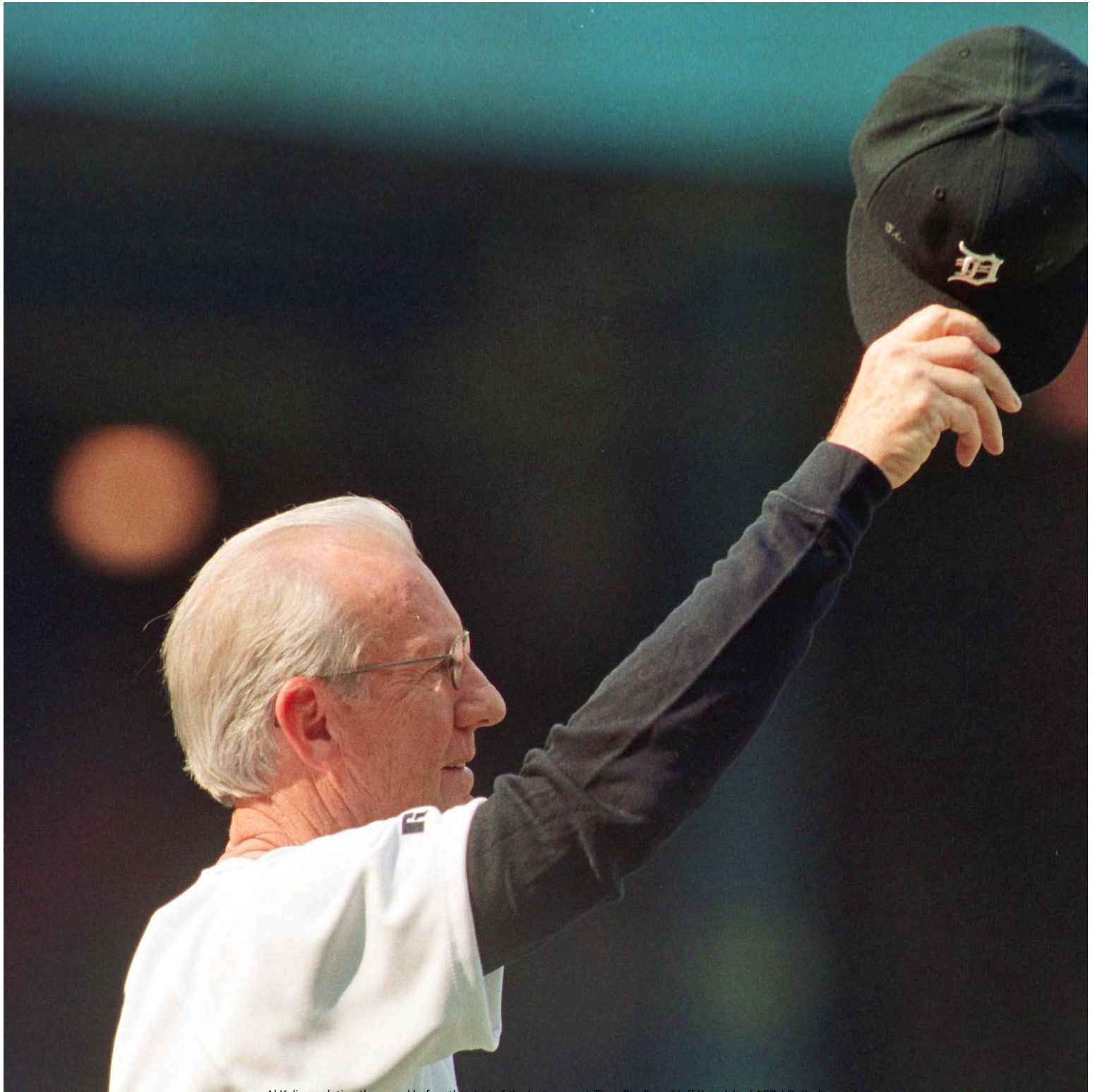
Strange, then, to think it has been 20 years since they last played a baseball game at the stadium he called home.

