

By Paul Ladewski
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Mark Buehrle pitched the second perfect game in White Sox history on Thursday afternoon. Fifty-one years after a near miss by the left-hander to whom Buehrle often is compared, it was as if the baseball gods had payback in mind.

In June, 1958, Billy Pierce was one out away from a perfect game in the ninth inning, only to have it ruined on a double that was fair by mere inches. The same Billy Pierce who won more games than any southpaw in team history, a record that Buehrle could own himself one day.

Buehrle had three close calls in his 116-pitch masterpiece against the usually potent Tampa Bay Rays line-up. One was a screamer off the bat of B.J. Upton in the seventh inning. Another was a Pat Burrell line drive in the eighth. Each was foul by less than a foot.

Outfielder Dewayne Wise saved the perfect game on a sensational catch with one out in the ninth inning, when he reached over the wall to spear a drive that Gabe Kapler had launched to deep left-center field.

“So much stuff has to happen for a no-hitter or perfect game to happen,” said Buehrle, whose wife and 4-month-old daughter were in attendance. “There were two balls that went an inch or two foul today. I had everything going for me.”

“I told myself, ‘Whatever it takes.’” said Wise, who had entered the game at the start of the inning. “If had to run through the wall to catch it, then I had to do it. If I had to eat it, then I was gonna catch it.”

Instead, Wise crashed into the image of a former White Sox great painted on the wall. It was that of Billy Pierce, of course.

Best catch in his career?

“By far.”

Buehrle became the second White Sox pitcher to pitch two no-hitters in his career. He also became the first pitcher to face 27 batters in two no-hitters in major league history. In April, 2007, the only runner that reached base in his no-hitter against the Texas Rangers was erased on a double play.

“Couldn’t happen to a better guy,” Manager Ozzie Guillen said.

Afterward Buehrle received a telephone call from President Obama, an unabashed White Sox fan. The two had met at the All-Star Game in St. Louis one week earlier.

“He said that he would take a little bit of credit, because he wore a White Sox jacket at the All-Star Game,” said Buehrle, who already had received 54 text messages by his count. “He said, ‘Congratulations. A lot of people will remember this forever.’”

It was the perfect finish to a perfect day.