

This Day in History... September 10, 1934

Happy Birthday, Roger Maris

Baseball player Roger Eugene Maris was born on September 10, 1934, in Hibbing, Minnesota. He went on to break Babe Ruth's home run record – and his own record stood for over 35 years.

Maris's family moved to North Dakota when he was a teenager. There he played baseball and football in high school. He still holds the high school's record for the most return touchdowns in a game, with four.

Maris began his baseball career in 1953, playing for the Cleveland Indians' minor league team, the Fargo-Moorhead Twins. He was made rookie of the year for the Northern League that year. He spent four years in the minor league, playing for five different teams, all of which had a better win-loss record when he was on their team. He also scored a record seven runs in the 1956 Junior World Series.

Maris reached the major league on April 16, 1957, with the Cleveland Indians. He hit his first home run, a grand slam, two days later. The following season he was traded to the Kansas City Athletics. The Athletics then traded him to the New York Yankees in 1959.

In his first season as a Yankee, Maris led the league in runs-batted-in with 112 and was second in home runs with 39 (one behind Mickey Mantle). Maris also won the Gold Glove Award and was named the American League's most valuable player. But the accomplishment for which he is most remembered happened in 1961.

Decades earlier, in 1927, Babe Ruth hit 60 home runs in a single season as a New York Yankee. That phenomenal record seemed unreachable for 34 years. Then during the 1961 season, Maris and teammate Mickey Mantle took turns leading the league in homers. By August,

Maris was four ahead. An injury in September put Mantle out of the race.

By October 1, the final day of the season, Maris had 60 home runs, tied with Ruth. In the fourth inning, he faced Boston Red Sox pitcher Tracy Stallard. When Maris connected on the third pitch, the stadium fell silent as the ball raced for the stands. When the ball hit with a thump about ten rows up in the seats, the crowd let out a roar. The baseball was caught by a fan and returned to Maris. The ball is now on display at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Maris received the Hickok Belt, honored as the top professional athlete of the year. He also won that year's American League MVP Award. He remained with the Yankees through 1966, making his seventh and final All-Star Game appearance. He played two seasons with the St. Louis Cardinals, which included perhaps the best World Series performance of his career, before retiring in 1968.

After leaving baseball, Maris joined his brother in a beer distribution business. He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 1983 and died two years later on December 14, 1985.

In the early 2000s, several baseball players surpassed Maris' record 61 home runs, but because of their connections to performance-enhancing drugs, some question the legitimacy of their accomplishments. While Maris has yet to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, he has been honored with a museum in his hometown of Fargo.



Maris stamp from the Celebrate the Century Series



Stamp issued for the 50th anniversary of the first All-Star Game.



This stamp honored the battle to break Maris's record in the 1990s.

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