On the day of the last game at Tiger Stadium — Sept. 27, 1999 — Kaline was part of the opening ceremonies. He was dressed in uniform, the initials of deceased teammates written in white on his dark blue cap. "I wanted them to be on the field with me," he said. He spoke into a microphone before a stadium packed to the top, just the way it was when he made his debut.

"Tiger Stadium's strength lies not in its dazzling architecture or creature comforts, but rather in its character, charm and history," Kaline said that afternoon. "And while common materials may have been used to build this place — concrete, steel and bricks — the memories are the cement that has held it together for 88 wonderful seasons."

Now, looking out at this modern field that replaced the battleship, Kaline is searching through the memories of that final day. He pauses, then begins.

"It really was," he says, "one of the best nights of my life."



Al Kaline saluting the crowd before the start of the last game at Tiger Stadium. (Jeff Kowalsky / AFP / Getty Images)
(<https://theathletic.com/1225934/2019/09/24/the-last-night-at-tiger-stadium/bba-tiger-stadium-last-game/>)

They played 6,873 games there. There were 35 postseason contests, three All-Star games, six World Series. There were also two pre-Super Bowl NFL championships, Joe Louis, Billy Graham and Nelson Mandela. Navin Field, as it was first called, opened on April 20, 1912 — the same opening date as Fenway Park, five days after the Titanic sank into the North Atlantic. The ballpark sat on a plot of less than 9 acres, sprung up out of nowhere. It was the only fully enclosed, double-deck stadium in baseball. It had horrid sight lines, bad bathrooms, subpar clubhouses and a dugout with a ceiling so low countless players hit their heads over and over. But it was an experience unlike any other in baseball.

“The fans were right on top of you. If they were stomping their feet, it felt like the stadium was going to fall down,” said Alan Trammell, the Hall of Fame shortstop.

“When you talk about Tiger Stadium, you talk about Yankee Stadium, you talk about Fenway, you talk about Wrigley,” said Lou Whitaker, the second baseman whom many in Detroit believe should be in the Hall of Fame.

So on the last night at the grand old ballpark, the people of Detroit, and of Michigan, and of baseball lore, headed to the corner of Michigan and Trumbull one last time. They brought cameras and camcorders, punched their tickets and safely kept them in plastic bags. People held up gigantic signs.

Thanks for the memories

Goodbye, old girl

Today there is crying in baseball

Before the game, Tigers team president and CEO John McHale, who was instrumental in constructing a new downtown ballpark, entered the clubhouse. *I haven't really said a whole lot about this game tonight*, McHale told the players, *but you guys need to try to do everything you can to win it.*

In the clubhouse, they felt the momentum building all summer. The 1999 Tigers finished with a 69-92 record, but it felt like the stands were always full. Especially into August and September, the stadium was packed with fans making one last pilgrimage. The home bullpen was down the third-base line, and the bench was half-buried, jutting out from the stands. All year long, relief pitchers were close enough to hear the stories, grandparents telling grandchildren about the first time they came to the ballpark; a son with his father battling cancer, coming to see the Tigers together for the last time.

“The more stories you got, the more you realize this is a much bigger deal than just playing the final game at Tiger Stadium,” said Todd Jones, the team’s closer. “It represents everything.”

The Tigers were playing the Kansas City Royals, and before the first pitch, Kaline met Royals great George Brett at home plate, 6,161 hits between them, and the two legends exchanged lineup cards. It was a 4:05 first pitch. Jeff Suppan started for the Royals. The Tigers started Brian Moehler, who a few nights before had climbed on top of the center-field scoreboard and snapped photographs of the stadium and the downtown skyline.

On the game’s first pitch, as cameras snapped and fans cheered and grown men cried, Royals second baseman Carlos Febles flew out to Gabe Kapler in center field. Every Tiger player was wearing the number of one of the franchise’s legends, except Kapler. He had no number on the back of his jersey, an homage to Ty Cobb, the first Detroit star.

