

# UP FRONT



## WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SPORTS MUSEUM

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### Marking a Spot in History

On a Saturday late in April 1955, Hall of Famer Honus Wagner sat in a convertible parked near the left field gate at Forbes Field and watched as his granddaughter Leslie pulled a string to unveil a 10-foot-tall bronze statue of the legendary ballplayer. His teammate Fred Clarke had advocated for the statue for years, but a public fundraising campaign stalled the project until it was almost too late. Wagner lived just long enough, however, to see his place in sports history commemorated and marked. He passed away in December of that year at the age of 81.

Forbes Field came down in the early 1970s, but Wagner did not—his statue moved, first to Three Rivers, where a bronze of the great Roberto Clemente joined him, and then later to PNC Park, where Willie Stargell's likeness was added on opening day of the new park, a tribute to the "We Are Family" ballplayer who had passed away just two days earlier. Bill Mazeroski has the most recent sports sculpture added at PNC Park, with a bronze statue of Maz slamming the 1960 World Series winning home run, unveiled in 2010 for the 50th anniversary of that event.

In the years before PNC Park, a statue of The Chief, Art Rooney, Sr., appeared outside Three Rivers Stadium. The first, and so far the only member of the Steelers organization to be

remembered in bronze, The Chief now sits in the shadow of Gate D, the last remaining piece from Three Rivers, near Heinz Field.

A statue, *Le Magnifique*, of hockey great Mario Lemieux, unveiled in March of last year, joined this exclusive group of sportsmen. Located outside Consol Energy Center, it is unique in that it features players other than just Lemieux, showing him as he bursts through two defenders enroute to the goal. This action image not only captures

a moment in Mario's career, it is also meant to represent how Lemieux broke through barriers and overcame challenges both on and off the ice.

Just recently a new monument joined these statues. On December 22, 2012, Franco Harris and Frenchy Fuqua unveiled a marker on the site of the Immaculate Reception to commemorate the 40th anniversary of what



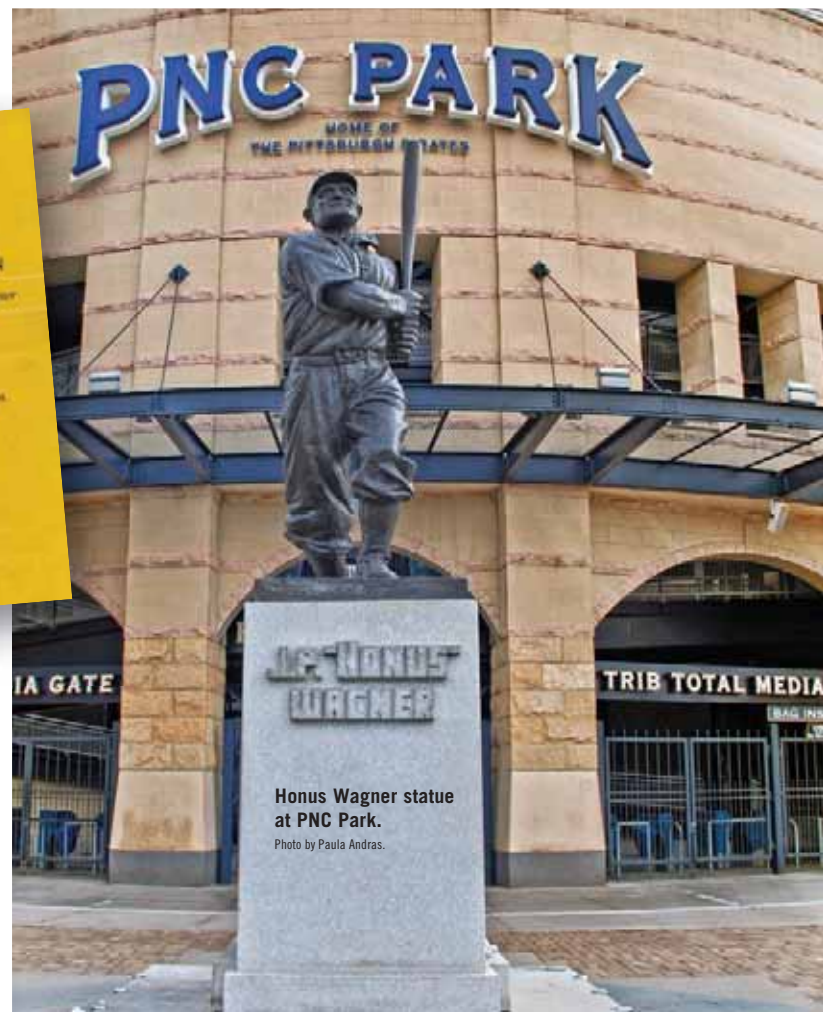
Immaculate Reception monument unveiling, December 22, 2012.  
Former Steelers Franco Harris and Frenchy Fuqua unveil the monument commemorating their historic play.

