

# HOME RUN

## Adventure

By Debra Stevko Miller



### N.J. MOM AND SON VISIT ALL 30 MLB BALLPARKS

#### *From sea to shining sea...*

That recognizable song lyric from “America the Beautiful” takes on new meaning when the goal is to visit all 30 Major League Baseball (MLB) stadiums. As a unique way to bond, a New Jersey mom and her young son did just that and even more.

On Sept. 1, 2024, Heather Lea Szostak and son Fynn completed their ambitious ballpark chasing goal with a stop to see the Philadelphia Phillies at Citizens Bank Ball Park armed with their customary homemade signage touting their numbered accomplishment.



“It’s been so much fun,” said Heather of their coast-to-coast trip, including Toronto, which she estimates covered 20,000 miles.

It was while attending a Yankees game in August of 2021 that Heather and Fynn, who was 7 years old, decided they should visit every MLB stadium and become part of an exclusive club of ballpark chasers.

Traveling thousands of miles (much by car) over a three-year span in-between school breaks, their strategy was to arrive at the stadium gates as soon as they opened. Fynn would then situate himself in the front rows near the dugout ever hopeful to get a glance, a nod, or a word from one of the team members during practice.



In celebration of Fynn Szostak’s 10th birthday, he and his mom, Heather, visit stadium No.25, Truist Park in Atlanta.  
*Photo courtesy of Heather Szostak*





**At stadium stop No. 5, Fynn met with the four mascots from the Cincinnati Reds.**  
Photos courtesy of Heather Szostak

On many occasions, his strategy worked which accounts for his expansive collection of memorabilia displayed in his bedroom. With mitt in hand, he struck up conversations with coaches and players. His outgoing personality and distinctive curly hair made him easily recognized and remembered even when visiting other stadiums. His interactions are notable.

Catcher Alejandro Kirk of the Toronto Blue Jays threw a ball with Fynn before the August 2022 game at Target Field in Minneapolis.

On the Fourth of July, pitcher Joey Krehbiel gifted Fynn with his personal Independence Day hat when the baseball player was with the Orioles in 2023.

While in Houston at Minute Maid Park, Fynn obtained baseballs from New York Yankees outfielders Aaron Judge and Juan Soto (now with the Mets) in March 2024.

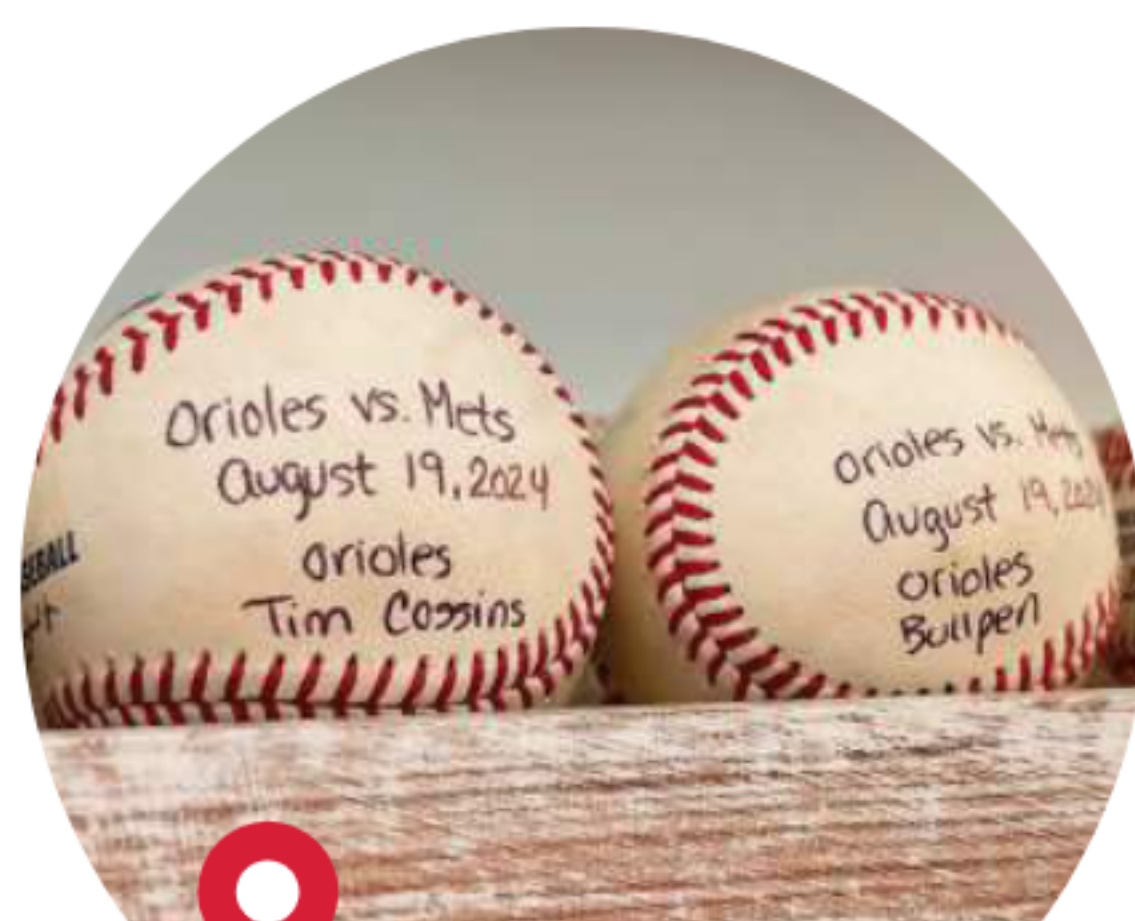
In June 2024 the mother-son pair were at the right place at the right time for the special tribute to Hall of Famer Willie Mays at Oracle Park in San Francisco. It was a free event attended by dignitaries, secret service, and celebs — much to their amazement.