Ernie Harwell, the team’s beloved broadcaster for 42 seasons, famously remarked that if he could take one artifact from Tiger Stadium, it would be the urinal in the visiting clubhouse. Everyone from Babe Ruth to Mark McGwire used it, and Harwell hoped to put it in the garden and use it to hold roses. (Shockingly, his wife objected.)

The next day’s edition of the Detroit Free Press featured extensive coverage of the game and all its meaning, leading with an A1 column from Mitch Albom, who waxed nostalgic about fathers buying hot dogs, grandmothers keeping score and the eyes of old girlfriends. There were the fumes of smoking sausages, the exposed pipes, the peeling walls and all the ghosts of Tigers lore.

So many forces came together that evening. To be there was to be part of something.



(<https://theathletic.com/1225934/2019/09/24/the-last-night-at-tiger-stadium/fans-pack-the-corner-of-michigan-avenue-and-trumbull/>)

Officially, 43,356 people attended the game, but everyone swears the stadium was packed to its 52,416 capacity. Regardless of the number, everyone left with a story. Dan Hasty was a young teenager in 1999, a loyal Tigers fan who had collected ticket stubs from each game he went to as a child. Before that final game, he had counted out 99 stubs. Tickets for the last game, of course, were in high demand. Somehow, Hasty's father came home with tickets the night before the game. Hasty took the day off school, just like was a family tradition

each Opening Day. They arrived early, and Hasty met his favorite player, Bobby Higginson. He played catch with Doug Brocail, over the top of the Tigers' dugout.

Hasty and his father did not have good seats; they were behind one of those notorious blue beams in the upper deck. But for Hasty and so many others, there was something magical about that night, when everything went right. He and his father snuck down behind home plate. Someone came around and asked, "*Which Ford do you know?*"

Hasty and his father looked at each other briefly, and then his father said: "All of them."

Hasty was born in 1985, the year after the last Tigers team to win the World Series. For much of the '90s, the Tigers were losers. So for the first and last time, Hasty got to see and experience Tiger Stadium at its best, a roaring crowd locked in on every pitch, savoring every sweet moment.

"When you're invested in something super heavily, and you feel like maybe you're in the minority, you start to question, 'Why do I spend my time like this?'" Hasty said. "But that night answered the question of just how much bigger it was than just going to a ballgame with your mom and dad or your sister, just wanting to have cotton candy every time you went. You got to really get a feel for how much it impacted people, even though the Tigers hadn't been any good in that decade. It didn't matter. And in a lot of ways, that gave me enough momentum to really pursue what I do now."

Twenty years later, Hasty is the team broadcaster for the West Michigan Whitecaps, the Tigers' Class A affiliate.

"I knew I loved baseball," he said, "but to really feel connected to it, it kind of shows you where you're supposed to be."

Before the game, Al Kaline noted how the wind was blowing straight out, and in the clubhouse, he approached a rookie named Robert Fick and said: *You're gonna hit a home run today.*

In reality, Fick was not supposed to be there. He was a young player from California, and as Kaline noted on the TV broadcast, he "dances to a different tune." Fick spent nearly all season down in the Tigers' Florida compound, rehabbing a shoulder injury. He was only in the lineup because the night before,

left fielder Juan Encarnacion had been hit by a pitch in the face. Encarnacion broke his nose and his cheekbone, and the day of the final game, he was having surgery. Players wrote Encarnacion's No. 34 on their hats in his honor.

In the bottom of the first inning, Tigers left fielder Luis Polonia led off with a home run, awakening any spirits who hadn't yet risen to pay farewell to the stadium. The Royals answered with a homer from Mark Quinn in the second, and then Fick brought home another Tigers run with a deep sacrifice fly in the bottom half of the inning.

The Royals tied the game in the third with an RBI single from Joe Randa, and the Tigers did not pull ahead until Karim Garcia, wearing Kaline's No. 6, smacked an opposite-field, two-run homer in the bottom of the sixth.

