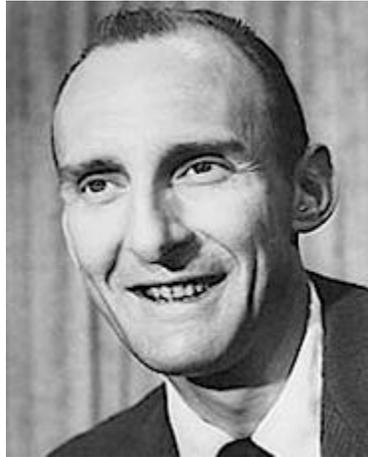


Radio Broadcast of Game 7 of the 1960 World Series --Chuck Thompson, announcer (October 13, 1960)

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Essay by Wayne Stewart (guest post)*



Chuck Thompson

The 1960 World Series played between the dynastic New York Yankees, a team loaded with sluggers, and the upstart but confident Pittsburgh Pirates holds an incredible, nearly unfathomable place in baseball history.

The Yankees circled the bases like a conga line, scoring 55 runs to Pittsburgh's 27--the 28-run disparity is the largest by far in the annals of the game. What made the Pirates' upset so startling is the fact that the Pirates outlasted the potent Yanks, prevailing in seven games, shocking them after being pummeled by scores of 16-3, 10-0, and 12-0.

Regardless, the self-assured Pirates considered themselves a team of destiny, having been resilient all season long. One particular tenacious comeback occurred on Easter Sunday. Stymied through eight innings, and losing 5-0, the Pirates appeared to be done. Six hits, including two homers, and six runs later, they secured a walk-off win. Catcher Hal Smith was prescient, saying, "After one [such comeback], I said to [outfielder] Bob Skinner, 'Hey, Bob, where do we sign up for our World Series tickets?'"

Helping to preserve this incredible slice of history was play-by-play broadcaster Chuck Thompson (despite his making two glaring errors--more on this later).

Thompson was most closely associated with the Baltimore Orioles and the Colts. A Library of Congress website states, "Thompson was a seasoned baseball announcer with over 20 years' experience when he was assigned NBC's radio coverage of the Series, and he came through with good, evenhanded calls and colorful insights and observations throughout the rollercoaster ride of these seven games."

Throughout the Series, Thompson never talked down to his audience, telling them that the House That Ruth Built was “a triple-decker structure” that “has become synonymous with the fall baseball classic,” and informing them that in the games New York won, they had always “pulverized” the Pirates.

Naturally, Thompson was armed with enough historical background, statistics, and anecdotes to captivate his audience. For instance, early on in his broadcast of the Series finale, Thompson filled his audience in with some tangential, but interesting, material. He informed them that all of the players around the batting cage were singing an old song with a theme that applied to the upcoming game, “There’s No Tomorrow.”

In baseball vernacular the deciding Game #7 meant it was “all hands on deck.” Both managers, Casey Stengel of the Yankees and Pittsburgh skipper Danny Murtaugh, used exactly half of their pitching staff in that day’s contest.

The 36,683 Pirates’ fans that packed Forbes Field were gloomy entering the last half of the eighth, down 7-4, but a five-run explosion capped off by a three-run Smith homer gave them the lead. His hit traveled near the 406’ marker in left field and disappeared into Schenley Park.

Another broadcaster, Mel Allen, who worked for the Yankees throughout the regular season, called it a 425’ poke and shouted that pandemonium had broken out in the park! Thompson’s call was similar, “Forbes Field is at this moment an outdoor insane asylum.” However, the insanity ended as the Pirates blew their lead in the top of the ninth.

Thompson then proceeded to supply a detailed and lengthy account of the action--relating how the whopping 18 total runs scored entering the bottom of the ninth had knotted the game.

This World Series would soon make history once again, becoming the only one ever to end on a Game #7 walk-off home run. That occurred quickly, very shortly after Bill Mazerowski strolled to home plate to lead things off; he was facing pitcher Ralph Terry. “Maz” was known for his stellar defense at second base, but certainly not for his hitting power. (He had hit only 11 home runs during the season.)

Announcer Thompson introduced the batter and let his audience know that Mazerowski wasn’t tempted by the first pitch--“too high.” Thompson then set the stage with impeccable timing, saying, “Well, a little while ago when we mentioned that this one, in typical fashion, was going right to the wire, little did we know.” The next pitch was crushed, sailing over the head of left fielder Yogi Berra and over the ivy-clad brick-left field wall!

The game was over, plunging the Yankees into despair--Mickey Mantle was spotted sobbing in the Yankees’ clubhouse--but propelling the Pirates into elation.

Thompson’s succinct live call of the Mazerowski blow went like this: “Art Ditmar throws. Here’s a swing and a high fly ball going deep to left--this may do it. Back to the wall goes Berra! It is over the fence! Home run, the Pirates win!”

Shortly after Mazerowski began circling the bases, Thompson wisely chose to slip into silence--letting the bedlam from the electrified crowd take over and tell the story.

Perhaps the sudden ending flustered Thompson. The consummate broadcaster made a couple of *faux pas*. He had identified the Yankee pitcher who served up the fateful home run as Art Ditmar, who was then warming up in the bullpen, not Ralph Terry.

Thompson then issued his summation, "Ladies and gentlemen, Mazerowski has hit a 1-nothing pitch over the left field fence at Forbes Field to win the 1960 World Series for the Pittsburgh Pirates by a score of 10-to-nothing!"

Then, apparently realizing his error, Thompson continued, trying to smoothly and hastily cover his mistake. "Once again, that final score. The Pittsburgh Pirates, the 1960 Worlds Champions, defeat the New York Yankees. The Pirates 10 and the Yankees 9. It is all over. In one of the

most dramatic finishes in history.... You could employ a lot of script writers and pay a lot of money but try and write a better finish to a ball game--or a more exciting one!"

When the Pirates were in the planning stages of producing a commemorative album on the Series, Thompson was asked if he wanted to correct his mistakes, re-recording that segment of his broadcast. He declined, saying, "I figured it had gone on the air that way, so it would not be honest to change it."

Years later, he candidly spoke of his mistakes on another occasion. "It's the kind of thing you hate to think about happening, but you have to face facts. It was a most unfortunate mistake, but to deny it and to look for excuses about why it happened is the wrong thing to do. Just let everybody know that you made the mistake and try to learn to live with it."

Thompson was honored with the Ford C. Frick Award by the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1993. The MASNsports.com website said of Thompson's voice, "[it] crackled over front porches, marble stoops and through hidden transistor radios tucked beneath pillows [throughout Baltimore]."

Wayne Stewart grew up in Donora, PA, a suburb of Pittsburgh and the home of his high school baseball teammate, Ken Griffey, Sr. as well as Stan Musial. Stewart has written over 40 sports books including "1960: When Pittsburgh Pirates Had Them all the Way."

*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and may not reflect those of the Library of Congress.