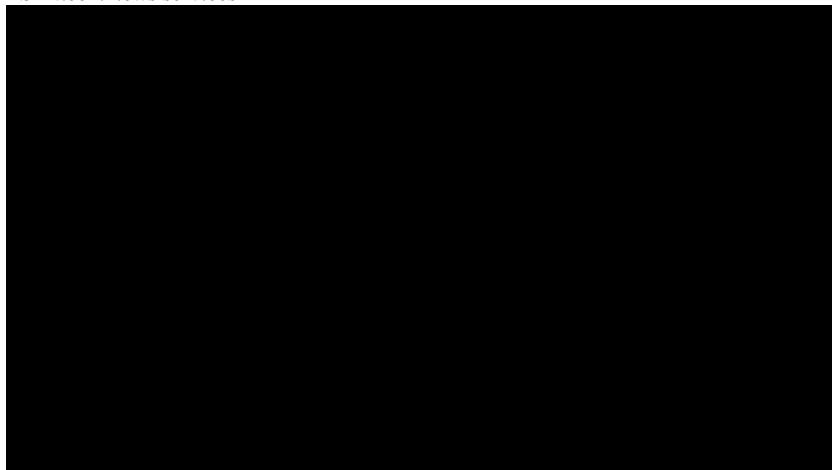


Harwell dies after cancer battle

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Remembering Ernie Harwell

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DETROIT -- From the sandy shores of Lake Michigan to the rugged streets in Flint, they listened to Ernie Harwell tell the [Detroit Tigers'](#) tales for more than 40 years.

Beloved by generations of baseball fans who grew up enraptured by his rich voice, Southern cadence and quirky phrases on the radio, Harwell died Tuesday after a months-long battle with cancer. He was 92.

More from ESPN.com



Some men lament the loss of their baseball cards. Not me. No, what I wish I'd saved is that microcassette with Ernie Harwell's golden voice all over it. But it's gone. Eleven years ago, I was young. I thought he would live forever, writes ESPN.com's Rob Neyer. [Blog](#)



For generations, famed broadcaster Ernie Harwell made listening to the Tigers an almost spiritual happening. As he dealt with cancer, ESPN.com's Liz Merrill watched as Harwell's own spirituality provided peace as his friends and fans said their goodbyes. [Story](#)

The longtime Tigers broadcaster died about 7:30 p.m. in his apartment at Fox Run Village and Retirement Center in the Detroit suburb of Novi, said his attorney and longtime friend, S. Gary Spicer.

His wife of 68 years, Lulu, and his two sons and two daughters were at his side, Spicer said.

"We'll miss you, Ernie Harwell. You'll forever be the voice of summer," Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm tweeted.

A Hall of Fame announcer who was acquired by the Brooklyn Dodgers for a catcher in 1948, Harwell revealed in September that he'd been diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the bile duct. He took the news with characteristic poise, saying he planned to continue working on a book and other projects.

"Whatever happens, I'm ready to face it," Harwell told The Associated Press on Sept. 4. "I have a great faith in God and Jesus."

Harwell's body will lie in repose at Comerica Park on Thursday beginning at 7 a.m. and "until the last person who wishes to pay their respects" has done so, Spicer said.

"It might be an all-night vigil," he said.

There will be no public memorial service, and the family will hold a private funeral service at a location Spicer declined to disclose.

The Tigers were in Minnesota on Tuesday night. During the seventh-inning stretch, the Twins announced Harwell had died, and fans honored him with a standing ovation.

"All of Major League Baseball is in mourning tonight upon learning of the loss of a giant of our game," commissioner Bud Selig said. "This son of Georgia was the voice of the Detroit Tigers and one of the game's iconic announcers to fans across America, always representing the best of our national pastime to his generations of listeners.

"Without question, Ernie was one of the finest and most distinguished gentlemen I have ever met."