“Fynn got to see people he’d never see (otherwise),” said Heather of the experience.

At the Oakland Coliseum in July 2024, Fynn played catch from the stands with Baltimore Orioles outfielder Heston Kjerstad, Coach Tim Cossins, and catcher Adley Rutschman.

“This whole entire time he’s never wanted an autograph,” said Heather of Fynn’s affection for the players. “He’s not that kid. He wants to play catch with them and just wants to talk to them. To Fynn, that means more than a baseball.”

However, he does have a collection of 160 baseballs, which hail from every stadium resulting from batting practices, foul balls, home runs, playing catch with a player, or a toss from the bullpen or a generous fan. Each ball is meticulously labeled with the date, teams involved, and how he got it.



**Part of Fynn’s collection of 160 baseballs, which hail from every stadium resulting from batting practices, foul balls, home runs, playing catch with a player, or a toss from the bullpen.**

Of course, the youngster couldn’t go home without some gear. Beside a T-shirt or two from each ballpark, he has keepsakes from all 30 stadiums such as official Rawlings logo souvenir baseballs, stadium pins, bobble heads, and first game certificates.

Coordinating the road trips took several days to plan. Heather created a spreadsheet noting when and where teams were playing, places to stay in those areas, and a detailed driving route. For one long trip during which they saw 11 different teams play, she drove to Missouri, Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin, and back to Illinois before the flight home.

Starting out in August 2021, Fynn tossed a few balls into the Detroit Tigers bullpen with Coach Juan Nieves. Later, his mom caught a ball for him when former Tigers outfielder Derek Hill hit his first home run at Comerica Park. A video of the catch and the follow up interview taped for YouTube are treasured mementos.

The next month, Fynn appeared on the stadium jumbotron as the designated honorary captain at Great American Ball Park in Ohio for the Cincinnati Reds game.

In celebrating his 9th birthday in Tampa Bay, Fynn couldn’t have asked for a better present. He caught his first home run ball at Tropicana Field that afternoon in Florida.

For his 10th birthday, he appeared on television when ESPN cameras captured the left field fan section singing happy birthday to him at Truist Park during an Atlanta Braves night game.

An avid fan, Fynn plays nearly year ‘round on recreational and summer leagues as a catcher and outfielder. He started competing at age 4 and even practices at home with his grandma, Sonya, who played softball in her heyday.

Fynn’s dream is to play professionally for the San Diego Padres. One of his favorite players is the club’s shortstop and right fielder Fernando Tatís.

“Fernando inspired me to start playing baseball. I remember seeing him on TV and he made an incredible play at shortstop. He leaped in the air, super high, and caught a ball,” Fynn said. “He inspires me because he is really good and I want to be just like him.”

His other favorite player is catcher Adley Rutschman of the Baltimore Orioles.

“Adley is my favorite player because he is a switch-hitting catcher. I can switch-hit just like him and I’m also a catcher! He’s really good at what he does and I really want to be just like him when I make the Majors,” Fynn said.

“He can tell you stats about players for days,” Heather said. “He just loves watching the players and who is being traded and what their batting average is.”

Another memento: Fynn’s 30 team T-shirt logos will eventually be crafted into a blanket as a special reminder of time spent traveling the country with his mom.

For the location of each MLB stadium, visit: [www.mlb.com/team](http://www.mlb.com/team) ♦






  
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Photo courtesy of Heather Szostak