Up in the radio booth, Dan Dickerson was standing in cramped space, behind Ernie Harwell and Jim Price. Dickerson was working for WJR, doing pregame and postgame coverage all season. Price, a catcher on the 1968 World Series team, was originally scheduled to leave the broadcast booth before the sixth inning to prepare for the postgame ceremonies. Back then, Harwell would call the first, second and third innings, then Price would come in and call the middle innings before Harwell finished the seventh, eighth and ninth. A producer had asked Dickerson to call the sixth inning, but then there was a change of plans. Price was staying, and Dickerson, tentatively, would join Harwell in the seventh inning.

Somewhere in the middle innings, Harwell turned to Dickerson and asked, *What's the plan here?*

Dickerson, realizing nobody had told Harwell what was happening, muttered ... *Well, I think I'm supposed to join you when Jim leaves in the top of the seventh.*

Harwell, the voice of summer, in his last game at Tiger Stadium, asked Dickerson: *You want to do an inning?*

In your last game at Tiger Stadium? Are you sure?

Do you want to do an inning?

"I wasn't going to say no twice," Dickerson says now, laughing.

At that point in his career, Dickerson had called football and basketball games on the air, but he had never called a live inning of baseball play-by-play. When the bottom of the seventh inning came, Harwell called out on the broadcast and cooed in his Georgia voice: *And now, the major-league debut of Dan Dickerson.*

Dickerson grew up in the Detroit suburbs of Birmingham and Rochester. His first game at Tiger Stadium was in 1967. He was 8 years old, and he wore a coat and clip-on tie to the game. At age 10, he stood down by the dugout and got a ball from pitcher Joe Sparma. When Dickerson got his driver's license in 1974, he'd drive himself down, snag a ticket for \$1.50 and sit in the upper deck, foul territory, down the right-field line, scorebook in hand.

As the sun started to dip in the Michigan sky, Dickerson called the bottom of the seventh and the top of the eighth that night before Harwell took over. Dickerson's wife, Lori Anne, was down in the stands, sitting next to friends and near Ty Cobb's granddaughter. Lori Anne started crying as her husband's voice rang out over the radio, and so did half the stadium as the innings grew late and the memories started to swirl.

The radio booth was near the owner's booth, and after Dickerson's call, Tigers owner Mike Ilitch walked out and poked his head in. *Was that you on the radio? Sounded good.*

Dickerson joined the booth for the middle innings the next season. In 2003, he became Harwell's successor.

"To be a part of that night," Dickerson said, "I get chills just thinking about it."

Entering the bottom of the eighth, the Tigers held a 4-2 lead, but the game was still hanging in the balance. Before the inning, Tigers manager Larry Parrish had told Fick: *If your spot comes up in the order, Catalanotto is going to hit.*

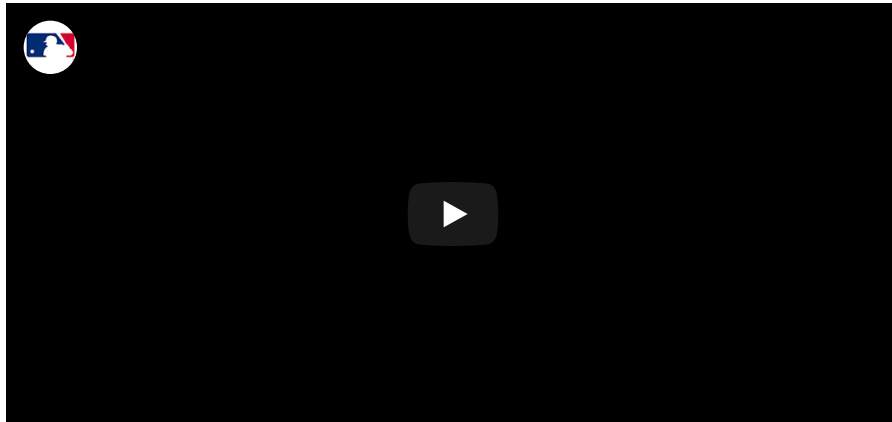
"No disrespect to the man at all," Fick says, "but thank God for his forgetfulness."

