

Michigan Every Day **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

Oct. 6, 1991

Ernie Harwell calls his "final" ballgame

The Detroit Tigers traveled to Baltimore to play the final game of the regular season. For the beloved broadcaster Ernie Harwell, it appeared the game would be his last as a Tigers announcer. What made Harwell's supposed final game on Oct. 6, 1991 so notable was that the play-by-play man was not leaving on his own terms. In a move inexplicable to fans and the baseball world, Harwell had been fired.

Harwell was a Detroit institution. Tiger's fans thought of him as part of their family whose arrival each year into their homes through their radios signaled the start of spring. He was considered one of the greatest baseball broadcasters ever and had been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Harwell, determined to leave gracefully, did not make a fuss about his firing. "My main reaction has been one of puzzlement," he told reporters. "I've had so much support from people, and that's been very gratifying. I can't allow myself to be bitter. We all have to move along."

At the time, Harwell was not sure whether he would retire or take a job with another team and, therefore refused to make that season a farewell tour. "I don't want to be one of those guys who says goodbye and then comes back next month," he said. "That's kind of embarrassing." A month after he left the Detroit airwaves, there was talk he would take a job calling games for the New York Yankees. Harwell began his career in the major leagues as the announcer for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1948, after he was traded for a player. Harwell's contract with both the Tigers and its broadcasting station, WJR Radio, would not be renewed for the 1992 season. A Tigers vice president said Harwell was let go because his broadcasting skills had diminished over the previous few years. The move caused a furious backlash against the team owner Thomas Monahan and team president Bo Schembechler, the former U-M football coach.

Bumper stickers appeared around Detroit exclaiming, "Say it ain't so, Bo."
Newspaper columnists seethed. Fans threatened to boycott Tiger games and Monahan's other business, Domino's Pizza. Harwell returned in the 1993 season after the team was sold to Mike Ilitch. He retired on his own terms in 2002 after 42 seasons broadcasting Tiger games.