

## **“62” (Real ‘Pop’ or Not?)**

**(By Toshio U.-P.)**

Watching old footage of Roger Maris’ 61<sup>st</sup> homerun on the last game of the 1961 season, I couldn’t help but feel somewhat sad that this monumental milestone has again been challenged in an era where PEDs (Performance Enhancement Drugs) are almost omnipresent in all professional sports. Last year—some 61 years later—another challenger by the name of Aaron Judge has surpassed the mark, making skeptics wonder (yet again) if new and illicit substances—taken to speed recovery after exertion and slow muscle and joint fatigue during workouts—were used secretly and periodically during the homerun chase to surpass the ultimate test of power and strength in Major League Baseball. While many Yankee faithful and baseball enthusiasts throughout the world would come to the right fielder’s defense—claiming that the titanic frame and swing velocity of the power hitter is legitimate given his God-given gifts and abilities—a full inquiry into new and cutting-edge doping practices—like the application of AndroGel and Testosterone cream to specific areas on the body—is needed to confirm that the new record established on the second last game of the 2022 season should indeed stand without an asterisk next to it. In a modern age when former National League record-high homerun totals surpassing Maris’ mark of 61 are thought of as inflated and even tainted—primarily due to widespread use of HGH (Human Growth Hormone) in the late-90s and early 2K era—one should revisit that day in October of 1961 when Maris came to bat in the fourth inning and rocked a fastball deep over the right field fence of Yankee Stadium, rounding the bases with his trademark short-sleeved ‘muscle shirt jersey’ as over 20000 fans on their feet roared and later thundered for a much anticipated curtain call. While some controversy existed with baseball statisticians at the time—mainly due to the fact that Maris played in a prolonged season compared to the previous single-season homerun king Babe Ruth who hit 60 in eight fewer games—Maris became a good ambassador for fair play and was known for being gritty and hard-working. When asked about the homerun chase, Maris was quoted saying: *“It would have been a helluva lot more fun if I had not hit those sixty-one home runs.”* In fact, when closing in on Ruth’s total that year, he reported feeling quite stressed, partly due to some of the death threats he had received in the mail and over the telephone. To properly assess the value of heralded baseball collectibles such as cards, bats and baseballs, a proper assessment of number ninety-nine’s latest feat of homerun heroism needs to be made in order to decide whether his new brand of ‘pop’ is Hall of Fame worthy or should come with yet another disclaiming asterisk (\*).