Gabe Kapler was batting with the bases loaded, and Fick had already stepped into the on-deck circle. Kapler grounded back to the pitcher, who fired home. It was a close play, but Dean Palmer was called out at the plate. Parrish went out to argue. And all the while, Fick was looking back at Frank Catalanotto. "And I'm like, am I batting?" Fick said.

Fick stepped up to the plate, bases still loaded, wearing Norm Cash's No. 25. He got a first pitch middle-in from Jeff Montgomery and swung. Ball met wood, and suddenly the ball was flying way out toward right field.

"Al told him he'd hit a home run today ... AND HE DID," they said on the TV broadcast. "There she goes, and it is on the roof!"

Fick still remembers the pitch and the swing, one of those he could barely feel because the contact was so pure.



“I’m peeing my pants,” Fick said. “I’m a rookie in that situation. A grand slam? Holy shit. Did this just happen?”

From the stands, Dan Hasty still has an image of the bat and ball colliding frozen in his memory. The flashbulbs illuminated the stadium, with the sun just beginning to set in the distance. Fick’s grand slam bounced on top of the roof in right field and fell back into the stadium. The Tigers took an 8-2 lead, and as Fick rounded the bases and headed into the dugout, the fans erupted, cheering for a curtain call. Fick stepped out and tipped his cap, a smile on the rookie’s face. After the game, a reporter asked if Fick was thinking of Norm Cash, who hit four home runs over the right-field roof.

Fick said he was thinking of his father, who died the year before.

“It just seemed like it was meant to be,” Fick says. “There’s a couple photos from that game where it just seems like there’s light shining down on my head. Just a special day for me, dude.”

Fick went on to become an All-Star for the Tigers in 2002, also playing for the Braves, Devil Rays, Padres and Nationals in 10 MLB seasons. He says he will always be a Tiger at heart. He lives in California now, and in the 20 years since that home run, he played and retired, been married and divorced. He coaches Little League now, and that home run at Tiger Stadium still serves as the defining moment of his career.

“The older and wiser I’ve gotten, it probably means more to me each day, as corny as that sounds,” Fick said.

In the top of the ninth, Todd Jones came out from the bullpen. On Opening Day that year, he lined up along the foul line wearing Al Kaline's glove as a tribute. Now, Jones had "R+B" written on the front of his hat, a reference to a radio show back in Jones' Alabama hometown. On the back of his hat, he wrote the names of his children, Alex and Abby.

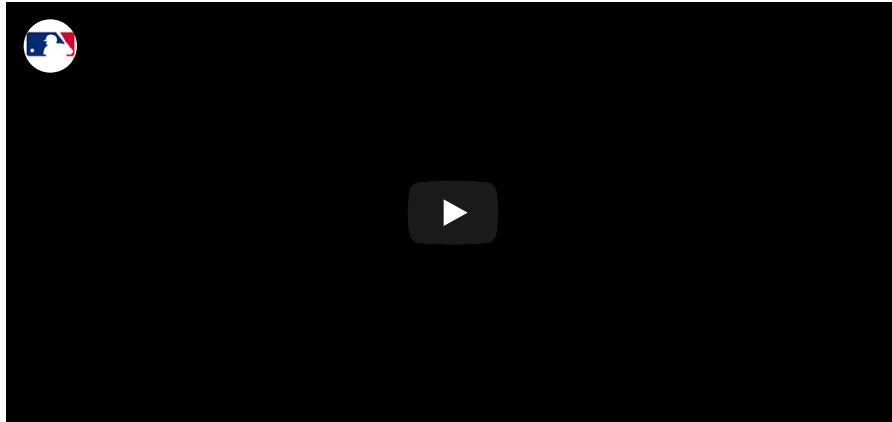
"You wrote on your hat," Jones said, "because you knew you were part of something special."

Jones wanted the chance to throw the final out at Tiger Stadium, and now he had the opportunity. He began the ninth by striking out Scott Pose on four pitches, then Rey Sanchez hit a first-pitch lineout to second base. With two outs in the ninth, the crowd rose to its feet, and the flashbulbs started going off again. If not for playing in the midst of the McGwire-Sosa home run chase the year before, when the flashes were similar, Jones says he wouldn't have been able to pitch.