Pittsburgh Steelers. Photo by Karl Roser.



Dedication program, Honus Wagner statue, 1955. Noted Pittsburgh sculptor Frank Vittor created the 1,800-pound statue of the Carnegie native and Pirates great, Honus Wagner.

HHC Collections, gift of Donald Lancaster and Faye Bradwick.



Honus Wagner statue at PNC Park.

Photo by Paula Andras.

## Len Martin, Jim Haller, Dan Bonk, and Bob Sproule pose at the spot marking Three Rivers Stadium's second base.

Finding home plate and second base at Three Rivers Stadium was an effort led by Len Martin, with Dan Bonk providing support. Martin's years of experience using sophisticated computer tools like Google Earth, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe Photoshop and overlaying digitally scanned Three Rivers Stadium design drawings enabled him to nail down these two locations. Once the locations were confirmed, he developed his own set of maps of true-to-scale baseball baseline, infield, and foul line drawings that allowed the locations to be measured on-site using convenient stationary features such as road curbs and trees. The research took about 12 months, and the actual field measuring and marking took a little over an hour to complete.

Photo by Dan Bonk.



is considered one of the greatest plays in sports history.

In the parking lots nearby, visitors can find two spots where baseball bases have been spray-painted on the ground by sports historians Len Martin and Dan Bonk. One marks the original site of home plate at Three Rivers Stadium; the other, located just yards away from the Immaculate Reception monument, marks the spot of second base in Three Rivers – the place where Roberto Clemente stood in September 1972 after getting hit 3,000 and acknowledged the cheers of the crowd. Three Rivers Stadium is no more, but those great moments from 1972, which occurred just a little over three months and 20 feet apart, are noted.

What drives men such as Martin and Bonk, who pored over architectural drawings and photographs to find home plate and second base? And what motivates us as a culture and a city to remember and commemorate these athletes and these moments, be it with spray paint or something more permanent? Public art, especially sculptures or monuments, provides a tangible connection to the past, a way to link a specific place with a person or an event deemed notable. These works are durable, substantial in size, and feel permanent. They are meant to recall the past, but also to instruct. They tell a story about who we are as a culture, what is important to us, and what we choose to commemorate and remember. By their size, they elevate the mortal to a larger than life status, preserving the person, but also what they represent.

Meant to endure, these expressions of shared memory are usually carefully chosen and crafted. Very often, some period of time passes before the immortalization of an individual or event: 40 years for the Immaculate Reception, 50 for Maz's home run. The people or events have stood the test of time, their achievements or character proven worthy of a material such as granite or bronze that will outlast the artist, the honored, and the builders. These monuments are emblems of civic pride, their meaning linked to and reflective of the place where they are sited. Some, like the Immaculate Reception monument and the spray-painted bases, mark a specific spot where an event actually happened. They are rooted in time and place. Others, such as the Honus Wagner statue, have moved multiple times to maintain their relationship to Pirates history and the place where baseball is played. All are meant to be relevant to a larger community, to recall a moment or a person that represents the best of what the city has to offer.

Public art helps to build a community identity; it must be consistent with and representative of what the community values and appreciates. An inscription on the

pedestal of the Honus Wagner statue states what Wagner and, by extension, these other athletes represent: "A champion among champions, whose record on and off the playing field ... will ever stand as a monument to his greatness and as an example and inspiration." In Pittsburgh, we build these monuments, we mark these spots, because we want to be known as the best of champions. We choose our sports heroes carefully to represent those qualities that matter to us—not just raw talent, but hard work and dedication, both on and off the field, to the team and the city. 🌟



Roberto Clemente statue at PNC Park.  
Photo by Paula Andras.