Major League Baseball to Honor Glenn Burke at All-Star Game

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Glenn Burke

The late Glenn Burke, a former Major League Baseball (MLB) player, will be honored July 15 at the 2014 All-Star Game in Minneapolis, The New York Times reports. Burke played in the league for four seasons. He left the MLB in 1980 and came out publicly as gay in 1982. He died of AIDS-related complications in 1995. Lutha Burke, one of his five surviving siblings who was his caregiver when he was dying, and her daughter Alice Rose will attend the game.

This event is the first time the MLB has officially recognized Burke as a pioneer in the LGBT movement. Professional sports nationwide are seeing openly gay players, such as Robbie Rogers in soccer, Jason Collins in basketball and Michael Sam in football. So far, the MLB has no openly gay players. To prepare for that moment, the MLB has selected former player Billy Bean, who retired from the league in 1995 after six seasons and came out publicly as gay in 1999, as an advisor.

Burke made his MLB debut when he was 23 years old with the Los Angeles Dodgers. He played 225 games during his MLB career. In 1977, he played with the Dodgers in the National League Championship Series and the World Series. As a popular player among players, Burke was widely credited with inventing the high-five. Gay rumors were blamed for his trade to the Oakland A's. Injuries and continuing gay rumors led to his decision to leave the MLB.

After coming out in 1982, Burke went on to play in gay baseball and softball leagues. He won medals at the Gay Olympics, which are now referred to as the Gay Games. In 1987, he broke his leg when a car struck him. The accident compounded his struggles with drugs, homelessness and crime. In 1991, he pleaded guilty to grand theft and possession of a controlled substance. Sentenced to 16 months in prison, he was released after six months. He was 42 when he died.

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