

Champions At Last: Tigers Outlast Pirates in Seven to Claim the 2031 World Series

The 6th title in franchise history arrives on a 10–2 rout, a series-long survival act, and a lineup that refused to go quiet

By a national baseball correspondent, filed the morning after Game 7 at Comerica Park

DETROIT — For six months the best team in baseball looked exactly like what the record said: 107 wins, a 25-game romp through the AL Central, a roster with almost no holes. For seven games in October, that same team had to find out the hard way that none of it comes free. It took a Game 2 shootout loss, a boomerang of a Game 6 that went 11 innings and broke the wrong way, and a Pittsburgh Pirates club that refused to fold on cue — but on a rain-soaked, delayed, occasionally chaotic Wednesday night at Comerica Park, the Detroit Tigers finally closed the door, 10–2, to take the World Series in seven games. It is the franchise's 6th championship, and by the time the last out landed, nobody in the ballpark was thinking about how messy the path had been to get there.

“When you play for championships, you have to play better than the team in the other dugout,” said first baseman Juan Soto, who was named World Series MVP after carrying the offense from the leadoff game of the series to the last. “We did that in this series, and all year. Now we're the best team in baseball.” Manager Tommy Judd, not a man prone to over-explaining a good result, mostly just agreed with his best player. “Juan said it best,” the skipper said. “We played better than the other team.”

“We played better than the other team.” — manager Tommy Judd, asked to improve on his MVP's postgame quote, and declining to try.

How It Happened: A Series That Never Sat Still

Detroit made an early statement in Game 1, riding a 5-for-5, four-RBI night from Soto and a first-inning two-run homer from rookie Ethan Petry to a 10–3 laughter behind Tarik Skubal. It lasted exactly one game. Pittsburgh shortstop Starlyn Caba turned Game 2 into a track meet, driving in the go-ahead run with a bases-loaded walk in a five-run fifth inning, and the Pirates evened the series with a 12–6 win that exposed Detroit's bullpen depth for the first time all October.

Guo-fang Hou put a stop to the bleeding in Game 3, throwing 8 innings of 2-run ball on the road at PNC Park in a 5–2 Detroit win that put the Tigers back in front. “Guo-fang knows how to get ahead of hitters, stay ahead of hitters, and put people out,” Judd said afterward — a line that would prove prophetic before the series was through. Pittsburgh answered again in Game 4, with Zebby Matthews spinning 5.2 innings of two-hit ball in a 5–3 win that squared things at two apiece, before Skubal reasserted himself in Game 5, allowing a single run

over 7 innings in a 6–1 road win that pushed Detroit back in front, 3–2, with a chance to close it out at home.

They didn't get the chance to close it out cleanly. Game 6, played in a cold, steady rain at Comerica Park, turned into the tensest game of the series: Jackson Jobe, in the outing of his October, held Pittsburgh to 2 hits over 6.1 innings and was named Player of the Game — despite the eventual result. Hao-Yu Lee's two-run homer off Cade Smith in the bottom of the ninth erased a Pirates lead and forced extra innings, but Pittsburgh's Starlyn Caba delivered again, lacing a two-run triple in the top of the 11th that held up for a 5–3 win and sent the series to a decisive Game 7.

If Game 6 was Pittsburgh's best case for one more twist, Game 7 was Detroit simply refusing to allow it. Riley Greene opened the scoring with a second-inning homer off Josh Pfister and was named Player of the Game; Kevin McGonigle, activated off a day-to-day ankle injury just in time for the World Series, delivered a two-for-five night with a double, an RBI, and two stolen bases in his return to shortstop. Max Clark and Ethan Petry both went deep in an eighth-inning outburst off reliever Logan Pettitte, and Hou, working on short rest, allowed just one earned run over 5.1 innings to improve to 4–0 this postseason and lock down the win that mattered most. The night had its share of theater along the way — a 20-minute rain delay, Pfister and Pirates reliever A.J. Minter both exiting with injuries, and third baseman Hao-Yu Lee ejected in the second inning for arguing a strike call — but none of it slowed Detroit down. By the final out, it was 10–2, and the celebration that had been building since March finally had somewhere to go.

The Heroes Who Pulled It Together

Juan Soto, World Series MVP. The signature moment came in Game 1 — a 5-for-5 night with a homer, a double, and three singles — but the honor was for the body of work across all seven games, in a series where Detroit's offense repeatedly had to answer a Pittsburgh team that kept finding ways to punch back.

Guo-fang Hou, the stopper. Twice this series, with Detroit facing a must-win road game and a series-clinching opportunity at home, the ball went to Hou, and twice he beat Josh Pfister — an 8-inning, 2-run gem in Game 3 and a championship-sealing effort in Game 7 that finished his postseason at a perfect 4–0. If this roster has a stopper, it wears number 28 and throws right-handed.