"You really had a hard time seeing," Jones said.

Players stepped to the top of the dugout, taking pictures of their own. Even the broadcasters stood. "Somebody in 20 years will say, where were you on the 27th of September, 1999?" one voice said on the TV call.

With two outs, Jones faced Carlos Beltran, that year's American League Rookie of the Year. With more flashes going off as the sun began to set, Jones got Beltran into a two-strike count. Catcher Brad Ausmus had the idea to call for a curveball in the dirt. Beltran, nearly blinded by the lights, flailed at the pitch, a swing and a miss. The ball bounced off Ausmus' glove, and before he even gathered and tagged out Beltran after the dropped third strike, Jones raised his arms in the air. Typically fiery and emotional on the mound, Jones' celebration now was picturesque yet subdued.



“I didn’t shout and scream or jump up and down, because we were just trying to stay out of the way and let everybody enjoy that season, that moment,” Jones said. “To be the cherry on top, to be the last team that got to play in Tiger Stadium, is something none of us will ever forget.”

Jones hoped to get the ball from that final out, but as with every other ball from that game, it was collected, labeled and put in a plastic bag. The ball from the final strike was sent to Cooperstown along with the 440 pad from center field.

Four years later, Jones was playing for the Rockies. Jamie Quirk, the bench coach for the 1999 Royals, was now on the Colorado staff. Jones and Quirk started talking about that game at Tiger Stadium, and Quirk mentioned having Beltran’s bat from the final at-bat.

Jones offered Quirk \$5,000 for the bat, but Quirk gave it to him for free. Jones keeps the bat that missed the ball displayed in his basement, his link to a game that was intertwined with everything.

Willie Horton moved to Detroit when he was 5 years old and grew up in the Jefferson Projects, Briggs Stadium casting a shadow over his adolescence. At Northwestern High School, they called him “Willie the Wonder,” and in a city championship game, he hit a home run that banged off the light tower high on the right-field roof.

“Tiger Stadium, that’s me,” Horton says, seated inside the present-day Tigers clubhouse. “Detroit, that’s me.”

The Tigers were the second-to-last MLB team to integrate, but Horton became the organization's first black superstar, a community staple who loved to walk through the stands or interact with fans at the barbershop or the drug store. In 1967, he stood on top of a car in uniform and tried to calm violent crowds as a race riot engulfed the city.

When Horton is down by Comerica Park now — an area he once circled in his paper route — he always drives through his old neighborhood. They put up a ceremonial blue sign earlier this year and renamed a street Willie Horton Drive. So on the final night at Tiger Stadium, after the final out, when they opened up the center-field gates and introduced more than 70 Tigers legends, one by one as they trotted out to their old positions, no one was more emotional than Willie Horton.

After the game ended, the grounds crew used a pickaxe to dig up home plate, and they loaded the plate in a car. Via police escort, they headed for the construction site of Comerica Park. Then, on the board in center field at Tiger Stadium, they showed a video message from Sparky Anderson, the revered Tigers manager who was unable to be in attendance.

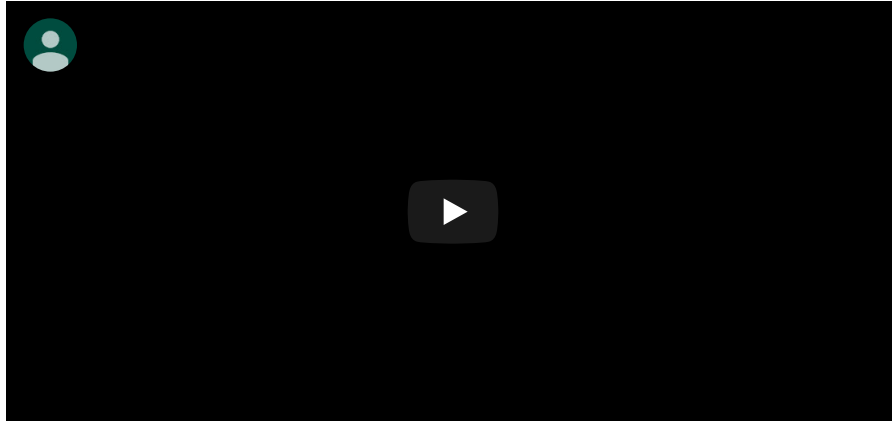
“This will go down in history as the greatest moment in sports in all of Detroit,” Anderson said.