Mike & Mike in the Morning



Detroit Tigers manager Jim Leyland says we should be celebrating Ernie Harwell's life instead of mourning him. He was one of the few announcers who had the impact of a player and he was a friend to everyone.

Shortly after Harwell announced that he was ill, the Tigers honored him during a game against the [Kansas City Royals](#), showing a video tribute and giving him a chance to address the crowd at Comerica Park.

"In my almost 92 years on this earth, the good Lord has blessed me with a great journey," Harwell said at a microphone behind home plate. "The blessed part of that journey is that it's going to end here in the great state of Michigan."

Harwell spent 42 of his 55 years in broadcasting with the Tigers, joining Mel Allen, Jack Buck, Harry Caray and others among the game's most famous play-by-play voices.

He announced Detroit games on radio from 1960 to 1991, again in 1993 and from 1999 to 2002. He broadcast games on over-the-air and cable television from 1960 to 1964 and from 1994 to 1998.

When he signed off following his final game in 2002, Harwell was as eloquent as ever.

Vin Scully on Ernie Harwell



Hall of Fame announcer Vin Scully, right, began broadcasting Brooklyn Dodgers games in 1950, the season after Ernie Harwell left.

He shared some his memories of the legendary broadcaster with ESPNLosAngeles.com's Tony Jackson.

- "Ernie Harwell, I don't know if any of you know it, set a record before he ever came to the major leagues. In 1948, the Brooklyn Dodgers were in Pittsburgh. It was an off day, and Red Barber was playing golf at the Pittsburgh Field Club. He was at a place on the golf course that was close to the clubhouse, and he felt very nauseous. He was wearing a coconut straw hat. He took it off and ran to the clubhouse and upchucked, only blood. He had a bleeding ulcer, so they flew him to New York immediately. Branch Rickey was running the Brooklyn Dodgers at the time. Arthur Mann was running the Atlanta Crackers. Branch called Arthur, because they knew each other very well, and he said, 'I need your announcer.' And Arthur said, 'Well, I need a catcher.' So Clint Dapper was sent to Atlanta, and Ernie Harwell came to Brooklyn. It was the only trade that ever involved an announcer."

- "He was with the Dodgers in '48 and '49, then I sat in his chair. I didn't follow or succeed him, I just sat in his chair. He was so gracious and kind. Probably the best word is that he was a gentleman, and it came across. He just cared for people. He loved baseball. He was such a nice guy, so you can understand why the people of Detroit just loved him."

- "I can't remember the year, but there was a game where the Dodgers turned a triple play against Atlanta in Atlanta. I had never seen the Dodgers turn a triple play. Ernie Harwell was sitting on the other side of a glass partition from me, and he had called the other Dodgers triple play in 1949. So I leaned back and asked him about it. I'm thinking this is great, both of us right there together. But he just said in that perfect Southern way, he said, 'Vinny, I don't rightly remember.' And that put in perspective, to show that it was one moment, now let's get on with it."

"It's time to say goodbye, but I think goodbyes are sad and I'd much rather say hello. Hello to a new adventure. I'm not leaving, folks. I'll still be with you, living my life in Michigan -- my home state -- surrounded by family and friends," he said.

"And rather than goodbye, please allow me to say thank you. Thank you for letting me be part of your family. Thank you for taking me with you to that cottage up north, to the beach, the picnic, your work place and your backyard. Thank you for sneaking your transistor under the pillow as you grew up loving the Tigers. Now, I might have been a small part of your life. But you've been a very large part of mine. And it's my privilege and honor to share with you the greatest game of all," he said.

Hall of Fame announcer Vin Scully began broadcasting Dodgers games in 1950, the season after Harwell left.

"Probably the best word, he was gentle. And it came across. He just cared for people and he loved baseball," Scully said. "You can understand how the people in Detroit just loved him. I followed him into Brooklyn, and then I followed him into the Hall. He was such a lovely man. However that word is defined, that was Ernie."

Harwell's passing came one season after the death of another cherished baseball announcer, the [Philadelphia Phillies'](#) Harry Kalas.