Ethan Petry, the story nobody saw coming. A rookie playing on a league-minimum contract opened the postseason as a role player and is closing it with 9 home runs in October, including a decisive shot in the clinching game. Few players in this franchise's history have picked a bigger moment to arrive.

Tarik Skubal, the stabilizer. Both of Skubal's starts came right after Detroit had just lost the previous game — Game 1 after nothing, Game 5 after a Game 4 defeat that had evened the series — and both times he simply shut the other dugout down. Two starts, two wins, one run allowed across 13 innings in his second outing alone.

Kevin McGonigle, the comeback. A day-to-day ankle injury cost him time right as the World Series opened, and the smart, cautious call to start Jude Warwick in his place looked like exactly the right one for as long as it lasted. McGonigle came back clean, went 2-for-5 with a double and two stolen bases in the clincher, and

reclaimed his job at shortstop right on schedule.

Hao-Yu Lee and Jackson Jobe, redemption in real time. Neither man's signature moment ended in a win, and that's exactly what makes them worth mentioning. Lee's ninth-inning, game-tying two-run homer in Game 6 was the loudest moment of the series that didn't end up in the winning box score. Jobe, who'd been rocked in Game 2, came back in Game 6 and threw the best start of his October — 6.1 innings, 2 hits — and was named Player of the Game in a losing effort. Both showed up again when the series needed them to, which is usually how these stories end anyway.

Riley Greene, Michael Arroyo, Max Clark and the everyday lineup. A championship team wins with its stars, but it survives a seven-game series with its everyday lineup, and Detroit's did exactly that — Greene's Game 7 homer and Player of the Game honor was just the latest example of a top of the order that hit all October long.

Winter Is Coming: What the Offseason Might Hold

A parade is one thing; running it back is another. Detroit heads into the winter as the team every other front office in baseball is chasing, and the question that follows a 107-win, championship season is never whether to stand pat — it's how to get better without getting careless. A few threads are already worth watching. Ethan Petry's rookie-scale contract is up after a 9-home-run October on a league-minimum salary, and figuring out his next deal — extension or arbitration — is about to become one of the more interesting contract conversations in the sport. Tarik Skubal, meanwhile, is down to a single guaranteed year left on his current contract; an ace who just won two World Series starts on that kind of clock tends to become extension business sooner rather than later.

There's also the matter of a roster that's carrying real long-term money already — Guo-fang Hou's massive extension, Michael Arroyo's, Kevin McGonigle's escalating deal — which means any push to trim payroll this winter is unlikely to touch the championship core and far more likely to focus on the complementary pieces around it. Expect a full audit of the bullpen after a Game 6 that exposed some depth issues in extra innings, a look at what Jackson Jobe's second half of the season says about his ceiling versus his volatility, and a general front-office mandate that sounds simple and rarely is: get younger and cheaper at the margins without giving back anything that made this team a champion in the first place. The winter meetings will have plenty to say about how that balancing act goes. For now, Detroit gets to enjoy being the team nobody else in baseball wants to see on the schedule.

Reaction From Both Clubhouses

Detroit Herald

Six years. That's how long it had been since this city last got to feel this particular kind of tired — the good kind, the kind that comes from screaming through a rain delay and an ejection and a bullpen that made things far harder than they needed to be, and getting the parade anyway. This wasn't the cleanest championship run in franchise history, and it didn't need to be. A team that won 107 games in the regular season had to survive a Game 2 blowout loss and an 11-inning gut-punch in Game 6 before it finally got to be exactly what everyone

assumed it was back in April. Juan Soto is the MVP because the trophy has to go somewhere, but this was a whole-roster job, from a rookie DH who picked October to become a household name to a shortstop who wasn't even supposed to be healthy enough to play in it. Enjoy the parade, Detroit. Then get ready, because the front office isn't going to let this be the only one.

Pittsburgh Tribune

There is no shame in this one, and Pittsburgh should know that by morning even if it doesn't feel that way tonight. A 94-win team with a rotation that got shakier the further it went from Bubba Chandler pushed the best team in baseball to seven games, forced two extra-inning-caliber nights, and had the tying run at the plate deep into a game it ultimately lost by eight. Starlyn Caba was the best position player in this series not wearing a Detroit uniform, full stop, and a taxi squad by the names of Josh Pfister and Zebby Matthews gave this organization more than enough reason to believe the next great Pirates team is closer than people think. This one will sting for a while. It should also be the last time in a few years that anyone is surprised to see Pittsburgh playing in October.

Detroit Tigers · 2031 World Series Champions · 107–55 regular season, AL Central champions, defeated the Pittsburgh Pirates 4 games to 3