They played the score from “Field of Dreams,” and out first came Mark “The Bird” Fidrych, the pitcher who electrified the city in 1976. Fidrych leaped out of the gates, tipped his cap and ran out to the pitcher's mound. He scooped dirt in his hands and placed it in a plastic bag he pulled from his back pocket. And then they all followed, now under the cover of darkness. Frank Tanana and Mickey Lolich. Gates Brown and Jack Morris, Willie Hernandez and Cecil Fielder, Dan Petry and Bill Freehan. Kirk Gibson came out and jumped and raised his arms, just like in the 1984 World Series. In one of the many sidebars from that night, Ron LeFlore, the player Billy Martin discovered out of prison and who went on to steal 455 bases, came onto the field. After the game, police took LeFlore into custody on charges of unpaid child support.

As the whole grand thing unfolded, Horton wasn't sure if he wanted to go through with the ceremony; he didn't think he could handle the emotions. Teammate Aurelio Rodriguez convinced him to do it. So Horton, who hit 20 or more home runs six times as a Tiger, stepped out and spun around and tipped his hat. He jogged out to left field and raised his arms. And as he neared his position, he put his hands on his head, then raised them again. He wiped tears from his eyes and shook his head. Larry Herndon put an arm around him

as Horton continued to shake his head and cry. Horton said he thought of the times he got caught sneaking into Tiger Stadium, then got a job working in the visitor's clubhouse. He thought of that home run in the all-city game.

"My whole childhood came out of me," Horton said.



As the ceremonies continued, security ringed the field, and the modern Tigers kneeled along the baselines, camcorders in hand. Robert Fick sat there, feet criss-crossed. In the days before the final game, stadium personnel informed Lou Whitaker and Alan Trammell they would be the final players introduced, a way of commemorating baseball's longest-tenured double-play duo together. Trammell checked with Al Kaline, asking if he had any objection. "I felt very strongly that Mr. Tiger should have been the last guy," Trammell said.

Kaline told Trammell not to worry about it. So that night, as the crowd of players out past the center-field wall dwindled, it was finally time for Kaline's introduction. "No. 6, The Man," they said on TV. Kaline got a massive ovation, doffed his hat, clapped his hands and ran out to right field with trademark Kaline elegance. "The fans appreciated everybody, not just me," Kaline said.

Trammell and Whitaker followed Kaline as the crowd roared its loudest. Both tipped their hats and ran to the infield.

"To get from center field to second base, that was a load of emotions in itself," Whitaker said.

As Trammell ran out, he thought of his first memory of Tiger Stadium — watching Reggie Jackson's legendary home run, hitting the transformer, in the 1971 All-Star Game. He thought of the 1984 World Series and all the teammates and all the memories.

When Trammell and Whitaker reached the infield, they shook hands at the cutout. Trammell split off to shortstop, Whitaker to second base.

"I just remember looking up, one last time, into the stands and looking up at this stadium that was obviously older, but just a cool place that was home for basically 20 years," Trammell said.

Sometimes now, when Trammell is in Detroit, he will stay at MotorCity Casino, just north of the old stadium site. He usually stays on the south end, and from his window, he looks down and can feel the presence of a ballpark that is no longer there.

After Trammell and Whitaker took their positions, all the players migrated to a single-file line in the center of the field, stretching from the wall to home plate. They lowered a commemorative flag, etched with the date of the game, still waving in the wind, down from the tallest flag pole in baseball. They passed the flag down the line, starting with Mike Ilitch, way down to Elden Auker, who pitched for the Tigers from 1933-1938. Auker was 89 years old, and it was 66 years after he threw his first pitch for the Tigers. He prepared to hand the flag off to Brad Ausmus, one generation merging into another.