"What a voice," said longtime Tigers shortstop Alan Trammell, the World Series MVP the last time the Tigers won it all, in 1984. "He did it with class, he did it with dignity. We shed a tear tonight, that's for sure."

The Tigers and their flagship radio station, WJR, allowed Harwell's contract to expire after the 1991 season in what became a public relations nightmare. Then-Tigers president Bo Schembechler, the former Michigan football coach, took the blame. WJR general manager Jim Long later took responsibility for the unpopular move.

When Mike Ilitch bought the franchise from Tom Monaghan, he put Harwell back in the booth in 1993. Harwell chose to retire after the 2002 season.

"Ernie Harwell was the most popular sports figure in the state of Michigan," said Ilitch, who also owns the [Detroit Red Wings](#).

Harwell's big break came in unorthodox fashion.

Dodgers radio broadcaster Red Barber fell ill in 1948, and general manager Branch Rickey needed a replacement. After learning that the minor league Atlanta Crackers needed a catcher, Rickey sent catcher Cliff Dapper to Atlanta and Harwell joined the Dodgers.

Harwell said his most memorable game was the 1951 playoff between the Dodgers and New York Giants for the NL pennant, which Bobby Thomson won with a walk-off home run, but few if any people remember his account of the "Shot Heard 'Round The World" at the Polo Grounds that day.

Russ Hodges' exclamation on radio of "The Giants win the pennant!" became one of the most famous moments in sports broadcasting history. Harwell, meanwhile, was calling the first major sporting event televised coast-to-coast in the United States. His work that day has been largely forgotten.

"I just said 'It's gone!' and then the pictures took over," he recalled.

By his own count, Harwell called more than 8,300 major league games, starting with the Dodgers and continuing with the Giants and [Baltimore Orioles](#) before joining the Tigers. He missed two games outside of the '92 season: one for his brother's funeral in 1968, the other when he was inducted into the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association Hall of Fame in 1989.

His easygoing manner and love of baseball endeared him to generations of Tigers fans, enhancing the club's finest moments and making its struggles more bearable.

Even casual fans could tick off Harwell catch phrases: "Loooooong gone!" for a home run; "He stood there like the house by the side of the road

and watched that one go by" for a batter taking a called third strike; and "Two for the price of one!" for a double play.

Foul balls into the stands were "Caught by a man from [whatever town in the area that came to his mind]."

"I started that after I got to Detroit in 1961 or '62, and it just happened by accident," Harwell explained. "I said, 'A guy from Grosse Pointe caught that foul ball,' then the next ones were caught by a guy from Saginaw or a lady from Lansing."

The Baseball Hall of Fame honored Harwell in 1981 with the Ford C. Frick Award, given annually to a broadcaster for major contributions to baseball.

A life-size statue of Harwell stands at the entrance to Comerica Park, and its press box is called "The Ernie Harwell Media Center."

"I think we all know where he's heading," Trammell said. "What a gentleman, what a great person. It's a sad day for baseball."

Harwell took pride in making rare visits to the ballpark and for not doing much play-by-play work as a retiree. But he did make a guest appearance for ESPN Radio during the fourth inning of the 2005 All-Star Game in Detroit. He also presented the ceremonial first ball to Tigers greats Al Kaline and Willie Horton before Game 1 of the 2006 World Series when Detroit hosted the [St. Louis Cardinals](#).


"Ernie Harwell, it goes without saying, was one of the greatest in the history of our profession," Hall of Fame broadcaster Marty Brennaman said in a statement. "More important than that, however, he was one of the finest people I've ever known. I was privileged to call Ernie my friend. I will miss him greatly."

Harwell was born Jan. 25, 1918, in Washington, Ga., with a speech defect that left him tongue-tied. Through therapy and forcing himself to participate in debates and classroom discussions, he had overcome the handicap by the time he graduated from Emory University.

Harwell's survivors also include seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.

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