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# Big Mac nails 70th to end season

McGwire ends his record setting season by hitting his 69th and 70th homers

By R.B. Fallstrom  
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — An incredible 70 homers! Even Mark McGwire couldn't believe it.

"I've never even thought about it, dreamed about it," he said. "It's absolutely amazing! It blows me away!"

The St. Louis Cardinals' slugger ended his record-smashing season as mightily as he started it. He hit his 69th and 70th homers on the season's last day, a fitting finale for a year he began with a grand slam on opening day.

"This is a season I will never, ever forget, and I hope everybody in baseball never forgets," McGwire told the cheering crowd after the game.

Big Mac, who hit five homers on the final weekend, connected against Montreal rookie Mike Thurman in the third inning Sunday, then homered off Carl Pavano for No. 70 in the seventh. McGwire moved four ahead of Sammy Sosa and ended nine — nine! — in front of Roger Maris' old record.

Sosa went 2-5 with no homers as the Cubs lost to Houston, 4-3, in 11 innings, but his season is not done. The Cubs will face San Francisco at Wrigley Field on Monday night in a one-game play-off for the wild-card spot.

"I wish him the best of luck, along with the Giants," McGwire

said.

McGwire, who has 10 multi-homer games this year and 53 in his career, left many in awe.

"It's stranger than fiction, what this man has done," manager Tony La Russa said.

Expos manager Felipe Alou told his young pitchers to challenge McGwire.

"I left it up to God and the kid on the mound," Alou said. "I didn't want to tamper with history."

"Thank God the season's over, or he would hit 80."

McGwire hit a 1-1 fastball 377 feet into the left-field seats at 2:10

p.m. CDT for No. 69. After stomping on home plate, he took a few slow steps, then made several salutes to the

sellout crowd. The fans who had stood well before his at-bat demanded and got two curtain calls.

Kerry Woodson, a 22-year-old body-shop worker from Maryland Heights, Mo., wound up with the ball and said he didn't know what he would do with it.

"I reached up, closed my eyes, and it landed in my glove," Woodson said. "It's a dream come true. I hope he doesn't hit any more today."

He didn't get his wish.

With two on and two outs in the seventh and the score 3-all, he connected off Pavano (6-9), lining a first-pitch fastball 370 feet over the left-field wall at 3:19 p.m., sending the Cardinals on to a 6-3

win over the Expos.

"Every time the replay is shown, I'm not going to turn the TV off," Pavano said. "I hope he hits 75 next year so people will forget I gave up No. 70."

"C'mon Mark, I'm rooting for you."

This time, even a curtain call from McGwire didn't quiet the 46,110 fans, who remained on their feet, cheering even as Brian Jordan took a called third strike for the third out of the inning.

McGwire said No. 70 felt almost like No. 62, the homer that broke Maris' record, with the crowd at fever pitch and Expos infielders shaking his hand as he rounded the bases.

"What can I say?" McGwire said. "I'm speechless."

The second home run ball landed in a party box and was snared by Phil Ozersky, 26, of Olivette, Mo., attending the game with a group of Washington University research lab scientists. He said he didn't know what he'd do with the ball, which is worth a lot of money on the collectibles market.

McGwire opened the year with a slam on March 31 against the Dodgers' Ramon Martinez, then led the home run race all season except when Sosa twice passed him briefly — and then for only 103 minutes in all.

Sosa led for 58 minutes on Aug. 19 before McGwire went back ahead with his 48th and 49th homers in the same game at Chicago. Sosa led for 45 minutes on Friday when he hit his 66th before McGwire answered.

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