"Take this flag to Comerica Park, your new home," Auker began, and the crowd booed at the thought of watching baseball elsewhere.

"Take with it the boyhood dreams, the perseverance and the competitive desire it takes to become a Detroit Tiger," Auker said. "Never forget us, for we live on by those that carry on the Tiger tradition, and who so proudly wear the Olde English D."

Ausmus took the flag and raised it over his head.

"Mr. Auker, it's a privilege and an honor to accept this flag from you," Ausmus said. "It's a privilege and an honor to be standing on this field, in this stadium, with these fans and these players. Tiger Stadium may be laid to rest and we may be moving to Comerica Park" — there were more boos, and Ausmus smiled — "but the people, the players and the memories of Tiger Stadium will never be forgotten. See you next year."

In foul territory, along the right-field line, Frank Rashid, a lifelong Detroit, sat far back in the lower deck that night, overlooking the visitor's bullpen. He had considered not coming to the game. He knew plenty of friends who had refused to attend. "I remember being really torn," Rashid said.

Rashid was a founder of the Tiger Stadium Fan Club, a group dedicated to saving the stadium, starting when talks of building a new park began under Tom Monaghan's ownership as far back as 1987. Twenty years after the Tigers moved to Comerica Park, there is still a subculture of people who believe moving was the wrong decision. Rashid views it as "corporate welfare" that used public dollars to increase the value of the franchise. From failed preservation efforts to the stadium's 2009 demolition to the Navin Field Grounds Crew, the same forces that shaped the grand requiem that was the last night at Tiger Stadium also shaped animosity and political battles in the stadium's afterlife.

When Rashid walked out of Tiger Stadium on Sept. 27, 1999, he vowed to never attend another Tigers game in Detroit, and he has not. He says he does not do nostalgia, not in the traditional sense. But he also co-edited a book on Tiger Stadium, and he devoted decades of his life to the cause.

"It had been a place where I shared experiences with people I loved and cared about," Rashid said. "An uncle, a spouse, two spouses, actually. My first wife died in the middle of the battle. And I came to know and care about people. The people who worked with me on the stadium issue became people I never would have known, if not for Tiger Stadium."

Over at Comerica Park, as a new era began, a generation of young Tigers pitchers — Jeff Weaver, Matt Anderson and Francisco Cordero — stood around what would become home plate, not yet fashioned into a batter's box. There were piles of dirt and gravel in the background.

"I'm glad I could be a part of this," Weaver said. "Bringing two eras together is just fantastic."

They placed the 75-pound home plate into the ground and had two Little Leaguers be the first to stomp it with their feet.

Back at Tiger Stadium, each player still on the field threw a souvenir baseball into the stands. Then the players finally headed back through the center-field gates, ghosts fading into the night, and Harwell gave one last speech.

"Farewell, old friend, Tiger Stadium," Harwell said. "We will remember."

And in that moment, on that last night, no one knew what to do, and no one seemed ready to leave.

(Top photo: Jeff Kowalsky / AFP / Getty Images)

What did you think of this story?



MEH



SOLID



AWESOME



Cody Stavenhagen (/author/cody-stavenhagen/) covers the Detroit Tigers for The Athletic. Previously, he covered Michigan football at The Athletic and Oklahoma football and basketball for the Tulsa World, where he was named APSE Beat Writer of the Year for his circulation group in 2016. He is a native of Amarillo, Texas. Follow Cody on Twitter @CodyStavenhagen (<https://twitter.com/CodyStavenhagen>).

52 COMMENTS

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Jeff S. Sep 24, 11:34am 1 like

Touching. So many memories of that place.

Thanks, Cody

Ian M. Sep 24, 11:44am

Wow.

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What an awesome story. Well done, Cody!

John N. Sep 24, 1:19pm

Great Story!!

Bravo, Cody!!

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Next time someone asks me what I love about The Athletic, I'm just going to pull up this article and say "Read this." Thanks for a great one Cody.

Fave J. Sep 24, 1:27pm 1 like